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**Struggle for Equality**  
**From the Constitutional Revolution to**  
**Cyberfeminism**  
**with a Focus on the Role of New Media**  
**in the Women's Movement in Iran**

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Dr. Phil.)  
to the Department of Political and Social Sciences  
of Freie Universität Berlin  
by  
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Berlin, 2019

Dissertation zur Erlangung des akademischen Grades  
Doktor der Philosophie (Dr. Phil.)  
am Fachbereich Politik- und Sozialwissenschaften  
der Freien Universität Berlin  
Vorgelegt von Rezvan Moghaddam  
Berlin, 2019

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Tag der Disputation: 16.05.2019

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## Acknowledgements

I dedicate this dissertation to the women's rights defenders from the beginning of the women's movement in Iran to the present day, making a difference through their diverse initiatives to promote justice and to achieve equality.

Research for this dissertation was conducted under the auspices and direction of two academic institutions. This began during post graduate studies with the Department of Political Science and Social Sciences at The Freie Universität (FU) in Berlin, Germany. Research subsequently continued with the Department of Sociology in the Faculty of Social Sciences at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands. I cannot adequately express how grateful I am to have had the opportunity to be part of these two remarkable institutions.

I am profoundly and eternally grateful to my initial supervisor Professor Helgard Kramer, Professor of Sociology and Gender Studies at the Freie Universität Berlin since 1993 and currently Professor Emerita. During the time of my research, Professor Kramer recognized the challenges I faced and responded with an impressive spectrum of qualities. She reached out to me both professionally and personally. She provided precisely the right inputs to help me transcend obstacles and to navigate a positive path forward. She has continued to open doors for me to do research in my own ways. She has constantly encouraged me to develop my own voice, to be more open and to participate actively in political and social academic debates. My development and this dissertation in particular are in great degree a tribute to Professor Kramer's inspiring repertoire of professional guidance, vision and humanity. I am thankful to have the pleasure of knowing and working with Professor Gülay Çağlar. I owe a special thanks to Prof. Dr. Gülay Çağlar Professor of Social Anthropology for accepting to be my second supervisor at FU, who played a key role in helping me to develop my framework. I must equally express very special acknowledgment and appreciation to my advisor Professor Halleh Ghorashi, Professor in Diversity and Integration in the Department of Sociology at the Vrije Universiteit. Professor Ghorashi constantly demonstrated a great spirit and provided

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guidance that inspired my research and enabled me to bring it to fruition in the form of this dissertation. Many stages of this journey have their unique challenges. During this research period in the Netherlands Professor Ghorashi gave timely and valuable research suggestions. Her practical instructions on academic writing were eminently priceless. My development and the realization of this dissertation therefore owe the deepest gratitude to Professor Ghorashi.

I am grateful that my advisors had the professionalism and generosity of spirit to be positively enabling and empowering mentors.

In addition, two organizations merit special mention. I would like to express special acknowledgment to Scholars At Risk (SAR), an international network of institutions and individuals whose mission it is to protect scholars and promote academic freedom. I also gratefully note the contributions of The Foundation for Refugee Students UAF (Stichting Voor Vluchteling-Studenten UAF) for their moral support that gave me the means to develop my research, to pursue my education and to broaden my horizons.

During my time at the VU I was fortunate to meet many diverse and inspiring academics, with whom I could engage, share and develop thoughts, during sojourns into Amsterdam and during the process of refining, synthesizing and translating that nexus of thoughts into this dissertation.

My sincere thanks extend to all colleagues at the VU for their ongoing valuable contributions, stimulating engagement and often challenging discussions. I cannot adequately describe the profound importance and benefits of working in such a stimulating and positive collegial environment. In particular, I express gratitude to Nadira Omarjee, Zsuzsa Kovacs and Suzanne Verhoog for creating such a very pleasant work atmosphere and making me feel as “at home” as possible.

I also wish to express my gratefulness for the good fortune to have been extremely fortunate to work with many exceptional people over years who increased my courage to explore and develop my own work. Several were generous enough to edit, read and comment on my entire manuscript. For such valuable

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contributions, I wish to thank in particular Tori Egherman, Shiva Pazoki and Paiman Maria Davarifard.

This research would not have been possible without the cooperation and input of all the people who agreed to be interviewed, as well as all those who contributed to the online questionnaire. I am deeply grateful for everyone's time, inputs and belief in the value of this effort.

As a person intimately involved with social movements, I am of course grateful to all who have contributed more broadly to the realization of this dissertation. I am aware that some forms of support are subtle, yet in their own way are sources of great strength. So many communities and peoples have helped me in so many ways, directly as well as indirectly. Some are also not named for reasons of respect or discretion. Although it is not possible to name everyone, please be assured of my deep gratitude for each form of support.

Finally, I thank you, the reader, for your attention and thoughtfulness. I hope that the efforts here provide you with some meaningful reward for your kind investment of time and attention. I look forward to receiving your views and observations. I hope as well that in the future we may have some positive opportunities to continue this journey together.

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## **Notes on Language, Transcription and Translation**

I hope that this brief explanation helps to facilitate optimal access to the information and data in this research. This research has been conducted in multiple languages. The two primary languages are Persian (Iranian) and English.

The research spans an effectively 150-year chronological period starting mid-19th-century and extending to the present 21st-century. Numerous linguistic conventions evolved in that span of time, such that the name for a term, person or place stated in one period may have different orthography when stated in another. The same fact applies for sources: a name stated by one source often appears differently when stated by another source. Finally, this variation is even more evident regarding transcriptions into other languages across different time periods. Therefore, to expedite the most straightforward and direct analysis of the subject matter, this research has made a deliberate effort to adopt terms, names and spelling exactly as encountered in situ. It is not in the scope of this research to reconcile every linguistic variation. Inconsistencies reflect realistic referential accuracy rather than non-existent idealized consistency. Every effort has been made to remove risk of ambiguity and to make the research as clear as possible.

A great deal of primary and secondary research has been in Persian and translated by me into English. I take responsibility for translation. Every culture and language has unique referential terminology and nuances. No translation is identical to the original. When transcribing spoken interviews from Persian and translating them into English, the least editing possible has been applied, to try to remain as close as possible to original spoken tone-of-voice. Although some editors may transform rough or non-grammatical vernacular into polished text, it has been my ambition out of respect for the interviewees and academic accuracy to let the original speak as actually spoken and as directly as possible.

In view of my belief in the universal importance of this topic, I believe in the value to share this research in English, global lingua franca, what has occurred in Iran, currently the world's 18th most populated country with a population of over 82 million people, a country of global interest, yet not always accessible to non-native speakers. It is my hope that this research helps to open doors, build bridges and make a valuable contribution to stimulate further research and action.

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## List of Abbreviations and Equivalents

### Abbreviations

SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Science
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### Equivalents

#### Iranian Calendar and Gregorian Calendar (Western Calendar)

The Solar Hijri calendar (Persian: گاهشماری هجری خورشیدی also called the Solar Hejri , calendar or Shamsi Hijri calendar, and abbreviated as SH) is the official calendar of Iran. It begins on the March equinox (Nowruz) as determined by astronomical calculation for the Iran Standard Time meridian (52.5°E or GMT+3.5h) and has years of 365 or 366 days.

Its determination of the start of each year is astronomically accurate year-to-year as opposed to the more fixed Gregorian calendar or "Common Era calendar", which averaged out, has the same year length, achieving the same accuracy (a more simply patterned calendar of 365 days for three consecutive years plus an extra day in the next year, save for exceptions to the latter in three out of every four centenaries).

The Iranian year usually begins within a day of 21 March of the Gregorian calendar. The starting point of the current Iranian calendar is the vernal equinox occurred on Friday March 22 of the year A.D. 622. To find the corresponding year of the Gregorian calendar, add 621 or 622 (depending on the time of the year) to a solar hijri year<sup>1</sup>.

In this thesis, the convention is to state the calendar date as it appears in the original source. If that is Iranian calendar, then for clarity for all readers, the equivalent date in the Western calendar is also stated.

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<sup>1</sup> For information and a short table of year correspondences between Persian and Gregorian calendars see  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian\\_calendars](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_calendars)  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar\\_Hijri\\_calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solar_Hijri_calendar)

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## **Summary**

The present study aims to show the development of the women's movement in Iran during a politically and historically significant period spanning over one hundred years, from the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 through world and regional wars to contemporary cyberfeminism. In this setting, this study contributes in particular a focus on the role of new media in a critical decade of the women's movement (2003-2013) and related Green Movement of 2009. The specific objective in this historical and political context is to explore the emergence and significance of new social communication technologies and to examine their impacts on the ongoing struggle for social equality.

The Iranian women's movement sets the frame for this research. The Iranian women's movement itself comprises over one hundred years of recorded history and is well documented. Iranian women have made active contributions during key political transitional movements in Iran, notably the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 and the revolution in 1979. Yet in spite of involvement, repeated appeals to improve women's rights were consistently ignored. The lack of acceptable improvements in the status of women's rights has continued to motivate a number of pioneers to further organize and evolve the Iranian women's movement, including making use of new technologies.

For clarity, the four most recent decades since the 1979 revolution are summarized. During the first two decades after the 1979 revolution, women did not succeed in making their voices heard; endeavors to strengthen women's rights were diminished, hidden or invisible. From roughly 1999 forward, during the third decade of the revolution, the Iranian women's movement gained momentum and visibility. Since the late third decade from 2006, worldwide extension of the Internet and global innovations in communication raised high hopes for new effectiveness in the women's movement. Simultaneously, many new communication technologies emerged that been having major impacts in economies, societies and politics around the world. In the third and fourth decades,

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as new communication technologies became accessible at mass scale in developing countries, these have increasingly taken part in the landscape in relation to the promotion of human rights and women's rights.

Since the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the third decade of the Islamic regime, the Iranian women's movement has experienced a revival related in part to these new global communication technologies including the Internet and mobile phones that has created new opportunities to build communication networks in Iran, to build up support abroad and to mobilize huge Iranian exile communities all over the world.

One of the key issues in the study of recent social movements is the role played by the new media and the use of virtual social networks. A study of the role of new media in the women's movement in Iran, as well as the rise in popular protests resulting from Iran's 2009 presidential election, is a subject that merits and needs greater scrutiny from a variety of angles. With this in mind, this study focuses on trends of new media usage by civil activists in Iran, particularly women. Moreover, it includes an analysis of the impact and consequences of the use of the new media on the women's movement and the political movement that emerged during the 2009 presidential campaign, which became known as the Green Movement.

This study is structured into 10 chapters, as follows: Chapter 1 gives an overview of the research. Chapter 2 provides crucial background and key historical aspects of the women's movement in Iran and ways of struggle for women's rights. These chapters frame the context and describe relevant social and political factors. I note that when women have been able to access, create and operate communication technologies, magazines and associations, platforms have arisen and evolved where women been able to express their demands, spread their voice and achieve some success. Chapter 3 expands the focus onto impacts of the women's movement, new political approaches and new media. I examine the arrival and impact of new technologies, such as the Internet and new media, among women's rights activists. I show how the women's movement as a micro movement,

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through new media, was able to influence the macro movement so-called Green Movement. Chapter 4 analyzes in more detail the ways in which women's rights activists and social activists used new media to get out their messages. Chapter 5 moves the perspective into the larger context, to look at related social and political dynamics and resistance to surrender in the face of change. Chapter 6 looks how new media were in fact also an agent for diversity and pluralism in the women's movement in Iran. Chapter 7 explores the Internet as a double-edged sword, to assess social and political gains as well as to acknowledge new challenges. It examines how the government acted with its own sets of concerns, responses and technological controls. It explores social and political inter-dynamics with dominant institutional factors that mediate social equality. Chapter 8 looks with a larger regional perspective on the Impact of Iran's Pro-Democracy Movement – the Green Movement on The Middle East. Chapter 9 details my efforts to contribute scientific methods to test social and political hypotheses by conducting primary research, gathering data and doing statistical analysis. This further aimed to test to what extent quantitative tools, in such situations, can help to clarify, substantiate and even verify various observations. Chapter 10 provides the conclusions of this research.

The methodology applied in this study includes the development of original primary source materials. A qualitative survey approach was employed to document and examine the views of 18 experts residing in Iran and abroad about the role of new media on the women's movement in Iran. A diverse social spectrum of experts was identified and selected, that includes women's and civil rights activists, journalists, lawyers, political activists, artists, authors and students. Furthermore, in order to place these diverse first-person in-depth testimonials more clearly into the larger social context, I designed and produced a quantitative approach to create an empirical body of data in the form of an online questionnaire that was ultimately completed by 278 people. Another function of the online questionnaire was to apply structural tools to help isolate and reduce possible bias on the part of the interviewer

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that might occur during a face-to-face interview process. The combination of these two complementary methods creates a richer body of information and fuller sources of understanding of the phenomena studied.

In addition, a number of secondary sources including published comments and articles on the relation between the women's movement and the Green Movement in Iran were carefully studied and analyzed. For the analysis of data, combinations of quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The interviews were analyzed by interpretation.

The historical review of the women's movement in this study focuses on the women's rights movement in Iran and its impact on the Green Movement of 2009. This study focuses on two key inter-related questions: What effect did new media have on the Iranian women's movement; and what impact did the women's movement have on the Green Movement?

Analysis of the answers to these questions showed that the women's movement that occurred prior to the 2009 presidential election in Iran had, as a process, a significant effect on the shape and leadership of the demonstrations demanding rights. The quantitative analysis of the online questionnaires confirms the results of the qualitative analysis. The study demonstrates that women's rights activists affected the presidential election of 2009 in at least two ways. First, they influenced electoral policies; and second, they transformed the movement through dialogue. Furthermore, "policy influence" and "transformational dialogue" manifest in themselves key aspects of the nature of the process. These approaches show how activists progressively navigated towards gaining more effective means of voicing their demands in public platforms and opening dialogues for discussion.

The women's movement succeeded in establishing the "tolerance" approach as opposed to violence. In doing so, they not only distinguished themselves from the extremists but also challenged the political modus and discourse of extremism. Choosing slogans such as "Where is my vote?" is one example of the language created by women with regard to the presidential election. This was done with the

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intention of avoiding violence and swaying political discourse in a positive direction. The process can be characterized more as evolution rather than revolution.

***Keywords: Women's Movement, Iran, New Media, Green Movement, Diversity, Pluralism***

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## **Chapter 1 Research Framework and Methodology**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This study aspires to identify and analyze a few key aspects of the paths of Iranian women's rights activists up to the present and to highlight a few ongoing challenges to achieving full respect for women's rights in Iran. I have been closely following the evolution of the women's movement in Iran since 1979, a period spanning almost four decades. My initial relationship to the women's movement in Iran was on an experiential level. I have also been directly involved in several collective actions of the women's movement in Iran. My cumulative and growing involvement motivated me to seek ways to contribute more effectively to achieving social outcomes. With this in mind, I chose to pursue graduate education in gender studies and subsequently to research specific aspects of the women's movement in Iran. The academic approach provides a formalized means of social investigation. The academic framework creates complementary dimensions of formal analysis, understanding, and new potentials for greater social effectiveness. The academic forum is thus a socially important institutional context. In regard, I believe this study is capable of bringing to light vital contemporary issues in a way that is relevant to contemporary society as well as being a potential contribution to future generations to promote further research, insights and benefits.

Iranian society has a long and well-documented history of public debates on women's rights and feminist movements, dating back to at least the 19th century. Qurratu l-'Ayn was the first known woman to unveil herself in public, for which she was sentenced to death and beheaded in 1852<sup>2</sup>. Bibi Khanoom Astarabadi established the first school for girls in 1906<sup>3</sup>. These notable examples should not be

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<sup>2</sup> See Moghaddam, Rezvan. (2010). The activities and struggles of Iranian women for equality in the period of the "Constitutional Revolution" 1905-1909, We change - website, 2007 & International Women's Day, a symbol of stability and hope for women's rights <http://www.facebook.com/FeministSchool>  
See also <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%A1hirih> retrieved 23 December 2018

<sup>3</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibi\\_Khanoom\\_Astarabadi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibi_Khanoom_Astarabadi) retrieved 23 December 2018

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perceived as isolated incidents separate from their social, political and economic contexts. Feminist ideas had been introduced to Iran's intellectual milieu as part of a larger scenario, in which modernity "in its various forms gradually penetrated different strata of the Iranian society from the mid-19th century onward. Yet, since then women have been struggling for equal rights."<sup>4</sup> This statement summarizes yet simplifies a long and complex ongoing social transformation.

In discussing the women's movement in Iran, we consciously apply an umbrella term to refer to the broad struggle for equal rights in political, social and cultural arenas. The over 100-year-old women's movement is one of the oldest social movements in Iran. Iranian women have fought for equality and against discrimination in different ways using different methods. The Iranian women right's movement has in fact been sustained by a vast and diverse array of efforts that have been evolving over time.

In this landscape of contrasting interest groups and dynamics, it is vital to be aware that political motivations and actors are also complex and diverse. It is not a simple matter of women unilaterally fighting for their rights. Many groups are involved. For example, there have been brief occasions of state supported actions aiming at advancing women's rights and equality. During the Reza Shah period (1925-1941) unveiling was thought to be a sign of modernity, and women of the upper and middle classes received the opportunity to enjoy relative freedom in respect to the tradition of hijab<sup>5</sup>. However, such efforts referred to by some as "State-Feminism"<sup>6</sup> (Sedghi, 2007, p.79) were opposed by various factions of the opposition who united in anti-Western and Islamist discourse. This included groups

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<sup>4</sup> Chafetz, J. S., & Dworkin, A. G. (1989). Action and reaction: An integrated, comparative perspective on feminist and antifeminist movements. In M. Kohn (Ed.), Cross-national research in sociology (pp. 329–350). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

<sup>5</sup> Hijab is a veil worn by some Muslim women in the presence of any male outside of their immediate family, which usually covers the head and chest. The term can refer to any head, face, or body covering worn by Muslim women that conforms to Islamic standards of modesty. The term is not simply a neutral object, but has complex meanings, explained in more detail in this research. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hijab>

<sup>6</sup> Sadeghi, Hamideh: Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling andreveiling, New York 2007. p.76

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such as women political activists with an Islamist orientation, such as the Mojahedin-e Khalq “People’s Mujahedin”<sup>7</sup>.

At the core of the Islamist revolution in Iran of 1979 was a gendered subordination of women<sup>8</sup> resulting in a serious backlash for women’s rights and gender equality, establishing rigid gender segregation and imposing restrictive rules of political and personal conduct. At the same time, and although banished to the private sphere by the regime, “modern” facilities and even lifestyles spread among the younger generations of the cities.

It is also important to avoid generalized oversimplifications how Islamic theology translates into civic life. A matrix of factors and considerations apply. Unlike the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Islamic regime in Iran did not initially restrict women’s access to education. At the start of revolution, a separate women’s sphere of schools, universities and professional training was established. Although the Islamic state wanted to create a situation similar to that in Saudi Arabia, with a completely separate space for women in public schools, universities, parks and buses, it did not succeed. In Iran, a less-wealthy society, the Islamist regime needed a well-educated female labor force, which came into existence in the separate women’s sphere over the past 30 years. Many authors state that the regime managed to find support with parts of this class of well-educated women, who profit economically and have varying degrees of self-interest to identify with the fundamentalist ideology system.<sup>9</sup> Because this narrative aligns with the regime’s

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<sup>7</sup> See Schuckar, Monika. (2003). Staat, Gesellschaft und Geschlechterpolitik im Iran des 20. Jahrhunderts, in: Helgard Kramer/Roger Naegle (Hg): Geschlechterarrangements in globaler und historischer Perspektive, Heidelberg, 2003, 181-199

See also: Sanasarian, Eliz. (1981). The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran. Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini, New York

Nashat, Guity. (1983). Women and Revolution in Iran, Boulder

Sedghi, Hamideh. (2007). Women and politics in Iran: veiling, unveiling andreveiling, New York

<sup>8</sup> See Afary, Janet. (2009). Sexual Politics in modern Iran, Cambridge, Mass;

Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. (1999) Islam and Gender: the religious debate in contemporary Iran, Princeton, N.J.

<sup>9</sup> See Gerami, Shahin. (1994). The Role, Place and Power of Middle Class Women in the Islamic Republic, in: Valentine M. Moghadam (ed): Identity Politics & Women. Cultural Reassertions and Feminism in International Perspective, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1994, 329-348. See also Schuckar, op.cit., 192f.; Katajun Amirpur: Islamischer Feminismus in der islamischen Republik Iran, in Orient 3,1999, 439-452; Azadeh Kian: Gendered Occupation and Women’s status in Post-Revolutionary Iran, in: Middle Eastern Studies 31, 1995, 407-421; Azadeh Kian: Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran. The Gender-Conscious Drive to Change, In: British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 24, 1997, 75-96; Afsaneh Najmabadi: Power,

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political goals, it is also a more dominant narrative in state-supported media and propaganda. But as this research shows, there is in fact a very vibrant secular dimension of the women's movement that does not identify with the fundamentalist ideology system. The relevance of this research is to explore and document many of the realities of this very important but often ignored (intentionally as well as unintentionally) dimension of this important social movement.

## 1.2 Theoretical Framework

Due to the impact of the Internet and its inclusiveness in all aspects of social, political, cultural, economic and personal life globally, the ways of civil and political struggle have also changed and transformed. As a result, new ideas about social movements, including the women's movement, have emerged in the political and social sciences. In particular, feminist theories and studies of the women's movement during the last three decades have been influenced by the changes in the information technology. The focus of this study is to show the trend of using new media by women activists and the changes that have been made in the Iranian women's movement by the use of the Internet.

Therefore, before presenting a road map for this thesis, it is important to point out that due to the interdependence of the women's movement with concepts such as identity, gender, power, and race, and their overlap with some social movements, several issues regarding the women's movement can be raised. In particular, over the course of a century, there has been a tremendous transformation in feminist theories, and there have been a variety of feminism and feminist theories that even some of them are in tension with one another and challenge issues that have not been addressed in other critiques. For example, the intersectionality theory challenges liberal feminism theory on women's issues, which does not reflect the issues of black women.

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Morality and the New Muslim Womanhood , in: M. Weiner/Banuazizi, A.(eds): The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, Syracuse 1994, 356-389; Nayereh Tohidi: Modernity, Islamisation and Women in Iran: Valentine Moghadam (ed): Gender and National Identity. Women and Politics in Muslim Societies, London /New Jersey 1994, 110-147.

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In addition, today one of the most important and challenging topics in the field of social studies is the impact of Internet and social networks in political, cultural, economic and social processes. In this regard, this research offers an overview of various approaches and theories about social movements, identity, gender, feminist theories, and the role of new media in present-day social movements to conceptualize the relationship between the women's movement in Iran and the use of the media. Furthermore, to criticize some of the approaches and theories that look at using Internet through black or white glasses, I highlighted the role of the Internet as one of the sources of power and the means of mobilization for collective actions in the women's movement.

In my research, I examined social movement theories, feminist theories, media theories and identity theories and how the use of new media affected methods of Iranian women's movement struggle and their strategies. In addition to criticizing some of the approaches and theories that look at using Internet through black or white glasses, I highlighted the role of the Internet as one of the sources of power and the means of mobilization for creating collective actions.

In order to deeply understand the Iranian women's movement, this research takes a historical perspective of the women's movement in Iran and also situates new media and theory within broader understandings of technology and its relationship to women's movement and social change.

Different theories and literature draw from multiple disciplines and perspectives including media, communication, feminist theories, identity and social movement theories.

Throughout history, sociologists have been unable to agree on a single definition for social movements, due in part to their variety: there is no one single sociological definition for social movements. Subsequent to the dramatic student and women movements in the period around the years 1967-68, an increased degree of related theorizing began to emerge in the 1970s. Broadly viewed, social movements came to be categorized into three approaches. The first category is called "collective behavior approach" which consists of theories that examine social

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movements as emotional behavior and as a product of environmental pressures. The second category, which falls under "institutional approach", consists of theories that consider the nature of social movements as ultimately a political process and attends the rationality of movement organizations. The third category, denominated as the "civil society approach" are theories that take the essence of social movements from the existing ones in the civil society.

Turner and Killian (1972)<sup>10</sup> consider social movements to be collective behavior done with relative continuity to create change, or resistance against a change in society or a group of people in society, with unlimited members and a replaceable leader whose status and legitimacy are given unofficially by members. Blumer<sup>11</sup> considers social action as a collective effort to transform an area or a specific part of the governing alliances in society or to create a significant change in community relations through collaboration.

The institutional approach is the set of theories called "resource mobilization". Well-known theoreticians on an institutionalized approach like McCarthy and Zald (1977)<sup>12</sup>, focus on "social movement organizations", arguing that a minimal spatial organization should be an aggregation of resources. They consider members' money and work as one of the main sources of the organization. They believe that organizations of social movements compete with each other in order to transform "supporters" in the same social group into "members" with the goals of a sympathetic movement. With an excessive emphasis on the organizational aspect from McCarthy and Zald, they ignore the fact that the existence of an organization is not affecting the spontaneous movements. Charles Tilly (1977)<sup>13</sup> outlines his theory in the book *From Mobilization to Revolution*. His main hypothesis is the relation between "mobilization" and "collective action". As such, the greater the

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<sup>10</sup> Turner, Ralph H. and Killian Lewis M, (1972). Collective Behavior. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1972, 1987, p. 223.

<sup>11</sup> Blumer, Herbert.1969. "Social Movements" In McLaughlin, Barry. Ed. Studies in Social Movements. New York: Free Press

<sup>12</sup> McCarthy, J.D. and Zald, M.N. (1977) 'Resource Mobilization and Social Movements: A Partial Theory', American Journal of Sociology 82: 1212-1241.

<sup>13</sup> Tilly. Charles, (1977). From mobilization to revolution, University of Michigan

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amount of mobilization in a population or organization of a contender, the greater its collective action.

According to Porta & Diani (2006)<sup>14</sup>, a social movement is the fruit of unofficial networks that share common principles growing out of a contentious issue that leads to a form of protest.

Freeman and Johnson (1999)<sup>15</sup> believe that structure and spontaneity are two important elements in social movements, while Alain Touraine 1981<sup>16</sup>, among the new social movement theoreticians, believes that “social movements are not marginal oppositions to the existing order but are pivotal forces which fight each other for the control of the direction of the output of a society and actions of layers of a society in shaping its history.” He regards identity, opposition, and universality as the three major components of social movements.

Habermas<sup>17</sup> divides social movements into two major groups: 1) liberation movements; and 2) resistance movements. In his opinion, many movements, such as the Black Civil Rights Movement, the Green Movement and the environmental movement, minority movements and suburban movement fall in category of the resistance movements. Only social and women's movements can be considered as emancipatory movements. In his opinion, the women's movement, through the struggle against the patriarchal repression (system), is about to overthrow the objective and subjective forms of patriarchal monopoly domination.

In the view of Melucci (1994)<sup>18</sup>, the movements fluctuate in a range of apparent activities (mobilization and public protest) until latent periods. In the latency periods the movement does not stop, but the activities related to internal thinking

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<sup>14</sup> Porta, Donatella della and Diani, Mario (2006), Social Movements an Introduction, 2nd ed, Wiley-Blackwell, p 20

<sup>15</sup> Freeman. Jo and .Johnson. Victoria, (1999). Waves of Protest: Social Movements Since the Sixties, Rowman & Littlefield

<sup>16</sup> Alain Touraine.1981. The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements. New York: Cambridge University Press. p29

<sup>17</sup> Habermas. Jürgen (1984). The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2: Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason, Thomas McCarthy (Translator). Boston .Beacon Press  
<http://blogs.unpad.ac.id/teddykw/files/2012/07/Jurgen-Habermas-The-Theory-of-Communicative-Action-Volume-2.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> Melucci, A. (1994), ‘A strange kind of newness: what’s “new” in new social movements?’ in E. Laraña, H. Johnston and J.R. Gusfield (eds), New Social Movements: From Ideology to Identity Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, pp. 101–30

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and intellectual change are dominant. Hiding the period of the commune movement reveals the possibility of action. It provides the necessary resources for the solidarity and the unity for action; the necessary cultural framework for social mobilization. The apparent action of the movement strengthens the secret networks, adds strength to it, creates additional subgroups, and puts new supporters into the fortunes.

Based on a series of research in the United States, Asia, Latin America and Europe, Manuel Castells examined the underlying impacts of information technology in the contemporary world. Castells shows the social, political and cultural dynamics of societies as influenced by the evolution of communication technology and the globalization of the economy.

Castells<sup>19</sup> (2009) highlights two major features in relation to social movements. The first feature is the ability to induce the meaning and identity within social movements. The second feature is the historical background and social network that activists of the movement live within. He believes that identity is something that is made by activists and done collectively. Castells distinguishes between three types of identity: 1) The Legitimate Identity: this kind of identity is created by the dominant institutions of the society, in order to expand their domination to social activists; 2) Resistance Identity: this identity is created by activists in a state of being or in a situation considered to be worthless by the logic of authorities or subject to a stigma; and 3) Programmer Identity: when social activists create access to new objects using any cultural materials, which defines them from their new position in society, and as a result of the transformation of all social construction, this type of identification is realized. According to Castells, an obvious example of planned identity can be found in the feminist movement.

In sum, the examination of different approaches shows that for creating or participating in social movements, the only element of the existing condition is not enough, but other factors such as awareness, self-awareness, solidarity resources

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<sup>19</sup> Manuel Castells (2009).The Power of Identity: The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture, Volume2 Wiley, Social Science

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such as having a common goal, a common identity, a toolkit for mobilizing a mass and a platform for mobilization are also needed.

Social movements, like many aspects of human life, are by their very nature influenced by communication technologies. The development of communication technologies, the digital revolution and increasing integration of communication tools into the fabric of daily life have been profound disruptors and provided fertile ground throughout the world for the reconciliation and participation of social forces, bringing public voices and silent forces into the public domain in new ways. In recent years many scholars have paid special attention to the impact of information technology and social networks on mass movements and as a result, new definitions and new ideas have entered social dialogue.

Some, such as Garret (2006)<sup>20</sup>, examine how the use of new communication technologies affects political opportunities, mobilization of structures and filing of processes. Stark *et al.* (2010)<sup>21</sup> believe that the structure of mobilization consists of social networks and all the resources necessary for the emergence of a social movement and popular mobilization, which in this regard views social media as the fastest and most inexpensive way to mobilize. Lim (2012)<sup>22</sup> points to the role of social networks, in particular Facebook, as a driving force in the recent Middle East social movements. Goodwin and Jasper (2003)<sup>23</sup> claim that mobilization through social media can lead to the spread of democracy and regime change.

As this shows, a body of work is emerging to assess linkages between new media and social mobilization in social movements. Others have further stimulated debate by conjecturing, without necessarily having hard evidence, on the roles and extents of the Internet on social mobilization.

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<sup>20</sup> Garrett, R. K. (2006). Protest in an Information Society: A review of literature on social movements and new ICTs. *Information, Communication & Society*, 9(2): 202–224.

<sup>21</sup> Stark, Oded, Walter Hyll, & Doris A. Behrens. 2010. "Gauging the Potential for Social Unrest." *Public Choice* 143.1-2: 229-36.

<sup>22</sup> Lim, Merlyna. 2012. "Clicks, Cabs, and Coffee Houses: Social Media and Oppositional Movements in Egypt, 2004-2011." *Journal of Communication* 62: 231-248.

<sup>23</sup> Goodwin, Jeff, & Jasper, James. 2003. *The Social Movements Reader: cases and concepts*. Malden; Blackwell publishing.

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This study aims to contribute primary research and analysis to this field. It documents the role of new media in mobilization, pluralism and common identity as one of the most important factors in the current Iranian women's movement. In this regard, alongside traditional ways of organizing social movements such as face-to-face communication, women's rights activists began utilizing diverse innovative usages of social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, weblogs and mobile phones as a source of movement empowerment. These mechanisms helped to sustain and promote mobilization as well as to expand the scope of the women's movement. Therefore, this discussion is mainly about how the women's movement is used by the public in the public domain and the rational discussion between ordinary citizens about the general issues and discrimination against women through interaction with citizens and the transfer and diffusion of experiences in cyberspace.

The outcome of research, theories, and viewpoints on the women's movement shows that the core philosophy behind it is the deliberate struggle against patriarchy, and liberation from considering women as inferior creatures. For instance, Clayhills (1991)<sup>24</sup> emphasizes the willfulness of women's actions and considers the women's movement as the "willful action of women, which will not recognize the inferior status of women in a patriarchal society and seeks change." Also, Friedan (1963)<sup>25</sup> challenges the subordination of women. Women in nineteenth-century Europe introduced the idea of sovereignty of the people, and not men, by means of liberation from subjugation and elimination of discrimination. In this regard, Rowbotham (1992)<sup>26</sup> explains that the radical and revolutionary movements of the 19th century not only emphasized the right of individuals but sovereignty as well. Women argued that if people have the right to make a difference in a society, this must include women, since they constitute half the

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<sup>24</sup> Clayhills, Harriet. 1991. *Kuinnobistorisk uppslagbok*. Stockholm, Roben & Bokbörsen

<sup>25</sup> Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. W.W. Norton & Company. Inc. New York  
<https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/ows/seminars/tcentury/FeminineMystique.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Rowbotham, Sheila. 1992. *Women in Movement: Feminism and Social Action (Revolutionary Thought and Radical Movements)*, Routledge pp 6-11

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population. Based on this argument, the women's movement demands liberation from subjugation in the social, political, and private spheres of life. The degrees of liberation achieved manifest as forms of equality.

In this research, the women's movement in Iran includes a collection of women's struggles for genuine legal equality, especially in political, social and cultural discourse. Not every struggle takes place in legal arenas, yet ultimately social outcomes of equality aspire to valid legal protections. To achieve equality and diminish gender subjugation at different times, women in Iran have resorted to different methods with a generative characteristic. The history of the women's movement in Iran is the summation of all these struggles. Although the efforts of women's movement activists, since the 1979 Revolution in Iran, have mainly focused on the elimination of legal discrimination, another segment of the Iranian women's movement, based outside of Iran, is active on issues such as gay and lesbian rights. While such aspects of the Iranian women's movement can be categorized, it is equally important to not overlook the vital fact that the Iranian women's movement de facto includes all women who, by virtue of their own understanding of their rights, in some way clashed with Islamic and governmental decrees. Simply by wearing bright colors and short overcoats, by not tying their scarfs or covering their hair, by cohabitation outside of marriage, by occupying 65% of university seats, and by any way possible, women have manifested their objections to laws that discriminate against them and simultaneously expressed a degree of common cause. Such actions must be understood as transactions in the social space with real social and political implications: many suffered incarceration, corporal punishment, monetary fines or other forms of penalization.

The Iranian women's movement has often worked in concert with, and often along similar paths as the international women's movement on issues such as campaigns to secure the right to vote, or the right to education. Sometimes independent women's institutions and organizations were banned; the Iranian women's movement nonetheless found alternative forms of expression and ways to persevere, such as a number of "governmental feminists" who sought to encourage

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the elimination of discrimination against women by working to effect change from within the regime. One such example is Senator Mehrangiz Manouchehrian's<sup>27</sup> role in the passage of the Family Bill in 1975. In this light, the Iranian women's movement can be understood to have a social character and cultural vitality transcending officially sanctioned organizational forms. During repressive periods, the women's movement at times could appear, expressed as an organic metaphor, like assemblies ready to blossom at the right time, like a flower among the rocks.

To provide clearer understanding of the context, I analyze and review various ways that the Iranian women's rights movement has manifested itself during historically important periods of this movement. In addition, I analyze the influence of women rights activists in driving the change in Iranian social and political dynamics, in particular in relation to new media.

In summary, the research asserts its relevance by clearly acknowledging the significant and compelling long-term and ongoing social, legal and political scopes of the women's movement in Iran; and subsequently aims to place itself squarely into this robust context and make a vital contribution to improve understanding of some of the core dynamics.

### **1.3 Review of Literature**

In many Western countries, a significant link between the media and women's movement can be clearly identified as early as "first wave feminism" in the 19th century. At the landmark 1848 women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, the organizer Elizabeth Cady Stanton explicitly sought to raise public awareness about women's rights by engaging the press (Donsbach, 1992). Wary of the misrepresentation of her ideas, Stanton knew the value of press attention to achieve her goals (Barker-Plummer, 1995). By the 20th century newspapers

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<sup>27</sup> Mehrangiz Manouchehrian (1906-2000) an Iranian lawyer, feminist, and appointed Senator She was involved in the Women's Organization of Iran. She was involved in drafting the Family Protection Act - a set of laws extending women's rights in marriage. Her contribution to an improvement of women's rights in Iran is acknowledged. Retrieved from Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehrangiz\\_Manouchehrian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehrangiz_Manouchehrian)

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became more entrenched in everyday life and grew in importance as vectors of communication.

Researchers aiming to gain insight into the role of media in women's movements have conducted studies on the association between the two (Ross, 1981; van Zoonen, 1992; Camahort, Jardins, & Stone, 2007). Ross (1981) measured and analyzed the quantity of news coverage from 1900 to 1977 in the New York Times and periodicals in the Reader's Guide and found that news coverage of women was strongly related to the women's movement. The coverage was highest when the women's movement was strong. Content analysis showed that the quality of news coverage varied with the strength of the movement. Van Zoonen (1992) studied the interaction between media and the women's movement in the Netherlands at the time of the movement's resurrection in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Analysis of news coverage explored media stakeholder control of the movement's "public identity" and found that it was constructed within a liberal feminist framework, built upon what was identified as three "foundations": emancipation is legitimate, 'feminism' is deviant; movement activists are quite different from and not representative of 'ordinary' women; the movement is directed against men. A more recent study by Camahort, Jardins, & Stone (2007) found relations between changes in the technology of news platforms and movement dynamics. After the creation of new media tools, such as blogging technology, reduced some barriers to publishing online, women who had previously long been the majority of web users, but not the majority of active web creators, became just as likely to create or read a blog on the web as men.

Regarding the role of women in media, Byerly (2004) claims that in today's world, women who historically had not had strong representation in major media in terms of high-level management, were becoming even more under-represented in decision making on media coverage and policy issues, and less cited as expert "sources for major news stories."

In regard to the media characterizations of women, George (2005) found that women from developing countries are portrayed in a "highly selective and

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disempowering manner” ignored by most global media coverage except as victims or refugees in crisis situation. Additionally, radio studies by Suarez Toro (2000) show that although women are not represented proportionately in the production of radio, it is heavily used by women, because of its low cost, and also because women can be doing other work while listening.

Research on the women’s movement and gender equality in Iran has a long history. It has especially flourished since the Iranian revolution in 1979 and the subsequent establishment of an Islamic state in Iran at the core of which was the subordination of women resulting in a serious backlash for women’s rights and gender equality, establishing rigid gender segregation and imposing restrictive rules of political and personal conduct (see Afary, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 1999; Moghissi, 1994). For elaborate study on groups and activists, see Abrahamian (1982). Iranian and foreign researchers have well documented the development of the women’s struggle against patriarchy and discriminatory laws before, during and after the revolution (Bamdad, 1968; Sanasarian, 1982; Tohidi, 1991; Moghaddam, 2007; Schuckar, 2003; Nashat, 1983; Sedghi, 2007); political groups in general (Paidar, 1997); and women’s movement organizations (Afary, 1996). Since the beginning of the 1990s, an area of focus and debate began to emerge in various countries, including Iran and amongst Iranian expatriates, on so-called “Islamic feminism” in which gender equality, female emancipation and women’s rights was often considered inherent to Islam and where the Quran could be used as a relevant contextual basis and frame for feminist argumentation.

“Islamic feminists” manifest diverse approaches and conceptualizations, yet viewed as a whole they can be seen as a dynamic ambition to (re)interpret sacred Islamic texts in ways that articulate an emancipatory Islam in which men and women are equal (for an overview see Moghadam, 2002; Mir-Hosseini, 1996; Najmabadi 1994/1998; Amirpour, 1999; Afshar 2001; Gheytanchi, 1998; Paidar, 1997; Shahidian, 1998; Barlas, 2002).

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Valentine Moghadam (2002) claims, many “Islamic feminists” are publishers, writers, academics, lawyers and politicians, often associated with the women’s press in Iran.

However, as it is very important to note, there are many issues with this so-called “Islamic feminism” and the related body of research. First, the conceptualization as “Islamic feminism” is open to question, as the political facts align more with “institutional reform” than bona fide feminism. To some extent, the terminology of the feminist movement has been politically co-opted.

Many previous academic researchers were focusing on groups that were aligned with this “Islamic feminism” way of thought and as such missing communities of secular feminism. Consequently, a body of research emerged that may have a degree of value but does not provide the full picture of social and political realities. From a methodological perspective, it is not difficult to understand that some researchers may have been conducting research from contexts more closely aligned with politically powerful so-called “Islamic feminism” and that this impacted data and analysis. It is also not difficult to understand that vested political interests may have had an agenda to promote this perspective. The women close to the power could have their own magazine. In a not unrelated way, secular feminists had a lack of access to relevant platforms.

In addition, there has often been a tendency to generalize about feminism in the Middle East; while many of these generalizations may have varying degrees of truth and relevance, there is nonetheless to date a significant lack of academic recognition for the simultaneous profound importance of secular feminism.

Regarding the role of women in relation to the Green Movement, a few publications have appeared (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010; Eshraghi, 2011), yet material in this area is relatively scant. The publications note significant impacts of the women’s movement on the organization of the protests and the agency and autonomy of Iranian women which became visible during these weeks. In a global perspective, this also challenges victimizing images and stereotypes of ‘Oriental’ women in Western media (for more on post-colonial critiques of the constructions

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of the ‘Oriental’ woman, see Harper, 1985; Lewis, 1996; Mohanty, 2004; Yeğenoğlu, 1998). As Victoria Tahmasebi-Birghani (2010, p.78) rightfully states: “The extraordinary peaceful heroism of women demonstrators has awakened us in the West to the massive presence of women in Iran’s Green Movement.” This stands in contrast to images of violence, often gendered, transmitted by the media.

The presence of new media tools in relation to the Green Movement has been observed, noted, documented and commented upon, to varying degrees, by media, journalists, news commentators, organizers, activists and others, with emphasis in general on new media or on the presence of women in the protests. Yet no rigorous systematic studies have been carried out to document and scientifically map correlations between the use of media and the development of Iran’s women’s movement, and to analyze the role which new media played for the movement.

In the absence of such studies, the key elements of untested assumptions and presumptions about perceived events and the significance of impact of social media, such as networking sites like Twitter or Facebook, is conjectural and speculative. Correlation does not imply causation. Research on the so-called Arab Spring (Difraoui, 2011; Perthes, 2011) identified complex social dynamics and interrelationships to technology; although new media were in fact notably visible and widely used to mobilize people for demonstrations, the revolutions were nonetheless sustained by the masses of ordinary, working class people and the urban poor with no access to the Internet or other modern forms of communication. Such findings underscore the need to advance beyond empirical data, conjecture and speculation, and highlight the desirability of well-designed studies able to test hypotheses.

It is this gap in research that this project aims to address: the role of new media for the democratic movements in Iran (and in the region, as relevant) and in particular the relation to the women’s movement. This study draws from the above literature on the development of the women’s movement, recent studies on the Arab Spring and sociological literature on new media and the role of the Internet for social movements in general. This research will significantly add to existing

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knowledge on the dynamics of new social movements and civil society organizations in the Islamic world and to the research on Islam, modern nation states and transnational social movements.

#### **1.4 Revival of the Women's Movement**

In recent years, with the increasing role of communication technologies like the Internet, mobile phones, satellite TVs, and access to the World Wide Web, many of the activists who had spent the first two decades after revolution without access to media and confined to small assemblies, were drawn to the impressive presence of media. Despite government restriction of online-contents and controls of access to broadband DSL<sup>28</sup>, the Internet and new technologies have become organizing instruments and are facilitating international support of women's rights groups, feminist movements and human rights activists. Since approximately the beginning of the 21st century, there has been a notable correlated emergence of activity of Iranian women in diverse movements such as participating in the "One Million Signatures"<sup>29</sup> campaign; anti-stoning- campaigns; women entering the sport stadium-campaign; anti-execution campaigns; and in different NGOs for empowering women, and many more activities struggling for equality.

Furthermore, the appearance and growth of a new generation of women's rights activists, of educated women and girls in particular empowered by access to technology, and pro-equality and anti-authoritarian created new styles in cyberspace that enabled them to create a pro-democratic and pro-freedom dialogue by standing up to authoritarianism from beyond the limits of the state's monopolistic media. In the context of such an environment and free from any ideological tendency, the women's movement produced a new language and entered it into the Green Movement, which is discussed subsequently in this thesis.

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<sup>28</sup> Digital subscriber line (DSL) is a family of technologies used to transmit digital data over telephone lines, widely used for Internet access. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital\\_subscriber\\_line](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_subscriber_line)

<sup>29</sup> The One Million Signatures for Repeal of Discriminatory Laws is a campaign by women rights activists to collect one million signatures in support of changing discriminatory laws against women in Iran.

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## **1.5 Interlinking the Women's Movement and the Democratic Movement in the Election Campaign of 2009**

In the past, due in large part to restrictions women's activists were facing in accessing formal and traditional media, they resorted mainly to new media, such as the Internet, to express their views. In the course of broad-based social actions, such as in the case of "The One Million Signatures for repeal Discriminatory Law", where many participants had no access to digital media, women also used face-to-face communication to raise awareness and reach an otherwise inaccessible collective.

Two months before the elections of June 2009 in Iran, women activists came up with a new and interesting political strategy. Out of urgent need, an informal structure was created, called "Ham-Gara'ie" ("The convergence of the women's movement"). Women from different political and religious or secular backgrounds gathered to share and discuss their mutual expectations and, in that way, build common ground for political action and formulate a sort of 'minimum political protest'. After in-depth discussions, demands were formulated and as a next step, communicated to all presidential candidates, and by that, potential future presidents of the country. The women asked to see each candidate individually and in the course of a comprehensive interview to discuss their points: to end discriminating laws, to change the constitution and to accept the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The "convergence of the women's movement" played a crucial role in challenging all candidates and forced them to present their specific views on issues relevant and of concern to women. By that, a particular focus on women's rights was inserted into the political programs of all the candidates, who were representing the democratic opposition in the beginning or became part of the opposition during

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the election process, except Ahmadinejad<sup>30</sup>. Women were also visible in the course of election events and quite active in all polling stations and headquarters.

Following the election fraud, all over the world people observed a broad range of peaceful demonstrations by expatriated Iranians as well as in Teheran and many other Iranian places. The new concept of connecting different political persuasions into a common activity such as exercised in Ham-Gara'ie contributed to preparing the ground for what became known as the “Green Movement.”

In the aftermath of the rigged elections, the population, particularly young people, started to exchange their views and their understanding of the events intensively: they wanted to know precisely what had happened. This process led eventually to the birth of the Green Movement and made it become a political reality.

The younger generation, who had long adjusted to a lifestyle with new media - for example, to consume forbidden rock & techno music, by using digital tools such as Facebook, to name but one electronic system of communication, rapidly succeeded to transmit information on events and developments to each other. Relatively isolated individuals, by using new media with which they were increasingly familiar, increasingly evolved into citizen reporters. They used mobile phones to take images, produce clips, video films, and exchanged written information and pictures of events exchanged through Bluetooth and mobile phone networks. Iranian youth became a channel of information transmission, neutralizing existing restrictions by their skills. Often the young people took the lead in actions, long before their political leaders. They organized next steps and moves, and this process continued to evolve. This overlapped and integrated with the women's movement and added further impetus to both.

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<sup>30</sup> Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was the sixth President of Iran from 2005 to 2013. He was the main political leader of the Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran, a coalition of conservative political groups in Iran.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud\\_Ahmadinejad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mahmoud_Ahmadinejad)

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## **1.6 The Goals of the Research**

This research examines the evolution of the Iranian women's movement and the role of modern media in that process, and the impact of a sub-movement like the women's movement on the pro-democratic movement in Iran that was shaped by the protest to the 2009 presidential election. This thesis attempts to thoroughly study and present a clear analysis of the theoretical, scientific and practical foundations of the women's movement. While studying the history of the Iranian women's movement from the Constitutional Revolution to the present time, it attempts to identify the strategies and tactics women's rights activists used to try to achieve equality in Iran, and the major obstacles and challenges that they faced. In this context, the role of tradition, Islam, and the clergy in preventing women from acquiring sexual rights and gender choice in their social, political, and private life are studied. A related aspect of this study explores the role of modern media, including the use of the Internet and social networks in cyberspace, on the Iranian women's movement during the decade between 2003 and 2013, the 10-year period of the movement's activity post-revolution. The goal is to give a descriptive narrative of the history, usage and impacts of social networks and Internet tools and technology used by civil and political users and activists, and of the women's movements in particular.

As such, this research attempts to add valuable critical insights that can help to address questions often considered essential to understanding the women's movement after the revolution, such as:

- What made women participate in the 1979 Revolution against their own interests?
- Why were women unable to defend their rights at the beginning of the revolution, by uniting against the patriarchal and theocratic Islamic regime?
- What is the reality of "Islamic feminism" in Iran?
- What was the role of modern media in women's rights activists' actions during the third decade after the revolution?

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- What effects did the women's movement have on the Green Movement?
  - How did the Iranian Women Movement activists utilize new media and cyberspace in their campaigning efforts?
  - How did new media provide a platform to reflect diverse communities and identities?
  - How did the new period of smartphones, online platform and social media revolutionize social movements including the women's movement in Iran?

In addition, this study explores questions about opportunities to use new media to organize resistance in Iran. How do new media support build a women's movement and stable linkages to the democratic movement? Do new media offer new chances for the organization of political resistance in Iran? What resources have been used especially by women, how and with what success? How might new media establish and strengthen ties between women's movements in the region, as seen during the Arab Spring? What conclusions can we draw for the future of the women's movement in Iran and the Islamic world as a whole?

Starting from the hypothesis that new media do have a significant impact on organizing the women's movement and the Green Movement for democratization, the research investigates the Internet, i.e., Iran-centered websites, blogs, social networking sites, analyzing information networks and path flows. This includes the monitoring of international networking sites of women's rights activists such as *Women Living under Muslim Law*, Iranian student email groups and chat rooms, non-governmental organizations working in the field of women's rights, homepages of women's or gender studies in Iran, as well as other sites informally organizing or mobilizing activities for women's rights and awareness raising.

## **1.7 Significance of the Subject**

Media plays a crucial role in social, political, economic and cultural life. In many respects, the impacts of media on modern life are as important as revolutions in the domains of science and technology. Media and its relation to development is one of the controversial issues of recent decades, leading to the point where the use

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of media is one of the indices of development. Studying the role of media on societal beliefs and social values is of great importance. Specifically, media provides a sphere for activists, elites, and pioneers of the women's movements to discuss and negotiate for equality. Media has critical potential to inform people in ways that increase awareness and understanding of human rights, cultural, educational issues. Media can stimulate people to think more critically about their place in society; or discourage it. Researching the role of media in the women's movement leads to insights into the effect of technology on the development of civil movement. Discussing taboo issues such as violence against women, pornography, rape, deliberate self-burning, prostitution, sexual harassment, and media can awaken women to fight exploitation and struggle for their gender and sexual rights. Research how women use specific media, such as new media, in relation to the media landscape, can clarify how women develop identity, mobilize empowerment, engage, assert and evolve rights further.

In today's world, in many countries, women do not have equal rights to men and suffer from violence and discrimination in different social situations. Iran is one of these countries where women are deprived of their obvious rights. Yet Iranian women are active in various movements such as the One Million-Signatures campaign, the anti-execution campaign, different NGOs for empowering women, women charter group and many other initiatives struggling for equality. The women's movement in Iran has become an impressive movement not only inside the country, but also in the neighboring countries like Afghanistan, Iraq and Turkey. However, the fact remains that Iran has a long way to go to be a developed country as far as women's rights are concerned. Women aspire to political, social, legal and cultural rights equal to men. This study sheds further light on influential factors in women's inequality. Among these, media is one of the most widely used influences, both personally in daily life and institutionally, worldwide. Improved understanding of media and its impact on women's rights can help women's movements around the world.

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Furthermore, the importance of studying social movements and their surrounding issues lies in the fact that some social movements are retrogressive while some are progressive, and they play a defining role in the process of democratization or lack thereof in a society. Meanwhile, the study of the role of the Iranian women's movement as the most enduring social movement in influencing and being influenced by other social phenomena in different periods is of particular importance. Modern media, the study's focus, is one of the most influential elements in contemporary social movements.

Totalitarian regimes consider modern communication technology their enemy because it is too easy for non-regime actors to create their own media outlet. Cyberspace, new media and social networks compete with state media to the extent that states, even with their finances and technology, are confronted with degrees of powerlessness to stop or slow down this phenomenon. The significance of this phenomenon can directly affect the quantity and quality of usage by civil rights activists, as well as the ability to use this sphere to negotiate social and political life. The use of media in the Iranian women's movement in particular is a significant part of the history of the women's movement in the era of modern technology.

Although much research has been done on the Iranian women's movement after the revolution, little of this research focused on the role of modern media in the movement. Even on an international level, there have been many studies on the effects of the Internet on social movements, but some research is skeptical about the role of the Internet, contrary to others who have idealized it. The aim of this thesis is not to be partial in a dogmatic positive or negative view of the Internet, but to look objectively and critically at the Internet in relation to the women's movement.

In studying the use of the Internet, Earl et al (2010)<sup>31</sup> concluded that cyber activists have different ways and aims in using these tools. Therefore, efforts have

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<sup>31</sup> Earl, Jennifer, Katrina Kimport, Greg Prieto, Carly Rush, and Kimberly Reynoso. 2010. "Changing the World One Webpage at a Time: Conceptualizing and Explaining 'Internet Activism'" *Mobilization* 15(4):425-446.

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been made in this study to evaluate different ways the modern media is used by cyber activists, regardless of whether the Internet is used to organize online campaigns, or guide demonstrations or social protests, or in individual acts of writing personal blogs.

## 1.8 Data Collection and Methods of Research

This thesis is the result of personal experience<sup>32</sup> and academic research complemented by primary research and fieldwork. I collected data by conducting an online survey questionnaire. A link to the questionnaire was sent to various mailing lists in Iran and internationally, as well as being shared via Facebook during 2012- 2013. The online survey questionnaire was viewed by 1,068 Internet users and subsequently completed by 278 Internet users, a response rate of 26.2%. The central theme of the questionnaire refers to users' identity, experiences and views on women's rights and democratic activities. The questionnaire covered the interviewees' perspectives on and experiences with the women's movement, their use of digital media in general and in relation to the Green Movement as well as their opinion on the role of the women's movement in shaping the Green Movement. Subsequently, Semi-structured face-to-face qualitative interviews were conducted with 18 Iranian activists for women's rights, during 2010-2013 in different countries. The interviews were collected and interpreted following the standard approach of interpretation. In addition, the quantitative data gathered was analyzed both descriptive, and inferential, utilizing chi-square test in SPSS (23.00), P<0.05. This allows for an exploration of interrelations and connections between the respective interviewee's political opinion on women's issues, the use of online

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<sup>32</sup> For a few examples documented in English, see: Moghaddam, Rezvan. (2015). Global Network, Women's E-Learning in Leadership (WELL) at George Mason University.  
<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://wellforpeace.org/24ezvan-moghaddam/>  
Moghaddam, R. (2015, 07 October). The Role of Women in the Non-Violent Struggle in Iran with Rezvan Moghadam. Presentation. Sponsored by Women and Gender Studies, George Mason University. Retrieved from <https://wmst.gmu.edu/events/5570>;  
Acid throwing in Iran | Stop Street Harassment, 26 april 2015. Translated by HKearl.  
<http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/2015/04/acidthrowingiran>  
<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/article/-f60eee2b03.html>  
Scholars at Risk. 06 September 2018. Courage to Think: Iran. YouTube. Interview Rezvan Moghaddam, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, in conversation with Dr. Olga Hünler, University of Bremen  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keHIpCR2KYQ>

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communication tools and his or her own political activities and actions, especially in the post-election demonstrations in 2009. The interviews were evaluated statistically and thus allow drawing representative conclusions, across the group of interviewees, on the role of new media in the mobilization for women's rights during the Green Movement.

Furthermore, libraries were consulted for relevant resources. An extensive review was conducted of women's publications, research, news, and the review of websites, weblogs, and foreign and domestic articles, activists. In analyzing data, both qualitative and quantitative methods have been used. Descriptive statistics and analytical statistics have been applied.

The key geographical locus of the research is Iran. Primary resources have been used wherever possible. With regard to news and incidents related to the Green Movement, in particular, the resources and websites used are in Persian. It would be difficult for non-Iranians to study them. In the section related to the women's movement and the Green Movement, mostly domestic sources and news and Internet sites have been used. As a women's movement activist after the revolution, I have tried to introduce events that took place within the women's movement, which were not reflected or discussed in public so that the readers and analysts of this movement may acquire a deeper understanding of the women's movement after the revolution. In the meantime, attempts have been made to make this work factual and impartial. Clearly, I cannot claim that this research covers every aspect of the women's movement, since despite all limitations after the revolution, in small cities and other parts of Iran women undoubtedly have used strategies suitable to their conditions to protest against discrimination. One recommendation therefore for future research is to study the women's and civil rights activists of the Iranian women's movement beyond Tehran and large cities.

In this research, I occupy the position of an observer who, from the early days of the revolution, witnessed the sudden disappearance of the achievements resulting from the struggles of Iranian women's movements by the movement of the finger of a certain religious figure. In search of answers to the whys and hows of an

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incident called the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which caused hardship and irreparable damage in my life and the life of my generation including execution, the denial of education following the “Cultural Revolution”, incarceration and torture, exclusion from the workforce by expulsion and dismissal, travel bans or forced departure from the country to become refugees, I was looking for an answer to why the voices of women went unheard for two decades. Moreover, how could all these atrocities happen in relative silence?

## **1.9 Representativeness of the Research Sample and Limitations of the Research**

Women's right activists in Iran served as the subjects of the research. To come up with a reliable result, subjects of the sample were selected among activists within Iran and diaspora, however due to practical obstacles only those with access to the survey were tested.

The logistical challenges were complex. It was not easy at all to collect information and conduct interviews. Due to risks related to widespread protests to the result of the election, some women's movement activists disappeared. Some migrated to other countries. Therefore, it was not easy to find people who both knew about the activities of women and could talk easily. In addition, data collection and interviews made large time demands. Interviewing activists inside the country was not easy for security reasons. Therefore, interviews were conducted in several countries, and different cities, including France, Germany, Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey. In light of my research questions and purpose, I defined the range of information that should be collected.

A major advantage of online questionnaires is that the researcher has no role in selection of respondents, therefore minimizing risk of influence in demographic characteristics of participants. Although there were serious restrictions as the Iranian cyber army and cyber police, also known as FATA, has sophisticated systems to control posting of materials on websites, online bulletin boards, blogs and social media. FATA police fundamentally monitor production and

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communication in cyberspace in Iran and filters or in some cases arrests the bloggers. In addition, small cities suffer from low Internet speed with limited Internet access. Clearly, this study is not a comprehensive data set of all Iranian society. It must be understood that the nature of the information obtained in this study is a valuable reflection of real circumstances, relevant to social and political life. A best effort has been made under the circumstances and with the resources available to draw meaningful conclusions. Further research is also suggested.

### **1.10 Some suggestions for further research or actions**

Most independent studies and peer reviewed papers emphasized positive aspects of social media to counteract the Iranian government, which in turn focuses on limiting its role and maintaining control of cyberspace. As technologies, and actors' use of them, evolve, it is possible that new media could have potentially negative effects on social movements. This requires further study. Furthermore, over the last decade based on the rapid growth in digital applications in cyberspace, some apps are more popular than others. For example, over the years, in a country where Twitter and Facebook are banned, the app Telegram has helped Iranians quench their thirst for online political expression with approximately 20 million Iranian users; Telegram is the most widely-used messaging app in the country. It would be valuable to conduct research that focuses on specific social media, such as Telegram, to understand better what makes it effective in Iran.

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## **Chapter 2 The History of the Women's Movement in Iran**

### **Elections**

#### **2.1 Iranian women's movement during the Constitutional Revolution, 1905-1925**

In Iran, in the past, because so much of what constitutes history was being predominantly written and controlled by men, and proportionally less by women, many facts of women's rights activities were being overlooked, neglected, omitted or lost in the clouded annals of time. Nevertheless, there is still a historical record to research: in between pages of scripts and documents that exist, one can obtain a partial view of the facts and the activities of women in Iran from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For example, William Morgan Shuster, in his book, *The Strangling of Persia: Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental* says: "From 1907 the Iranian women have been regarded as the most advanced, if not the most radical, women in the world."<sup>33</sup> Such a remarkable attestation highlights the merit of further investigation into the historical record.

Although the Iranian women's movement clearly goes back to the Constitutional period, there were many other previous notable efforts made by progressive women in areas such as equality and breaking down social stigmas and taboos. Among such efforts we can cite the manifestly historic unveiling in 1848 of Qurratu l-'Ayn<sup>34</sup> while speaking at a gathering in a public space. Since then, countless other women have risen up in many ways against patriarchy and masculinism rules. Unfortunately, very few activists protesting injustice and inequality in the political status quo are likely to be remembered by name in either

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<sup>33</sup> Shuster, William Morgan 1912 "The Strangling of Persia: Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental", Originally published: 1912, Literary Licensing LLC, 7 Aug 2014

<sup>34</sup> Qurratu l-'Ayn also known as Táhirih, Tahereh (Táhirih) (Persian: طهرا, "The Pure One," and Qurrat al-'Ayn (Arabic: العين فرة "Solace/Consolation of the Eyes") are titles of Fatimah Baraghani/Umm-i-Salmih (1814 or 1817 – August 16–27, 1852), an influential poet and theologian of the Bábí faith in Iran one of the Letters of the Living, the first group of followers of the Báb. Her life, influence and execution made her a key figure of the religion. The daughter of Muhammad Salih Baraghani, born into one of the most prominent families of her time. Táhirih led a radical interpretation that, though it split the Babi community, united messianism with Bábism. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/T%C3%A1hirih> retrieved 23 December 2018

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a positive light or in much detail in the official history books.

On one hand, the Iranian women's movement arose to deal with hidden and open inequalities and injustices shaped by the culture, religion and patriarchy in the fabric of the society for centuries. On the other hand, it is the result of women's higher awareness about gender equality, as well as the socio-economic conditions of women in Iran in comparison to the rest of the world and awareness about women's movements for equality in other countries. It is evident that the Iranian women's movement is the cumulative result of many experiences and struggles of the Iranian women over the years. Without a proper understanding and evaluation of such a past, any effort to analyze the present women's movement would be difficult and inadequate.

While in the 19th century and even until the first half of the 20th century, the transfer and exchange of information and news was very slow, social movements at times managed to spread into global movements. In the women's movement, we can point to the women's suffrage movement in the United States in 1848 as a basis for broader social movements. Towards the late 19th century, women's issues, with their socio-economic and cultural dimensions, received more attention by intellectuals, modernists, nationalist and anti-colonial forces (Paidar, 1997; Sanasarian, 1982)<sup>35</sup>. The Iranian women's movement peaked in the 1920s, and if not at the same pace of the global women's movement, nonetheless in line with its demands. Iranian pioneer women were catching up with the West, energized by the victory of women's suffrage movement in England in 1918 and in the United States in 1920, they too demanded voting rights for women and by voting for likeminded representatives to the Iranian parliament, they managed to influence power to bring change and realize their demands.

The Iranian women's movement was influenced by other international events as well. The first period of women's social movement activities is associated with four important events. First, it coincided with the First World War that lasted from

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<sup>35</sup> Sanasarian, Elise. (1982). *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini*. USA:Praeger.

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1914 to 1918. Second, the constitutional movement in the second half of the 1900s that led to the Constitutional Revolution in Iran. Third, the Constitutional Revolution in 1905. Fourth, two events in Russia: the Russian Revolution in 1905, and the October Revolution in 1917. These events were followed by the rise of Reza Shah to power and the Pahlavi Dynasty inception in February 1921.

The Constitutional Revolution in Iran occurred almost simultaneously with the 1905 Russian Revolution and many changes in that country. It was inspired by high ideals for democracy and modernity, as well as the movement against dictatorship and for reform in Iran (for more information, see Brown, 1991; Abrahamian, 1982)<sup>36</sup>. Within the political climate in the first decade of the 1900's, women were able to take collective action in the public arena. Although the political efforts of women activists were initially in support of the constitutionalists and raising public demands, they gradually gave more attention and greater focus to their own demands for women's rights.

Gradually, especially after the year 1906 (1285), the women's movement became more visible and independent. Women created their own forums and held special gatherings. These gatherings were often irregular and based on friendship and amicable connections. In fact, personal relationships between members of the groups would form the structure of the group, and the group functioned in an informal manner. These types of relationships and formal and non-formal gatherings gradually made women become more aware of their social responsibilities. During the Constitutional Revolution in Iran, many secret and semi-secret societies were formed. Women, in accordance with these trends, also formed some secret societies. (For more information, see Khosropanah, 2003/1382). Through these secret societies, they managed to organize activities

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<sup>36</sup> Browne, Edward Granville. (1991). *T he Persian Revolution of 1905–1909*. London: Frank Cass, 1966, reprinted edition; Mangol Bayat, *Iran's First Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press); Keddie, Nikki., Amanat, Mehrdad. (1991) "Iran under the Late Qajar, 1848–1922," Cambridge History of Iran, v. 7 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 174–212; Abrahamian, Ervand. (1982) *Iran Between two Revolutions*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press. pp. 496-537

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against foreign forces and in support of the Constitutional Revolution. (For more information, see Abrahamian, 1984; Sanasarian, 1982, pp. 1384-1439.)

William Morgan Shuster (1912)<sup>37</sup>, one of the scholars and researchers in the book *Repression in Iran*, provided information regarding women's semi-secret societies during the Constitutional Revolution. Describing the activities of women during this period, Mangol Bayat claims that participation of women in political events (1905-1911) was spontaneous and without any organization, because there are no records of women's organized political activities to guide or inspire them. (Bayat, 1978, 1991)<sup>38</sup> However, some historians have pointed to women's groups in this period, for example "The Committee for Iranian Women", or "Anjoman-i Saadat-i Iranian", formed by a few exiled constitutionalist women and girls in Istanbul. This committee was working to make connections with European organizations to engage their support for the Iranian women's movement (Khosropanah, 2003/1382, p. 62-65)<sup>39</sup>.

In the light of the socialist revolution, for the first time in history, the equality of men and women in all areas was officially promulgated and certain laws were adopted in support of women. Influenced by socialist revolution, revolutionary movements in Europe and America were formed and women were active as participants in these movements. Also due to the of Soviet neighbors to Iran, the news and the exchange of information regarding Soviet women's organizations for equality spread to women organizers in Iran. For example, according to the newspaper *Qadyny East* (Eastern Woman) printed in Soviet Azerbaijan, in 1921, a celebration of International Women's Day, 8<sup>th</sup> March, was held by Iranian communist women, with about 45-50 participants. (Abdul Hossien Nahid, p. 106.)<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Abrahamiam, Ervand. 1984. Iran between the Two Revolutions. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

<sup>38</sup> Bayat, Mangol. 1991. Iran's First Revolution: Shi'ism and the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1909 (Studies in Middle Eastern History) Oxford University Press; 1 edition (November 14, 1991)

Bayat, Philipp, Mangol"1978. women and Revolution in Iran ,1905-1911" in women in the Muslim world , Edited by Beck, Lois , Keddie, Nikki, Cambridge, Mass; Harvard University Press,1978, p.306

<sup>39</sup> Khosropanah, Mohammad Hassan. (2003/1382). "The goal of the revolution and the struggle of Iranian women to the Pahlavi" second edition, Publication Payame emrooz Tehran, Iran pp. 62-65

<sup>40</sup> Nahid, Abdul hossien.1981. Zanane Iran dar jonbeshe Mashrote (Iranian women in the constitutional movement) Published Nashre ehya ,Tabriz ,p106

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In addition, there were other factors influencing the formation and advancement of the women's movement, which was the first wave of feminism in Iran. For example, one factor was the impact of new ideas and modernity, and the spread and advancement of the "Babi Movement" in the 19th century. This new movement demanded religious reform, especially the realization of women's social rights. Additionally, the teachings of the Bab, founder of the Babi Movement, challenged the old and decadent traditions and crumbling social structure of the time, including the oppression of women, and brought a new vision to the thousands of followers of this movement that included women's rights. For examples of this, we can refer to the writings of Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and Shaykh Ahmad-i Ruhi, who spoke against the suppression of women at home and the forced veil. (Afary, 1996, 64)<sup>41</sup>

In addition to the progress of Western civilization, communist parties and communist women's activities in Europe and America, the influences of new ideas and modern Iranian intellectuals were effective in the formation of associations and groups seeking modernization and reform. Even within the Qajar royal court, some movements for modernity and reform were taking place, which led to the Constitutional Revolution in 1905 and the demand for changes in the law and judiciary. Not only that was a milestone in the history of Iran's Constitutional Revolution, but it also represented a turning point in the flourishing women's movement.

The participation of women in the Constitutional Revolution leads to another important point on women's involvement in social and political activities. Women not only had a notable share of success in this revolution, but their activities during this period often comingled with nationalist activities. Many publications promoting women's issues and women's rights were printed during this period to raise woman's awareness about their rights. Two important issues often highlighted in such publications were the right to education and the right to vote.

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<sup>41</sup> Afary, Janet. 1996. *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy and the origins of Feminism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

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## **2.2 Differences in tactics, alliance in strategy**

During the Constitutional Revolution, leading women activists promoted two major perspectives. One group of women became very active in the political arena and tried to promote and pass new laws to achieve equality. This group of women, together with constitutionalist men, fought against fanaticism, autocracy and traditionalism, with the hope that the Constitutional Revolution would improve social conditions. The other group of women activists, greater in numbers, concentrated in the cultural field with a main goal to change the cultural and social conditions of women. This group began working in the cultural field and worked towards the foundation of girl's schools, literacy projects and women-specific publications. In fact, in order to challenge the clergy who were against the opening of girl's schools, they began a vast campaign to change the public mindset, including writing articles, organizing gatherings for debate and consultation on the importance of literacy for women and girls. In fact, both perspectives and methods used during these periods were complementary to each other and indispensable in the women's movement. The Armenians in particular were among the leading groups in forming girl's schools and at the forefront of the advancement of girl's education in Iran. (See Houri Berberian, 2001)<sup>42</sup>

Access to education for women had many challenges. In relation to the right to education for women, there were two views among the Constitutionalists. A group of them included social democrats, who believed in no limitation and no discrimination against the education of girls. Conversely, other Constitutionalists had traditionalist views more aligned to fundamentalists opposed to establishment of schools for girls. Women activists persisted in their campaign to promote the idea of education for girls and the importance of establishing schools for girls. The opening of a new "School for Girls" (Dabestand-i Dooshizegan) in March 1906 by

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<sup>42</sup> Berberian, Houri .2001, Armenians and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905–1911 The Love for Freedom has no Fatherland boulder, Westview press.

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Mrs. Astarabadi. (Bibi Khanum Vazirove)<sup>43</sup> followed by the opening of another girls' school "Namoos" by Tuba Azmoodeh in 1907, encountered fierce opposition from traditionalists, especially religious authorities who linked the establishment of girls' school with the proliferation of prostitution. (Khosropanah, 2003/1382, p.34)

Religious authorities believed that literacy and establishment of schooling for girls was against religion. "In some cities the strong opposition coincided with opening and closing of a number of schools at the same time." (Ibid., p. 220) Clergy used the pulpit to incite anger and deceitfully influence the public mind. They made demagogic outcries against the establishment of schools for girls and women. For example, one of these religious figures, Shah-Abdul-Azim, shouted from the pulpit: "For a country that allows the opening of girls schools one must weep." People indeed wept in response (Vaziri, 2006/1385)<sup>44</sup>. Such examples highlight the long, complex and difficult journey that activists in the women's movement faced, while moving from effectively no basic social and individual rights, to a situation today where over 65% of university students are women. The opposition of the clergy Ulama (mullahs)<sup>45</sup> against opening new schools was not limited to girl's schools only. They also opposed the opening of schools for boys (See Ringer, 2002)<sup>46</sup> their opposition was against learning, knowledge and sciences. A related reason was because it would end their monopoly on controlling information and education. They feared that education would lead to agnosticism and secularism, which could erode their hold on power by doctrine. Nevertheless, the situation was worse when it came to women. The clergy considered education of women prohibited and

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<sup>43</sup> Name alternately written as Bibi Khanoom Astarabadi. For more information see <https://goo.gl/6EU7J6> and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibi\\_Khanoom\\_Astarabadi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bibi_Khanoom_Astarabadi)

<sup>44</sup> Vaziri, Afzal. (2006/Persian 1385). Iranian pioneer women, women's studies "Zanane pishgam irani, Motaleaat zanan", p.27.

<sup>45</sup> Ulama are scholars educated in religious institutions (madrasas) and the sources of traditional Islamic law. Mullah refers to Shi'ite clerics, frequently involved in politics but only in positions of power after the 1979 revolution. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulama>

<sup>46</sup> Ringer, Monica M. 2002. Education, Religion, and the Discourse of Cultural Reform in Qajar Iran Review by: Shireen Mahdavi Source: Iranian Studies, Vol. 35, No. 1/3 (Winter - Summer, 2002), pp. 233-236 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of International Society of Iranian Studies, P236.

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against the religion. An example of such ideology today is the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram still active in Nigeria. (Moghaddam, 2014)<sup>47</sup>

Although the constitution recognized the right to literacy for women, the opposition of the clerics, traditionalists and fundamentalists continued against the movement for establishment of schooling for girls and literacy. Examples include destruction of schools, attacks on girls' schools, harassment of teachers and students, and propaganda against women's rights activists. However, even in the face of such obstacles, as a result of the persistent work of leading women activists, by 1911 over 57 schools had been opened in Tehran with 2,172 students.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the active participation of women in the Constitutional Revolution, after the victory the constitutionalists dismissed women's efforts. Women were still deprived of participating in elections or political activities. They were not even rewarded with basic rights, such as right to divorce, marriage, or custody of their children. An important point to note is that although the number of women's rights defenders was few during this period of the women's movement, their activities and efforts led to quantitative and qualitative change, to the degree that they managed to bring in many men to defend women's rights.

Although the majority of women's groups and associations during the early stages consisted of community service work, literacy classes, housekeeping classes and sewing classes, in certain times and according to political conditions these groups had a more political focus, for example, The Women's Association, Women's Charity Company of Khavateen in Iran, Women's Union etc. During the Russian ultimatum, widespread protests opposing the policies of that country were organized, which had great impact at the time.<sup>49</sup>

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47 Moghaddam, Rezvan.2014, Stop violence against women is an urgent and practical action / <https://www.facebook.com/notes/the-feminist-school-/10152838117757356/> accessed August 12th 2016

48 The Tamaddon newspaper, the fourth year Wednesday 15 Rajab 1329 Number (25), page 8 (Western calendar 12 July 1911).

49 Afary, Janet. (1998). (1377 Persian). Translated by Javad Yousefiyan, Women's semi-secret societies Constitutional Movement."Anjoman haye seriye zanan dar nehzat moshroteh.Nashreh Banoo.p.21

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The activities of freedom-loving women during this period were so impressive that it stunned Morgan Shuster (1912)<sup>50</sup>, consultant to the treasury's minister of constitutional government. In a chapter of his book that is dedicated to women of Iran, it says:

We, Europeans and Americans, are long familiar with increasing awareness of women's rights, and the role they play in social, political, cultural, science and commerce arena. However, what one can say about these innocent and suppressed women behind the veils in the East that during a short period of time became teachers, editors, founders of clubs and politicians? Iranian women since 1907 are amongst the most advanced and most radical women of the world. They have revived the spirit of freedom in their country. (Shuster, 1915)<sup>51</sup>

## **2.3 The Women's Movement during the Pahlavi Dynasty, 1925–1979**

This chapter examines the scope of the women's movement in the 54-year period 1925-1979 politically demarcated by the reign of the Pahlavi monarchy rule of Reza Shah (1925-1941) and his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979).

### **2.3.1 The women's movement during the reign of Reza Shah, 1925-1941**

With the fall of the Qajar dynasty and coming to power of Reza Shah, Iran witnessed many changes and advancements on a vast scale in both the political foundations and social fabrics of society. As stated above, the challenges and struggles of leading women advocating for equality from the constitutional period and their efforts to realize their fight for civil and legal rights as well as the educational rights that had been opposed by the clergy, was now a reality for a large part of society, with Reza Shah coming to power. This added a dimension to the motivations for modernizing Iran.

When Reza Shah came to power, the clergy were the only authority holding legal and judiciary powers. Once Reza Shah established his throne, he succeeded to pass the civil rights bill through the parliament. Therefore, the judicial laws of

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<sup>50</sup> Shuster, William Morgan. (1912). *The Strangling of Persia: Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental* accessed <https://archive.org/details/stranglingofpers001925mbp>

<sup>51</sup> Shuster, William Morgan. (1915). *Strangulation of Iran*. "Ekhtenagh Iran"Kolkata p 234-236.

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the land were written according to modern laws for the first time. Additionally, modern schools, in the style of the European schools, were established. On a formal level, the hands of the clergy that had up to then exclusively held the reins of education and the judiciary were cut off.

However, the plans that Reza Shah introduced for modernization of Iran needed support and promotion from agencies and organizations if they were going to be successful in a closed and religious society. Women's groups, women's schools and women's organizations were undeniably among the most effective channels in society to achieve the objectives set by the government. For this reason, increasingly, the number of women's associations multiplied (see Nahid, 1981, p. 113). At the beginning of the rise of Reza Shah, there were no limits to the activities of women's associations and women's organizations (such as Vatankhah female population). The women's organizations were free and active, and the Communist Party operated freely. (Afary, 1996; Abrahamian, 1982; Sanasarian, 1982)<sup>52</sup>. But soon their activities were stopped.

Reza Shah's modernization plan, which from the outset faced rather fierce opposition by the Islamists, also resulted in some contradictory outcomes from within. Reza Shah took positive steps towards his vision of modernity, which resulted in many opportunities for women to flourish in their capacities, such as access to university education or employment. (Esfandiari, 1997)<sup>53</sup> On the other, Reza Shah's vision of modernization had constraining aspects: he moved forward with his plan to close newspapers and publications as well as dismantle independent associations such as the Kurdish Women Society (Najmabadi, 1991).<sup>54</sup> The last such organizations closed in 1933. (Paidar, 1997; Abrahamian, 1982) During this time, political groups like the Communist Party of Iran were banned, and activities

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<sup>52</sup> Afary, Janet (1996), *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911*. Columbia University Press.  
Abrahamian, Ervand. 1982, *Iran between Two Revolutions*. Princeton University Press.

<sup>53</sup> Esfandiari, Haleh 1997. *Reconstructed Lives: Women and Iran's Islamic Revolution*. Washington, D.C. and Baltimore: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press and the Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>54</sup> Najmabadi, A. (1991). "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran." In *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti, Hounds mills: Macmillan. pp 48-77.

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of women's groups were stopped; their publications and newspapers either came under the complete control of the government or were shut down.

Reza Shah additionally hampered independent secular groups. Religious education became mandatory in public schools, simultaneously befriending religious interests and providing a convenient institutional way to monitor and control any secular views with the potential to be construed as subversive. Prominent preachers were invited to present religious programs on the national radio. Reza Shah encouraged them to openly promote some sort of reform in Shia Islam. (See Abrahamian, 2008)<sup>55</sup> Such policies often ran at odds against notions of modernity and secularism that Reza Shah ostensibly claimed to promote.

With the establishment of Tehran University in 1934, women's access to higher education became a reality, a significant milestone and major factor in allowing women to participate in social, cultural and political arenas of society. But women were still deprived of participating in elections. This meant an ongoing degree of discrimination and deprivation of women's political rights. The issue of the right to vote became one of women's most pressing demands in the women's movement during this period. In 1943, a bill for women's right to vote was presented to parliament by representatives of the Tudeh Party<sup>56</sup> but rejected on the grounds that it was against Islam's Sharia laws. (Sanasarian, 1982)

In addition, many articles of civil law, passed during the time of Reza Shah, were in accordance with the laws of Islam, contrary to the concept of secularism that in essence means separation of religion and state. For example, the law recognizing polygamy still existed and the right to divorce was only granted to men. Men could even divorce their wives in absentia. In addition, Reza Shah never made polygamy or temporary marriages illegal. In fact, at the time he had more than one wife himself. Nevertheless, in this complex period, some notable changes in civil

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<sup>55</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand. (2008). A History of Modern Iran. Cambridge University Press pp 69-83.

<sup>56</sup> Full name Party of the Masses of Iran transliterated Hezb-e Tudeh-ye Iran  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudeh\\_Party\\_of\\_Iran](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tudeh_Party_of_Iran)

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law did occur. One of the basic rights for women, to marry, was established. The age of marriage for girls, which until then had never been restricted, was raised to 15 years. Men were legally required to register marriage to make it official. (See Cronin, 2007)<sup>57</sup> Rather than signaling major victories, such changes must be viewed in the broader political and economic context where the interests of women remained secondary and subordinate.

With all the restrictions and limitations that existed in the path of independent women's organizations, the women's movement from the early years of the Pahlavi reign succeeded by printing publications and organizing gatherings, which paved the way for the unveiling of women and gender equality actions. The evaluation of historic documents and a study of feminist views that existed in Iran at that time show that a good understanding of gender equality existed. This understanding is evident in poems and the writings of women's rights activists, such as Zandokht Shirazi and Sadigheh Dowlatabadi. Zandokht Shirazi, in her publication *Iranian Girls*, demonstrated her opposition to the poor economic and social conditions of women. She challenged the idea of the physical inferiority of women and encouraged women to show audacity in standing up for their rights.<sup>58</sup> That sparked opposition of women and men against the hijab, which due to the highly important role it played in the women's movement, merits review as part of the events in Reza Shah's period.

### **2.3.2 The background to Elimination of Women's Veil by Reza Shah**

One of the controversial actions of Reza Shah was the elimination of the hijab, the women's veil, in 1936. This had many supporters as well as opponents among the defenders of women's rights. The process of eliminating veils during Reza Shah's period, and then after the Iranian revolution forcing veils to be worn again, is a subject that requires close review under the cultural, religious and political

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<sup>57</sup> Cronin, Stephanie. (2007). The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Riza Shah, 1921-1941 Review by: Hessam Vaez British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies Vol. 34, No. 3, Iranian Intellectuals (1997-2007) (Dec., 2007), pp. 410-412.

<sup>58</sup> See Sanasarian 1982, p.65

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conditions of Iran. The “unveiling” campaign during Reza Shah can be viewed from two perspectives. First, as the fulfillment of a demand by the women’s movement; and second, as Reza Shah’s view of women as part of his desire to project an image of modernization. In this regard, we can refer to two historic events that provided perspective for Reza Shah and informed his actions to bring changes to women’s form of clothing. It is also necessary to evaluate the process of elimination of the veil itself.

The earliest rumors about potential changes in laws relevant to unveiling women occurred when Amanullah Khan and Queen Soraya, the King and Queen of Afghanistan, came to visit Iran in 1929. The Queen of Afghanistan was unveiled, which sparked major controversy among the clerics of Iran. They demanded Reza Shah to force the Queen of Afghanistan to wear hijab, but Reza Shah refused to do so. The other issue usually referred to in such research work is Reza Shah’s travel to Turkey in 1934 and meeting Ataturk. It was said that Reza Shah was very much influenced by Ataturk’s actions. Sanasarian (1982) refers to this matter and writes that during that time some rumors about unveiling were circulating in girl’s schools, but no law had been passed yet.

It is necessary to point out that at the beginning of Reza Shah’s reign; the issue of women’s hijab was an accepted fact. Even a few women who refused to wear hijab were arrested by the police forces (Bamdad, 1969, 1977)<sup>59</sup>. While opposition to hijab was an issue, as highlighted by the intellectuals in constitutionalists’ literature since the 19th century, the issue of freedom of women and the choice to use hijab was fiercely discussed in newspapers and publications. Various Iranian women’s rights activists' groups criticized forced hijab, such as the publication *Alam-i Nesvan* in 1931<sup>60</sup> that opened a serious debate about hijab. It published a

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<sup>59</sup> Bamdad Badrolmolok, 1969.(persian1348) Iranian women from the constitutional revolution to the White Revolution,( zane irani az enghalabe mashroteh ta enghelabe sefeed),p 68

See also Bamdad, Badrol-Molouk. 1977. From darkness into light: Women's Emancipation in Iran. Translated from Farsi and edited by F. R. C. Bagley. Smithtown, N. Y.: Exposition Press.

<sup>60</sup> The magazine published several articles and denouncing early marriage of girls, lack of political rights of women in Iran, and dealt with the veil. Especially in the last years of its publish, had sharp criticism from bad women situation. After unveiling, Reza Shah announced the publication of the magazine must be stopped.

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questionnaire about it, and then published the views of both supporters and opponents. In total, women supported the elimination of hijab and attributed the lack of morality to the suppression of women by men in society.

Sanasarian (1982) refers to this in the following words: “Some sources say that during the process of Constitutional Revolution some women put aside their hijab and started a demonstration in the Grand Bazar. They shouted slogans such as *‘Long live Constitutional Revolution, long-live freedom, Constitutional Revolution granted us freedom and we shall defend it from any religious restrictions and live the way we choose.’*” The Association of Women was one of the women’s organizations whose main goal was to promote elimination of hijab. Bamdad, a member of the board of directors of the Association of Women, writes: “beside other activities, the main goal was the gradual promotion of elimination of hijab, therefore, the female members decided to gain the support of their own families and encourage them to unveil themselves.”

In the 1940s (1320s) secular organizations such as Bahamad Azadegan, demanded their rights, including “right to unveil and right to divorce” for Iranian women. (Afary, 2012)<sup>61</sup> The Bidaran Association, that followed Marxist ideas, also criticized the veiling of women.<sup>62</sup>

This evidence shows that Iranian feminists had already raised the subject of elimination of hijab, over and over, in various forms, before Reza Shah acted. Many women’s organizations and publications, and many liberal magazines, used poetry and creative writings to highlight the subject of equality and the elimination of hijab for women. There is also evidence that whenever such a publication gained some notable support, the opposition would become fiercer and such publications would be banned, or the editor or the writer of the article would be subjected to physical harm, imprisonment or exile. A historical mistake Reza Shah made was not just dismissing the role of leading women in raising public awareness, but by banning

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<sup>61</sup> Afary, Janet. 2012. New norms intellectuals and sex,” Roshanfekran va hanjarhaye jadideh jesiyati” [http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2012/03/120313\\_144\\_kasravi\\_homosexuality.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2012/03/120313_144_kasravi_homosexuality.shtml) 20 September 2016

<sup>62</sup> See Mahnameh Zemestan Vol 2 1393 p10 (Western calendar January 2015).

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women's press and suppression of freedom of speech, he allowed reactionary forces to further marginalize women.

Persian poetry and literature are constant companions of Iranian thinking. The eloquence and beauty of words in form of poems has lasting effects on one's mind. Freedom-loving poets and intellectuals used poetry to criticize traditions and religion. One of the celebrated poets known for his work in this regard is Mirzadeh Eshghi. Prior to Reza Shah's order for the elimination of hijab, he wrote many beautiful poems criticizing forced hijab. Eshghi was assassinated in 1924, at the young age of 31, for his fierce criticism of egalitarian tradition and denunciation of the veil. Iraj Mirza was another well-known male figure who was openly against women's hijab, and like many other modern male intellectuals, was promoting a Western-style of clothing for women.

Additional places with active opposition to hijab included girls' schools. Unveiled girls attending schools, and organizing various celebrations at girls' schools, and the presence of women and girls performing without veils on the stage were among other steps in changing cultural attitudes towards women, especially for the elimination of hijab. (See Sutton, 1965)<sup>63</sup> All the events stated above contributed to a major cultural transformation influential in paving the way for Reza Shah's executive order to eliminate hijab in 1936.

These events also testify to the opposition of women to hijab. The advanced and intellectual women believed in secularism and modernity and saw hijab as an obstacle for the growth and development of women as well as for the elimination of discrimination against women. However, the masses of women, who were illiterate and had little awareness of their rights, were used by clergy, through the propaganda from the mosques and pulpit, and their ignorance and unawareness of their rights were exploited in the hands of those opposing hijab.

Reza Shah's elimination of hijab was also one of the reasons for the clergy's enmity against the Pahlavi dynasty. The clerics, who opposed any sign of modernity

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<sup>63</sup> Sutton, Elwell, Laurence Paul, 1965, translator Sabori, Abdolazim. Reza Shah or New Iran. First Edition, publisher Keta Corp.2009, USA p.377.

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and considered it an influence of Western civilization with the sting of blasphemy, incited the public through various machinations to oppose the Shah's order to unveil women. Despite all the opposition from the clerics, society moved towards modernity and change.

The law of "forced unveiling" executed in 1936 was a controversial policy in and of itself, which insufficiently promoted awareness about women's rights before it happened and attracted further criticism because of the way it was executed. Nonetheless, with all its shortcomings, imperfections, and inadequacies in the way it was carried out, the elimination of hijab by Reza Shah was a huge step in the removal of discrimination against women. It should above all be noted that elimination of hijab was not just the result of a spontaneous act of Reza Shah but the fruit of one of the long-standing demands of the women's movement.

### **2.3.3 The fall of the women's movement during the reign of Reza Shah**

During this period of women's movement activities, development and modernization of the country led to major transformations in the judiciary system, as well as positive steps to improve the situation of women such as creating learning and educational opportunities for women, improving the social condition of women, changes in certain laws, and the elimination of hijab. However, due to a masculinist attitude that persisted in society, adequate reform in legal and political processes, among the most basic rights of women, did not happen.

During the 1920s, the women's movement had reached its peak and their activities expanded beyond the borders of Iran. For example, the Association of Nationalist Women communicated with women activists in the Middle East and some African countries. This group hosted the 1920 Congress of Eastern Women in Tehran. Women from Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Iraq and India participated in this congress and passed a resolution that included provisions for the advancement of women, such as the right to vote, compulsory education for boys and girls, equal

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rights to work, elimination of polygamy, female adult literacy programs, and transformation of men's attitude towards women in general. (See Morton, 1940)<sup>64</sup>

With the dissolution of the independent women's organizations and in light of Reza Shah's domestic policies, after the first three to four years of his reign, women did not form any movements that were organic and self-motivated nor stand up for their civil rights. In fact, with the closure of independent women's organizations, Reza Shah took the power of innovation away from the hands of leading women activists. The dismantling in 1932 of The Women's Nationalist Society, the last major women's organization, was the end of a critical phase of the women's movement in this period. Instead of using women's power to educate and build the capacity of traditional women, the closure of independent women's societies gave certain jobs that should have been done by women to men to carry out, such as taking the hijab off women's heads by force.

In light of what has been stated, during this era the independent women's movement faced two main deterrents. One was the restrictions and limitations placed in the path of women's societies or independent women's organizations; the other was the vast propaganda organized and pushed by the clerics fiercely opposed to women's presence in society. The clerics opposed any aspect of women in the public domain, which was construed as being contrary to Islam's doctrines.

Due to opposition from Reza Shah, the independent women's organizations lost their institutional cohesion. Nevertheless, women's rights activists did not become passive. The women activists invested in social achievements in a way that the government would not be able to prevent them. Intellectual and enlightened men and women once again focused on establishing institutions for the education of girls, which had the support of Reza Shah. The number of girls' schools grew within a four-year period from 190 schools in 1929 to 870 schools in 1933.

In 1935 with the executive order of Reza Shah, a "Women Association" was formed by a number of educated women. As secular and forward-looking women

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<sup>64</sup> Morton, Rosalie Slaughter. (1940). A Doctor's Holiday in Iran. Funk & Wagnalls Company. p. 1. Retrieved 8 March 2016 p. 311.

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managed this Association, the very foundation of governmental feminism was formed, working towards the realization of the government's goals and objectives set for women. This operated under the government. (For more information on Association activities, see "hotspot women" Shaykh al-Islam, 1351 and Dolatabadi, 1324; Western calendar 1972 and 1945)<sup>65</sup>. Under the shadow of governmental feminism, Reza Shah took women's demands under his control. The demands of the women's movement in the area of education, renewal of laws regarding family legal codes and elimination of hijab developed under Reza Shah's modernization projects. Reza Shah could not tolerate the independence of women's organizations and preferred that any such activities were carried out based on his interests and vision, under his supervision and control.

The unprecedented increase in the number of girls' schools by women's rights activists was supported by Reza Shah, in contrast to the problems that women experienced during the constitutional era. Reza Shah encouraged the opening of new schools and his government was supporting them. Changes were made and hijab was eliminated under government feminist policies.

Reza Shah, without seeking fundamental changes in cultural and religious fabrics and infrastructures, embarked on modernizing society and its affairs. Some reforms took place during Reza Shah's reign; although there were advancements, they were built on old, socially decadent foundations. Unveiling of women was achieved by executive order, yet mindsets remained rooted in ideology. Religious beliefs were not addressed. Reza Shah had the potential to empower women and remove obstacles by raising public awareness and promoting human rights, a far more fundamental change. Though he would have faced opposition from the traditionally backward-looking sector of the society, the transformation would have been from within and by the women's movement, and perhaps with less controversy and conflicts, indeed conflicts that women still face today.

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<sup>65</sup> Sheykh ul Islami, Pari. 1972. Iranian women journalist and intellectual. Tehran: Mazgraphic. Dolatabadi, Sedigheh. "The report of tenth academic year the Women's Center" (Gozareshe dahomin sale tahsiliye kanoone zanan ,Zabane zanan No 3 , Persian date Khordad 1324 (Western Calendar May, 1945)

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#### **2.3.4 Conclusions: Reza Shah Period**

Reza Shah combined elements of modernization with political dictatorship and created a dictatorial and reformist style of government in place of a traditionalist and outdated Qajar Monarchy. However, the traditionalist and worn-out cultural and religious infrastructure that had deep roots in Iran's society strongly opposed Reza Shah's reformism. Reza Shah tried to open the door for women's participation in social action, and for this very reason issued the order for unveiling women. However, Reza Shah's action led to strong opposition from the clergy against the Shah and figured in long-standing animosity that continued through the Pahlavi Dynasty until its downfall in the revolution in 1979.

Many aspects of laws remained based on Sharia Law of Islam, despite changes made in favor of women during this period, such as the right to participate in social activities and employment, as well as the right to choice of clothes after the Shah's order for unveiling (forced unveiling was only for three years and after that women were given the right to choose clothes). During this period women were still deprived of the right to vote, due to the opposition of the clergy. During this period, women also lost important structured means of control to take initiative and action, after Reza Shah shut down or banned many independent publications and organizations for women. By the outbreak of the Second World War and the fall of Reza Shah in 1941, the political atmosphere had become relatively open, and as a result, a fresh period of women's social and political activities began. For example, some liberal and intellectual women participated in the leftist movements of that period organized by the Tudeh Party<sup>66</sup>.

### **2.4 The Women's Movement during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, 1941-1979**

The women's movement in Iran during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi<sup>67</sup>, the son of Reza Shah, can be seen in two historic periods: first, the

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<sup>66</sup> The Tudeh Party of Iran is an Iranian communist party formed in 1941.

<sup>67</sup> Period often referred to as Pahlavi II

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overthrow of Reza Shah and end of Prime Minister Mossadegh's term in office; second, from the fall of Mossadegh's government to the 1979 revolution.

#### **2.4.1 From the ousting of Reza Shah to end of Mossadegh term of government**

Following the Second World War, Iran was occupied by the Allied Forces. An order for ousting Reza Shah was issued. Mohammad Reza Shah at the time was 22 years old and succeeded his father. During this period, although Iran was occupied, insatiable desires for modernity and cultural decadence existed and the people enjoyed a greater level of freedom of speech and demonstration. In this political atmosphere, a new wave of activities started, including social and political spheres. Many political groups and parties were formed, from the far left to the radical right. Such conditions also brought opportunities for women to regroup and organize. One such group was the Women's Society, formed in 1942, with the objectives of changing and improving women's conditions. In 1942, two former members of the Centre party, Fatemeh Sayyah and Safieh Firouz, formed the Women's Party for Women, which insisted on political equality and right of women to vote. In 1943, a group called Iran's Women's Council was formed by the efforts of Safieh Firouz, with the goals of gender equality and enhancing women's understanding and culture. (Afkhami, 1997)<sup>68</sup>

The objectives that women set after the constitutional era, at this juncture, were organized and led by women activists and included the advancement of education for women, realization of women's right to vote and raising awareness among the masses of women. The New Way Society, "Rah-e Naw Society", led by Mehrangiz Dowlatshahi<sup>69</sup> in later years, was one such organization. Dowlatshahi became a parliament representative for three terms and in 1975, Iran's first woman

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<sup>68</sup> Afkhami, Mahnaz. 1997. A Peaceful Revolution: Review of the Activities and Achievements of the Women's Organization of Iran, Iran Nameh

<sup>69</sup> Mehrangiz Dowlatshahi (1919- 2008) Iranian social activist and politician, who held significant positions, including ambassador of Iran to Denmark during the Pahlavi era. She also served as a MP for three terms. Mehrangiz studied in Germany and held a bachelor's degree from Berlin University.

Rah-e Naw also transliterated as Rah-e No.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehrangiz\\_Dowlatshahi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehrangiz_Dowlatshahi) Retrieved from Wikipedia June 10th 2015

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ambassador. Rah-e Naw's programs included organizing the first international exhibition on "women's activities" with women from more than 30 countries in Asia and Europe participating. Rah-e Naw arranged meetings for discourse and debate on the subject of Iran's constitution and civil laws. The objectives for such meetings were to inform women and raise their awareness regarding laws. In addition, women activists printed many publications in the year from 1941 to 1951 to highlight and cover women's rights, such as Women Leading ("Zanan-e Pishro") with the aim to defend women's rights and social justice for all. (For more information see Sanasarian, 1982)

Many scholars share the view that during this period of the women's movement, most women activists had a political affiliation, often with left-leaning political parties such as Tudeh. For example, "Women Organizations" was a very radical group and branch of Tudeh. Sanasarian (1982, p.113) presents a very radical outlook of women's rights. The women's organization that printed Awakening Magazine ("Majale Bidari") began with the slogan "*fight for equal rights with men, fight for peace, and fight for equal pay*", became a member of the International Democratic Federation in 1946, and worked for equal pay and the fight against fascism. This organization, which defended women's rights in all countries, changed its name to Democratic Women's Organization, with goals such as defending women's social and political rights, fighting abuse of women workers in factories, defending equal pay for equal work, and pushing forward in parliament the bill for women's right to vote. In 1946, the women's sector of Tudeh made an attempt to pass the bill but did not succeed. (Tohidi, 2010)<sup>70</sup>

After the government crackdown on Tudeh, the women's sector of the party did not survive. Not only was the magazine Majale Bidari closed in 1948, but those in charge of women's democratic organizations were imprisoned or went into

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<sup>70</sup> Tohidi, Nayereh. 2010 (Persian 1389) The importance of "doctor certified" for the women's movement and the movement for democracy <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article5302> retrieved May 11<sup>th</sup> 2016 <https://translate.google.com/translate?sl=auto&tl=en&u=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.feministschool.com%2Fspip.php%3Farticle5302>.

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hiding. Some of those women included Zahra and Taj Eskandari, Iran Arani, Maryam Firuz, Dr. Khadijah Keshavarz, Dr. Akhtar Kambakhsh, Badri Alavi. (See Shafagh, 1387; Western calendar 2001)<sup>71</sup> Democratic and intellectual women, who played an important role in raising awareness amongst uneducated women, united and published the magazine Women's World ("Jahan-e Zanan") in 1950 with the slogan "Unite, Women in Iran to obtain your rights" (Sanasarian, 1982; Habibi, 2014)<sup>72</sup>.

#### **2.4.2 The women's movement is revived**

Political groups regained the opportunity to be openly active in the period 1951–1953 under Prime Minister Mossadegh and the women's sector of the Tudeh Party in Iran became active again and tried to use this opportunity to push for the women's right to vote. In an unprecedented action, they managed to collect nearly 70,000 signatures in support of the women's right to vote on a petition prepared in a week<sup>73</sup> and presented to Dr. Mossadegh. However, due to strong opposition from the religious leaders, Mossadegh chose to not take action regarding this matter at the time, because the clergy with the support of the Islamic students and businesspeople in the Grand Bazar claimed that this would be against the laws of Islam. Kashani, one of the main people opposing the women's right to vote, kept emphasizing that the government should only protect the right to vote for men, and prevent women from voting, because women should stay at home and fulfill their main tasks of housekeeping and raising children. This provides yet another illustration how the clergy has been the main player using religion as an instrument to fight women's rights, as it has done at different times in history. The main reason

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<sup>71</sup> Shafagh, Azar 2010. (Persian 1389). "The women's movement and mass struggle" (Jonbeshe zanan va mobarezeh todeee), Navide no <http://www.rahman-hatefi.net/jonbeshe%20zanan%20-zanan-362-870111.htm> Retrieved May 11<sup>th</sup> 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Habibi, Elaheh. 2014. The Women's Association of the Tudeh party of Iran 1944-1948 the National and Transnational Struggles of Left feminist Group, Central European University, Budapest Hungray Review October 20<sup>th</sup> 2016 file:///C:/Users/rmoghaddam/Desktop/habibi\_elahesh.pdf

<sup>73</sup> Ahmadi Khorasani, Noushin. 2010. (Persian 1389). "Won the women's movement in discourse" (piroozi jonbeshe zanan dar goftemane taze nafas) <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article5496> Review October 20th 2016.

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for the clergy's emphasis on the importance of family, and accordingly to suppress the equal rights of women was to protect the domination and control of men over women. The more traditional sector of society supported the clergy to maintain the dependence of women on men, especially economically, and for men to remain in power over women in social activities. The clergy derived a great deal of power from this construction, and as a direct result, was always among the fiercest in its opposition to women's rights.

The main focus of the women's movement in this period was women's right to vote. Most women's institutions and publications were working towards this objective. However, the majority of women's institutions during this period were more radical than they were previously in their approach towards women's rights, and demanded more. While collaborating with political parties, they highlighted social issues regarding women. In this way, they could be actively involved, engaged and able to influence men to share their support, the same men brought up in a male-dominated society. Nonetheless, all political parties gave higher priority to other objectives rather than issues related to women's rights.

In this context of heightened political involvement and social enterprise, the first women's political party, the Iranian Women's Party, led by Safieh Firouz, was founded, and directed by Fatemeh Sayyah. The main objective of this party was the realization of women's right to vote.<sup>74</sup>

#### **2.4.3 The fall of Mossadegh's government 1953 – Iranian revolution 1979**

Before going into details of the women's movement during this period of history, it is necessary to give a summary of what led to the fall of Mossadegh and the political and social climate of the country before the Revolution. After the Prime Minister Mossadegh was overthrown and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was instated as the Shah, especially during his first 10 years of reign, there was a lot of political

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<sup>74</sup> Sanasarian eliz (1982). p115.

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opposition that affected women's activities and goals for equality. As more restrictions were imposed on women, they became less visibly active.

The clergy that did not see eye-to-eye with Mossadegh feared that secular groups would now be empowered. The nationalization of the oil industry was a terrible blow to the British government. Britain gained the support of America to plan a military coup against Mossadegh. America, which also wanted to keep Iran at a distance from communist influences, with the help of military that supported the Shah and the backing of the clergy (that is, high level clergy, preachers and their followers), together with the land owners and conservative politicians, managed to overthrow Mossadegh. (Abrahamian, 2008)<sup>75</sup> America's interference in overthrowing Mossadegh resulted in the fact that Iranians see not only Britain as their enemy but also consider America as Imperialist and Enemy Number One.<sup>76</sup> Understanding this political context helps to grasp historical root causes that later influenced many social positions, views and actions taken by people, especially women, during the 1979 revolution.

After the fall of Mossadegh in 1953, the social tension led to a wide gap between political activists on the left, nationalists and the Shah. Some scholars believe that the roots of the 1979 Iranian Revolution can be traced back to that coup. In contrast, I believe that the opposition of the clergy to modernization was the main impetus to overthrowing the Shah, especially with regard to policies for women's freedom. (See Gasiorowski, 1987; Keddie, 2003; Abrahamian, 1982)<sup>77</sup>

The return of the Shah to power was followed by the suppression of political parties, as well as the deactivation of many women's organizations and associations. Some groups used creative ways to manage to remain active for a few years, for example, by changing names while keeping their ideals and objectives. Many women's groups were working to empower other women and conduct charity

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<sup>75</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand. (2008). *The history of Modern Iran*, Cambridge University Press p.118-122

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.122

<sup>77</sup> Gasiorowski, M. (1987). The 1953 Coup D'Etat in Iran. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 19(3), 261-286. doi:10.1017/S0020743800056737

Keddie, Nikki R .2003 *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, Yale University Press.

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work in various areas. The scope of activities and modes of operation were vast and diverse. Workshops were organized to eliminate illiteracy and enhance culture. This led to women filling management positions and political posts. “The council for collaboration with Iranian women groups” was established in 1956, leading to successful collaboration and consultation of many women groups. Farokhro Parsa<sup>78</sup> was one of the members of the board of directors of this council. One of the council’s main objectives was the realization of political rights for women.

The high council for women’s groups, operating under the supervision of Ashraf Pahlavi, twin sister of the Shah, was created in 1959 with 17 different women’s groups. The main objective of this council was to centralize the women’s organizations and to coordinate and plan their activities. Although this council prepared a political climate for the legislation of women’s right to vote, it did not succeed to unite its members, which led to its inaction and closure.<sup>79</sup>

After that, in 1966, Ashraf Pahlavi formed a larger, more coherent organization under the name of “Iranian Women’s Organization.” In 1976, Mahnaz Afkhami was given a ministerial post, “Minister of State for Women and Family Affairs.” Afkhami was the second woman in the history of Iran, prior to the Islamic Republic, to become a government minister. She announced her affiliation with the Iranian Women’s Organization, and its activities, although she did not officially join the organization.<sup>80</sup> She also affiliated with other women’s groups such as women lawyers, journalists and academia. From the number of members and participants in Iranian Women’s Organization, one can estimate the scope and diversity of its activities, before it could be monitored and controlled.

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<sup>78</sup> Farokhro Parsa an Iranian physician, educator, and parliamentarian. She served as Minister of Education of Iran in the last pre-Iranian revolution government and was the first female cabinet minister of an Iranian government. The Islamic Republic executed her on eight of May 1980 (aged 58) in Iran.

<sup>79</sup> Rangbar Omrani, Homera. “The changing nature of women’s associations from the beginning until the Women’s Organization” (Taghire mahiyate jamiyathaye zanan az aghaz ta sazman zanan), in Persian [http://www.iichs.ir/Upload/Image/139308/Orginal/a6937669\\_44e7\\_444d\\_827c\\_5f9a487ca3aa.pdf](http://www.iichs.ir/Upload/Image/139308/Orginal/a6937669_44e7_444d_827c_5f9a487ca3aa.pdf) accessed September 28<sup>th</sup> 2016.

<sup>80</sup> Afkhami, Mahnaz,Enghlabe mosalemat ami1343-1357 in Persian <http://fis-iran.org/fa/women/organization/introduction> accessed September 27th 2016.  
See also Afkhami, Mahnaz, An Introduction To The Women’s Organization Of Iran <http://fis-iran.org/fa/women/organization/introduction> accessed September 27th 2016.

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Within a decade the “Iranian Women Organization” had grown to a degree that it had 349 branches, 113 centers, and 55 organizations working with women, just prior to the Islamic Revolution. (See Najmabadi, 1991, pp 62-63) The organization was directly operating under the State. Regardless of the connection with the government, during those years the organization had a role in promoting women’s rights. However, this organization cannot as such be included in the women’s movement. During this period women activists were again attracted to work for the government and become active in governmental projects and plans. The period as such reflected a kind of feminism similar to that under Reza Shah.

The women’s development programs completed under Mohammad Reza Shah undoubtedly had some worthy impact on the empowerment of women and promoting women’s abilities and strengths. What came to be identified as “state feminism” stemmed from the independent activities of the women’s movement propagated by the state. A prime example is Senator Manouchehrian<sup>81</sup>, a prominent figure among Iranian feminists, whose efforts in “Centre for Women” and “Women’s Organization” are praiseworthy, including presenting a bill to the Senate in 1967, a very advanced bill, for women’s right to vote. This bill was opposed by the clergy and traditionalists, and the clergy issued a verdict to outcast her for blasphemy. Regarding this Mahnaz Afkhami says: “the more radical aspects of Mrs. Manouchehrian petition to the Senate was covered in the Iranian press and created a controversy.” Due to pressure by the clergy, she had to leave Tehran for a while until things calmed down. (Mahnaz Afkhami in interview with Ahmadi Khorasani)<sup>82</sup>. The reason for the clergy’s opposition was that they claimed the bill was against Islam.

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<sup>81</sup> Mehrangiz Manouchehrian (1906-2000) an Iranian lawyer, feminist, and one of two women appointed as the first female Senators in Iran in 1963. She was involved in the Women’s Organization of Iran. She was involved in drafting "Family Protection" laws. She resigned from the Senate In protest against the reform bill passport that the married woman must get permission from their husband to have a passport or travel abroad.

<sup>82</sup> <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article1392> accessed September 18th 2016.

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The "Iranian Women's Organization", according to its statutes, stated that it is not a political entity, but it did carry some political activities, as Mrs. Mehrangiz Manouchehrian stated:

At the beginning of the Women's Organization of Iran, a group of women carried certain political activities and others became interested in social and cultural work. In fact, there were two kinds of activities that were happening independent of each other and therefore was not possible to unify them. Therefore, that group of women who were involved in political activities, the mode and style of operation was different to that of the organization. Those women, who were active within the organization, considered themselves to be completely non-political and therefore could not fully grasp the depth of the issues of equality. This led to the formation of a new perspective that did serve the full participation of women in the society." (Khorasani, Ardalan, pp. 502-503, translated by the author)

It seems that Manouchehrian has a critical view about the lack of cohesion between political and non-political activities.

Although the women's organization officially and under the government's supervision made considerable efforts and did valuable work in the field of research, publications, recruitment of political participation and literacy, it was nonetheless a government entity and did not have the characteristics of a movement. Most of the focus was on women's presence in society and employment in the work force, so women's empowerment in these areas was a priority. Interest by women in getting jobs and seeking economic independence was notable, as confirmed by statistics for employment of women during this period.

Afkhami, who served as Secretary-General of Iranian Women's Organization for eight years, presents the result of a survey by this organization and says:

Contrary to the view point that existed, and our speculation that the prime objective was to improve the status of women in Iran, change in law, and especially change in family law, the result of the survey showed that women most fundamental concern was on economic independence. They would constantly raise this issue, that economic independence is the foundation of the absolute freedom and affects all our right. Although, changing the law was important to women, but the believe such changes, such as change in law for equal rights with men in divorce or child custody,

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without economic independence would not be practical.<sup>83</sup>

The desire for development was not only orchestrated by the government, but was a movement that stemmed from the constitutional movement. In fact, by the fall of the Qajar Dynasty and rise of Pahlavi, in the years around 1925, the process of modernization and change had started. In regard to this issue, Afkhami<sup>84</sup> says:

What helped us was that society as a whole in the context of development and modernity and the government was committed to the idea of change and progress. The prevailing atmosphere in society demanded a more open space where men and women can both be present and to express their views. Our perspective about the future was quite different to what it was in the past. In those days very rarely, Iranians would compare with their neighboring countries. Those they compared themselves with were the most advanced countries in the world.

#### **2.4.4 Shah and People White Revolution, 1963, role of clergy and opposition to women**

As stated previously, in the 1940s and 1950s intellectuals found the opportunity to organize and mobilize the masses against the power structure. Among non-religious organizations first the Party and the National Front headed by Mohammad Mossadegh succeeded to attract middle-class and working-class. (Abrahamian, 1982)<sup>85</sup> In light of political openness and freedom of the parties, the political activities of women soared, along with an increase in publications on a variety of issues related to women. Most of these publications emphasized women's social and political activities and above all women's right to vote. Due to work by the women's movement to raise awareness about women's social, political and individual rights, changes in the structure of society, in terms of economic, social and cultural spheres, were in process.

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<sup>83</sup> An Interview with Mahnaz Afkhami, Minister of Women Affairs in Pahlavi-era Iran, BBC Persian News – by Maryam Ghanbarzadeh.

<http://www.mahnazafkhami.net/2011/women-in-iran-from-the-shah-to-the-islamic-republic>  
Retrieved July 18<sup>th</sup> 2016.

<sup>84</sup> See Mahnaz Afkhami , 2008 in an interview with Noushin Ahamadi khorasani  
[http://www.mahnazafkhami.net/2008/faatefamilyprotectionlaw\\_persia/](http://www.mahnazafkhami.net/2008/faatefamilyprotectionlaw_persia/) Retrieved July 18th 2016

<sup>85</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand .1982. Iran between Two Revolutions. Princeton University Press.

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Nonetheless, as noted, due to closure of independent women's organizations, the women's movement became isolated to the degree that by the time of the Islamic Revolution, all feminist activities were in a state of stagnation. However, the presence of women in political and social scenes was impressive and every day the level of participation of women in social, political and cultural spheres increased. In addition, some young women opposed to the Pahlavi political activity turned to political secret guerrilla activities and military forms of resistance. Due to suppression of non-religious and secular forces, a path for new Islamic groups was also paved. This led to the open and strong opposition of clergy to the Shah's developmental projects. The attraction of women to guerrilla political activity and armed resistance had additional internal and external factors that merit attention but are not relevant to the topic here.

Mohammad Reza Shah, seeking to reconstruct society and reform and advance economic development, presented in 1962 one of the most important socio-economic development programs in the history of Iran, the White Revolution of the Shah and People. (Abrahamian, 2008, pp.122-155; Said, 1988)<sup>86</sup> As part of his enterprise, women were granted their long-standing wish: the right to vote. However, this action of the Shah was strongly opposed by the clerics headed by Khomeini, who considered the elimination of two main conditions to vote to be a man and Muslim a huge blow to Islam and the clergy. In one of his speeches in Qum, he said:

“The government issues unlawful decrees, and grant women the right to vote. The honor of Islam is under the attack. They want to take our innocent 18 years old girl to mandatory military service.”(Davani, 1377; Western calendar 1998)<sup>87</sup> Khomeini did not stop there, and wrote a letter to the Shah, asking him to reverse the law, stating:

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<sup>86</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand. (2008). A History of Modern Iran. New York: Cambridge University Press, p.122-155

See also Amir Arjomand, Said. (1988). The Turban for the Crown: The Iranian revolution in Iran. Oxford University Press. pp. 72-73.

<sup>87</sup> Davani, Ali. (1998) (Persian 1377), Nehzate Rouhaniyane Iran, Nasher markaze asnade enghlabe islami p.195.

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After greetings and salutations, as it is published in the newspapers, the government has failed to include “Islam” as a main condition to vote and also has granted the right of vote to women. This is very worrisome to the clergy and Islamic religious leaders as well as other Muslim sectors. It is known to the Royal Sovereign that the best way to protect the country is by keeping up the provisions of Islam and keep hearts in peace. It is ardently requested that an order be issued to eliminate from the government plans all those aspects that are in contrary to Islam and attract the blessings and good wishes of Muslim.

Khomeini spoke out in speeches against the reform and development programs of the Shah and took a stronger stance. In a famous speech that led to his arrest, he affiliated the actions of the Shah regarding women’s right to vote, to the Baha’i Faith, in order to attack the Baha’i faith and to threaten the Shah. In his speech, he says:

Yes, there are some truths undercover this. I am getting a headache again; there are some truths in this. You people, go and check the calendars of the Baha’is, in the last two or three years, you will see that in there it says, ‘equality of men and women is the wish of Abdul’Baha’ Now these heads of state are following his commands. Moreover, Shah has not understood this and gets on his high horse and says: equality of women and men! One must say that this has been injected to you so later they can say that you are a Baha’i, and then I turned and say you are an infidel, so they can throw you out. (Khomeini speech 13<sup>th</sup> Khordad 1342 (3 June 1963). Translated by the author)<sup>88</sup>

Despite strong opposition to the legalization of equality between women and men, by a majority of clergymen against the Pahlavi regime’s expansionist plans, the Shah never considered such opposition a serious threat to his government and did not take it into account. His main focus was intellectuals and youth with an inclination to left-wing ideas. But not only did a coalition between the king and intellectuals including academics and women against the religious fundamentalism constantly opposing any form of reform and modernization never take shape, but in fact some youth even went to the side of the clergy and opposed manifestations of modernization.

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<sup>88</sup> <http://www.tebyan.net/newindex.aspx?pid=67609>

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In any case, during the reign of Pahlavi II, although fundamentalists appeared outwardly to have been pushed to the side, Islamic fundamentalist ideas were powerfully penetrating into cities, villages and underprivileged and uneducated families. In addition, the religious institutions were financially independent from the government and received recognition and legitimacy directly from religious people. In addition, the religious leaders had the support of the masses, while the government needed the support of the clergy to have the support of people. (Keddie, 1981)<sup>89</sup> Clergy would receive funds directly from people, through donations and paid services during religious occasions. This was outside the control of the government. Therefore, clergy could operate with much freedom, especially to go to homes to perform religious ceremonies, which gave them opportunities to indoctrinate people and incite them against the government.

As such, one of the key reasons that not only the Shah, but also the women's rights activists could not withstand the growth of religious fundamentalism, was the lack of growth and expansion of independent entities and organizations, though which it would have been possible to counter the intrusive growth of fundamentalism. Yet in that period, as religious fundamentalism was becoming more active every day, the energy and resources of women's right organizations were being used to oppose the Shah's regime.

Neither the Shah nor the women's activists ever imagined that religious fundamentalists would be able to take power from their hands. They never anticipated that the triumph of the revolution and Islamists coming to power would cause them to lose all that they had fought to achieve for so long. Mohammad Reza Shah, responsible for closure of the women's organization, made similar political miscalculation with the Resurgence Party (Rastakhiz Party) in 1975. The Shah admitted in his book *Answer to History* (1980)<sup>90</sup> that formation of Rastakhiz was a mistake, "unfortunately, the mistake in forming this party was proven in practice. The Rastakhiz party could not realize the goals it had set to achieve."

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<sup>89</sup> Keddie, Nikki. (1981). Roots of Revolution: Religion and Politics in Iran. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>90</sup> Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. (1980). Answer to History.

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In March 1975, Mohammad Reza Shah dismantled all political parties and legal unions to include them in a one-party system – the Rastakhiz Party – which would not last for more than three years. In September 1978, the party closure was announced. Nothing remained of independent legal political organizations. Instead, towards the end of 1964, the opposition to the Pahlavi regime, from leftist ideologists to Islamic fundamentalists, started forming undercover groups and political parties. Some even went as far as becoming military guerrilla groups.

Such organizations included the Mojahedin-e khalq organization, formed in 1965 with Islamist inclinations, and the Fadaian-e khalq with Marxist Leninist inclinations. These two underground groups attracted many women members to the armed resistance. The groups active against the Shah before the revolution were profuse and widespread; separate research would be required to fully document. (For further information see Abrahamian, 1982, pp.610-611; 651-652). In the absence of independent political parties and an independent women's movement, and with the increasing dissatisfaction of people about the unequal distribution of oil-derived wealth, and the widening gap between rich and poor, resistance ignited in the summer of 1978 and led to the 1979 revolution.

During Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, although women achieved many campaign demands, the Shah's lack of trust in independent women's right organizations inhibited the full realization of women's freedom in Iran. In his book *Mission for My Country* (Pahlavi, 1961)<sup>91</sup> he writes: "Those who are advertising the equality of men and women's issues are complex and would block women. These individuals through propaganda intend to advance their own agenda. I just say that I only agree with what French say that is "Long live the difference""<sup>92</sup>. The

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<sup>91</sup> Pahlavi. Mohammad Reza. (1961) Mission for my country. [First Ed.] McGraw-Hill: New York  
[http://dl.bookiha.ir/tarikh/Mohamad\\_Reza\\_Pahlavi-Be\\_Sooye\\_Tammadon\\_Bozorg%5Bwww.bookiha.ir%5D.pdf](http://dl.bookiha.ir/tarikh/Mohamad_Reza_Pahlavi-Be_Sooye_Tammadon_Bozorg%5Bwww.bookiha.ir%5D.pdf); <https://iranpoliticsclub.net/library/persian-library/MPahlavi-TowardTheGreatCivilization.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Original phrase in French: "Vive la difference" refers to the difference between the sexes, as well as to highlight any difference or diversity in general. It has no political or legal connotations. The Shah was educated for many years in the French language in Switzerland at Institut Le Rosey, the world's most expensive boarding school. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad\\_Reza\\_Pahlavi#Education](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Reza_Pahlavi#Education)

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Shah's decision to apply a simplistic phrase to address a compelling political and legal issue betrayed his failure to truly grasp it. The equality demanded by the women's movement would enable differences to live and flourish. In fact, the phrase reflected the mindset of the Shah; it was a paternalistic statement condoning stereotypical roles, dismissing serious discussion.<sup>93</sup> In this light, the view of the Shah was not so different from the religious views that inequality between men and women was due to biological differences that translated to a need to conform to a vision of society that maintained the status quo of patriarchal order.

Pre-revolution, male domination was deeply rooted in all aspects of society. Even in left-leaning political parties, a belief that a "good woman" had two dimensions prevailed. The "good woman" would work in a self-sacrificing way towards the realization of the objectives of that organization to which she belongs; or work in a self-sacrificing way among the mothers or wives of male activists. The leftists and traditionalists shared the same view that a woman 'with Western ideas' is a cause of destruction of culture and the spread of corruption in society. A female role model defined and introduced by theoretician ideology, by so-called "religious new thinking" was the Prophet's daughter Fatima, who died at age of 18! Prior to the revolution, the leftist organization Mojahedin-e Khalag (MEK) promoted Islamic dress; after the revolution this form of dress became the forced hijab imposed upon women.

#### **2.4.5 Women's official Publications during Mohammad Reza Shah**

Research on women's publication during the Constitutional Revolution shows a high number of publications, in contrast with the quantity of women's rights activities. In fact, female journalism and women becoming writers were among the methods of raising awareness. One of the early feminist publications in Iran was

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<sup>93</sup> Prior to the Shah's comment, a Hollywood film called Adam's Rib (1949) starring celebrities Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn, had been nominated for an Oscar for Best Writing, and included a well-known quote that illustrates the absurd reductionist aspects of the phrase: "Well, you know as the French say... What do they say? Vive la difference! Which means? Which means hurrah for that little difference."

<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0041090/quotes/>

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Bibi Khanoom Astarabadi's *The Vices of Men*,<sup>94</sup> published in 1894 in response to the anti-women book *The Training of Women (Tadibol nesvan)*. In her book, Astarabadi discussed issues such as objections to polygamy and the unilateral right of men to divorce, and emphasized education for women. She criticized the imposed structure of society and based her critique on altering the relation between men and women. With determination, she bravely articulated some previously-unspoken demands of women. Terms such as "Rights", "Law", and "Women's Liberation" were introduced in women's literature during the Constitutional Revolution. During this time, journalism alongside political and cultural activities formed inseparable pillars of women's activities for equality.

Meanwhile, during the Pahlavi era, specifically the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, women were deprived of women's publications, despite the country's official adoption of a path toward modernization. In fact, there were only two weekly magazines, *Banovan* (Women), and *Zan-e Rooz* (Woman of Today)<sup>95</sup> established in 1965 with male editor Mohammad Davami, which became the most popular magazine in the history of Iran prior to the revolution<sup>96</sup>. The topics of discussion in the magazine included fashion, news, health, photos, entertainment, children, movie stars, and coverage of the Miss Universe contest. Although it had a large audience, it provided no space for women critics. While it was a very popular magazine, this potential was not applied toward the institutionalization of women's rights, but instead toward the objectives of the state and reform programs of the Shah. As a result, it played no role in drawing attention to the demands of women during the revolution.

Another popular magazine was Women's News ("Etelaat Banovan"). The owner of this magazine, Abbas Masoudi, was also male. Their first issue came out in March 1954. Up until 1978, over 1,000 issues of the magazine were published, which focused on fashion, news, arts, and fiction. After a lapse of two years in its

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<sup>94</sup> Astarabadi Bibi Khanoom 1894 "The Vices of Men "(in Persian Maayeb al rejal) Access online in Persian <http://www.qajarwomen.org/fa/items/1018A17.html>

<sup>95</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zan-e\\_Rooz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zan-e_Rooz)

<sup>96</sup> <http://www.dw.com/fa-ir/a-5752819> accessed May 11, 2016.

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publication, it began publishing again under the editorship of Zahra Rahnavard in 1980. It did not last long, and in February of 1981, the magazine permanently stopped publishing. Considering the contents of these weekly magazines, neither had a critical nor rigorous view on women's issues. For this reason, they were not popular among intellectual women. Meanwhile, fundamentalists and Islamists were not only against such publications, but completely boycotted them.

#### **2.4.6 Conclusions: Mohammad Reza Shah Period**

After Mohammad Reza Shah came to power, the process of modernization intensified. During this period another chapter of political, economic and social reform started under the shadow of political oppression. In 1962, as part of initial White Revolution measures, women were granted the right to vote and participate in elections. However, Mohammad Reza Shah's reign neglected a deeper issue: fundamental cultural transformation, including education of men in society. Reza Shah and Mohammad Reza Shah focused on changes to conditions for women, but neglected the fact that many men, including educated and intellectuals, were still following the traditional ways of thinking of their fathers, which was to deprive women of their civil rights. Additionally, even within educational settings, gender stereotypes existed and were being passed on to new generations in textbooks and other structural ways. The role of motherhood in textbooks was always highlighted. Very few men raised in such a system could truly believe in the equality of men and women. Even the Shah, who claimed to advance Iran to a great civilization, had not truly embraced the equality of men and women, as Abbas Milani (2010)<sup>97</sup> correctly points out this characteristic of Shah in his book:

It seems Shah, in his solitude, believed in natural inferiority of women, especially in comparison to men. He would say that women do not even have superiority in the kitchen, as best chefs in the world are men.

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<sup>97</sup> Milani. Abass, 2010. Mysteries of the life of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Character as Destiny, in Persian( Razhaee az zendegiye Mohammd reza Pahlavi,shakhsiyat besane sarnevesht) [http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/07/100726\\_150\\_shah\\_anniv30\\_milani.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2010/07/100726_150_shah_anniv30_milani.shtml) accessed September 12 2016.

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In the process of modernization a considerable number of educated people in and out of the country gained political and social awareness, such that they were inclined to align and support the Shah's alleged positive goals and development plans. Yet the Shah was focused on indicators of changes and failed to use this phenomenal opportunity to create unity at a more fundamental level, in particular, to restrain or neutralize traditional attitudes. The Shah failed to steward potential forces of left, secular intellectuals and writers in opposition or critical of governments policies. By suppressing them, he lost potential allies, created adversaries and empowered the clergy. On this point, the subject of "religious studies" was included in academic subjects from primary level to pre-university level. The Shah seemed blind to the fact that the main obstacles to the process of modernization were the traditional fundamentalist forces. He left the hands of religious forces open to promote the Islamic culture, such as the Islamic veil, as we see in the books by Morteza Motahari<sup>98</sup> and Shariati, and to allow their publication in vast numbers, even being sold at a discounted price at universities.

During this period, woman's presence in the public arena and social and political activities expanded rapidly. Thousands of Iranian women were working in industry, education and health services, factories, government offices, police, the army and the private sector. After the dissolution of the independent women's organization, women often turned their energies to fight in the political realm as groups of women's rights activists joined women's governmental activities and governmental feminist projects to advance governmental plans, or through political participation and progressive legislation tried to eliminate discrimination against women. But some others adopted a more aggressive style of resistance.

From the second half of the 1960s onwards not much independent feminist work was done with regard to women's social rights and gender equality issues. Especially in the leftist movement, women's liberation and realization of equal

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<sup>98</sup> Morteza Motahari (Persian: مرتضی مطهری) was an Iranian cleric. Motahari is considered to have an important influence on the ideologies of the Islamic Republic. See, Manouchehr Ganji (2002). Defying the Iranian Revolution: From a Minister to the Shah to a Leader of Resistance. Greenwood Publishing Group, Untitled Stat of America, p. 109.

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rights was made conditional to the establishment of socialism and realization of political objectives. In this period, contemporaneous with these changes, the participation of women in different political groups opposing the Shah expanded and even reached its height during 1960s and 1970s, especially in guerrilla campaign, as leftist groups or religious groups.

Regardless how one judges the style of resistance, the fact remains that women, especially young girls, stood alongside men participating in guerrilla campaigns, and like men would clash with the police, or get killed in safe houses or in the streets during clashes. They were seen tortured in prisons, sentenced to life in prison or executed. This dramatically shattered gender stereotypes that had previously branded women as helpless creatures. If during Reza Shah's era the opposition of clergy led to the unveiling of women, resistance under Mohammad Reza Shah manifested itself firmly in women's right to vote, participation in elections, and response to the Shah's modernizations programs and the White Revolution.

In the 1979 Revolution, all these political axes came together with common or opposing political agendas, to demonstrate against the monarchy regime, ranging from Marxists who like Marx believed "Religion is the opium of the people" to religious fundamentalists who believed that shedding the blood of infidels is lawful. To great amazement, the adage "the end justifies the means" became personified, to its full meaning. The unity of thought and action among various groups, demanding that the Shah leave power, literally evaporated any chance of debate or contemplation of future prospects among revolutionary activists. Although the leftists saw themselves as the advocates and champions of freedom and equality for women during the Constitutional Revolution, during the 1979 Revolution, not only did they pay no real attention to issues related to women, but considered these issues secondary.

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## **2.5 The Women's Movement during Islamic Revolution**

### **2.5.1 1979 Revolution reliance on Populism**

As stated earlier, prior to creation of the single legal Rastakhiz Party 1975, multiple political parties had a license in Iran (See Lorentz, 2010)<sup>99</sup>. In spite of the political climate, many opposing the Shah's regime, mindful of sensitive security measures, chose to continue their activities secretly in groups of two or three. The Rastakhiz party designed by Shah required mandatory membership rather than voluntary membership. Moreover, it did not have an inclusive political character. Therefore, when inevitable whispers of dissent started, many formal members of the Rastakhiz Party were at the forefront of the opposition.

The waves of dissatisfaction and dissent set in motion became increasingly furious and pulled people in. Events began snowballing, one after another. The dismantled political parties did not have a proper chance to reorganize. Other political parties had been active secretly, but with many members still in prison. The only group that had a direct and coherent existence and could freely and openly penetrate all aspects of the people's lives was the clergy. The clergy had a presence in the mosques and in religious ceremonies. In this way they cemented their place in society and the lives of ordinary people. They used religious ceremonies as an instrument to promote Islam and to oppose the reform projects introduced by the Shah. In addition, they used the mosques as propaganda headquarters that were always open and the Islamic schools, to which they had exclusive access, for similar purpose.

With such political structural advantages, Khomeini could attract the support of ordinary people with populist slogans and general, ambiguous promises such as "justice", "spiritual fulfillment", "free water and electricity", etc. In the view of many Western intellectuals and modern thinkers, he presented himself as an

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<sup>99</sup> Rastakhiz Party of People of Iran (Persian: Hezb-e Rastākīz melat Iran) was Iran's single legal political party from 1975 to Iranian Revolution, founded by the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Retrieved from, Lorentz, John H. (2010). "Rastakhiz Party". The A to Z of Iran. The A to Z Guide Series. 209. Scarecrow Press. pp. 266–268.

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irreconcilable fighter and representative of “Revolutionary Islam.” For political parties and intellectuals who had suffered and experienced imprisonment and torture, the catastrophic events about to take place were unimaginable. No one envisaged that after the fall of the monarchy, a theocracy based on the rule of “Velayat-e Faghih<sup>100</sup>” would be established and cut the throat of intellectuals and freethinkers by its blade. After all, one of the main and fundamental demands of Iranian youth was to bring an end to dictatorship and achieve political freedom.

### **2.5.2 Media Propaganda and the charismatic image of Khomeini**

Khomeini’s dramatic impetuosity opposing the Shah and related mass media propaganda transformed Khomeini into a charismatic figure. The religious propaganda and public deception evolved to such a degree that a rumor was spread around the country that Khomeini’s face could be seen in the moon. A group of university-educated people rushed to their roofs to see his face in the moon. A rumor came the next day that one could find a strand of Khomeini’s beard in the Quran’s pages. This time it was the turn of more religious group to rush to check the pages of Quran in the hope to find the strand of his beard. Such were the initiatives to create a holy face for Khomeini. Yet a mere holy face did not suffice for the religious sector, as they needed a mask to hide behind, in order to push their objectives forward. So, they created an idol to ensure that after it comes to power no one can say a word against it. Even those who were Khomeini’s closest allies were very quickly eliminated, if they uttered the smallest criticism.

A point well worth contemplating is to examine why, with revolutionary excitement at its zenith, no one was questioning Khomeini’s opposition to the Shah’s reform programs, including freedom for women to vote. Before Khomeini came back to Iran, while still in exile in Nofel Loshato (Neauphle-le-Château) near Paris, France, all his talks revolved around the point that the Shah must leave. Shortly after the triumph of the revolution, with Khomeini presented as a holy

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<sup>100</sup> Also transliterated velāyat-e faqīh. The Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist, also called the Governance of the Jurist. A conception of governance based on a theory in Shia Islam which holds that Islam gives a faqīh (Islamic jurist) custodianship over people. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guardianship\\_of\\_the\\_Islamic\\_Jurist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guardianship_of_the_Islamic_Jurist)

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figure, even some of his comments which had quite a negative message would be reinterpreted and justified in a positive tone by his followers, and to a degree presented as sacred. For example, when Khomeini came to Iran, a reporter asked him, what are your feelings after coming back to Iran after 15 years? His response was: "Nothing." Khomeini's followers made major propaganda around this reply and blamed people for not having the capacity to understand the depth of such answers. There was no large popular opposition to this political stance. The few intellectuals who had the courage to criticize him in public were condemned.

After the victory of the revolution, his position as an "anti-imperialist" attracted the support of some non-Islamic forces both in Iran and in the international arena. Support of the Islamic Revolution for its "anti-imperialist" characteristic, was not exclusive to the people of Iran. Certain well-known intellectuals, such as the well-known French philosopher and social theorist Michel Foucault, were attracted to the Iranian revolution, and with excitement and enthusiasm referred to it as spiritual politics. (See Afary & Anderson, 2005)<sup>101</sup> In the United States, Richard Falk, professor of international law at Princeton University, defended Khomeini's positions. He published an article entitled: "Trusting Khomeini", after he visited him in Paris, saying:

The conservatives are warning us that Iran will go back 1300 years and a theocratic fascist regime will come to power. But you should not believe it, because Khomeini wants to go to Qum and reside there and act as an advisor and a critic to Islamic regime when necessary.<sup>102</sup>

Falk subsequently realized that he made a grave mistake about Khomeini and on 5 March 1984 (15 Esfand 1362) wrote a strongly-worded apology rebuttal in

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<sup>101</sup> See Afary, Janet & Anderson, Kevin B. 2005. Foucault and the Iranian Revolution, Gender and the Seductions of Islamism, University of Chicago Press.

<sup>102</sup> Falk, Richard. Trusting Khomeini - New York Times. February 16, 1979. Retrieved 30 November 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/1979/02/16/archives/trusting-khomeini.html>  
See also Richard Falk's defence of Khomeini, 1979.

<http://elderofzion.blogspot.com/2011/02/richard-falks-defense-of-khomeini-1979.html>  
See also: U.N.'s Richard Falk justifies his 1979 "Trusting Khomeini" NYT op-ed  
<http://blog.unwatch.org/index.php/2012/10/12/u-n-s-richard-falk-justifies-his-1979-trusting-khomeini-nyt-op-ed/>  
<https://web.archive.org/web/20111016091523/http://elderofzion.blogspot.com/2011/02/richard-falks-defense-of-khomeini-1979.html>

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The New York Times with the title “On Iran Deploring the Crimes of Khomeini”, criticizing the evolution of events as follows,

Naturally, I feel deeply saddened by the course taken by the Iranian revolution. There is much for all of us to learn from this bitter experience in Iran. I can only say that the overwhelming majority of Iranians committed to human rights and democracy welcomed the revolution at the time as a deliverance from darkness. Khomeini's plans for post-Shah Iran were then obscure. He fooled, and later persecuted, many dedicated, humane followers and may himself have moved by stages and for a variety of reasons to lead the Islamic Republic in such a demonic direction. There is one puzzling implication in your editorial. You seem to suggest that more vigorous protests by individuals on the left might yet have some impact in Teheran, yet in the same editorial you point out correctly that the left has been singled out, along with Bahais, for systematic repression. In fact, the left has been crushed in a far more decisive manner in Khomeini's Iran than it ever was under the Shah.<sup>103</sup>

In fact, many other politicians, social sciences, experts and philosophers also had initially viewed Khomeini in an optimistic light. However, many similarly later realized their gravely mistaken political analysis. Taking into account the social conditions and public movement, the vast majority of people were calling for a regime change. In other words, it can be named an "anti-Shah movement".

The revolutionary fever left no doubt about future plans of the government that had come to power, and the fate of women was no exception. Although women had a massive presence in demonstrations during the revolution, there was no women's movement to present women's demands, and even women who had left-leaning or “nationalistic-religious” views, disappeared in the organizations and groups they had joined. In the absence of an organized and assertive women's movement or organizations, not only did the new government neglect women's demands, but went further to actively condemn and oppose “modern and forward-looking

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<sup>103</sup> Falk, Richard. (1984, March 5). Letter: On Iran Deploring the Crimes of Khomeini. The New York Times  
<https://www.nytimes.com/1984/03/05/opinion/l-letter-on-iran-deploring-the-crimes-of-khomeini-032119.html>  
See also Falk, Richard. (2012). Was it wrong to support the Iranian Revolution in 1978 (because it turned out badly)? Middle East, US, Viewpoints  
<http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2012/10/12/was-it-wrong-to-support-the-iranian-revolution-in-1978-because-it-turned-out-badly/>

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women”, whom they viewed as a symbol of “Imperialism and the West”, and followed the religious forces.

### **2.5.3 Iranian revolution and the Crisis in Women’s Organizations**

Khomeini supported villagers and illiterate groups more than any other sector in the society, as a reflection of his chauvinist views and enforcement of Islamic laws, but initially it was nationalist Islamists, educated in Europe and America, such as Bani-Sadr, Ghotbzadeh, Yazdi and others who became his legislators and executive muscles. The majority of open-minded leftists and liberals could hardly perceive, let alone take seriously, the penetration of religious traditionalist in the public mind and domination over the revolution. They imagined that after Shah’s fall from power, people would somehow rationally self-organize and be able to govern themselves. As such, an emphasis was placed on a unified front at the expense of discussion. Many times, it could be heard from the tongues of intellectuals and enlightened people that ‘now is the time to put aside our differences’, or ‘now is not the time for discussion’, or ‘once the Shah is gone then we decide what we need to do.’

Images that survive from the “anti-Shah” demonstrations show a clear fact: women with left Marxist views, religious views, and non-religious views, with hijab or without, hand-in-hand with men poured out into the streets with the prime objective to overthrow the Shah. American photojournalist David Brunt recorded many such images for history. It is not surprising that when we review the slogans of the revolution, we see no slogans in support of women’s rights. On the contrary, organized groups would caution women with phrases such as “sister, please observe your hijab.” Words, such as “sister” or “brother”, were Islamic vocabulary, yet gradually entered everyday conversation amongst secular people. However, none of these signs or warnings seemed serious enough to women, whether religious or non-religious, to call for reaction. The closer to victory, the greater the gaps that grew between men and women in demonstration. This grew to the point where women and men in demonstration were completely separated.



Figure 1 Diversity among activists and dissidents<sup>104</sup>

As previously stated, under Reza Shah, the majority of independent women's group were dismantled or merged with women's organization. Women lacked their own organized and independent organizations, resulting in greater likelihood to be swept along with the revolution. Not only did women lack effective means to articulate and assert their own voices, but masses of women were swept up by 'larger anti-Shah revolutionary interests' and co-opted in such a way that without thinking they stood up against their own interests as women. Female intellectuals, often active in political organizations, including women with inclinations towards Marxism or affiliation towards religious nationalism, representing two prominent groups of politically-active women, believed that freedom of women was only possible by the preeminent establishment of a government founded on "social justice" and any women's interests were subordinate to that goal.

Religious women with Islamic political objectives, who had become active not long before the revolution, could function in a more organized way, were more cohesive in their actions and received more support. Such women were following the Mojahedin-e Khalq or women connected to Islamic Nationalist groups or religious student groups at schools. For example, students at schools and universities started to wear clothing that was not standard or the norm, to show

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<sup>104</sup> [www.akairan.com/foto-aka/ziba/201321083352.html](http://www.akairan.com/foto-aka/ziba/201321083352.html)

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opposition to the Shah's regime as well as support for Islam. A year before the revolution, students were setting out display tables to sell books of Motahari and Ali Shariati, two well-known religious figures against the Shah's government. (I personally witnessed a number of these events).

Regarding the increased appeal of hijab before the revolution, Mansoureh Pirnia<sup>105</sup> writes in his book *Mrs. Minister* a biography of the education minister Dr. Farrokhroo Parsa, including her thoughts and ideals: "thirty-five years after the unveiling event, hijab, knife and face cover has returned and this is a bitter fact. It was even more saddening to see thousands of girls walking to schools and universities, wearing black chador [covering their whole being]." This point is well worth reflecting upon, because we need to understand what elements caused women to go backward and act against their own interests. The process of such self-destruction had begun three decades before the revolution and was guided by the religious forces in a truly disconcerting manner; and for most part presented itself in the form of hijab as a symbol of resistance to the Shah. Furthermore, in the larger context this is far from a trivial point, because the hijab itself became one of the iconic symbols of the Islamic Republic.

Regarding women's and girls' use of the hijab towards the end of the Shah's reign, Pirnia writes:

We are witnessing schools that up to a couple of years ago you could not find even one student with hijab, yet by the middle of Mrs. Farrokhroo Parsa's term in the office, almost half of the girls were wearing hijab. There were certain forces in action that would promote hijab as the "symbol of resistance."

Mahnaz Afkhami, also talks about hijab as symbol of resistance against the Shah and says:

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<sup>105</sup> Pirnia, Mansoureh. (2007). (Persian 1386) *Mrs. Minister (Khanome Vazir)* in Persian Mehre Iran: USA.

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Islamic hijab had gained popularity among certain groups of women. In fact hijab was used as an instrument or a symbol of resistance, because one of the areas of development for Iranian people, which was quite prominent in Iran and at the international stage was the women's development and women's rights. So, in order to overthrow the Shah, this was one of the ways to symbolically resist the manifestations of such development. (Interview with Mahnaz Afkhami, oral history)<sup>106</sup>

#### **2.5.4 Keeping with Islamic and Anti-feminist tendencies**

In this context, intellectual and educated women used chador (hijab) as an instrument to dominate women during demonstrations against the Shah. This raises the question of why women - half the population of Iran - not only did not present any clear set of demands or did not recognize the need for an independent movement towards realization of women's rights, but by going along with Islamic tendencies, participated in establishing an anti-feminist system of government that violated women's rights in the name of Islam.

As stated, in the process of the “anti-Shah” revolution, due to overwhelming rhetoric about larger social goals and the absence of independent women's organizations, women acted in a form of ‘activism’ that was to a large extent compliant, passive, negative and even self-negating. Among key factors: 1. Women were unable to form their own independent organizations; 2. Women were unable to transfer their insights and understandings into a political force, to impact women's policies even at the level of slogans; 3. Although the women's movement was widespread, it failed to properly represent women – not even a small group. In contrast, Khomeini succeeded to pull in large masses of women from a wide spectrum of society, from religious individuals to Marxists, to participate in the revolution. Only a few women understood that in the heat of the hysterical revolutionary “anti-Shah” excitement of the masses, political parties and groups, not only was the voice of women being excluded, it was also being severely suppressed.

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Mahnaz Afkhami by Gholam Reza Afkhami, “Society, government and the Iranian women's movement 1963-1979 (Jameh, Dolat, va jonbeshe zanan 1342-1357) in Persian. The Foundation for Iranian Studies.

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In exploring the question of why have women not been able to form their own struggle for independence, a fundamental reason is lack of independent platforms. This barrier originates in policy put in place under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, as stated above, which reduced the number of women's organizations through amalgamation or by shutting them down altogether. The enforcement of this policy resulted in that all remaining women's organizations either became dependent on the government, or that women's rights defenders joined organizations associated with the political opposition. The government politically confiscated and controlled the official forum to express women's rights, as well as the subsequent decisions and results.

As a result, the process of legislative changes for women had a significant social disconnect that led to inaction or opposition to these changes. All women's achievements started to be presented as the Shah's favor to them or as political bargaining chips, such as granting the women's right to vote in relation to the White Revolution. Such 'tainted achievements' lacked legitimacy in the eyes of groups opposed to the Shah and were not always viewed in a positive light. As such, the cause of women's rights became victim to opposition to the Shah.

One of the reasons and factors that led to the collapse of the Pahlavi monarchy and the women's rights movement was the Shah's resistance to social movements such as labor, student and women's movements. Regardless of their motivations, such groups were viewed less as potential allies, and more as threat to the government. No organization that operated independently from the government was given permission to exist. As a result, the intellectual community did not support the Shah's actions. Simultaneously, extreme religious forces opposed the Shah's program of expansion and modernization, especially in the area of government-led women's issues. The religious groups opposed the Shah because they thought his modernization program of the country undermined the integrity of Sharia law and viewed many aspects of women's rights advocacy as examples of this threat. As stated previously, after the social-economic reforms in the Shah's White Revolution that began in the early 1960s, the clergy led by Khomeini began their protest and

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opposition to the White Revolution, especially to women's right to vote. Khomeini declared the White Revolution an act "against God", a mistake and a crime.<sup>107</sup> Bakhsh (1985)<sup>108</sup> noted that Khomeini maintained that "women's suffrage" contradicted the principles of Islamic Sharia law and corrupted women. The Shah's ruling order trusted women to control their lives and the fundamentalists did not tolerate women to control their lives, and women's rights were effectively pushed and pulled between these two opposing forces.

During the 1979 revolution, women scholars did not have a public platform to evaluate, debate or critically challenge Khomeini and other religious leaders' reasons for opposition to the Shah. No groups, whether small or large, including opposition groups, expressed concern about what would happen to women's rights when leadership of the revolution moved into the hands of a fundamentalists and an entity whose alleged reason to oppose the Shah was in large part their opposition to women's right to vote. A criticism of political groups, especially women's political groups, is that women's rights were not recognized and that no independent movement existed to address the threat to women's rights.

Prior to the 1979 revolution, an undeniably significant gender gap still existed at all levels of society, yet thanks to women's rights activists, Iranian women were able to achieve many rights through bargaining and political participation, pressure from below, and raising awareness. Such rights included the right to free education up to the highest levels of academia, the right to choose their clothing, the right to vote, and the rights to participate in politics and business. Furthermore, the Family Protection Act was passed in 1974, which, despite all its shortcomings, was far more progressive than the family law after the revolution.

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<sup>107</sup> Afkhami. Gholam Reza, 2009. The Life and Times of the Shah, University of California Press, p. 233.

<sup>108</sup> Bakhsh, S. (1990). The reign of the ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution. New York: Basic Books. See also Lewis, B. (1985, January 17). How Khomeini Made It: The Reign of the Ayatollahs: Iran and the Islamic Revolution, by Shaul Bakhsh. Volume 31, Number 21&22. Retrieved from <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1985/01/17/how-khomeini-made-it/>

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In 1978, just prior to the revolution, 38% of university students were women, 1,500 women had senior management positions, 22 women were members of the legislative assembly (congress), five women were mayors, and women held 33% of all higher education jobs.<sup>109</sup>

Thus, the question arises of why, despite all these achievements, Iranian women participated in the 1979 revolution. It is particularly important to answer this question and to examine the experience of Iranian women in order to identify the weaknesses of the women's movement. Women's experience during the 1979 Iranian Revolution can serve as a model for women in the region. Considering the changes that have occurred in recent years in the Middle East, the growth of Islamic fundamentalism and its political and social consequences, particularly for women, it is necessary to pay attention to conditions of that time, and the role of women and factors leading to Iran's establishment of a religious government.

Some historians like Sanasarian (1982) believe that secular women supported the Iranian revolution because Khomeini did not say much about women's rights and when he did, it was in a general way allowing latitude for interpretation. Women gradually began to believe that the anti-Shah movement was not anti-women. Its goal was to topple the monarchy and bring democracy, not to suppress women<sup>110</sup>. Although there is some truth to this theory, it cannot explain how political groups at the time did not realize the danger. How could they call themselves political yet not be aware of Khomeini's dangerous ideology, which caused his exile to Turkey, then Iraq and then France, not to mention countries which denied him?

If women's wishes were not voiced during the 1979 revolution, was it because they felt they got all they wanted during Pahlavi's regime? Or was it lack of

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<sup>109</sup> Mafinezam, Alidad & Mehrabi, Aria. (2007). Iran and its place among nations Praeger (2007-11-30) p.121.

<sup>110</sup> Sanasarian, Eliz. (1982). The women's rights movement in Iran: mutiny, appeasement, and repression from 1900 to Khomeini (Persian jonbesh hoghoqe zanan dar Iran), translated in Persian. (2005). p.177

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knowledge about feminism, women's issues, and history, especially the history of the women's movement and its activists since the Constitutional Revolution?

Valentine Moghadam (2004) believes that: "Women, like other groups, had different reasons for opposing Shah, such as economic disadvantages, lack of political freedom or simply agreeing with Islamic rules".<sup>111</sup> Among the three reasons stated, women's rights is not stated. It is worth noting that the first two reasons (economic disadvantages and lack of political freedom) were components of the century-long women's movement struggle for equality. In other words, the same age-old reasons could have motivated women to oppose the Shah. On top of those two reasons, there was a growing chorus of chants that toppling an oppressor would lead to improvement. The third reason (agreeing with Islamic rules) suggests that some women opposed the Shah simply because of ideology.

There were different reasons for the divide between the people and the government since the beginning of Pahlavi dynasty. The clergy's disagreement with Shah was mostly because of modernization and its consequences. Most of them did not have any problem with the monarchy. The clergy's objections started during the Constitutional Revolution. An obvious example is Sheikh Fazlollah Nouri, who believed that the Constitutional Revolution endangered Islam and Sharia law. (Najafi, 2011)<sup>112</sup>

Another example is the cleric Moddares, a staunch opponent of women's rights during the constitutional period and the reign of Reza Shah. Moddares believed that modernization following the pattern of Western modernity equaled atheism and caused the destruction of religious foundation in Iranian society. That is why he vehemently opposed the republican government suggested by Reza Shah, because the Republic was a symbol of modernity and westernization. His opposition was so

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<sup>111</sup> Moghadam, V.M. (2004). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action. Valentine Moghadam was former Director of Women's Studies and Professor of Sociology at Illinois State University. She currently works at UNESCO.

<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ValentineMoghadamFinal.pdf>

<sup>112</sup> See Najafi, Mousa. (2011). (Persian calendar 1390). Constitutional Studies, Historical knowledge and Analysis of contemporary Islamic Movement of Iran (Mashroteh shenasi, shenakhte tarikhitahlili nehzathayeh Islami moaaser dar Iran), Nshare aarma

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strong and went so far as to gather a number of clergy and business owners in front of the congress to chant against the Republic and the Sardar Sepah (Reza Shah). On 21<sup>st</sup> March 1924, that congress had a public meeting to announce the Republic.<sup>113</sup>

During Mohammad Reza Shah's reign, the religious sector's objections were not just about women's rights. They believed the economic, social and cultural changes and the trend of modernization had resulted in promiscuity, comingling of men and women, drinking alcohol and the opening cinemas, nightclubs. On the other hand, the secular sector was concerned about political freedom, social justice and economic equality. Although there were many reasons to oppose the Shah's government, the goal of all Islamist, socialist, and communist groups was to topple his regime. Most people did not have any notion about the government that would follow. Intellectual women in particular and leftist groups in general did not think that the new government would move society backwards. Aside from Khomeini and a few of his closest people, nobody knew his plans.

Considering the victory of the revolution, the Islamists had the upper hand. The situation Khomeini and his supporters found themselves in meant they were able to overcome all opposition and, using modern tools such as the referendum, establish the Government of the Islamic Republic, a government defined by the suppression of women's sexual and gender rights.

According to experiences and explanations given by opposition groups from the right (religious groups) and left (secular intellectuals), the reasons for women's unconditional support of the 1979 revolution were the lack of awareness of women's rights, trust in the clergy, and anti-imperialist sentiments. Women were not aware of the history of women's rights, especially the efforts of its pioneers; they were unable to analyze the situation within the full context and demand women's rights accordingly.

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<sup>113</sup> Maki, Hossien. (1981) (Persian calendar 1359) Twenty-year history of Iran, (Tarikh bist saaleh Iran), Bongah tarjomeh va nasher ketab , Vol. 2.

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In some academic research by women who witnessed the revolution, they criticize themselves honestly and explain reasons for participating in the revolution. For example, Chahla Chafiq, a women's rights defender, explains:

I was raised in a non-religious family. While I was studying sociology at the university and was working with the left opposition, I had an optimistic idea toward Khomeini and his words to a point that I saw him as the representative of Islam, the fighter. [...] I, like tens of thousands of women without a hijab, believed that wearing a scarf at the demonstration would unite us with women with hijab against the common enemy, Shah and his imperialist friends.<sup>114</sup>

This is what Simin Daneshvar, one of the well-known writers, said:

I had read many of Imam Khomeini's statements and had heard a lot of his tapes. I had no doubt that he would respect all the individual political and social freedoms and would defend human rights, humanity and dignity. I believed that the dark time had ended and from now on God would have mercy on us. If I could help exile Shah while wearing a hijab, I would be honored to wear it. (Simin Daneshvar in an interview with Ayandegan newspaper 1357; Western calendar 1979)

This statement shows opposition specifically to the Pahlavi regime, rather than to dictatorship itself. Ms. Daneshvar, a seasoned intellectual writer who had lived over half a century by 1979, and could have been a guide and role model for younger generation, claims that she "had no doubt that Khomeini would respect all the individual, political and social freedom and would defend human rights, humanity and dignity", but she never questions herself if wearing hijab by force would contradict basic individual rights and freedoms, the very same issues that she has preached about before. There were quite a few similar arguments between different opposing groups throughout the revolution.

A hard look at the full past clearly reveals that the situation of Iranian women, viewed in terms of women's movement goals, went from bad to worse. The lessons of this experience are instructive for the future of Iranian women with their sensitive political activities, as well as for the women of the region; people stuck with

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<sup>114</sup> Chafiq, Chahla. 2013. (Persian 1392), Islam politique, ex et genre, (Islam siyasi, jesiyat va jensgonegi) translated Nasehi, Reza, Khavaran, pp 13-14.

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governments who deny the rights of minorities in the name of religion, nationalism, or ideological reasons. It is also a lesson for the women's movement to respect their goals and demands, and not surrender to power-hungry usurpers.

### **2.5.5 Role of Religious Leaders in Mobilizing Women Against Themselves**

As previously stated, the core of the Iranian revolution consisted of the following: opposition to the Pahlavi regime; collusion with Westernization of the country; monarchy; and imperialism with the aim to achieve social justice. If the women's right to vote was discussed during the Constitutional Revolution, there was no mention of women's rights at all in the 1979 revolution. As Iranian and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Shirin Ebadi<sup>115</sup> stated in her interview with me (2010):

"The Iranian revolution was a masculine movement against women."

Before the revolution, some intellectuals, writers and more modern clergy started nurturing and strengthening Islamic ideology in their speeches and books, which played an essential role in attracting young generations to different Islamic groups. For example, the well-known writer Jalal Al Ahmad was writing in opposition with Westernization while wearing a tie. Ali Shariati<sup>116</sup> had regular speeches in "Hussainieh Ershad".<sup>117</sup> This is how a religious-nationalist woman talks about Ali Shariati's role: "We would go to his speeches in miniskirts and after a few sessions we were wearing hijabs." Morteza Motahari who was wearing a cleric cloak writes about "The Philosophy of Hijab".<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Shirin Ebadi is an Iranian lawyer, a former judge and human rights activist and founder of Defenders of Human Rights Center in Iran. In 2003 Ebadi was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her significant and pioneering efforts for democracy and human rights, especially women's, children's, and refugee rights.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shirin\\_Ebadi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shirin_Ebadi)

This interview has been conducted on 21 December, 2010 in Geneva.

<sup>116</sup> Ali Shariati Mazinani was an Iranian revolutionary and sociologist who focused on the sociology of religion. He is held as one of the most influential Iranian intellectuals of the 20th century and has been called the 'ideologue of the Iranian Revolution' Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali\\_Shariati](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ali_Shariati)

<sup>117</sup> The Hosseiniyeh Ershad is a non-traditionalist religious institute established by Nasser Minachi in Tehran, Iran in 1967. The institute is housed in a large, domed hall, and is used for lectures on history, culture, society, and religion. Ali Shariati held his anti-Pahlavi speeches here before the revolution.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosseiniyeh\\_Ershad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosseiniyeh_Ershad)

<sup>118</sup> Based on my personal observations from this period time and the space of pre-revolutionary

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Theorizing by people like Ali Shariati about the law as "religious modernity" and "new way of looking at religion" attracted women to Islamic ideology and created a wave of opposition to the modernization process the Shah was pursuing. Shariati's ideology, due to its conceptual point of view, was able to promote the revolution of political Islam. The notion of being on the frontline of opposition against democratization and the fight against imperialism was a tremendous added attraction. Shariati, like Fatima Mernissi,<sup>119</sup> was seeking to create a democratic Islam. He was proclaiming going back to the essential elements of religion that had no historical existence and was not going to have one. Shariati did not simply critique conventional clerics, he believed that Islam had to be taken out of the hands of the clerics and entrusted to religious intellectuals.

If some conventional clerics were stating that their struggle and fight against the Shah was to achieve women's freedom, Shariati was introducing political Islam as a form of opposition to the modernized West. He thought that women would be the best instrument to fight Westernization. He permitted himself to take the transcript of Fatima (daughter of Mohammed, the founder of Islam)<sup>120</sup> "The Good Women" as the foundation (this Fatima, of course, in his imagination) as the best model for women. Shariati was one of the people who had a great influence on educated women and was able to attract them to Islam and add them to the front lines of opposition to the Shah's reign. At the beginning of one of his speeches at Arshad Mosque he said: "I can see that the countenance of the assembly is not that of a school class. However, at the same time, the countenance of assembly is not a preaching oration and the ladies and gentleman that are present are all intellectuals and educated. These are the representatives of contemporary society." (*Fatima is Fatima. p3*)<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Muslim feminist of the women's movement, whose book *Beyond the Veil* (1975) become a classic in anthropology and sociology on women in the Arab World, Mediterranean area and Muslim societies.

<sup>120</sup> Fatima daughter of Muhammad, Arabic: فاطمة Fātīmah; born c. 605 or 615 – died 28 August 632). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatimah>

<sup>121</sup> Shariati, Ali. (1978). *Fatima is Fatima*. Electronic publishing, p.3  
[http://www.2000dl.ir/go/index.php?url=http://file.2000dl.ir/90/09/Fateme\\_Fateme\\_ast.rar](http://www.2000dl.ir/go/index.php?url=http://file.2000dl.ir/90/09/Fateme_Fateme_ast.rar)  
retrieved 10th June 2016

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Shariati believed that women's economic independence was the consequence of urbanization and modernization in the West and the result of more people living in cities. In addition, he believed that women's economic independence was the reason for family disruption and decline in family values. That is why he was looking to create and introduce an image of an ideal Eastern woman, a woman whose identity would originate in Islam. His book *Fatima is Fatima* included a series of his own lectures. The characteristics of Fatima could be summed up as the "epitome of a girl who is nice to her father, the epitome of a great wife to her husband, the epitome of a good mother to her children and, finally, a female warrior and a responsible person." His ideal woman was created on the bases of a Fatima of his own imagination.<sup>122</sup> Shariati's ideal Iranian woman was a traditional woman or a woman who was not a product of the West. It was emphatically an idealized imaginary woman who was the epitome of a self-sacrificing soldier with a strong sense to obey and no self-will. The imaged woman was saturated by ideology and projected as saintly, in contrast to Western vilified enemy captives.

It was surprising that female students, who were beneficiaries of modernization by virtue of their attendance at universities, were the ones who listened to Shariati. This is how he described Iranian women in one of his speeches:

"They built plaster mannequins out of our girls that are neither from the East nor from West and put them behind the windows. They are dolls from West that are hollow and full of make-up that have neither the feelings our women in the past, nor the intellect of today's women. They are like clockwork toys that are neither Eve nor Adam, they are neither wives nor lovers; they are neither housewives nor workers [...] they are a humiliation and an insult to Iranian women!"<sup>123</sup>

He provided a fake and fabricated image of Iranian women. Yet those who listened to Shariati's speeches thought his comments were revolutionary. The aim here is not to discuss at length Shariati's belief, it is simply to give an image of the atmosphere of opposition and religious tactics under the name of "modern religion" at the end of Pahlavi's regime. Furthermore, the idea behind these tactics was to

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid. p.133

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, p.52

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prepare a political religious atmosphere prior to the revolution that would specifically attract young female university students to Islamic ideology.

In addition, before the revolution and especially after the events of 1963, many religious groups formed to fight the Pahlavi regime, the Islamist; leftist and militaristic structure "Mojahedin Khalgh" among them. The organization attracted a considerable number of young people, especially girls, to the revolution. An Islamic ideology seemed different from the Islam introduced by Khomeini. The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran or the Mojahedin-e Khalq (MKO) had a special role in developing and promoting the Islamic dress, the veil imposed on women by the Islamic Republic.

However, influenced by regular and planned propaganda that started approximately two decades before the revolution, since 1979, hijab and especially the veil, became the symbol of the struggle against the Shah's regime and the rejection of modernity. In addition, women's bodies were exploited as a means of political action. After the revolution, the hijab became a symbol of the Islamic Republic. (Lewis, 2003)<sup>124</sup> The dual use of the veil fully explains it. In 1979, middle-class women veiled their heads to show their solidarity with working class women, whereas now the veil is mandatory in Iran by law. While in both instances the reasons for wearing hijab are given, in the first instance, it expresses the opposition to the Shah and Western Colonialism, while in the second instance, it symbolizes the real Islamic Iran. In both cases, the hijab expresses two different concepts in terms of content and performance, but the mechanism of exploitation of the female body and subjection of women for political purposes is the same.

The issue of control over women and their bodies was moderated through hijab. This was one of the major issues among so-called "religious intellectuals", including theorists such as Shariati and Motahari, religious or traditional characters as well as religious and semi-religious groups such as MKO. What better way to achieve control than by using women themselves? The veil (hijab) and female body

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<sup>124</sup> Lewis, R. & Mills, S. (2003). Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader. New York: Routledge, p63.  
<https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=uYpMo1ZRkMAC> accessed 30 November 2018

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became a means to construct a submissive new identity to literally embody the Islamic Republic: useful for signaling opposition to the Shah, promoting mass adherence to an idealized Islam and mobilizing submissive conformity. After the revolution, the bulk of ordinary women and women's rights activists were forced to fight against the hijab.

## **2.6 Effective Factors in the Post-Revolutionary Women's Movement**

### **2.6.1 Women, the losers of the Iranian revolution in Iran**

In the first few days after the establishment of Islamic Republic, women found themselves losing rights that had been the fruits of over 100 years of persistent, peaceful efforts by egalitarian women before and after the Iranian Constitutional Revolution. Khomeini and his supportive entourage showed their enmity toward institutionalized social and individual freedoms during the Pahlavi period freedom of religion, freedom of hijab, freedom of social conduct, etc. As a result, for any rights to even be considered for women, they had to be consistent with the Islamic doctrine.

We focus here on issues that affected the Iranian women's movement and shaped its resistance after the rise of the ideological regime of Iran, including discriminatory laws against women and their origin, as well as how hijab became mandatory. The reasons for addressing the issue of hijab are two-fold: first, during and after the revolution, women were exploited multifariously by submitting to Islamists' wishes regarding hijab, including joining forces with Islamists and regarding women with hijab as a symbol of opposition to Shah and modernization, forging identity for Islamic Republic, and using hijab to stay anonymous during hidden operations or demonstrations. Second, to study how a part of post-revolutionary resistance by women revolved around opposition to mandatory hijab in a way that drained part of the energy and capacity of women's rights activists and ordinary women.

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## **2.6.2 The Issuance of Islamic Decrees: hijab a tragic symbol**

Three important and unpleasant events took place after revolution and before the ratification of the constitution: making hijab mandatory for women, disqualifying women from being judges, and repeal of the 1974 Family Protection Law. These were not insignificant matters that could easily be ignored, but rather undermined women's human rights. They were warning signs, not only for women, but for all to be wary of the Islamic republic safeguarding basic rights of women. But the eye ignores reality when it must see and the mouth is closed when it must shout. This is what we women experienced in the 1979 revolution.

Less than a month had passed from the revolution when Khomeini repealed the 1974 Family Protection Law under the pretext of being anti-Islamic. Aside from lacking any legal justification, this decree ignored the efforts made by dozens of lawyers and women who had fought for decades to claim such rights before revolution. This decree deprived women of several rights from the very beginning. (For more information on provisions of this law, see the version ratified in 1974)<sup>125</sup>. For instance, the age of marriage for girls and boys was considered 18 and 20 years, respectively, in conflict with Islamic laws, which deemed 9 lunar years the legal age of marriage for girls. The 1974 Family Protection Law was repealed with no alternative proposed and no constitution drafted. In fact, the Islamic Republic was not even established.

During his stay in Neauphe-le-chateau, Khomeini made several promises and remarks in his interviews that differed from, and at times contradicted, his previous positions and statements on women after the revolution. For example, quoting Al-Safir, Kayhan published an interview with Khomeini during the turbulent days of Iran in which he stated:

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<sup>125</sup> Foundation For Iranian Studies, The family protection act (1975) <http://fis-iran.org/en/women/laws/family> Retrieved February 10th 2016.

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Women should have equal rights with men. Islam has emphasized the equality of their rights and has given both the right to choose their fate, meaning that they should enjoy all forms of freedom, including freedom of choice and being chosen, freedom of education, freedom of work and engaging in economic activities. Muslim women have chosen Chador due to their Islamic upbringing. In the future, women are free to make their own decision in this regard. We will only forbid gaudy clothes.<sup>126</sup>

Despite promising equal rights for men and women, there are obvious contradictions in his speech. He states that women have chosen hijab themselves, when this is not true. The demonstrations and oppositions to mandatory hijab after the revolution continue to this day in various forms, and this shows the flawed and compulsory nature of his view. In addition, he maintained that men and women should enjoy all forms of freedom only to contradict himself with the statement, “We will forbid gaudy clothes.” Moreover, as we saw, the laws changed for the worse after the revolution for women, even though few took such remarks seriously or deemed them practical amidst the tumultuous regime change.

There were other signs that could have warned secular and leftist women about the danger of Islamists and given them a chance to adopt a clear, systematic strategy in combatting an Islamic ideology that had made the inferiority of women its top priority. However, disagreements among various political groups and the prioritization of anti-imperialist opposition and political agendas were major obstacles in the way of achieving unity among women in that grave historical period. A young leftist Iranian journalist, Noushabe Amiri, conducted another interview with Khomeini, which revealed his negative attitude toward women. She went to Paris to ask about Khomeini’s opinion of hijab: “Since you have accepted me as a ‘woman’, it shows that our movement is a ‘progressive’ one. Nevertheless, others have tried to portray it as ‘regressive.’ Do you think that our women ought to wear hijab, covering their hair with scarves for example?”

Khomeini responded:

Regarding me accepting you, I have not! You have come here without me knowing. That is why I accepted you. That is not the reason why Islam is

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<sup>126</sup> Keyhan newspaper, Sunday, January 21, 1979. (Persian 1th Bahman1357), No. 10618, P 3.

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progressive either. Progress is not what our men and women imagine it to be. Progress lies in human virtues and the effectiveness of women in society, not going to cinemas and dancing. These kinds of “progress” conceived by Mohammad Reza Pahlavi have made you move backwards; something that we must rectify in the future.<sup>127</sup>

Khomeini’s ways of treatment of the issue of hijab in the two interviews are fundamentally different and contradictory to one another. In the first interview, he speaks of freedom and equality of rights; yet, in the second interview with an Iranian woman, planned to be published in a Persian newspaper, his tone and content change. As his domineering tone suggests, he warns that what you have been experiencing so far as freedom is not progress and that he intends to rectify the situation in the future.

After less than a month had passed since that interview, Khomeini had forgotten all about what he said to the foreign journalist and pursued what was of domestic value, i.e., what he said to the Iranian journalist. In an unprecedented decree against women, he maintained: “no sin should be committed in Islamic ministries. Women should not dress improperly therein. Women should work in ministries while observing hijab.”<sup>128</sup>

Violent actions against Iranian women prompted women’s rights activists from other countries to help them regain their rights with their support. Alice Schwarzer, who had travelled to Iran in 1979, accompanied by a committee of women’s rights advocates, published her observations in *Emma Magazine* in an article entitled Iran: The Deceived (“Iran: Die Betrogenen”).

Schwarzer, shocked by what she witnessed during the first days of the revolution in Iran, began her article with the following sentences: “*Yes to the government of God! Yes, to religion! No to legal equity!*” Thus, began the global Islamic campaign ideologically armed by Iran and financially supported by Saudi

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<sup>127</sup> Keyhan newspaper, Tuesday, January 23, 1979(Persian 3th Bahman 1357), No. 10620, Khomeini in an interview by Nooshabe Amiri.

<sup>128</sup> Keyhan newspaper, Wednesday, March 7, 1979,(Persian 16th Esfand 1357), No. 10655, p 1

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Arabia. She wrote about mandatory hijab in her article and the protests.<sup>129</sup> (See Schwarzer, 1979)

She rightly points out that “hijab has turned into a tragic symbol: once a symbol of resistance against mandatory westernization, hijab is now a symbol of modern submission. Thus, women who used hijab in opposition to Shah are now marching the streets in opposition to hijab.” This is an intelligent description by Schwarzer about hijab. Despite being published less than three months after revolution, the tragedy of mandatory hijab soon turned into the daily nightmare of numerous Iranian women.

On the persistent widespread protests by women against mandatory hijab, Schwarzer notes: “20-30 thousand women have come to the streets of Tehran. They shout: ‘We are Iranian women and won’t tolerate being chained,’ ‘the revolution is in vain if women are not liberated,’ and ‘we didn’t fight against the previous dictatorship only to submit to a new one.’” The next day, a sit-in protest was staged at the university campus. No one was wearing hijab despite the rainy weather. Fifty thousand women participated in the Saturday demonstration. Many, even non-smokers, smoked that day; opposing to a remark made by Khomeini who said: “Iranian women do not smoke cigarettes on streets.”

What Schwarzer notes is just a small portion of what Iranian women had gone through. It was unthinkable that Islamists could take over all political, social, and cultural organizations where they could not even tolerate mild Islamists such as the Nationalist-religious<sup>130</sup>. Demonstrations resulted in a “temporary” retreat of clerics, and women were assured that the Islamic covering carries a sense of “respectability” and did not necessarily entail wearing chador (Moghissi, 2009)<sup>131</sup>.

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<sup>129</sup> Schwarzer, Alice. (1979, May 1). Iran: Die Betrogenen.

<http://www.emma.de/artikel/iran-die-betrogenen-264297> retrieved 19th April 2016

<sup>130</sup> The Nationalist-Religious (Persian: Meli-Mazhabi ) is an Iranian political group, described as, religious semi-opposition with a following of mainly middle class, intellectual, representatives of technical professions, students and technocrats. For more information. See Amir, Arjomand, Said. 2009, After Khomeini: Iran under His Successors, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 99 and Buchta, Wilfried (2000), Who rules Iran? The structure of power in the Islamic Republic, Washington DC: The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung

<sup>131</sup> Moghissi, H. (2009). Women and the 1979 Revolution: Refusing Religion-Defined Womanhood. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Volume 29, Number 1, 2009

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However, two years after the revolution, the process of making hijab mandatory was implemented as forcefully as possible. A number of factors rendered initial oppositions to mandatory hijab ineffective, among the most important of which were a lack of unity among women to adopt a common strategy to combat misogynistic decisions, the prioritization of anti-imperialist opposition over women's issues, the Iran-Iraq War, and the suppression of political parties and groups.

### **2.6.3 Contradictions between Tradition and Modernity within the Constitutional law of the “Islamic Republic of Iran”**

After the 1979 Revolution in Iran, contradictions between tradition and modernity emerged widely through the process of legislation by the new system of governance. Particularly, where the concept of ‘republic’ sat next to the word ‘Islamic’ to define a state whose nature was still vague. The composition of “the Islamic Republic” was the chaotic offspring of a revolution that was not homogenous. If we accept that a republic is one in which people have the freedom of choice, we subsequently oppose the Islamic ideology, particularly in which the governance structure, “Vali-ye Faqih”, the council of Guardian of Islamic Jurists, is fixed and has a veto right that shapes the nature of the state as totalitarian rather than republic or democratic<sup>132</sup>. The system mandates governance on Islamic ideological grounds, in which every rule is constituted based on Islamic orders.

In such state, only those who rigidly believe in Islam are considered the nation, Iran, particularly the Twelver Shi'is. While the clergy has repeatedly shown its opposition to concepts of modernity, it has applied modernity's functionalities to give legitimacy to its power, including clerics' actions during the Constitutional

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<sup>132</sup> Due to the basics of the absolute guardianship of the Islamic jurist, the Islamic jurist has an absolute right of decision. Faqih is the absolute governor and has the substitute power of The Fourteen Infallibles in Shia religion. The absolute guardianship means the consideration for the best of the nation. Because of the relevance of government and public interests, without the absolute guardianship, the presence of an Islamic government and implementation of Islamic rules is impossible. Reference: Moghadass Ardebili, Ahmed bin Mohammed. Utility and argument Complex to explain the guidance of the minds. (in Arabic مجمع الفائد و البرهان في شرح ارشاد الأذهان Majam Al - Faideh and Al – Burhan fee sharh ershad Al – Azhan), Modaresin Association ,Ghom ,Ira

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Revolution in 1905 and 1979 Revolution. Despite all the differences between these two revolutions, both had at least two commonalities in their establishment of the constitution: the dominance of the clergy in legislation and neglecting women's rights.

During the Constitutional Revolution in 1905, Ulama succeeded to impact constitutional law, based on their power and influence among the masses.<sup>133</sup> They hindered the approval of some progressive laws, such as women's suffrage. Nevertheless, in legislating constitutional law 70 years before the 1979 Revolution, the legislators showed more intellectual diversity and the educated individuals who were the members of the parliament defended the equal right for everyone regardless of religion or belief. They believed in secularism. Subsequently, they suggested that the government's politics should be separated from religious education, and political interests and the government's responsibilities should be separate from education of the Ulama as well, while the Persian Constitution of 1906 was limiting the monarchy's power (*ibid*, 412).

At that time, although Ulama opposed anything with Western features, the constitution introduced Western ideas, steadily expanded a central government, and a new revolutionary class of modern intellectuals emerged (*ibid*). Abrahamian (1979)<sup>134</sup> concludes from analyzing the approach of intellectuals during the constitutional era that intellectuals considered constitution, secularism, and nationalism as three crucial elements in constructing a modern and developed country. He also refers to the fact that these intellectuals were fighting against three elements, namely: monarchic dictatorship as an adversary of political liberations, equality and development, religious dogmatism as the ideological adversary of

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<sup>133</sup> Encyclopedia Iranica. Constitutional Revolution. pp. 163-216  
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-index>

<sup>134</sup> Abrahamian, Ervand. (1979). The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1979, August), pp. 381-414, Cambridge University Press, p.395  
[https://mideast-africa.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media\\_server/mideast\\_africa/untitled%20folder/3.2Abrahamian-CausesOfConstitutional%20RevolutionPp381-414](https://mideast-africa.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/mideast_africa/untitled%20folder/3.2Abrahamian-CausesOfConstitutional%20RevolutionPp381-414)

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rational-scientific knowledge, and finally, imperialism as the cause of economic exploitation of less powerful countries like Iran.

Nonetheless, the Iranian revolution opposed the manifestations of modernity, the West, and intellectual discourses particularly, dissidents. It tried to eliminate all the opponents from the political and legislative spheres. This elimination is completely apparent in the composition of the legislators. What is mentioned so far is significant in understanding how the elimination of the levers of resistance – including the left wing and secular intellectuals helped during the legislation stage to introduce the discriminatory laws against women.

It is also necessary to mention that the first constitutional law was introduced after the French Revolution in 1791. It was frequently edited and changed due to social changes and human history. Subsequently this constitutional law has become a blueprint for the introduction of constitutions in other countries, particularly Iran. The philosophy of constitution was to create a rule out of social relations and to control the power of monarchs and governors. Despite this, the Islamic Republic's constitution gives a power above the law to a person, called the Guardian of Islamic Jurist ("Vali-ye Faqih"). Article 57 of the constitutional law, *Vilayat-e Mutlaq-e Faqih* [the absolute guardianship of the Islamic jurist], gives unlimited power to this position. However, to have a clear perception of what the role of the guardian of Islamic jurist is, we need to clarify the meaning of this expression.

*Vilayat* [guardianship] is an Arabic term, meaning supervision. The absolute guardianship of the Islamic jurist assumes that a person as *Vali-ye Faqih* [guardian of Islamic jurist] supervises a nation to implement the Islamic orders and values. The suffix "absolute" merely emphasizes the totalitarianism of this rule. The axiom of *Vilayat-e Faqih* implicates legalizing a dictatorship, whose values are certainly far from what countries with a constitution based on human rights believe in. Based on this axiom, if the *Vali-ye Faqih* comments that an action is *Haram* [forbidden], his [because it will be a man, not woman] command needs to be implemented despite the action being considered legal or not. For instance, it is enough to forbid

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women from riding bicycles, if the guardian of the Islamic jurist proclaims that it is forbidden for women to ride bicycles.

As seen so far, the constitutional law of the Islamic Republic of Iran is paradoxical. On one hand, the authorities perceive themselves as the executives of *Sharia* [Islamic law], on the other hand, they apply the modern mechanisms inspired by French constitutional law to the political sphere and legislations to legitimize the Islamic governance. Khomeini, the first supreme leader of Iran, alludes to the theology of regulations in one of his interviews with the Financial Times (1979), during his exile in Neauphe Le Chateaux, France<sup>135</sup>. The reporter asks: “the Western world does not have a correct knowledge of Islamic government. Explain briefly the axioms of an Islamic state.” Khomeini replies: “we want an Islamic republic. Republic shapes the form of this governance and Islamic will be the content, which is the God’s law.” This reply foreshadowed regulations on women. Because he obviously announced that, “the content of governance will be Islamic and theological rules.” Consequently, regulations that would have been the consequences of modernity were replaced by “theological rules” with no changes from 1,400 years ago.

#### **2.6.4 Woman in the “Islamic Republic of Iran’s Constitution”**

Considering Khomeini’s comments on women’s issues, such as his opposition against women’s suffrage in 1963 and the women’s dress code – and particularly the specific approach of clerics towards women’s rights – it is not strange that in the introduction of Islamic Republic’s constitution a vague short paragraph is allocated to women<sup>136</sup>. This leads to the question of why women are seen separated

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<sup>135</sup> Khomeini interviewed by Financial Times Monday, January 8, 1979, See also Sahife Nour , interview with English journalist, Retrieved from The Financial Times newspaper, vol,4 p157  
1357/10/18، ص 157، مصاحبه با خبرنگار انگلیسی روزنامه فاینشال تایم، صحیفه نور، ج 4،

<sup>136</sup> In establishing Islamic social institutions, human forces that have thus far been utilized in the service of the multifaceted foreign exploitation now reclaim their own genuine identity and human rights. In this process, it is natural that women, who up until this point have endured a greater degree of oppression under the despotic regime, should be granted more rights. The family is the primal unit of society and the essential center for the growth and grandeur of men. Compatibility in respect to beliefs and ideals is the fundamental principle in establishing a family that is the essential ground for the course of humanity’s growth and development. It is among the responsibilities of the Islamic Republic to provide the conditions for attaining

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from men in the constitution. Does a state with Islamic features treat women differently? When the paragraph in the constitution about women is scrutinized, this government's conception of women's rights becomes apparent.

In addition, to understand the status of women within the Islamic Republic, before exploring the approach of the legislators it is significant to mention that among the 72 legislators of the constitution only one was female (Manijeh Gorji)<sup>137</sup>. Furthermore, there was no dissident school of thought among the legislators while various groups from religious groups to communists participated in the revolution. Despite all, the committee of constitutional legislation, called "Assembly of Experts for the Constitution" was a homogeneous assembly that received approval from Khomeini.

Although in 1979 Iran did not lack intellectual and jurist women, only one religious woman was admitted to the Assembly of Experts for the constitution. Even her presence led to several complaints from the clerics in the assembly. Shahindokht Molaverdi, vice president of Women and Family affairs, says, "The selection of this woman in the assembly drove to the protests of some of the experts in a way that they threatened if she does not leave the assembly, they will leave<sup>138</sup>." Monireh Gorji points to this event in an interview: "in the first assembly of experts one of the representatives from Shiraz stood up and said, 'This is an assembly of sin.' One woman and 70 men! How a clergy thinks I may cause a sin? You cannot imagine we had to encounter this kind of people and talk with them. How can one imagine that?"<sup>139</sup> Bear in mind that these are the words of a woman from the same school of thought as this system; it gives an indication how a dissident woman with an opposing viewpoint would be treated.

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this goal. In accordance with this view of the family unit, women are emancipated from the state of being an "object" or a "tool" in the service of disseminating consumerism and exploitation, while reclaiming the crucial and revered responsibility of motherhood and raising ideological vanguards. Women shall walk alongside men in the active arenas of existence. As a result, women will be the recipients of a more critical responsibility and enjoy a more exalted and prized estimation in view of Islam. An Ideological Army In establishing and equipping the defense .Retrieved from Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

<sup>137</sup> <http://www.majleskhobregan.ir/fa/Default.html>

<sup>138</sup> <http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/528406/society/family>

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Monireh Gorji, Isna. (2016, 15 May 15). (Persian calendar 26th Ordibehesht 1395) <http://www.isna.ir/news/95022615758/> retrieved June 20th 2016.

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While Gorji was like-minded with Khomeini and thus not representative of all Iranian women, her opinions though very conservative were rejected throughout the process of drafting the constitution. A section on the role of the woman as mother in a draft of the constitution, suggested by her as the only woman of this assembly, was rejected. Based on her suggestion an article would have been added to the constitution with the following details: “Based on the woman’s main role in the family, the material and intellectual rights of women, especially mothers, should be preserved and marriage should not hinder her legal freedoms and cultural growth. Also, to maintain family rights, a merit juridical system should be formed.<sup>140</sup>” At the end, the role of the woman within the constitution was defined through the family structure and article ten of this law was added as “since the family is the main unit of an Islamic structure, all the rules, regulations and plans related to that should be shaped in a way to ease the composition of a family, preserving its sanctity, and maintaining the family relations based on Islamic rights and morality”.

In general, the official view of the Islamic Republic towards women is drafted in the introduction of the constitution. It shows the insistence on the motherhood role of women; particularly Articles number 115 and 157, which relate to the political participation of women. Article 115 states that women are not allowed to take the position of Presidency. Due to Islamic theological rules, women cannot be a judge, based on Article 115, and cannot serve as Chief Justice of Iran.

The essence of debate on women’s rights within the Islamic Republic’s laws is solely related to rights mentioned in Islam. Moreover, most of these laws are against the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and are discriminatory. Some examples: the residence of a married woman is where her husband lives (Civil code, article 1005); a husband can forbid his wife any profession which is against family’s interests (Civil code, article 1117); a husband has the right to divorce at any moment he demands (Civil code, article 1133); the blood money of a Muslim woman is half

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<sup>140</sup> Quoted from Shad Sadr 2009 moroure se dahe mobarezate hoghoghi zanane Iran  
<http://www.iran-women-solidarity.net/spip.php?article708>  
[Cultural Affairs and Public Relations of the Parliament, 64: 444](http://iran-women-solidarity.net/spip.php?article709)  
<http://iran-women-solidarity.net/spip.php?article709>

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of the price of a Muslim man (Iranian Penalty Code, article 33); the husband is the head of the family regarding couple relations (Civil code, article 1105); a woman cannot accept custody without her husband's permission (Civil code, article 1233); among other laws that are discriminatory to women.

Highlighted throughout the laws is the patriarchal approach towards women, situating them as inferiors, neglecting women's social, political, cultural and economic abilities in a way that legal gender discrimination has become one of the most controversial issues between the Islamic Republic and women since 1979. It is one of the hot topics among the Iranian feminists who fight against gender discrimination and violence against women, since the Revolution.

## **2.7 The identity of the Iranian women's movement**

### **2.7.1 Iranian women's movement, a secular movement or "Islamic feminism"**

Discriminatory laws against women in Iran and their incompatibility with social, political, economic and cultural conditions and needs of society mean that the conflict between the government and women is not limited to women rights' activists. Even some of the devout Muslims who have been able to acquire positions in the Islamic government have stood up against the legal anti-women discriminations. Twenty years after the revolution, this sector started engaging in activities against some of the laws rooted in religion.

This has led some foreign scholars of women's issues to an incorrect perception of the women's movement in Iran. They do much to highlight the role of religious women as "Islamic feminists" and give them more attention than they deserve (for example, see Najmabadi, 1994; Mir-Hosseini, 1996). Mir-Hosseini is among the scholars of feminism that incorrectly uses the term "Islamic feminism" when speaking of women rights activists in the Iran of 1990's. She says:

I was among the first scholars to use the term to speak of a new gender consciousness that emerged in Iran in the early 1990s, a decade after the 1979 popular revolution that led to a merger of religious and political

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power in the country.<sup>141</sup>

Here I aim to give a clearer and more exact picture of the identity and nature of the women's movement in Iran and its hidden or less-seen sides. Thus, it is fitting to state a few important clarifications on this point regarding the actual character of the women's movement. In the early 1990's, most women's activities consisted of in-house gatherings and groups, often held by women who were among non-religious political activists and not able to hold open meetings, not even to discuss a book review. Despite these conditions, and to some extent very much because of them, many women would avail themselves of effectively each and every small opportunity to challenge patriarchy and theocracy.<sup>142</sup>

This sector of activists did most of the work in showing the causes of women's oppression and criticizing discriminatory legislation. But because they were dispersed, semi-open and deprived of any media, venue or platform to express their views, these activists were unseen by those who travelled to Iran for a few weeks for academic research. In contrast, the religious section of society always enjoyed use of visible platforms, such as media, offices and organizations to express their views openly. The advent of the Internet, fortunately, gave an opportunity to the Iranian women's movement to have its own media and speak to the masses. The change in platforms changed the visibility of all actors. This topic is examined in more detail in following chapters.

Additionally, some scholars of social and political sciences (including Afary, 1996) have noted the secular nature of intellectual currents in Iran, and especially the women's movement, as one of the most durable secular social movements in Iran. It should be noted that secularism is a historical demand of Iranian intellectuals and the demand for separation of state and religion was supported by New Iran ("Iran-e No Newspaper") the paper of the Democratic Party<sup>143</sup>, led by Taqizade, a

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<sup>141</sup> Mir-Hosseini, Ziba. (2010). Islamic Legal Tradition and Feminism: Opening a New Dialogue <http://www.violenceisnotourculture.org/content/islamic-legal-tradition-and-feminism-opening-new-dialogue>

<sup>142</sup> This observation is based on my own experience during that period as a member of the women's rights activist groups.

<sup>143</sup> Democrat Party was a social democrat political party during the constitutional period in Iran.

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leader of the Constitutional Revolution. This is still a current and strong demand, especially among the younger generation in Iran.

Additionally, intellectual and progressive women, with secular and leftist tendencies, have played the most influential role in putting forward demands of women in the fields of law, culture, society and politics, despite going through much oppression in different eras, especially after the revolution. This is why it must be clearly and emphatically stated that reducing the Iranian women's movement to some kind of "Islamic feminism" not only lacks a real and objective basis but is in fact a wholly incorrect and inaccurate presentation of the Iranian women's movement to the global community. The Iranian women's movement is a far more diverse group that includes secular feminists, feminist atheists and feminist Muslims. It is absolutely essential to clarify this identity of the women's movement, to ensure that the discussion is based on facts.

In Iran's post-revolutionary theocratic system of governance, the government imposed its intervention and control on the smallest matters of sexuality and gender. This includes such concerns such as the age of marriage, sexual behavior, women's obligation to satisfy a husband, and punishing sexual relations outside marriage, up to and including capital punishment or stoning. While faced with such injustice, many women's movement activists demanded a change in the discriminatory anti-women laws, not a simply different reading of religious rules. It is true that, due to the political blockage and domination of all political, social and cultural questions and bodies by the religious sectors, in order to reduce real risks faced by the women's struggle, sometimes the opinion of this or that religious cleric was sought or their support gained. But such political or strategic calculus does not equal an attempt to equate women's rights with Islam. In fact, quite the opposite can be noted: a very small number of women's rights activists in Iran, known as religious new thinkers, seek an explicit reconciliation of Islam with women's rights.

Compulsory Islamization of public and even private spaces is another point consistently opposed by the majority of women in Iran. This has inevitably influenced methods of struggle of women's movement activists in Iran including

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the use of hijab against hijab, finding contradictions in religious rules, being forced to use Islamic discourse to express demands, or using civil disobedience. The latter means that a considerable number of Iranian women consciously resist their domination and seek to change the conditions and escape the Islamization of society by using various methods, where they continuously attempt to emancipate themselves from Islamic limitations and realize secularism and democracy.

Due to the diversity of strategies among activists in the women's movement, the modes of the Islamic government in Iran, and because the term "Islamic feminism" has entered feminism's political and social discourse, it is necessary to clarify the general concept and aims of feminism and compare it to what is called "Islamic feminism." I attempt to assess the contradictions, nature and roots of "Islamic feminism" and its positive and negative effects on the post-revolutionary women's movement in Iran.

This is why it is necessary to enquire whether the term "Islamic feminism" can or should be applied to the rights-seeking activities of women in Iran. If this is not analyzed, discussion of the Iranian women's movement risks losing a degree of credibility. Therefore, I have tried to put this issue to the test with closer analysis of facts and realities as far as possible to establish the existential philosophy, nature and prevailing discourse in the Iranian women's movement. Before analyzing "Islamic feminism" in Iran and whether this term should be applied or not, I conceptualize feminism to show the internal contradictions of "Islamic feminism" and show the role that Islamic feminism has played in misleading the women's movement.

### **2.7.2 How is feminism distinct from "Islamic feminism"?**

The term feminism was first used by Charles Fourier<sup>144</sup>, a 19th-century socialist, to defend the movement for women's rights. With a social perspective, he portrayed utopian societies in which women's talents are fully utilized. With more

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<sup>144</sup> Fourier (1772-1837) Retrieved from New world Encyclopedia <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Feminism> accessed March 10th 2015

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than two centuries of experience, the women's movement has used different methods to achieve its main goal, to change the cultural, socio-economic and political structures that perpetuate gender discrimination against women. Divergence of opinion on the root causes of women's oppression and methods of struggle against this oppression led, over time, to adopting different adjectives to qualify different forms of feminism.

Despite the diversity, varieties and controversies of feminism, it can be stated that feminism encompasses social movements that reflect a common goal, which is gender-blind equality of rights in political, economic, personal and social fields. (See Hawkes, 2006; Beasley, 1999) The main and central core of feminist theory is that political, social and economic equality and rights, privileges, status and responsibilities should not be based on gender. In Islamic ideology, however, gender has an explicit and critical role in dividing the roles and responsibilities of women and men along gender lines in family and society and in further justifying the legal inequality between women and men. This approach, which prioritizes gender as the basis for assigning different tasks to women and men, is against that of Wollstonecraft, which rejects cliché-based gender roles.

Wollstonecraft (1792) was among the early feminists and she affirmed that women and men are born equal and that inequality is constructed by society. She insisted on equal education for girls, creating employment for women as a precondition for equality, and did not accept stereotype roles that women define for 'men'. In her landmark book, *A Vindication of The Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft criticizes stereotype roles for women and says:

Would men but generously snap our chains and be content with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more faithful wives, more reasonable mothers in a word, better citizens. (Wollstonecraft, 1792, p.25)

There is a diametric contrast between what Wollstonecraft states, as a pioneering feminist, versus those who believe in Islam's claim to impose not only alleged "natural duties" onto women but also to correlate that to justice. The

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concept of justice in explaining “Islamic Feminism” can be examined further. Feminism attempts to understand the causes of the existing inequalities and concerns itself with gender policies and equations of power and gender. Feminists struggle for citizenship rights, lifting discrimination against women, eliminating gender stereotypes and objectification of women, injustice and patriarchy.

Liberal feminism, for instance, struggles to secure equal citizenship rights for all humans. In this view, women and men are both human and as such entitled to the same natural and inalienable rights. Observed differences between the two sexes are not a legitimate basis for legal discrimination. Furthermore, a great deal of differences are socially nurtured, the result of socialization and homogenization of sex with social roles. A just society demands laws that reflect this and make discrimination against women illegal. (See Barnett, 1998; Mackinnon, 1989; Abbott, Tyler & Wallace, 2006)<sup>145</sup> When we study the demands of the Iranian women's movement after the revolution, it is clear that they are in line with those of liberal feminism. But as some women who have taken part in the movement also do have Islamic standpoints and beliefs, it is more accurate to refer to the role of “Islamic feminism” in the women's movement.

### **2.7.3 Paradox of “Islamic feminism”**

“Islamic feminism” is a term that, since the late 1980’s, has been used by some sociologists, academics, activists and even feminists. However, this concept remains vague and unclear. This is because it consists of two elements, “Islamic” and “feminism”, each containing their own diversity. Islam is not a united whole and has dozens of sects and branches. Which Islam are we talking about, and which feminist tendency? Feminism focuses most on threatening gender inequality and promoting women's rights. Feminists believe that gender in human life should not be a determining factor in their social, political and economic status. While in

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<sup>145</sup> For discussion of liberal feminist theory, see: Barnett, Hilaire. (1998). Introduction to Feminist Jurisprudence. London Routledge - Cavendish; Mackinnon, Catharine A. 1989. Toward a Feminist Theory of the State. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press; Abbott, P., Tyler, M. & Wallace, C. (2006). (Persian calendar 1385) Introduction to Sociology Feminist Perspectives. (M. Najm Araghi, Trans.) Jame shnasiye Zanan (Women's Sociology), p287 (Original work published 1990).

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Islamic law without any ambiguity men are clearly superior to women. This question indicates that “Islamic feminism” requires considerable improvement in clarity.

Additionally, while the introduction of the term “Islamic feminism” to the lexicon of the feminist movement and its accuracy can be debated, it cannot be ignored that the creation of the term aims to reflect the very real oppression that Muslim women experience in Islamic societies. The harsh reality is in and of itself a reason why some women right’s activists seek emancipation from Islamic laws that justify discrimination against women; their goal is to find more equitable interpretations and readings of Islamic texts. Such readings rarely aspire to condone or elevate oppressive theology, but rather provide a pragmatic strategy to reduce discrimination against women in countries under Islamic law.

As examples, one can look to the thinking of some proponents of women’s rights in Islamic countries such as Moroccan writer Fatima Mernissi, Egyptian writer Leila Ahmed, and Algerian-French writer Assia Djebar. Such women tried to challenge Islamic law in their societies in order to reduce gender discrimination. In the early 1980’s Mernissi (1983), studied Islam’s approach to gender in her book *Sexe, Ideologie, Islam*. She tries to identify the foundations of male-female equality in Islam. Amina Wadud (1999)<sup>146</sup>, in her book *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*, tried to show how the Quran’s approach to women is different from that of men in Muslim societies. Wadud was born in a Christian African-American family and later converted to Islam. It is important to note that she lived primarily in the West and chose to accept hijab as an expression of her own piety and devoutness, and was her voluntary choice. Muslim woman do not all live in societies with the same legally guaranteed freedoms, rights or liberties of choice. Hijab remains a fact and symbol of discrimination and violence against women in Islamic societies. Muslim feminist women in Iran are struggling for the right to freedom of clothing. Moreover, to counter compulsory hijab and reject the

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<sup>146</sup> Amina Wadud’s original name was Mary Teasley [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amina\\_Wadud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amina_Wadud)

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model of Islamic hijab, many women show opposition by engaging in civil disobedience.

Some scholars who work on gender in Muslim societies, like Margot Badran (2009), consider “Islamic feminism” a feminist discourse and practice that is internally connected to an Islamic paradigm. She says that “Islamic feminism” gets its conception and power from the Quran and it seeks rights and justice for women and men. But the “justice” that Margot references in defining “Islamic feminism” is a general concept. What is justice and what is not? Nevertheless, when we speak of legal equality between women and men, the aim is clear. We see how “Islamic feminism” remains a vague term and, on many questions, lacks a convincing answer to the posed questions and women’s oppression in Islamic law. Some consider this justice, while others consider it discrimination and violence. On one side, Muslim feminist women like Fatima Mernissi who, as a pioneering feminist of the women’s movement in Morocco, rejects hijab in her book *Beyond the Veil* (Mernissi, 1987). On the other side are those who even consider themselves “Islamic feminists” and believe Islamic hijab should be compulsory even for non-Muslim women.

As stated, many “Islamic feminists” have a notion of “justice” that runs counter to non-gender-specific legal equality of women and men,” a fundamental principle of feminism. Such “Islamic feminists” believe that differences (discrimination) in Islam between the rights of women and men are “just” because in their world view, everything is in its god-determined theologically ordained right place. By their own logic, whatever they contrive to construe the Quran says about women rights is just. For instance, if the inheritance of a sister is half of that of her brother, this can be considered just, simply because text can be found in the Quran to the effect that men are considered the guardians of women. Additionally, Islam bases the legal differences of women on their physique and body, and most “Islamic feminists” accept this. It stretches credulity to ask what the physique and body have to do with many legal rights. As a result, gender clichés, powered as they are by Islamic rules, are often accepted when it comes to women’s rights, just as the question of hijab.

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#### **2.7.4 “Islamic feminism”, a plan for freedom - or a trap for the women's movement?**

Some believe that with the incompatible and sometimes contradictory combination of divine ideologies and religions with human theories, they could solve the problem of women in backward or religious societies. Mir-Hosseini (2010)<sup>147</sup>, a scholar of “Islamic feminism” regards it as a plan for freedom of Muslim women, and says:

I believe that ‘Islamic feminism’ is, in a sense, the unwanted child of ‘political Islam’. ‘Political Islam’ actually politicized the whole issue of gender and Muslim women’s rights. The slogan “back to the Sharia” so forcefully pressed by advocates of ‘political Islam’ in practice meant seeking to return to the classical texts on feqh or Muslim jurisprudence and doing away with various laws advantageous to women that had no sanction in the Islamists’ literalist understanding of Islam.

To describe “Islamic feminism” as an unwanted aspect of political Islam is accurate, but it should be noted that it is deformed and confused about its role. Sometimes it accepts inequality and discrimination against women as justice, yet sometimes it justifies and amplifies injustice. Look at the issue of hijab: some religious women have embraced hijab as a strong belief and defend it, believing that the facts of their behavior is proof of a “just” reason that legitimizes unequal proscriptive laws for women. Moreover, many assume and play the roles imposed on women through religious commands, tradition and men of the family. Women who follow such roles, even partially, can become tools serving the goals and identity of political Islam. If the facts of behavior do not reflect the goals of feminism, then it is not feminism. Any claims to the contrary are often supported more by semantic sophistry than facts.

However, since the regime of the Islamic Republic is an obvious example of political Islam, it is necessary to look at the foundations of the so-called “Islamic feminism” in Iran and see how semantic sophistry ensues. On this point, we need

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<sup>147</sup> Interview with Ziba Mir-Hosseini by Yoginder Sikand. Understanding Islamic Feminism. Countercurrents.org (2010, 07 February) <http://www.countercurrents.org/sikand070210.htm> Accessed March 9th 2015

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to reflect back on the 1970's. Although the expression "Islamic feminism" entered the feminist literature in the 1990's on a global level, the roots of this intellectual tendency in Iran, more accurately labeled "women in the standpoint of political Islam", extend back to a group called "Religious New Thinkers" which predates the 1979 Islamic Revolution. It is true that they never called themselves "Islamic feminists" but before the revolution, they popularized a brand of ideological Islam that was to play a role in social and political affairs and governance.

The journey of "Religious New Thinking" is fundamentally different from the women's movement in Muslim countries that has come to be known as "Islamic feminism." What we see in Egypt, Morocco and Algeria is those thinkers, like Fatima Mernissi, looking for different interpretations of Quranic verses to find a way for emancipation of women from the religious bonds that have deprived them of social rights and reduce the interference of religion in women's personal affairs. In Iran the process has been the opposite,

Before the revolution, women were entitled to the right to choose their dress, employment and education. Not only did the government not place obstacles on the path of women to progress and their political and economic participation, but it was seen as part of the process of modernity to encourage women to undertake political and social participation. However, in that very period, some women who opposed the Shah's modernization programs and belonged to religious groups ended up following men who promulgated limitations on women as a religious and moral value.

The ideologues of political Islam, who had been active since the 1960's, wanted the intervention of religion in governance and campaigned for it. They wanted a so-called 'new reading' of Islam that ultimately led to a theocratic government. Ali Shariati and Motahari were two proponents of Islamic ideology with two very different styles. Among their causes was the establishment of an

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Islamic government in Iran. Motahari was a mullah in garbs. Ali Shariati<sup>148</sup> wore modern attire and Western ties, but argued for women to wear hijab. Motahari wrote on “the system of women’s rights in Islam” and the hijab question and propagated Islamic ideology by publishing books and articles.

Ali Shariati also aimed to create and introduce a model Muslim woman, Fatima, daughter of Prophet Mohammad, who Iranian women needed to follow. This is the Fatima that was to be a model for Iranian women, as described by Ali Shariati, in his book *Fatima is Fatima* writes: “Fatima works on a hand-mill<sup>149</sup>, bakes the bread, works at home and many have saw [sic] her bringing the water from outside.” (Shariati, 1971, p.89)<sup>150</sup> Fatima’s highest point, in Shariati’s view, is when she defends her husband’s right to the caliphate. Moreover, this is how Shariati describes her as a political personality! (Ibid, p.122) We do not aim to criticize the thought of Ali Shariati here but only to show the beginning of an intellectual current in Iran which, in opposition to the symbols of modernity, led to political Islam.

Shariati’s intellectual current, an anti-West religious current, expanded its activities in the institute Hosseiniyah Ershad<sup>151</sup> in the second half of 1960’s and this attracted many youth, intellectuals and women students. Shariati saw Islam as “a total ideology that determines political and social regime, way of life and all dimensions of human life” (Shariati, 1968, p.141). This is how he characterized what he perceived as a superiority of Islamic thought.

Women who were attracted to the thought of Shariati and, to a degree, Motahari, encompassed a broad spectrum that ranged from opposition and fighting against the government of Islamic Republic to becoming MPs in the new

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<sup>148</sup> Shariati is seen as a “religious new thinker” by his proponents, who in turn consider themselves religious new thinkers. Motahari is one of the religious figures considered to have an important influence on the ideologies of the Islamic Republic. See Ganji, M. (2002). Defying the Iranian Revolution: From a Minister to the Shah to a Leader of Resistance. Greenwood Publishing Group. p. 109.

<sup>149</sup> A mill rotated by manual labor, the force of human hand, here specifically a woman’s hand and labor.

<sup>150</sup> <http://www.playandlearn.org/eBooks/FatimaIsFatima.pdf> accessed February 10th 2015 retrieved 8 August 2014.

<sup>151</sup> Hosseiniyah Ershad is a non-traditionalist religious institute in Tehran, Iran, closed for a time by the Pahlavi government in 1972. Ali Shariati held his anti-Pahlavi speeches here before the revolution. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosseiniyah\\_Ershad](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hosseiniyah_Ershad)

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parliament. Unlike what Mir-Hosseini thinks, it was not a new generation of activists for equal rights which came into being in the early 1990's in Iran. It should be noted that Iranian Muslim feminist women do not consider themselves "Islamic feminists" and those known as "religious new thinkers" also do not introduce themselves as "Islamic feminists." Nahid Tavasoli is among those religious new thinkers that not only reject the label "Islamic feminist" but rightly points out that there is no such a thing as "Islamic feminism" in Iran. In one of her interviews, she says: "Interpretation of Quran and Hadith and using dynamic Ijtihad to realize equal and just rights for women has not taken place as of yet. Not by new thinking Muslim women and not even by the male jurisprudents and clerics" (Nahid Tavasoli in an interview with Fazayeli and Hosseinkhah)<sup>152</sup>. Mir-Hosseini, although a proponent of "Islamic feminism", also accepts that this intellectual current does not like to be called "Islamic feminist."

Some of the proponents of "Islamic feminism" abroad have reached the same conclusion. Some called "Islamic feminists" by Iranian scholars abroad do not accept the label themselves, as this example from Mir-Hosseini shows:

Like other feminists, their orientation is also issue-by-issue, diverse, multiple and developing. Many do not accept such a title and protest the use of the term "Islamic" or "feminist." They all seek gender justice and equality for women, although they all differ with one another on the meaning of "justice" or "equality" and the best ways to reach these".<sup>153</sup>

Why is it that these groups do not like to be called "Islamic feminists"? What matters is Mir-Hosseini's contradiction introducing "Islamic feminists." First, she claims that "they all seek gender justice and equality for women" but the discourse of "Islamic feminism" seeks justice and not equality and this is one of its points of contention with other feminist currents. Second, Mir-Hosseini believes that "Islamic feminists", whom she considers diverse and multiple, differ with one another on the best ways to reach "justice" or "equality." It seems that Mir-Hosseini considers "Islamic feminism", which seeks a different reading of Islamic texts,

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<sup>152</sup> <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/46858> accessed March 10th 2015.

<sup>153</sup> [http://www.mazefilm.de/daripdf/mir-hosseini\\_1.pdf](http://www.mazefilm.de/daripdf/mir-hosseini_1.pdf) accessed March 10th 2015.

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comparable to different feminist tendencies. If “Islamic feminists” seek justice, as Mir-Hosseini claims (although as explained, the proponents of this intellectual trend themselves believe in justice, but not equality), what is their difference with Western feminism which also seeks equality?

In addition to the different conceptions of “Islamic feminism,” it must also be noted that “Islamic feminism” declares itself in favor of gender justice and women’s rights “inside Islam.” It is precisely this limiting of women’s rights “inside Islam” which leads to a contention in accepting “Islamic feminism” as a way of emancipation for Muslim women. This can lead to its opposite. Moghissi (2013), a scholar of women’s studies, for instance questions the credibility of those analyses that consider “Islamic feminism” a path of women’s emancipation and in criticizing the proponents of “Islamic feminism”, saying: “Uncritical attraction to post-modernism will be a costly experience for Middle Eastern intellectuals. Without them wanting this or knowing this, this will be considerable aid to oppressive movements and Islamic fundamentalist leaders in the region.”

There are those who consider “Islamic feminism” a form of resistance against Western feminism and complain that feminism should not be based on Western standards. For example, they claim a “post-colonial feminism” that considers ethnic forms or a multi-cultural feminism. (See Weedon, 2002)

However, “Islamic feminism” is not only a form of resistance against Western feminism but also an adaptation to religious conditions and beliefs that women in Islamic societies grow up with. It is giving up full rights based on the concept that “If there are differences between women and men in Islam, there is also justice.” In this view, justice is right; but for “Islamic feminism”, equality is sometimes right and sometimes not. “Islamic feminism” is thus a trap that will encumber Muslim women with Islamic ideology. “Islamic feminism” is actually more about the theocratic manipulation of “justice” to legitimize and defend discriminatory Islamic practices, rather than to defend equality or women’s rights.

Furthermore, Shahidian a sociologist and scholar of social movements, also argues that the attraction of “Islamic feminism” in the Middle East is due to a “crisis

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of identity” among secular women, by which Shahidian means secular feminists abroad. In Iran, the women’s movement does not show any attraction toward “Islamic feminism” nor does it use that term to introduce itself. Shahidian also states that “Islamic feminism cannot be an emancipatory alternative to the dominant Islamic discourse on sex and gender” (Shahidian, 1994, 1998).

Other scholars consider “Islamic feminism” a form of populist womanism, which, by alleging cultural relativism, does not accept global ideas about women, rejects global sisterhood and aims to transform one form of patriarchy into another. It seeks to promote women’s rights and equality-seeking ideas while keeping the Islamic regime intact. (Moghissi, 1997, p.57) Nahid Keshavaraz has similar beliefs and says:

Islamic feminism can be preferred by the intellectuals and practitioners of the Islamic government. They could use it to bring women under the umbrella of Islam and as soon as they demanded ‘too much’, they will be reminded of Islam and a calculated set of limits will be imposed on their demands<sup>154</sup>

Another point that has led some academic scholars to be attracted to “Islamic feminism” is the belief that “Islamic feminism” gives subjectivity to Muslim women. Yet experience has shown, on the contrary, that this creates a form of resistance against change and leads to adapting to doctrinaire religious teachings. Moghissi gives an elaborate analysis of this issue, and says:

The excitement about Muslim women's agency being and the creation of an ‘Islamic feminism’ and naming it as a revolutionary strategy in the Middle East suggests nothing but lowering expectations about what can be or must be achieved for women in Islamic countries.<sup>155</sup>

Moreover, “Islamic feminism”, unlike dominant feminist currents, considers the gender roles of women as wives not constructed by culture and society but due to natural differences in women and men.

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<sup>154</sup> (Rahe Azadi monthly, issue 46, 13, 1996).

<sup>155</sup> Moghissi, H. (2011). Islamic Feminism Revisited. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East, Volume 31, Number 1, p.81. doi 10.1215/1089201 x -2010-054  
Last accessed 15 November 2018 from <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/444366/pdf>

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“Islamic feminism” has been taken seriously by some women’s movement activists and scholars abroad, but it does not have a place, except among very few. Some Muslim women exist who defend women’s rights in Iran self-identify as modern religious thinkers and seek to show that Islam is not in contradiction with women’s rights and human rights. Yet they largely ignore that religion is a private matter. The majority of the women’s movement, formed of political activists of 1980’s and especially the young post-revolutionary generation, fundamentally seek laws to be based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For example, the “One Million Signature Campaign<sup>156</sup>”, a notable women’s movement action, declares as its main goal, explicit in its mission statement, a move to annul all gender discriminatory laws. It is based on international law, not contorted readings of Islam constantly at odds with a patriarchal status quo that owns the interpretation.

Another point that can help to explain the nature of the women’s movement in Iran is that, despite all the objections previously noted, the secular section of the women’s movement, with its demand for equality and anti-discrimination approach, has the upper hand in quantity and quality, yet has not opposed the views of those Muslim women who consider themselves defenders of women’s rights and seek a different reading of Islam. It tolerates diversity of views, as long as they don’t force others to adopt them, a step in the direction of moderating dogmatic religious beliefs and stepping away from Islamic fundamentalism and toward bettering the personal lives of women who believe in Islam. It simply rejects the intervention of religion in personal affairs and state governance and the domination of religion over society that results in inequality and discrimination against women and other dissenting citizens.

Furthermore, up until now, the composition of women’s rights activists in Iran has reflected the fact that the central question and common point has been the defense of women’s rights and struggle against discrimination. This is why, in the summits, dialogue sessions, and actions that have happened in public spaces since

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<sup>156</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One\\_Million\\_Signatures](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_Million_Signatures)

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2003, the discussion has not been over bringing some lines from the Quran to prove that Islam is not against women's rights! It can be said that the women's movement is trans-ideological and, in furthering its goals, has tried to adopt strategies and tactics that go beyond ideologies and seek to create fundamental changes by pushing the main demand of women, which is the repeal of all gender and sexual discrimination in society.

The points stated about the nature and identity of the women's movement in Iran are based on critical reading of qualitative information. To test and analyze such claims, I have conducted original research and applied quantitative methods. The data obtained is based on an online questionnaire that polled responses from 278 people, including 210 women, 61 men and 7 who consider themselves neither female nor male .The respondents answered questions on the women's movement. The results show secularism as a widespread and undeniable demand. The following table and diagrams show that 93.5% of the respondents seek separation of state and religion and only 2.2% oppose it.

**Table 1 Do you agree with the statement: “State and religion have to be separated”**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	260	93.5	93.5	93.5
	No	6	2.2	2.2	95.7
	Don't Know	4	1.4	1.4	97.1
	No Response	8	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	278	100.0	100.0	

Data in the table above shows that 93.5% of respondents agree with separation of religion and state. Data in the table below shows that 64.4% of valid respondents consider themselves feminists. In view of the simple fact that more than six of every 10 respondents consider themselves feminists and nine out of every 10 respondents believe there must be a secular separation of religion and state, there clearly appears to be strong congruity between being feminist and being secular. For the record, such claims were put by this research to more rigorous formal statistical analysis and are substantiated.

**Table 2** Do you call yourself a feminist?

Responses		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	159	57.2	64.4	64.4
	No	88	31.7	35.6	100.0
	Total	247	88.8	100.0	
Missing		31	11.2		
Total		278	100.0		

**Table 3** Do you call yourself a feminist? \* Do you agree with the following statement: "State and religion have to be separated?"

		Do you agree with the following statements "State and religion have to be separated"					
Cross tabulation		Yes	No	Don't Know	No Response	Total	
Do you call yourself a feminist?	Yes	157	1	0	1	159	
	No	77	5	3	3	88	
Total		234	6	3	4	247	

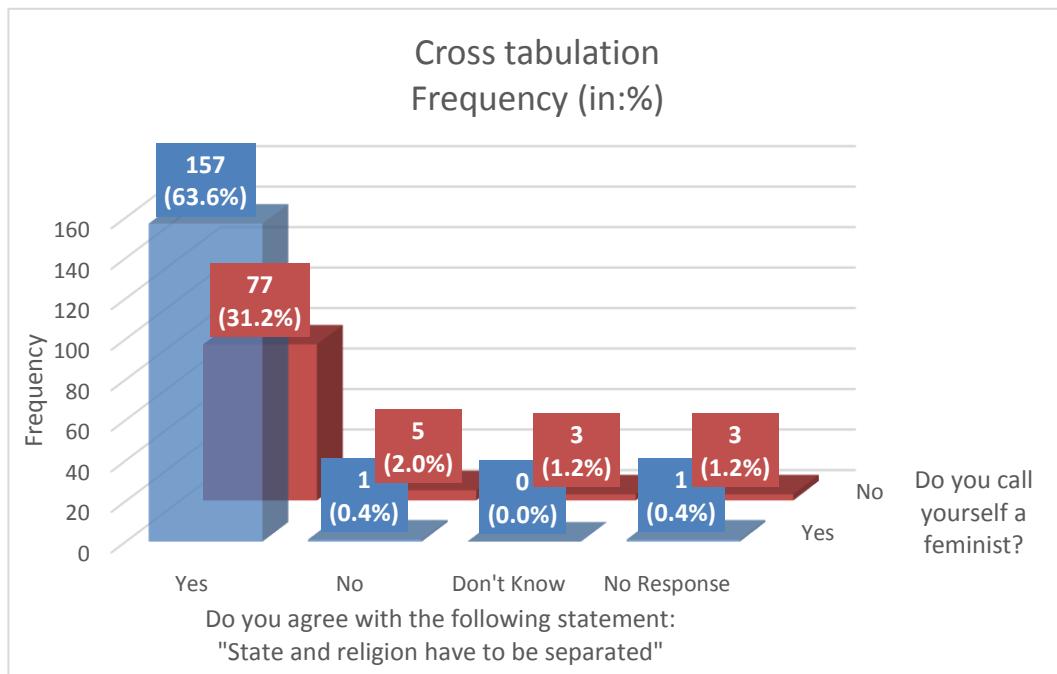


Figure 1 Cross tabulation. Do you call yourself a feminist? \* Do you agree with the following statement: "State and religion have to be separated"

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**Table 4 Figure Chi-Square Tests**

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	14.834 <sup>a</sup>	3	.002
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	15.327	3	.002
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	247		

a. 6 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.07.

**H0: There is no relationship between being a feminist and being a secular**

**H1: There is a relationship between being a feminist and being a secular**

Based on the information in the Chi-Square table and some simple calculations, the Hypothesis H0 has been rejected. Therefore, we can accept the hypothesis H1, i.e. there is a meaningful relationship between being feminist and secular.

As we can see the analysis of qualitative methods too, confirms the quantitative data. We cannot claim that the respondents definitely represent the whole of Iranian society but since they are mostly civil rights activists, we can claim that the demand for secularism is meaningfully present among this group.

At the end, I should point out that feminism, across the span of historical time and faced with impediments to equality, including religion in all its forms, has been able to influence misogynist religious beliefs. In new-thinking Judaism, for example, women can become rabbis. Among new-thinking Christians, women's roles in developing new fields of beliefs has been considered. What has been influenced and changed is the approach of some religions toward women's rights. This is why a term such as "Jewish feminism" or "Islamic feminism" can be so misleading; adding qualifications can distract or blind analysis from an examination of equality. Further, what has changed is the approach of religion toward women. This is the opposite of women seeking new ways to accommodate religion. Based on this outlook, whenever a Muslim, a Jew or a follower of any religion adopts feminist thinking, they should be called Muslim feminists, Jewish feminists, etc. If we can accept that it is right to apply "Islamic feminism," why then not, for

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instance, “patriarchal feminism”? Many men who had patriarchal opinions have become feminists after changing their views on women’s rights. What do we call these men? We call them feminist men, not masculine feminists.

## **2.8 Shift from Circles to Cyberfeminism, 1980's–2003**

The post-revolutionary period can be viewed not only as political transition, but also in terms of fundamental new media changes and their related impacts on the women’s movement. Key phases of this transition, over a period of two decades, are described below.

## **2.9 Underground Activity during Decades of Oppression and Silence**

The 1980s in Iran can be labeled as the decade of political exclusion, violence, terror, and suppression. During this period, a significant number of dissidents, including secular women, were eliminated from the socio-political arena. The severe elimination of opponents, the vast number of Iranian immigrants, and the Iran-Iraq War were among factors that silenced the slightest protests, including by women, for two decades. The exclusion of women from higher-education centers and workplaces was the first step toward their marginalization from cultural, social, economic, and political spheres.

Khomeini did not hold intellectuals, experts, writers, and the elite in high regard and was opposed to freedom. In his view, freedom was valid insofar as it was used in the propagation of Islam. He explicitly condemned Western freedom in his speeches and writings, including in the following remark:

Western freedom that perishes the lives of our youths is to be condemned from the perspective of Islam and reason. Propaganda, speeches, articles, books, and magazines that are against the Islamic doctrine, public morals, and national interests are haram religiously forbidden and it is incumbent upon all Muslims to stop them<sup>157</sup>.

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<sup>157</sup> Khomeini, Ruhollah, Sahife Noor, Volume 21 p .453

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The first step in the implementation of Khomeini's ideas against Western cultural manifestations and secularism was to purge intellectuals from universities, academic-educational centers, and positions in the government.

A large-scale purge of dissident professors, teachers, employees, and students was therefore carried out after revolution under the label of Cultural Revolution<sup>158</sup>, which mostly affected female students and working women. After the expulsion of a vast number of students and reopening of universities in 1983, female students constituted a mere 10% of the total number of students compared to the pre-revolution figure of almost 40%,<sup>159</sup> which is a clear example of excluding and depriving women of higher education and marginalizing them from scientific and occupational spheres.

The next step was to suppress critics of the Islamic republic and opposition groups. During the first decade of revolution, all political groups, including those who had opted for armed opposition as well those protesting peacefully through cultural activities were suppressed one after another. Many were imprisoned or executed, with many others living in hiding out of despair. Due to the state of fear and terror, many dissidents had no choice but to leave Iran, including female political activists representing a considerable part of the opposition.<sup>160</sup>

During this period, independent publications were completely shut down. The offices of political associations, parties, and groups were dissolved, and their property was confiscated. The media, including newspapers, radio and television were in possession and control of the government. Therefore, Islamic revolutionary purges were carried out in complete silence.

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<sup>158</sup>The Cultural Revolution (1980–1987) (Persian: enghelabe Farhangi ) was a period following the Iranian Revolution, when the academia of Iran was purged of Western and non-Islamic influences (even traditionalist unpolitical Islamic doctrines) to bring it in line with the revolutionary and Political Islam. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian\\_Cultural\\_Revolution](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Cultural_Revolution)

See also, Razavi, Reza. 2009. The Cultural Revolution in Iran, with Close Regard to the Universities, and its Impact on the Student Movement, Journal Middle Eastern Studies Volume 45, 2009 - Issue 1.

<sup>159</sup> Chapin Metz .Helen (1987), ed. Iran: A Country Study. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1987. Education Iran Table of Contents <http://countrystudies.us/iran/61.htm>

<sup>160</sup> This observation is based on my own experience during that period of time.

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Sociologists and scholars who have studied post-revolution events have pointed out the crackdown on political forces and the marginalization of women. Moghissi (2013) has the following to say about this:

Months later, after the bloody suppression of left anti-government forces in the universities, the regime's invasion of Kurdistan and Turkoman Sahra, and the closure of all universities and expulsion of leftist professors and students under the ploy of the Islamic "cultural revolution." All liberal daily newspapers were shut down on the Ayatollah's instruction.<sup>161</sup>

Reflecting on this period, Najmabadi (1995)<sup>162</sup> states:

During the first years after revolution, 'revolutionary purges', societal 'clean-ups' of 'the previous regime's remnants', and 'deoccidentalizations' were carried out through the most misogynistic policies. In response to such moves, the opposition shown by a number of women's groups had left us with a most valuable historical relic, but it was not enough to prevent such policies from taking effect.

The spring of freedom after the Iranian revolution was disappointingly short. Such ideals as freedom and equality were suddenly and unbelievably abandoned. Ghorashi<sup>163</sup>, an Iranian sociologist and anthropologist, most aptly depicts the post-revolutionary condition:

The political structure changed from monarchy to an Islamic republic but the foundations of the old structure i.e. dictatorship, a repressive security service, corrupt officials, and self-centered leaders remained intact in that the revolution began to eliminate its supporters from the very beginning, and the most tragic thing was to watch it bury its justice-seeking ideals.

Although freedom and social justice were the basic demands of women, the revolution produced reverse outcomes. Women faced more discrimination and injustice as each day went by. They were eliminated from decision-making and decision-forming arenas. The government's attempts toward the Islamization of the society revolved around women's issues, in particular hijab, and gender segregation. However, despite imposing the Islamic ideology on all aspects of

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<sup>161</sup> Moghissi, Haideh (2013). Arab Uprisings and Women's Rights: Some Lessons from Iran <http://solidarity-us.org/pdfs/ATC%20165--Lessons.pdf>

<sup>162</sup> Najmabadi, Afsaneh, 1995. (Persian 1374) Difficulty during the years of growth, Female Written in the Islamic Republic (Negaresh haye zanvaraneh da jomhuriye islami ) in Persian , Kankash ,Vol, 12. Fall.

<sup>163</sup> Ghorashi, Halleh. Reflections on the revolution <http://www.arsehsevom.net/fa/degargoni-enghelab-haleh-ghoreishi> Retrieved 10th August 2016.

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people's private and social lives, the Islamic republic was not successful at marginalizing women and making them stay at home for a number of reasons.

## **2.10 The Failure of the Islamic Republic to Marginalize the Women's Movement**

A number of reasons, including the effects of the modernization program initiated during the Pahlavi period, strong inclination of women for higher education, Iran-Iraq War, and most importantly, the arrival of the Internet and the subsequent de-monopolization of media from the government rendered the Islamic republic unsuccessful at eliminating women from socio-political spheres.

The modernization program, initiated by Reza Shah Pahlavi and which increased momentum under Mohammad Reza Shah, inevitably left a deep impact on society and women's lifestyles. The continued social presence of women after the revolution can be mainly attributed to the modernization of the Pahlavi period. Before the revolution, some women, religious or non-religious, entered guerrilla warfare, shattering social gender stereotypes about women being passive, helpless and incompetent. They had also effectively taken part in scientific, political, and especially social spheres. Ghorashi (2002)<sup>164</sup> has a similar perspective regarding the effect of pre-revolution conditions on the continued presence of women after revolution: "The opportunity for social participation of women was created before the revolution, but this time there were women from all strata of society who became active".

From a global perspective, enormous changes had been brought about regarding women's liberation and acknowledgement of their rights. Therefore, it was very difficult, if not impossible, to isolate Iranian women considering the international conditions.

The Iran-Iraq War was another factor that not only made women remain in the social scene, but also brought previously-inactive housewives to social and political

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<sup>164</sup> Ghorashi, Halleh. 2002. *Ways to Survive, Battles to Win: Iranian Women Exiles in the Netherlands and United States*. Nova Science Publishers, Inc.: New York. p.57.

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arenas during the war effort. War and its irreparable damages made border security maintenance the top priority in that period and marginalized other matters including women's issues. However, it played a key role in empowering women and assigning social roles to them. Among the inevitable consequences of the Iran-Iraq War was the breaking of traditional role of housewives, development of national partnership, and their inclusion in public and political spheres. The participation of religious women in demonstrations and instigating slogans chanted in support of Khomeini and his ideals were – in ironic fact – a rejection of religious-traditional theories that maintained men should not hear the voice of non-mahram<sup>165</sup> women based on the Islamic doctrine!

In a study on Iran-Iraq War martyrs' wives and those who had helped the war effort, Saeidi (2010)<sup>166</sup> demonstrated that the presence of religious women at the theatres of war, irrespective of their political viewpoints, was due to their desire to come out of their homes and gain new experiences. He concludes that efforts by the women's movement which began before the revolution had not ended there and continued in other forms. In addition, after the conclusion of war, women were not only reluctant to return home, but demanded a greater share of political power. He also shows women's discontent about having to stay at home after the revolution.<sup>167</sup>

Kar (1996)<sup>168</sup>, a women's rights activist and lawyer, points out the role of war in the inclusion of these women in the political scene:

Now that religious authorities have recognized the presence of women and that they are allowed to leave their homes and use their power for the furtherance of the revolution and policy-making, why should they remain limited to jobs at the administrative officer level and not be assigned top ministerial and managerial positions?

Another consequence of the Iran-Iraq War pertaining to women's issues was that the war practically demonstrated the inefficacy of a number of Islamic laws.

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<sup>165</sup> Na mahram: women/men that you are allowed to marry.

<sup>166</sup> Saeidi, Shirin 2010 ‘Creating the Islamic Republic of Iran: wives and daughters of martyrs, and acts of citizenship ISSN: 1362-1025 (Print) 1469-3593 (Online) Journal homepage: Citizenship Studies Vol. 14, No. 2, April 2010, 113–126.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid. p.122.

<sup>168</sup> Kar, Mehrangiz. (1996). (Persian calendar 1375). Iranian women's political rights, (Hoghoqe siasi zanan Iran) in Persian, Nshre Roshangaran, motaleaat zanan, pp 20-32.

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For example, the custody of the children of war martyrs had to be given to the paternal grandfather, which turned into a matter of dispute between martyrs' wives and the government. Women whose husbands were killed, held captive, or were still fighting at the fronts had to handle out-of-home affairs despite receiving support from the government. This served to considerably undermine stereotypical gender roles and male-female dichotomies. Women were seeking independence, decision-making and family management power. Here, the demands of female household heads prevailed over state laws and wishes.

In addition, doubts were later thrown at Islamic values even by the martyrs' children. Saeidi points to an intergenerational change in such children and claims that the majority of martyrs' children have idolized their own parents and not religious figures such as Fatima Zahra:

Very few interviewees remembered Fatemeh al-Zahra as their role model and usually responded to this question by nominating their mothers' bravery as single parents to be a source of desired emulation.<sup>169</sup>

The social presence of women after revolution was inevitable. The clerics who had been persistently opposed to the social presence of women had no choice but to accept this undeniable truth. Contrary to what some might think, the retreat of the Islamic regime from women's demands was not a matter of choice, but due to the fierce resistance of women to the isolation policies of the government.

Pursuing higher education and excelling at scientific fronts were other tactics used by women against the marginalization policy. Female students quickly surpassed their male counterparts, representing more than 65% of the total number of students admitted to universities in the third decade after revolution, despite numerous discriminations and limitations.

As such, it was not easy to follow models established 1,400 years earlier and return women, whether religious or non-religious, to the confines of their homes despite the numerous excuses used to deny them jobs such as improper observance of hijab, or being labeled non-Islamic and counterrevolutionary.

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<sup>169</sup>Ibid, p.123

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Despite discriminatory and cumbersome laws against and all-around restrictions on women, they often both openly and secretly resisted the regime's policies using innovative strategies, flexible tactics, and by forming adaptable organizations to challenge patriarchal religious values.

Coinciding with women's rights activists living overseas touching on theoretical issues, activists inside the country used the slightest opportunity to revive the women's movement.

## **2.11 The Emergence of the Women's Movement from the Heart of Repression**

With the conclusion of the Iran-Iraq War, the second decade of revolution can be aptly labeled as the decade of women's circles and house meetings. The fear of brutal purges and distrust still prevailed in society. Social divisions deepened between the government and a part of society which had been suppressed altogether or did not find room to come to surface. The government could not tolerate a dissenting voice. A number of groups and circles were founded with the aim of raising the awareness of feminist activists overseas and changing the conditions of women in all corners of Iran, particularly in large cities. Women's issues in this period were characterized by activities including study sessions to discuss feminist theories, social and political analyses, identifying with political activists and academic women, with significant contributions and guidance by older survivors of the 1980s repressions<sup>170</sup>.

Women's circles discussed women's issues progressed to a more practical level by holding cultural meetings, establishing cooperative funds for resolving the financial problems of members, reading books, and analyzing recent Iran and world news in small private gatherings. Publications and articles written by Iranian women's rights advocates that could otherwise hardly be accessed were analyzed in these circles. Honoring such events as the International Women's Day, women's

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<sup>170</sup> This observation is based on my own experience during that period of time.

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rights advocates in Iran strived toward promoting gender awareness among women and presenting their demands.

It is worth noting that women's circles were not merely places for discussing socio-political issues but were strongholds for members to voice their concerns – problems that stemmed from a patriarchal-theocratic atmosphere governing the households and societal relations. The study of the relationship between discriminatory laws, domestic violence and teaching the skill of 'saying no', among other activities, took place in circles under social conditions where national media and school textbooks propagated images of women as obedient creatures. The guiding philosophy in such circles revolved around empowering women to enable them to more effectively engage in the public domain.

A generation of Iranian feminists developed in these circles, which, later, became the experts and activists of the women's movement in the third decade of revolution. Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani (2012)<sup>171</sup> has the following to say on the role and impact of such circles on herself and her activities:

It was probably due to the communicative role played and the impact made by these intellectual women on domestic circles – circles which fostered a new generation of women's movement – that prompted me to publish *The Second Sex* as a foothold to facilitate this communication.

Since the majority of key members of these circles had political and organizational experience in parties and groups, they recognized the significant role of democratic organizations and institutions in putting forward demands and bringing about internal change, and they knew that collective acts required a synergy of power through the establishment of organizations.

Another function of such circles was the emergence of founders of a number of NGOs originating in house meetings operating officially or unofficially. These groups enjoyed a level of organization which defied such terms as "circle." They were well-organized groups with their own objectives and regulations, and some of them were officially registered. Taking advantage of gender awareness, these

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<sup>171</sup> Ahmadi Khorasani, Noushin. 2012. (Persian 1391). The spring of Iranian Women's Movement. In Persian Iran, Tehran. Self-publishing, p.43.

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groups engaged in the cultural and social spheres and strove for the empowerment of women, child welfare, health, and the environment, and paved the way for social and legal issues to be addressed. The potential and true capacities of the women's movement were fostered in these very institutions (Abbasgholizadeh, 2009)<sup>172</sup>.

Describing this period, Khorasani (2003, p.179)<sup>173</sup> states:

The expansion of such circles helped create places at which women's issues could be discussed, as they could relatively fill the gap created by the lack of an arena for discourse. Such circles raised the awareness of women and turned into places where feminist views could be formed. They also diminished the predominant boundaries in public and private spheres of the society and revealed personal sufferings of women as a social problem. Viewpoints that could not be expressed due to the absolute dominance of moralization and deterring traditions were expanded verbally in such circles. A few numbers of such circles helped women produce and foster thoughts and ideas which gradually made demands give way to rights in their mind.

Since the late 1990s, topics discussed at the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women were discussed at house meetings by participants with primarily leftist viewpoints. The assemblies were mainly formed based on intellectual tendencies and shared political backgrounds of people and gradually grew more general. It should be pointed out that holding such circles was not free of risk. However, the International Women's Day on March 8th could not be stopped in Iran after the revolution. The celebration of the International Women's Day at homes or in small gatherings provided an opportunity for more people to know about women's rights and strive to expand their knowledge and the knowledge of those around them of such rights. Activities done in circles were not demands but rather a necessity of time or, more aptly, a form of innovation.

It should be noted that, due to socio-political obstructions, there was no choice but to maintain solidarity through small gatherings. Circles were, in fact, born out of the repressive atmosphere of the time and were directly related to the severity of

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<sup>172</sup> Abbasgholizadeh, Mahboubeh. 2009. (Persian 1384). The women's movement in the sixties , women leftist circles (Jonbesh zanan dar shast, mahafele zanae chapgara) in Persian

[http://victoriaazad.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=546](http://victoriaazad.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=546) Retrieved 12<sup>th</sup> June 2016

<sup>173</sup> Ahmadi Khorasani, Noushin. 2003. (Persian 1382), Women under the Shadow of Patriarchs, Nshere toseeh, Iran: Tehran, p.179.

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suppression. Using this method of collective work, women were able to function more systematically using the most basic tools and shut down the oppressive engine of the government. Small groups of women were therefore able to move isolated gatherings and small islands to public places and form an archipelago of women's movements.

The active period of circles was almost concurrent with the activation of another group of women who followed in Khomeini's footsteps in absolute faith and joined in with the purpose of propagating Islam, but had come to realize the shortcomings, problems, obstacles, and limitations put by the Islamic republic on the way of political, economic and social partnership by women. Due to their Islamic background and being trusted by the government, this group of women's rights activists worked in the press as journalists.

In addition, they had the right to obtain licenses to publish magazines and other forms of publication. Publication rights were a great bonus that enabled them to be heard louder and more frequently. Among such publications were the *Women* and *Farzaneh* magazines which, despite having distinct lines of thought, were managed by Muslim women who did not view the existing system as in accordance with their demands. In search of justice, these publications criticized the status quo through the articles published therein (Gerami, 1994)<sup>174</sup>. A number of Muslim women gradually gravitated toward their secular colleagues in terms of demands and objections, thus joining the women's rights campaign and forging coalitions to issue their basic demands.

In the public sphere, women stood out in scientific, economic, and artistic domains. Artists such as Maryam Zand—photographer, directors such as Rakhshan Banietemad, Tahmineh Milani, and Manijeh Hekmat, among poets, authors and translators grew more sensitive about women's issues. Although the result of their artworks cannot be attributed to the women's movement, their collective activities

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<sup>174</sup> Gerami, Shahin. 1994. The Role, Place and Power of Middle Class Women in the Islamic Republic, Edited by Valentine M. Moghadam. Identity, Politics and Women Cultural Reassertion and Feminism in International Perspective. (Boulder, Co:Westview Press, May/June 1994 Issue, pp 329-348.

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altered the religious-traditional view and beliefs about women and questioned gender stereotypes.

## **2.12 The Reform Atmosphere: Increasing Public Visibility of the Women's Movement**

In the beginning of the third decade of revolution, which coincided with the election of Khatami in 1997 and the start of the reform period, a slight change was observed in the political approach and conduct of the Islamic Republic. The repressive policies of the government in the last two decades had led to public discontent, ever-increasing pressure on the Iranian people, and the disappointment of the pre-revolutionary generation with the government. A younger generation of children born from idealistic, but crushed, parents had come to grow up in this environment, and they sought change. These factors, collectively, propelled people to vote for Khatami who had promised reform. Consequently, he won the presidential election in 1997 with a large margin in competition with three nominees who were closer to the Leader, Ali Khamenei, gaining about 70% of the total votes.

Despite numerous problems in the Iranian election system, people took advantage of the slightest opportunity to say “No!” to totalitarian fundamentalists, exercising their collective will and to show their discontent with the status quo. Blumer (1939, 1969)<sup>175</sup>, as a pioneer of modern sociology in the process of social movements, observes dissatisfaction with the status quo and a collective will and participation to create a new order in life as effective factors in the process of the formation of social movements.

Social movements can be viewed as collective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their inception in the condition of unrest, and derive their motive power on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a

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<sup>175</sup> Blumer, Herbert (1939). Collective Behavior. In R.E. Park, Ed. An Outline of the Principles of Sociology. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1939, p.199.

Blumer, H. (1969). Collective behavior. In A.M. Lee (Ed.), In Principles of Sociology (3rd Ed.). New York: Barnes and Noble Books pp. 67-121.

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new scheme or system of living (Blumer, 1969).

Moreover, three major events occurred in the reform period that helped promote civil movements including the women's movement, student activism, labor movement, and subsequently the 2009 democracy-seeking movement: the increased number and diversity of the press, formation of NGOs and the expansion of civic societies, and the advent of the Internet.

In light of the relatively open political milieu of this period, a number of publications dubbed "the reform press" entered the political, cultural and social scenes (see Mashayekhi, 1999)<sup>176</sup>. In addition, students in universities became active and eager to publish their views and academic work. This resulted in "260 student publications to participate in the festival of Student Publications."<sup>177</sup> This was important as, after a long period of removing women, a significant increase in the willingness of women to enter universities, engage in student activities, and write in student publications was seen. Regarding the active presence of women in student publications, Ziba Mahmoudi<sup>178</sup> says: "female students, just like any female journalist, tried to demonstrate their ability. A number of female students issued exclusive publications on women's issues."

Moreover, publications by female students included discussions about gender discrimination and feminist discourse. Zohreh Asadpour, a women's rights activist, had the following to say about the impact of such publications on the atmosphere of University of Guilan. "*Shaliz* quickly came to fame as a feminist publication."<sup>179</sup> The regular publication of a quality women's periodical induced various reactions. Women's issues were discussed at *Shaliz* sales tables in various faculties. Later, student publications included women's movement campaigns in their discussions. Most publications had been banned on blasphemy charges due to covering women's

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<sup>176</sup> Mashayekhi, Mehrdad. (1999). the Revival of the Student Movement in Post-Revolutionary Iran. International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society, Vol. 15, No. 2, winter, 2001.

<sup>177</sup> ibid

<sup>178</sup> Mahmoodi, Ziba. (2012). (Persian 1391). Student Publications and Women's Voices (Nshriyat daneshjooee va sedaye zanan) in Persian. Radio zamaneh <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/47818> Retrieved 11<sup>th</sup> May 2016.

<sup>179</sup> ibid

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issues including hijab, publishing a March 8th special issue, or criticizing gender quota policies.<sup>180</sup>

As pointed out earlier, other factors reinforcing the women's movement included civil society and social issue-oriented organizations. Women's rights activists took advantage of the opportunity to express their voice. Establishing NGOs, especially in fields such as women's empowerment, the environment, children's rights, social harms such as addiction and HIV/AIDS, and other cultural, artistic and social activities, they continued organizing in a coherent way. In addition, they used NGOs as bridges for network-building. Launching campaigns and forums, forming coalitions, breaking ideological boundaries and entering cyberspace characterized the activities of the women's movement in this period. Organizing seminar sessions for women and such campaigns as the One Million Signatures, Stop Stoning, the 2012 Family Protection Law Campaign, and coalitions such as the convergence of women to issue demands on elections are products of this period. The subject of campaigns and coalitions is discussed later in more detail.

## **2.13 The Internet: Alternative New Media and Development into Cyberfeminism<sup>181</sup>**

Dissident women activists were deprived of numerous social rights, including publication rights, as these were exclusive to government-based organizations. There were even obstacles for obtaining licenses for the publication of so-called "objective" scientific journals. If an applicant had a political background inconsistent with the Islamic Republic of Iran's policies, he or she would be "disqualified", regardless of his or her intention to publish a scientific, cultural, economic or social journal. Limited access to media and restrictions on establishing public civil institutions marginalized dissident women from all angles that did not

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid

<sup>181</sup> Cyberfeminism is a term that was coined in the early 1990s and is used to describe the philosophies of a contemporary feminist community and the work of feminists interested in theorizing, critiquing and exploiting.

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even cross the radar of those studying the legal movement of Iranian women. The active forces of the women's movement had access to media and their voice could be heard. After the general public gained access to the Internet, active forces in different spheres with diverging viewpoints could be identified.

With the arrival of the Internet, the women's movement in Iran entered a new phase, gained prominence and attracted the public's attention by taking advantage of facilities such as social networks. The Internet provided the opportunity for people to stop waiting for their contents to be published and worrying about censorship. Easy access to the Internet enabled activists to have a louder voice, create social networks, exchange innovative ideas, and develop scenarios in coordination with women's movement theorists. The expansion of social networks created new opportunities to form unofficial or unorthodox groups based on shared wishes, to discuss ideas in cyberspace, strategize around political processes and actions and participate in policy-makings by the government. However, despite the appeal and remarkable growth of the Internet in Iran, civil rights activists faced many obstacles including Internet censorship, the summoning website administrators to courts, and imprisonment of bloggers.

Women's rights activists found meaningful potential in the Internet and new technologies to communicate and express their demands so as to become more empowered in the world. They individually or collectively designed websites, weblogs, mailing lists, chat rooms, discussion groups and so on, to assist the furtherance of the women's movement goals. Reflecting on her Internet experiences in Iran, Noushin Khorasani, a well-known women's rights activist, states:

If I had to point out a single amazing experience in that turbulent atmosphere, I would opt for the impact of the Internet without any thinking. It was a genuine, interesting experience of the enormous impact of the Internet in helping activists coordinate and stay informed under that risky conditions and demonstrated its value as an effective tool for organizational purposes. The Internet had given us the opportunity to communicate and cooperate easily despite not being able to settle in a fixed location. We were all informed of each other's condition, could follow moment-to-moment news and coordinate effectively thanks to the Internet. It was a truly remarkable experience. Of course, the state officials did not

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have strict control over the Internet at that time. Most controlling was done on cell phones and phone lines; therefore, the Internet was a very appropriate option for the organization of gatherings.”<sup>182</sup>

Describing news delivery methods of that period on her Facebook page, Nahid Hosseini, a women’s movement activist, states:

I can recall that after the 1979 Revolution, we had to use small pieces of paper to convey news during that time of repression and arrest. We would write down the news in tiny letters and hide the paper in our underwear to make it to our rendezvous. After an hour of playing hide-and-seek with the officials to make sure that we were not being pursued, we would convey the message and return home exhausted and worried. Almost reaching the doorstep, we could sense that the beet salesman or the street greengrocer had kept an eye on us. Using social media, news is broadcasted domestically and globally within minutes. It is no longer practically possible to censor such tools. No weapons, party organizations, or so-called leaders are needed! We should honor this important phenomenon under the conditions of drastic social changes in Iran.<sup>183</sup>

Such remarks from a generation which has experienced a period of suppression can help us understand why female political activists kept the women’s movement alive by running circles, and this demonstrates the significance of this unrivaled tool. The Internet made an enormous impact from a collective stance and offered a suitable environment for women’s actions on an individual level, within which they were able to express themselves in a novel atmosphere. Reading the comments of others in cyberspace, those who previously preferred self-censorship gained enough courage to write more freely. Cyberspace offered them the opportunity to express themselves without intermediary or patriarchal dominance and publish openly that which was previously private and forbidden.

Using the Internet, women could voice their views through personal blogs. They could tell their story and write about themselves, their wishes, and demands in the virtual public space without having to be judged by their appearance. Masih Alinejad, the administrator of the Stealthy Freedom webpage, talks about the role

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<sup>182</sup> Ahmadi Khorasani, Noushin. (2012). (Persian 1391). The spring of Iranian Women’s Movement. In Persian Iran, Tehran. Self-publishing, p.215.

<sup>183</sup> Retrieved from Nahid Hossiani Facebook page.

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of Internet in the lives of women and how they can narrate their story without any intermediate using the Internet: “Women who, using a simple cell phone camera, try to de-monopolize the media from celebrities and narrate their own story.”<sup>184</sup>

Additionally, the Internet became an unparalleled presence that acted as a supporting force for civil activists, social movements, unknown journalists, and outcasts. With these new possibilities, the working style, tactics, and strategies of women’s movement activists underwent a fundamental change. As a feminist theoretician, Joe Freeman believes that collectivism plays a key role in women’s politics (Humm, 1994)<sup>185</sup>. New media also served as a supplemental agent for women’s ‘collectivism’ policy to operate more effectively.

Consequently, women’s rights activists were able to use the Internet and their mobile phones to facilitate and link cyber activities and collective actions within society. For example, women’s movement activists in several mass meetings focused on the importance of collective actions, and planned for rallies and protests. To continue discussions more efficiently and save time and energy, subsequent coordination was handled through email and text messaging. Face-to-face meetings and follow-up group communications in cyberspace resulted in demonstrations. An example is the demonstrations women’s rights activists organized between 2004-2006 to protest discriminatory laws against women. During those years, women demonstrated that, despite the absence and silence of overt political powers, their own collective and social actions had the ability to raise awareness in society on women’s issues and shape the political sphere.

The Internet’s free flow of information helped women on two fronts; first by breaking the state and male monopoly on the media, and second, by challenging and influencing government policies and behavior toward change. We must turn our attention to Habermas’s theory on the public sphere in this regard, in which he

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<sup>184</sup> Retrieved from Masih Ali Nejad .Stealthy Freedom Campaign. Alinejad launched My Stealthy Freedom (also known as Stealthy Freedoms of Iranian Women) in 2014, with a Facebook page that invites Iranian women to post pictures of themselves without a hijab.

<sup>185</sup> Humm, M. (1995). *The Dictionary of Feminist Theory*, second Edition, 2nd ed, Edinburgh University Press.

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argues that, “Information is the oxygen for democracy, the benefits of democracy is more realistic and effective if production process is freer and more rational, with higher participation of social forces.”<sup>186</sup> According to him, the public sphere is a social space where people can freely criticize social conditions and influence the political decision-making process. Therefore, we can claim that women broke a taboo in the public sphere of the Internet by sharing their demands, ideas, and criticisms. Furthermore, by networking and disseminating information in the public sphere, women have been effective actors doing the groundwork of laying foundations for democracy and mobilizing towards social change.

In addition, Plant (1997)<sup>187</sup>, one of the early advocates of cyberfeminism, argues that the digital revolution and feminization are complementary to each other. She believes that women are more suitable to use the Internet since women and the Internet are similar in nature. Therefore, in line with this argument, women activists in Iran quickly adopted and used cyberfeminism because it was suitable to the mechanism of the women’s movement and because the Iranian women’s movement does not have a designated leader: it has multiple voices and is pluralistic. Similarly, cyberspace has no hierarchy, therefore it presented a good opportunity for women’s movement activists to use the space to share information, provoke discussions, publish statements or online magazines, or create videos, in the style they deemed effective.

The use of the Internet placed women’s movement activists at the core of an equilateral triangle. One leg of this triangle was networking among the group to follow the news, discussions, and analyses; the second leg projected to the outside world the conclusions and analyses that formed through collective actions such as gatherings, demonstrations, or campaigning; and the third leg attracted external support from groups such as journalists, foreign and domestic politicians or activists, or other social movements such as labor or student movements.

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<sup>186</sup> Habermas, Jurgen.1993 (Fifth printing). Translated by Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*. The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

<sup>187</sup> Plant, Sadie 1997. “Babes in the Net.” *New Statesman & Society* January 27, p.28.

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## **2.14 The Challenge of Excessive Dependence on the Internet**

The suppression of civil activists and protesters after the 2009 presidential election results forced a substantial number of civil rights movement activists, such as women's rights activists, to leave Iran in order to seek safety and face issues in the diaspora. Under these circumstances and despite being tracked and identified in cyberspace, the Internet was still considered a crucial tool for the survival of the movement. Not only did it change the shape of social activities, but it also influenced the substance of the women's movement. This influence had positive and negative aspects. The overarching atmosphere of repression disrupted the balance and coordination between the use of the Internet and activities on social networks on the one hand, and the practical engagements of the activists on the other, which had worked well prior to 2009 election, to the extent that the extreme tendency to use the Internet replaced real-world activities for women's movement activists. As such, a new generation of women's movement activists made a strong appearance in arena of cyberfeminism where their actions were limited to the use of cyberspace.

It is noteworthy that in the past the term cyberfeminism applied to young, white, Western women from affluent social classes who were trained in modern communication technology (see Plant, 1997; Wajcman, 2006; Consalvo, 2003)<sup>188</sup>. This definition no longer applies to cyberfeminism because use of Internet is not exclusive to a particular segment of society, its widespread use has expanded from cities to villages in rural areas and is moving toward universal access.

The women's movement in the past century has aimed to organize mass movements by optimizing use of modern media. As new media continue to develop, new and different forms of social discourse and organizing are evolving. Today,

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<sup>188</sup> Wajcman, Judy. (2006). TechnoCapitalism Meets TechnoFeminism: Women and Technology in a Wireless World, *Labour & Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work*, 16:3, 7-20, DOI: 10.1080/10301763.2006.10669327 <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rlab20>

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/10301763.2006.10669327?needAccess=true>  
Consalvo, Mia (2003), "Cyberfeminism", in Jones, Steve, *Encyclopedia of New Media: An Essential Reference to Communication and Technology*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, pp. 108–109, ISBN 9780761923824.

[http://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Ch17\\_Cyberfeminism.pdf](http://study.sagepub.com/sites/default/files/Ch17_Cyberfeminism.pdf)

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many women's movement activists from all ages and backgrounds live in different cities and countries and engage in exchanging news, information, and ideas through Facebook, Twitter, group emails, and mobile social networks such as Telegram, Viber and Instagram. A downside of this vast networking is that the power and energy of activists has evolved to more rapid and shorter exchanges, such as tweets and images, as the increased quantity of information creates increased distraction. Users focus on exchanging latest news and liking each other's posts as a stream of information rapidly evolves. There is correspondingly less time for substantive discussion, debate, fact-checking, analysis, reflection or conclusion on previous topics. This is to such an extent that the time available for lengthy social discussion becomes increasingly compressed and transient. An increasing amount of material competing for human attention is generated by machines, non-human actors, algorithms and artificial intelligence. Numerous questions arise about the rapidly changing cyberspace and scope for the women's movement to use media effectively.

Considering current conditions, the Iranian women's movement needs to revise its method of utilizing the Internet to articulate women's demands. In this regard, Donna Haraway<sup>189</sup> believes that while women should become better experts in using communication technology so that they can take part in the "informatics of domination" and challenge it, women also need to be informed in ways that they can effectively connect with and enlighten other users and not merely be one skilled user among other unskilled users.<sup>190</sup> (See Haraway, 1997)

Universal access to new technologies and gender equity is by definition essential to achieve more equitable distribution of resources. But access to media

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<sup>189</sup> Donna J. Haraway is a Distinguished American Professor Emeritus in the History of Consciousness Department and Feminist Studies Department at the University of California, Santa Cruz, United States. Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donna\\_Haraway](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donna_Haraway)

<sup>190</sup> Haraway, Donna. (1997). *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium. FemaleMan©\_Meets\_OncoMouse™: Feminism and Technoscience*. New York: Routledge  
Haraway, Donna. (2000). "A Cyborg Manifesto". Science, technology and socialist-feminism in the late twentieth century. An ironic dream of a common language for women in the integrated circuit, Georgetown University pp 291-324, *The Cybercultures Reader* TXT eBook edited by Barbara M. Kennedy, David Bell, Routledge, London and New York  
<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Haraway-CyborgManifesto-1.pdf>

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alone, to create mere consumers of information, is not conducive to gender equality. It is important for women to become stakeholders who are increasingly capable of participating in all aspects of decision-making related to these tools, in ways that reinforce the goals of the women's movement. To some extent, the medium is the message. Women need greater competency, expertise and mastery of technological aspects of communication technology in order to move cyberspace closer to reflecting women's interests and demands. It is essential for women's movement activists to examine how all aspects of technology, new media, social networks, and the Internet can be used to empower women and voice their demands. This is even more vital in relation to demands. This issue is particularly relevant and vital in regard to the education and workforce representation of women in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines.<sup>191</sup>

Other thinkers like (Munster, 1999 and Luckman, 1999)<sup>192</sup> believe that it is naive to think that the more use of new media technology will provide women with access to power and authority. They believe that technologies are embedded in structures of power, and do not always have positive implications. It is challenging for all people to navigate choices in ways where they can be conscious of, and critical towards, the risks and obligations of new technology. In countries such as Iran, with a government-mandated lack of gender equity, the challenges that women face have additional dimensions of complexity.

The Internet is expanding digital connectivity into an environment where people will live increasingly with a ubiquitously-interconnected Internet of Things. It is unclear what relationship Homo sapiens will create over time with technology. Among the basic questions is to what extent the Internet can be a tool to achieve social goals, rather than where the user becomes a tool of the Internet. To clarify

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<sup>191</sup> As indicative statistic, in 2015 in the U.S.A., a developed economy, women filled 47% of all U.S. jobs but held only 24% of STEM jobs and on a gender basis are significantly underrepresented. See Office of the Chief Economist, U.S. Department of Commerce, Economics and Statistics Administration.

<https://www.commerce.gov/sites/default/files/migrated/reports/women-in-stem-2017-update.pdf>

<sup>192</sup> Munster, Anna 1999 "Is There Postlife After Postfeminism? Tropes of Technics and Life in Cyberfeminism."

Australian Feminist Studies, Vol. 14, No. 29, pp. 119–131.

Luckman, Susan. (1999). "(En) gendering the Digital Body: Feminism and the Internet." Hecate v.25 p.2, pp.36-48

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with a simple example, one can envision the Internet as a tool that can be used for entertainment, for human communication, to seek work and for other purposes. If a cyber-social activist (a civil rights activist who uses cyberspace to achieve the goals of a movement) aims to serve a movement but is unable to utilize cyberspace other than liking posts in response to digitally artificially manufactured content, then the activist is hardly using Internet as an effective tool but has become a tool subservient to the technology.

Although the Internet has had many benefits for women's movement activists, we are now faced with serious challenges regarding how to best utilize the Internet. For example, what solutions are available to overcome the negative aspects of Internet use and the security threats facing Internet users? What measures should the women's movement take to "encourage the engagement of energetic individuals who mainly volunteer for fieldwork and practical actions? There is a debate now among women's rights activists on whether a presence in the cyberworld can replace action in the real world. If not, how is it possible to keep the balance between a presence in the cyberworld and collective action in the real world?

The complexity and problems of using the Internet increase as its usage becomes more universal, as the technology becomes more advanced, as stakeholders become more complex and sophisticated, as economic factors and financial interests consolidate greater control over the Internet, and as all these interests conjointly heighten risks of the Internet transforming into digital battlefields. It is essential for women to be part of the process, to learn how to face and overcome obstacles preventing effective use of cyberspace by women. Some obstacles are in some ways more specific to women, such as violence against women in cyberspace, tangible and intangible control of women by their relatives, control and monitoring of women's movement activists by intelligence agencies, etc.

Clearly, the Internet is not a utopia nor ultimate the path for women's right activities. Despite all limitations the movement has achieved great outcomes without the Internet. A brief glance into the history of the women's movement

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shows the magnitude of work its forerunners engaged in toward achieving equality. The prevalence and availability of the Internet's tools necessitates not only mastering the use of this technology but to become equipped with techniques to overcome the threats posed by it, while mindful of dark aspects of the Internet, to be able to advance with open eyes and firm steps confidently forward towards social goals.

## **2.15 Diversity and Polarization**

Technological changes also reflect a transition from broadcasting to mass audiences into numerous niche interactions. This in turn had implications for issues related to gender and polarization.

Since the middle of the 20th century, immigration of Iranians to other countries has existed. However, the most important junctures of immigration are respectively after the 1953 Coup d'état, after the 1979 Revolution, and after the emergence of the Green Movement following the 2009 presidential election. The number of Iranian Diasporas before the Revolution was approximately 10,000 people. But, since the 1979 Revolution hitherto millions of Iranians have left their homes country. Although there is no exact number of Iranians in diaspora, it is estimated around four to five million (Ghorashi & Moghaddam, 2016)<sup>193</sup>

It is significant to mention that the activities of the Iranian diaspora in political, social, and cultural fields such as academia, politics, journalism and arts were eminent, and have a great impact on activism inside the country. Accordingly, whenever social movements in Iran, particularly the women's movement, are discussed, it is important to consider the activities of Iranians outside the country. While the aim of this part is to assess this impact on the women's movement after the Revolution, first a brief history of women's political emigration will be illustrated. Based on political incidents in Iran, it can be declared that political and

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<sup>193</sup> Ghorashi, Halleh & Moghaddam, Rezvan. 2016. "Iranian feminists and transnational contestations" labrys, études féministes/ estudos feministas janeiro/ junho 2016 - janvier/juillet 2016  
<http://www.labrys.net.br/labrys29/monde/halleh.htm>

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civil activist women left the country forcibly (forced displacement) or emigrated voluntarily (voluntary immigration) in three main junctures.

After the 1953 coup in Iran, a wave of forced emigration, or rather exile, commenced which continued until the 1979 Revolution (for more information about the coup refer to Gasiorowski, 2009; and Abrahamian, 2013)<sup>194</sup>. This wave of emigration mostly included members and followers of the Tudeh Party (an Iranian communist party) and members of other political groups and organizations. Among these political activists were women who were advocates of women's rights in addition to their defining party membership, such as Maryam Firouz, Malekeh Mohammadi, Razyie Ebrahimzadeh. In addition to politically active individuals, another group of Iranians was sent to other countries: students. While the initial reason of their emigration was education, some gravitated towards political groups outside the country. They had a role in the 1979 Revolution as a student movement of outside Iran. Most of the ones who had been forced to leave the country after the 1953 coup, returned to Iran after the 1979 Revolution and during the bloody suppression of 1980s, they were either killed or sentenced to life imprisonment.

The second wave of exodus leaving the country occurred after the 1979 Revolution. This wave encompasses two groups of people. Firstly, the ones who were the members of Pahlavi Monarchy, including people with high military rankings, the governors and the ones who were opponent to the Revolution and Islamic Republic. Furthermore, a notable fraction of population of the religious minorities such as Zoroastrian (Choksy, 1987)<sup>195</sup>, Jewish, Baha'i, Armenian, and Assyrian people were obliged to sell their properties and transfer their possessions outside Iran to start a new life. However, some of the Western-educated Iranians with the hope of change, freedom and equality returned to Iran after the 1979

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<sup>194</sup> Gasiorowski, Mark J. and Byrne, Malcolm. 2004. Mohammad Mosaddeq and the 1953 Coup in Iran (Modern Intellectual and Political History of the Middle East).

Abrahamian, Ervand. (2013) The Coup: 1953, The CIA, and The Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations

<sup>195</sup> Choksy Jamsheed K (1987), Zoroastrians in Muslim Iran: Selected Problems of Coexistence and Interaction during the Early Medieval Period Vol. 20, No. 1 (1987), pp.17-30

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of International Society of Iranian Studies.

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Revolution with the intention to actively make Iran a better country than what it was. But not long after the Revolution they realized that they could not identify with what the Islamic Republic had determined for the people, so they once again left the country. This group of people are the ones who left the country two or three years after the Revolution.

However, the second group of the latter wave had to leave the country later than the ones mentioned above. This group was the political activists who got sacked from state offices, universities and schools, despite their political participation during the Revolution. A high percentage of this group was in danger of detainment, imprisonment, torture and possibly execution due to the grand suppression of political groups. The displacement of this group, which has shaped a large group of Iranian political refugees, started in 1981 and continued for two decades. This period is considered as one of the most tyrannical periods in the contemporary history of Iran, accompanied by suppression and execution. During this period, the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) occurred. In addition to the regime's suppression, the war caused closed borders for several years. Despite all, many Iranians succeeded to flee the country, illegally. They saved their own lives and left the country.

Finally, the third wave of immigration encompasses women's rights activists, civil rights activists, students and young journalists who settled in different countries as immigrants or refugees due to the political oppressions and danger of imprisonment and detainment in Iran. Besides these forced displacements due to the political and civil activities, the emigration of students should be added. It is important to mention that due to the importance of the subjects of political emigration and exile, they should be discussed separately. In this text, I aim to give a brief description of the displacement phenomenon and the composition of Iranians in diaspora in order to illustrate the relationship between the women's movement in Iran and the activists outside the country.

Examination of the mutual impact of the women's movement inside and outside Iran is important to show how this relation helps to improve the Iranian

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women's rights movement. Iranian feminists in diaspora have played a particularly significant role by producing and spreading the Iranian women's movement's discourse through scientific research, and their illuminating, revealing and theoretical activities outside the country. This widely helped in the expansion of feminist ideas and raised awareness among Iranians in Iran and in diaspora. However, this relation has not occurred easily, rather it has encountered various challenges and difficulties.

There was a cold relationship between Iranians inside and outside the country in the first decade after the revolution. Through the first decade, various reasons such as closed borders, the Iran-Iraq war and the political isolation of Iran not only contributed to physical separation of political and social activists in Iran and in diaspora, but also led to undeniable emotional effects on the ones who stayed in the country and the ones who left it.

The people who had left Iran were obliged to adapt themselves to their new situation. These people who had to leave the country to survive felt wounded and an anger towards the Islamic Republic that had remained a part of their identity for a long time. Some would even radicalized this feeling as far as that they concluded the ones who stayed in country were connected to the regime. On the other hand, the Iranians who were active inside the country would feel betrayed by the diaspora community, and could not trust the perspective and judgment of the ones outside the country. This was because they believed that due to the absence of emigrants from Iran, the diaspora did not have an accurate sense of reality, and consequently, could not perceive the current situation of the ones who lived in the country.

Therefore, there was an atmosphere of distrust among those inside the country and those in diaspora. The physical distance and the distrust became a barrier to connection between political activists for a period. It is important to mention that the efforts of female civil rights activists and academics, as well as of artists, played a worthwhile role to break this disconnect.

Despite communication problems, before the emergence of the Internet, Iranian feminists in the diaspora had a great impact on presenting women's issues and

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raising the voice of women's movement in Iran through publishing journals and participating in seminars, conferences and international forums in order to give the voice to women's issues.

## **2.16 The Women's Rights Activist Press in Diaspora**

The press published outside Iran has had a ceaselessly informing role inside the country. These publications ranged from ones published before the revolution that would have difficulty entering the country, to publications after the revolution, such as the journal *The Other Half* (1985) published by feminist activists in diaspora such as Parvin Paydar, Afsaneh Najmabadi and others, as well as the journal *Women's Reflection*, a cultural, political and social publication based in Berlin and Frankfurt, Germany. It was run by the Iranian independent women's movement. Another example is the magazine *Woman's Voice*. These publications worked as catalysts for activists inside the country and contributed to the series of theoretical and applied discussions in Iran. Iranian women's publications outside the country focused on women's issues inside Iran, as well as the production of theoretical knowledge about the global women's movement, presentation of opinions, theories, experience and research conclusions. They had a significant role in the progress of the women's movement inside the country.

The 1980's were the peak of suppression of political activists in Iran. The press steadily became monopolized by the state. Newspapers and journals could publish only if content aligned with the Islamic Republic's goals. Even scientific publications or organizations assumed to be opponents of the Islamic Republic could not publish their productions. In that period, the Internet and cyberspace was not an option, so access to information was limited. Books, journals, and any publications which could enter to the country would be used to their utmost.

From the late 1990's on, accessibility to transnational spheres created new possibilities for civil activists, especially women's rights activists, by means of Internet and smartphones. The Internet was a great chance for communication

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between those inside and outside the country (Rahimi & Gheytanchi, 2008)<sup>196</sup>. By use of virtual space, easy access to online publication and information exchange contributed to further opportunities, explained in the upcoming sections.

Seminars and conferences outside Iran also form a communication bridge between the women's movement activists inside and outside the country. Through these seminars and conferences and the invitation of activists from Iran a sphere has been created in which academics and activists could exchange their knowledge, experience and information with each other. Academics can learn about the activities inside the country and consequently produce profound research based on their observations. Women's rights activists inside the country in turn can increase their knowledge through the produced theories and studies (Ghorashi & Moghaddam, 2016). It is necessary to mention two divergent events, which indirectly affect the relations between the civil activists on both sides.

From 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> April 2000, a conference titled "Iran after Election" was held in Berlin's House of World Cultures. It was an event, held by the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Germany's Green Party. Individuals from the reformist party of the Islamic Republic, like the cleric Eshkevari, and sixth parliament member Jamileh Kadivar, as well as individuals opposed to the Islamic Republic participated in this conference. This latter group included Mehrangiz Kar, lawyer and women's rights activist; Mahmoud Dowlatabadi, author; Moniru Ravanipor, author; Shahla Lahiji, publisher and women's rights' activist; Fariborz Raisdana, a member of Iran's Authors' Center and political socialist activist; among others.

Although one of the intentions of the conference was to create a bridge between reformists and intellectuals inside the country and political activists outside Iran, the event managed in a way that meant those who were invited from Iran became the lecturers while Iranian dissidents formed the audience. Thus, this conference was arranged without balancing between different parties. The Berlin Conference

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<sup>196</sup> Rahimi, Babak & Gheytanchi. Elham 2008. Iran's Reformists and Activists: Internet Exploiters. Middle East Policy Council (MEPC), Volume XV, number 1  
<http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/irans-reformists-and-activists-Internet-exploiters?print>

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was attacked by two opposing sides: from the diaspora opponents of the Islamic Republic who objected to the suppressions and executions of the 1980's as well as from the Islamic Republic authorities, particularly Khamenei, the supreme leader, who understood the conference as a conspiracy of Germans. Regarding this event, the Iranian government attempted to present a distorted image of the conference and Iranians in exile by screening selected parts of it via the national television. However, the result was contradictory. It not only provoked the curiosity of the audience to seek for understanding the truth about this event, but also drew attention to the different voices both inside and outside the country.

After the participants returned to Iran, they were summoned for trial. Some received unfair injunctions, representing the state's revenge on them. While the Heinrich Böll Foundation did not achieve its goal by holding this conference, it was variously influential for Iranians. First, the gap between the reformists inside the government and the circles around the supreme leader became deeper and more apparent. Second, a part of the diasporic opposition realized that creating space for a conversation was vital, as the situation in Iran was different from 20 years ago. Third, without rereading and reviewing the past, they could not reach a stable agreement. Fourth, the civil activists outside and inside the country were required to communicate with each other regardless of their political or ideological differences. Finally, the unfair injunctions for participants shocked the German authorities and the Heinrich Böll Foundation. It also demonstrated the oppressive political sphere in Iran despite the existence of a reformist government (Ghorashi & Moghaddam, 2016).

The key point is that these challenges and polemics seemed harsh, but in the end, they contributed to a common understanding among the civil and political activists inside and outside the country. Despite the Islamic Republic's effort to hinder the exchange of information and knowledge between political activists and women's rights activists, the communication has become more profound.

Another factor which extended relations inside and outside the country is related to the Bam Earthquake of 2003. It is interesting to reflect how an exogenous

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event, a natural disaster, is connected to the women's movement. On 26<sup>th</sup> December 2003, an Earthquake with 6.6 magnitude struck the ancient town of Bam. This earthquake led to a death toll of around 50,000 inhabitants of Bam. The intensity of human and economic loss was so broad that it not only touched the feelings of Iranians inside the country but also the Iranians in diaspora and ~~the~~ international institutions which empathized deeply with this incident. Various groups were formed outside the country to collect donations and send them to Iran. Despite dissociation of Iran and the U.S., an American military aircraft landed in Iran for the first time in 20 years to help the victims of earthquake<sup>197</sup>.

To distribute the donations to the victims of earthquake there was a need to communicate with the individuals who were directly impacted by the incident. Most of the voluntary forces were comprised of children's rights activists, environmental activists and others who were working with non-governmental organizations. Shaping a relationship between the international institutions and civil activists based in Bam stimulated new connections to emerge between activist women outside and inside Iran. In addition, cultural and philanthropic relations took place between the two sides. Consequently, this broke the communications taboo between activists inside and outside the country (Ghorashi & Boersma, 2009)<sup>198</sup>. Additionally, a common political past served as a connecting factor between the Iranian feminist activists inside and outside the country. Feminism has also worked as a conjunctural factor and a motivational force that emerged in the "Iranian Women's Studies Foundation" as a part of women's movement outside Iran.

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<sup>197</sup>Iran quake toll may hit 50,000 (2003-12-31 09:46) (Agencies)

[http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/31/content\\_294833.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/en/doc/2003-12/31/content_294833.htm)

<sup>198</sup> Ghorashi, Halleh & Boersma, Kees. (2009). "The 'Iranian Diaspora' and the New Media: From Political Action to Humanitarian Help." *Development and Change* 40(4): 667-691.

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## **2.17 The Iranian Women's Studies Foundation, a communication bridge**

Previously, numerous seminars and conferences in political, cultural and social fields have been held by Iranians in diaspora. However, the focus here is on the activities of women in diaspora who hold conferences specifically on women's issues. It should be taken into account that the Iranian women's movement in diaspora is more extensive than what can be illustrated in this text and deserves to be studied in a separate research, as Iranian activists are dispersed around the world and each has his or her own way to present Iranian women's issues according to context and possibilities, ranging from satellite channels and radio to conferences and campaigns. This text emphasizes a focus on the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation due to its features compared to other conferences which makes it distinct from the others.

In 1989, Golnaz Amin, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Shahla Haeri founded "the Women's Studies Foundation" with the objectives of the extension of Iranian women's communication networks, representation of their activities, and exchange of ideas about Iranian women's issue in annual conferences. The first conference of the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation was held in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1990. Since then, this foundation has not only involved a widespread network to elevate Iranian women's voices to the world, but also shaped communication among people interested in Iranian women's activities. Every year, hundreds of Iranian women from around the world participate in this three-day conference.

Each year the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation has concentrated on a topic about women's issues in Iran and has made it main theme of conference for instance Iranian woman after the revolution; woman and politics in contemporary Iran; the Iranian woman and human rights; the Iranian woman and modernity; Iranian women inside and outside the country: what should be done?; woman, religion, ideology; globalization and its effect on women; the social role of gender through the process of modernity in Iran; today's conditions and challenges of Iranian

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women: generational outlook; essential requirements of Iranian woman in current period; and finally, women's movement within the new global status of Iran: opportunities and challenges. The latter is the title of the twenty-seventh conference, held in 2016.

Nahid Nosrat, a prominent feminist activist in diaspora, correctly comments about the impact of the Foundation that,

"This Foundation has played a significant role in the emergence and continuation of dialogue between activist women outside and inside Iran. In the Foundation's third conference, the guest lecturer was invited from Iran for the first time. Subsequently each year a minimum of one lecturer from Iran participates in the conferences. The Foundation is delighted to be able to be a direct connection between women inside and outside the country. It features a broad scale of opinions and solutions about the situation of women in general and the pitiful situation of the Iranian woman. The efforts of Iranian women inside the country, the One Million Signatures Campaign, the No Stoning Law campaign, feminist websites and interior activists have always been supported by the Foundation and their activists have presented in the Foundation's conferences". (Nosrat, 2014)<sup>199</sup>

The Foundation's conferences have been held in different cities of the United States and Canada (such as Cambridge, Los Angeles, Berkeley, Denver, San Diego, Maryland), and Europe (such as Paris, Stockholm, London, Berlin, Cologne). The programs of these conferences consist of lectures, debates, cultural presentations, and unofficial meetings. Based on conference subjects, activists from Iran or non-Iranian feminists are invited to the conference to present a research or essay (Ghorashi & Moghaddam, 2016).

A very significant point is the fact about where this conference is held: every year it takes place in a different country. This extends communication and leads to a cumulatively more expansive range of activities. The approach towards the organization of the Foundation is interesting as well. Since 1989 the leadership, guidance, and implementation of the conferences have been the responsibility of Golnaz Amin, while local committees organize annual conferences, with the aim of a democratically centralized structure. Women's rights activist volunteers in the conference host country constitute the local organizing committee, from providing

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<sup>199</sup> Nosrat, Nahid. 2014, Achievements of Iranian Women's Studies Foundation <http://www.iran-women-solidarity.net/spip.php?article2912> review 15.02 2016

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a location for the conference to the assessment of the articles submitted for the event and the invitation of lecturers inside and outside the country.

Before global access to the Internet, the invitation of speakers from Iran was based on the knowledge and introduction of the individuals inside or outside the country and quite limited. Sometimes the participants of the conference from Iran would share their experience with the women's movement activists after returning to their country. On the other side, they would share the activities and works of the activists inside Iran with the Iranian activists in diaspora during the conference. However, with access to the Internet, participation has become much simpler. There is no need for introduction; anyone who has done research related to the theme of the conference can submit her or his application to the committee.

The advantage of the local committee structure is that not only is the potential of Iranian women's movement activists applied to organize a conference with approximately 500 participants in different countries, but it also leads to the gaining knowledge, skill and experience in the organization of an event. Moreover, despite the shortcomings, it is an effective way to prevent the centralization of power by an individual or specific group.

Through intellectual exchange, the creation of cooperation among women in different fields ranging from arts to politics, the foundation as feminist organization makes a significant contribution towards documenting Iranian women's efforts, drafting and acknowledging the women's movement, and encouraging research and recognition of the Iranian women's movement history.

The Foundation is not only a tribune for women's rights activists, but also members of the regime have found the opportunity to state their opinions from the same tribune. For instance, in the sixth conference of the Foundation, "Ayatollah" Mohsen Saeed-Zadeh gave a lecture called "adaption of 'Islamic feminism' to the Islamic religious questions." The significant point is that he had published articles about women within an Islamic framework with female pen names such as Mina Yadegar and Zeinab Sadat Kermani, in the women's magazine (in Persian Majaleh

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zanan) (See Avaye Zan 1995)<sup>200</sup>. However, women's rights activists in diaspora criticized his contribution, because his speech was aligned with the propagation of Islamic ideology and an Islamic approach towards women, while from the women's rights activists the Islamic regulations towards women are considered discriminatory. Nevertheless, the presence of figures like Mohsen Saeed-Zadeh in these conferences was positive, as the activists in diaspora could objectively learn what was going on inside the country. From the perception of the country, the theme of each conference is chosen based on the most prevalent and pressing women's issues.

It is important to note that the existence of the Foundation was not linear; on the contrary, it had to face challenges and surmount crises in implementing these conferences, endure critiques of its leadership, critiques of lecturers, and other issues. Sometimes the opposition to the speakers who came from Iran to participate would change from challenge to crisis. The conference would create controversy and the speaker would be verbally attacked. Such attacks were mostly based on political ideology, but sometimes it was due to the appearance of the speaker and her headscarf (Ghorashi & Moghaddam, 2016). Nonetheless, there were disagreements among researchers in the diaspora about the activities inside the country (Moghadam, 2002)<sup>201</sup>. Within the last years in many cases, the activities of the women's movement inside Iran were either looked upon or rejected by women's movement activists who participated in conferences of the Women's Studies Foundation. However, growing impact and flexibility can be witnessed from the viewpoint of women's movement activists outside the country towards the performance of women's movement inside Iran. This text provides insight into the Iranian women's movement in diaspora, in particular the cooperation of the Foundation with women's movement activists inside the country, illustrating how

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<sup>200</sup> Avaye Zan (Women's voice) Persian language Quarterly, Women's Bulletin, No 23, summer 1995.

<sup>201</sup> Moghadam, Valentine, M. 2002. "Islamic Feminism and Its Discontents: Toward a Resolution of the Debate." Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 27(4): 1135-1172.

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it has persisted in a visionary, determined, adaptive and resilient character, and forged a rather unique dynamic network structure on a world scale.

To conclude I quote Golnaz Amin of the Women's Studies Foundation, who in 1996 made the following valuable observation (Mahbaz, 2005)<sup>202</sup>:

I hope different groups of women, despite different attitudes, do not forget a fact and this fact is being a woman. Due to this fact, despite all the differences we should be able to cooperate with each other. I see this cooperation grow every day. If we look at the Foundation's publication, we will see that different studies presented by different groups and their authors allow their names to be published next to the names of the ones who may have a different attitude from them. I see this as positive progress for Iranian society.

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<sup>202</sup> Mahbaz, Efat. 2005. (Cheraghi dar dast cheraghi dar rah) "Iranian women, lamp in hand lamp in the way." Baran publication Sweden, p.193.

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## **Chapter 3 The impact of the women's movement on the Green movement, 2009 Elections**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses in particular on the influence the leadership structure of the women's movement on the Green Movement through non-violent struggle, collective leadership, inclusivity and demand-driven functions. Here I will be discussing the different campaigns established by women's rights activists, collective leadership, inclusivity, and the verbal expression within the context of the Green Movement. Furthermore, this chapter is about the narratives of Iranian women's rights defenders and social activists. Some of the women who were interviewed for this research participated in the Iranian revolution of 1979 within leftist organizations. In this part of the research, I will include the description and discussion of the demand-driven campaigns that were founded by women's rights activists.

The Iranian women's rights movement is known for being spontaneous, dynamic, decentralized and non-institutional. After the political repressions during the first post-Iranian revolution decade and the destruction of political parties and groups, women were the first ones to form an organized effort in a demand-driven approach. Activism around women's rights for the establishment of freedom and equality has been conducted through the formation of different activist groups advocating around human rights, feminism, children's rights, poverty alleviation through women's empowerment, and efforts to drive cultural change for peace and the environment. Gender equality has been the most pivotal motto of the Iranian women right's movement in the past three decades, meaning that men and women should have equal rights, duties, and opportunities, and that gender should not be a barrier for anyone to access resources, barriers that lead to limitation in opportunities and discrimination. Equal wage and inheritance rights, the right to work and choose one's occupation, equality in family law, including the right to divorce and child custody, are among the goals of Iranian activists.

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The Iranian women's movement, as one of the strongest social movements in Iran, emerged out of the internal contradictions of the dominant religious discourse and patriarchy that reached its peak of influence in the deepest and darkest era after the Iranian revolution 1979.

### 3.2 From Revolution to Devolution

As noted, Iran from 1905 to 1979 witnessed two revolutions, although for political reasons the latter got more attention in Western media. It is fair to say that the success of both revolutions is owed to women's participation in political parties and organizations. The avant-garde women actively participated wholeheartedly in both revolutions without fearing paying a price. Especially during the revolution of 1979, Iranian women were extremely active and fought for democracy and freedom, though devoid of highlighting their gender-particular demands. It would be a fair generalization to say, prior to the revolution, women active in politics, groups, and organizations often followed leftist ideologies and believed women's emancipation was interdependent on the establishment of a socialist system. Ghorashi<sup>203</sup> correctly points out that: [...] “the feminist movement appeared to me as a waste of time. I believed that women’s problems would be solved as soon as a classless society was established.” In confirming this view, Khadije Moghaddam<sup>204</sup>, a sixty years old accountancy bachelor degree holder says:

[...] “We were under the presupposition, that through our fights against imperialism, social justice would automatically be achieved and in the process, women would also obtain their rights.”

Despite widespread awareness of gender discriminatory Islamic law among the women political activists of the 1979 revolution, anti-imperialism ideologies (that were anti-America) and the intent of overthrowing the Shah overshadowed all

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<sup>203</sup> Ghorashi, Halleh.2003. From Marxist Organizations to Feminism Iranian Women’s Experiences of Revolution and Exile, JSRI • No.6 /Winter 2003 p. 89.

Ghorashi, Halleh.2002. Ways to Survive, Battles to Win: Iranian Women Exiles in the Netherlands and United States, Nova Science Publisher, Inc. New York pp 59-71.

<sup>204</sup> This interview has been conducted on 10th of August 2011 in Berlin, Germany Original language: Persian

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gender-specific objectives and demands. Politically active women subordinated women's rights aspirations to the wider goals of the organization or parties they were member of or adherent to. (Azari, 1983; Moghissi, 1993; Shahidian, 1994; Tohidi 1991, Afshar, 1993)<sup>205</sup>. For this reason, they failed to develop or formulate independent demands and so did not have a role in shaping guidance or leadership in the women's movement and politics. In turn, this prioritization and political partisanship prevented them from organizing themselves against misogynistic tendencies and policies.

Effat<sup>206</sup> 53 years old and a political activist (incarcerated 1984-1991); bachelor degree holder in English literature, laboratory sciences and gender studies), and an active blogger and member of the One Million Signatures Campaign describes her encounters with Iranian activist women coming from abroad. They had returned to Iran after the revolution with dreams of becoming involved in a new political system in Iran. Effat's impression was that their interests were in politics rather than in the women's movement. She states that these women could not seem to find a way to be effective immediately. She remembers:

Those women who had come from abroad had been entirely affected by the atmosphere of revolution and were dissolved in politics, but gradually could not find a role for themselves, they could not be involved. Their intent of conveying what they had seen abroad in a short space of time and or to organize other women for that same purpose fell short. I remember a debate with one of these women who was the head of the "confederation" and feeling they were not there with a feminist perspective. In the time frame that they had entered Iran, politics was such a sensitive/sharp issue that they inevitably became involved with these matters. During this time, a socio-political crackdown was taking place. They eventually took the backseat, packed their suitcases along with their lives and left

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<sup>205</sup> Moghissi, Haideh 1993 "Women in the Resistance Movement in Iran," Afshar, Halleh ed., Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation, London, p. 159.  
Shahidian, Hamed 1994, "The Iranian left and the 'Woman Question' in the Revolution of 1978-79," International Journal of Middle East Studies, Vol. 26, No. 2 (May, 1994), pp. 223-247.  
Tohidi, Nayereh, 1991, "Gender and Islamic Fundamentalism, Feminist Politics in Iran," In Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism, edited by Chandra. Mohanty et. Indiana University Press, pp. 251-267.  
Azari, Farah 1983 "The Post-Revolutionary Women's Movement in Iran," in F. Azari, ed., Women of Iran, London, pp. 190-225.

<sup>206</sup> The interview has been conducted on 27th September 2010, Geneva Swiss Original language: Persian.

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the country.

Eventually, in 1979 a faction of Khomeini's supporters succeeded in concentrating political power in the Shiite clergy, which put an end to the secular justice system, and set gender-oriented politics as one of their foremost priorities. Only 15 days after the revolutionary system was established, women were officially required to strictly observe the Islamic dress code when going to work. (See Najmabadi, 1998)<sup>207</sup> Also, three months later, the Family Protection Law, which had given the right of divorce to women in polygamist marriages and required the legal permission of the first wife for further marriages, was abolished. Furthermore, the new family law abolished mothers' rights to child custody (Kar, 1996; Kar, 2008; Mir-Hosseini, 1993)<sup>208</sup>.

From the earliest steps, Islamic politicians indicated that women's rights issues had no place on their agenda and rapidly abolished previous the achievements and progress in this arena.

Shirin Ebadi<sup>209</sup> recalls early years of the revolution as following:

"In my opinion, taking the discriminative issues that were passed law, the Islamic Republic is a misogynistic. They would leave no doubt on the matter. For instance, in summer 1980, at the time when the constitutional law was not yet passed, the political structure of the country was not yet clear, in a time when no parliament was built, nor was the first president elected, the committee of revolution passed a law and permitted each man to marry up to 4 women at once and also divested mothers of the right of child custody – which it was granted to them before - withdrawing the "Family Assistance" law... and passing many other discriminative laws. From this very day, I proclaim that this revolution was not Islamic, it was a revolution of men against women, but the same revolution of men against women grew its antithesis inside of itself."

Parvin<sup>210</sup>, Women's rights activist and journalist, who was twelve years old at the time of the revolution, reflects on the matter:

"We lost our rights, gradually veiling became compulsory and so on, but women's issues did not seem so serious. Meaning, you were more likely to hear these voices outside the country rather than inside. Because those outside, could comprehend what

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<sup>207</sup> Najmabadi, Afsaneh, 1998. Feminism in an Islamic republic: Years of hardship, years of growth, Islam, gender, and social change pp.60-61.

<sup>208</sup> Kar, Mehrangiz, Women and Personal Status Law in Iran, an Interview with Mehrangiz Kar, Middle East Report (MERIP) 198, 1996, 36–38.

<sup>209</sup> The interview has been conducted on 21 December, 2010 in Geneva, Original language: Persian

<sup>210</sup> This interview has been conducted on 10th of September 2012 in Malmö Original language: Persian

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was happening; just the way we now observe Egypt from a distance. Moreover, when we are in the flaw we do not apprehend. Because during the first decade we faced suppression. Suppression characteristically restricts the spaces. Within that constrained ideological atmosphere, to instigate working on women issues was even more difficult”

Ideology divided women political activists in Iran at the beginning of the revolution. However, they have been at the forefront of their country's democratic aspirations and social uprisings.

At the core of the Islamist revolution in Iran was a gendered subordination of women (Afary, 1999)<sup>211</sup>, resulting in a serious backlash for women's rights and gender equality, establishing rigid gender segregation and imposing restrictive rules of political and personal conduct. In response to such restrictive Islamic policies, the Iranian women's rights movement has been relentlessly working and expanding its demands for an end to gender discrimination in a country where, in the realm of family and penal law, women are treated as second-class citizens (See Bashi, 2009)<sup>212</sup>. Although effectively bound by the regime to the private sphere, at the same time, “modern” facilities and even lifestyles spread in the younger generations in the cities. Unlike the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Islamic regime did not restrict women's access to education but at the beginning of the revolution, created a separate women's sphere of schools, universities and professional training. In Iran, a less-affluent society, the Islamist regime was in need of a well-educated female labor force, which came into existence in the separate women's sphere during the last 30 years. (Gerami, 1994; Amirpur, 1999; Moghaddam, 1994; Kian, 1997; Najmabadi, 1994; Tohidi, 1994). Many authors state that the regime managed to find the support of parts of this class of well-educated women, who profit

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<sup>211</sup> See Afary. Janet: Sexual Politics in modern Iran, Cambridge, Mass. 2009; Ziba Mir-Hosseini: Islam and Gender: the religious debate in contemporary Iran, Princeton, N.J. 1999.

<sup>212</sup> Feminist waves in the Iranian Green Tsunami? Retrieved September 11, 2014

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/06/feminist-waves-in-the-iranian-green-tsunami.html>

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economically from the system, and therefore identify with fundamentalist ideology.<sup>213</sup>

Any woman outside this ideological sphere was forced out of workplaces, communities, and organizations. As a result of the shock of repression, women, along with the majority of the population, did not dare express their demands for a long time.

### **3.3 From reactive to demand-driven approach**

In order to rally around Islamic ideology, women were either excluded entirely or severely limited from decision-making in the political arena. In the two decades following the revolution, the women's rights movement was mainly reactive in its approach. An example is the movement's reaction against mandatory veiling in the early days after the revolution, which remained merely a reaction and did not coalesce into change. The movement was not able to initiate an action to prevent mandatory hijab. As a reaction to forced veiling and in the wake of the first International Women's Day after the revolution, on March 8th, 1979, women organized a number of public meetings and demonstrations, in order to express their dismay and protest. Although these protest actions were temporarily successful, the next round of protest was badly defeated by the Hezbollah, and organizing paused. Although they did not accept the veil easily nor readily, activists were unable to organize a movement which would prevent the approval of the law on veiling. Later on, women became more active in claiming their civic rights and opposed many of

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<sup>213</sup> See Gerami. Shahin: The Role, Place and Power of Middle Class Women in the Islamic Republic, in: Valentine M. Moghaddam (Ed): Identity Politics & Women. Cultural Reassertions and Feminism in International Perspective, Boulder, San Francisco, Oxford, 1994, 329-348. See also Schuckar, op.cit., 192f. Amirpur, Katajun (1999). Islamischer Feminismus in der islamischen Republik Iran, in: Orient 3,1999, 439-452

Kian, Azadeh (1995). Gendered Occupation and Women's status in Post-Revolutionary Iran, in: Middle Eastern Studies 31, 407-421

Kian, Azadeh (1997). Women and Politics in Post-Islamist Iran. The Gender-Conscious Drive to Change. In: British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies 24, 1997, 75-96; Afsaneh Najmabadi: Power, Morality and the New Muslim Womanhood, in: M. Weiner/Banuazizi, A.(eds): The Politics of Social Transformation in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan, Syracuse 1994, 356-389

Tohidi, Nayereh. (1994) Modernity, Islamisation and Women. In Iran: Valentine Moghadam (ed): Gender and National Identity. Women and Politics in Muslim Societies, London /New Jersey 1994, 110-147.

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the measures that were imposed on them. Over time, the women's movement in Iran became more adept at working within the political limits to initiate action for specific issues, based on women's demands and needs. Some of these actions had potential for larger mobilization, which I will point out later.

Although the first two decades' endeavors to strengthen women's rights were almost hidden, and did not succeed to sustain their voice, women activists continued their struggle through private meetings at homes and writing and publishing articles addressing issues specific to women. Mansoureh<sup>214</sup>, researcher and women's movement activist, talks about her introduction to the women's movement through domestic circles:

I was quite happy to have found such a group, although it was quite short but unfortunately, after the fractioning of women section of "Fadaian Organization" their office was occupied. Afterwards the group meetings were somehow coordinated in private homes for a while. As for external actions, I remember - and it was my first experience in the heart of female movement. [...] It was the Labour Day and we exhibited a photographic show of employment problems of Bolivian women. It was a good experience. However, later not much ... because of war and the difficult circumstances [associated with it], and that black, bloody and disgraceful decade of 60s (according to Iranian calendar, 1360-1369 [Western calendar 1981-1991] and because of the fractioning. [...]. Besides that, what attracted me to the women's movement was my own education and what I had learned from my mother about the importance of women's independence, the respect towards women, which was the norm in my family. After the war (Iran-Iraq, 1992) [...] later we were connected with the independent women abroad and became aware of the progressions related to women, specifically in the part of feminism and afterwards, in fact, the presence and the existence of the Iranian women there and the "Nimeyeh Digar Magazine" (The Other Half), the academicians who could come and go and inform us on the theories and discussions about women and also the forming of "Goruhe Azade Bnowan" (Free Women's Group). Before that group, we used to watch feminist films.

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<sup>214</sup> The interview has been conducted in Geneva in December 21, 2010. Original language Persian.

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Fortunately, during the third decade of the revolution, the Iranian women's movement adapted due to the new global communication technologies, including Bluetooth and mobile phones, and the chances to build networks in Iran, with supporters abroad, and to the substantial Iranian diaspora communities all over the world. Since the turn of the century, Iranian women were active in various movements such as participating in the One Million Signatures- Campaign, along with campaigns around anti-stoning, women entering the sports stadium, and anti-execution campaigns, along with other campaigns by NGOs empowering women and struggling for equality. Despite the controls and restriction of online content in Iran, the Internet and new technologies have become organizing instruments that are facilitating international support of women's rights groups, feminist movements and human rights activists. This juncture also prompted the birth of progressive voices of the women's movement that aimed to promote pluralism and democracy in the society as a whole. In these years, we were witnessing the active participation of powerful women in the public sphere fighting in order to achieve their rights and demands by forming different campaigns

The One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws Campaign (OMSC) is a prime example of the Iranian women's movement that had great potential for mobilization. Nasrin<sup>215</sup>, now a USA resident, emphasizes this point clearly:

I come from a social background that is expected to be aware of these issues. However, at the very most, I would read the Women's Magazine and never imagined it possible that a connection could be formed or it was plausible that I could go and meet these individuals. Later I read about the campaign on its website, the "*Alley to Alley*"; it left a deep impression on me. Then I met the Campaign's affiliates and took part in its first anniversary.

Kiana<sup>216</sup>, 29 years of age, an electrical engineering now living in America and working as a Web designer reflects on her take on OMSC:"

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<sup>215</sup>For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity some of the people interviewed, asked me to pseudonym name. On the contrary, some of those interviewed insisted their real name to be used.

The interview with Nasrin has been conducted on July 2010 in Paris Original language: Persian

<sup>216</sup> The interview has been conducted on July, 2012 in Amersfoort, Netherlands, Original language: Persian

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Through One Million Signatures Campaign I became familiar with the broader themes of women's issues. But with regard to the campaign, what was particularly beneficial to me was that the issue has gone beyond the campaign itself and in a way has appended a gender identity concern to me.

Soudeh<sup>217</sup>, 29-years-old and a student of management, left Iran at the age of 10. She talks about the mobilization campaign, confirming Nasrin and Kiana's views:

"Why am I a member of the one million campaign? I was a feminist before this campaign won the Simone de Beauvoir Prize in France. I was an activist who used to work with French activist friends. As this happened, we felt responsibility towards it and took it upon ourselves to become the Paris fraction, but how many Iranians did live in France who were trying to collect signatures? So, we shifted our focus on trying to form awareness in the French society and to explain what the Iranian Women Movement and the Project of one million signatures is about, who these people are and what they are trying to achieve,"

However, the participation of women within Iran and outside in the One Million Signature Campaign took place at many different levels from signing the statement of the campaign to the forbearance of imprisonment. The campaign was a turning point of women's movement in post-revolutionary Iran. I will get come back to the campaign and its goals and methods later.

Another example of demand-driven action is Mothers for Peace<sup>218</sup>, which was formed by a group of activists with the purpose of opposing war. Although it did not obtain the necessary mobilization power as a demand-driven action, the group was able to organize a number of women around peaceful opposition to the death penalty and war and to promote a culture of peace and solidarity.

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<sup>217</sup> Geneva September 26th, 2010 (Original Language: Persian)

<sup>218</sup> "Iranian Mothers for Peace" is a non-profit forum, well known and respected in Iran's civil society. A number of social activists indicted this forum in October 2007(13th of Aban1386 Iranian calendar).

"Mothers for Peace" is not a political party and organizationally it has a flexible structure. "Mothers for Peace" takes pride that its 700 participants come from very diverse political backgrounds and different social classes. See also: <http://www.irandokht.com/news/readnews.php?newsID=35856>

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A third example is the Women's Charter, with the objective to set an Iranian women's rights charter based on international human rights documents as well as demands such as removing compulsory hijab from the Civil Code. The drafters of the Women's Charter considered that process is more valuable than results.

The fourth example is the "Women's Coalition Against Family Protection Bill".<sup>219</sup> In spite of its organizing capacity, this initiative was unable to mobilize large numbers in the community. Yet the Coalition Against Family Protection was successful in seriously challenging the bill, which was presented to parliament by the Ahmadinejad government. They criticized the undisputed Family Protection Bill referring to it as "the multiple wives bill" or "anti-family bill".<sup>220</sup>

As a result of these protests, the parliament agreed to eliminate Articles 23 and 25 demonstrating the effect of this collective action.<sup>221</sup>

The women's movement became fragmented as a result of disagreements and differences on methods and objectives, as well as changing trends and tastes. Each of these groups, according to their respective power and force, represented a different kind of movement. Some were active for a limited period of time, others had long-term goals. An example is the "anti-family bill" which was a short-term action. The purpose of these kinds of campaigns was to organize seminars and conferences at the cross-sectional occasions for collecting signatures to remove the

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<sup>219</sup> The Iranian government calls it the Family Protection Bill, but activists call it the "Anti-Family Protection Bill."

<sup>220</sup> Articles 23, 22, 25 and 46 were of the most contested articles of the bill. Article 23, one of the most criticized articles in the bill, would make polygamy easier for Iranian men. Currently, an Iranian man needs to obtain the permission of his first wife in order to marry a second. These safeguards would be effectively removed for women in the proposed legislation. Article 25 would have taxed women's "*mehr*", a monetary sum given by the groom to the bride, which is often considered a protection for women against arbitrary divorce by their husbands. Article 22 of the Bill states: "Registration of temporary marriage shall be subject to Rules of Procedure to be approved by the minister of justice." The Bill removes any requirement for registering temporary marriages with the Registrar's Office. Finally article 46 states: "Any foreign national who marries an Iranian woman without obtaining the permit mentioned under Article 1060 of the Civil Code, shall be sentenced from ninety-one days to one year's imprisonment. In that case, the woman, if she has got married of her free will, and the girl's father, if the marriage has taken place with his permission, will be sentenced as accomplices of the offence." This means that foreign nationals who marry Iranian women without first obtaining permits will face prison sentences ranging from ninety-one days to one year. Even a woman who marries of her own free will, and all the parties involved, could face harsh sentences. Although marriage is a desirable institution, current family law shows no respect for the rights of those marrying foreign nationals, which means a lack of equality in citizenship. The impact of this bill on Iranian women living abroad is significant. Based on existing family law, Iranian women married to foreign men will not be able to obtain citizenship for their children, even if these children are born and raised in Iran.

<sup>221</sup> <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=17625> Remove tow article from the Family Support bill. Read more about it: <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=17625> © www.tabnak.ir.

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family bill from the parliament agenda and support of political prisoners. Despite the diversity of methods and objectives, what these campaigns and groups had in common were their focus on non-violence and civil disobedience to achieve legal equality and eliminate discrimination against women.

It should be noted that the diagnosis of “pressing and urgent problems” differed between each group of women's rights activists. However, after individuals and different groups of women were able to come to consensus, joint action was agreed upon. For example, before the presidential election of 2009, with the accumulated experience of previous elections, women's rights activists decided to take action and bring women's demands into the electoral space. This case entitled “Coalition of Women for their Demands” will be further elaborated later in this paper.

The choice of method for opposition, strategy and tactics, reactions and actions by women's rights activists in Iran has been historically dependent on the political and social environment in the country. To understand the reasons behind the various methods chosen by the activists, to grasp the strategies and tactics taken by women over the past decades, as well as the influence of women's rights activism on social movements, including the 2009 Green movement, it is necessary to situate the women's rights movement within the political context and in relation to civil society in Iran. This requires understanding the social and political atmosphere and structure of Iran in different historical periods, particularly in the last nearly four decades of turbulent history post-revolution.

### **3.4 Dynamic interaction: the women's movement and civil society in Iran**

The majority of women \ inside Iran who participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 had ties to the government or were active in organizations under the control of the government. However, a few women who were independent also had a chance to participate. There were a number of notable achievements in Iran as a result of this conference for women, be that by people from the government in the role of civil society, or NGOs in general. Additionally, the event changed the attitude of some individuals close to the state towards secular

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women, women's rights, and women's issues. The impact was so great that some of the most religious participants either changed their views about women's rights or rethought their Islamic ideology<sup>222</sup>. Upon their return to Iran, a number of participants focused on a Programmed of Action of the Beijing Conference<sup>223</sup>. Some formed NGOs and other organizations<sup>224</sup>

Khadijah describes the impact of the Beijing Conference on women's awareness:

"In my opinion, the Beijing conference had a profound impact on women's awareness all over the world. Since then, there have been some other noteworthy conferences of course. For me, for instance, with environmental concerns, there was the Stockholm conference in which countries committed themselves to strengthen environmental NGOs. Well in our case, "strengthening" was not really relevant, since we did not have them to begin with. We had neither women nor environmental NGOs. It was since then that groups with environmental concerns, such as our own, Women against Environmental Pollution were organized and began operating. Although we began operating in 1993, it was only in 1995 that we finally got the permit to register from the Ministry of Interior. Of course, there would be those who may not categorize this in the realm of feminist pursuits" [...] "I remember in the Rafsanjani era<sup>225</sup>, they were supposed to submit a list of NGOs to the conference and there was none; meaning all that existed were governmental organizations. They ended up having to include Tehran's Barbers Union, or for instance, the Tailors Union in the list as it was too embarrassing not to have any NGOs related to women at all. In any case, there they committed themselves to establishing such NGOs; which was continued during Khatami's administration.

International events in the field of women's issues such as the Beijing Conference not only had a catalytic role in the establishment of non-governmental organizations but also stimulated development of non-governmental organizations in Iran and increased civil activist engagement. After the Beijing Conference, women quickly turned to the establishment of civil institutions.

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<sup>222</sup> Among these are two women's rights activists (Fariba Davoudi Mohajer and Mahboubeh Aabbasgholizadeh)

<sup>223</sup>See UN Women, Fourth World Conference on Women .  
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/>

<sup>224</sup> Women and Poverty, Education and Training of Women, Women and Health, Violence against Women, Women and Armed Conflict, Women and the Economy, Women in Power and Decision-making, Institutional Mechanism for the Advancement of Women, Human Rights of Women, Women and the Media, Women and the Environment, The Girl-child

<sup>225</sup> Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the fourth Iranian president, post Revolution (1989-1997)

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These efforts gained momentum with the presidency of Mohammad Khatami in 1997.<sup>226</sup> What followed was a relative opening of space for civil society during the election, which was intelligently used by women's rights activists, who formed a coalition of civil rights activists, the so-called "Hamandishi faalaane hoghoqe zanan" ("Women's Consultation Forum.) This was the first coalition of its kind in Iran, composed of female activists on issues such as children's rights, the environment, health, women's empowerment, and religious and non-religious issues. Although these women were active on diverse issues, they had a common goal in defense of women's rights. They came together despite different ideologies and political opinions, with the main purpose of challenging and eliminating all discrimination and inequality against women.

Ultimately, the group determined that the discrimination laws were the main cause and source of inequality and violence against women. They decided to take action with a focus on the discriminatory laws against women. The first time that "Hamandishi "held a major street protest was in June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005 in front of Tehran University. The aim of this protest was to make the voice of women heard, by not only authorities and people inside Iran, but also those outside of Iran. Approximately 6,000 people participated in this peaceful protest. The number of participants exceeded the expectations of the organizers. It was an unprecedented demonstration.

After nearly three decades of relative silence, this action brought attention to the women`s movement and was recognized inside and outside the country. The protest in 2005 had several characteristics. First, it was the largest and most widespread protest by women after the demonstrations against forced veiling and gender segregation in March 1979. Second, it avoided violent action. Third, it marked the beginning of the presentation of women`s rights activists in the public sphere to highlight their protest against discrimination. Fourth, women's rights

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<sup>226</sup> Mohammad Khatami, fifth Iranian president, post Revolution (1997.2005) promised increased economic opportunities for Iran's youth, social justice, individual freedoms, political tolerance, greater rights for women and the rule of law.

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activists from provinces near and far attended this street protest, joining their voices to those of women's rights activists in the center (Tehran, the capital city). Finally, the protest was demand-driven and raised two specific demands: 1) ratification of CEDAW, the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women”; 2) revision of four articles (19, 20, 21, and 115) in the constitution that enshrine gender-based discrimination. In the latter case, it was the first time that women had shown courage to cross the line into questioning the constitution, which had been considered by the Islamic community as “sacred.” Due to the significance of the unity and alliance displayed by these women from different groups with different ideologies and backgrounds who organized the June 2005 gathering, that day was named by the “Coalition” or “Hamandishi” as “Women's Solidarity Day” (In Persian “Rouze hambastegi zanan”).

A year later, to mark the anniversary of the first demonstration and to follow-up on the demands of that protest, a meeting was held in one of the most crowded places in the heart of Tehran: Hafte-Tir Square. Ahead of the gathering, two opposing views were put forth. One view was that because of the number of members of this coalition or “Hamandishi”, Ahmadinejad and his supporters would certainly suppress women's rights activists, which would cost the women's movement dearly. Nevertheless, most of the members held the second view, which was that the demonstration should be held, even at the cost of arrest and detention. It was argued that in the case of no arrests, the activists would once again be able to appear in the public sphere and put forward their demands. If arrested, their voices would reach the media as well as other women's rights activists inside and outside of the country. After the announcement of the gathering<sup>227</sup> men and women of different groups were supportive of this decision. This rally was also supported by national and international women`s organizations.

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<sup>227</sup> In the statement, which release by the Steering Committee of this event it has been stated: "On June 12 we will gather from 5 to 6 pm in" Hafte Tir square" to announce that we, the women of Iran, are fed up with the contempt disrespect embedded in the law and the immoral shadow that these discriminatory laws have created over our lives, and they must be changed.

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The 2006 protest was initiated by a coalition of women's rights activists. Approximately 2000 people inside Iran and hundreds of individuals and human rights organizations outside Iran, including Amnesty International and women Nobel Prize winners such as: Shirin Ebadi (Iran), Jody Williams (US), Betty Williams (Ireland), Wangari Maathai (Kenya), Rigoberta Menchú (Guatemala) and Elfriede Jelinek (for Literature) signed a petition on behalf of this peaceful protest. On the day before the demonstration, activists distributed a booklet entitled "The Effects of Laws on the Lives of Women" in public spaces across Tehran in order to raise awareness in the community about the demands of the women's rights activists'. But as had been predicted, the peaceful gathering was violated disrupted by security forces.

According to official reports (Ministry of Justice), 70 people (42 women and 28 men) were arrested. Women's rights activists, journalists, students, political activists, labor activists, writers and even homemakers who did not have any background in civic activism were among the detainees. In spite of their severe repressive actions, security forces did not succeed in making women's rights activists passive. Media outlets reported on the Iranian women's movement and it gained recognition inside and outside of the country. This meant that the demands of activists were introduced to the public. Soudeh mentioned the effect of this gathering.

[...] getting to know the Women Movement specifically, it was through the happenings of Hafte Tir square but I was not in Iran by the time, thus, I got to know about it through the coinciding films and photo exhibitions of Mr. Arash Ashoorinia at his own website, it is called" KOSSUF" (eclipse of the moon) about Iran, which was a really effective.

Ali, a 25 year-old who studied mechanical engineering in Tehran's Sharif University, told me the same words:

[...]" if the photographs that Mr. Ashoori<sup>228</sup> took on Khordad 22nd [13]85 (June 12th, 2006) were not published on Kossoof [website], the Khordad 22nd,

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<sup>228</sup> Arash Ashoorinia a photographer and he published pictures from women's demonstration in his Blog called Kossof.

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could never have become what it has. Now in every medium, when there is a reference to the Khordad 22nd, Delaram Ali's image is there, Mousavi khoeiniha's image is there, images of those batons."

However, this demonstration also provided a context for another movement, the "One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality", which had the aim of transforming women's demands for public discourse in society. Women's rights activists, with all their differences and diversity of thought and approach, joined hands. Even though they sometimes criticized and judged one other or even stood in opposition, these women activists acted together, created a different discourse within civil society, and put a new plan in action. They also had been able to inspire a mass movement: The One Million Signatures Campaign to change discriminatory laws. After that, the women's movement as a typical demand-driven action, conveyed the information to the public by making campaigns.

### **3.5 “One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality”**

Following the June 12, 2006 gathering on Hafte-Tir Square in Tehran which was met with severe repression, a group of activists gathered to formulate demands based on the issues raised by women during the two demonstrations. As the result, the first campaign of the women's movement was created, "One Million Signatures", to collect signatures to support equal rights for women and change discriminatory laws. This campaign took a pragmatic approach and was the result of dialogues and consultations with women's rights defenders. It had its roots in the historical experience of a century of struggle for equal rights in Iran, as well as the experiences of women's rights activists in other countries, such as Morocco where a petition campaign was used to change unfair family law.

Despite many obstacles, on August 27, 2006, the campaign became public. Police blocked the seminar attendees from entering the Raad Institute, where the campaign was to be announced. Over 300 attendees, including women's rights advocates, writers, student activists, and journalists continued the meeting in the street. Nobel Laureate Shirin Ebadi spoke to the crowd while activists distributed brochures and collected the first signatures to support the campaign. "The birth of

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the campaign initiated an expanding movement, on the national and international levels, for Iranian women's rights defenders could discuss women's issues and demands more widely in public spaces “<sup>229</sup> (translated from Persian by the author).

The campaign was based on two main pillars. The first pillar was to improve women's legal status and to address gender discrimination in Iran's legal system through education and raising general awareness. The second was to collect signatures and put pressure on legislators to change misogynist laws. The campaign focused on the most tangible of these problems: discriminatory laws. Many such laws are enshrined in the civil code, family law, the penal code, and even the constitution. The goal of the Campaign for One Million Signatures was to promote awareness, raise consciousness, and facilitate communication among women and men from all backgrounds. The campaign also aimed to change cultural attitudes, especially patriarchal beliefs deeply embedded in society, through education. Below I elaborate on the three main documents that formed the basis of the campaign.

It should be noted that one of the most important and effective characteristics of the One Million Signatures Campaign was to publicize women's demands and grow their influence in the society. As discriminatory laws were enforced upon all women, the campaign succeeded in involving all different classes of women into this social movement, from educated to illiterate villagers, to the extent that illiterate supporters signed the statement issued by the campaign by putting their fingerprints as a signature. This is to say collecting signatures promoted cooperation between different sectors of society that could lead to changes in discriminatory laws.

### **3.6 Original campaign documents**

The One Million Signatures Campaign consisted of the following documents:

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<sup>229</sup> <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article716> Retrieved September 11, 2014

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1) “Campaign Statements”; 2)” General Outline of a Million Signatures to Change Discriminatory Laws”; and 3) The “Campaign Pamphlet Regarding the Impact of Discriminatory Laws on Women’s Lives.”

The One Million Signatures Campaign was designed to change discriminatory laws by face-to-face interaction. Any Iranian who wanted to change the discriminatory laws against women could sign the campaign’s declaration if he or she desired and could use his or her real name. Discriminatory laws, such as inheritance and blood money, were mentioned in the Campaign statements. They also demanded that the weight and value of a woman’s testimony in a court of law be made equal to that of a man, the banning of stoning and criminalization of honor killings, and changes to the legal age of marriage, rights to divorce, child custody, and the right of transmission of citizenship of the mother to her children. At present, under Iranian law, a child’s citizenship can be derived only from the father. If a woman marries a non-Iranian man, her child is not considered Iranian, and therefore cannot legally live or go to school in Iran. Other problematic laws included that women do not have the right to leave the country without their husbands’ permission, and that the age criminal responsibility for girls and boys differs.

### **3.7 Goals of One Million Signatures Campaign**

The second document was the one in which the objectives, methods and goals of the campaign were briefly described. Although collecting signatures was one of the most crucial goals of the campaign, the campaign had other goals as well. These other goals can be described as fundamental, institutionalized and peaceful changes in beliefs of equality between men and women across cultural lines, through face-to-face meetings, education, and dialogue.

### **3.8 Implementation and methods of the campaign**

(1) Door-to-door visitation of campaigners (in Persian khane be khane) for collecting signatures, as well speaking with women individually or in groups.

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(2) One of the main objectives was to reach ordinary people on the streets or wherever they could be found, as a result of which campaigners would be connected with the general public to collect signatures in public spaces such as shopping centers. They also held debates and discussions groups. In fact, public spaces such as public transport, parks, universities, production workshops, beauty salons, health and sport centers, religious events, and any other public place where women might be present were targeted. Through this channel of communication, the movement addressed women's needs and amplified their voices. "This training approach resonates well with the student movement, to spread and disseminate the message of equality within the whole educational university system"<sup>230</sup> (Davoodi Mohager, 2010 translated from Persian by the author).

(3) Campaigners also engaged in discussions and collected signatures at seminars, meetings, and discussion forums in cultural centers.

(4) An online campaign was also used to share the campaign pamphlet on the impact of discriminatory laws in women's lives, as well as to collect signatures and engage with commenters.

(5) Women were offered the opportunity to write about their experiences of signature collection during face-to-face interactions. In this way, the experiences of activists could be shared with other volunteers and with the public through publication on the website Change for Equality (<http://we-change.org/>).

The pamphlet "The impact of discriminatory laws on women's lives" described in plain language the laws women's rights defenders were trying to modify. As the volunteers collected signatures and engaged in discussion, the pamphlets were distributed.<sup>231</sup>

### **3.9 Leadership Model**

Choosing a horizontal structure for the campaign and avoiding traditional and hierarchical models was not easy. The challenge to find alternative forms of

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<sup>230</sup> <http://www.mahnazafkhami.net/2011/tavaana-interview-campaign-change-for-equality-in-iran-in-persian/>  
Retrieved September 11, 2014 Fariba Davoodi Mohajer. "Interview with Tavaana." 2010.

<sup>231</sup> <http://www.irianfeministschool.info/campaign/spip.php?article28>

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connection among three generations of women's rights activists, young and old, with different ideas, experiences and knowledge, produced tension. Experimenting with a new horizontal structure to advance the goals of the campaign was quite a challenge, particularly in the context of a country like Iran with a dominant hierarchical culture in both the formal organizational and informal family statutes. Understandably, it was not easy for some members of the campaign to adapt this horizontal management style in practice, regardless of age or level of education. Several important characteristics differentiated the leadership model of the campaign from other contemporary and historical social movements. Firstly, the horizontal management structure led to a kind of deconstruction of relationships within the group. Each member of the campaign could take the lead, but becoming a leader and dominating a group needed to be avoided and controlled. For example, new members could take their own initiative to communicate with society and to engage in education. No one could force them to use a specific methodology or obey another member.

The campaign got its strength from its ability to engage with the public and the development of its participants' personal leadership skills, leading to the ability to foster the growth of new and diverse leaders who could take responsibility without dominating others. The members used discussion and consensus to develop a shared vision and action plan. Some activists believed that the leadership of the women's movement was theirs. However, major decisions were made by voting and by the collective advice of the initial core team. Therefore, the recorded date of membership in the campaign or the status of being among the founders was not considered as a kind of authority or supremacy. In most traditional leadership models, the leader takes an authoritarian approach. First, the leader puts forward her or his ideas and others are invited to ask questions. Second, the leader imposes a decision, and third, the leader announces it. Even in traditional democratic models the procedure is fairly hierarchical. In those models, the leader first allows subordinates to move within the set framework, the leader describes limitations and then she or he asks the group to make a decision.

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Another aspect of the campaign was its ability to transcend boundaries inside and outside the country. In this regard, the Internet and new media played an important role. The speedy exchange of information and ideas via email was a powerful tool for connecting activists inside and outside the country. The core of the campaign was inside Iran, with important support from Iranians abroad. Volunteers and members of the campaign could organize their activities according to their individual abilities, avoiding a task-oriented approach and, as mentioned before, in the absence of individual leadership model.

Core groups and branches in cities within Iran or abroad formed according to the features and characteristics of their local culture. The method of collecting signatures, conducting face-to-face training and mobilization varied. The only requirement was that the basic principles needed to be respected. Because of this model, which allowed for autonomy at all levels, the campaign had no centralized control. This made it more adaptive and creative. For example, in Khuzestan and in the north of Iran, volunteers went into the rural areas and talked to female farmers about their inheritance rights. Under Islamic law, women don't have inheritance rights to the land owned by their husbands. Understandably, this was a convincing argument for signing the petition.

The fluid and horizontal character of the campaign in the Iranian women's movement has led to dramatic changes, making it one of the most powerful women's movements in the Middle East region. "The motivating force and energy behind the women's movement comes from the tangible demands of women, the vast majority of whom are young women who joined the campaign with a new identity and who tried to eliminate discrimination. These efforts tried in various ways to apply pressure on restrictions, and still continues" (Khadijeh Moghaddam, 2012, translated from Persian by the author).<sup>232</sup>

The campaign spread quickly across borders, giving space to new member activists. It became an important subject for sociologists, political activists, and

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<sup>232</sup> [http://asre-nou.net/php/view\\_print\\_version.php?objnr=21488](http://asre-nou.net/php/view_print_version.php?objnr=21488) Retrieved April 2, 2015

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academics inside and outside the country in civil and political matters. “The fledgling ‘One Million Signatures Campaign’ to ensure the equal rights of men and women, is a very creative initiative “method” that could serve as a pattern and example for other social, civil, union, and student movement inside as well as outside of Iran.” (Kazem Alamdari, 2010 “The One Million Signatures” model for civil society in Iran, translated from Persian by the author<sup>233</sup>) Alamdari adds, “This initiative, which used non-violent methods to address civil, legal, and public issues could create a deep and wide impact on society and could be a good example for many social movements in other countries. With this kind of civic low-cost way, anyone associated with the training it can cause long-term social and even national cohesion.” (Kazem Alamdari, 2010) “One Million Signatures Campaign is spirit of boldness and courage to blooming the discourse against discrimination.” (Elahe Amani, 2010 translated from Persian by the author)<sup>234</sup> Amani adds:

“Maybe it was for the first time that a coalition of independent individuals; relying on the use of public spaces, using non-violence, with the objective and to change discriminatory laws, challenged the state “(Elahe Amani, 2010). Babak Ahmadi states:

“With confidence we can say that the social awareness and behavior in non-violent struggle, as well as emphasis on civil and egalitarian was unprecedented in the history of modern Iranian women (of the constitutional era so far) and of the Iranian democratic struggle.” (Ahmadi, 2008)<sup>235</sup>

Bahar<sup>236</sup> is 32 years old and has a master’s degree in international laws. In the case of respect to the campaign’s influence on the masses, says:

This campaign was really influential in terms of information distribution. When they visited women in beauty salons or swimming pools or other places where activists went to inform them (general public), it wasn’t that they became familiar with Women’s Movement so that they became activists themselves. No. That is not what I am implying. Because many

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<sup>233</sup> <http://www.feministschool.com/campaign/spip.php?article210>, Retrieved September 1, 2014

<sup>234</sup> <https://jahanezan.wordpress.com/2010/09/19/thmin-159/> Retrieved April 2, 2015

<sup>235</sup> <http://www.feministschool.net/spip.php?article733>, Retrieved October 6, 2014

<sup>236</sup> For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity some of the people interviewed, asked me for used pseudonym name. The interview with Bahar has been conducted on 26th of June 2012 in Amersfoort, Netherlands, Original language: Persian

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said, they would never participate. I said, they are not supposed to participate. Even if they do not sign ...it is not important whether they sign or not. What is important is that when she reads it, she says, oh, so that is how it is. Just as she understands it, she goes and tells someone else about it. In women's social gathering, instead of talking about the price gowns and jewelry etc. She would say, oh by the way, I have read somewhere that the law is such and such and she would explain all these verbally and face to face to her son and her husband.

It is a notable point, that the Campaign's decentralized approach supported grassroots initiative and embraced diversity and social networking. Facebook reinforces this function process by providing a highly-interactive platform for many alternative voices and opinions that were seeking to frame their own diagnosis, prognosis and motivation for collective action.

### **3.10 Results and achievements of the campaign**

Because of the aforementioned characteristics, in less than six months, the campaign managed to attract hundreds of young volunteers to collect signatures. In addition, it was able to re-engage many political activists that had left the county in the 1980s as the result of political repression. It even attracted some within the regime to support the egalitarian demands of the Iranian women's movement, while raising awareness among some of the forces of the regime about needed changes concerning discriminatory laws against women.

Mina<sup>237</sup> thirty years old, living in Kurdistan, with a master's degree in international law, emphasizes this point clearly.

"The discussion of women's issues was the daily discussion and, in the end, it was intuitive and went on until they have reached a place, it became the One Million Signatures Campaign. All of the efforts were there, all the NGOs were there, all society was there in the form of a tangible assembly. I can say that it was very good and had a positive outcome on everyone's life, in Universities and in family life. This awareness was transmitted and channeled. With attentiveness you could work with your own preferred field there, therefore we would also see the force of women working for women's rights in Tehran in different ways."

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<sup>237</sup>The interview has been conducted on twenty-sixth of June 2011, in Netherlands Amersfoort. For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity some of the people interviewed, asked me for used pseudonym name. Original language: Persian

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In spite of oppositional voices against the women's movement, the campaign succeeded in pressurizing the parliament to amend the inheritance law in 2008. In the same year, women were also granted the right to equal blood money in accidents covered by insurance (earlier they were only entitled to half of what men received). Activist Mansoureh Shojaei believes that the One Million Signatures Campaign had impact on the masses: "Today, the demands and concerns for change and equality between women and men in society is shared with the lower stratum of society in inner cities and rural areas." (Shojaei, 2012)<sup>238</sup>

### **3.11 Election 2009**

#### **The process of formation of Iran's pro-democracy movement (election 2009): Green Movement**

After the Iranian revolution of 1979, the monarchy was overthrown in favor of an Islamic Republic that used elections as a tool to provide a semblance of legitimacy for the regime and to shift the power between the religious and political factions within the government. Laws are made by an elected legislature. The president is also elected, but elections in Iran are never considered free and fair by Western standards. For example, only two choices were offered on the 1 April 1979 referendum that brought the theocracy to power: yes, or no to ending the Shah's regime and becoming an Islamic Republic. Because Iran's government is a theocracy, significant numbers of candidates are eliminated from consideration through a vetting process run by the Guardian Council. The Supreme Leader exerts ideological and political control over a system dominated by clerics who shadow every major function of the state. The power of elected officials can be curbed, and decisions can be vetoed by the unelected Supreme Leader.

Although investigating the causes of the revolution and political regime change in Iran is not the subject of this chapter, it is worthwhile to note that one of the basic demands leading up to the 1979 revolution was the right to freedom of opinion and

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<sup>238</sup> Take the Campaign for Equality, An interview with Monsoureh Shojaee 2012, Retrieved October 6, 2014 Retrieved from <http://cheraghezadi.org/index.php/archives/4306>,

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expression and having freedom of association, including political parties, unions, trade unions, and cultural institutions. Following the revolution, however, these demands were marginalized and gradually suppressed ending with the severe repression of intellectuals, political activists, writers, and artists, and destroying opposition parties. Political repression became stronger and stronger even for government insiders. Even a number of religious forces and allies close to Iran's first supreme leader became excluded from political area. Exclusion of political figures close to Khomeini began at the start of the revolution. For example, the first post-Shah era Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, resigned from office in November 1979. The first president, Abol Hassan Bani-Sadr, although initially approved by Khomeini, was driven from office. Bani-Sadr fled Iran after being impeached in 1981. In 1980, Khomeini declared a "Cultural Revolution" to re-Islamize Iranian society, and universities were closed for three years, hundreds of teachers were fired, and thousands of students became dissidents, from leftist to liberal.

Members and supporters of political parties and groups were arrested one after another and imprisoned. Many political activists were executed, as well as their supporters. When a magazine was critical of the government, it was forced to close down. The secular newspaper Ayandegan closed for publishing criticism about the regime (Moghissi, 2009)<sup>239</sup>. Repression of political parties continued unabated. In the summer of 1988, with orders from Khomeini's government, thousands of political prisoners were executed (Arjomand, 2009)<sup>240</sup>. This period marked the peak of repression.

After the Iran-Iraq war, gradually the intellectual gap that previously existed between some inside the government became more exterior. The government's actions caused dissatisfaction of the public, as well as among politicians within the government who had serious differences over how to run the country. There was a

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<sup>239</sup> Moghissi, Hayedeh. (2009). Women and the 1979 Revolution: Refusing Religion-Defined Womanhood. Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Volume 29, Number 1, 2009.

<sup>240</sup> Arjomand, Said Amir. 2009. After Khomeini, Iran under his successors. Oxford University Press, pp. 18-30.

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big gap between large parts of society, mostly between the beliefs and attitudes of the young and Islamic beliefs and attitudes. This led to the emergence of reformers.

In collaboration with the reformists, Mohammad Khatami was elected as president with the official slogan of “political reform” in 1997. The Government Reform (or Khatami’ faction) won the majority of seats in the sixth parliamentary. The two-term presidency of Mohammad Khatami from 1997 to 2005 is now remembered as the Reform era. Reformists sought freedom of the press and the formation of civil society organizations, such as councils and creating an atmosphere of political engagement in Iran. It could be said that reform was a reaction to absolute power and hope to change one of the reasons for participation in elections of 1997 as well as 2009. Bahar thirty-two years old, and a lawyer with a master’s degree in international law, talks about this:

I remember, up until a few days before the election no one was going to vote. But in last two or three days, whoever one crossed path with, said I am going to vote for Khatami. It did not matter what their point of view was. They just said we must vote for Khatami because he is such and such. Moreover, people were extraordinarily hopeful. I was seeing my grandfather, for example, who had never voted before or my grandmother who also would never vote, they asked where they could vote. Actually, my grandfather had voted in secret so that we would not throw it in his face that, you see, you eventually voted too. It was only later that we realized he had gone and voted for Khatami. Everybody felt something huge was going to happen, an enormous sense of hopefulness.

With the victory of the reformists in 1997, the public isolated the fundamentalist faction. However, reformers were successfully prevented from making structural changes in the government, which was disappointing to their supporters. By the close of Khatami’s second term in office, hardliners had equipped themselves to “win” the ninth presidential election term. They succeeded at mobilizing disappointment with reform in favor of Ahmadinejad. The result was that hardliners were able to monopolize power once more.

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### **3.11.1 Ahmadinejad's performance against competitors on the eve of election**

Ahmadinejad as president had access to resources that could be used for self-promotion, such as money, blank cheque, and even gold coins from the state budget among that could be distributed to people.<sup>241</sup> Gold coins were distributed to staff of Milad hospitals, for instance. This action was met with protests from staff and other public and private hospitals<sup>242</sup>. He also had the means to make use of state communication channels while limiting his competitors' access to the same. In addition, fundamentalists within the government and a number of members of parliament, who also had access to public forums, were in support of Ahmadinejad. In 2009, the space for competition in the elections was reduced to crushing rivals rather than putting forward policy, especially when it came to the appearances of Ahmadinejad in the televised debates.<sup>243</sup>

### **3.11.2 The use of cyberspace by reformers**

Mir-Hossein Mousavi Khameneh, an Iranian reformist politician who served as Prime Minister of Iran from 1981 to 1989, was a reformist candidate in the 2009 presidential elections and eventually the leader of the opposition in the post-election unrest. He had wide support from young and educated urban classes and among reform-seekers within the government. Because of the lack of access to physical and media public spaces, Mousavi's supporters became active in cyberspace, especially on Facebook. The 2009 presidential elections in Iran marked the first time that virtual space was used widely by candidates. More than 36,000 people, many of them under thirty years old, became fans of Mir Husseini Mousavi's Facebook page<sup>244</sup>. Mousavi's supporters have also created a Twitter page and a

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<sup>241</sup> Expropriation "Dowome khordad "by "Sewome Tir ", "Etemad newspaper. (Persian date 31th of Ordibehesht 1388), No, 1957 (Western Calendar 21 May 2009

<sup>242</sup> Distribution of electoral coins created trouble in Milad Hospital. " Republican Newspaper (In persian Jomhoriyat), Persian date 5<sup>th</sup> of Khordad 1388

<sup>243</sup> <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/R40653.pdf>/ Casey L. Addis, Analyst in Middle Eastern Affairs, July 6, 2009, Iran's 2009 Presidential Elections, p3Retrieved September 6, 2014

<sup>244</sup> <http://www.wired.com/2009/06/irans-wired-generation-challenges-ahmadinejad/> Iran's Wired Generation Challenges Ahmadinejad•Retrieved September 12, 2014

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YouTube channel. He chose green as his campaign color<sup>245</sup>. Asr-e Iran (asriran.com) according to the English newspaper The Financial Times reported:

“Leading candidates in Iran's June presidential election compete and challenge the president through powerful devices such as Facebook to spread their message among the audience.”<sup>246</sup>

Behzad Mortazavi, a Mousavi election committee official said:

“We will use the new technologies because they have the capacity to take that message by individuals via Bluetooth, email and text messages. That can be reproduced to other fans which could be invited through Facebook.”<sup>247</sup>

In addition to the use of cyberspace, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube by Mousavi supporters, messages were also transmitted via mobile phones using Bluetooth. In this way, videos, speeches, and photos were shared.

### **3.11.3 Filtering Websites**

In response to youth participation in virtual social networks, especially Facebook, the government blocked several Internet sites on the eve of the elections. These included a number of sites popular with rivals of Ahmadinejad and included “Fararo”, the news blog “weblog news”, Facebook and Twitter. Many were banned because of fears that reformist groups and activists were using the Internet to organize. The extent of Internet filtering attracted the attention of many in the foreign media. For example, CNN quoted the semi-official Iranian Labour News Agency, as saying that the government has a roguish electoral politics has blocked access to Facebook.<sup>248</sup> The Guardian also wrote:

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<sup>245</sup> Mir-Hossein Mousavi Khamene; is an Iranian reformist politician, who served as Prime Minister of Iran from 1981 to 1989. He was a reformist candidate for the 2009 presidential election and eventually the leader of the opposition in the post-election unrest.

<sup>246</sup> فیس-بوک-ابزار-محبوب-تبليغاتي-رقابي-احمدی-نژاد / <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/72251/> Retrieved October 6, 2014

<sup>247</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/05/23/iran.elections.facebook/> Retrieved October 8, 2013

<sup>248</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/05/23/iran.elections.facebook/> <http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/05/23/iran.elections.facebook/index.html?iref=topnews>, Iran blocks Facebook ahead of presidential election, retrieved October 6, 2014

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“Iran has blocked access to Facebook, prompting government critics to condemn the move as an attempt to muzzle the opposition before next month's presidential election.”

Blogs and websites such as Facebook became an important campaign tool for the leading reformist candidate, Mir Hossein Mousavi, to mobilize Iran's critical youth vote before the June 12 vote.<sup>249</sup>

The actions of the government were not limited to restricting access to the Internet. A day before the elections, the SMS system was also disconnected for a number of mobile operators. From midnight of June 11, hours before the start of the presidential election vote, the ability to send text messages was interrupted. After 40 days of intermittent outages, SMS services were once again restored again in Iran. Ali Akbar Mohtashamipour, the head of Mir Hossein Mousavi's election monitoring committee, stated that the Ministry of Communications confirmed that the Minister of Information ordered the disruption of the SMS system.<sup>250</sup>

Hardliners within the government were able to order public facilities and government resources to filter websites and social networks in addition to spreading rumors against the two reformist candidates, Mousavi and Karroubi. In addition, mobs attacked the main headquarters of Mir Hossein Mousavi in northern Tehran just before the elections. During the attack, they cut off the Internet TV programs of Mir Hossein Mousavi's campaign and destroyed computers. They also used tear gas in their attack on the people present in the headquarters.

### **3.12 Women and the Green Movement**

#### **3.12.1 Acquiring experiences, giving the Green Movement its peaceful character**

The examples by women in general, and women's rights activists in particular, led to a less-hierarchical discourse and dialogue for the expression of demands and

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<sup>249</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/24/facebook-banned-iran> Iranian government blocks Facebook access. retrieved October 6, 2014

<sup>250</sup> [http://zamaaneh.com/news/2009/07/\\_40\\_6.html](http://zamaaneh.com/news/2009/07/_40_6.html) Retrieved October 8, 2013

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desires for change. This type of discourse had four prevalent features: **1) nonviolent struggle and violence avoidance; 2) a basis of raising awareness and culture and building capacity in society; 3) being neither ideological nor opposed to ideology; and 4) being demand-driven.**

These characteristics created a space of acceptance for people with different ideas. Here we can refer to examples of women's civil resistance: the nonviolent civil disobedience against the forced veiling of women in general which started from the beginning of the revolution and continues to the present day. This form of continuous and slow resistance against the veiling has led to a new form of hijab. Obligatory veiling is not accepted by women, and compared to Islamic veiling in the region, veiling is more playful and diverse. This kind of civil struggle became a model for other Islamic countries like Afghanistan; countries which are suffering more religious fundamentalism as compared to Iran.

I should point out that the presence of women in civil society and institution-building in the NGO and Non-Profit Organization (NPO) sector is crucial for expressing criticism of government institutions. As Paweł Stefan Zaleski believes in the role of civil society in political power,<sup>251</sup> Iranian women can demonstrate political power through the civil society arena. Since the revolution, women have had influence on social movements in Iran. This is particularly true of the recent pro-democracy movement, also known as the Green Movement, which included many women's rights activist and women in general. The involvement of women in social change has not been linear. Women can be said to have been affecting gradual change, overtly and covertly, in Iran's Islamic community. The resulting accumulation of experiences by activists and non-activist women over the three decades underpinned the 2009 pro-democracy movement. Tohidi (2009) argues that the youth, especially the student movement and the women's movement, now make

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<sup>251</sup> Zaleski, P.S. (2006). Global Non-Governmental Administrative System: Geosociology of the Third Sector. In D.Gawin & P.Glinski (Eds.) *Civil Society in the Making* (pp.114-116) Warszawa: IFIS Publishers.

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up the main forces of the current civil rights effort and constitute the primary agents of change and democratization in Iran.”<sup>252</sup>

The activities and effects of the women's movement in the tenth presidential election in Iran can be assessed in three stages: 1) Before the 2009 elections the “coalition of women's movement” which shifted towards demand-driven activities and away from response-driven protests; 2) Challenging candidates during the election campaign as well as at the polls; 3) Promoting non-violent demonstration and fostering a model of thinking and behavior that was civic-minded and non-violent.

Essentially Iran's political atmosphere is a masculine space. Moreover, the Iranian regime is based on patriarchal, authoritarian and theocratic government features, where not only there is no discourse about gender discrimination but also discrimination is interpreted as justice. Even within the Islamic Republic's opposition, there is less gender awareness. Therefore, we witness a kind of gender blindness in both the majority leading party and the faction of opposition that does not scan women's demands. Historically, during the political struggles of factions within the government or among government and people, women have often been used as a pawn to gain power, the best examples being the Constitutional Revolution in 1905<sup>253</sup> and Iranian revolution in Iran in 1979. Even after both revolutions, certain factions within the governments took advantage of women's

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<sup>252</sup> Cole, Juan. (2009). Tohidi: Women and the Presidential Elections: Iran's New Political Culture, Thoughts on the Middle East, History and Religion  
<http://www.juancole.com/2009/09/tohidi-women-and-presidential-elections.html>

<sup>253</sup> “The establishment of a constitutional regime in Persia was the chief objective of the Revolution of 1323-29/1905-11. Like any other major revolution, the Constitutional Revolution in Persia encompassed a broad spectrum of ideas and objectives, reflecting diverse intellectual trends, social backgrounds, and political demands. At the time, even the text of the Constitution itself did not have universal support. Yet, in spite of ideological ambiguities, the Revolution remains an epoch-making episode in the modern history of Persia because of its political achievements and its enduring social and cultural consequences. As a modern revolution, it was aimed at dislodging the old order by means of popular action and by advocacy of the tenets of liberalism, secularism, and nationalism. For the first time in the course of modern Persian history, the revolutionaries sought to replace arbitrary power with law, representative government, and social justice and to resist the encroachment of imperial powers with conscious nationalism, popular activism, and economic independence. Constitutionalists also tried to curb the power of the conservative religious establishment through modern education and judicial reforms. By centralizing the state, they sought to reduce the power of the tribal and urban notables. The greater sense of nationhood that emerged out of the Revolution has remained essential to the modern Persian identity”. (Encyclopedia Iranica)

See also, Constitutional Revolution. Intellectual background the establishment of a constitutional regime in Persia was the chief objective of the Revolution of 1323-29/1905-11  
<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-i>

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influence to establish their hegemony. On the 2009 occasion, a group of women's rights activists decided to take action independent from the election campaigns. Where the opposition inside and outside the country, as well as part of the reformist faction, were in doubt whether or not to participate in the elections, women's movement seized the opportunity in the election space to plan and shift the debate to the realm of women's demands in order to promote awareness of gender discrimination issues.

Due to the relatively open political atmosphere ahead of the presidential election 2009 in Iran, a group of individual women activists from various cultural, social and political backgrounds organized themselves around the concept of taking joint action to press for women's demands. The decision was made to take action in two phases towards the end of February 2009. In the first phase, they used the virtual space as a forum for discussion and included a list of women's rights activists to share ideas. The second phase was to use physical space to meet for discussions and seminars. After weeks of debate, discussion, and presenting ideas and suggestions the "Coalition of the Women's Movement to Set Forth Demands in the Election" emerged.

At a press conference in Tehran and with the release of a statement, the group announced its existence. The collaborative demands of women became a key part of the election atmosphere in Iran. Moreover, they did not take a stand on a particular candidate or invite women to participate in or boycott the upcoming elections. More than 700 activists and 40 groups signed a statement in support for the Coalition of the Women's Movement to Set Forth Demands in the Election. The coalition made two fundamental demands of the presidential candidates: first that Iran ratify the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and second that they try to "remove all discriminatory laws against women and the revision and amendment of articles 19, 20, 21 and 115 of the Constitution in order to include the principal of unconditional gender

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equality". Women's rights activists attended to embody the principle of gender equality unconditionally.<sup>254</sup> Included in the coalition's statement was:

"We want to shift the dominant, state-masculinized discourse to a peaceful manner in the electoral domain, to fulfill the needs of civil society, especially the demands of its women citizens that they have delayed and even ignored. Through our collective action, we want to call the authorities' attention to their responsibility in not only helping those from high levels of power but also the public and those from amongst the marginalized social strata. If the authorities want to gain the votes of women, students, teachers and other social groups, and if they want to achieve legitimacy, they should strive to fulfill their needs and demands."<sup>255</sup>

### **3.12.2 Challenges among women's rights activists inside and outside the country**

The convergence of the Women's movement mobilized their forces and used all feasible means within the framework of the options available to them, to get women's demands in front of the candidates on three levels: 1) in the public sphere; 2) through cyberspace, 3) and in civil society.

There was opposition to the coalition from a number of women's rights activists who had been abroad for years and away from the activities related to women's movement in Iran or had been involved more through virtual space such as the One Million Signatures Campaign. Many believed the coalition efforts would lead to weakening or abandonment of the campaign or was a parallel rather than intersectional action.

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<sup>254</sup> Hamgarā'iyyih Junbīsh-i Zanan Barayih Tarh-i Mutalibat dar Intikhabat [Coalition of Women's Movement To Advocate Electoral Demands], Asre-Nou, April 25, 2009, available at <http://asre-nou.net/php/view.php?objnr=3081>. See also Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani's comments on the creation of a "coalition of women's movement to advocate electoral demands" and its success in shaping the issues of import in the June 2009 presidential race. How Social Movements Can Change Iran, Znet, June 12, 2009, available at <http://www.zcommunications.org/how-social-movements-can-change-iran-by-noushin-ahmadi-khorasani>.

<sup>255</sup> <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article2461>

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Here is Nosrat's account of the events. She is one of the women`s rights activists outside Iran in opposition to the coalition:

"I think basically that women's movement is different from men's maneuvers in the sphere of politics. Maneuvers that ignore the mass awareness, that should be the real force of power, and their talking and their discourse is with the people who rely on power". (Nahid Nosrat, 2009 Deutsche Welle reports from the roundtable pros and cons of collaboration, Translation by author)<sup>256</sup>.

But regardless of the debate surrounding the coalition, the initiative prevailed. It was the first time that women's rights activists meaningfully contributed to the presidential elections in Iran.

### **3.12.3 Making space for dissent: The women's movement and the electoral campaign**

Among the initiatives employed by women's rights activists during the presidential campaign was to invite the candidates to participate in a debate with women's rights activists. The two reformist candidates (Mousavi and Karroubi) agreed to debate with representatives of the women's movement. The two other candidates (Ahmadinejad and Rezai) did not participate in the debate. A week before the elections, on 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2009, the debate took place at the office of the women's Islamic Revolution, in front of an audience of nearly two hundred political activists and domestic and foreign media representatives.

Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, a women's rights activist who had participated as a representative of the coalition in the debate, began by stating: "For the first time in Iranian history, the demands of women to the presidential candidates become one of the main concerns, and three of the four candidates have expressed their program on women's issues." (Abbasgholizadeh, 2009)<sup>257</sup>

Jamileh Kadivar, a representative of Mehdi Karroubi, participated in the debate, stating: "Demand driven is a characteristic of the presidential elections in

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<sup>256</sup> [همگرایی-زنان-در-انتخابات-آری-با-نهبخش-اول/a-4290228](http://www.dw.com/fa-ir/a-4290228)

<sup>257</sup> <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article2635> Retrieved October 6, 2014

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this era. So, women, teachers, workers, publishers, students and other social groups, discussed issues with the candidates and received some degree of acceptance of their demands in the candidate's platform.”<sup>258</sup> (Jamileh Kadivar, 2009). Both Karroubi's and Mousavi's representatives, as well as the representatives of the coalition, referred to “demand-driven” activities, which was unlike earlier presidential or local and national campaigns in Iran. In this context, the history of demand-driven (khaste mehvari) actions refers to the method and strategy of the One Million Signatures Campaign to change discriminatory laws.

The fact that thousands of women's rights activists in the One Million Signatures campaign communicated face-to-face with people on the issue of the demands of women could have played an active and effective role in the process of subsequent development of the coalition. Therefore, an analysis of actions, initiatives and civil resistance by activists for women's rights shows that the time of indifference to the demands of women was over, and that it was now time to advocate civil rights that were inclusive of women's rights.

### **3.12.4 Convergence, Instead of “One Voice”**

The difference between these two terms is that pluralism is hidden within convergence. That is, preserving our beliefs, by relying on our interests, demands, methods, and values, we seek to reach a specific goal, by accepting certain differences, commitments, and limitations in the face of others and collective, we give shape to a joint action around a common goal. “One voice” that was used for the first time by Khomeini and in the course of the 1979 revolution is based on consensus and the removal of the other. In the one-voice-only approach, one speaks. In the 1979 (1357) revolution, although the opposition was not homogeneous, by following Khomeini's one voice under the title “the Shah must go” without fueling the discourse of democracy and pluralism in the community, everyone said the Shah

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<sup>258</sup> <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article2635>, Retrieved October 6, 2014

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must go. The result was that the religious forces pushed other forces aside and became the only actor in the political arena.

Discourse for convergence that was shaped by women sought to adopt a method to reach democracy in a system of governance that has a concentrated, rigid, and authoritarian structure. Convergence is unity and cooperation of differing tendencies around a specific goal while preserving the principle of pluralism. In this method, unity based on acceptance of differences must be agreed upon as a principle. In carrying out the common action by women's movement activists, most of the tendencies of women, from the atheist to the religious, stood next to each other. By creating an anti-discrimination, demand-centered discourse based on rights, this discourse was born both within the women's movement and outside the women's movement, in the community with the goal of creating common grounds for cooperation and common action.

### **3.12.5 Women's rights activists, electoral politics, political movement**

During the 2009 elections, women had two types of performance: 1) influence on electoral politics and 2) influence on the policies of the pro-democracy movement. Klandermans (2014) states that participation in collective action is based on the two major types of impact: electoral politics and movement policy. This section looks at the impact of the women's movement on electoral politics.

A reformist group of women had a significant presence during the elections. Many were members and supporters of the National Coalition Party, which was led by Mehdi Karroubi. Those who had a presence in Karroubi presidential campaign, tried to shift the power within the executive branch. Their objective was the transition power from fundamentalism to a more balanced outlook that included individual choice and reform. They worked with the campaign to promote Karroubi as a reformer and made the aspirations of women part of his political publicity. The campaign of Mir Hossein Mousavi also included many women activists and reformists. Zahra Rahnavard, Mousavi's wife, stated:

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"At this point of the election, opposition to discrimination and protection of the rights of women in all aspects could be the slogan of any candidate who truly seeks to promote the concept of civil and political society."<sup>259</sup>

The result of these efforts was that Mousavi vowed to reconsider discriminatory laws against women in Iran if he was to be elected president.<sup>260</sup> Another group of women's rights activists and non-activist women took part in political actions by displaying their demands and encouraging debate about women's rights in cyberspace, on Facebook and Twitter, as well as in email groups. In physical spaces, women appeared in public squares with placards displaying their demands and held impromptu meetings in the street conventions. They making use of the temporary openness that presidential elections typically exhibit in order to create engagement with women's issues and contribute to a very different atmosphere as compared with the prior elections.

Twelve years earlier students formed the core of the reform movement that swept Mohammad Khatami to power and ushered in a period of reform. In 2009, women's rights activists fueled the discussions, focusing on the demands of women. The coalition was a combination of streams of women's activism, which is noted above. These streams included reformists but also activists who wrote multiple statements, contacted legislators, interviewed and challenged the candidates to challenge them and in that way influenced the electoral politics.

Forty-two women announced their intention for enrolment in presidential candidacy, while challenging the limitation and restriction of constitution imposed on women for the presidential post. Once again, the theme of "the candidacy of women" for the presidential election was challenged and taken into account by women's rights activists, although the Guardian Council disqualified all 42 women.

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<sup>259</sup><http://aftabnews.ir/vdcg3w97.ak93t4prra.html> Retrieved October 2, 2014

<sup>260</sup> <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/may/24/facebook-banned-iran/> Iranian government blocks Facebook access, Retrieved October 6, 2014 [http://zamaaneh.com/news/2009/07/\\_40\\_6.html](http://zamaaneh.com/news/2009/07/_40_6.html) Retrieved October 8, 2013

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### **3.12.6 Candidate debates challenge political communication norms**

As noted earlier, pro-Ahmadinejad forces had closed off reformist access to virtual and physical spaces in such a way that the election *campaign* was turned into electoral *battle*. Ahmadinejad attacked the records and reputations of the three former government administrations of Mir Hossein Mousavi, Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohammad Khatami. On state television, he accused many senior officials of the Islamic Republic and their families of corruption, including Rafsanjani, Mousavi and Khatami.<sup>261</sup>

The debate between Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sparked a wave of anger among supporters of Mousavi. Subsequent to that televised debate, security forces used tear gas to disperse a rally of Mousavi supporters who had gathered in front of the state broadcasting facility to protest Ahmadinejad's allegations.<sup>262</sup>

The opposition to Ahmadinejad did not have at their disposal any official, domestic media outlet to express their view regarding the debates, so they moved the arguments to cyberspace. From Ahmadinejad's economic plans, to his statements denying [the existence of] homosexuality in Iran, to promises he had not fulfilled like not bothering the youth about their appearance and bringing the oil money onto people's table, to the story told by Ahmadinejad about a visible halo of light around him while at the UN General Assembly, and his impolite and improper use of language; all were subjects of discussion by users on the Internet.

So, as a reaction to the rising discussions and spreading news on websites and social networks, the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance ramped up Internet control. Such a reaction may indicate the establishment's fear of the spread of information as the fact that the establishment may not favor the free media outlets influencing the atmosphere of elections.

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<sup>261</sup> <http://aftabnews.ir/vdcbz8b9.rhbgspluur.html> Retrieve June 3, 2014

<sup>262</sup> [http://www.radiofarda.com/content/o2\\_debate\\_reactions\\_Iran\\_election/1746328.html](http://www.radiofarda.com/content/o2_debate_reactions_Iran_election/1746328.html) Retrieve June 2, 2015 And see at <http://www.khatami.ir/fa/news/910.html> Retrieve June 2, 2015

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In sum, three types of group discussion were more visible in cyberspace. The first group was arguing very specifically about elections. They not only were challenging the candidates' debates; they were also emphasizing the need for participating in elections. The next group was those centering their discussions on de-legitimizing of the regime by boycotting the elections and the third group also was general public mostly eager for change.

The tense atmosphere that had formed before the elections led to even more tension with the announcement of the rushed and unexpected results of the voting, hurriedly announced just hours after the close of polls in the early morning hours of June 13. The results of the election in Iran were not acceptable to a large part of the voters, as well as to the political analysts who were doubtful of the announced victory for Ahmadinejad. For example, the Associated Press wrote in a report of election results:

Experts such as Susan Hyde, a professor at Yale considered the speed of counting as the most important evidence for the possibility of infringement. Susan Hyde mentioned that this was uncharacteristically fast<sup>263</sup>, noting “If they're still using hand counting that would be very speedy, unusually speedy” (Hyde, 2009).

After the announcement of the election results, thousands of protesters including supporters of Mir Hossein Mousavi, the main rival of Ahmadinejad in the election, took to the streets in Tehran and other Iranian cities, protested the counting of votes, on the 13th and 14th of June. The main slogan was “Where is my vote?” (In Persian rayeh man kojast?)<sup>264</sup>

As mentioned in the previous section, women were highly visible during the civil protests. Although the massive presence of women was amazing for those not aware of the women's movement in Iran, their participation had not happened overnight. It was the result of years of educational and organizational work by a small group of women and men with a focus on civil rights, especially the rights of

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<sup>263</sup> Keyser, J. (2009, June 15). Speed of Iran vote count called suspicious. Associated Press. Retrieved from [http://web.archive.org/web/20090619031550/news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090616/ap\\_on\\_re\\_mi\\_ea/ml\\_iran\\_fraud\\_Allegations](http://web.archive.org/web/20090619031550/news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20090616/ap_on_re_mi_ea/ml_iran_fraud_Allegations),

<sup>264</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/8098896.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8098896.stm) Retrieve June 3, 2014

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women (Tohidi, 2009). After protests in the summer of 2009, many of the feminist pioneers were imprisoned or forced to leave Iran and many others were detained or harassed simply because they were related to the reformists. For the first time in Iran, the vital role of women in the struggle for democracy was recognized (Afary, 2010).<sup>265</sup> Iranian women found themselves once again at the forefront of their country's democratic aspirations and social uprising (Bashi, 2009).

The impact of women in protests following the announcement of the results included: curbing violence with the presence of women in the ranks of protesters, disrupting gender stereotypes, expressing women's literature through slogans, finding the symbol of the struggle in the aspirations of women, and finally in suing for justice.

### **3.12.7 The image of Neda becomes a symbol of struggle**

People took to the streets in a silence march to protest what they believed to be fraud at a massive scale. There is now adequate evidence that the government had prepared to deal with potential protests with extreme violence and repression. In fact, the protests were met with state violence. Several days into the protest, on 20 June 2009, Neda Agha-Soltan was shot in front of a stunned crowd. Her death was caught on video with a mobile phone. The world was shocked by the phone footage of Neda's murder, and "Neda" became the symbol of the struggle of Iranians seeking freedom and of voices of protest<sup>266</sup>.

Of course, this was not the first time a woman was killed for democracy in Iran. During the Constitutional Revolution of 1905, at least 22 women were identified as active participants in the struggle disguised in men's clothing. During the 1979 revolution, many of those killed were women, although their deaths were ignored after the revolution.

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<sup>265</sup> Afary, Janet, The sexual economy of the Islamic Republic :Birth control ,female sexual awakening ,and the gay lifestyle, Journal of Azerbaijani Studies. pp 39-61. Retrieved from <http://dspace.khazar.org/jspui/bitstream/123456789/853/1/04te-sex-JANET-aFARY.pdf>

<sup>266</sup> <http://web.archive.org/web/20090623045539/http://blogs.usatoday.com/ondeadline/2009/06/in-.html/> In Iran, one woman - Neda - becomes a symbol Retrieve June 5, 2014

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### **3.12.8 Impact of non-violent behavior**

Despite the fact that women's rights activists had experience with nonviolence, they were unable to directly guide the leadership of the Green Movement protests, but as supporters they could be effective in curbing violence. Many images can be found showing women as a buffer between the police and young people, supporting the protesters and attempting to prevent police violence.

One example was the formation of a human chain in front of the police to protect the young demonstrators. One other noteworthy example was the incident when a member of the repressive army was in the hands of angry young men, who were invited by women to keep their calm. Slogan content also reflected the spirit of peace-seeking and nonviolence approach, for example, one of the slogans of the demonstrators was “Put down your gun, because I hate to see that bloodthirsty thing, be it in Gaza, or Lebanon, in Quds or Iran”.

Azadeh<sup>267</sup> 30 years old, a doctoral student in comparative literature of women in Iran, currently living in Australia, emphasizes this point clearly:

“Women determined the slogans. Women’s websites broadcasted the news. At that point, in the Women’s Movement and the Green Movement, I sensed a difference; firstly, the apparent raising of gender awareness as well as the non-violence basis of the movement. All these were, in my opinion, mainly due to the fact that women stood on the forefront of the Green Movement.”

Effat recalls those days of demonstration in the following way:

From what I read on the news broadcasts and what I saw in video clips, I gathered that the role of the women’s movement was a strong one. With the development of the peaceful protests I saw the real leader of the Green Movement as being women. Where their sound was cut, I saw women’s bravery and their role in opposing the violence. I saw women of my generation who shielded young men and women when government officials were attacking them. In these circumstances film footage stands as a great witness.

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<sup>267</sup> The interview has been conducted on July 2010, in Paris France, Original language: Persian

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In addition, Women were determined to play a role in the civic sphere in Iran before the 2009 elections and to voice their demands during the campaign. After the announcement of results, many women participated shoulder-to-shoulder with men in the protests and in the massive marches. Despite the fact that during the 1979 revolution the country was not a religious one, women and men were separated during the marches and demonstrations. In the Islamic state, women broke through those boundaries. Gender stereotypes were also broken during Friday Prayers. Men and women stood side-by-side and prayed together. Raja News, a website close to the government wrote:<sup>268</sup>

People stood together in prayer and there was non-compliance by women of proper coverage, the scene was captured in images and the photos published. Zahra Rahnavard, held her husband's hand and spoke to thousands of women of gender equality. (Bashi, 2009)

### 3.12.9 Protest slogans and women's literature

Protest slogans were developed with women`s language, rhythm, and literature in mind. In addition to being effective in encouraging nonviolence, the slogans used also demonstrated the effective participation and empowerment of women among opposition demonstrators. Although it is not clear who composed them, people familiar with Iranian literature could recognize the roots of the protest slogans in women`s and children's literature, language, and rhythms. Here are some of examples of slogans:

“Obama, Obama, either with them or with us” (In Persian, Obama – pronounced *u ba ma*– means he's with us).

“They robbed our vote, now they show off with our vote” (in Persian: rayeh ma ra dozdidand daran bahash pooz midan (رای ما رو دزدیدن، دارن با هاش پز میدن)

“They brought potato, oil and gold were taken”. (In Persian: Naft vat ala ra bordand sib zamini avordand. (نفت و طلا را برداشت سیب زمینی اوردهند

“Don't be afraid, don't be afraid, we are all together!” (in Persian: Natarsid Natasid ma hameh ba ham hastim. (نترسید نترسید ما همه با هم هستیم

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<sup>268</sup> The New Yorker - Volume 85, Issues 31-39 - Page xxxi

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The impact of women's literature was not limited only to these slogans. It was also seen in the literature and the demands of the Green Movement's statements and writings. In cyberspace, a demand-driven wave of writings and speech flowed around the demands of women by women.

### **3.12.10 Further commentaries on the role of women's rights activists on the Green Movement**

As mentioned earlier, one of the points of the focus of this research is the impact of the women's movement on Green movement. To further outline this point, following is an amalgamation of a number of citations, quotes and comments by different individuals.

“The role that women's rights activists have played over the past year has led me to the conclusion that the women's movement has reached maturity. This maturity has been hard won; born out of the hardship and difficulties experienced during the past year and also by the acceptance of diversity within the women's movement. Furthermore, I can say that I have witnessed no time in the history of the women's movement like last year with its participation in the pro-democracy movement in which women's rights activists were so serious<sup>269</sup>” (Faride Mashini 2010).

“Women were at the forefront of the Green Movement, I think we all have to write the history of the Green Movement, to be able to portray all the aspects of the conditions that were experienced in a cohesive manner.”(Fakhrosadat Mohtashamipour, 2010).

In describing the impact of women's movement on the Green Movement R. Jahanbegloo (2015) states:

“I think the impact of the Iranian women's movement on the Green Movement was strong. Women played an important role in the Green Movement because in recent years, their demands were more meaningful and profound than those of many

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<sup>269</sup> <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article5434>, Retrieved October 6, 2014 Faridae Machini Speech as " what in the past year went to women. "At the third meeting of the convergence green women's rights activists.

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other political parties, groups, and political figures. Another reason is that women have played a significant role in civil society in the past 35 years, which has been strong, particularly in relation to the issue of demands and new ideas and values in critique of violence in Iranian society. Perhaps women were the only social group to have criticized the idea of violence at a structural level.”<sup>270</sup> (Translated by the author).

Manijeh, a 47-year-old director and filmmaker, also mentioned this point<sup>271</sup>, “Women’s active presence was in such a way that a woman with 85 years of age was among the crowded, women who were fully veiled, from different regions, from Nazi Abad (south Tehran, a highly disadvantaged part of the city) and further remote areas. There was enough awareness of the movement and information distribution had a huge impact. Women’s presence for the purpose of the election was beside the leaders of the Green Movement and they were the same people as the Women’s Movement. Hundreds of women from the southern of Tehran (the deprived part of the city) joined [the Movement]. Women filmmakers, visual artists, photographers, teachers, university professors and students, women were everywhere and formed the initial core of action and organized functions and protests.”

Parastou<sup>272</sup>, 29 years old, with a bachelor’s degree in computer engineering, now living in Iran, shares a similar view:

“In my opinion, Women’s Movement had already generated the equality discourse quite widely amongst the population. Gender equality and civil rights equality was the context of the recent movement.”

In contrast, Nasrin’s<sup>273</sup> opinion illustrates a contradictory aspect of the role of women’s movement on Green movement.

“I do believe that we are sometimes delusional when it comes to the power of Women’s Movement; meaning we choose to see our surrounding in an exaggerated manner. [...] We only work around ourselves and I am seeing

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<sup>270</sup> <https://zanantv.net/blog/2015/06/12> accessed June 10th, 2015.

<sup>271</sup> The interview has been conducted on July 2010, in Berlin Germany, Original language: Persian.

<sup>272</sup> The interview has been conducted on July 2010, in Paris France, Original language: Persian

<sup>273</sup> For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity of some people interviewed, pseudonym names are used. The interview with Nasrin was conducted on July 2010 in Paris, France. Original language Persian

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around myself. It is just like my circumstances five- six years ago when I was not even aware of the Women's Movement. [...] When it comes to the impacts of Women's Movement, we are delusional. I could be mistaken. But this is how I feel when look at my surroundings and get out of the circle of the activists."

Ali<sup>274</sup>, 25 years old, BA holder in mechanical engineering, reflects on these characteristics of the women's movement and their impact on the Green movement:

"[...] well, in my opinion Women' Movement had a substantial importance. I would say, the Green Movement was composed of a series of miniature movements - not implying that small movements carrying less of significance – movements that are vibrant both inside and beside the Green Movement; be that the Women' Movement, Students Movement, Labor Movement, Teachers Movement, all these are dynamic. But what role Women's Movement in particular had, well, I think, us I mean you and me and many others who were active in the Women's Movement in general and in particular in the One Million Signature campaign in particular, understood the architecture of the Green Movement rather effortlessly and hence caused a greater positive impact. In the One Million Signature campaign, we all claimed that the campaign structure was horizontal. That we have no leader, that it is demands orientated and that we wish no hierarchical formalities in it. They made the same four claims in the Green Movement, but they said it as if they have got the idea from thin air. If we did not have the Campaign's experiences and we had not publicized those gained experiences, that discourse could never take place in the first place. [...] This said decentralization, this structural aversion; the demands orientation is such an important discourse. You witness these same discourses in the Green Movement; orientating the Movement around the demands."

Mohammad, 37 years old, lawyer, emphasizes the difference between the women's movement and the Green Movement:

The Green Movement was somehow generated spontaneously, and people carried green flags and then wore green bracelets and became more demonstrative only after the election. But the Women's Movement did not share the same characteristics. In my opinion, we should consider the Women's Movement more constant and longer lasting than the Green Movement because the Green Movement is only a transient movement. Whether it has had any impact on the Green Movement or not; I think it has not had a considerable impact, because Women's Movement has always conducted itself more resiliently. After the election just when the Green Movement was being initiated, Women in Convergence stepped aside, and it was advantageous for women for the reason that they should have worked independently.

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<sup>274</sup> Interview conducted on July 2010 in Paris, France. Original language Persian

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Bahareh<sup>275</sup>, 26 years old with MA in human rights sees the influence of the women's movement, a movement with a long-term history of publicly demanding these rights:

"Iranian women had resisted daily in fact, with fundamentalism, with discrimination, with inequalities, and we could see that women brought a culture of resistance in families and gave them to their children. I personally learned fighting from my mother. [...] one of the key concepts in Green Movement is the concept of 'active citizenship' meaning people who rise as a claiming institution to gain their rights. We women were an example of active citizenship. We resisted anti-women laws, our own fathers and brothers were against us. This followed by their presence in front of Majles (Islamic parliament), in the streets, and other broad social presence. These all made a profound base for making 'active citizen'. Showed men that it is possible to resist, to contest. Women's presence was observable in street unrests. In many cases men pulled back but women stayed. And it was not unreasonable that Neda became the symbol of Green Movement. That was because women were hugely present both physically and theoretically. We learn to fight from childhood regardless of our economic situation. We bring this to the society and this becomes a movement."

### **3.12.11 Litigation and protest crackdown**

In the aftermath of the elections, a number of women were killed and hundreds of girls and women participating in peaceful protests were arrested. The Minister of Information (Heydar Moslehi, 2009) called the post-election events "soft war" and "sedition" against the Islamic Republic, naming feminists as one of the axes of "soft war" and described feminists as one of the axes of war<sup>276</sup>. Included among the detained women were journalists, writers, directors, artists, actors, political and civil activists, students, and even homemakers. Senior government officials were highly sensitive of the presence of women in public, therefore arrests were ordered to limit their influence in the Green Movement

In fact, the expression of protest against the 2009 election was the result of thirty years of accumulated grievances against dictatorships. During the protests, blood was drawn by the government, leaving dozens dead and wounded, and even more imprisoned. On July 10th, women's rights activists were among the first civil rights activists in Iran to issue a statement of protest, asking government officials to "put an end to the oppression of women and men in Iran and release all

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<sup>275</sup> This interview has been conducted on 25th of September 2011 in Geneva, Switzerland

<sup>276</sup> <http://www.rajanews.com/news/79378> accessed June 5, 2014

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detainees”. Women seeking justice for those killed during the demonstrations rose up and became known as the Mothers of Laleh Park (Mourning Mothers).

Using the accumulated experience of previous civil campaigns, the Mothers of Laleh Park was organized in a horizontal and fluid manner. In their first statement, they announced that they would unceasingly seek justice and the identification of perpetrators who ordered the murder of their relatives. They organized protests, demonstrating in front of the prosecutor's office and in front of prisons, expressing solidarity with other families and participating in their mourning and remembrance ceremonies. The women gave media interviews and gathered at the specific location every Saturday evening (following Argentinian women's model of resistance).

Here is Azadeh's impression of events:

“In my opinion, women had the principal role in the Green Movement. Simply because of the Mothers of Peace, mourning mothers and wives of [politically] imprisoned sons and husbands and those who had lost their loved-ones to the system.”

### **3.13 Summary of Commentary Interviews**

This section presents interviews with eighteen activists (with different expertise or interests) residing inside or outside of Iran. The interviewer encouraged those interviewed to articulate their perspectives on the 2009 Green Movement in Iran. They were asked to answer one specific question about the impact of the Iranian women's movement on the Green Movement. The results are highly noteworthy

While some interviewees, such as Mohammad, emphasized the difference between the women's movement and the Green Movement, others (for instance Manijeh and implicitly Roja) accept that the women's movement is part of the Green Movement and an active participant. Although all but one of those interviewed (Effat claimed there was no impact) believed that the women's movement positively influenced the Green Movement, they mentioned quite different influential factors with different frequencies.

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The most important element mentioned by those interviewed was the peacefulness of the protest (Roja; Azadeh; Parvin; Effat, and Mansoureh). This illustrates the importance and priority of peace in a country such as Iran that has always been under dictatorships, either the monarchy or the velayat-e faqih (over the people and nation). Interestingly, only one person Ebadi, mentions democracy, but this definitely does not mean this aspect was not important. When mentioning peace, equal rights, or civil rights, the interviewees argued that democracy was at the base of every modern movement and there was no need to emphasize it separately.

Equal rights, regardless of gender and sexuality (Azadeh, Parastou, Mansoureh, Soudeh) and then civil rights (Azadeh, Parastou, Soudeh) was mentioned immediately after peace. It seems that most of those interviewed saw the demands of equal and civil rights in the Green Movement as due to the influence of the women's movement, a movement with a long-term history of publicly demanding these rights.

Leadership, active citizenship, and resistance to achieve the goals, are other factors mentioned as impact of the women's movement on the Green Movement.

And finally, one important point in which interviewees have contrasting opinion on is the concept of 'leadership'. Did the Green Movement have or has leader(s)? If yes, does the women's movement have any impact on this leadership? There were two different points of view expressed. Some interviewed answered (Ali, Khadijah) that the Green Movement did not and does not have leader(s) due to the influence of the women's movement, which implies that the women's movement does not have leadership either. The others (Azadeh, Effat, and probably Bahareh) realize felt that women or the women's movement headed the Green Movement. It seems that this response may reveal a bigger conflict amongst Iranians about whether changing society and achieving civil rights needs leadership or a specific leader or not?

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## **Chapter 4 How women's rights activists and social activists used new media to get out their message**

This chapter describes the trends and developments in the use of New Media.

### **4.1 Introduction: trends and developments in the use of New Media**

One of the key issues in the study of recent social movements is the role played by new media and the use of virtual social networks. A study of recent movements without considering the role of new media would miss an important aspect. A study of the role of new media in the women's movement in Iran, as well as the rise in popular protests resulting from the 2009 Iran's presidential election, is a subject that needs greater scrutiny from a variety of angles. With this in mind, this chapter will show the trend of new media usage by civil activists in Iran, particularly women. Moreover, it includes an analysis of the impact and consequences of the use of new media in the women's movement and the political movement that emerged during the 2009 presidential campaign, which became known as the Green Movement.

This chapter describes the characteristics and use of changing new media channels such as text messaging with mobile phones and the use of social media. Social networking sites used in the course of the Green Movement and the women's movement in Iran include Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Paltalk, Yahoo Messenger, Instagram, Skype, and blogs and mobile phones. The key question is this: How did the use of new media influence the adoption of peaceful means for achieving equal rights?

The Internet, along with the attendant transformations of telecommunications and information exchange, has made geographic distance less of a barrier to interaction, meaning that we now live in conditions of more fluid geography. Everyone with access to the Internet has the possibility to cross geographic borders, and share beliefs, opinions, and information with others. This fact is consistent with the predictions of Walker, who said in 1990 that in an increasingly interdependent

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world, the traditional boundaries of political communities would be swept away. (Walker, 1990)<sup>277</sup>

Blogs and websites, online chat software (i.e., Skype, Paltalk, Yahoo Messenger, Viber, WhatsApp, Line), and social media have provided Internet users access to inexpensive long-distance communication. The capabilities and number of these types of applications continues to rise. Communicating via social networks and private online chats has been so well-received by the public, especially by the younger generation, that the first 15 years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century have seen a dramatic rise in the use of social networking. Facebook alone had 1.71 billion users in 2016.<sup>278</sup> In today's world, a major portion of time is spent in cyberspace. The Internet has become a key source of communication in the lives of young people (Gemmill & Peterson, 2006; Jones, et al. 2002; Lenhart, et al 2007; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008)<sup>279</sup>.

In addition, information technology and telecommunications have transformed human interactions. Cyberspace has altered public and private social relationships, lifestyles, and even people's private lives have been impacted by the cyberspace. It has fundamentally changed the way civil movements are built and revolutions made. Information media and technology play a fundamental role in modern society (see Castells, 2000)<sup>280</sup>.

This rise in the use of online communications, whether through social networks or chatroom and online forums, has, in recent years, given rise to dramatic

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<sup>277</sup> Walker, R. B. J. (1990). Contending Sovereignties: Redefining Political Community, Publisher: Lynne Rienner Pub; First Edition.

<sup>278</sup> "Company Info Facebook Newsroom". *Newsroom.fb.com*. N.P., 2004. <http://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>. Last visited 30 July 2016.

Internet goes to college. Washington D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Retrieved December 30, 2015, [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_College\\_Report.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_College_Report.pdf).

Lenhart, A., et al (2007). Teens and Social Media, The use of social media gains a greater foothold in teen life as they embrace the conversational nature of interactive online media. Social networking websites and teens, Pew Internet & American Life Project.

Retrieved December 9, 2015

[http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2007/PIP\\_Teens\\_Social\\_Media\\_Final.pdf.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2007/PIP_Teens_Social_Media_Final.pdf.pdf)

Subrahmanyam, K., & Greenfield, P. M. (2008). Communicating online: Adolescent relationships and the media. *The Future of Children: Children and Media Technology*, VOL. 18 / NO. 1 / Spring 2008,p. 119-146

<sup>280</sup> Castells, Manuel (2010). *The Rise of the Networked Society*, *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*, volume 1, second edition with a new preface first published 2010. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers

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transformation in the social systems of various countries all over the world (e.g., Gemmill & Peterson, 2006; Jones, 2002; Lenhart & Madden, 2007; Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2008).<sup>281</sup> For some scholars, widespread internet communication has led to utopian notions that it can work wonders when it comes to resolving social problems (Fisher & Wright, 2001).

What the techno-utopians miss is that the power for individuals to communicate across borders is matched by the power of (oppressive) governments to track their communications. This is an issue that will be discussed throughout this chapter with concrete examples of Iranian writers, bloggers, activists, and new media users who have been arrested and harassed because of online activities. The utopian notion is also countered by Morozov who writes, “It’s fashionable to hold up the Internet as the road to democracy and liberty in countries like Iran, but it can also be a very effective tool for quashing freedom” (Morozov, 2010)<sup>282</sup>. Cyber-utopianism has fueled reactionary movements in authoritarian countries (Morozov, 2010). While Castells argues, “The shift from traditional mass media to a system of horizontal communication networks organized around the Internet and wireless communication has introduced a multiplicity of communication patterns at the source of a fundamental cultural transformation, as virtuality becomes an essential dimension of our reality.” (Castells, 2010, p.18). In any event, the role and impact of new media on human life, be it economic, social, political, or cultural, and its

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<sup>281</sup> Gemmill, E., & Peterson, M. (2006). Technology use among college students: Implications for student affairs professionals. *NASPA Journal*, 43(2), 280–300.

Jones, S. (2002). The Internet goes to college. How students are living in the future with today’s technology, Washington D.C.: Pew Internet & American Life Project, [http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2002/PIP\\_College\\_Report.pdf.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/files/old-media/Files/Reports/2002/PIP_College_Report.pdf.pdf)

Lenhart, A., & Madden, M. (2007). Social networking websites and teens: An overview. Washington, DC: Pew Internet & American Life Project, Retrieved August 9, 2007, from [http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP\\_SNS\\_Data\\_Memo\\_Jan\\_2007.pdf](http://www.pewinternet.org/pdfs/PIP_SNS_Data_Memo_Jan_2007.pdf)

Subrahmanyam, K., & Greenfield, P. M. (2008). Communicating online: Adolescent relationships and the media. *The Future of Children: Children and Media Technology*, 18, 119–146.

<sup>282</sup> Morozov, Evgeny ,2010; The Digital Dictatorship, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703983004575073911147404540> retrieved 12.10.2015

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relationship with political development, is one of the most challenging issues we face.<sup>283</sup>

The study of the media's role on the beliefs and values of humans as well as its impact on the formation of civil movements is of great significance. Lievrow argues that “alternative/activist new media employ or modify the communication artifacts, practices and social arrangements of new information and communication technologies to challenge or alter dominant, expected or accepted ways of doing society, culture, and politics” (Lievrow, Leah, 2011)<sup>284</sup>. While others argue that although the Internet has facilitated long distance communication, the technology could have negative consequences such as decreased face-to-face interaction, leading people to remove themselves from public life and diminishing the sense of social participation (e.g. Wilhelm, 2000)<sup>285</sup>. Michael Hauben (1997) described people online who actively contribute towards the development of the Internet as “Netizens.” He argued that these people understand the value of collective work and the communal aspects of public communications. Hauben wrote

“These are the people who discuss and debate topics in a constructive manner, who e-mail answers to people and provide help to new-comers, who maintain FAQ files and other public information repositories, who maintain mailing lists, and so on. These people discuss the nature and role of this new communications medium. These are the people who as citizens of the Net, I realized were Netizens. However, these are not all people. Netizens are not just anyone who comes online, and they are especially not people who come online for individual gain or profit. They are not people who come to the Net thinking it is a service. Rather they are people who understand it takes effort and action on each and everyone's part to make the Net a regenerative and vibrant community and resource. Netizens are people who decide

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<sup>283</sup> Media in Support of Sustainable Development and a Culture of Peace , Published in 2015 by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, p.8.

<sup>284</sup> Lievrow, L. (2011) Alternative and Activist new media; Digital media and society series. Cornwall: Polity Press, Cambridge, p.19.

<sup>285</sup> Wilhelm, A. (2000). Democracy in the digital age. Challenges to Political Life in Cyberspace, New York: Routledge. The Information Society: An International Journal Volume 17, Issue 2, 2001.

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to devote time and effort into making the Net, this new part of our world, a better place. Lurkers are not Netizens, and vanity home pages are not the work of Netizens. While lurking or trivial home pages do not harm the Net, they do not contribute either.”<sup>286</sup>

By using the term “Netizens,” Hauben imagines a world citizen, connected online, who understand that with the arrival of the Internet, a great transformation in human life was occurring. With the interpretation of “Netizens,” that cosmopolitan makes sense in cyberspace.

## **4.2 The trend of Internet use by political and civil activists from 2000-2013**

Up until 2000, Internet services were accessible through a few state-controlled centers and under somewhat difficult conditions. This included government and academia, but Internet access was still not universal nor public. The state’s closure of reformist newspapers during President Khatami’s first term (1997-2001), led to the use of the Internet by reformists as a substitute channel for use by the closed publications. This use ushered in the growing public use of the Internet. Online social networks quickly emerged. The expansion of the variety of news networks and websites containing overseas publications and news “worried” the government. Faced with the rising growth of news websites, the government sought to close or block them. Despite implementing security, cultural, and technological measures and also deployment of high-handed and repressive programs, such as summoning the directors of some websites to court and jailing of some bloggers, the government did not get the desired result. The citizens were able to get around the restrictions created by the government by making use of circumvention tools, virtual private networks (VPNs), and other tools. Internet use by civil activists in Iran can be divided up into three periods, on which I elaborate below.

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<sup>286</sup> Hauben, Michael and Hauben, Ronda. 1997. *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*. Wiley-IEEE Computer Society Press. May 1997.

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#### **4.2.1 First Period of Internet Use, 2000-2008**

In the early 2000s, the government did not have the technical knowledge it needed to block the Internet. People with that knowledge were mainly in the private sector or they were too young. Therefore, there was a lot of easy circumvention by activists and others. The government started building their technical capacity in the run up to 2009 and following this, it had become a master.

The period from 2000 to 2008 was marked by the perceived failure of reformists, a return of the religious extremists to power in 2005, and a rising frustration and dissatisfaction, particularly on the part of the younger generation, with the religious government. During this era, small groups were in communication and exchanged information with one another through mailing lists, blogging, Skype, Paltalk, Yahoo Messenger, and other platforms. One of distinguishing features of this period is the use of cyberspace inside Iran by civil activists to coordinate field activities and activities in cyberspace. The social activists' groups, such as women's rights activists and student activists, while making use of virtual space for domestic and international communications, did not neglect meeting in physical space. While they regularly held online meetings for discussions, they would organize joint activities in physical space. During this era, which we can call an era of balance, there existed a relative balance between activities in virtual space and in physical space. Of course, this era was coupled with an unpredicted growth in blogging. "Persian blog" was the first wholly Persian blog service provider that officially began June 13, 2002. In its first seven months, about 21,000 signed up to use the Persian blogging service Blogfa (Persian Blog).

During this period, the turning away of the younger generation, in particular women, from the theocratic regime was made visible from the posts, writings, and pictures shared on social networks. Rahimi and Gheytanchi (2008) mentioned this point:

“Iran's theocracy continues to face an increasingly dissatisfied population. Indeed, as the state continues to deny the public's aspirations for civil rights and

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democracy, Iranian dissident groups have persisted in fighting back, using alternative forms of communication, such as the Internet, to facilitate their expressions of discontent” (Rahimi & Gheytanchi, 2008)<sup>287</sup>.

However, during this period, with its spike in online activities, government surveillance and filtering increased. In this period, we witnessed an increase of state-sponsored hacking, blocking, and closing of websites. This was especially true of women’s websites, to the extent that in 2006, even simply using the term “woman” on the Internet would trigger filtering. In this era, women’s news websites and key terms like “gender” were considered to be against modesty and were blocked. It was an era when at this time, the government focused mostly on keeping news websites out of the reach of users.

#### **4.2.2 Second Period of Internet Use, 2009-2010**



Figure 2 “Where is my vote?” became a campaign slogan, iconic image and common poster.

The second period of Internet use was accompanied by the emergence of the Green Movement, a popular movement associated with the 2009 presidential elections. The use of cyberspace by reformist campaigns, and the popular protests following the announcement of the election results, represent the peak of activity during this period.

Most of the online activities in this one-year period were carried out using Facebook. Of course, much of the coordination for organizing protests or other joint

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<sup>287</sup> Rahimi, Babak & Gheytanchi, Elham. (2008). Iran's Reformists and Activists: Internet Exploiters. Spring 2008, Volume XV, Number 1 <http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/irans-reformists-and-activists-internet-exploiters>

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actions was done more forcefully, while the activists were using their former methods, namely face-to-face “gatherings” in physical space.

In addition to Facebook, Twitter was used as a tool during the Iranian election protests, mainly by activists, which produced many versions of the latest news. But the government sought to aggressively avenge and deal with the widespread use of cyberspace, in addition to simply functionally filtering, blocking sites or making some sites unavailable. In a shocking action, Twitter was hacked by a group having a presumed Iranian government affiliation.<sup>288</sup> On the morning of Persian date Azar 27 1388 (Friday, December 17, 2009) Internet users in Iran trying to access the Twitter website were redirected to a webpage displaying a the image of a green flag and message claiming the site had been hacked by the Iranian Cyber Army, with this text in a mixture of Farsi, Arabic and English: “U.S.A. Think They Controlling and Managing the Internet by Their Access, But They Don’t, We Control and Manage the Internet by Our Power, so you do not try to provoke the Iranian people. (Now which country in embargo list? IRAN? USA? We push them in embargo list ; ) Take Care.”<sup>289</sup>

By this time, the government had employed Internet experts in order to track down, censor, block, and hack websites. In this era, the government intensified the identification of cyber activists. The presence of security forces, in an overt and covert manner, in virtual space imposed an enormous cost on users. For instance, security forces monitored the activities of individuals through social networks such as Facebook and identified civil activists. To give an example of the repression of online activists, on July 13, 2014 “Eight Iranians Active on Facebook Sentenced to Combined 127 Years in Prison<sup>290</sup>. And yet, the government was powerless to take complete control of the Internet as it desired. As the saying goes, people do their thing and the government does its thing. In the hours following the announcement

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<sup>288</sup> The Iranian Cyber Army is an Iranian computer hacker group thought to be connected to Iranian government, although not officially recognized as an entity by the government. It has pledged loyalty to Supreme Leader of Iran. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian\\_Cyber\\_Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Cyber_Army)

<sup>289</sup> <https://techcrunch.com/2009/12/17/twitter-reportedly-hacked-by-iranian-cyber-army/>

Posted Dec 17, 2009 by Michael Arrington (@arrington Twitter hacked, defaced by “Iranian Cyber Army”

<sup>290</sup> <https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2014/07/fb-127-yrs/>

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of the 2009 presidential election results, the slogan “Where is my vote?” began to appear on social networks. This became a rallying cry used to organize the largest post-revolution protest of Iranians both inside and outside of the country. Demonstrations outside the country were held simultaneously with popular protests inside the country. Protestors gathered in front of the embassies of the Islamic Republic and in other public spaces. This was the start of the most widespread protests by Iranians abroad against the Iranian government after the revolution. The opposition succeeded in persuading a number of non-Iranians to join them across the world. The use of Facebook for spreading the news of post-2009-presidential-election events turned Iran into one of the outstanding examples of the impact of social networks on social movements. @A number of theorists have even employed the Green Movement in Iran as an example to prove their theory. In 2009, online social media was the opposition’s only tool for rallying the masses. The extent of foreign support for the popular movement in Iran was such that athletes, artists and even singers joined in. A high-profile example is Joan Baez, an American singer, who dedicated the song "We will win" to the Iranian protesters<sup>291</sup>.

#### **4.2.3 Third Period of Internet Use, 2011-2013**

In the wake of government suppression of the Green Movement, a large number of civil and political activists, including women’s rights activists, labor activists, and student activists transferred the field of struggle to behind the computer desk, a type of activity in cyberspace that some of the new media experts and also critics of virtual social networks and of online activities call “slacktivism”. Because of the political repression in Iran and the geographic dispersion of the political, women, and student activists, most activities took place online. That included writing statements, collecting signatures for the release of imprisoned political and civil activists, forming online campaigns, and the sharing of texts and videos. This trend continues often by civil and political activists overseas. Although

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<sup>291</sup> [http://www.pscelebrities.com/whitelightblacklight/2009\\_07\\_01\\_archive.htm](http://www.pscelebrities.com/whitelightblacklight/2009_07_01_archive.htm)

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this type of online activity has been much-criticized, we should be aware that not all these activities fall under the category of slacktivism. A person who spends her energy and money toward activities aimed at an expansion of cultural, humanitarian, and libertarian goals through online activities cannot be said to suffer from slacktivism. Despite numerous critiques of online activities, once again, on the verge of the 2013 presidential elections, discussions on both boycotting and participating in the elections grew heated.

The 2013 presidential elections that led to the election of Hassan Rouhani as president were marked by the impact of social networks on decision-making. Once again, Facebook became the most important social network for pro-Rouhani campaigners. Supporters of Rouhani started promoting him through mobiles and landlines and the Internet, and in a short period of time, a large number of messages were exchanged, and status updates posted on Facebook in support of Rouhani. The newly elected Hassan Rouhani expressed his appreciation for the activities of his supporters on Facebook.

#### **4.2.4 Internet in Iran**

In 1993, Iran was the second country in the Middle East to be connected to the Internet. (Sohrabi, 2011)<sup>292</sup> Of course, in the beginning, it was used at academic centers. The first computer in Iran to be connected to the Internet was in 1989<sup>293</sup> at the Research Center for Theoretical Physics in Iran. A year later, in 1990, the first Iranian website was launched inside Iran. The first Persian-language newspaper circulated on the Internet was *Hamshahri* in 1994, which is considered the first official Iranian newspaper on the web. In 2001, the weblog phenomenon in Iran began in earnest. Since that time, the number of Internet users in Iran has steadily grown. A year after the first weblog was launched in Iran, unofficial figures

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<sup>292</sup> Mohammad Hadi Sohrabi-Haghigat, New Media and Social-political Change in Iran, Cyber Orient, Vol. 5, Iss. 1, 2011

<sup>293</sup> Iran's Telecom and Internet Sector: A Comprehensive Survey, Open Research Network, June 15, 1999, p9  
<https://nsrc.org/regions/MIDEAST/IR/internet-iran-2001.pdf>

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showed that the number of webloggers was higher than 15,000. At that time, Persian was widely reported to be the second language of the Internet.

From 2001 to 2009, Internet use rose 48% (Sohrabi-Haghigat, 2011)<sup>294</sup>. The number of Internet users in Iran keeps rising daily. If in 2000 only 3.8% of the population had made use of the Internet, by 2015, the percentage of Internet users in Iran had risen to 57.2%. This rate of growth is consistent with the global growth rate of Internet use.<sup>295</sup>

In spite of the early embrace of the Internet, the Iranian community has been deprived of access to a high-speed Internet proportional to its needs.

Based on the Netindex report on December 2012<sup>296</sup> figures regarding Internet speed available to home users, Iran was ranked 164 out of 178 countries and among Middle Eastern countries, only Egypt and Syria ranked lower<sup>297</sup>. In 2013, Iran remained among the slowest countries in the world when it comes to providing high-speed Internet. Nevertheless, at the time of this writing, Iran boasted the highest number of Internet users in the Middle East and almost one-half of the Iranian people are somehow connected to the Internet<sup>298</sup>. Iranians have proven to be one of the most active Internet user groups (Graham and Khosravi, 2002)<sup>299</sup>.

#### **4.2.5 The demographic profile of Internet users in Iran**

Iran, demographically, is a young country. In the latest census carried out in 2011, the population of Iran was reported to be about 76 million. Young people between the ages of 15-29 made up 31.5% (23.7 million) of the population. Those

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<sup>294</sup> Sohrabi-Haghigat, M.H. (2011). New Media and Social-political Change in Iran, Cyber Orient, Vol. 5, Iss. 1. <http://www.cyberorient.net/article.do?articleId=6187>

<sup>295</sup> For more information see, Iran Internet usage, broadband and telecommunications reports at <http://www.internetworldstats.com/me/ir.htm>

<sup>296</sup> Internet Usage in the Middle East, Middle East Internet Usage & Population Statistics <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm> <http://www.webcitation.org/6DLXGWN6q>

See also The Global Evolution of Digital Commerce and MENA eCommerce, The International Omni Retailing Members Association (IORMA) April 2013, p 32 [http://www.visamiddleeast.com/me/common/include/uploads/ecommerce\\_apr2013.pdf](http://www.visamiddleeast.com/me/common/include/uploads/ecommerce_apr2013.pdf) Retrieved 12.10.2015

<sup>297</sup> <http://www.webcitation.org/6DLXGWN6q>

<sup>298</sup> Yazd, A. (2014, July 10). Iran: From 'axis of evil' to last best hope in the Middle East. <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/09/opinion/iran-u-s-alliance-opinion> retrieved 13.10.2015

<sup>299</sup> Graham, M., & Khosravi, S. (2002). Reordering Public and Private in Iranian Cyberspace: Identity, Politic and Mobilization, in Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 9: 219-246

aged from 30-64 were at 39.3% equivalent to 29.5 million). Only 5.7% of Iranian population (4.2 million) is comprised of those aged 65 and over. Over 70% of the population is between 15 and 65 years old. Internet penetration factor was reported to be at 54%. This translates to more than 42 million individuals. Furthermore, 28% (11 million) of Iran's Internet users connect to the Internet from mobile phones, which means that there is significant smartphone penetration in Iran. A full 46% of the population is between the ages of 20-44. That is 36.1 million people. It is in that group that the highest number of Internet users can be found. Many of them are now connecting to the Internet from their mobile phones.

An additional figure interesting to consider relates to e-commerce in Iran. Iran's Center for E-commerce Development recently announced that nearly 70% of applicants for electronic retail licenses are younger than 30.<sup>300</sup>

**Table 5 Usage of the Internet in Iran- Internet Growth and Population Statistics**

Year	Internet Users	Population	% Pop.
2000	250,000	66.131.854	0,4%
2002	5,500,000	67.983.330	8,1%
2005	7,500,000	70.421.811	10,7%
2008	23,000,000	72.845.542	31,6%
2009	32,200,000	73.687.565	43,7%
2010	33,200,000	74.567.511	44,5%
2012	42,000,000	75.491.582	55,6%
2015	46,800,000	79.360.487	59,0%

Source: Internet users, years with data available: <http://www.internet worldstats.com/me/ir.htm>

Population: United Nations Population Division. World Population Prospects: 2017 Revision.

Dataset by The World Bank. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/country/iran-islamic-rep>

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<sup>300</sup> Yazd, Arezo. Special to CNN, Iran: From 'axis of evil' to last best hope in the Middle East, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/09/opinion/iran-u-s-alliance-opinion> Retrieved 12.08.2015

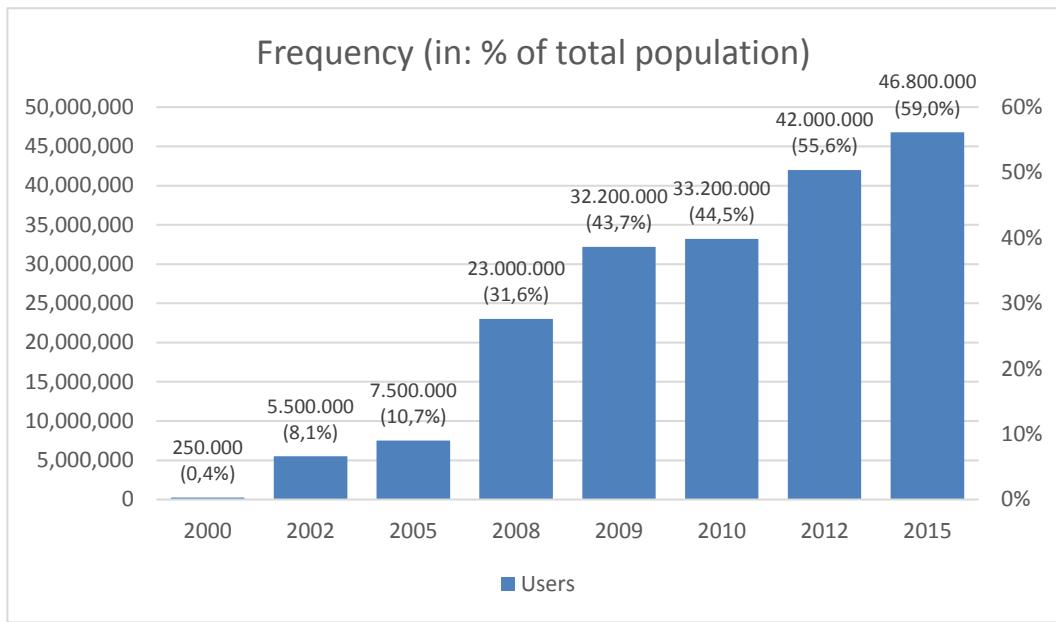


Figure 3 Usage of the Internet in Iran- Internet Growth and Population Statistics

Looking at the table above, there is no doubt that during the past 15 years Internet accessibility in Iran has grown quickly. Less than 4% of the population was wired in 2000, while 15 years later that was up to 59%; 46 million new users in 15 years is an impressive result, especially when we consider this happened in a country governed by an Islamic theocratic regime with heavy filtering and censorship. As we can see, there is jump in Internet use from 31.6% in 2008 to 43.7% in 2009. This appears to be related to the events following the 2009 presidential election in Iran. As, Abdo G. mentioned “communication technology has liberated Iranian society from government restrictions on free speech. Going online enabled Iranians to express their views. The so-called Green Movement and the broader opposition, in particular, used new technologies to communicate with their fellow citizens inside as well as outside Iran”.<sup>301</sup>

<sup>301</sup> Abdo, Geneive. (2010). In Robin Wright, The Iran Primer, Power, Politics and US Policy .e(1st ed., pp. 53–56). Washington, D.C.: US Institute of Peace Press. Retrieved from

## Middle East Internet Users per 31-December-2014

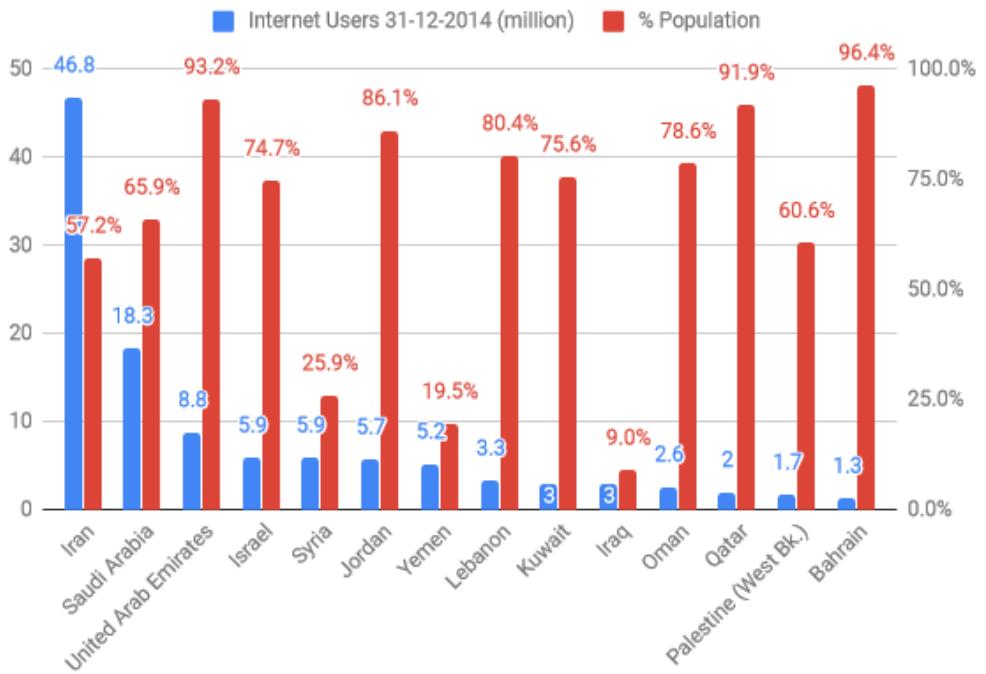


Figure 4 Internet Users in the Middle East<sup>302</sup>

The graphic above shows that in 2014, Iran had the largest number of Internet users (46.8 million) in the Middle East. This was two and a half times more than the country with the second largest number of Internet users: Saudi Arabia, at 18.3 million users. This is even more striking when viewed in consideration of the fact that the huge number of users in Iran was still only 57.2% of the population. The opportunity for another 35 million people in the Iranian population to become Internet users should not be overlooked. This stands in contrast to countries that had achieved higher levels of Internet usage saturation. Countries also had different size, geographic, capitalization, markets and infrastructure situations that impacted Internet uptake. In this period, users in Iran faced difficulties and restrictions due to web-filtering and blocking access to many websites. Advocates of filtering in Iran argue that to prevent access to pornographic and so-called “obscene” sites, it is

<sup>302</sup> Miniwatts Marketing Group. Internet World Stats. (2015). Middle East Internet Statistics, Population, Facebook and Telecommunications Report. Retrieved 12 December, 2018 from <https://web.archive.org/web/20151224210612/http://www.internetworkstats.com/stats5.htm>

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necessary to enforce filtering. While the results of a study in 2013 aimed at exploring the social and cultural attitudes and behaviors of those aged 15-29 throughout Iran by the Center of Investigations of the Youth Affairs and Sports shows that less than 5% of the youth use the Internet for access to “immoral and non-essential sites”, the research said, without being more specific. Based on results of this investigation, 67.4% of youth in Iran use Internet. The results of this government research also showed that near 20% of those studied in the research use the Internet for online chats, 15% for social networks, and only 10.4% for studies and scientific research. Some 19.1% chat online, 15.3% use social networks and 15.2% cite entertainment as a reason for using the Internet<sup>303</sup>.

#### **4.2.6 The Gendered Internet**

It is necessary to point out that women’s access to new media, like other sources of power, is discriminatory and gender pressure in cyberspace is more severe in the Middle East First because of “problematic practice” that families put their resources at the disposal of the boys. Second, marginalized women presumably would be excluded from the same opportunities as men. Third, women face persecution in cyberspace. However, there are no detailed and reliable statistics about what number of Internet users in Iran are women.<sup>304</sup> Despite that, the quality and effective participation by women in social networks changed the face of cyberspace, which was at the start very masculine (“Building Information Societies: Grappling with Gendered fault-lines”) has found that “women are 22% of all Internet users in Asia, 38% of those in Latin America, and 6% of Middle Eastern users.”(Quoted from Esfandiari, 2003)<sup>305</sup>. At the time of that survey only 6% of

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<sup>303</sup> MEE and agencies. (2014 September 8) ‘When you create filters, they create proxies’: Iranian web users get past filters. Retrieved from <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/when-you-create-filters-they-create-proxies-most-iranian-web-users-get-past-filters-522622943>

<sup>304</sup> Media Program, Iran. (2014). Liking Facebook in Tehran: Social Networking in Iran. A survey of Iranian Facebook groups provides more detailed information. Retrieved from [http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/fileLibrary/PDFs/Liking\\_Facebook\\_in\\_Tehran.pdf](http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/fileLibrary/PDFs/Liking_Facebook_in_Tehran.pdf)

<sup>305</sup> See Building Information Societies: Grappling with Gendered Fault-lines <http://www.dqindia.com/building-information-societies-grappling-with-gendered-fault-lines/>

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Middle Eastern women were active in digital spaces, showing how these digital spaces were masculine.

The results of a survey of Iranian Facebook users show that women tend to share content related to cultural issues, domestic news and events, societal/civic issues, gender, and the environment; whereas men more often share content related to the economy and sports.<sup>306</sup> In a 2012 update of a 2003 lecture given by the editor-in-chief of the online journal Iran dokht, Pari Esfandiari wrote:

Iranian women have become part of a global movement of women in cyberspace, and ranging from their sheer presence online to hardcore feminist activities, they are making their mark and are challenging the power relations within cyberspace. (Esfandiari, 2012)<sup>307</sup>

Iranian women quickly learned how to use cyberspace for the interests of the women's movement in promoting egalitarian demands and the benefit of the core mission of their activities. Women have greatly succeeded in challenging the established forms of male domination on the Internet by establishing connections with women and among women's rights activists in cyberspace.

The radical growth of the Internet and the use of telecommunications technology was accompanied by a hope that it would play an influential role in advancing feminist discourse from practical and theoretical angles. Women could begin to make their voices and their presence at least partly audible in public using the new technology as a vehicle for disseminating and enhancing cultural, social, and political activities. The transfer of knowledge and the exchange of expertise, information, and news via cyberspace with minimal time and energy became a daily occurrence for civil and political activists, including women's rights activists, in most connected societies. Meanwhile, the new communication and social network platforms help social movements, particularly the women's movement, redefine themselves and engage in alternative social actions. For instance, new media has

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<sup>306</sup> See pdf, Liking Facebook in Tehran: Social Networking in Iran, A survey by, Iran Media Program Center for Global Communication Studies Annenberg School for Communication University of Pennsylvania p.19  
[http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/fileLibrary/PDFs/Liking\\_Facebook\\_in\\_Tehran.pdf](http://www.global.asc.upenn.edu/fileLibrary/PDFs/Liking_Facebook_in_Tehran.pdf)

<sup>307</sup> <http://www.irandokht.com/welcome/editormore.php?NoteID=12#>  
Accessed 12.08.2015

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had such an immense impact on feminism that the term “online feminism” has been used in feminist literature. Some claim that the fourth wave of feminism includes many feminists who offer another interpretation of feminism using media and digital tools. There is a whole generation of young feminists utilize the social networks. According to #FemFuture: Online Feminism<sup>308</sup>, females born after 1985 are the “power users of social networking” (Martin & Valenti, 2013)<sup>309</sup>.

With online feminism<sup>310</sup>, women's rights activists could easily communicate with one another and act cooperatively using social media regardless of geographic boundaries. These fourth wave feminists using digital tools have their own interpretation of living in the modern era and human relations, interactions with men, LGBTQI<sup>311</sup> society, control over the body such as reproductive rights, and so on. Apart of the fourth generation of feminists, neither feel bound to any prescribed manifesto nor necessarily accept the views of women's activists who came before them. Taking advantage of new technology, these feminists act individually and in groups to make the issues important to them more visible.

Moreover, the exponential growth in media technology and the attendant impact on personal social life and public social movements means that sociological theories of the 20th century no longer seem to adequately respond to questions concerning civil movements in the 21st century. Access to global communication has fundamentally changed the way that movements grow and information is shared.

“Americans have traditionally had high participation levels in voluntary associations and there are various theories about why this is the case. However, there is some evidence that volunteerism is on the decline in the United States, and

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<sup>308</sup> Martin, C.E., & Valenti, V. (2012) #FemFuture: Online Revolution. Barnard Center for Research on Women. Retrieved from <https://bcrw.barnard.edu/publications/femfuture-online-revolution/>

<sup>309</sup> Martin, C.E., & Valenti, V. (2013). Volume 8: #FemFuture: Online Revolution. Barnard Center for Research on Women. Retrieved from <http://bcrw.barnard.edu/wp-content/nfs/reports/NFS8-FemFuture-Online-Revolution-Report-April-15-2013.pdf>

<sup>310</sup> Online Feminism: Who Are We Excluding? [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debateout/online-feminism-who-are-w\\_b\\_6187770.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/debateout/online-feminism-who-are-w_b_6187770.html)

<sup>311</sup> Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning and Intersex.

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one possible explanation is the influence of the Internet. People can join groups online and donate money online to support causes without participating in any face-to-face meetings or activities.”<sup>312</sup>

In addition, it is clear that resource mobilization is an important element in social movements, and at present the Internet is one the most important resource mobilization in new social movements.

Here it is necessary to examine some of the tools that have been effective in raising the voices of women and civil society activists. New media and social networking sites have been used by social activists and especially by the women’s movement activists in Iran, including mobile phones, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Paltalk, Yahoo Messenger, and Skype.

### **4.3 Technology tools used by women's rights activists**

#### **4.3.1 Mobile phones**

The assignment of mobile phones to people in Iran began in 1994. In the beginning, phones were a luxury item and only specific people carried them. At the start, mobile phones were only in the hands of top government officials. Merchants were next. Before long, the use of mobile phones had spread throughout all sectors of the population and in all areas. At the end of 2014, the number of mobile phones in Iran was estimated at about 20 million<sup>313</sup>. Figures from the World Bank show that by 2015, 88 out of 100 people in Iran had mobile phone subscriptions<sup>314</sup>.

The ability to share content and engage in asynchronous group discussions without time and place restrictions has created another revolution in social communications. Whereas so-called traditional media like newspapers and radio and television are under the exclusive control of a specific group in the ruling

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<sup>312</sup> Collective Action, Social Movements, And Social Change, Chapter 18.

See think <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/soc/you-may-ask-yourself2/ch/18/outline.aspx>

<sup>313</sup> Arezo Yazd, Special to CNN, Iran: From 'axis of evil' to last best hope in the Middle East, Updated 1221 GMT (1921 HKT) July 10, 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/09/opinion/iran-u-s-alliance-opinion/>

<sup>314</sup> "Mobile Cellular Subscriptions (Per 100 People) | Data". *Data.worldbank.org*. N.p., 2016. <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.CEL.SETS.P2?locations=IR>. Last accessed 30 July 2016.

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establishment, the mobile phone has become one of the best means of information access available to all. People use it in the car and at parties. People in Iran were quick to use text messaging to communicate beyond their social circles.

For instance, women's rights activists used phones to inform the demonstrators about the location of a rally or sending short and important updates. I remember the gathering in Hafte-Tir Square in Tehran in June 2006 where 70 women's rights activists were arrested, the organizer kept in touch with participants by sending messages via smartphones. It helped to have this coordination of the event and people could prepare themselves for the events ahead. Although at that time, the government had access to technology controls of cellphones and some of the activists' calls and their locations were under surveillance by the security service. Intelligence agents sent threatening messages to some activists to show their power, such as a warning that participation in any demonstrations can be punished by 5 years in prison.

The speedy expansion of the use of smartphones (40 million in 2015, according to United for Iran<sup>315</sup>) throughout multiple layers of society along with the ease of use of the Internet-enabled mobile phones has made it possible to form new social networks and access more mobile messaging applications. Despite the possibility of monitoring audio and text communications, many people in Iran, both political and non-political, have accepted the risk and many use mobile applications for communication, including Instagram, Viber, Telegram, Line, WhatsApp, and FaceTime. These mobile applications allow for private and public communications. They allow for list-style communication and include fairly public groups with anonymous members to private family groups to political groups.

Moreover, influential social networks have been able to break through the dam of news censorship with the aid of smartphones. With the entrance of smartphones, the world of publishing has faced a great transformation in the sphere of news journalism and reporting. Many who had no knowledge of journalism and reporting

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<sup>315</sup> "Creating Tech Tools For Advancing Civil Rights". *United4Iran*. N.P., 2016.  
<https://united4iran.org/irancubator>. Last accessed 30 July 2016.

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in Iran started using their phones to record events and share these with others, serving as citizen journalists.

#### **4.3.2 Citizen Journalism**

With phones being easy to access, light, small, simple-to-use, and quick to capture images, the speed of information transfer and reception of mobile phones has been so remarkable as to replace many tools of journalism. It has also led to the creation of a new type of journalism. With the coming of a new generation of mobile phones capable of taking movies and pictures, informing and becoming informed through pictures and videos by ordinary people in the community was enhanced both quantitatively and qualitatively. In addition, with the expansion of the digital culture, the Internet, and participation in social networks, through ordinary citizens taking videos and pictures of events and circulating them on the Internet and social networks, the media emerged from the control of authoritarian governments and the people became the media. Shirazi (2011) writes:

“Young Iranian men and women become ‘grassroots’ journalists as they captured and disseminated hundreds of thousands of images and video clips of the socio-political events in June 2009” (Shirazi, 2011)<sup>316</sup>.

2009 was a watershed year for citizen journalism in Iran. That year technology, politics, censorship, and activism came together and resulted in mass sharing of events using Internet-enabled mobile phones with video capabilities. This became especially true in the course of the campaign for Iran’s president and after the controversial election results. One of the hallmarks of the post-election Green Movement<sup>317</sup> that took shape in response to election fraud was the way so many Iranian youth made use of their cellphones to register and record historical moments. This resulted in the term “citizen journalist” entering the vocabulary in

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<sup>316</sup> Shirazi, Farid. 2011. Information and communication technology and women empowerment in Iran, Telematics and In-formatics, 29(2012) pp 45-55.

<sup>317</sup> The Iranian Green Movement (Persian:Jonbesh-e Sabz) refers to a political movement that arose after the 2009 Iranian presidential election, in which protesters demanded the removal of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad from office. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian\\_Green\\_Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Green_Movement))

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Iran. In the years after the Green Movement, during the so-called “Arab Spring” events, citizen journalism was also used as a model.

In the wake of the 2009 presidential elections and the demonstrations that followed, foreign journalists were forced to leave the country and there was a ban on reporting. In response to this, opposition presidential candidate Mir Hossein Mousavi addressing his supporters, wrote on his Facebook page "Today you are the media, it is your duty to report and keep the hope alive". This is when citizen-journalists took over the dissemination of information. Despite all the restrictions, they broke through the censorship by sharing their pictures and videos, raising the curtain on acts of violence and repression. One example of the works of citizen-journalists is the video and pictures of the murder of Neda Agha-Soltan. They were published just a few minutes after her death. The video soon became viral on social networks and reached the top of the news in global media, including on radio and television.

Just six years before the Green Movement, mobile phones with cameras were a rarity in Iran. People with mobile phones capable of taking photographs were suspicious in the eyes of the authorities. A number of journalists were brought in for questioning because of the capabilities of their phones. For instance, Nazila Fathi who works as an Iranian correspondent for *The New York Times* told her story of how she fled the country in 2009, fearing for the safety of her family after defying a ban on media coverage of the Green movement. She explained:

Ten days into the protests, I received a call from the paramilitary commander of a pro-regime force called the Basij. I had met him at a demonstration a few days earlier and then interviewed him at his office. “Government forces have given your photo to snipers, with orders to shoot you,” he told me over the phone: “Stop going out on the streets.”<sup>318</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Fathi, N. (2014). *The Lonely War: One Woman’s Account of the Struggle for Modern Iran*. New York: Basic Books. See also Fathi, N. (2014). *The Exiled Heart: A New York Times Correspondent’s Story of Fleeing Iran with Her Family*. Vogue. Retrieved 27 October 2014 from <http://www.vogue.com/3348811/nazila-fathi-book-the-lonely-war-one-womans-account-of-the-struggle-for-modern-iran>

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A particularly tragic case is that of Zahra Kazemi<sup>319</sup>, the Iranian-Canadian journalist who visited Iran in 2003 as a journalist. Despite receiving an official license for news reporting from Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, she was detained because she had taken pictures in front of Evin Prison with her mobile phone camera<sup>320</sup>. She was brutally killed in prison under torture. At the time, some newspapers inside Iran wrote that because the mobile phone owned by Zahra Kazemi had a camera, she was suspected of spying. A short while after Zahra Kazemi's murder, modern mobile phones poured into markets in Iran and the world.

Authoritarian governments still seek to control and create restrictions on access to the media, yet they face challenges when it comes to closing the borders in cyberspace on information exchange, by different limitations such as hacking, filtering and low-speed connections.

#### **4.3.3 Mailing lists**

One of the primary tools women activists in Iran used that caused a shift in their operating methods was email. In the beginning, some women's right advocates, though very active, did not know how to use the Internet. It was enough for few individuals who were members of the movement, mainly young members, to send news by email to a friend or acquaintance abroad and it would circulate through the global virtual network on an international level. The speed of propagation of news was incredible. Individuals who saw a role for themselves in the movement had to, in the shortest amount of time, adapt themselves to the new technologies. Many began learning to use the new technology. Due to the efficacy of the new media, middle-aged activists, the first post-revolutionary generation of women's rights activists, sought to place technology at the service of the movement's aims. Familiarity with the new technology and the science of

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<sup>319</sup> Zahra "Ziba" Kazemi-Ahmabadi was an Iranian-Canadian freelance photographer and journalist who was arrested in front of Evin Prison in Tehran. Iranian officials following her arrest killed her.

<sup>320</sup> Death in Prison: No One Held Accountable International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, June 2011 <https://wwwiranhumanrights.org/2011/06/death-in-prison/>

See also. Canada & Kazemi, A Canadian citizen is a Canadian citizen is a Canadian citizen. April 4, 2005 <http://iranian.com/Mohyeddin/2005/April/Canada/index.html>

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telecommunications increased their awareness and knowledge and opened a window on extra-national activities.

The first step for many activists was to open an email account in order to be able to keep in touch with their counterparts in the women's movement in and out of the country. Next, they sought out appropriate mailing lists. In the first years of Internet usage in Iran, when the authorities were not sensitive to Internet users' activities, mailing lists were one of the most secure communication tools. It was not at risk of eavesdropping like the telephone. Moreover, members of mailing lists could, in an unlimited manner, follow intra-group conversations, raise a question, or participate in a discussion.

A number of mailing lists were formed during the 2009 elections and afterward in the process of popular protests at the flawed elections. Each of these had its own specific function. Among the ones with the largest membership, we can point to the Where-Is-My-Vote mailing list. This group had over 800 members. The advantage of the group was that it was made up of a wide spectrum of civil and political activists. Group members were from both inside and outside the country and different age groups and classes. Members included students, women's rights activists, journalists, filmmakers, writers, teachers, professors. Up until the arrest of a number of civil activists, group members were discussing sensitive issues. One of the functions of this mailing list was its high potential for rallying collective movements. But after the arrests, the group became passive. It was said that the mailing developed a leak, meaning the intelligence apparatus had the passwords of some of the list members. Numerous other mailing lists were also formed after 2009 and lasted longer and were more specialized. For example, there were lists for feminists, labor, student, political, environmental and even religious activists.

Of course, I need to point out a significant point: although the use of mailing lists, due to the speed of information transfer and telecommunications, generated a remarkable transformation in the modus operandi of women's movement in and out of the country, at the same time, today we are witnessing that many email lists have become passive. At best, participation and activity of most group members is

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limited to in-group discussions or news exchange and less oriented toward carrying out a common activity and the creation of a field movement in the physical world.

#### **4.3.4 Chat Rooms**

##### **4.3.4.1 Yahoo Messenger**

Yahoo Messenger was one of the facilities that very quickly found a place not only among civil activists but also among the youth and adolescents were spending most of their free time chatting with their friends and coworkers. When the Internet was first introduced in Iran, the government did not enforce control and filtering. Using chat applications such as Yahoo Messenger was one of the best means of quickly sending messages, despite the low speed and quality of the Internet. Yahoo chat rooms became a place for holding serious political and cultural discussions. However, because of Yahoo's weaknesses and special features, there was a great chance for disturbing and disrupting meetings. By using Yahoo Messenger, many pairs have raised discussions about daily political, social and cultural issues and shared ideas. Also, after security services found out about activists' use of these tools, their control intensified. Gradually civil activists preferred using other tools that offered more privacy.

##### **4.3.4.2 Paltalk**

The video group chat service Paltalk was initially released in June 1998. It is now a well-known messaging system with Farsi-speaking users. Because this messaging tool is capable of setting up chats, voice and video conversations, file transfers, conference calls, and communication with a high number of individuals, it made discussion and dialogue inside and outside the country possible.

By the time of its release, it had been years since civil and political activists inside Iran had been able to participate in conferences, in abroad and get together freely with connections outside the country. For a number of reasons, it was not possible to participate in outside conferences. Some activists were prohibited from leaving the country. Participating in conferences outside the country was risky, and

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there was a chance of being detained after participation in a conference.<sup>321</sup> In addition, the cost of trips was prohibitive. Paltalk rooms made it easier for civil activists. For instance, the 2004 IWSF conference was one the first conference, which was covered by ‘Paltalk’. As Ghorashi and Tavakoli (2006) mentioned:

“The 2004 IWSF conference, which also marked its fifteenth anniversary, took place in June in Berlin. The most intriguing part of this conference was that the whole program was broadcast through Internet via ‘Paltalk’”<sup>322</sup>.

New capabilities built into Paltalk made it easy to manage the rooms. This was one advantage of Paltalk over Yahoo. With the controls offered by Paltalk to the room manager, it was easy to expel disruptive voices seeking to shut down group communication.

Paltalk became a platform for virtual conferences. One example of this was an online meeting held by women's rights activists on 28 May 2005 to discuss a campaign for the abolition of unequal laws and Islamic punishments against women. One-hundred-fifty people participated<sup>323</sup>.

At a time when holding public meetings in real space met with serious problems, Paltalk was able, by crossing geographic boundaries, to strengthen the link between activists inside and outside the country and help in the exchange of knowledge and expertise among political, cultural, and civic groups. When I, from inside the women's movement in Iran, first participated in a Paltalk conversation crossing the country's border I felt so excited that we were able to so easily have a conversation and discussion. I felt that Internet use that, like so many things, seemed to be a masculine activity, was no longer the sole province of men. Soon after, women's rights activists were able to make use of this tool to advance their own goals. For example, for the first time, it became possible to participate, through

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<sup>321</sup> Ghorashi, H., & Tavakoli, N. (April 01, 2006). Paradoxes of transnational space and local activism: Iranians organizing across borders. *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, 2006, 47, 90-102. p 98

<sup>322</sup> Ghorashi, H., & Tavakoli, N. (April 01, 2006). Paradoxes of transnational space and local activism: Iranians organizing across borders. *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology*, 2006, 47, 90-102. p 96

<sup>323</sup> A report of the meeting Paltalk campaign for the abolition of unequal laws and Islamic punishments against women by women's rights activists. <http://www.shabakeh.de/archives/individual/000249.html>

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Paltalk, in the World Conference on Women's Studies in 2004 and some domestic activists remotely followed the discussions.

#### 4.3.4.3 Skype

For civil activists, Skype replaced the telephone. Communicating by telephone outside the country, besides being costly, was accompanied by another risk: its vulnerability to being controlled and surveilled by government authorities. Using Skype provided a higher degree of privacy and made conference calls possible. In cases of a small group, it was often a good choice for holding discussions. Of course, the capability of Skype goes beyond a chat room. Sending videos, pictures, texts or audio files, watching the image of the interlocutor and providing talks for a large group through Skype opened a new door throughout the world not only to civil activists but for every individual as well. One of the advantages of Skype over the telephone was that it made it possible to see the face of the other party. And moreover, the individuals in a Skype group trusted each other, creating a deeper friendship among the group's members.

#### 4.3.4.4 Instagram

Instagram is a social network, which allows users to share their pictures and videos on other social networks as well. In Iran, it is a favorite of youth. The number of Instagram users in Iran is estimated at about 7.5 million. They are thought to be between the ages of 16 and 35. Since it has the potential for uploading short-duration video, it is often suitable for notifications and short messages.

Instagram, as a social network, has also drawn the attention of performers and athletes. Many Iranian actors have accounts. Visitors can easily go to the personal page of their favorite performers, see their latest news and pictures, get in touch with them, and send them messages. By participating in social networks, performers and athletes stay in touch with their fans and share information about their personal lives with people. Reaction to the publication of certain pictures is unpredictable.

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There have been many cases of abuse and insults against public figures that have led to some closing their personal pages temporarily or for good.

A few actors have over a million follows on Instagram. For instance, Mohammad-Reza Golzar, a popular young actor, has 1.5 million followers. Behnoosh Bakhtiari, has 2 million followers on Instagram.

Instagram is of interest to politicians as well. For example, President Rouhani's page has over 380,000 followers and Mohammad-Javad Zarif, the foreign minister, also has 350,000 followers. It is noteworthy that the pages of politicians who are at the so-called top-tier of government are run by an admin.

Some clerics also have an active presence on Instagram. An instance of this is Hojjat ol-Islam Shahab Moradi<sup>324</sup> who directly runs his Instagram page and by raising controversial issues, has had a colorful presence on Instagram. He discusses all sorts of topics, from answering religious questions to artistic and political discussions. In one of his discussions, he discussed awarding the Oscar to the movie "A Separation" and the lack of importance of the award. One of his followers responded:

"Mr. Moradi, who do you think you are? For the Oscar ceremonies to be important for you or not? These ceremonies have nothing to do with America and your political games and are made up of various cultures, what are you talking about? You really brought shame on the [Qom] seminary and the clergy; please do think a little before talking..." [Ellipsis as received]

Reviewing the questions and answers between an ordinary user and a clergy, especially in a community where the clergy hold the power and wish to have the first and the last word, we come to several key points. First, cyberspace has provided the possibility that ordinary people can, without official formalities and in a plain language and without fear, criticize official statements. The follower asks, "Mr. Moradi, who do you think you are?" meaning a youth challenges a cleric and frankly tells officials not to comment on every issue and to think before talking. In

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<sup>324</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/moradishahab/> retrieved 13.10.2015

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response to this criticism also, Moradi apparently accepts the suggestion and replies: "I am grateful for your attention and advice to think."

Although the cleric's answer is short, it is a response. Second, the participation by a wide spectrum of individuals on social networks such as Instagram and their mutual relationships shows an example of the impact of the new media on contemporary social communications.

Use of this social network is not limited to the urban community; in rural areas it is also popular with the youth. For instance, the Guardian describes an example of the impact of Instagram on rural areas:

"Mohammad, a shepherd in a remote village in northeast Iran, is already an Instagram star in his native country. He has nearly 38,000 followers, most of them urbanites. The account was reportedly set up by a brother who went to Tehran to study with the support of Mohammad's earnings from the farm. Upon completing his Ph.D. and earning his first paycheck, he bought Mohammad a cell phone. Salarpolad is a combination of the names of two of his dogs, Salar and Polad, who have passed away. The photos offer scenes from rural life without the cultural filters, perhaps not for the squeamish. For them I have picked a few pretty ones"<sup>325</sup>.

Even Khamenei, the leader of the Islamic Republic, joined the social network Instagram in 2012. Obviously, this was for advancing his political and religious goals. Of course, many officials in Iran, especially among the clergy, are so uninformed about the workings of the Internet as to not know that broad cultural changes have taken place in society.

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<sup>325</sup> The Guardian, 5 August 2015. Iran's must-follow Instagram accounts  
<http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/aug/05/iran-instagram-accounts-tehran-photography>  
retrieved 13.10.2015



Figure 5 The Supreme Leader of Iran is Now on Instagram, Yes, Really

#### 4.3.5 International Communications in the Internet

As pointed out earlier, one of the pluses of new media, particularly the Internet, is living as if in a floating geography. At any point with Internet access, individuals can communicate with one another without any geographic limitations. Regarding Iran, where participation by civil and political activists at conferences and meetings outside the country was difficult, the Internet offered a unique possibility so that activists could, at a minimal cost, increase and expand their communication with people outside the country and become informed of the latest scientific and technological achievements and, in many cases, benefit from them.

More important, activists were able to establish communication with individuals that it would have been difficult or almost impossible to contact in the physical world.

This issue acquires added significance when one faces limitations on movement, travel, and communication. For refugees and those in exile it was a lifeline to home. They were able not only to easily communicate with their relatives but also, through access to first-hand news and information, feel themselves to be inside the country.

“One of the impacts of recent globalization is the formation of new offline and online transnational connections among migrants worldwide. The formation of these networked communities is linked to concepts such as homeland and identity”

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(Ghorashi & Boersma, 2009)<sup>326</sup> Ghorashi and Boersma argue that in spite of how challenging transnational connections could be, many Iranians had created virtually embedded ties that transcended nation states and geographical borders.

For instance, in an interview with Carolien Roelants from the Dutch newspaper NRC, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, a women's rights activist in Iran, stated:<sup>327</sup>

“You cannot say that the green movement knows borders. Some fight within Iran and others make the fight visible abroad, by means of media and Internet. The Internet is the alternative for the street. We exchange the latest news. We provide emotional support. We, exiles, do not live abroad. We live in cyberspace. People in Iran cannot talk on the street, but they can communicate and organize by means of Internet.”

In one of her posts, the journalist Naeimeh Doostdar portrayed an exiled migrant's relationship with her relatives and the media's impact on the life of an individual with a personal experience:

“An exiled immigrant is, at a minimum, more fortunate than her previous generation. She is able to see the latest pictures of her friends on Instagram and find out about what they are up to on Facebook. She has friends who every moment are sending her text, audio, and video messages via Viber.

“The family of an exiled immigrant, the one who is unable to board any plane back and to whom the borders are forever closed, now will probably feel very fortunate. Deep down they are satisfied that their dear one is, at least, enjoying security and liberty and that their meetings, instead of being inside a prison's meeting room, is from behind a monitor. They are not complaining: they take their cellphones and laptops to the dining room table, kitchen, and living room and eat together. The mother brews the tea; the father blows the candles on his birthday cake. Their lives had become noticeably more technical, the techniques of finding new software and how to use them, of adjusting the screen brightness to better see

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<sup>326</sup> Ghorashi, H., & Boersma, K. (2009). The 'Iranian Diaspora' and the new media: From political action to humanitarian help. *Development and Change*, 40(4), 667-691.

<sup>327</sup> Roelants, C. (2010, September 15). 'Wij, Iraanse ballingen, leven in cyberspace' (translation: "We, Iranian exiles, live in cyberspace"). Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh. *NRC Handelsblad*. <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2010/09/15/wij-iraanse-ballingen-leven-in-cyberspace-11943513-a206355>

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their child's face and of course the battle against filters that are constantly distorting the communication.” (Radio Zamaneh, 7 September 2015)

In the description written about the virtual relationship of an exiled immigrant with her relatives, there are several hidden messages. First, that the new telecommunications technology has cut distances, reduced homesickness, and drawn a generation behind monitors that may even be unable to read or write. But the pace of change under the impact of the new telecommunication technology has forced them, in order to virtually meet with their children, to learn, even if at an elementary level, to use the technology. The flip side of it is that relationships become superficial. Seeing the images of dear ones through monitor screens has replaced their physical presence and virtual relationships have taken the place of physical ones. Do these relationships not reduce the human factor to a virtual identity?

On the other hand, communicating with the world abroad is not always without problems either. There have been times when setting up simple communications has led to detentions in Iran. Those detentions have even such that it has raised protest from some individuals close to the establishment. For example, on 12 October 2004, Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, head of the office of the president, parliamentary and legal deputy, and advisor to the reformist era President Khatami, in protest at the detention of some webloggers, wrote in his personal weblog<sup>328</sup>:

Confronting the Internet community like you do gang or guerrilla houses shows the utmost ignorance about the reality of this group. They do not know [how to] wage war or plot at all. In the weblog and a talk with a judicial official, there was the talk of Internet users communicating with the world outside the country. Someone has to say that this is no longer the Qajar era when anyone trying to talk across the borders should take asylum at an embassy and be a spy. Today when you press the first Internet key, you are connected to the world abroad! There is no longer inside [the country] and outside. Everywhere is both inside and outside [the country]. This is a major development that is ignored.”

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<sup>328</sup> <http://www.webneveshteha.com/weblog/?m=07&y=1383&page=2> retrieved 12.10.2015

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This discussion shows that use of the Internet and putting it in the public domain was inevitable. Governments, even repressive ones, are forced to accept global developments.

#### **4.3.6 Cyberspace as an alternative or complement**

There are many differing views of cyberspace and what it is and contains. Virtual media theorist David Bell believes that the definition of the cyberspace is complex. He presents three overlapping definitions for cyberspace: the definition of cyberspace from the viewpoint of hardware, meaning the global network of computers connected with each other via telecommunications infrastructure that images and ideas. the definition of the cyberspace on the basis of its working nature as representing a type of meeting among physical and symbolic elements that, depending on the way a person uses it reveals different values. (Bell, 2001)<sup>329</sup> Jaron Lanier, another theorist of virtual reality, goes beyond this. In his book, *you are not a gadget*; he warns that Internet communications classify people into "antagonistic virtual tribes."<sup>330</sup> (Lanier, 2010)

"Something started to go wrong with the digital revolution around the turn of the twenty-first century. The World Wide Web was flooded by a torrent of petty designs sometimes called web2.0. This ideology promotes radical freedom on the surface of the web, but that freedom, ironically, is more for machines than people. Nevertheless, it is sometimes referred to as "open culture" (Lanier, 2010). Benkler (2006), on the other hand, claims that the Internet has a potential to change the practice of democracy thoroughly owing to its participatory and interactive characteristics.

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<sup>329</sup> David Bell, 2010. An Introduction to Cyber cultures, London and New York, Contributors: David Bell - Author. Publisher.

<sup>330</sup> Lanier, Jaron, 2010, You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto, (first published 2010) Published in the United States by Alfred A. Knopf.

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“It allows all citizens to alter their relationship with the public sphere, to become creators and primary subjects, to become engaged in social production. In this sense, the Internet has ascribed the powers of democratization”<sup>331</sup>. ”

Michael Benedikt defines cyberspace thusly: “Cyberspace: A common mental geography, built, in turn, by consensus and revolution, canon and experiment; a territory swarming with data and lies, with mind stuff and memories of nature, with a million voices and two million eyes in a silent, invisible concert of enquiry, deal making, dream sharing, and simple beholding.” (Benedikt, 1991)<sup>332</sup>

In fact, virtual space is a kind of digital reality known as “computer-generated reality,” a reality that is virtual or artificial in the sense of not taking up space in the real world and physical environment and is created in the mind of users as a result of interaction with the electronic medium. Naturally, virtual networks also are realities within the digital world.



Figure 6 Examples of popular graphic conceptions of Social Networking inter-relationships

#### 4.3.7 Social Networks in the Virtual Space

Cyberspace has provided the potential for the creation of new communities of users. Since Tönnies<sup>333</sup> and his efforts to define two types of human association, that is “community” versus “society” “Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft”<sup>334</sup>. Many

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<sup>331</sup> Benkler, Y. 2006. *The Wealth of Networks: How Social Production Transforms Markets and Freedom*. London: Yale University Press.

See also: [http://www.benkler.org/Benkler\\_Wealth\\_Of\\_Networks.pdf](http://www.benkler.org/Benkler_Wealth_Of_Networks.pdf)

<sup>332</sup> Benedikt, Michael. 1991. *Introduction to “Cyberspace: First Steps”* MIT Press, 1991 ,p2

see also <http://homes.ieu.edu.tr/nozgenalp/MCS490/Media.Culture.and.Technology-Readings/week.11-introduction.to.Cyberspace%20First%20Steps%20Benedikt.pdf>

<sup>333</sup> Ferdinand Tönnies, 1922 ,*Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft : Grundbegriffe der reinen Soziologie*

<sup>334</sup> *Gesellschaft und Gemeinschaft*

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social and cultural thinkers have noted “being face to face,” “numeric limit”, and the “existence of emotional relationship” as the fundamental features of community. Although the relations between the users of cyberspace are mediated and not face to face, many Internet scholars tend to use the term “community” to refer to a collection of users. Currently the term “social networks” has been fully established and accepted among the public.

A social networking site is a networked communication platform in which participants 1) have uniquely identifiable profiles that consist of user-supplied content, content provided by other users, and/or system-provided data; 2) can publicly set up connections that can be viewed and joined by others; and 3) can consume, produce, and/or interact with streams of user-generated content provided by their interactions on the site.

Virtual social networks are a generation of Internet that are based on online. Social networks as a type of social media have provided the possibility of making contact and sharing content on the Internet. Horizontal relationships, production and distribution of information and content, the high speed of production and publication of news and the crossing of red lines and confrontation with (previously) taboo subjects are among the attractions of virtual social networks. Moreover, the public is the most important unmediated producer, and so besides having the potential for expanding a democratic culture, social networks are able to play a fundamental role in recreating, strengthening, and actualizing identities. What many activists find useful in these networks is the power to unofficially publish information and to use the platforms to collectively brainstorm for projects, for example making use of collective wisdom<sup>335</sup> to generate content, as is the case on Wikipedia with its multiple authors; or as on Facebook where long comment threads can lead to the refinement of ideas.

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<sup>335</sup> Collective wisdom, also called group wisdom and co-intelligence, is shared knowledge arrived at by individuals and groups. Collective intelligence, which is sometimes used synonymously with collective wisdom, is more of a shared decision process than collective wisdom.

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From the 1990s onwards, a number of social movements became active in Iranian political life. This includes the student movement, ethnic-minority and national movements, the women's movement, and the environmental movement. Since 2002, the numbers of groups with extensively political activities has increased rapidly. This may be due to access to social networks. This expansion of conscious interactions of citizens with one another and with public organizations and institutions is among the consequences of the use of new media. Virtual social networks are more than technological tools that provide Internet users with interesting communication capabilities. Rather, social networks have created particular transformations in social, cultural, economic, and political structures. Often network members are directly or indirectly catalyzed and encouraged to participate in activities outside the virtual sphere. There is a lot of research indicating that those who participate in online activism "clicktivism" are also more likely to participate offline.<sup>336</sup>

Networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, Telegram, and Instagram are examples of virtual social networks that have quickly grown among the Iranian youth and around the world. Due to the broad scope and the dominance of virtual social networks in social life in modern societies, and the fluid and dynamic nature of this phenomenon, it is essential that along with the technological content-based growth and development of virtual social networks, we critique and study their role in social developments.

Moreover, at present, virtual social networks are one of the key challenges faced by governmental intelligence apparatus. This occasionally ends in confrontation and conflict between citizens and governments in cyberspace. For every advance in online communications, there comes an advance in surveillance capabilities. This is a key consideration in Iran. For Iran's authorities, one way to

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<sup>336</sup> <http://jcr.oxfordjournals.org/content/40/6/1149.abstract>  
<https://ari.nus.edu.sg/Assets/repository/files/publications/InterAsiaRoundtable-2012.pdf#page=83>  
<http://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/viewArticle/3336>

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confront social networks is through infiltration or by creating governmental social networks.

#### **4.3.8 Functions of social networks among women and civil activists**

In spite of the fact that online behavior does not always correspond with offline behavior, the reactions to posts and information by the users in cyberspace can help us understand the behavior and beliefs of portions of society. For example, Facebook, Twitter, or Instagram use provides the possibility for users to share their favorite posts with friends and other network users. From the manner of dialogues and participation in discussions and an analysis of the content, we can do an analysis of the behavior and social psychology of the society.

Another basic function of social networks is control and critique of government institutions along with the expression of one's wishes through online groups and forums. For example, through Facebook, which is a social network favored by Iranians, civil activists could quickly launch campaigns and stir debates in cyberspace. This created an exceptional opportunity for women's rights activists and gender equality supporters to share their demands with a greater number of people and to stimulate sensitivity to gender issues among a larger group of citizens, as well as to turn the attention of some officials to defects in the current laws. For example, despite the explicit command of the Supreme Leader (Ali Khamenei) banning the entry of women into stadiums, a debate was fueled on social media around the "Campaign entry of women into the stadium" or White scarf campaign White scarf campaign in year 2005, during the Iran-Bahrain game. Officials in the Ministry of Sports relented to the people, and women were allowed to watch the volleyball tournament between Iran and Serbia; about 150 women entered the stadium, along with national media. Even a number of top-tier officials in Iran, including some who were unfamiliar with new media and the Internet, felt pressure to have an online presence. One reason for this was to familiarize themselves with the needs of the younger generation. Another was to compete with the opposition and political and civil activists.

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#### **4.3.9 Organizing Campaigns in Cyberspace**

Much of the communications on social networks take shape on the basis of political or religious vision, expertise, and interests. Members of virtual networks, through the links they establish with each other, often follow a common goal in the real world. In a short time, numerous campaign were organized including The International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran and the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign, among others. One example of a campaign that combined virtual and physical activities was the One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws.

New methods of protest were incorporated in the development of the One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws, which was initiated in 2006. Although the campaign was face-to-face in physical space, preparations, notifications, and cross-border communication to gain international supporters was done using new media. Activities inside the country depended on face-to-face contact with people willing to sign the petition. Outside Iran, activists and interested parties could follow the activities online through the website Change for Equality (<http://we-change.org/>). The One Million Signatures Campaign has been explained in the earlier section on the women's movement in three decades of revolution.

With the expansion of social networks, other campaigns took shape one after another such as No to Execution, the Campaign of the Families of Political Prisoners, the Campaign against Stoning, and the Campaign of Men against the Hijab. Moreover, dozens of other campaigns formed on social networks. Some campaigns were formed with the objective of informing or drawing the attention of other media outlets.

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#### **4.3.10 Orkut and Facebook**

Before Facebook was released for public use in 2006, people in Iran were already using the social network Orkut<sup>337</sup>.

A research by Hazhir Rahmandad et al. (2006)<sup>338</sup> suggests that the population of Iranian users of Orkut were 68% male and 32% female, the average age of the population was 26 years old and 20% were married. Iranians took to Orkut so quickly and in so many numbers that after Brazil and the US, Iran became the third largest user country. It was the first online collective experience of Iranians.

Orkut provided a space where members could be involved in several dialogues at the same time and become familiar with different people. At that time, it was an opportunity to develop and introduce different ideas to find their own pros and cons, and to discuss calls. Orkut was a means of cultural exchange. Orkut provided an opportunity for members to open a discussion on a particular subject with others who were interested in that subject (political, social, cultural, art and so on).

#### **Facebook**

Facebook with high number of users is one the most favorite social network not only among social and political activists but also among ordinary people. Due to the widespread use of civil activists before and after the Presidential Election 2009, The Iranian government has controlled access to Facebook. In 2009, Facebook was twice blocked and unblocked again. Despite reporting to the contrary (such as “Iran has blocked access to Facebook, but that has not prevented tens of thousands of Iranians from joining the site to connect with each other and share ideas, pictures, and even sensitive political content”<sup>339</sup>), Iranian officials cite the violation of privacy as the reason for filtering. Critics state the reason to be political.

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<sup>337</sup> Orkut was launched on 22 January 2004 as an online community that connects people through a network of friends. It provides an online meeting place where people can socialize, make new acquaintances and find others who share their interests.

<sup>338</sup> Rahmandad, Hazhir ,Sarkhili, Sara , Hafezi, Mohammad ,Mostashari, Ali Parsinejhad, Farzan Saeidi, Nima, Khademhosseini, Ali. 2006. Iranians on Orkut: Trends and Characteristics. ISG research report. See article in [http://isgmit.org/projects-storage/Orkut/updated-orkut\\_report\\_Mar07\\_06.pdf](http://isgmit.org/projects-storage/Orkut/updated-orkut_report_Mar07_06.pdf)

<sup>339</sup> <http://www.payvand.com/news/11/jun/1080.html>, retrieved 13.10.2015

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Iranian politicians first used Facebook during the campaign for president in 2009. Despite restrictions including filtering, censorship, blocking and shutting down certain websites, along with throttling bandwidth, the campaigns of the opposition candidates and their supporters were active in virtual networks. In Wired we read:

"Facebook is emerging as a particularly important campaign tool. As Elham Khatami<sup>340</sup> of the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reports, Facebook has become a way to circumvent state-run media, which tends to favor the incumbent administration. Mousavi now counts over 36,000 Facebook friends, a network that could prove a potent way to mobilize voters under 30, who make up around half of the electorate. His supporters have also created a Twitter page and a YouTube channel.<sup>341</sup>

The activity of Iranian youth on Facebook peaked just after the 2009 election results in an unforgettable way. Facebook activists would call one another to participate in demonstrations and give each other guidelines regarding methods of protest. In a short time, many Facebook messages were exchanged about ongoing events. A number of studies showed the role of Facebook in the rapid spread of news and organized protests by opponents. For instance, with the Green Movement's decentralized approach and use of Facebook, grassroots initiatives embraced diversity by providing a highly-interactive platform for many alternative voices and opinion for organizing collective actions.

Esfandiari (2011) in describing this period of the young cyber activities wrote:

"Many Iranian opposition activists and human rights defenders use online tools like Facebook to spread news about the beleaguered opposition movement, to report oppressive activities by the state, and to discuss other sensitive subjects."<sup>342</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> The link to Elham Khatami's original piece no longer works.

<sup>341</sup> Iran's Wired Generation Challenges Ahmadinejad, See article in <http://www.wired.com/2009/06/irans-wired-generation-challenges-ahmadinejad>  
Accessed on October 25, 2015

<sup>342</sup> Golnaz Esfandiari, 2011, In Iran, Beware of New Facebook 'Friends' See article in <http://www.payvand.com/news/11/jun/1080.html> retrieved on 13.10.2015

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Alinejad (2015) described the use of Facebook by the second Iranian generation in diaspora during Green movement in her doctoral thesis:

“Facebook was important for respondents during this time for the organizing of events. Facebook was the central way my respondents would find out about art shows, vigils, protests, and other events organized in solidarity with the voters and protesters in Iran”.<sup>343</sup>

In addition, news related to the repression circulated in social networks. There has been much critique of the use of social media during the protests following the elections. Instead of joining protestors in demonstrations, it seems that many remained behind computers and made do with communicating the news of those arrested and liking of each other’s posts. This kind of activity has become known as “clicktivism.” Some scholars believe that the risk of clicktivism, sometimes called slacktivism, is that activists become passive. This includes the American journalist and activist Micah M. White: "Clicktivism will never breed social revolution." He continues:

“Still, the real-world action is the only way to achieve a social revolution. Clicking a link can never replace taking to the streets. Nor can we rely on digital technologies to get people off the screens.”(White, 2011)<sup>344</sup>.

It is correct that clicking a link or posting and sharing news can never replace taking action in the streets, but it should be noted that Facebook or other social networks are tools and not purpose. No doubt that the speed of transferring news and information, and the high capacity to organize protests and strikes by relying on the creativity of the masses in the beginning of the 21st century was unique.

Obviously, slacktivism does not lead to a revolution, but could cause some to connect to issues they might have otherwise ignored. In the balance between activities in virtual space and in physical space, strong social movements could be forming. The Arab Spring throughout the Arab world and the Green Movement in Iran are obvious examples of this, regardless of their outcome.

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<sup>343</sup> Alinejad, Donya. (2015). Next Generation Diaspora, The formation of Iranian American-ness among second-generation migrant Internet users in Los Angeles, VU Amsterdam, Netherlands 2015, p. 268.

<sup>344</sup> Micah M. White, 2011; Activism after Clicktivism How to energize the political left. Adbusters. See also, <https://www.adbusters.org/magazine/93/activism-after-clicktivism.html> retrieved 19.10.2015

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The idea that expressing opposition on Facebook is less risky than going out into the streets was not entirely valid in Iran. There is much evidence that a number of those arrested in the wake of the 2009 elections faced accusations due to their activities on Facebook. Some have even been accused of acts incompatible with chastity for posting Facebook pictures from parties or group trips. To address the threat of arrest for political messages or inviting people to protest in Facebook, young people tried calling gatherings for recreational sports events or playing in parks on Facebook.

However, in Iran even the nonpolitical is not without cost. A good example of this was the 2011 invitation to join in water play at the “Water and Fire” park in Tehran. After the publication of pictures from the event showing males and females together, a number of those sharing posts were arrested. Some of them were even placed before state television cameras to testify against themselves. However, this move had another dimension as well. The security confrontation did not lead to retreat. Instead, Facebook calls for a similar event in other cities emerged. Youth were invited to participate in water play in the park. Constant was the message of the youth that they had the right to be happy and have fun. The third point of this action is that although it was neither a political act nor a movement, it included a link between a cyberspace call to action and the transference of that call to action in physical space. This movement can be seen as a model for combining clicktivism with real action and also for prevailing over the atmosphere of fear fueled by security forces in order to neutralize civil actors on social networks.

#### **4.3.11 Twitter in Iran**

During the 2009 election process in Iran, Twitter was one of the tools used by a number of people in opposition to the government for quick communication of news and information. And Twitter’s front page was dedicated to the Iranian

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elections. Some activists used Twitter to send links to videos, pictures, and reports.<sup>345</sup>

Bailly (2012)<sup>346</sup> claims that a Twitter revolution took place in Iran in 2009. Despite his claim, based on the evidence, Twitter, unlike Facebook, did not meet with much public welcome in Iran. Domestically, only a limited number of students and professional political and civil activists used it. Through Twitter, they critiqued international media for not covering the news of public protests as they should have, and of course they also managed to involve many prominent Twitter personalities from outside the country.

During the repression of Iranian media, Twitter was used as a means of communicating news about popular protests of election fraud to those outside the country. The organization of collective movements and domestic communication was still done through Facebook, mailing lists, weblogs, and mobile phones. YouTube was also well used for uploading videos to share.

So, although Twitter played a valuable role in publishing the news abroad, it was not accessible to many segments of the population. Therefore, Bailly's use of "Twitter revolution" concerning Iran is not only unconvincing but also seems quite optimistic. Dissemination of information did not take place only through Twitter, but as with other countries facing press censorship, through a collection of online social networks. In addition, in Iran Twitter is still not as much used by the public as Facebook. As Aday, Farrell, Lynch, Sides, Kelly, & Zuckerman, E. (2010), write:

There were probably too few active Twitter users in Iran for it to drive any mass mobilization. Sysomos reports that there were approximately 8,500 Twitter users who self-reported as Iranian in May 2009, and Gaurav Mishra claims that less than 100 of those were active during the election period. Such numbers pale compared to the hundreds of thousands of Iranians who participated in the protest movement at some point. (Aday et al., 2010, p.18)

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<sup>345</sup> Brad Stone and Noam Cohen June, 2009, Social Networks Spread Defiance Online  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/world/middleeast/16media.html?ref=media&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/world/middleeast/16media.html?ref=media&_r=0) Retrieved 13.09.2015

<sup>346</sup> Bailly Jordan,2012, The Impact of Social Media on Social Movements: A Case Study of the 2009 Iranian Green Movement and the 2011 Egyptian Revolution, Washington State University, Advisor: Dr. Martha Cottam – Department of Political Science; College of Liberal Arts

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Morozov (2011) also claims in this regard:

“In fact, there were few (impossible to say how few) Twitter users in Tehran, and it is unclear whether Twitter is really used to organize protests; on this story, media spread rumors rather than investigate facts.”

In my opinion, Morozov’s claim that the number of Twitter users was very small is more consistent with the facts of the 2009 elections than Bailly’s view of a “Twitter revolution” to describe the tweeting of news regarding the protests in Iran during the 2009 elections. Twitter had more of an impact outside the country than inside.

#### **4.3.12 Blogging in Iran**

Weblogs, which quickly became known as blogs, were an online, public diary. The first blogs were launched between 1994 and 1998. In 1997, Jorn Barger, one of the earliest bloggers, described his online journal as a weblog.

“The early waves of web activity were remarkably energetic and had a personal quality. People created personal “homepages,” and each of them was different, and often strange. The web had flavor.” (Lanier, 2010).

The first Persian/ English blog was launched by Hossein Derakhshan<sup>347</sup> in Canada on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 2001. However, Salman Jariri, a 22-year-old student of computer engineering at Sharif University of Technology, launched the first Persian Weblog inside Iran on 26 September 2001. He published his first post titled “What does a Weblog mean per se?” Not long after that blogging attracted the interest of many professional journalists, students, civil activists, ordinary people, and even politicians in Iran. The early 2000s were a period of rapid growth for blogs in Iran.

Simmons (2005)<sup>348</sup> describes that how Iranian students quickly welcomed the Internet during the first year.

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<sup>347</sup> Hossein Derakhshan, (born January 7, 1975), is an Iranian-Canadian blogger who was imprisoned in Tehran from November 2008 – 2014.

<sup>348</sup> Erin Simmons, 2005, The Impact of the Weblog: A Case Study of The United States and Iran, The Ohio State University

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"Iranian students and journalists have started blogging in large numbers, encouraged by the opportunity to share their lives and perceptions with the world."

How much impact did the blogs have? Simmons could not be sure. However, Simmons recognizes "anonymity" as an important factor in the lack of access to the affected of the blogs:

"Determining the impact of the blog may prove to be difficult at best because it is not immediately obvious how one would show impact. The anonymity of the Internet prevents easy measurement of audience effects, particularly in Iran." (Simmons, 2005)

Although, there are no exact figures on the number of Iranian blogs. But based on a study in October 2005, the number of Iranian blogs is estimated to be about 700,000 of which only 40,000-110,000 were active. Most of those were written in Farsi.<sup>349</sup> It has been reported that in 2009, about 70,000 active Iranian blogs existed. (See FIKRUN WA FANN)<sup>350</sup> Perhaps one of the reasons for the drop in the use of blogs should be sought in remarks by Daryl Plummer, a researcher at Gartner Inc. He says that most of those who daily write on the web as a hobby, have so far tried it. Those who love doing it commit themselves to go on doing it, while others are tired of it and have abandoned it.<sup>351</sup> I think Plummer's reason is convincing. Because Iran had more blogs per capita than anywhere else. (See also Kelly, 2008)<sup>352</sup>

However, it appears that in Iran, other factors were also influential in the decrease in blogging. Those included the slow Internet speed, filtering of sites particularly political and social criticism blogs, emergence of a variety of social networks, and the attraction of some bloggers to other social networks, plus entrance of new telecommunications tools such as smartphones that facilitate access

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<sup>349</sup> <http://www.blogherald.com/2005/10/10/the-blog-herald-blog-count-october-2005/> retrieved 17.10.2015

See also: <http://weblogcrawler.blogspot.nl/search/label/Research>, a research from Koorosh Eslamzade.

<sup>350</sup> <http://www.goethe.de/ges/phi/prj/ffs/the/103/fa14587618.htm> Retrieved 10.11.2015

<sup>351</sup> Larry Weber .2007, Marketing to the Social web, How Digital Customer Comities Build Your Business. p 169, John Wiley & Sons-Inc. Hoboken, New Jersey.

<sup>352</sup> Kelly, John, 2008. Mapping Iran's Online Public: Politics and Culture in the Persian Blogosphere, access [https://cyber.harvard.edu/publications/2008/Mapping\\_Irangs\\_Online\\_Public](https://cyber.harvard.edu/publications/2008/Mapping_Irangs_Online_Public)

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to mobile social networks. And most importantly, the widespread detentions of bloggers in Iran may be another factor for some blogs becoming inactive. For example, in 2003, Sina Motalebi, a journalist, and blogger, was detained for posts published on his blog. He was forced to leave Iran a few months later. Omid Memarian, Roozbeh Mir Ebrahimi, Shahram Rafizadeh, Javad Gholamtamimi, all of whom were bloggers, were arrested without being charged. After being released, they declared that during their detention, they had been subjected to physical and mental violence. These cases illustrate that blogging has not been, as is imagined, free of risks for Iranian users in cyberspace. So far, many bloggers have been detained. Some, like the blogger Sattar Beheshti who was arrested in 2012, have died in prison. Iranian workers, bloggers, and activists had lost their lives in prison accused of propaganda against the state through blogs and social networks.

During the elections and the protests that followed Iranian blogs like others, online and traditional media outlets were blocked by security service. the regime reduced the frequency at which bloggers could post between June 7 to 25, 2009. However, blogging returned to pre-election levels soon thereafter.” (Aday et al., 2010)<sup>353</sup> Other research has yielded similar results.

“The Iranian Blogosphere is monitored and filtered by the government, leading to many questions regarding the ability of these groups to promote political and societal change. In addition, the scene is decentralized and fragmented, representing a multitude of voices, groups, and interests. It will be very difficult to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness, or even the sincerity, of the bloggers, given that alternative forms of communications between Iran and the Western world are so highly censored”<sup>354</sup>”(New Media and Development Communication, “Blogospheres: Iran”).

Despite all the obstacles, what is worth noticing though is the fact that, the rapid growth of the Iranian blogosphere offers one window into propositions about the impact of the new media on intergroup relations and civil society, through careful study of the linkage patterns and political and cultural affiliations of Persian-language.

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<sup>353</sup>Aday, S., Farrell, H., Lynch, M., Sides, J., Kelly, J., & Zuckerman, E. (2010). Blogs and bullets: New media in contentious politics. United States Institute of Peace, 65, 1-31.  
<https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pw65.pdf>

<sup>354</sup> New Media and Development communication,  
<http://www.columbia.edu/itc/sipa/nelson/newmediadev/Iranian%20Blogosphere.html> Retrieved 12.11.2015

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However, regardless of the quantity of blogs in Iran and their rate of growth, what matters is their performance in an environment of political obstruction. Consider that in Iran it is not easy to get a license to publish. Moreover, even after getting a license, it is not possible to freely publish different issues, views, and news without consideration for the establishment's red lines, otherwise the publication would risk getting shut down. Considering such circumstances helps us to better realize the importance of blogging. For example, in May 2000, on Supreme Leader Khamenei's order, the Islamic Republic's judiciary twice banned all reformist newspapers. Only establishment newspapers such as the hardline *Kayhan*, which is associated with the Office of the Supreme Leader, and other newspapers affiliated with government bodies like such as *Hamshahri* were allowed to publish. The restriction of newspapers and the simultaneous expansion of the Internet created the right set of circumstances for blogging to become an important means of information dissemination in Iran. The importance and power of blogging were in spreading information and ideas and breaking through government control of messaging. It is worth noting that in the blogosphere, blogging is not solely for the youth against the state and or intellectuals. Radical religious people and pro-government groups are also very active. They promote religious ideas through blogging.

The existing Farsi blogs online can be divided into the following categories:

- News and Political Analysis
- Commercial
- Religious
- Sports
- Humor and Entertainment
- Scientific and Education: presentation of scientific articles and talks
- Personal: Recording of feelings, poems, and events of everyday life

Even as many in Iran welcomed the new blogs, the establishment adopted various mechanisms to close and block them, or even going as far as to detain some bloggers in order to control online activities.

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In April 2003, Iran became the first government to take direct action against bloggers<sup>355</sup> (Alavi, 2005), after already being long known as a country that violates freedom of the press. It seems that one of the reasons the Iranian government has had a hypersensitivity to and strict controls on blogging was the quick emergence of a blogging culture. Some sought alternative outlets for reporting and freedom of expression.

In addition, we can say that the bloggers' network has had a special importance from the viewpoint of mutual interaction among bloggers and of creating movements. We can study it from two angles: *intra-group impact* and *the impact on the group*.

While bloggers interact with each other and are influenced by one another to moderate or change their view concerning a particular issue, blogging can also be influential in spreading hate and promoting destructive ideas. On the other hand, blogging can also be influential in creating currents and rallying masses of individuals at sensitive junctures, as well as in advancing social, cultural, and political goals through the creation of a network of bloggers and their ordinary readers. For instance, in the course of 2009 elections, a wave of online conversation was initiated concerning participation in the elections or not among the bloggers.

Akbar Montajebi, author of a blog by the same name, in an interview with *BBC Persian* stated:

"Blogs are in fact an underground media outlet that are not highly recognized but quantity-wise they are very numerous and quality-wise, since they are personal media outlets, they can comment on or support a specific candidate. During this period, the key point is the atmosphere of weblogs that has generally gone in the direction of encouraging everyone to participate in elections. This is an event whose opposite we witnessed four years ago. That is, in the last period of presidential elections, the blogging atmosphere was one of the boycotts. Because of that also, anyone with hatred toward or negative view of the establishment or existing conditions, was seeking to persuade others not to participate in the elections. But this year it is the other way around."<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Alavi, Nasrin. 2005. *We Are Iran: The Persian Blogs*. Soft Skull Press; First Edition pdf, p.3.

<sup>356</sup> [http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2009/06/090609\\_ra\\_maf\\_election\\_blogs.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2009/06/090609_ra_maf_election_blogs.shtml) Retrieved 15.10.2015

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In addition, certain research on a global scale has shown the impact of new media on advocacy. For instance, Browning (1996)<sup>357</sup> and Bennet & Fielding (1999)<sup>358</sup> studied the impact of new media on the encouragement to vote and political advocacy.

Evidence has shown the impact of blogging on advocacy and mobilization, an example of this being the impact of discussions between bloggers on the encouragement to vote or not to vote and political advocacy during the election process 2009 in Iran.

#### **4.3.13 Iranian Women and Blogging**

With the coming of the Internet, a great transformation began in the lives of Iranian women.<sup>359</sup> Women from different strata discovered the possibility and the courage to write about their issues and feelings. Housekeepers to employees, students, and even women who were studying religious sciences in seminaries all started to write weblogs.

In countries like Iran, official power dominates all spheres of public and even private life. In Iran, this is especially true in the case of women who do not even have the right to choose the type of clothes they wear. Gender separation is imposed on children from pre-elementary years. The expression of personal ideas and beliefs is restricted and censored. Under these circumstances, blogging provided the rare environment where women, mostly writing under pseudonyms, could express themselves with others. Ebrahimi writes:

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<sup>357</sup> Browning, Graeme. 1996. *Electronic Democracy: Using the Internet to Influence American Politics*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge,

<sup>358</sup> Bennet, Daniel & Fielding, Pam. (1999). *The Net Effect: How Cyber advocacy is changing the Political Landscape*. Merrifield, VA: E-Advocates press.

<sup>359</sup> “In a society where women had no public forum, no opportunity to express themselves, writing became an act of unveiling, a way of making themselves publicly visible, expressive, and mobile. Previously, women’s writing had been limited to those who were professional writers or had some literary talent, but with the emergence of the new Internet technology and the phenomenon of weblog writing or blogging, women’s writing gained impetus. Blogging spread among ordinary young women of the urban middle class who for the first time found a medium in which to express themselves. Women gradually emerged as important actors in the Iranian blogosphere (Weblogistan). Through bold narration in their blogs, they unveiled the hidden woman, suppressed by the traditions of Iranian society, and revealed first-hand information about themselves which had never before been told publicly.”(Ebrahimi 2008)<sup>359</sup>

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Indeed, the emergence of thousands of female bloggers in Iranian cyberspace coincided with the spread of the new hijab movement in Tehran and other large cities. Yet contrary to the general opinion that the majority of Iranian female bloggers are young, modern, and secular, significant numbers of young, religious women are very active bloggers, including religious students (talabeh) who are proud of their hijab. Nevertheless, in apparent contradiction to their belief in the concept of hijab, they too write outspokenly about their own lives and thoughts and enter into extended discussions with other bloggers.<sup>360</sup>(Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008)

Farid Shirazi (2011) argued, “that women’s digital activities prove to be an effective means of participating in communication discourse and mobilizing the female population of Iran in their struggle for a just and fair society”<sup>361</sup>.

Blogs with political and feminist subjects made effective use of the Internet space. In some cases, by putting down the everyday events, diaries, and poems in simple and readable ways, they challenged traditions, social agreements, and laws. An example of this is the blog started by Farnoosh Mehr-Foruzani in 2001. “Nooshi and Her Chicks” was an early popular and controversial blog.

Nooshi and her Chicks contained the writings of a young woman who wanted to separate from her husband and was facing custody issues of her two young children. Mehr-Foruzani regularly updated her blog and thousands of readers followed these posts. By documenting her struggle with the divorce and the legal system, she was able to challenge misogynistic laws concerning custody rights and to involve in and sensitize readers to the issues and problems that women grapple with in terms of family law.

Female bloggers were among the most successful bloggers in Iran and their blogs were among the most popular, receiving visits and comments by many in Iran. Surprisingly (in the context of the Middle East), many active female bloggers use their real identity online despite the high risk of doing so in Iran. (Shirazi, 2011)

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<sup>360</sup> Masserat Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008 Transgression In Narration The Lives of Iranian Women in Cyberspace, Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Fall 2008) p100

<sup>361</sup> Shirazi, Farid; 2011. Information and communication technology and women empowerment in Iran, Telematics and Informatics,29(2012)pp45-55

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Female bloggers grew more outspoken with time. Some began writing under their real names. Many broke taboos against discussion of the body. Many of these bloggers, most in fact, were from the first post-revolution generation. One example of a blog challenging social norms was that kept by children's rights activist Parisa. She blogged about a woman's body and fueled a taboo-breaking discussion about the vagina. In one of her postings, she challenged the ownership of a woman's body. With such a description:

"A woman's body is considered a public right about which different members and parts of society can make decisions. This body is in fact considered a public interest. In wars, it is used to create fear and threat or to meet the needs of soldiers. In commerce, it is seen as one of the most profitable tools. In the fashion world, it holds the winning card. In an unequal relationship, it is a means for a man's pleasure and politics, a place to suppress and humiliate it. The owner of a woman's body is the law, society, and family and she herself has no identity or existence without a 'feminine' body. In a patriarchal society's view, a woman without a uterus or breast is mutilated. The decision and action of that woman is considered not as her right over her body, but as folly in a direction contrary to society's expectations. Parisa, who uses her blog to criticize sexist stereotypes, and considered subjecting of the female body as a universal issue.

"In that world, a woman is just a sexual organ or a breast. This approach can never acknowledge any rights for a being who is just a means of pleasure and would always view it as part of its property." (Parisa Kakaee, 2013 translated by author)<sup>362</sup>

Another instance of taboo-breaking content is from Nazli Kamvari's popular blog called Sibiltala (Gold mustache). In her posts, she not only crossed government and traditional red lines but also wrote without fear of others' judgment. Through her blog, she could express her feelings and thoughts without self-censorship. Nazli, in one of her interviews, stated:

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<sup>362</sup> <http://myknapsack.blogspot.de/search?updated-max=2013-07-14T12:28:00%2B02:00&max-results=5>  
Retrieved 13.11.2015

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“In my view, in Iranian media, a woman is always shown to be a step away from her real self. In media outlets that my generation – after the revolution – has been faced with, there has always existed an authority figure or filter between a woman’s image and herself or her body. This authority figure/filter has typically been either a physician or a religious jurist. That is those who talked about a woman’s body or a real woman with her doctors who should from a physician’s standpoint or religious jurist from a religious point of view. And these two groups also were generally men, meaning you did not have a ‘woman’s voice’ or a ‘feminine voice’ (Nazli, interview with Radio Zamaneh<sup>363</sup> Translated by the author).

In my opinion, Nazli’s comment shows that she sees that women are represented by other figures. She also compared the English-language blogs written by Iranians with the Iranian Persian-language blogs and says:

I never saw in English-language blogs the wave of anger that existed especially in the writings of Iranian girls. Of course, we are talking about a current, not specifically about one or more weblogs. I never saw that tide among English speakers. Perhaps because there was no need for it. The anger that existed in our feelings and postings did not exist in them. Even if they wrote about their personal relationships, it does not generate sensitivity like it does in the society of our readers. Our postings were kind of a record of pains. I find in Nazli’s words that the pain and anger are two elements in the blogs of Iranian women in Persian-language. It might seem her expression has been exaggerated about the Iranian women’s language blogging. But it is a fact that when people suffer restrictions and have less opportunity to express themselves, inner feelings will manifest in the words written.

Many bloggers courageously broke redline in their writing especially when expressing their own experiences. One example is Khorshid Khanoom (Lady Sun), the weblog by Bahareh Alavi, a member of the “One Million Signatures” campaign. Her posts were simple, honest, and frank. She was not too ashamed to write about her sexual needs. At the same time, she was challenging the patriarchy and discriminatory laws against women.

Most female bloggers were trying, through their writings, to bring up issues in their blogs that were hidden behind a curtain of shame and patriarchal thinking. They wanted to be seen as well as heard. Besides, blogging was a chance for a writer to see the reaction to her postings without an intermediary and to respond

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<sup>363</sup> <https://www.tableaumag.com/2394> Retrieved 15.11.2015

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directly. In this way, conversations and discourses took shape and expanded around certain issues. This feature of blogging that facilitates a bi- or multi-lateral interaction between bloggers and readers is one of the attractions of blogging. Hermida writes: “The web is providing a way for women in Iran to talk freely about taboo subjects such as sex and boyfriends’ (Hermida, 2002)<sup>364</sup>.

Skalli (2006)<sup>365</sup> argues that use of technology benefits women and allows them access to information and knowledge outside the censorship mechanisms that exist in traditional media. In addition, it gave them a chance to raise their voice. In this regard, Skalli mentioned:

“I argue here that women have been involved in shaping, impacting, and redefining the public sphere despite the often-institutionalized norms of exclusion and marginalization restricting their physical mobility and visibility.” (Skalli, 2006, p.36)

An article titled “Performance in Everyday Life and Rediscovery of the ‘Self,’” points out that “blogging as” a new form of public space in Iran, alongside daily writings of Iranian youth and women, has acquired many meanings. They use blogging as a process aimed at shaping of identity and rediscovering oneself and finding a new way to make contact.”( Ebrahimi, 2004)<sup>366</sup>.

However, it is important to point out that the blogging of Iranian women was not exclusively about women’s issues. Besides writing about their bodies and daily experiences, female bloggers were deeply concerned with social, cultural, political, and economic issues. Some blogs even specifically dealt with current political issues. For example, during the 2009 elections, Parastou, one of the bloggers for the group blog “Zan-nevesht” (Written by women) blog, wrote:

“However, I look at it, I see that under current conditions in my country I am placed in the group of the marginalized – because of being a woman, of being a

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<sup>364</sup> Alfred Hermida2002,Web gives a voice to Iranian women, Monday, 17 June, 2002. BBC News. See also, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/2044802.stm> Retrieved 10.10.2015

<sup>365</sup> Skalli, Loubna H. 2006. Communicating Gender in the Public Sphere: Women and Information Technologies in the MENA. Journal of Middle East Women’s Studies. Vol. 2, No. 2 (Spring 2006). pp. 35-59  
For additional information

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/jmw/summary/v002/2.2skalli.html>

<sup>366</sup> Amir-Ebrahimi, Masserat. 2004. Performance in Everyday Life and Rediscovery of the “Self” in Iranian Weblogs. Badjens Iranian Feminism Newsletter. 7th Edition. September 2004  
See also: <http://www.badjens.com/rediscovery.html> Retrieved 10.11.2015

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libertarian, etc. I am not hopeful either of a quick change of circumstances. I will vote in the elections so that at least my right to exist on the margins is officially recognized so that I may somewhat raise my voice and engage in the activity.”<sup>367</sup>

Writing under an alias, as many women did, gave them more freedom and there was less self-censorship as a result. Sometimes the blogs reveal a fear of being identified. However, sharing emotional issues, feelings of empathy, the experience of writing far from men’s impositions, and lack of observing the so-called “social norms” led to a flowering of blogs among women.

Donya<sup>368</sup> a female blogger, who wishes to remain anonymous, cites her reason for using an alias:

I want to talk about my body, talk about my femininity. My problem is not just the government. I have a problem with my family, or I should rather say they have a problem with me. Terms such as honor, masculinity, reputation and such are solely to suppress women.

One female blogger, who wished to remain anonymous, Tara<sup>369</sup> is another female blogger, has similar reasons as Donya for writing under an alias. She stated:

That is because should I write under my real name, I would, in the best case, be disowned by my family. It is better to first prepare the society to receive the new culture. Perhaps someday I will publish my writings under my real name. If I write under my real name, I will be forced to filter out a lot of things I wish to say – for I have to keep in mind that my brother may be reading my blog.

Donya says:

When I started blogging, the world changed for me. Consulting with a friend of mine, I decided to open a blog on Blogfa.com and post my poems there. Those days I was writing the White City, the Four Pieces, and Caricatures in Words. After starting philosophy, circles and book reading also, my studies moved close to philosophy. As far as my courses allowed me and I had time, I would take refuge only in this area. I was a very curious girl who wanted to experience life in a different way. I knew that

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<sup>367</sup> <http://parastood.ir/category/politics/>, Retrieved 13.09.2015

<sup>368</sup> This interview has been conducted on 10th of August 2013 in Germany Original language: Persian. I used a pseudonym name for Interviewer security.

<sup>369</sup> This interview has been conducted on 20th of May 2013 in Germany Original language: Persian. I used a pseudonym name for Interviewer security

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I would never want to be normal or live an ordinary life. But I still did not know what I want. The Internet's influence on my life was that it took me into spaces where I could unconsciously find my favorite places in that virtual world.

When I started blogging and updating, every day I would get to know people better. Sometimes I would go to their blogs and read others' comments. Later on, I was invited to The Internet get together to set up by the people at the center (Tehran) on Paltalk. In that space, we talked about literature, poetry, philosophy and [...] anyone who had written something would read it and people would get to know each other.

She added:

These years it was like being on duty in a hospital ward; sometimes when I would stay away from the Internet for long, I would miss the friends whose faces I had never seen or those stealthy talks and poetry readings.

Woman bloggers are suffering not only from the government censorship but also from the control of women by male relatives in cyberspace and behavior of male-dominated. AS a result, they have become self-censored.<sup>370</sup> Ebrahimi (2008) properly described Blogosphere space for Iranian women, ex-press themselves.

In a society where women had no public forum, no opportunity to ex-press themselves, writing became an act of unveiling, a way of making themselves publicly visible, expressive, and mobile. Previously, women's writing had been limited to those who were professional writers or had some literary talent, but with the emergence of the new Internet technology and the phenomenon of weblog writing or blogging, women's writing gained impetus. Blogging spread among ordinary young women of the urban middle class who for the first time found a medium in which to express themselves. Women gradually emerged as important actors in the Iranian blogosphere. Through bold narration in their blogs, they unveiled the hidden woman, suppressed by the traditions of Iranian society, and revealed first-hand information about themselves, which had never before been told publicly.

In my opinion, even though Iranian women bloggers have broken redlines, created a new literature, and openly expressed themselves, the fact that some remain hidden and "hide behind a pseudonym" shows that women still have a fear of being judged. Of course, the dominance of patriarchal culture, increase in state

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<sup>370</sup> Amir-Ebrahimi, Masserat. 2008, Transgression in Narration: The Lives of Iranian Women in Cyberspace, Journal of Middle East Women's Studies. Vol. 4, No.3 (Fall 2008). P95

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intervention and scrutiny likely caused many to stop blogging or write anonymously.

#### **4.3.14 Women under the blade of censorship in cyberspace**

When new media first entered Iranians' lives, it provided space for women to create and expand the protest movement in both virtual and physical spaces. They could express their wishes and demands, either individually or as a group. But afterward, the regime quickly rallied and used the same tools women activists were using to expand discursive space in order to suppress it and the movement.

As was pointed out, not only were women's rights activists using personal websites and the Internet for self-expression, so were many non-political women in the community. Even this non-political group faced government filtering. Women's websites were routinely blocked. Visiting them led to a page reading, "Based on an order from the judicial authority, access to information on this website is prohibited." The site for "Feminist School" was blocked for 20 times. "Zanestan," the organ of the women's cultural center, was blocked six times before it was shut down completely. "Change for Equality," the website of the One Million Signature campaign, was blocked 23 times. The website "Until an Equitable Family Law" was blocked 12 times. That has just to name a few. Most of the aforementioned websites were closed down entirely after being blocked several times. Simultaneously, a number of civil activists, journalists, and women's rights activists were accused, because of their writings and activities, of disturbing public opinion and spreading falsehood. (Moghaddam, 2013)<sup>371</sup>

The main goal of stopping and blocking these sites was to push women's rights activists out of cyberspace in order to further monopolize communications. In a short period of time, a large number of pro-government websites, blogs, and news agencies were launched by government and establishment institutions on the

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<sup>371</sup> Moghaddam, R. 2013. (19 May, 1394). Silencing Narges Mohammadi and "Women's Magazine", in Farsi خاموش کردن صدای «نرگس محمدی» و «مجله زنان» <http://www.feministschool.com/spip.php?article7717> retrieved 18.10.2015

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subject of women. All of them contained content explicitly aimed at fighting feminism and rejecting ideas based on equality between women and men. These government websites were charged with propagating and promoting the models favored by the establishment such as the ever-increasing promotion of the hijab, a unilateral emphasis on the role of woman in the family, an excessive emphasis on the role of mother and wife and other similar models. “Official Headquarters for Hijab and Modesty [Efat.ir],” “Zanan press,” “Mehrkhane,” “Negar Cultural and Religious Site [negar.charchoob],” “Fatemeh Zahra Site,” “Charghad,” “Reyhane news,” “Babolkarimeh,” “Dokhtiran,” “Linkzan,” and dozens of similar blogs and websites popped up overnight.

An interesting survey was done by Kelly & Etling (2008)<sup>372</sup> which shows that there are more male bloggers than female bloggers in Iran. Only about blogging secularist women overseas and religious women who were classified as “Twelver”<sup>373</sup> which is planned by the government. Despite the impressive presence of women bloggers, gender inequality in this area is also impressive. Kelly & Etling (2008) express the distribution of Iranian bloggers.

“The majority of the bloggers in all clusters are men, but some clusters feature a large minority of women, principally *secPat and poetry*, and to a lesser degree *mixNet* and the ‘Twelver’ sub-cluster of the conservative pole”.

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<sup>372</sup> Kelly, J., & Etling, B. (2008). Mapping Iran’s online public: Politics and culture in the Persian blogosphere. Berkman Center for Internet and Society and Internet & Democracy Project, Harvard Law School.  
[http://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.harvard.edu/files/Kelly&Etling\\_Mapping\\_Irands\\_Online\\_Public\\_2008.pdf](http://cyber.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.harvard.edu/files/Kelly&Etling_Mapping_Irands_Online_Public_2008.pdf)

<sup>373</sup> The term Twelver refers to its adherents' belief in twelve divinely ordained leaders known as the Twelve Imams, and their belief that the last Imam, Mahdi.

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## **Chapter 5 The resistance to surrender in the face of change**

### **5.1 Totalitarian government makes substitutes for social networks**

The same way that people can use the Internet to break down barriers of communication, the government can use it to gain access to private seemingly communications, in line with their military, economic, cultural, and social objectives. They may even have greater control over the sphere than the public. The technology can be used in their service.

Totalitarian governments that block access to information and the free world, end up waging a kind of cyber war against civil activists and dissenters in cyberspace. When they do not reach their desired and expected outcome from filtering and closing down sites, they made use of other methods to restrict and control access. Making substitutes for social networks is among the measures adopted by a number of authoritarian countries including Iran. Officials have announced the goal of launching substitute sites to be to confront the so-called “unIslamic environment” and the “enemy’s cultural assault,” according to a report of Sullivan (2014).

“Iran’s conservative clerics would rather leave the Internet to the Supreme Council of Cyberspace, which was set up in 2012 to censor what Iranian eyes can see online. The council’s concerns? Political opposition groups, Web sites that promote Western culture and Satan worship, the ability to share naughty photos, use of social media by protesters and other digital-age evils.”<sup>374</sup>

In order to deal with the so-called “enemy’s cultural assault” in addition to filtering web sites and television programs, the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting launched different language programs such as Spanish-language Hispania TV<sup>375</sup> geared to Latin America to promote Islamic culture.

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<sup>374</sup> Sullivan, G. September 2, 2014, Iranian cleric issues fatwa against the Internet, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/09/02/iranian-cleric-issues-fatwa-against-the-internet/> retrieved 14.10.2015

<sup>375</sup> [آغاز به کار شبکه اسپانیایی زبان ایران/](http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/194325) <http://www.asriran.com/fa/news/194325>

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### 5.1.1 Halal Internet

Making substitute or imitation sites and social networks based on existing ones, is part of a broader project called *the Halal* or *Clean Internet*. The project was initiated in 2011 during the term of President Ahmadinejad. The term *halal* (clean and permitted) is the opposite of *haram* (an act forbidden by God and thus, unclean). The implication in the name is that the global Internet is unclean and haram. Of course, the main concern of those backing the halal Internet is not only to sweep away so-called “immoral” websites, but also to gain ever-greater control of users in Iran<sup>376</sup>. The daily rise of communications among young users on social networks threatens state control. Many backers of the project have openly declared this. For example, Prosecutor General and the Spokesperson for the Judiciary Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejehi went further, stating:

“The Facebook environment allows anti-security activities and provides education on immoral, prostitution, and inappropriate content, and so long as these illegal activities remain on it, this trend will continue<sup>377</sup>.”

The establishment’s sensitivity over citizens’ use of social networks is so high as to bear great expenditure to prevent the use of various social networks. It has formed filtering committees with members that are ministers or deputies of the six ministries of intelligence, education, telecommunications and information technology, judiciary, culture and Islamic guidance, and sciences. Moreover, the attorney general, head of Islamic propaganda organization, head of state television organization, commander of law enforcement, an expert in information and telecommunications elected by the parliament’s industries and mines committee and a lawmaker elected by the legal and judicial committee are among the other members of this committee. The committee makes decisions on filtering of sites and applications. Despite the general and dominant policies of monitoring and

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<sup>376</sup> Franceschi-Bicchieri, Lorenzo. 2014. Iran Sentences 8 Facebook Users to Combined 123 Years in Jail <http://mashable.com/2014/05/28/iran-jails-8-facebook-users/#SI3gryk2cgqT>

<sup>377</sup> Ibid.

controlling citizens, President Hassan Rouhani claims that it officially recognizes the citizens' right of free access to global networks.<sup>378</sup>



Figure 7 Engaging with President on Twitter to discuss social media landscape and political policy

Co-founder and the CEO of Twitter addressed President Hassan Rouhani, directly in one of his tweets: "Good afternoon Mr. President, can Iranian citizens read your tweets? And the twitter account attributed to Mr. Rouhani, in reply to Mr. Dorsey, without directly answering his question, wrote: "Evening, @Jack [Jack Dorsey]. As I told @camanpour [CNN journalist Christian Amanpour], my efforts geared 2 ensure my ppl'll comfortably b able 2 access all info globally as is their #right."<sup>379</sup>

What follows are a few examples of Iranian versions of popular social networks that have been launched to combat global social networks.

Access to communications technology is also in the hands of people who use it to communicate political, economic, and cultural abuses of governments, in the hopes of forcing them to become more transparent. Totalitarian governments view

<sup>378</sup><http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2013/oct/02/iran-president-hassan-rouhani-internet-online-censorship>  
Retrieved 12.11.2015

<sup>379</sup> The 1 October 2013 exchange can be accessed on Twitter:

<https://twitter.com/jack/status/385056531269427201>. Retrieved on 12.11.2015

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the Internet as an enemy that through censorship, blocking, or any other method they must deprive the citizens from ready access to it. Since 2006, the Iranian government has sought, by launching the “national Internet,” to cut off people’s communication with the global Internet. The implementation of the national Internet project, which is aimed at information censorship and ever-greater control over users, has been pursued with greater seriousness since 2011. In addition to providing an alternative to international websites, by establishing controlling bodies in cyberspace such as law enforcement forces and the cyber army of the Revolutionary Guards, cyber activists will be confronted by security forces and by local network production instead of international networks, for instances: FaceNama instead of Facebook or Fars Twitter as an alternative to Twitter.



Figure 8 Fars Twitter – an Iranian version of Twitter

## 5.2 Fars Twitter

This site is a substitute for global Twitter and was launched in 2012 aimed at creating “clean Internet” for Iranian users. It’s headed by Ali-Akbar Sadeqi<sup>380</sup>. Its introduction reads: “This network is aimed at competing with foreign social networks and creating an environment appropriate to the Iranian culture.”

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<sup>380</sup> Ali Akbar Sadeghi, director and designer of Fars Twitter network



Figure 9 FaceNama

### 5.3 FaceNama

FaceNama also launched in 2012 and is aimed at competing with Facebook. The introduction to this network reads, “Founded with the aim of competing with foreign networks and providing a safe environment for users under the direction of Ali-Reza Qasempur.”

### 5.4 Soft War Officers’ Social Network

Soft War Officers’ Social Network also is a network that declares its goal to be that of “empowering young officers confronting the enemy’s soft war.” The entity named “Cyber Army of Iran”<sup>381</sup> also has undertaken to hack the news sites of opposition and even personal emails of some civil and political activists and certain Farsi news sites abroad. It should be noted that the impact of Cyber Army in Iran on social networks is a very important issue that needs to be further considered.

<sup>381</sup> Iranian Cyber Army is an Iranian computer hacker group. Iranian Cyber Army is thought to be connected to Iranian government, although it is not officially recognized as an entity by the government yet. In a message, they have pledged loyalty to Supreme Leader of Iran.  
[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian\\_Cyber\\_Army](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Iranian_Cyber_Army)

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## 5.5 Online clergy: the impact of the Internet on the seminary



Figure 10 Clergy using technology hands-on

Although the general policy of the government was that of filtering and control of cyberspace, nevertheless it has not achieved its desired outcome from filtering and has no other way but to adapt itself to the existing circumstances and telecommunications technology. To such an extent that in the religious seminaries that are among the most traditional centers of religious training, computer training and the Internet has entered the curriculum of young students. Internet use at first drew mostly the attention of “reformist” clergy, but as the more traditional and fundamentalist portion of the seminary also realized the necessity of using technology in order to influence the youth in cyberspace, they have tried with all seriousness to get up to speed in this area. Internet penetration is to such an extent that religious seminaries have been set up online. In religious cities such as Mashhad, religious centers have set up, with government support, websites for interpretation and teaching of the Quran. Some researchers indicate clergy’s proclivity to use the Internet to advertise religious. Including (Rahimi & Gheytanchi, 2008; Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008; Rahimi, 2011)<sup>382</sup> implied clergy’s tendency to use the Internet:

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<sup>382</sup> Rahimi, Babak & Elham Gheytanchi. 2008. Iran's Reformists and Activists: Internet Exploiters. Middle East Policy Council (MEPC), Volume XV, number 1: <http://mepc.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/irans-reformists-and-activists-internet-exploiters?print>

Rahimi, B. (2011). The agnostic social media: Cyberspace in the formation of dissent and consolidation of State power in postelection Iran, Literature Department, University of California San Diego, La Jolla, California, USA Version of record first published: 09 Sep 2011. Pp, 158-178.

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“Although not a monolithic community of scholars, these clerics have brought a powerful reformist discourse into the post-revolutionary political culture of the religious community by identifying the theocratic foundation of velayat-e faqih [guardianship of the supreme jurisprudent] as tyrannical and undemocratic. Such a foundation, they argue, inherently contradicts the flexible and pluralistic spirit of the Islamic faith. Through their religious networks, composed of seminaries (howzeh), representatives and young jurists, the reformist Ulama have succeeded in disseminating this and other anti-establishment views, as well as pushing for a shift in the conception and practice of Islam in the Iranian political sphere.” (Rahimi & Gheytanchi, 2008)

In the reformist era, which started with the election of President Khatami in 1997, a group of clerics also appeared, in the area of paper press, under the name of reformist clergy and published critical writings in newspapers. Nevertheless, before long, the reformist media outlets were faced with opposition and severe repression by the judiciary and boycott by the conservative clergy. After that, “reformist journalists and even clergy” turned to the Internet to get around censorship. On the opposite side, also there is another group of clerics that uses the Internet to promote conservative and fundamentalist perspectives such that BBC Persian, in a news report, writes:

“If you look at the website of the Computer Research Center of Islamic Sciences, you will see what a great fortune has been spent to turn the seminary’s texts into computer software. The bulk of Quranic interpretation also is available today in the form of CDs. It appears that computerization of seminary’s texts, more than creating a transformation in the framework of the knowledge of the seminary, has transformed human memory to digital memory. Digitization of memory, in

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some cases, has resulted more in strengthening the theoretical foundations of traditional thinking, rather than in its transformation.” BBC Persian<sup>383</sup>

Hojjat ol-Eslam Morteza Hajiani is a student in seminary with an active presence in the areas of blogging and graphics. In an interview with the website “Mashregh” that belongs to the Qom Seminary, in relation to the clergy’s reasons to use the Internet, he says: “The clergy also is a social group like any other, meaning the space that exists for the whole society, belongs to the clergy as well. So, when there is a space where everybody talks, why shouldn’t a cleric talk? Since the Internet started its activity, it grew at a remarkable pace. Now it is within everybody’s reach, meaning, on a cellphone, with a 10,000-tuman -- \$3 – SIM card, you can connect to the Internet. In addition, in this space, everybody can say what is on his or her mind. Because of the wide sweep of the Internet, groups like us also have to enter this space and speak their mind. This availability itself was the reason for us to see greater space before us, to get to know more people who are closely engaged in this space and who can hear us.” He goes on: “There are seminary students on Twitter who are working in different languages. Also, a while back, one of the students who writes in English sent me an image that shows he has 16,000 followers on Twitter.”<sup>384</sup> While some Shiite sources of emulation such as Makarem Shirazi consider the high-speed Internet and cellphone usage to be against the sharia<sup>385</sup>, on the opposite side is the view held by another group of clerics who consider the Internet a Godsend to promote Islam.

“In religious missionary terms, the Internet has also provided the Islamic state with a new means to promulgate the Shi'a ideology. The Internet, according to several clerics, is a ‘gift to spread the word of the prophet,’ and its potential benefit for Islam is immeasurable.” (Rahimi, 2003, p.103)<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> [http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2005/08/printable/050802\\_mj-mkhajali-internet-qom.shtml](http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/story/2005/08/printable/050802_mj-mkhajali-internet-qom.shtml) retrieved 01.12.2015

<sup>384</sup> <http://www.mashreghnews.ir/fa/news/451592/> Retrieved 11.12.2015

<sup>385</sup> <https://www.techdirt.com/articles/20140901/08522128387/iranian-grand-ayatollah-issues-fatwa-against-immoral-high-speed-internet-connections.shtml> Retrieved 11.12.2015

<sup>386</sup> Rahimi, Babak .2003. “Cyber dissent: The Internet in Revolutionary Iran,” Middle East Review of International Affairs,( MERIA) Journal , Volume 7, No. 3 - September 2003 ,103

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Use of Internet in the seminary, or generally by the clergy is not limited to men. Female seminarians also have, with little delay, either individually or collectively entered this area, from blogging to online education on religious themes through virtual social networks. Even the seminary has devoted a portion of its budget to Internet education of the “sisters.” And much effort has gone into the combining of modernity with traditional seminary education using telecommunications technology.

Hojjat ol-Eslam Mohammad-Taqi Qandi, head of distance education, advises: “Female seminarians, considering their knowledge of religious and Islamic sciences, can be influential in the promotion of Islamic knowledge through taking the message of the religion to others and also by defending the religion against attacks in cyberspace.<sup>387</sup>

“Interest of religious youth made the Internet a new challenge in religious schools. Through the Internet, religious students had access to multiple sources of information that allowed them to have new perspectives and even to criticize their professors and their way of teaching and to ask new types of questions.” (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008)

Ebrahimi, in a review of female blogging in Iran, refers to the difference between religious women and other female bloggers in Iran.

“Most religious bloggers use their blogs as tools to propagate their political, ideological, and religious ideas and rarely write about personal subjects. Usually they post in their blogs a special text for different religious and political events like Ashura or the beginning of Ramadan and Muharram. But others take an opposite approach, writing about their personal lives and ideas of giving first-hand accounts of their experiences of living and studying in a religious school (howzeh).” (Amir-Ebrahimi, 2008)

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See also,

[http://www.sssup.it/UploadDocs/4567\\_9\\_Cyberdissent\\_The\\_Internet\\_in\\_Revolutionary\\_Iran\\_Middle\\_East\\_Review\\_of\\_International\\_Affairs\\_10.pdf](http://www.sssup.it/UploadDocs/4567_9_Cyberdissent_The_Internet_in_Revolutionary_Iran_Middle_East_Review_of_International_Affairs_10.pdf)

<sup>387</sup> <http://vu.whc.ir/news/view/20572/>

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However, it should be noted, considering the religious sector of society to use the Internet for religious propaganda show that, despite all the opposition to the new media, tradition defeated in the face of modernity. Communication technology even makes a fundamental part of the government revised that their relations with religion and adjust themselves with new living situation. One could even say that the religious section uses very organized and coherent cyberspace to expand their political and religious goals.

Thus, the active participation of various factions of clergy in the Internet shows that when it comes to the phenomenon of Internet use, the clergy is in serious competition with other segments of society. The websites and the coherent and systematic propaganda on the Internet done by the clergy, and particularly its government-linked sector, because of having a specified and systematic budget in this area, takes place in a completely coordinated, planned, and targeted manner. However, social media not only fueled political debates among various groups on social networks, but it was also used within clergy.

## **5.6 Challenge of Tradition and Modernity use of cyberspace**

During the election period, the establishment made the greatest use of the new media, alongside the traditional media outlets, for propaganda and to protect its position. Nevertheless, civil and political activists' use of cyberspace has generated such a fear among the fundamentalist part of the establishment that Facebook has been blocked and is considered a tool of the enemy and a satanic symbol. In an exhibition on digital media in Tehran in 2011, in one of the booths a statue of YouTube as a symbol of Satan is pelted and attacked by "officers of the soft war".<sup>388</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> <https://www.balatarin.com/permalink/2011/11/14/2800616> Retrieved September 12th 2015

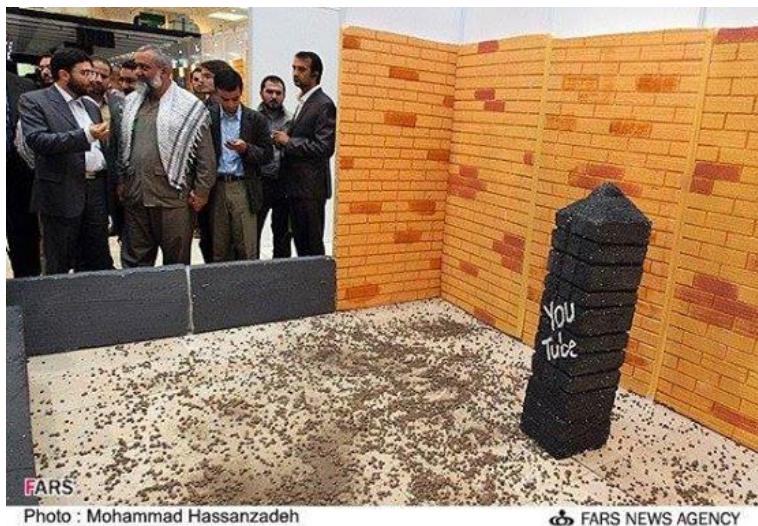


Figure 11 YouTube presented as a symbol of Satan to be pelted and attacked by “officers of the soft war” in an exhibition on digital media in Tehran in 2011.

Traditionalists may have initially resisted new media, but they have learned from the opposition and are now creating an online presence to serve their own interests. Traditionalists in repressive governments and religious fundamentalists are now making use of new media to spread their own message and to repressing the citizenry.

Even though there is high literacy, with women making up 65% of university students, in addition to a high degree of urbanization, and youth informed about the variety of lifestyles in Western countries, repression remains high. Iran’s ruling elite keep the country from progressing overall. Among the youth that are the product of Islamic education and the Islamic Republic, there is a headlong flight from religion. Conversion to Christianity is at an all-time high.<sup>389</sup> Even many observant youths are opposed to religious government. In the most optimistic view, the majority of advocates of the Islamic government can be found among conservative rural Muslims and those whose priority is to protect their power and position. Many urban youths are strongly inclined toward a Western lifestyle, go to all-night parties, freely pursue friendships, and resent the forced hijab. In short, the religious teachings that youth have learned by force and propaganda in elementary

<sup>389</sup> International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, the Cost of Faith Persecution of Christian Protestants and Converts in Iran., New York Headquarters. [https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians\\_report\\_Final\\_for-web.pdf](https://www.iranhumanrights.org/wp-content/uploads/Christians_report_Final_for-web.pdf)

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school and beyond, become a source of ridicule later in life. On the opposite side, an ideological government apparatus that restricts every type of personal freedom and views as criminal whatever it deems to be contrary to Islamic commands. This ideological apparatus considers the use of Internet, cellphone, and satellite television that is not in line with the goals and principles of the Islamic Republic, as examples of criminal conduct.



Figure 12 Satellite television

### 5.7 The use of satellite television channels by the movement

During the Islamic Revolution, musical recordings, informational media, and any means that might be used to access information from sources outside the country and outside government were prohibited. At first, the prohibitions were vigorously enforced. Intercity guardian forces stopped and frisked travelers. Listening to women singing was completely banned, and that remains the case today. Songs sung before the revolution by male singers were also prohibited. Censorship was also applied to films in which women appeared without veils. The content of those movies was thoroughly changed. This censorship was not limited to the screen. Dialogue was changed so dramatically that the audience was left confused. In such an atmosphere, many had no choice other than using video players to watch the original uncensored films. Owning video and cassette players was criminalized in an effort to Islamize society. Many people charged with owning a simple video player were lashed and fined. This policy against video players continued until the end of Hashemi Rafsanjani's government in 1996. By that time, many in Iran had adopted the use of satellite dishes to access forbidden media and information. Graham and Khosravi (2002) explain:

Since the early 1990s, the presence of satellite television channels in Iran

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has presented the authorities with a problem as a steady stream of news has entered the country. Although the possession and use of directional antennae has been forbidden, Iranians continue by various means to circumvent the prohibition and gain access to the airwaves. Methods include keeping an antenna in a wheelbarrow and trundling it out in the evening. Iranians in Iran have never stopped watching foreign after every match, no matter what the result; Iranian youths occupied the streets to television channels. During the qualifying matches for the 2002 World Cup express their defiance of the conservative Islamic government. (Graham, M & Khosravi. 2002, p. 225)<sup>390</sup>.

In February 1994, the Islamic Parliament passed a law prohibiting satellite-receiving systems<sup>391</sup>. The Guardian Council passed the bill. According to clause 9 of the law, holders of satellite receivers would face confiscation of the property in addition to a fine of USD 500-1500. Similarly, carrying, owning, setting up, and/or repairing such devices would carry a fine of USD 500-2500 Even with high fines and more than 20 years of implementation, such laws did not reduce the use of satellite dishes and receivers.

The Islamic Parliament's Research Centre confessed that the law was not effective<sup>392</sup>. Ali Jannati, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance in Hassan Rouhani's government in December 2013 stated:

Previous actions, such as the prohibition on using video players, sound ridiculous today. We should not take actions that will cause make us to laugh at ourselves after five years. 71% of Tehran's population watches satellite television. Handling this issue is the necessity of the field of science and modern technology." (Translated by author)

The Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance spoke about unstoppable proliferation and the development of communications in his speech on Research Day in Iran on November 2013 and asked: "What could be done when 71% of people watch satellite?" Moreover, he continued, "We must find a way to confront the harms of those channels" (Reported by Tabnak News Agency translated by the

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<sup>390</sup> Graham, M & Khosravi. S. (2002). Reordering Public and Private in Iranian Cyberspace: Identity, Politic and Mobilization, in Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power, 9: 219-246

<sup>391</sup> <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/law/show/92510> retrieved 11.10.2015

<sup>392</sup> <http://rc.majlis.ir/fa/news/show/897801> retrieved 11.10.2015

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author)<sup>393</sup>. Such a stance by the state authorities shows that the use of communications technology is inevitable.

## 5.8 Public efforts for the right to access media

Millions in Iran broke the rules in the hope that they could achieve their right to access information. Agents of the government even invaded homes, confiscating and destroying satellite dishes and receivers, yet it wasn't long before people were setting them up again. This still happens on an irregular basis, and from time to time users of satellites encounter a shock. Such so-called security measures escalate when a news blackout is on the agenda. Hence, satellite jamming and confiscating the dishes are acts aimed at frightening citizens. Jamming the signals of Persian-language channels abroad is often undertaken. Those channels are thought to influence the public and to lead to less viewership for state television. Satellites broadcast news or recordings of state TVs does not. Similarly, satellite television creates an opportunity for discussion and dialogue among its audience. Seraj, a state-run website close to the supreme leader, "Khamenei", wrote:

"The slum houses, where the weight of a satellite dish might devastate the roofs, still use satellites. This means watching satellite means more than safety and prosperity. Such people cannot afford to repair their houses, yet they pay to watch satellite TV. [...] "Here is the question. In the present situation, and despite the ban satellite television, why does the majority want it?" (Seraj website, 2014)<sup>394</sup>

A considerable number of the magazines and newspapers repeated the words of Rouhani's minister on the uselessness of the policy. What follows are a few samples from prominent publications. The newspaper *Aftabe Yazd* chose as its headline, "No one can compete with technology." In a similar vein, *Jahane-Sanat* and *Shahrvand* chose published the headlines "We cannot compete for the modern technology" and "The control of the media is not possible" respectively. *Arman* wrote: "As a result of the westerners' plan, anyone can receive more than 2000

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<sup>393</sup> <http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news/365680/> retrieved 12.10.2015

<sup>394</sup> <http://jseraj.ir/> retrieved 12.10.2015

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satellite channels on their cell phone. With the extension of such technology, there will not be any dishes to destroy.” *Etemad* added: “The Americans are currently positioning 14 new satellites in less than 10-kilometer altitude. Then you will watch the satellite easily on the street via your mobile phones. Instead of finding a way to use this facility better, only try to jam the signals.” *Iran* stated: “The minister of culture believes that not only do the geographical borders allow control of the satellite, but also the civil rights could prevent it or prevent the news from foreign sources to the country (The analysis of the Iranian press, Monday 11<sup>th</sup> of May 2015 – Uselessness of confiscating satellite dishes<sup>395</sup>. Research conducted by scholars, governmental organizations, and NGOs confirm that government efforts to confiscate satellite dishes from rooftops is ineffective. For example, see Sanati (2006) and Aday et al. (2010).

“Iranians have taken stoically a crackdown on rooftop satellite dishes that allow then to watch ‘decadent’ foreign channels as well as a proliferation of Farsi language programs beamed in by dissident expatriates.” (Sanati, 2006)<sup>396</sup>.

Aday et al., (2010) adds:

Although Iranians surely use the Internet for clandestine access to external media and news sources, they can also access them through more traditional means. Satellite dishes, although illegal, are relatively common, allowing access to BBC’s Persian-language service, the Voice of America’s Persian News Network (VOA Persian), Radio Farda, and other external sources of information. (Aday et al., 2010)<sup>397</sup>

“It is likely... that externally based media (satellite television and perhaps some Internet sources) that rebroadcast directly into Iran helped protesters coordinate and demonstrate that the protests had significant support.” (Aday et al., 2010, p.25)

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<sup>395</sup> <http://www.irna.ir/fa/News/81603965/> retrieved 08.10.2015

<sup>396</sup> Sanati, K. (2006, August 21) Crackdown on Satellite TV Taken Stoically. By IPS Correspondents.

<http://www.ipsnews.net/2006/08/media-iran-crackdown-on-satellite-tv-taken-stoically> retrieved 12.10.2015

<sup>397</sup> Sean Aday, Henry Farrell, Marc Lynch, John Sides, 2010; Blogs and Bullets new media in contentious politics. Peace works No. 65. First published2010. United States Institute of Peace

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## **5.9 Why satellite channels attract Iranians**

Although there is no precise statistic on the users of satellites, a range of between 60-70% of the population has been reported. Despite the fact that many authorities try to prevent access to the signals, still others support. Even after Rouhani stated that, there was no point in restricting the use of satellite receivers, around 800 satellite dishes were destroyed in Shiraz.

A study by Mehrdad Matani, et al (2013) showed that in the northern city of Ghaemshahr, most of the audience watched satellite television during the evening. The lower the educational level was, the more people watched satellite television. In addition, women spend an average of three-and-a-half hours watching satellite channels, and men two-and-a-half hours a day.<sup>398</sup>

This tendency has several roots. These include censorship and a monopoly state broadcasting, one-sided news and political programs, the persistence of airing reviewed approved programming, which no one is interested in, and the censorship of sporting events. Satellite television counters this with hundreds of professional, scientific, arts, documentaries, sports, series, and movie channels. Seeing women perform without the veil is also an initial draw.

## **Chapter 6 New Media: An Agent for Diversity and Pluralism in the Women's Movement in Iran**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The women's movement in Iran developed during a politically and historically important period spanning over 100 years, from the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 through 20th century world and regional wars to contemporary cyberfeminism, in the ongoing struggle to achieve social equality. This movement evolved in parallel with important industrial and technological changes, including

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<sup>398</sup> Matani Mehrdad, Hassanzadeh, Ramezan, Farhangi Aliakbar – 2013: The Audience's Approach in Ghaemshahr through Satellite Channels, spring 2013, No. 21 (Serial 53), Pages 129-156 In Farsi. See also <http://fa.journals.sid.ir/ViewPaper.aspx?ID=193183> retrieved 07.10.2015

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the emergence of new social communication technologies. New media in particular played a demonstrably significant role in the recent critical decade of the women's movement (2003-2013) and related Green Movement of 2009. Previous chapters analyzed questions such as: how did the Iranian Women Movement's activists utilize cyberspace in their campaigning efforts; how did the new age of smartphones, online platforms and social media revolutionize social movements including the Women's Movement in Iran. It is vital to analyze these relationships in order to gain insights into social and political functionalities in pluralism. Nonetheless, it is important to avoid the risk of generalizing the women's movement as a homogenous macro-phenomenon. In fact, numerous questions arise about diversity and agency. The specific objective of this chapter is therefore to further explore inter-relationships between the uses of new media in relation to the women's movement in Iran and the evolution of channels of networking and information, with an emphasis on aspects of diversity and agency. This chapter also seeks to answer the question, how did new media provide a platform to reflect various communities and identities? This is based on primary research interviews with a diverse cross-section of activists.

## **6.2 A Look Back in History**

Before addressing the questions above, it is necessary to briefly look at the shift in women's role in Iran after the revolution of 1979. Regime change in Iran brought about complete change in the judicial system that fundamentally transformed Iranian society. The new legal code was based on Islamic law or Sharia. While the revolution did not dismantle the Pahlavi judiciary in its entirety, it replaced many laws that directly affected the everyday lives of all Iranian women, including the marriage, divorce and inheritance laws.

Aside from the judicial system, an all-encompassing anti-emancipatory initiative was developed by the Islamic regime that aimed at discouraging women from entering the workforce, academia and the society in general. With the objective of creating a homogenous Islamic nation with its own Islamic values, all

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efforts were made to ensure that women could not obtain decision-making positions and were relegated to the more traditional matriarchal role. The theocratic and totalitarian structure of the Islamic regime transformed the society into a bipolar one –us versus them, religious versus nonreligious, believer versus non-believer, trustworthy versus untrustworthy, masculine versus feminine.

The creation of an “ideal Islamic female” became an instrumental pillar for the regime’s ideological existence. Some of the gender strategies implemented by the regime were to veil women, separate male and female public spaces as much as possible and to objectify and constrain women in all aspects of life, from education to marriage and labor force. By consistently objectifying women and defining them in an Islamic mold, the regime constantly denies the existence of secularism and other identities and has always propagated and pretended that Iranian culture is exclusively Islamic. Meanwhile dissident women, ethnic and religious minorities are being denied, repressed or humiliated by the government.

Parvin Ardalan, an Iranian journalist and women’s rights activist spent her adolescence in the early years after the revolution. In an interview I conducted with her, she depicted the atmosphere of those years as such: “During the first decade after revolution, it felt like we were thrown in a space, where each person had to redefine their identity to know who they were [...] We were faced with severe repression that made working on women issues difficult.” This is one example of the shock caused by the obscurity, the objectification, and the identity crisis that women faced during the early years after the revolution in Iran. To this day, one of the main challenges of the vast majority of Iranian women is to liberate themselves from being treated as an object.

Removing, marginalizing and constraining minorities and dissident women has led to the creation of diverse curricula by several identity groups, demanding recognition and liberation. In fact, the women’s movement in Iran is the result of the lack of recognition of the demands of a great part of women in Iran by the Islamic regime. To further explain this point, it is useful to point out the

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“recognition” theory by Honneth<sup>399</sup>, which argues that recognition issues (non- and mis-recognition) are a basis for social and interpersonal conflict. In examining the various notions that create identity, Honneth pays special attention to political structures. He considers political structures to be effective in producing a thought process. In his view different political structures work differently in reinforcing diversity of thought i.e., democracy as opposed to totalitarian systems. The Iranian political structure, as a theocratic system that represses diversity of thought takes pride in a unified Islamic identity. However, despite all the oppression and denial of the numerous other identities, the new media in recent years provided a platform for the silent voices and diverse identities that did not have an opportunity for representation in the past.

### **6.3 Social Identity on the Web (Diversity and Identity?)**

One of the main focal points of the social movements’ literature during the past decades is identity. In fact, one can say that identity is the most crucial concept debated in today’s studies about social movements. Several identities have been examined and studied by sociologists.

Some examples are Political Identity (Garner, 1996)<sup>400</sup>, Gender Identity (Taylor & Raeburn, 1995)<sup>401</sup>, Collective Identities (Friedman & McAdam, 1992; Hunt, 1991)<sup>402</sup>, Conflicting Identities (Taylor, 1996)<sup>403</sup> and Insurgent Identity (Gould, 1995)<sup>404</sup>.

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<sup>399</sup> Honneth, Axel. (2001). Recognition or Redistribution? Changing Perspectives on the Moral Order of Society, SAGE Vol 18, Issue 2-3, 2001 pp ,43-55  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/02632760122051779>

<sup>400</sup> Garner, Roberta. (1996). Contemporary Movements and Ideologies. New York: McGraw-Hill

<sup>401</sup> Taylor, V. & Raeburn, N.C. (1995). Identity politics as high-risk activism: Career consequences for lesbian, gay, and bisexual sociologists. *Social Problems*, 42(2), 252-273.

<sup>402</sup> Friedman, Debra & McAdam, Doug. (1992). "Collective Identity and Activism: Networks,. Choices and Life of a Social Movement. In A.D Morris & C.M: Mueller (Eds.), *Frontiers in Social Movement Theory* pp.156-173. New Haven: Yale University Press.

<sup>403</sup> Taylor, Verta. (1996). Rock-a-by Baby: Feminism, Self-Help and Postpartum Depression (Perspectives on Gender) New York: Routledge.

<sup>404</sup> Gould, Roger V. (1995). *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. University of Chicago Press.

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The concept of identity has been utilized as a crucial tool in understanding collective behavior, personal experiences and the interaction between individuals and society (see Weigert, 1983; Baumeister, 1986)<sup>405</sup>. Identity as a general concept is often defined as the fact of being who or what a person or thing is. Social Identity, on the other hand, rather than being inherited, refers to an individual's sense of belonging to a certain social group and is a product of agreement or disagreement. It provides a ground for intergroup collective acts towards a common goal and vision.

Understanding the concept of identity and collective identity provides a framework to identify the root causes of collective action. Collective identity may bind around many different factors or a combination of factors including race, ethnicity, and indigenous connectivity to land, the common position of people under oppression, gender, sexual orientation, national pride, or religion. In the recent decade, due to the substantial role that social media and Internet play in forming new communities, new collective identities are formed that surpass the geographical boundaries. There are studies that address the relationship between identity and social networks and argue that identity is subject to change in cyberspace. (Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007; Papacharissi, 2009; Wellman, 1998)<sup>406</sup>

Protheroe (2009)<sup>407</sup> studies media as a factor on identity formation and argues that media have a meaningful impact on nuances in behavior and ideology and therefore also affect the social identity of individuals. Protheroe refers to identity

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<sup>405</sup> Weigert, Andrew J. (1983). Identity: Its Emergence within Sociological Psychology, *Symbolic Interaction* Volume 6, Issue 2, pp. 183-206

Baumeister, Roy F. (1986). Identity: cultural change and the struggle for self. New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>406</sup> Ren, Yuqing & Kraut, Robert & Kiesler, Sara. (2007). Applying Common Identity and Bond Theory to Design of Online Communities. *Organization Studies - ORGAN STUD.* 28. 10.1177/0170840607076007. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228641027\\_Applying\\_Common\\_Identity\\_and\\_Bond\\_Theory\\_to\\_Design\\_of\\_Online\\_Communities](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228641027_Applying_Common_Identity_and_Bond_Theory_to_Design_of_Online_Communities) accessed December 18, 2017.

Wellman, Barry, (1998). Networks In The Global Village: Life In Contemporary Communities, Routledge; 1 edition (1998, December 31)

Papacharissi, Zizi. (2009). The virtual geographies of social networks: a comparative analysis of Facebook, LinkedIn and ASmallWorld. SAGE Publications. Vol11(1&2): 199–220  
<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1461444808099577> accessed December 21, 2017.

<sup>407</sup> Protheroe, Claire. (2009). Identity formation in contemporary society: the influence of the media on the formation of identity. University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa.  
[http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/138/Protheroe\\_C\\_2009.pdf](http://researchspace.ukzn.ac.za/xmlui/bitstream/handle/10413/138/Protheroe_C_2009.pdf) accessed January 18, 2018

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as a dynamic process that is constantly evolving and is affected by many factors, including the media. Facebook is a good example of the role social media plays in identity formation in cyberspace. Through its tools and capabilities users can subjectively determine the terms of interaction with other users, portray a certain desired picture of themselves beyond their actual position in the real world and thus shape their social identity as desired.

The cyberspace gives individuals the opportunity to be actively involved in the manifestation of their ideas and themselves. It is a space where “identity is self-defined rather than preordained”. (Reid, 1994)<sup>408</sup> The “selected” self in the virtual space might be different, and sometimes even contradictory to the actual self. The selectiveness in cyberspace offers users opportunities for self-expression that are not easily accessible in the actual world.

Due to the fluidity of geography in cyberspace, a single social identity is replaced by many dispersed identities. Although these separate identities form a larger identity together, they still are not in agreement with one another in many regards. It goes without saying that the identities formed in such space, due to their dispersed, fluid nature, are often unstable and unlimited, which is different than identity in its traditional sense. Therefore, the relationships formed in such space are also complicated, disperse and undefined.

#### **6.4 The Structure of Women’s Movement in Iran**

Most sociologists agree that social movements are collective actions that are based on common interests and ends. Turner and Killian (1987)<sup>409</sup> define social movements as a particular type of collective behavior that is in opposition with “organizational” and “institutional” behavior. While many civil and political organizations and institutions in Iran have been active in women’s affairs, they have

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<sup>408</sup> Reid, Elizabeth. (1994). Text-based virtual realities: identity and the cyborg body.  
<http://www.aluluei.com/cult-form.htm>

<sup>409</sup> Turner, R. and Killian, L. (1987). Collective Behaviour. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.p.4  
Turner and Killian define social movements as a peculiar kind of collective behavior, which is contrasted to 'organizational' and 'institutional' behavior (1987, p.4)

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played a decisive role in the women's movement by creating incentives to participate in collective action.

Alain Touraine (1981, p. 81)<sup>410</sup> defines a social movement according to three principles: the identity of the movement, the subject of its struggle and its purpose. Here I strive to explain the structure of the women's movement in Iran based on Touraine's theory.

#### **6.4.1 Identity of the Movement**

Women in general are not a homogeneous social group, and include many identities, which is true of the women's movement. In Iran, women's movement, despite the differences and diversity of identities is a secular movement. It focuses predominantly on the elimination of discrimination against women, but there are nuances in its theoretical and practical approach. Therefore, from this perspective, there is significant diversity and pluralism in the Iranian women's movement both on a practical and theoretical level. Many feminists representing a wide range of values and beliefs (liberal, radical, Marxist, socialist, postmodern, etc.) unite in their critical standpoint towards discriminatory laws in Iran. Therefore, the general approach of the Iranian Women's movement is close to the "Feminist Legal Theory", although this theory is essentially classified as liberal. (Lacey, 1989, p.384)

#### **6.4.2 Subject of Struggle**

Despite diverse political and ideological tendencies among Iranian feminists, common concerns bring them together. These include patriarchy, sexual and domestic violence, and specific social and economic injustices in regard to class. But most importantly they gather to challenge the widespread male dominance and female subordination in society through various control mechanisms including discriminatory laws.

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<sup>410</sup> Touraine, Alain. (1981). *The Voice and the Eye: An Analysis of Social Movements*. Cambridge University Press, p.81

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#### **6.4.3 Purpose of the Movement**

The main goal of the women's movement is to nullify the discriminatory laws against women that root in Islam and more specifically in the Shia jurisprudence. Some researchers consider difference in interpretation of the concept of gender equality as a reason for the diversity of the "discursive politics". Gülay Çağlar (2013)<sup>411</sup> argues that there is ambiguity to define the goals of gender equality; this consequently results in divergent gender mainstreaming practices and policies. But differences of opinion about the concept of gender equality could be the source of diversity in the women's movement in some circumstances.

In conclusion, the diverse nature of the women's movement is due to many unmet social and cultural demands of society. The plurality has the effect of reducing the pressure on the women's movement by the government. Because many different actors each pose a part of women's problems and demands. thus, they can better comprehend and express women's issues, offer solutions and pave the way for inclusive mass movements.

#### **6.5 Unity in Diversity**

Despite differences in approach, women's activists in Iran are comprised of a variety of think-tanks academics and low-literate, LGBTQ, atheist and religious, rural and urban, working class and affluent, reformist and subversive. The issues of a female worker might be substantially different than a female employer. Issues such as regular pay, regular work hours, and equal pay for equal work, sexual abuse and harassment. Nonetheless, all women are subject to discriminatory laws and therefore share a common affinity for women's issues and the fight against gender discrimination.

Another factor in bringing these vastly different groups together, is the notion that women's movement in Iran is non-polar, and to a great extent based on

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<sup>411</sup> Caglar, G. (2013). Gender Mainstreaming. *Politics & Gender*. Cambridge Press. 9 (3) 2013, pp.336-344  
doi:10.1017/S1743923X13000214  
Caglar, Gülay; Prügel, Elisabeth; Zwingel, Susanne. (2012). *Feminist Strategies in International Governance*. London, New York: Routledge.

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acceptance of each other. Women's movement is an example of an inclusive movement, consisting of various social classes and ideologies — quite unlike the regime's system of segregating the society into "them" and "us".

Women's movement's past experiences, including the "One Million Signature Campaign" proved that in order to successfully perform a collective act, it is important to include diverse groups of women, which can enhance its impact. As a result of such insight and based on the multiplicity of women's demands, several groups were formed both in physical space and cyberspace, that engaged in collective act, while keeping their autonomy. These groups work together or in parallel with each other and in addition to their specific goals, they are working at a national level for the Democracy movement in Iran.

Different ethnic groups, such as Baluch, Kurd, Azeri, Turkmen, different religious groups including Jewish, Christian, Zoroastrian, and also different sexual orientations have been effective actors that have contributed to the women's movement during the past two decades.

## **6.6 Intersectionality**

"Intersectionality is an analytic framework which attempts to identify how interlocking systems of power impact those who are most marginalized in society. Intersectionality considers that various forms of social stratification, such as class, race, sexual orientation, age, disability and gender, do not exist separately from each other but are interwoven together. While the theory began as an exploration of the oppression of women of color within society, today the analysis is potentially applied to all social categories (including social identities usually seen as dominant when considered independently)."<sup>412</sup>

It is valuable to include an intersectionality analysis of the women's movement in Iran, which refers to women's many overlapping identities – including race, class, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. These diverse identities greatly

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<sup>412</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intersectionality> accessed 30 November 2018

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impact the way women experience oppression and discrimination. For instance, a heterosexual woman residing in the Capital might experience certain advantages in terms of discrimination over LGBTQ, Beluchi, Kurd or Suni women. Female circumcision among Suni population is an issue that was unknown to the mainstream feminist debates until recently. Also, due to the recent strivings of Kurd, Azeri, Khoozestani and Beluchi activists, issues like honor homicides, forced and child marriages and also widespread suicides by burning, that is common among certain regions and ethnicities, entered Iranian feminist debates. Internet and social media gave marginalized groups a platform to share their challenges and bring up issues that used to be taboos. All these new debates enrich women's movement in Iran ever more.

Despite inter-group and intra-group disagreements and criticisms, the fight against discriminatory laws unites diverse groups and gives a ground for collective act despite differences. Therefore, diversity, plurality and unity are three elements of the Women's Movement in Iran.

## **6.7 Diversity, plurality and identity of the movement through new media**

Ericsson (2004)<sup>413</sup> shows that the greatest diversity can be found within voluntary organizations that open their doors to young social activists. Easy, high-speed, and low-cost access to communication technology – and most importantly without intermediaries – enabled this generation to express their ideas with new degrees of freedom. In the same way, the use of new media by Iranian women's rights activists has revolutionized the women's movement, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

For nearly two decades after the revolution in Iran, the omnipresence of the radicals who monopolized the media halted the formation of social movements, including the women's movement. But as the new media became an inseparable

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<sup>413</sup> Erickson, B.H. (2004). The distribution of gendered social capital in Canada. In: Flap, H, Volker, B (eds) The Creation and Returns of Social Capital: A New Research Program. New York: Routledge, 27–50

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part of the everyday life, authoritarianism and the absolute control of groups and individuals by the government shrank. Diverse women's groups were formed that each addressed a different area of women's issues.

Along with the growth of Internet networks, women's rights activists also changed their campaign practices. Through the diverse uses of the World Wide Web, women's issues were discussed beyond geographic boundaries and engaged new audiences with diverse personal and social backgrounds.

Following this huge transformation, a new wave of women's rights activists was formed that was now able to publish their work without the need for an official government permit or censorship. In this way, the use of smartphones and social networks enabled people in different parts of the world to simply connect and interact.

The use of new media among activists was not linear and evolved throughout time. For instance, one of the most basic functions of the Internet were mail groups. When a face-to-face discussion was not possible due to government limitations, mail groups became an important platform for collective engagement and action towards common goals.

The constant efforts of civil society actors to create and use alternative spaces for gatherings including cyberspace and the widespread use of Internet and smartphones by women's rights activists created led to the growth of the women's movement and creation of diverse feminist groups between 2003-2013, such as:

- The Women's Field
- Feminist School
- The Iranian Women's Association

Several related campaigns were formed based on the use of cyberspace. Among those campaigns were:

- "The One Million Signatures Campaign"
- "The Anti-Stoning Campaign"
- "The Campaign to Allow Women Entering Stadiums"
- "The Laleh Park Mothers"
- "Campaign against Compulsory Hijab"
- "The Campaign: Towards Transforming the Male-dominated Face of the Parliament."

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The groups and campaigns named above utilized both the virtual and physical networks, which led to mobilization of women's social forces and participation in street protests, changes to some of the laws in the parliament, and in some cases even halting execution sentences. They succeeded in securing equal rights in regard to damages in driving accidents, inheritance, agricultural land rights, raising the marriage age for girls from nine years Lunar calendar<sup>414</sup> to 13 years; and raising child custody for the mother until the child's age of seven years.

Campaigns websites played a substantial role in attracting people to support and engage in civic activism. To name some, "Change for Equality" represented the "One Million Signature" campaign. "The feminist school" website in addition to supporting "The One Million Signatures Campaign" was also a theoretical-analytical site. Other websites representing each a different women's group were "The Equal Family", "The Women's Field", and "Talash-garan Salamat", each with their own specific audience.

## **6.8 Research Interviews: Key Findings**

The interviews conducted in this study look at diversity and agency, to explore how people became familiar with the Iranian women's movement through the Internet and evolved their new social and political identities.

It also shows the impact of the new media on attracting young forces to the women's movement in Diaspora and identifying herself or himself as a feminist.

Kiana<sup>415</sup>, 29 years old, a web designer living in the United States, describes her acquaintance process with new media with the women's movement: "I became familiar with the broader themes of women's issues through the One Million Signatures Campaign". She continued:

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<sup>414</sup> Lunar calendar is a calendar based upon the monthly cycles of the Moon's phases, in contrast to solar calendars, whose annual cycles are based only directly upon the solar year.

<sup>415</sup> This interview has been conducted on the 25th of July 2011 in Amersfoort, Netherlands.

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Media had a key role on my awareness with the Women's Movement in Iran. Firstly, reading the news on Esha Momeni<sup>416</sup> arrested, was the reason I joined the campaign and news distribution was the work of Women's Movement. Iranian state news media did not reflect any news on Esha Momeni. It was women activists in Iran, or outside Iran – I am not sure – by means of the new media published the news where the Government was trying to distort the news or hide it. That was my initial introduction to Women's Movement and how I joined the campaign. I mean I had feminist concerns but, until then, these apprehensions had not evolved into actions.

Kiana's story how she joined the women's movement reminds us of the important fact how the Internet network opens up a new window for activities not only as a secure inner communication method but also rapid, unlimited access to the outside world, and this is exactly what human and women activists in Iran always dreamed about.

Following the interview, Kiana tells us her feelings in an honest and simple fashion about the arrest of a girl whom she has not known yet. Reading the news of arrest and seeing a picture of a girl at her age in social media had a significant impact on her which leads to take part in a collective action.

It evolved to become an action when I realized a girl, just like me, with curly hair, studying Graphic Design, just my age is sitting behind bars with huge smile. And suddenly I felt a part of me is behind bars and all of a sudden I realized, all these years, part of me has been behind bars and I just felt like giving more value to my concerns and evolving them onto actions. It was the movement's successful use of new media that made me aware of Esha Momeni's story. Otherwise if the story was published and distributed in a newspaper in Iran, I would not have become informed of what was happening to Esha Momeni. The other reason was that, along with information on Momeni, there were also some other documents on Women's Movements in Iran, what the campaign and its objectives were about, what was the plan of action, the means of communication with the general public and so on. All these information was available online and it was this on-line sphere that gave me the opportunity to familiarize myself with the campaign. Afterwards I downloaded a form and signing it, I considered myself part of this common identity. So that is to say, it

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<sup>416</sup> Esha Momeni is a citizen of both Iran and the USA and a member of One Million Signatures campaign. She traveled to Iran to make a documentary film about the women's rights movement in Iran, conducted interviews with members of the One Million Signatures Campaign, and was arrested in October 2008. After three weeks in prison, Momeni was released in November 2008 on \$200,000 bail and prevented from leaving Iran. Eventually she was released and returned to Los Angeles 11 August 2009.

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attracted me. I mean, first it informed me and then it gave me the opportunity to become an activist. Because, if on the first day, I wanted to participate in a civic action, I wouldn't know where to begin.

Formerly I pointed out how important the “One Million Signature” campaign was in changing the attitude of the society towards women’s rights and attracting young forces to the women’s equality movement. Kiana, who was abroad when the campaign was established, is an example of an effort towards self-identification through this campaign.

The Campaign said, we have outlined these types of discriminations in these manners and we have a specific objective and you can have a social impact by gathering signatures or organizing face-to-face contacts. You know, I would like to credit the Women’s Movement one more time for their ability and intelligence in defining a function, that it can effortlessly attract and recruit volunteers and uses its web-site to connect with me in southern California. [new media] plays a very important role in this regard as well. If it was not for new media, if it was limited to signed forms, if there was no website for me to go there and view the scopes of the Women’s Movement, study its history, perhaps I could not have connected with it. And probably I could not have given it enough credit or want to join it. But the impression that back then I got from the Women’s Movement via the Internet was one that I wished to have a common identity with. It reflected my apprehensions. I valued its history and it gave me the means to fight this battle. My tool was that signed form. I had something in my hand with a specific definition and a specific objective. In any case, I could start speaking with people. Therefore, to me personally, new media had a very important role for being here now.

But Mina, who has higher education with a relatively good job position and helps at a center for treatment and support of victims of violence in Kurdistan Iraq, is seeing the effects of new media on women and democracy movements from a different perspective.

You know that in the course of history it is a human instinct to like a mirror, type of egoism/khodshiftegi, a kind of narcissism exists in every person. When they stand and face a mirror and look at themselves, and inspect their face and body, the feeling that they exist is transmitted to them- that [the feeling of] “I am”. My problem is that I see myself and this mirror that we look into daily, [this] should be transmitted to society. I think that the media has exactly this role of mirror. I mean it has the role of a collective mirror. For example, in Iran whether in the women’s

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movement or in the people's movement, it doesn't make a difference in all movements. On the whole, when we see that 'Seda o Sima' (Government television) is a special example and in the end will go its own way and has its own politics. When all the news transmitted has been altered and you see that the thing that you transmit is not reality, even that the news is the thing that they want it to be, but the reality of the news is something else. That is when people search for a different mirror that is not so clouded. This mirror is in Iran as channels that are very private. Satellite dishes which directly broadcast people's opinions, and their votes and make all of these things possible. It is here that YouTube, Facebook and all of these networks come to be. All of these things transform into the mirror and this really has an effect. [...] I mean you want to be seen. When you are protesting in the street you want to be seen and at night when you return from protesting, from that psychologically trying and very heavy atmosphere you come home and you see the images of thousands of people like you are there this gives you courage. It gives you the feeling that you are not alone. It could be that physically you see those around you but think that maybe it is just in your area that it is taking place. What will happen if you come here and control this area or me tomorrow? But you check the channels on the satellite showing you and see yourself on the Internet regularly. These are all there and when you see this you do not feel alone. It is then that you see yourself again. You both get energy and realise the weaknesses of your work.

It seems Mina cared the most for the new voices to be heard through new media. She sees media metaphorically like a mirror as it conveys the reality of a society, good or bad. She also values Internet more as a utility to de-isolate a person rather than an informing tool. It satisfies the instinct and need to be seen and at the same time, daring because she/he does not feel lonely anymore.

Khadijeh<sup>417</sup>, one of the "Mothers of Laleh Park"<sup>418</sup> (campaign name), gives an objective example of how the new media function and affect (the society), something that Mina, one of the veteran women activists, mentioned as the need "to be seen" in her speech.

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<sup>417</sup> The interview was conducted, 18th of January 2011 in Berlin, Germany.

<sup>418</sup> The Mourning Mothers, also known as the Mothers of Laleh Park, is a group of Iranian women where one of their relatives were killed by government agents after the revolution and especially in the protests following the disputed Iranian presidential election of 2009.

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Referring to an objective example, Khadijeh points the impact and performance of New Media in reaching the voices of women activists to the general public and in raising awareness of their achievements and activities:

Actually, I could repeat this same example of the grieving mothers. In a short statement they call for this assembly and this is broadcasted in the media. What would have happened if the media had not publicized it? In fact, the simple matter of radio and television and the Internet sites spreading the news that these mothers are planning to gather in Laleh Park, some becoming aware of this event, some younger people informing their mothers; this is how this event could take place. This is beside the point that on that first week twenty of these attendees were arrested. In spite of this, they did meet up and they did manage to gather in smaller groups around the park and organize the next week's meeting and continued the movement. Their voices were heard around the globe. Mothers from other towns and cities also responded positively to this incitement and joined the movement. For all these, we are indebted to the New Media and the role it played.

Khadijeh points out another important aspect of the new media in the women's movement, and her vision is more focused on how to use the social media. In her view, although different groups may use media to the advantage (in a negative manner), still the benefits overweight the drawbacks.

Even inside Iran, the impact of the New Media cannot be overemphasized. I give you an example. On the 8<sup>th</sup> of March [13]84 (2005) we had organized a rally in the Daneshjoo Park. I was one of the organizers. After the Police forces raid and subversion of the rally, well, everyone knows the story of it, I was standing on a corner. Many women approached me and asked, ok! Now that they have scattered us, where else can we meet you? We would like to join your cause. How could we do so? We had no answer for them. We did not have a base, an office of some sort, nor did we have a permit. Even if we did, we did not dare invite these people to our base. It was media that caused the formation and initiation of this network. The Internet provided the opportunity to, together, establish this network via emails. I think it played such a positive role. Of course, it has its own negative aspects too. Naturally the enforcement agencies also used the net and now well-disguised, can quite easily penetrate its influence. However, in my opinion, its positive aspects outweigh the negative ones in the Women's Movement. Consider this, as our demonstration was taking place in front of the Tehran University, it was also being broadcasted all over the world -almost in real time! Of course, it was abused in some cases too. There were opportunists who had organized sub-

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events and were promoting their own causes and objectives and took advantage of it [New Media/ Media presence?]. This is all true. But if it were not because of the conventional media and New Media, the issue would have never become so global the way it did. The News would not have got such depth. It would have never become so widespread to reach all the rural areas.

To elaborate khadijeh is exemplifying one of our gathering events for Women's day (March 8th) in Tehran and sharing how some of the participants in the women's day march (mostly women) were eager to be engaged with women's movement activities and how effective exchanging emails for further communication was, while we had no office nor a specific safe place for our gatherings.

Azadeh<sup>419</sup>, 30 years old, is a doctoral student in Comparative Literature of Women in Iran. Her expertise is in literature and poetry and she currently lives in Australia. Azadeh, found the identity of the women's movement through the Internet and the website of the feminist school.

Azadeh who like Kiana lives abroad, first got familiar with the women activities in Iran through women activists and then finds her identity as a women activist.

I became aware of the Women's Movement in Iran 3 or 4 years ago. At that time the Women's Movement was at the peak of its activities but I was not in Iran. A year and a half ago I got to know "Madreseh Feministi" (The Feminist School) and gradually started work with them. After Ahmadinejad was elected and what happened, took place, I decided to withstand and confront those who tried to eliminate women from core activities in the society. So, in short, since from just before the election and I owe the growth of my knowledge mainly to those who were active in the "Madreseh Feministi."

Azadeh through the naming some of the websites and groups of women's rights activists in cyberspace, emphasizes the plurality of women in the movement.

"Before I came across the "Madreseh Feministi", mostly I referred to Change for Equality website. There was another site that its name I have forgotten. Perhaps Women's Field website. As said before, when Women's Rights activism was at its climax, I was not there and so I followed the events via the Internet. I

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<sup>419</sup> The interview has been conducted in Paris 2010 ,France. Original language: Persian

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mainly use the Feminist School, Change for Equality and Association of Iranian Women website. Lately, websites with focus on women's issues are numerous. In the beginning, I was not paying very much attention to the Women's Movements aspect of these websites. My focus was on literature and was investigating the work done in that field. In this process, I unexpectedly, came across Women's Rights websites. Later, I sent articles to the Feminism School's website and received encouragement. This resulted in altering my focus.”

Parvin<sup>420</sup>, one of the founders of the One Million Signatures Campaign, is concerned with the use of media by women's activists as a tool kit.

On the one hand, I think, back then when we organized a rally, we did not realize that we had the necessary devices and now when organize such rallies ... I mean a necessity was sensed and that necessity was responded to. Back then, one of our tools was to ensure news sites and or institutions become aware of them. However, prior to that we had the March 8th congregations and we had rallies against violence. [New] Media had just become available. But it was not as if the rallies were organized due to media or an organization or the New Media. You would do something and use whatever tool available at the time and, of course, such means help [a cause] become more public but absence of instruments does not necessarily mean nothing can be done. If that was the case, how are we aware of the occurrences of a hundred years ago? I would say, women at all stages never let go of documentations. At a certain period, they wrote themselves and left them for us to go and benefit from them and now we do so ourselves; meaning, documentation and information distribution simultaneously. Therefore, I think these two complements each other but this does not mean in the absence of one the other would not exist.

As some interviewees have correctly pointed out social networks especially weblogs and Facebook familiarized a specific class of the society with women's issues (through virtual communication). But a valid concern for other activists is whether rapid tendencies in using virtual networks and depreciating the role of printing publications (at least on this matter) would deprive segments of society that does not have the passion nor interest in using cyber technology (usually elder part of society) from the latest updates.

Parvin, correctly mentions the censorship as a barrier to information flow and how creative women activists were in initiating the One Million Signatures

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<sup>420</sup> This interview was conducted on 23 August 2012 in Malmo, Sweden.

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Campaign as an example to overcome the censorship. She added how relatively successful this experience was with merging face to face contact and sharing mutual experiences in social media.

“Well, this is not only us who deprived them. This was the result of deficiencies and censorship that we were facing. But, on the other hand, it goes back to the issue of initiatives. Just like our creativeness in the [One Million Signature campaign]; we employed a media device while performing within the media role and entered the public realm. This is inventiveness. However, when a movement becomes limited to a mere street movement or mere blog movement or cyber movement and when it becomes a media organization, a news organization and not an influential organization. This is one of the disadvantages. I mean we had all these problems.”

Soudeh<sup>421</sup>, 29 years old and a student in the field of Management. She left Iran when she was 10 years old.

Soudeh who belongs to the second post revolution generation still stayed connected with her roots in Iran through Internet and social media even though she left Iran when she was 10. She attended one of the United Nations meeting as a human activist when I met her first.

Soudeh talked about the role of the Internet in her acquaintance with the women's movement:

I got acquainted with the women activities as I was a very small (child), I remember that I have an aunt who was permanently serving the women activities. But the new media have a very much roll in my knowing about the Women Movement in Iran, because I was out of Iran and as I used to go to Iran, I was not aware of the real problems and happenings of the society unless I wanted to know about it by myself. I used to see the problems, but I could not see the solutions, and also, I could not see the way (some) used to use the solutions. My only connection to the society, my only permanent communication to the society of Iran was via Internet. It was thought weblogs which I used to read them and through photographs which I used to see and the news they used to write about and if they were all not there, I would not know what would happen. [...] Fortunately, most of the campaigns existing in Iran do have a website and I read all of them. I read “Madresseye feministi” (feminist school), I read “Meydane Zanan” (women field), I read “Taghiir baraye Barabari” (change for equality) even

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<sup>421</sup> This interview with Soudeh has been conducted in the Geneva, Switzerland September 26, 2010, Original Language: Persian

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“Khanevadeh Barabar “(equal family) or other websites... I read “jense digar weblog” (other- gender weblog). They give a lot of feedback to each other and you feel like you’re close to the issues in Iran, that’s the reason why I spend a lot of my time reading about the issues in Iran.

An interesting point in her interview was how important Iran’s issues were to her and she was in contact with different Iranian women activists through the Internet.

For the time being I use the new media as one of the most important instruments of communication. Now if we go back to some years ago reading weblogs and websites was not the everyday business of my friends in Iran. But it was so much that they used to write, and I used to be informed and I used to write, and they used to be informed. And actually, I cannot say how effective it was, but it was the only way of communication and it was the only path way, the only streamlet which could reach us and we used to use it completely and from different places. But what the new media is for us I can say it is the biggest instrument of us in order to promote the movement, not only for the women movement but also in each case. We belong to the people whose communications run mostly through the Internet. The reason why the Internet is playing an important role is maybe because we are using it easily. For example, I knew someone though Internet from Iran and I know her family here also here. After sometimes I got to know her personally here again and it was first face to face confrontation with her. This may happen to the women movement as well. I may know you not personally, but I may know your thoughts and may have read your articles and may know what you may have told something somewhere and anyway regarding what may have been told inside different weblogs or in different websites.

What can be interpreted from Soudeh was her emphasizes on how significant the Internet/social media role is in joining new members to women’s activists' groups.

Effat<sup>422</sup> was born in 1958 (1337). She began two university disciplines concurrently in 1976: English Literature and Laboratory Sciences. Because of her involvement in student activities, she was one of the first set of people to be expelled from university for these reasons and was arrested in 1988. After being

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<sup>422</sup> This interview took place on the date: 27 September 2010 in Geneva.

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incarcerated in Iran for seven years, she left and moved to England where she has been involved with NGOs and women's rights organizations.

The first book I wrote deals with women's issues. The book is entitled: "The women of Iran, a light in hand, a light in the way" (Cheraghi dar dast, cheraghi dar rah). This book is a collection of interviews that took place within a period of ten years after the revolution; in reality this book illustrates the start of the women's movement activities following the first ten years of the revolution through the medium of oral interviews.

Efat emphasizes on the unity of the women's rights activists and the practice of collective action while disagreeing and controversy. She said:

From what there is at the websites on the Internet, the emails, the articles, books that come from Iran- these are all related to one another. [...] In all of my years outside of Iran my source of pride is that **Iranian women despite their problems were able to have unity in Iran**. I still hope that this has a way of continuing. By any tiny means of continuity, any that New Media use, is excellent. One of the things that Nooshin Ahmadi did via the medium of film was, in reality I saw our reaction in Iran and she took us into the heart of people who have things to say and opinions to air and want to continue the work. The last thing that made me happy was that 40 women went to Parliament, and put 5.000 signatures on the table of representatives and put the issue of polygamy under real question. This act was very valuable in Iran. Here people may think that this is very "ordinary" but in Iran this is a very difficult thing to do. The fact that this act was publicized means that the role that the media played was a big one.

Ali<sup>423</sup> is 25 years old. He studied Mechanical Engineering, but then continued in Gender Studies at the Central European University in Hungary. He said:

And the first workshop that the One Million Signatures Campaign formed for men. I was a member of the Campaign, and after 4 workshops the men formed their own campaign committee. I supported another women's campaign such as allowing women to enter the stadium, the campaign against quotas, and now I am at your service.

His collaboration with various campaigns confirmed the plurality of women's movements and multiple identities.

I think [the new media] played role in the wide spread familiarization of

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<sup>423</sup> This interview with Ali has been conducted in Paris 2010, France. Original language: Persian

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the general public with the Women's Movement and it has been very helpful. Although, I think, four and a half years ago, when I first began getting to know [the movement], it was not to the extent that it is today. Because, I remember, back then, my sources were limited to two websites. One of them was Zanestan, which was later shut down. There was another website that was active back then that is also shut down now. Later the Feminist Tribune website which was later shut down as well. But the websites were not as productive or as numerous as now. Or if they were, they would not attract me as audience. Or perhaps I was not as interested back then. Now the states of Women's Movement in media are much better than four and a half years ago. Now we have the Change for Equality website, we have the Feminist School; we have the Iranian Women Association, Women's Field. We have the Shahrzad News. Their material is up to date. They won't let it pass six months before they update them. Of course, it is regrettable that sites such as Zanestan are deactivated. And then, in the social networks such as Facebook, websites such as Balatarin, unfortunately it seems women are lost these days and, in my opinion, are not getting adequate advantage of them.

On one hand, Ali says women in cyberspace have become more active since four and a half years ago, and he also called some of the websites that were filtered or blocked; on the other hand, he believes that surprisingly women do not use social networks good enough!

Listening to Ali and how a wide range of websites dealing with women issues have attracted young men into women's movement was fascinating for me. As Parvin also pointed out in her interview, we have not waited for our collective actions to be reflected in social media. We just did our job, no matter what. When the One Million Signatures Campaign was launched, we could not have guessed how pervasive the movement would become using the Internet. Ali is adding:

I think if the Internet didn't exist then I think the women's campaigns would be nothing like they are today. The One Million Signatures campaign is like the core that links all activists around the country. For example, I wrote about my experiences doing Kuchebekucheh (door to door) and somebody else wrote from Rasht and one from Tabriz, and anybody who wanted to. And if anybody wanted to campaign, there was not a specific place to go to ask for a brochure, or the laws, or a sheet from the campaign. Everybody went to the website and printed the sheet from the campaign and they wrote emails for the campaign. Other campaigns worked this way as well. For example, Mydam Zanan (Women's Field) there is a place in the corner of the homepage and they post every new

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piece of news from other agencies that happens about women. It was very important that it happened. By this method, you documented important events. Of course, it was not only by the Mydam Zanan website but also other websites did the same, but that was just an example. I was really happy when I saw these websites respectively; from time to time they updated their news. I remembered that when I was a student in the University in an association it was so easy for us to catch women's news and we didn't need to search very deeply for this news. (The news was all in one place and they could print it and put it up at the University) We immediately printed it and put it on the board at the university. And everyone could read it. By working this way we made a louder voice for women. These things that I'm saying are not only as a man but also as an attendant for the women. Who am I to say that I am the one raising the voices of women?

Roja<sup>424</sup> is 30 years old. She left Iran about 10 years ago and now lives in Los Angeles. She is currently a PhD student of Electrical Engineering. She started her social activities with the One Million Signatures Campaign. Roja describes how she got acquainted with the women's movement through the Internet.

One of my friends sent me an email in the same month that the Campaign was initiated. She sent me a series of photos from your gathering in front of the Tehran University, which made a great impression on me. I made a genuine and swift bond with it. After that the news of the Campaign was spread around and it took me a few months to study the core information and discussed it with those people I knew were active online and social media. But what my motivation was; I am not sure. I think it had to do with my upbringing. Perhaps because of the presence of strong women like my mother and grandmother in my life. Or even my father who was against the [patriarchic] system, or perhaps he wasn't ... In any case, I was raised with relative freedom. At high school, my teachers and classmates were people with strong personalities in my life. When I eventually stepped into the society, I couldn't really comprehend and/or accept the extent of discriminations. Coming to America, made me increasingly feminist. Because one desensitizes to day to day discriminations and I had become conditioned to those discriminations in Iran but not used to the types of discriminations in America because this was a different manner of discrimination. In some aspects, there is less inequity compared to Iran, but nevertheless and for that reason I was ever more drawn to women's [rights] activities.

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<sup>424</sup> This interview with Roja has been conducted in Paris 2010, France. Original language: Persian

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Roja belongs to the post-1979 revolution generation, who despite living abroad, has not lost her contact with homeland (Iran) and has been following the feminist activities in Iran through social media and Internet. She mentions how she got familiar with several campaigns and was surprised by the diversity of their activities:

We became aware of a number of campaigns simultaneously, such as campaigns against stoning and a number of websites and on-line women's magazines such as Zenstan. We followed on line magazines, websites such as Change for Equality that was built around about the same time as [Women's] Field and the Iranian Women's Association site. I did not know any of these and became familiar with them through the [One Million Signature] Campaign. I never heard anything of Women's Cultural Center until much later; same with Jens e Dovom (The Second Gender) magazine. There were also institutes related to reformist women. I am aware that there are women active in various NGOs, but they are not all specifically related to women issues. For instance, I have heard about the Khaneh Khorshid (the House of Sun) and, this year, I also saw a film on it. It was two and half or three years ago that I heard about it. I am certain there are many more, but these are what I know.

Mohammad<sup>425</sup>, 37 years old, is a lawyer active in abolition of stoning punishment and discriminatory laws against women. After the Green Movement (protests against the 2009 election results) he was forced to leave Iran. He also sees the Internet and the online media effective in expanding and promoting the efforts of the women's movement. So, in Mohamad's opinion, the convergence and unification between the activists was a result of new media availability. Specifically, after the green movement was shut down, many women activists were forced to leave the country and Internet was the only way keeping the communication between activists inside and outside of Iran alive.

I think if we have made any progress in the field of Human Rights, and especially Women's Rights, we are all indebted to the online media and the Internet. The media, and the Internet in particular, led to people coming closer together. It helps reaching the voices of those who are trying to help women, [trying to] eliminate discriminatory laws to the world. Of course,

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<sup>425</sup> The interview with Mohammad conducted in Berlin 2011, Germany. Original language: Persian

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we should distinguish the Ahmadinejad era from the time prior to that. At the time of Khatami's presidency, the atmosphere was much more open than period of Ahmadinejad's presidency. At that time [Khatami's era] the media primarily worked internally. Women's issues were rarely conveyed outside Iran and if they did, they did not create an eminent reflection and so it [the Internet and Media] could be effective inside Iran. When many newspapers were shut down, coinciding with the election of Ahmadinejad when the ever-increasing restrictions were imposed, Women's Right activists were suppressed even further. Many left for abroad and those outside Iran began operating via the Internet and the media. These mutual interactions led to an amplified reflection of women's activities.

In general, Mohammad considers the activists' closeness and their alliance due to the result of the use of a new media. In particular, following the events of the Green Movement, a number of women's rights activists were compelled leave the country and the Internet was a means of communication between activists inside and outside.

Mansoureh, born in 1958, is a researcher and activist in the Women's Movement in Iran since the "*Peking Conference*".<sup>426</sup> Since then, she has been trying to play her role in the Women's Movement through her works as an activist and through writings.

I was one of the members, who together with you (Interviewer) started the "One Million Signatures campaign" in 2005, which is fortunately still running and its common in the society! Together with "Nooshin" (Persian name of a person) and other friends, we started the Feminist Site in 2007 and announced our existence. This site is still active, and I am in charge of its literature & Art Café Part. Naturally media had played its role in the women's movement which, becomes a current issue in Iran and in the world. It was important from three main points: when there was no media for women inside the country, it was difficult for us to communicate with the overseas and, thirdly, to find enough capability. So, this age is the age of communications. Communication has an instrument and the instrument of the media is its language. Language is a media by itself and one has to know it fluently. And beside it, we come to the virtual space and start with discussions. The discussion about media is very important and that: media does not include just the Internet. We can take films which were made by the ladies, partly as new media. But it caused a simple and fast connection

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<sup>426</sup> The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace is the full official name given for a conference convened by the United Nations during 04–15 September 1995 in Beijing, China. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing>

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with not only Iranians abroad, but also the other networks out of Iran and this was very effective in elevating the condition of women.

Bahar<sup>427</sup>, 32 years old, is a lawyer with a master's degree in international law. She is among the youth who have developed identity as a women's rights activist by understanding the women's movement through the Internet.

Bahar is a social activist who directs a famous women's weblog. By emphasizing the diversity of women's movement, she mentions how she got her women activist identity by familiarizing herself with women's movements through social media.

I am familiar almost with Hamgaraee "Convergence", "Hamandishi" (Synergy) "One Million Signatures Campaign", "Women's Charter", "Campaign Against Stoning" and other campaigns. I have tried to collaborate with almost all of them and have been a contributor to many of them. I, myself, became aware of all of them via the Internet and followed them and then later via the Internet got to know those who worked on them and formed close affiliation with them.

She says about her blogging activities:

On my weblog, I leave links to issues related to news on women and I write on these subjects too; although I don't write exclusively on women. I have a weblog in which [I cover] urban problems, now, it could be on issues related to children or women, social issues. I am interested in cultural preservation and the environment. I mean, it is not very specific, but I do cover them.

Nasrin<sup>428</sup>, 28 years old, is in her first year of doctorate degree in Gender Studies in the USA. She says that she had no information from the Iranian women's movement before she knew the One Million Signatures campaign. She says: "I did, not at all. At the very most, I eventually only read Majale zanan (Women's Magazine). I did not know. I did not have access to these kinds of information."

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<sup>427</sup> For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity some of the people interviewed, asked me for used pseudonym name. This interview with Bahar has been conducted on the 26th of July 2011 in Amersfoort. Original language: Persian

<sup>428</sup> For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity some of the people interviewed, asked me for used pseudonym name. This interview with Nasrin has been conducted on the 26th of July 2011 in Amersfoort. Original language: Persian

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In connection with the process of becoming aware of the women's movement and gaining the activist status of the women's movement. She explains in this way:

I have always been preoccupied by it. I mean, when you are a woman and you are in Iran, you are always concerned. But I was unaware that Women's Movement existed; even though I come from a middle-class family. In any case, I come from a social background that is expected to be aware of these issues. But at the very most, I would read the Women's Magazine and never imagined it possible that a connection could be formed, or it was plausible that I could go and meet these individuals [...] At least in my case I did not have access to the Women's Rights activists to find out such effects existed. However later, via the Internet, I became familiar with the One Million Signature Campaign. When I came here to make a film, I was going to make a film on women artist and their issues in the art field. Later that I read about the campaign on its website, the "Alley to Alley" part of left a deep impression on me. There and then I sent an email and they responded to my email and I came to Iran, met the Campaign's affiliates and attended in its first anniversary. And from then I began acquiring signatures. Later they introduced me to the campaign affiliates in California. After that I came to America and have been collaborating with them ever since.

Although, apart from the One Million Signature Campaign, in relation to women's rights there have been other occurrences in Iran too; such as Women's Charter, Mothers of Peace, Campaign against Stoning, Campaign for access to Stadium, the Family Protection Bill, and what occurred during the tenth presidential election, for instance: the Women's Right's Activists Convergence. She did not know any of them. She says:

I cannot exactly remember. It is probable that I have read about them here and there. But what really captivated me was this "Alley to Alley", people's memoir. It was so entrancing to me that I did not think about anything else. I connected so well to it. Later when I became active, I got to know all of these and their causes. I mean I know them all now but my initial introduction to Women's Movement was through the Campaign.

Bahareh<sup>429</sup>, 26 years old, received a master's degree in Human Rights from Université de Lyon 2 in France. I met her at one of the side events at the United Nations in Geneva. Unlike her peers she was not familiar with the women's

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<sup>429</sup> This interview has been conducted on 25th of September 2011 in Geneva

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movement through new media. She joined the women's movement through family networks and friendship networks. Bahar tells the story of her acquaintance with the women's movement in this way:

By Khadije Moghadam who was one of the Environmental NGO activists and Mansoureh Shojai who is a friend of my mother, I became acquainted with Campaign from the first days of its constitution. But then I came to France for continuing my studies. But yes, I collected signatures myself and I was a member of Campaign. [...] before that I wasn't professionally working for women. I knew that they had publications and journals but never worked with them closely. My first cooperation was with the start of Campaign.

I was surprised by Bahareh because she belongs to a generation growing up with Internet (I-Gen). Although she has not used social Medias like her peers, she is not denying their impact in identifying the women's movement to society.

Internet didn't have so much impact on me. I got familiar with web blogging after my friends. I used Internet long after my friends did. Since my mother was active in NGOs and in my family and friends, I had access to 'other' kind of books and other Media I used to hear about such discussions and never felt the need to seek for another alternative. But what it came handy to me after was using it as an informing tool. I was able to find addresses and also read news and articles I wanted. I use so little of Persian new media except the use of Facebook during Green Movement. All these things about Twitter Revolution...but what I use is more international, because of my cooperation with International NGOs. But if we put me aside, new media had an extensive role in Iran. Because all media is systematically in the hands of a specific ideology that infuse specific ideas and new media was the only way to read other stuff and think other way and speak differently. In Iran this is possible because of Internet, mobiles, Bluetooth, taking pictures and sharing information in social networks. For me it was like that this way I could speak up what I wanted to say but not to learn something new. Of course, it was very important. Especially in Green Movement... This kind of proved that they cannot control the flow of information.

Manijeh,<sup>430</sup> is 47 years old and a filmmaker. She was 15 years old when the revolution took place and from the age of 15, she became involved with social issues.

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<sup>430</sup> This interview has been conducted on July2010 in Berlin. Original language: Persian

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Mainjeh expresses her observation that during the peaceful protests in Iran, as for oppressed people around the world, the rise of social networks- accessible with only a smartphone and a satellite signal- has had radical effects on civil society. The use of tech platforms as a protest tool has transformed these protests.

However, in the course of Khordad 22nd [1384]<sup>431</sup> (12 June 2005) and 1388 (June 2009)<sup>432</sup>, the public recorded films and photographs with their mobile phones and digitally broadcast them, whereas the women's movement, at a certain stage in 2003-2004 used new media for their internal communication, considering the fact, that at that time, social networks were not as widespread as today. Iranian woman, not only intellectuals but also the common women, came out and demanded freedom. They frustrated the government with [the inappropriateness of] their appearances and veils. Just as Iranian women got satellite [television], as Iranian girls got access to the Internet, they realized their lives are very different from those in the other parts of the world. Iranian women realized how their rights are different from the others.

Parastou<sup>433</sup> 29 is years old with a Bachelor's in computer engineering and work in the same field. She is one of the One Million Signatures campaign activists.

I became aware of the Women's Movement four or five years before the One Million Signatures campaign and mostly through websites and weblogs women and Women's Right activists. But I actively joined the Women's Rights Movement with the establishment of the One Million Signatures campaign. With the Campaign, the door was open to everyone. Prior to that, I had emailed other websites, but they never replied; whereas the campaign was otherwise. I consider myself one the Campaign's activists and continuously work in this area. And now working with Women's Movement has become my primary concern.

In my opinion the [One Million Signatures] Campaign was the most effective. Within the Campaign itself, different methods were undertaken.

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<sup>431</sup> Women's rights activists and their supporters called for a public protest in Tehran on 12 June 2006 in Hafte Tir Square

<sup>432</sup> In June 2009 millions of peaceful demonstrators in the Green Movement went into the streets in Tehran and other major cities to protest official claims that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won the 2009 presidential election in a landslide, with a simple slogan: "Where is my vote?"

<sup>433</sup> This interview with Parastou has been conducted on July 2010 in Paris 2010, France. Original language: Persian

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At one point there were comities, at others there were units. Depending on the circumstances, appropriate approaches were adopted. But activists' proceedings cannot be generalized. If the campaign, along with grass root connections, had lobbied, if it had reached government representatives, not so that they would change anything, but in order to changed them, so that they could derive this discourse, it could have been more effective. This did not happen then. But in the course of the Convergence Bill and the Family Act coalition this took place I believe that was beneficial. Campaign's method, face to face and direct contact with people is perhaps one of the most effective approaches and, perhaps, in Iran one of the best methods; the idea of beginning from the bottom, it effects on the general public and through this gains momentum and attracts forces.

What Parastou has expressed as the methodology, strategies, and tactics of the One Million Signatures Campaign was completely tangible for me as someone who has been working and collaborating with many other women's rights activists on women's issues in Iran since the beginning of the Iranian revolution. It is interesting to note that the campaign is a good example of plurality in ways of thinking and actions but unity in ambitions. Several individuals and groups were active in the campaign and what connects them all was the attempt to change the discriminatory laws against Iranian women. For example, we had activists in the campaign who went to the clergy to confirm their approval for equality of inheritance for men and women, while some members of the campaign were completely opposed to this approach. Those opposing believed that we did not need a Fatwa from clerics since they are who captured these rights from us. Regardless, the campaign had enough potentials that with all the differences, we fought for the same goal; changing the discriminatory laws against Iranian women.

## 6.9 Analysis

Empirical analysis of the activist interviews is made to add insights regarding the role of new media in the women's movement and simultaneously recognizes aspects of diversity and agency.

In the first instance, the interviewees can be categorized into two age demographics. The first group of interviewees are mostly seniors who started their activities from the beginning of the revolution and believed in using new media as

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a great tool to introduce the wishes of women activists. Although they recognized the fact that media could be potentially misinforming (for wrong purposes), most of the successes of the women's movement in Iran have accounted for the use of the Internet in recent years. The second group are mostly juniors, regardless whether raised and resided in Iran or abroad, for whom new media and particularly Internet was in some way an entry point that played a key role in getting them into the women's movement, as well as self-recognition of their identity as social activists and especially as women activists.

Members of both groups pointed out that public media are mostly controlled by the Iranian government and the news are manipulated, censored, unrealized and processed in their favor and censored news get delivered to the public.

The use of new media was a tool for the dissemination of unwanted sounds, the simultaneous activity of several social movements, with no spatial and temporal constraints, the emergence of groups that crossed the red line of the "system", like the Campaign Against Execution, Litigation Campaigns.

Last but not least, the activists of the women's movement turned cyberspace into a battlefield, a kind of decentralized digital resistance.

A decentralized movement that could have formed limitless subgroups. Cyberspace, due to its features and potential, is completely a center of escape with no boundaries, and no gravity point and considering the actual and fake identity of ones, it can be considered as the most diverse possible space with higher security than any other social activities.

## **6.10 Conclusions**

Political and social historical circumstances over the past century have given rise to the Iranian women's movement fight against inequality and discrimination against women. The relatively recent emergence of new media has been an additional catalyzing factor in this ongoing struggle.

As witnessed by the interviews with activists, the women's movement in Iran manifests, in both theory and practice, with a collective macro identity,

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commonality and unity. Simultaneously, upon examination, there is diversity and agency at micro levels, social sub-movements with robust diversity and plurality. This can be likened to a tree with trunk and numerous branches. Each part is nourished by common roots of historical evolution, heritage, experience and precedents; each branch tends to deal with locally relevant factors of systematic violence and discrimination against women.

However, unlike unique, fixed elements of a tree, an activist may have several collective identities. New media has provided further agents for diversity and pluralism in the Women's Movement in Iran. For example, an environmental activist is an activist for the rights of sexual minorities or the right to education, or, for example, the rights of ethnic minorities as possible. Women's rights activists' footprints are often seen in most movements. New media has provided new means for activists to transcend many temporal and physical constraints as they interact. Consequently, this creates, accelerates and amplifies further interconnected activities with varying affiliations, inter-relationships and overlaps with the women's movement. The women's movement is clearly simultaneously being multiplied by the emergence of new patterns of diversity, agency and unity. There is a need for further research to gain additional insight into the nature of these new networks, their dynamics and their social and political ramifications.

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## **Chapter 7 Internet, a double-edged sword**

### **7.1 A review of the two approaches to new media**

In the introduction to his book, “Religion and Globalization,” Peter F Beyer (1994)<sup>434</sup> writes that people, cultures, societies, and civilizations that previously were more or less isolated from each other are now in regular and almost unavoidable contact. The friction between cultures and the interchange of political and religious viewpoints and beliefs on a broad scale by way of the Internet can help enhance tolerance and acceptance of the other. It can also do the opposite. To prevent cultural assimilation, Islamic fundamentalist groups and some governments resort to systematic resistance and confrontation. A number of Iranian officials constantly warn against “cultural assault” and point to the existence of porn sites as one of the reasons for blocking free access to the Internet. They neglect to add that Islamic groups wage cultural attacks and through the Internet and seek to export “Islam” to the West. Currently many Islamic groups in Iran make the most use of the Internet’s potential to promote Islamic ideology – particularly since they also take advantage of financial and technical support of government and religious institutions. Those who advocate blocking of sites on the pretext of “cultural assault” do not answer the question of why Iranian youth cannot access information about Western culture in their view; this cultural acceptance is not interpreted as a factor in creating cultural balance and bringing cultures closer together.

Here it is necessary to add that Islamists believe that Western culture is distracting, it should be banned in every way and it should be avoided by young people. However, communication technology cannot be easily controlled.

Considering the uses and abuses of cyberspace, concerning the role of the new media in social movements, we are faced with two key, however entirely opposite, approaches. One is an optimistic approach that emphasizes the impact of social

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<sup>434</sup> Beyer, Peter F 1994, Religion and Globalization, Published in association with Theory, Culture & Society Sage Publications, Incorporated (31 Mar. 1994)

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networks in the cyberspace, including Facebook and Twitter, on the development of social movements. In this approach, they view it as a useful tool for reaching democracy. And they believe in revolution by way of virtual social networks. Advocates of this approach, who make up the majority of social network theorists, believe that the people are able, through the use of the new media, to circumvent the restrictions created by the government and to break the dam of media censorship. Moreover, the people can, by using virtual social networks, succeed in transforming political systems. For example (Shirky, 2010; Aday et al., 2010) the analysts with an optimistic approach praise the role of new media in democratization of society, believe:

New media, such as blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, have played a major role in episodes of contentious political action. They are often described as important tools for activists seeking to replace authoritarian regimes and to promote freedom and democracy, and they have been lauded for their democratizing potential. (Aday et al., 2010)<sup>435</sup>

In this regard, Shirky, in connection with the Iranian citizens' use of social media in the course of the Green Movement says:

"Even taking into account the increased availability of surveillance, the net value of social media has shifted the balance of power in the direction of Iran's citizens" (Shirky, 2010)<sup>436</sup>

Dabashi, an Iranian political and social analyst, along Shirky's line, claims:

Events following the election transformed Facebook into an active site of social networking beyond the cyberspace coffeehouse where people vicariously met each other. Did Facebook produce the Iranian civil rights movement or did the Iranian civil rights movement save Facebook? This question became an adage that came down on the side of the frequenters of the coffeehouse. (Dabashi, 2010, p.137)<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Aday, S Farrell, Lynch, Sides, J, Kelly, J, and Zuckerman, E. 2010; Blogs and Bullets new media in contentious politics, Peace works, August 2010, No. 65  
<http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pw65.pdf> Accessed on 08.01.2015

<sup>436</sup> Shirky. Clay. (2010, January). The Twitter Revolution: more than just a slogan. *Prospect Magazine*.  
<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-twitter-revolution-more-than-just-a-slogan>  
accessed 1 January 3.2015

<sup>437</sup> Dabashi, H. (2010) Iran, The Green Movement and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox, London: Zed Books.

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On the other hand, the pessimistic approach views the new media as a tool in the hands of authoritarian regimes for controlling and repressing social movements and warns about the dangers derived from using digital media like the Internet and social networks in popular movements as repressive regimes, through tracking down the opposition within these networks, may identify and arrest them. They view the positive role of the Internet in social movements as exaggerated. For example, Morozov, who is a critic of the so-called “Cyber Utopians,” in the book, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* claims that the view of Western governments and policymakers regarding the Internet’s role in extending democracy and the impact of Internet freedom on the democratizing trend is naïve. Morozov shows the dark side of using new media in such states:

Modern authoritarianism is a wicked, not a tame, problem. It cannot be 'solved' or 'engineered away' by a few lines of genius computer code or a stunning iPhone app [...] Most digital visionaries see the Web as a Swiss army knife ready for any job at hand. They rarely alert us to the information black holes created by the Internet, from the sprawling surveillance apparatus [...] to the persistence of myth-making and propaganda, which is much easier to produce [through the Internet]. The very existence of such black holes suggests that we may not always be able to shape the effects of the Internet as we would like.” (Morozov 2011)<sup>438</sup>. However, Morozov’s critique of social media’s role of activism in the virtual space, but it should be mentioned that cyber activism such as activism on Facebook succeeds motivating people appear in real space.

Moreover, Morozov, who has studied the post-2009 election events in Iran, regards the comments of American media outlets regarding the Twitter revolution as naïve.

He also believes that the Green Movement in Iran disappointed the cyber utopians. In this connection, he points to the role of government in using the Internet as a tool to repress its opponents. As an example, the Iranian government, using the information gleaned through the Internet about the protesters, including the Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, went about arresting them. Morozov believes that

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<sup>438</sup> Morozov, E. (2011) *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, New York: Public Affairs. 310-312,p5 and 11

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this illusion that the Internet by itself leads to revolutions has blinded the eyes of Western governments and non-governmental organizations.

They do not see that the authoritarian governments also use the very Internet to pursue the political opponents and strangulate their voice. (Morozov, 2011)<sup>439</sup>

Morozov, unlike Shirky (2010)<sup>440</sup>, argued that political insurrection is never solely driven by technology. But it is profoundly changing the landscape of modern protest in favor of those fighting for democracy. Whereas Morozov (2010)<sup>441</sup>, claimed Shirky was wrong to be upbeat about how technology is boosting Iran's democracy movement. If anything, it's helping the regime crack down. Analysts such as Cross (2010) also point to the failure of the Green Movement in Iran and claim that the people have become skeptical concerning the role of social media.

Since 2009, the movement has stumbled, and optimism about the power of social media has given way to pessimism. Many now even blame social media for the failure of the Green Movement, given the Iranian regime's use of the same technologies to harass and crack down on protestors. (Cross, 2010, p.170)<sup>442</sup>.

Gladwell a prominent critic of cyber-Utopianism also, pointing to the students' social movement in the decade of '60s that grew rapidly without using the new media, emphasizes the neutrality of the new media's role in the shaping of social movements. In this regard, he also believes:

Some seventy thousand students eventually took part. Thousands were arrested and untold thousands more radicalized. These events in the early sixties became a civil-rights war that engulfed the South for the rest of the decade and it happened without email, texting, Facebook, or Twitter. (Gladwell, 2010)<sup>443</sup>.

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<sup>439</sup> Morozov, E. 2011; *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*, (New York: Public Affairs, 2011). pp.1-31, pp.205-211

<sup>440</sup> Shirky, C. 2010. The Twitter Revolution: more than just a slogan.

<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-twitter-revolution-more-than-just-a-slogan>

<sup>441</sup> Morozov, E. 2010. Why the Internet is failing Iran's activists

<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/why-the-internet-is-failing-irans-activists>

<sup>442</sup> Cross-, Kevin (2010). Why Iran's green, movement faltered the limits of information technology in a rentier state. SAIS Review of International Affairs, Volume 30, Number 2, Summer-Fall 2010, pp. 169-187  
For additional information. <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/sais/summary/v030/30.2.cross.html>

<sup>443</sup> Gladwell, M., (2010) 'Small change: Small Change, Why the revolution will not be tweeted' ,*The New Yorker*, October 4, 2010

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Nevertheless, on the other hand, Mainwaring (2011)<sup>444</sup>, in response to Gladwell says:

While Gladwell is right to assert that social media is largely used to exchange trivial information, it is a mistake to limit its transformative potential to the worst excesses of its current practice, denying that technology and the dynamics it enables will mature and grow along with its users, especially in dramatic circumstances such as the protests in Egypt.

Of course, Gladwell does not seem unaware of the role of New Media in civic movements, as he points out in the article that, “the world, we are told, is in the midst of a revolution. The new tools of social media have reinvented social activism. With Facebook and Twitter and the like, the traditional relationship between political authority and popular will has been upended, making it easier for the powerless to collaborate, coordinate, and give voice to their concerns” (Gladwell, 2010.)

In an article titled “Brave New World of Slacktivism,” Morozov claims that the new media could make citizens less active by leading them to confuse online rhetoric with substantial political action and warns about the threat of clicktivism.

“Slacktivism” is the ideal type of activism for a lazy generation: why bother with sit-ins and the risk of arrest, police brutality, or torture if one can be as loud campaigning in the virtual space. Given the media's fixation on all things digital from blogging to social networking to twitter every click of your mouse is almost guaranteed to receive immediate media attention, as long as it is geared towards the noble causes. That media attention doesn't always translate into campaign effectiveness is only of secondary importance.” (Morozov, 2009)<sup>445</sup>

Although the views of Morozov regarding the dangers of the Internet are alarming, but it seems that Morozov also is exaggerating about the negative aspects of the Internet use. It is true that the Internet by itself does not lead to revolutions. But it is a tool in the hands of the people to take their voice beyond their country’s

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<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/04/small-change-malcolm-gladwell>

<sup>444</sup> Mainwaring, Simon.( 2011), Egypt: Social media as a life or death proposition,  
<http://wefirstbranding.com/community/egypt-social-media-as-a-life-or-death-proposition/>

<sup>445</sup> Morozov, E, (2009); Foreign Policy: Brave New World of Slacktivism, Published May 19, 2009  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=104302141>  
Accessed 14.10.2015

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borders in the shortest time possible. Moreover, where governments use the Internet to repress their opponents, what needs to change are the methods of Internet use among the civil and political activists and government's political opposition. Proponents of the negative attitude toward the role of the new media in social movements argue that through using the Internet to organize protests, the security and life of individuals, because of governmental repression, is endangered. Because spying organizations can readily access users' information.

Although this point is correct and acceptable, it does not pay enough attention to the point that, previously governments would force confessions under torture from their political opponents to betray their colleagues and fellow group members, or it would take a long time for spy organizations to discover and dismantle a group. But in return for all the secrecy they had to keep up, what were the odds of collecting any intelligence or information? Distributing a handwritten leaflet or a night letter entailed many risks. The person that was detained in relation to "forbidden" literature may have been sentenced to death. Those of my generation will not forget that reading of some of the books that PDF files are now on the Internet and are easily accessible to all was forbidden. For example, a book like Maxim Gorky's "The Mother", the novel "Gadfly" by the Irish writer Ethel Lilian Voynich, Jean Lafitte's "We Will Go Back to Pick Nasrin Flowers"<sup>446</sup> and hundreds of other titles were forbidden, and their readers were subject to prison and punishment. Even right now in Iran, many books do not get licensed to be published or if published, are forbidden to distribute. Like works by such writers as Sa'idi Sirjani, Shoja'eddin Shafa, along with all the books and publications criticizing Islam.

Therefore, in my view, the most important use of the Internet is to break the dam of government censorship and to access information. Right now, there are websites where those interested can see the list of forbidden books and download their PDF copies. For today's young generation, 40 years ago what dangers lay behind reading a book or even keeping the books with the above titles. In criticizing

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<sup>446</sup> written by Jean Lafitte

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online activities, some go even further than this and view the impact of social networks on rallying the public to be inconsequential. For example, Bimber, 2001; Dietram, et al, 2002<sup>447</sup>.

However, my personal experience from inside the activities of the women's movement in Iran, and the results gained from interviews with civil activists, do not corroborate this view. Because the effect of social networks on rallying the public depends on circumstances of time and location there is no general rule about it.

Some researchers also claim that the goals and activities in the virtual space by slacktivism is not enough to reach political goals. Including, Putnam (2000)<sup>448</sup> claims that cyber activists are mostly involved in the entertainment aspects of Internet. Caroline Sheedy (2011)<sup>449</sup>, in research about the Egyptian Revolution stressed the role of social networks in changing political systems and emphasized their risky nature.

But besides this, some other social sciences researchers have turned their attention to another aspect of the impact of media and correctly point out the role of media outlets in the shaping of beliefs and values. Among them, Hall (1997) believes that are very influential in the formation of our mental and even behavioral priorities and in what we think about. For example, analysts such as Hall has pointed out, that

It's concentrated on the effects and the products of signifying practices, practices with a carrying meaning, and that in our world happen to be widely circulated by the media, the media being one of the most powerful and extensive systems for the circulation of meaning, although one ought to always remind oneself, especially in media studies, that the media are, by no means, the only means by which meaning is circulated in our society.

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<sup>447</sup> Bimber, B. (2001). "Information and political engagement in America: The search for effects of information technology at the individual level," Political Research Quarterly, volume 54, number 1, pp. 53–67  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/106591290105400103>

Scheufele, Dietram A. & Nisbet, Matthew C. (2002). "Being a citizen online: New opportunities and dead ends," Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, volume 7, number 3, pp. 55–75  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1081180X0200700304>

<sup>448</sup> Putnam, R.D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Social science, Non-fiction. New York: Simon & Schuster

<sup>449</sup> Sheedy, Caroline (2011). Social Media for social change: A case study of Social Media in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution. <https://www.scribd.com/document/278925435/Caroline-Sheedy> accessed 08.01.2015

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(Hall, 1997, p14) <sup>450</sup>

Although we can use the various media outlets for training and culture making, on the other hand, there is always the risk of spreading clichés through the media, whether the traditional ones or the new media. In my view, by using the new media, because of its speed and expansion, we may be faced with the phenomenon of brainwashing and suggestion of false beliefs on a wider scale. Hall also refers to this aspect of the media,

In the media, although I want to remind you that there's no way that's guaranteed either. There is no guarantee in meaning; there is no way in which you can prevent a stereotype from being pulled back to some of its more stereotypical forms. But you can engage in a way that begins to open the stereotypes up in such a way that they become uninhabitable for very long. (Hall, 1997, p.21)

However, apparently one of the issues that have garnered little attention in the analyses and investigations by those with a negative view of the new media outlets concerning the effect of the new on social movements and activities of civil and political forces is the impact of the new media on the political activists moving from military methods to using civil and nonviolent methods. For instance, in the solar decades of '40s [starting on 1961] and '50s [starting on 1971] in Iran, some political groups whether from religious forces or the left followed an armed approach such as the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran and Organization of Iranian People's Fada'i Guerrillas; the first one was an Islamic organization and the second one Marxist Leninist. Political groups because of their activities suffered some hard blows from the country's Organization of Intelligence and National Security SAVAK<sup>451</sup>. Their leaders were, on charges of "acting against the country's security" sentenced to death and some were imprisoned. Most probably, those who followed the armed approach were not unaware that it was not possible with few

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<sup>450</sup> Hall, Stuart. (1997). Representation & the Media (pp 14, 21). In S.Talreja, S.Jhally & M.Patierno (Eds.), Media Education Foundation

[https://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/409/transcript\\_409.pdf](https://www.mediaed.org/assets/products/409/transcript_409.pdf) accessed 08 January 2015

<sup>451</sup> SAVAK (Persian: سازمان اطلاعاتی, short for Sāzemān-e Ettelā'āt va Amniyat-e Keshvar, Organization of Intelligence and National Security) was the secret police, domestic security and intelligence service established by Iran's Mohammad Reza Shah with the help of the United States' Central Intelligence Agency (the CIA)

Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SAVAK> access September 12th 2015

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weapons and forces to take over the government. But rather it seems that their objective in attacking the police stations outside the cities and killing several officers might have been more to draw attention to the presence of discontent in the society and stirring people to struggle what today is easily doable through using telecommunication technology and facilities for circulating information among a numerous collection of people by raising awareness. This cannot be compared with the difficulties of the struggle and the amount of repression of fighters and the political force in secret that was done in the past. During the time when I was imprisoned in the Joint Committee in Iran, I was fortunate to share a cell with a political activist who had secret activities before the revolution pursuing an unarmed approach. She was a member of the Tudeh Party of Iran and in recounting her memories, shared that in order to type up announcements, we needed a typewriter. After so much trouble, we found one. We rented a house through a male friend. To not raise suspicion, we picked a house that was just a few houses away from the police station. We soundproofed all the walls so that the neighbors could not hear the sound of our typing. Because the old machines for reproduction were stencil makers and these machines were noisy.

There is no doubt that infiltration of virtual social networks with fake user names by security forces is a simple job. Authoritarian governments use the Internet as a tool of repression and surveillance. Therefore, repression and identification of cyber activists also is an acceptable matter. Nevertheless, during the Green Movement, many of the detainees were familiar figures for the government. Some of them had a history of detention in Iran going back to the '60s decade [starting from 1981] or were even people who hold positions in former post-revolution governments. So, we cannot attribute their arrest solely to their being identified through the social networks. Although some of the detainees were followed through their activities in cyberspace. But the number of those arrested in the course of the widespread and one-million-strong protests in the Green Movement cannot be compared with the number of those arrested in the decade of '60s in Iran, arrests that in many cases ended in the prisoner's execution, without any kind of media

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coverage and without having been identified through activities in cyberspace. Even the families of the detainees had no knowledge of their status, let alone the global community! Because in the '60s the domestic media outlets were entirely a monopoly of the state, while during the Green Movement, the news about the arrests would be sent in a fraction of a minute to the remotest parts of the world. The arrested individual was able, with his cellphone, to immediately let his relative know about his status. The speed of information transfer caused to raise sensitivity in the community concerning such incidents. So, we cannot attribute the failure of the Green Movement simply to the ineffectiveness of social networks and to the risks stemming from Internet use. But rather this calls for a vulnerability study and deep scientific research in this area. Perhaps with a look inside the trend of Internet usage by political and civil activists in Iran vis-à-vis the government's confrontation with Internet users, we may present a clearer perspective and understanding of the impact of Internet use to researchers and those with interest.

In addition, Aday and others (2010) have shown, in an investigation, that the new media can influence political action on five levels. Individual transformation, intergroup relations, collective action, regime policies, and external attention (Aday et al., 2010)<sup>452</sup>

Evidence indicates one governmental concern is raising the people's political consciousness through the use of social media. So authoritarian governments increase their level of control and dominion over the Internet. This issue indicates the impact of the new media on social movements.

However, we should not ignore the fact that by putting her information on these networks every user of social networks is endangering herself. Nevertheless, as Nancy Snow (2010)<sup>453</sup>, professor of communications at Cal State Fullerton, in an

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<sup>452</sup> Aday, S. et al. (2010). Blogs and Bullets new media in contentious politics, by the United States Institute of Peace, 2010. Pp.9-12.

<sup>453</sup> Snow, N. (2010). 'What's That Chirping I Hear? From The CNN Effect to the Twitter Effect'. In Y. R. Kamalipour (Ed.) Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age The 2009 Presidential Election Uprising in Iran. Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, p.97-104, p. 99

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article titled From CNN to Twitter, about the impact of social networks on the Green Movement in Iran writes:

“An individual can with a computer or cell phone learn what is going on in the world and this is precisely what happened in Iran in the month of June of 2009. Twitter’s pitch is to answer the simple question, ‘What’s happening?’ Its pitch is ‘share and discover what’s happening right now, anywhere in the world’.”

The fact is that the Internet is a tool and it does not work miracles. Its consequences hinge on the type of use you put it to. Exaggerated viewpoints would lead us to either cyber-phobia or cyber-Utopia. In the same way that to prevent traffic accidents from happening, we must learn the appropriate way to drive, in order to use modern telecommunications technology safely, activists need to know the safety guidelines. In the same way that totalitarian governments track and control their citizens through their communications in cyberspace, the solution is for the activists to equip themselves with the knowledge of how to use the tools for protecting personal information.

## 7.2 Media Bias

Where is the line between media propaganda and news reporting? Occasionally we encounter analyses that consider the coverage of an event to be propaganda. Torbat (2011), for example, views publication of reports by new media on Iran’s 2009 Green Movement to be propaganda aimed at implementing a soft coup.

Torbat writes:

Propaganda campaign for managing a soft-coup in Iran has been underway since the launching of the Green movement in June 2009. The soft coup strategy is conducted under the cover of promoting democracy by means of propagandas through social networking, satellite TV, text messaging, e-mail, photo sharing, and so on. Social media technology helps people to communicate and organize uprisings, yet this technology is not well known to many people in the Third World. Even though, the State Department has recently launched Twitter accounts in Arabic, Persian and some other languages, still most of the propagandas are in English and do not seem to have much effect on the populous underprivileged class in

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these countries. (Torbat, 2011)<sup>454</sup>

Although media propaganda is influential in giving a direction to the judgment, beliefs, views, and opinions of their audience, Torbat's analysis of the role of new media in the Green Movement presents a picture of those protesting the results of the election as at odds with the reality of Iranian society. It minimizes the activism of the Iranian public. The people of Iran have, in different periods, consciously made use of the potential of elections as leverage to achieve a better political atmosphere. Without taking into account motivations to participate in elections, the Islamic Republic of Iran has exploited participation as a tool to lend legitimacy to its rule. The pro-democracy movement that emerged after the flawed elections of 2009 was [a symbol of] the freed-up energies of the people after 30 years of living under pressure and political obstruction and repression. Hence, such a movement that was the result of 30 years of pro-democracy efforts cannot be reduced to the level of being influenced by media propaganda.

### 7.3 Media, unequal battlefield

Governments always possess superior financial and technical facilities, more coherent forces, and stronger determination in confronting opponents or protestors to the existing establishment than activists do. This issue has been noted by researchers and journalists. For instance, Jillian C. York (2011)<sup>455</sup> activist, journalist, and travel writer notes:

“The potential for authorities to use tools like Twitter and Facebook to track down insurgents is very real. Many demonstrators chose early on not to hide their identities, emboldened by the success of Egypt’s mostly peaceful uprising. When coupled with Facebook’s requirement that users create profiles using their real names, pro-democracy activists are at risk of being unmasked on social networks.”

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<sup>454</sup> Torbat, Akbar E. 2011. The Arab Uprisings and Iran’s Green Movement, <http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article29458.htm>

<sup>455</sup> Jillian C. York (2011); When Social Networks Become Tools of Oppression, Bloomberg view. <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2011-06-07/when-social-networks-become-tools-of-oppression-jillian-c-york> retrieved 12.12.2015

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Although Morozov is one of the critics of cyber utopia, he acknowledges the impact of new media on political and social movements. For example, he states:

The challenge of anyone analyzing how the Internet may affect the overall effectiveness of political activism, is first, to determine the kind of qualities and activities that are essential to the success of the democratic struggle in a particular country or context and second, to understand how a particular medium of campaigning or facilitating collective action affects those qualities and activities. (Morozov, 2011, p.198)

However, the general public's use of social networks is a fundamental challenge to totalitarian governments. In order to preserve their dominion, totalitarian and authoritarian governments continually seek new ways to control their citizens. The extreme sensitivity on the part of governments and intelligence services to new media and its use by citizens for organizing protests and making transparent the power relations and intra-establishment favoritism is strong evidence for the impact of online social networks on the growth and development of social movements. For example, infiltration of social networks and threatening users is one of the methods used by intelligence services. Evidence shows that governments in Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, and Iran, and often use similar mechanisms for controlling citizens through social networks.

In Egypt, for example, members who identified themselves as government security agents joined the April 6 group too, posting comments under the insignia of the Egyptian police, and as April 6 approached, the government issued a strong warning against participation in the strike. (Shapiro, 2009)<sup>456</sup>

Rahimi points out,

These newer forms of social opposition that posit a new relation between everyday public and virtual life cannot be seen as separate from how state power, especially under authoritarian rule, authority in cyberspace where dissent could endanger its stability. States simultaneously exerts thrive on some level of risk in order to maintain their monopoly on violence (e.g., military and security-intelligence apparatus), but they also need to manage

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<sup>456</sup> Shapiro .M.S.(2009); Revolution, Facebook-Style, New York Time Magazine 2009  
[http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/magazine/25bloggers-t.html?_r=0)

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those risks that could potentially grow out of control. (Rahimi, 2011, p.161)<sup>457</sup>

As the government creates restrictions for Internet users, users seek ways to circumvent these restrictions. Some sociologists believe that governments seek to restrict the Internet in order to maintain social and political control.

Authoritarian regimes use new media to locate, target, and arrest dissidents, as when the Iranians circulated pictures of protesters for loyal members of the public to identify. Competing political movements will also adopt effective new technologies, erasing the short-term advantages that might be gained from the early adoption of new media platforms. (Citation of Morozov in Aday et al, 2010)<sup>458</sup>

On the contrary, Garrett (2006) claimed in the domestic environment, the Internet weakens a State's repression machine by enabling protesters to evade state regulations (Garrett, 2006).

As pointed out earlier, despite all the risks and issues that users of new media may face because of government control or even improper use of social networks, political and civic actors can use blogs and other social media sites as a strong platform for short- or long-term collaboration. The key is a mechanism that links activities on social networks and the physical world. Obviously, in the absence of a link with the real world, the virtual networks will be nothing more than tools for entertainment.

#### **7.4 Media in the service of the intelligence apparatus to repress civil and political activists**

New media outlets and social services can be useful tools for exchanging and obtaining information, yet are also coupled with risks. Email, chat rooms, electronic meetings, and cell phones were tools in the hands of civil activists for quickly setting up communication. Yet, because of the availability of monitoring

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<sup>457</sup> Rahimi, B. (2011). The agnostic social media: Cyberspace in the formation of dissent and consolidation of state power in postelection Iran, Literature Department, University of California—San Diego, La Jolla, California, USA

Version of record first published: 09 Sep 2011. pp, 158-178.

<sup>458</sup> Aday, S., Farrell, H., Lynch, M., Sides, J., Kelly, J., & Zuckerman, E. (2010). Blogs and bullets: New media in contentious politics. United States Institute of Peace, 65, p.7.  
<http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/pw65.pdf>

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capabilities, including eavesdropping, bugging, and monitoring conversations on virtual social networks, authorities could identify the users. So, with the same ease and speed it took for activists to create online networks, they could be exposed and dismantled.

Many of the arrests of activists and opposition were done by tracking the online social networks. The majority of Internet users in Iran were uninformed about tracking methods. They did not even know how to erase their browser history. Iranian authorities, on the other hand, had skilled experts for tracking down the users in cyberspace that were engaged in civil and political activities at its disposal. It was enough to arrest one individual belonging to a network in order for its entire information fall into the hands of the intelligence services. Much of the emails containing discussions and dialogues on social networks formed in the framework of mailing lists were accessible for security forces.

For instance, the BIHE (for Baha'i Institute for Higher Education) website, which was used for online education and student communication with each other and with their professors, is among the websites that have been blocked in Iran. Security forces raided the homes of over 30 individuals affiliated with this online university, arrested more than 15 individuals, and dismantled the university's organization.

Obviously, the IRI's security and intelligence apparatus is making use of a cutting-edge system for controlling the Internet in order to dominate online communications by political and social activists and opposition forces. In many cases it has its hands-on chats, conversations, and email exchanges. Conversations or pictures posted by individuals on their Facebook pages have been used as evidence of crimes against those arrested. Additionally, after the popular protests against the 2009 election results, most of the detainees were pressured, in preliminary interrogations, to surrender their passwords to the interrogator. Confiscation of computers, CDs, and cellphones aimed at getting hold of information on the writings and messages sent by the detainees in order to frame

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and track down those related to them were among the methods for so-called “vacuuming information” out of the detainees.

Many activists ignored security tips. Despite the fact that civil activists have repeatedly experienced the confiscation of their computers and cellphones, they continued to use traditional methods and stored everything in their computer memory.

Sara,<sup>459</sup> a student and civil activist, says this concerning his arrest:

On the interrogation day, they asked me, who handed you the manifesto? I pleaded ignorance saying, what manifesto are you talking about? I was yet unaware of the depth of the cyber disaster of the Islamic Republic. It was later on that I realized they were identifying the IP addresses. And after the first period of interrogations that lasted three consecutive days was finished, we found out that all of us had used Free Gate [anti-censorship software] and had used phone cards for indirect and inexpensive communication with abroad. That day, after eight hours of interrogation, they asked me to go back there again at eight o'clock sharp and take along with me my computer. I was even glad that in the interval I would erase the information on the hard disk. Those indirect communications were apparently in a more direct way connected with the ministry [of intelligence].

What Sara experienced was not unusual, as Figliola (2013) writes:

The freedoms of speech, association, and assembly including both political speech and organizing conducted via the Internet are not available to citizens in every country. In some countries activists are in danger any time they access or even attempt to access a prohibited website or service or promote political dissent. Political activity is monitored and tracked. Despite such hurdles, political activists have embraced the Internet, using it to share information and organize dissent. To protect themselves, they have purchased and deployed circumvention technologies to skirt government censors. (Figliola, 2013, p.1)<sup>460</sup>

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<sup>459</sup> For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity some of the people interviewed, asked me for used pseudonym name. The interview with Sara has been conducted on the 26th of July 2013 in Munich, Germany.

Original language: Persian

<sup>460</sup> Figliola, P. M. (2013). Promoting Global Internet Freedom: Policy and Technology, Congressional Research Service, 7-5700 www.crs.gov R41837, p.1 <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41837.pdf>

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While participation of individuals in social networks using pseudonyms may enable some individuals to freely express their opinions, it also entails a risk that the ruling apparatus can infiltrate social networks using fake profiles.<sup>461</sup> This is of course what is happening. An ordinary user another party cunningly enters the discussion. Participation in social networks of infiltrators with fake profiles is one of the ways of framing civil activists and getting information on other users. This is also a way of gaining access to the activist's friend's network, a very powerful tool for intelligence agencies. In order to cover their true identities, these infiltrators share a number of links and texts that are in line with the demands of civil activists, start gaining their trust, and then request "friendship" with prominent individuals in the women's movement and thereby get their hands on a large amount of information. When they arrest an individual, they use this same information against her. Maryam<sup>462</sup> says:

I received a summons from the Revolutionary Court. My charge was not specified in it. I was certain that I had not participated in any activities. When I went over, they interrogated me. The charge against me was over a chat on Facebook. My interrogator was the individual who had chatted with me on Facebook. At the end, I was released by paying a fine equivalent to \$7,000.

Lanier (2010) writes:

'Troll' is a term for an anonymous person who is abusive in an online environment. It would be nice to believe that there is only a minute troll population living among us. But in fact, a great many people have experienced being drawn into nasty exchanges online." (Lanier, 2010) But it should be noted that, Trolls have a kind of opposite goal: they do not want to infiltrate, but to annoy and agitate.

Repressive regimes seeking to prevent activities on the part of not just the opposition, but also against anyone who, by enhancing their awareness, may join the opposition, deploys, in accordance with time and place, particular methods. One

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<sup>461</sup> (See also) Farnaz, Fassihi..Updated Dec. 3, 2009, Iranian Crackdown Goes Global, Wall Street Journal, <http://www.naegele.com/documents/IranianCrackdownGoesGlobal.pdf> and <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB125978649644673331>

<sup>462</sup> For safety reasons and to protect the anonymity some of the people interviewed, asked me for used pseudonym name. The interview with Maryam has been conducted via Skype on the 25th of August 2014

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of the positive features of virtual social networks that has received minimal attention is the transparency of cyberspace. As the saying goes, Internet users put their cards on the table and the area of each user's activity is roughly defined. If an individual is arrested, in order to find out about her activities, it is no longer necessary, as in the past, to subject her to the most horrendous tortures. The interrogator may be a Facebook friend of the cyber activist. What is essential is for the cyber activists to equip themselves, against these risks, with the knowledge of how to use the new tools. Researchers like Zittrain & Palfrey correctly point to the fight against the control of Internet.

We are still in the early stages of the struggle for control on the Internet. Early theorists, reflecting the libertarian streak that runs deep through the hacker community, suggested that the Internet would be hard to regulate. "Cyberspace" might prove to be an alternate jurisdiction that the long arm of the state could not reach. Online actors, the theory went, need pay little heed to the claims to sovereignty over their actions by traditional states based in real-space" (Zittrain & Palfrey, Jr., 2007, p.3)<sup>463</sup>.

In my view, what can help more than anything to highlight social movements is attention from media outlets. This includes traditional media such as radio and television or new media. What motivated me to research in this area was the unceasing effort of women's rights activists over decades that were not given the attention they deserved despite their tireless efforts. This has been true to such an extent that many Iranian activists abroad did not imagine anything called a women's movement even existed in Iran. The coming of the Internet age allowed the women's movement in Iran to quickly expand beyond borders.

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<sup>463</sup> Zittrain, Jonathan L. & Palfrey, John G. Jr. (2007). Access Denied: The Practice and Policy of Global Internet Filtering, Oxford Internet Institute, Research Report No. 14, June 2007.  
<https://www.oi.ox.ac.uk/archive/downloads/publications/RR14.pdf>

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## Chapter 8 The Impact of Iran's Pro-Democracy Movement – the Green Movement – on The Middle East



Figure 12 Media Images of Pro Democracy Movements in the Middle East.<sup>466</sup>

### 8.1 Iran as a model in the Middle East

A comparison of images of popular protests in the Middle East region with those of the pro-democracy movement in Iran known as the Green Movement suggests the second may have served as a model for the first.

The 1979 Iranian revolution in Iran is viewed as one of the most important events of the second half of the 20th century not only in Iran but also around the world. The consequences of the revolution went beyond the geographic borders of

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<sup>464</sup> “Deadly Protests in Iran,” 16 June 2009, Daily Beast, AP photo, photograph caption, “A protester throws rocks at Iranian riot police in Tehran on June 21, 2009.” <https://www.thedailybeast.com/deadly-protests-in-iran>

<sup>465</sup> “In pictures: Tunisia protests” photograph caption “A protester prepares poised to throw a stone in Regueb, Tunisia” BBC News 10 January 2011 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12149160>, archived at <https://web.archive.org/web/20110111051905/https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-12149160>

<sup>466</sup> Pictures from egyptianstreets.com In addition to regional chronological scopes, it is also interesting to note how activism and political engagement are often visually messaged in different gendered ways.

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Iran. In countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, there came into being groups, parties, and movements modeled after the Iranian revolution and with an ideology of political Islam that have had substantial political consequences for the ruling systems in these countries and for the global political relations. Some leaders of Islamic political groups have acknowledged the impact of the Iranian revolution in the Middle East region. On the eve of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the Iranian revolution, one such leader, Abu Sharif, a representative of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad Movement, said: “The ‘Islamic awakening’ was inspired by the Iranian revolution that inspired liberation movements throughout the world.”<sup>467</sup> Although the impact of the Iranian revolution on the shaping of Islamic groups in the region is not the theme of my argument, it does have a relationship to the events of the so-called Arab Spring in the Middle East.

The pro-democracy movement in Iran after the 1979 revolution has had many ups and downs. At times it has been accompanied with bloody suppression and at others, such as during the elections, it has shown itself in the form of choosing between a bad and a worse option. The Green Movement can be viewed as an extension of efforts of pro-democracy social movements by women, youth, and civil forces that led to the coming to power of the reformist government in 1997. If the triumph of the Iranian revolution 1979 in Iran could enable the growth and the formation of various Islamic groups, the other side of that coin is that the pro-democracy movement could have an impact on liberation movements in their confrontations with authoritarian regimes in the region. This impact was such that the Green Movement in Iran was able, in a short period of time, to overshadow the region. Politicians, journalists, and researchers turned their attention to analyzing and investigating the role played by the Green Movement in the events related to

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<sup>467</sup> <http://www.magiran.com/npview.asp?ID=1800155>

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the widespread protests by people in the Middle East that became well-known as the Arab Spring.

For example, some political analysts such as Simanowitz (2011)<sup>468</sup> and Keiswetter (2012) and scholars such as Pickering (2011)<sup>469</sup> and Rafati (2011) have affirmed that at the beginning of the "Arab Spring" almost all groups were under the influence of the Green Movement.

"The events of the Arab Spring, it has been argued, have their precursors in Iran. Yet the proponents of such a view are split over which Iran it is that serves as the inspiration for events in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and elsewhere" (Rafati, 2011)<sup>470</sup>.

Keiswetter claimed that,

In many ways the Arab Spring began in Tehran. The protests following the corrupt elections in June 2009, braved the way for the Arab protests by pioneering the use of social networking and IT technology and grounding actions in the principles of non-violence. The still unfolding situations in Egypt, Tunisia, Bahrain, Yemen, Libya and Syria as well as in Iran roughly fall into the four categories. (Keiswetter, 2012)<sup>471</sup>

In addition, Cole (2010)<sup>472</sup> a prominent Islamologist, refers to the Green Movement in Iran as the greatest mass opposition movement since the 1978-79 revolution. Harders (2017) refers to "Neighbouring groups" that the night before the 2012 parliamentary elections for the first time in history of post-colonial Egypt, Neighbourhoods groups nominated their candidates, have entered direct debates with the various of local governments on immediate issues from waste disposal to

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<sup>468</sup> Simanowitz, S. (2011) "Iran's Spring on hold", New Internationalist, 17 June, <http://www.newint.org/features/web-exclusive/2011/06/17/iran-green-movement-nucleartensions/>

<sup>469</sup> Pickering, T. (2011), Implications of the Arab Awakening for US Policy in Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, US/Middle East Project, July.18 ,2011, p.2

<http://www.usmep.us/usmep/wp-content/uploads/2011-18-USMEPolicy-Brief1.pdf> accessed December. 11, 2015,

<sup>470</sup> Rafati, Naysan,2011. Iran and the Arab Spring, [http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR011/FINAL\\_LSE\\_IDEAS\\_\\_IranAndArabSpring\\_Rafati.pdf](http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR011/FINAL_LSE_IDEAS__IranAndArabSpring_Rafati.pdf)

<sup>471</sup> Keiswetter, A.L. (2012),The Arab Spring: Implications for US Policy and Interests, Middle East Institute 2012

<http://www.mei.edu/content/arab-spring-implications-us-policy-and-interests>

<sup>472</sup> Cole, Juan. (2010) "How Israel's Gaza Blockade and Washington's Sanctions Policy Hurt the Green Movement and Helped Keep Iran's Hardliners in Power" in Hashemi, Nader, and Postel, Danny. Ed. The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future. New York: Melville House. pp. 315-322

See also :

[http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175259/tomgram%3A\\_juan\\_cole,\\_israel's\\_gift\\_to\\_iran's\\_hardliners/](http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175259/tomgram%3A_juan_cole,_israel's_gift_to_iran's_hardliners/)

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the street beautification. (Harders, 2017, p.336). They put forward their electoral recommendations and demands. And this is akin to the “Ham-Gara’ie” (The convergence of the women’s movement), in Iran, who were challenged the candidates during the presidential election for the first time in the 2009, and women asked candidates to identify their plans in a systematic manner about women’s issues.

## **8.2 Fundamental difference between the Arab Spring and Green Movement**

Of course, we should keep in mind that there was a fundamental difference between the Arab Spring and the Green Movement. Although the protest movements in the Middle East, having been inspired by the methods of Iran’s pro-democracy struggles, brought about political transformations on a regional and even global scale, from the beginning a streak of radical Islamism was visible in them. They even followed the footsteps of the 1979 Iranian revolution in Iran. And they repeated the same behavior displayed by some of those opposed to the Pahlavi rule.

For example, conducting prayers on city streets in Tunisia by religious fundamentalists is similar to what the religious strata opposed to Pahlavi rule did in the course of the 1979 revolution. The other resemblance is the Islamists’ monopolizing of power after the collapse of the former regime and their ignoring of women’s rights. For instance, although the women’s movement in Tunisia had power and Tunisian intellectuals were many, the Islamists took power. In the example of Egypt, the Islamists drew up constitutional law similar to the law devised in Iran after the revolution. The situation of women in Egypt became much worse than before as a result. In Libya, Mustafa Abdul Jalil, head of the transitional national council of Libya, stated in his first speech after the liberation of Tripoli: “The Islamic law shall be the foundation of the Constitution in the new Libya.” Just three days after the killing of Gaddafi, he revoked the law prohibiting polygamy.

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Despite the fact that the popular protests in Iran in 2009 stemmed from a determination to change and ultimately to be freed from living under Islamic rule, the movements in other parts of the Middle East seemed headed towards Islamic rule. Those who participated in the Green Movement were not homogeneous and included people from all walks of life from the religious to the secular. Gradually, as the movement deepened, there were visible signs that it was moving in the direction of secularization. Signs of this included the use of the slogans “Neither Gaza nor Lebanon, May my Life be a Sacrifice for Iran” and “Independence, Freedom, Iranian Republic.”

Some analysts believe that the Green Movement in their use of new media inspired the Arab Spring protesters. Dabashi (2010) claims:

“As a major cosmopolis, Tehran is now the ground zero of a civil rights movement that will leave no Muslim or Arab country, or even Israel, untouched.”  
(Dabashi, 2010, p.13)<sup>473</sup>

(Monshipouri, 2015, p.206)<sup>474</sup> believes in the same direction:

Views differ as to whether Iran's Green Movement inspired or had a palpable impact on the subsequent Arab revolts that began in Tunis in December 2010. While the Islamic Republic and its state media maintained that the 2011 Arab uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa were similar to Iran 1979 Islamic Revolution.

As well, Biswas and Sipes (2014) concluded in their study of the role of the new media in the Arab Spring movement:

The influence of information sources can vary. Information from political organizations appeared to be influential in the use of the majority of attribute agendas situation/movement, political demands and citizens' rights, and the roles of internal political actors”(Biswas & Sipes, 2014, p.10)<sup>475</sup>

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<sup>473</sup> Dabashi, Hamid, (2010).Iran, the Green Movement and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox, Published by Zed Books Ltd.

<sup>474</sup> Monshipouri, Mahmood. The Green Movement for Human Rights in Iran. (2015), The Middle East in the World An Introduction. Edited by Lucia Volk published by: Routledge. 2015 ,pp.195-207

<sup>475</sup> Biswas, Masudul & Sipes, Carrie. (2014). Social Media in Syria's Uprising and Post-Revolution Libya: An Analysis of Activists' and Blogger's Online Engagement, Arab Media & Society (Issue 19, Fall 2014) [https://www.arabmediassociey.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2014092611739\\_BiswasSipes\\_SocialMedia\\_Final.pdf](https://www.arabmediassociey.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2014092611739_BiswasSipes_SocialMedia_Final.pdf) retrieved 16.12.2015

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A review of the opinions of experts, researchers, and the observations of journalists corroborates the impact of the Green Movement on the events in the Middle East. Swift spread of information and news related to the Green Movement through various social networks and the expansion of the news from global networks and broadcasting of images of Iranian youth with green arm- and headbands became headline news, setting an example for people dissatisfied with authoritarian governments in the Middle East, as well as arousing the sentiments of the global community in sympathy with the protesters in Iran.

### **8.3 Summary and Conclusions**

The result of the investigations illustrates the fact that the use of new media broke the media monopoly of the government. Despite filtering of websites by the government, the users succeeded, through circumvention, in communicating via social networks. Use of social networks made possible the circulation of information between civic activists and others in different periods and caused a strengthening of pluralistic and democratic values, with voices and decentralization in cyberspace. The use of new media by civic and political activists in Iran from 2000-2013, the timeframe of this study, may be divided up into three major periods.

The first period, that I call the *period of balance*, runs from 2000 to just before the Green Movement. This period features the concurrent use of virtual social networks and field activities resulting in organized protests and demonstrations expressing demands. During this period, as activity in cyberspace increased, government control and repression gradually intensified. The second period was that of widespread Internet use. During the second period, 2009-2010, people from any strata or group were drawn to social networks particularly Facebook. For the first time, reformist candidates made use of social networks in their election campaigns. During the period, civic actors took advantage of the potential of social networks as a platform for organizing protests against election results and to win popular support and to rally the people. The security apparatus responded with intensified identification of cyber activists. The presence of security forces in

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cyberspace, in both overt and covert manners, was aimed at intimidating users and imposed a heavy cost on activists in cyberspace.

During the third period, 2011-2013, following the repression of the Green Movement that led to the arrest of a large number of civic and political activists and the emigration of a number of women's rights activists, journalists, civic, political, and student activists, a number of activists crept from the field of battle to behind the computer desk. They adopted a type of activity in cyberspace, which some new media experts and also the critics of virtual social networks and online activities label as *slacktivism*.

As a conclusion we can say that new media was a vehicle not just to inform but also to organize gatherings and demonstrations during the Green Movement. Yet severe repression led to the arrest and death of a number of protesters and caused people to withdraw from the streets and return to their homes. In order to keep the people in the arena and to preserve the motivation to continue the struggle, the potential of new media was not used.

Also, a review of the activities of Internet users, in particular concerning women's rights, using the new media showed that blogging played a role in shaping thought. Moreover, blogging had an impact in creating currents and rallying the masses at sensitive junctures and also in advancing social, cultural, and political goals by creating a network between bloggers and their readers. In the course of 2009 elections, blogging, by creating a wave of comments among bloggers regarding participating or boycotting the elections, has been influential in raising political participation.

In its third phase, the women's movement, which since 2003 had attracted external attention via online activities, took advantage of facilities such as virtual social networks. Taking advantage of these facilities hinges on the level of initiative of users as to how and toward what goals they use the tools and communications technology. For example, the way women in Saudi Arabia use the Internet differs from the way Iranian women use social networks. In the Middle East, most governments exercise control over social networks and Internet use. Nevertheless,

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the widespread popularity of social networks and the possibilities created for political participation have meant that the participation of informal groups on the basis of the common demands and beliefs can influence public opinion and become a determining factor in politics.

Although undoubtedly, the Internet plays a crucial role in social movements, but it is necessary to note that the Internet is only a tool and not a miracle. As much as the opposition can use it to organize a demonstration, in the same way, or perhaps more powerful governments are able to detect or suppress opponents through advertising programs by the agents of influence in social networks.

Despite all its pluses and minuses in global communications, new media has taken root in all dimensions of human life. It is hard to imagine one day without the Internet. Political reform-minded forces have no choice but to make optimal use of this tool. Moreover, threats and restrictions must not prevent the use of telecommunication technology. Not using the Internet out of fear of identification of the activists in virtual networks is like traveling by horse or camel because of fear of a plane crash.

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## **Chapter 9 Quantitative Analysis of Data**

### **9.1 Introduction**

In this chapter we examine and evaluate our hypotheses by using quantitative analysis methods. The purpose of collecting information derived from the classified questions was to understand the variables studied and relationships between them. Thereby, proportionate to the objectives of the study, the data gathered were analyzed both descriptively and inferentially. In this direction data, analysis is done in two parts:

Part I: The collected data are described. In this section, we have used descriptive statistical methods.

Descriptive statistics were used to sort information based on the obtained data, as shown in tables and charts.

Part II: Data analysis is done based on statistical inference.

The purpose of inferential statistics is to conclude about the community from which the sample is extracted. The analysis was carried out by statistical software for the social science (SPSS)<sup>476</sup>. According to the nature of the questions and hypotheses in the research,I utilized the chi-square test (chi-square)<sup>477</sup> with p value<0.05, or 95% confidence. To determine if there is a relation between the two categorical variables.

Information on the basic characteristics of the people who were interviewed in the survey is essential for the interpretation of findings presented in this chapter and can provide an approximate indication of the representativeness of the survey.

Graphic charts are created to make it easier to visualize data, rather than just data in numeric tables. The clustered bar chart option highlights both the frequencies of responses and the relevant percentages.

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<sup>476</sup> Statistical Package for Social Science

<sup>477</sup> The Chi-Square Test of Independence is used to determine if there is a significant relationship between two nominal (categorical) variables. Chi-square is used when the data are frequencies rather than numerical scores.

## 9.2 Research Findings and Demographic Data Samples

### 9.3 Gender Distribution of the Study Sample

**Table 6** Gender Distribution of the Study Sample

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	210	75.5
Male	61	21.9
Other	7	2.5
Total	278	100.0

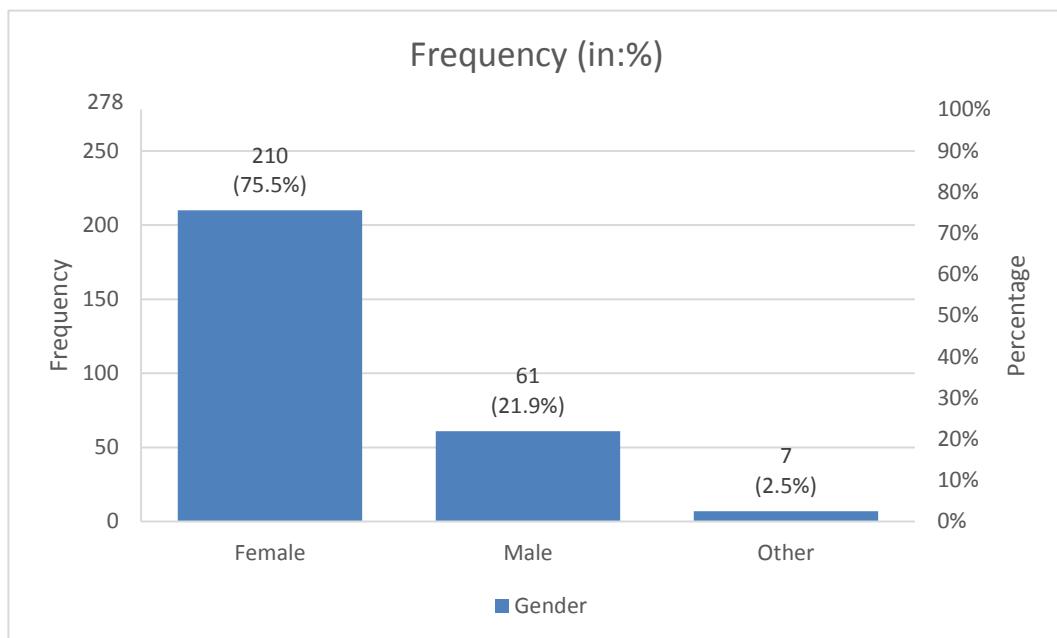


Figure13 Gender Demographic

As depicted in the table and chart above, 75.5% of respondents are female, (21.9%) male. Less than 3% of respondents did not identify as male or female.

### 9.4 Age

**Table 7** Age Distribution of Interviewees

Age in years	Under 16	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-35	36-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71-80	Missing	Total
Frequency	0	3	31	76	57	22	26	55	5	1	2	278
Percent	0	1.1	11.2	27.3	20.5	7.9	9.4	19.8	1.8	0.4	0.7	100

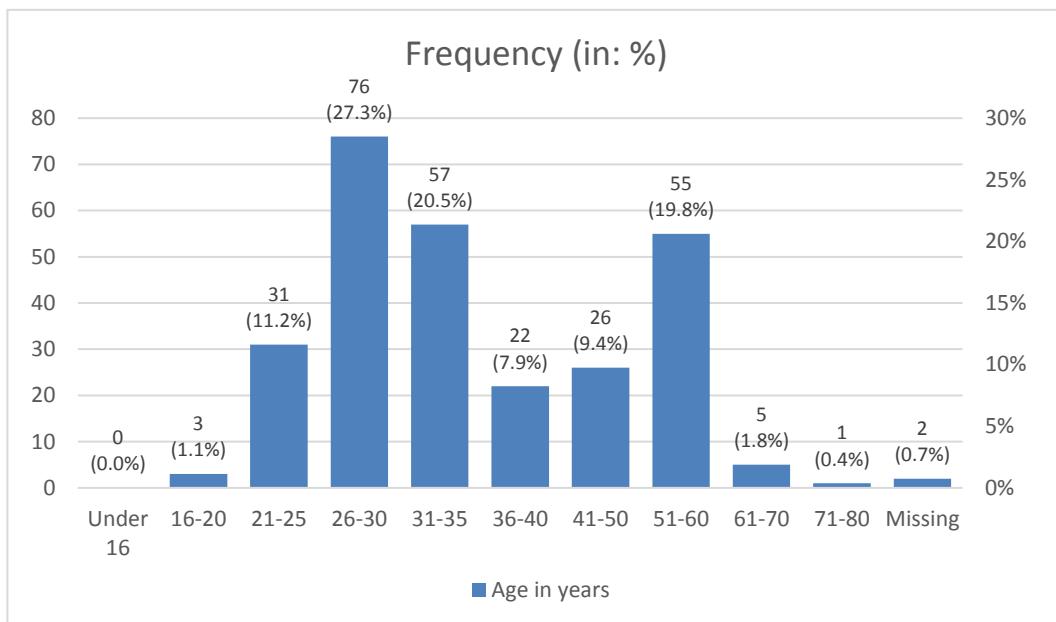


Figure 2 Age Distribution of Interviewees

The table and chart above show that the largest number of respondents (27.3%) belong to the 26-30-year age group. This can be for two reasons. First, it is proportional to the population composition. According to available statistics, the largest share of the combined population in Iran is the youth group. The second reason could be the Internet user demographic. Age groups of 30-35 and 51-60 with an almost equal share of 20% are the other major contributors in this study. The data do not show a significant difference between the age group of 26-30 compared with the group 31-35 and the group 51-60. This can indirectly suggest that preteen and more elderly groups older than age 60 did not participate in the social media activities as much as the 25-60 group.

## 9.5 Place of Birth in Iran

Distribution of the sample according to place of birth.

**Table 8 Place of Birth in Iran**

Place of Birth	Frequency	Percent
Iran (urban)	236	84.9
Iran (rural)	27	9.7
Missing	15	5.4
Total	278	100.0

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The data above show by far the largest number of respondents (85%) were born in urban areas and only 2.2% of respondents in rural areas.

## 9.6 Educational Status

**Table 9 Distribution of the Sample According to Educational Level**

Educational Level	Frequency	Percent
High school	6	2.2
Job Training	7	2.5
Associate degree	16	5.8
Bachelor – student	22	7.9
Bachelor – degree	93	33.5
Master – student	29	10.4
Master – degree	73	26.3
PhD – student	20	7.2
PhD – degree	4	1.4
Other	4	1.4
Missing	4	1.4
Total	278	100.0

The people who responded to the questionnaire self-identified as being literate and as Internet users. The study sample does not include illiterate or low educated people. The table above show that the largest number of respondents have an education of bachelor and/or master's degree. Almost 87% of respondents had an education level of bachelor degree or higher. The findings are consistent with the broader reality of Iranian society for a young country investing in education. As of 2010, 64% of the country's population were under the age of 30, with women having shown a keen interest in seeking higher education. For several years, approximately 65% of women have been accepted at university. This is roughly consistent with data in Table 6 which shows that 75.5% of the interviewees are women, reflecting a large component of women in society with higher education.

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**Table 10 Educational Status - Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Mean		Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	
		Statistic	Statist ic	Std. Error	Statistic	Statisti c	Std. Error
Educational Status	274	7.63	.104	1.714	2.938	-.287	.147
Valid N (list wise)	274						

## 9.7 Marital Status

**Table 11 Marital Status**

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Single	115	41.4
Not married, but in a relationship	31	11.2
Married	82	29.5
Divorced	33	11.9
Widowed	9	3.2
Missing	8	2.9
Total	278	100.0

The table above shows the distribution of the sample's marital status. The finding shows that about (43%) of respondents are single and (11.5%) are not married but in a relationship. The findings of this study are consistent with the existing reality in society. Although the government is Islamic, many young people do not follow Sharia law. Some 12% of respondents are divorced. This finding coincides with the fact that in Iranian society divorce rates are soaring. Since 2006, the rate of divorce has increased such that around 20% of marriages end in divorce.<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>478</sup> For more information visit the links

<http://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-divorce-idUSKCN0IB0GQ20141022>

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/06/iran-birth-rate-marriage-decline-divorce.html>

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## 9.8 Relation to the Women's Movement

Table 12 Relation to the women's movement

Relation to the women's movement	Frequency	Percent
Women's rights activist	95	34.2
Supporter	133	47.8
Neutral	14	5.0
Opposed to feminism but supporting women's rights	18	6.5
Opposed to feminism and the women's rights movement	3	1.1
Missing	15	5.4
Total	278	100.0

The table above shows that (36%) of respondents consider themselves to be women's rights activists. The largest number of respondents (51%) support the Iranian women's movement. Only three respondents (1.1%) stated being opposed to feminism and women's rights. About 7% of respondents stated that they opposed feminism but support women's rights. This is not surprising because propaganda against feminism affected even the women's rights defenders. It can be interesting to further research such distinctions. About (5%) are neutral.

## 9.9 Frequency distribution of respondents who call herself or himself a feminist

Table 13 Do you call yourself a feminist?

Do you call yourself a feminist?	Frequency	Percent
Yes	159	57.2
No	88	31.7
Missing	31	11.2
Total	278	100.0

As the table above shows, 57% of respondents call themselves feminist while 32% responded negatively. 11% did not answer the question.

## 9.10 Since when do you know about the women's movement in Iran

**Table 14 Since when do you know about the Women's Movement in Iran**

	frequency	% (valid n=252)	cumulative % (valid n=252)	cumulative frequency	percent of study (n=278)	cumulative % in study
Before 1970	4	1.6%	1.6%	4	1.4%	1.4%
1971	1	0.4%	2.0%	5	0.4%	1.8%
1972	1	0.4%	2.4%	6	0.4%	2.2%
1973	1	0.4%	2.8%	7	0.4%	2.6%
1974	1	0.4%	3.2%	8	0.4%	3.0%
1975	2	0.8%	4.0%	10	0.7%	3.7%
1976	3	1.2%	5.2%	13	1.1%	4.8%
1977	2	0.8%	6.0%	15	0.7%	5.5%
1978	4	1.6%	7.5%	19	1.4%	6.9%
1979	17	6.7%	14.3%	36	6.1%	13.0%
1981	1	0.4%	14.7%	37	0.4%	13.4%
1982	1	0.4%	15.1%	38	0.4%	13.8%
1984	2	0.8%	15.9%	40	0.7%	14.5%
1985	2	0.8%	16.7%	42	0.7%	15.2%
1986	2	0.8%	17.5%	44	0.7%	15.9%
1987	1	0.4%	17.9%	45	0.4%	16.3%
1990	2	0.8%	18.7%	47	0.7%	17.0%
1991	2	0.8%	19.4%	49	0.7%	17.7%
1994	7	2.8%	22.2%	56	2.5%	20.2%
1995	3	1.2%	23.4%	59	1.1%	21.3%
1996	6	2.4%	25.8%	65	2.2%	23.5%
1997	3	1.2%	27.0%	68	1.1%	24.6%
1998	9	3.6%	30.6%	77	3.2%	27.8%
1999	10	4.0%	34.5%	87	3.6%	31.4%
2000	8	3.2%	37.7%	95	2.9%	34.3%
2001	8	3.2%	40.9%	103	2.9%	37.2%
2002	5	2.0%	42.9%	108	1.8%	39.0%
2003	14	5.6%	48.4%	122	5.0%	44.0%
2004	17	6.7%	55.2%	139	6.1%	50.1%
2005	31	12.3%	67.5%	170	11.2%	61.3%
2006	27	10.7%	78.2%	197	9.7%	71.0%
2007	11	4.4%	82.5%	208	4.0%	75.0%
2008	13	5.2%	87.7%	221	4.7%	79.7%
2009	20	7.9%	95.6%	241	7.2%	86.9%
2010	6	2.4%	98.0%	247	2.2%	89.1%
2011	3	1.2%	99.2%	250	1.1%	90.2%
2012	2	0.8%	100.0%	252	0.7%	90.9%
Valid, total	252	100.0%			90.9%	
No Response	26					
Total				278		

From the 278 study participants, the number of valid responses was 252, with 26 (10.3%) not providing a specific response. This is not a surprise as some involvement goes back 40 years, and as memories span decades, year of first

awareness may be harder to recall. Nonetheless the responses are indicative and informative. As data in the table indicate, a few spikes in milestone years merit initial attention. The Iranian Revolution happened in 1979 (7%). In March 1979 women protested forced veiling; women opposed to compulsory hijab may have become more aware of the women's movement. The peak data year is 2005 (12%), significant because (after the last demonstration in 1979) in June 2005 women's rights activists organized a big gathering in the front of Tehran university that almost 6,000 people participated in the demonstration and media covered the news of it the cyberspace for the first time after the revolution. The third point is 2006 (10%) a year that witnessed several important events in the women's movement. In June 2006 a peaceful protest took place in Haft-e Tir Square, Tehran, with 70 women's rights activists arrested, second to follow up women's rights One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws officially launched on August 28, at a seminar entitled The Impact of Laws on Women's Lives. The campaign received wide international recognition.<sup>479</sup> As the data show, from 2003 to 2010 the largest number of respondents got to know about the women's movement in Iran.

## 9.11 Use of New Media

**Table 15 Use of new media to follow the Iranian women's movement**

Use of new media	Frequency	Percent
Daily	147	52.9
2 or 3 times a week	52	18.7
2 or 3 times a month	23	8.3
less than once a month	23	8.3
Missing	33	11.9
Total	278	100.0

<sup>479</sup> Based on my observations as one of the founding of campaign

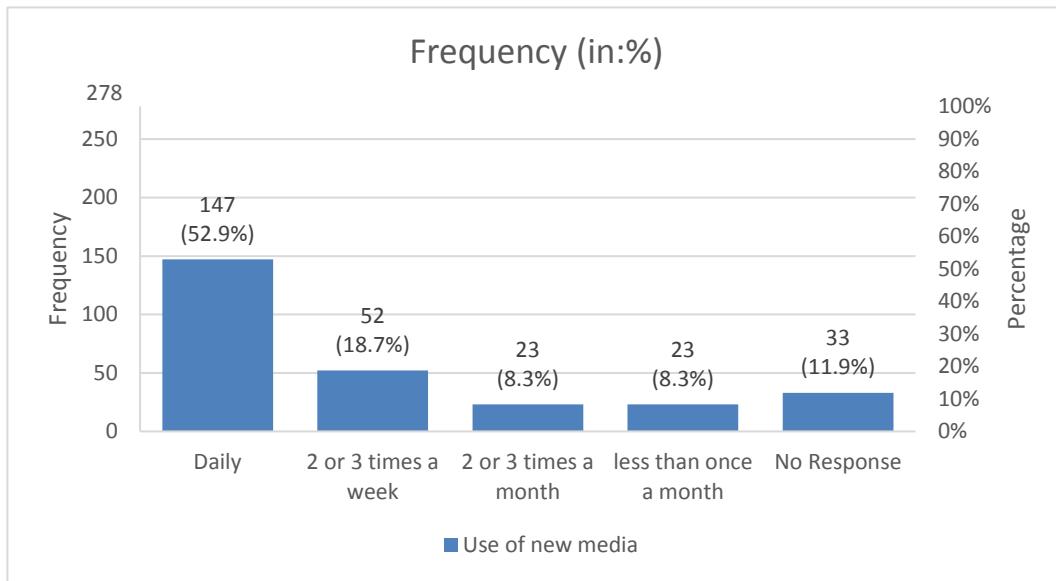


Figure 14 Use of new media to follow the Iranian women's movement

The table and the chart above show that (60%) of respondents use new media daily to follow the Iranian women's movement; almost one-fifth (21%) of the respondents use new media 2 or 3 times a week, follow women's movement in Iran while only (9%) 2 or 3 times a month, and a similar level (9%) use new media less than once a month to follow the Iranian women's movement.

### **9.12 On which website heard about the women's movement in Iran for the first time.**

**Table 16 Website heard about the women's movement in Iran for the first time**

Website heard about Women's Movement in Iran for the first time	Frequency	Percent
YouTube and Facebook	10	3.7
Website, Weblog, Email	20	7.3
Change for Equality, Zanestan, Women's field, Feminist school, Tribune feministi	45	16.3
Facebook	22	8.0
I don't remember	13	4.7
Missing	168	60.0
Total	278	100.0

The table above shows data of respondents who reported visiting various new media and hearing about the women's movement in Iran for the first time. This data is best understood in relation to the timeframe of responses spanning four decades.

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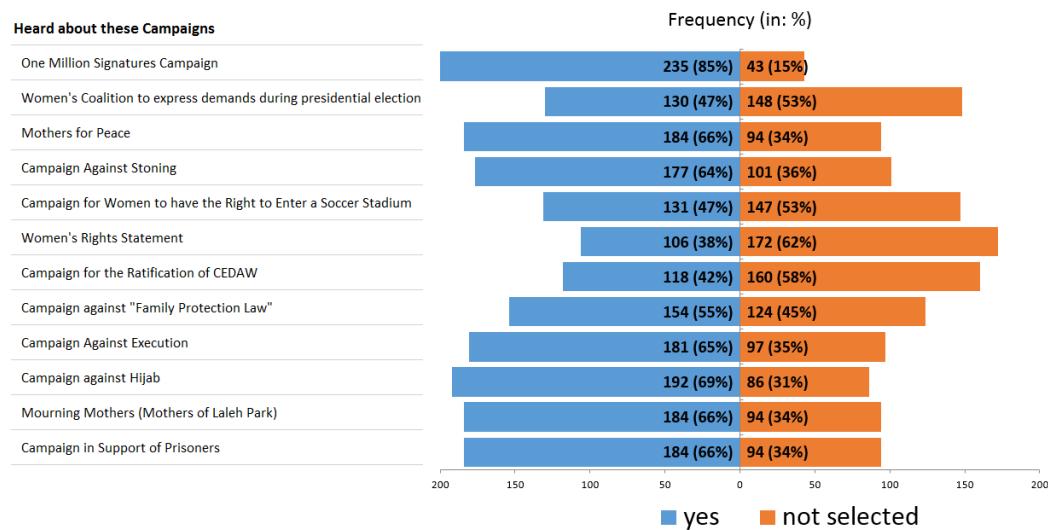
It is no surprise the dominant answer is No Response (168; 60%). As the data shows, over half the total interviewees (170 of 278; 61.3% of the total) were already aware of the women's movement in the period from 1970 and prior through 2005, a period of 35-years. This was prior to arrival of new media. These interviewees did not use new media to become aware of the women's movement for the first time. Then, in just the next seven years from 2006 through 2012, new media exploded onto the information landscape, with Facebook, YouTube, weblogs, etc. Some 82 participants (29.6%) reported new media where they heard about the women's movement in Iran for the first time. This corresponds to Table 5 Usage of the Internet in Iran- Internet Growth and Population Statistics. This data viewed together helps to create increasingly clear insights how the women's movement, as well as greater awareness of the women's movement, were evolving in relation to the emergence of new media.

It is interesting to look at the data in terms of digital diversity and eclectic new media sources. There was not a single hegemony voice of the women's movement. Many websites were Iranian, such as Zanestan, women's field, Feminist school, Change for Equality, Tribune feministi (Feminist's Tribune), Iranian Women Journalists and gooya.com. The most common Iranian websites among respondents are Change for Equality, Facebook and Feminist school.

## 9.13 Identify and communicate with campaigns. Which of the following campaigns have you heard about?

**Table 17 Which of the following campaigns have you heard about**

Heard about...	Yes	(in:%)	Not selected	(in:%)	Total
<b>One Million Signatures Campaign</b>	235	84.53%	43	15.47%	278
<b>Women's Coalition to express demands during presidential election</b>	130	46.76%	148	53.24%	278
<b>Mothers for Peace</b>	184	66.19%	94	33.81%	278
<b>Campaign Against Stoning</b>	177	63.67%	101	36.33%	278
<b>Campaign for Women to have the Right to Enter a Soccer Stadium</b>	131	47.12%	147	52.88%	278
<b>Women's Rights Statement</b>	106	38.13%	172	61.87%	278
<b>Campaign for the Ratification of CEDAW</b>	118	42.45%	160	57.55%	278
<b>Campaign against "Family Protection Law"</b>	154	55.40%	124	44.60%	278
<b>Campaign Against Execution</b>	181	65.11%	97	34.89%	278
<b>Campaign against Hijab</b>	192	69.06%	86	30.94%	278
<b>Mourning Mothers (Mothers of Laleh Park)</b>	184	66.19%	94	33.81%	278
<b>Campaign in Support of Prisoners</b>	184	66.19%	94	33.81%	278



**Figure 15 Which of the following campaigns have you heard about?**

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## **9.14 For what purposes do you use your mobile phone?**

**Table 18 Purposes for which mobile phone is used, ranked by largest use**

Purpose	Not selected	Percent	Yes	Percent	Total	Percent
Call and (SMS) with Family and Friends	52	18.7	226	81.3	278	100.0
Phone calls and text messages (SMS) for work	85	30.6	193	69.4	278	100.0
Call and (SMS) for Social Purposes	139	50.0	139	50.0	278	100.0
Using the Internet	156	56.1	122	43.9	278	100.0
Entertainment	187	67.3	91	32.7	278	100.0

The table above shows that 81% used mobile phone for calls and text messages (SMS) with family and friends; 69% of respondents for work by calls and text messages (SMS); 50% for social purposes; 44% for accessing Internet; and 33% for entertainment. This data clearly shows that mobile phone functionality integrates strongly with social experience.

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**9.15 Which of the following software do you use to exchange your information or chat with your friends?**

**Table 18 Software used to exchange information or chat with friends (ranked by usage)**

Software	Not selected	Percent	Yes	Percent	Total	Percent
<b>Facebook</b>	74	26.6	204	73.4	278	100.0
<b>Skype</b>	78	28.1	200	71.9	278	100.0
<b>OOVO</b>	157	56.5	121	43.5	278	100.0
<b>Yahoo Messenger</b>	162	58.3	116	41.7	278	100.0
<b>Viber</b>	174	62.6	104	37.4	278	100.0
<b>Google Talk</b>	186	66.9	92	33.1	278	100.0
<b>Paltalk</b>	208	74.8	70	25.2	278	100.0
<b>WhatsApp</b>	210	75.5	68	24.5	278	100.0
<b>Tango</b>	256	92.1	22	7.9	278	100.0

**9.16 The role of social networking on encouraging people to participate in the 2009 election**

**Table 19 In your opinion, what role did the social networking in Internet play in encouraging people to participate in the 2009 election?**

Role social networking on Internet encouraging people to participate 2009 election?	Frequency	Percent
Very Large Role	165	59.4
Large Role	57	20.5
Small Role	14	5.0
Very Small Role	5	1.8
Total	241	86.7
Missing	37	13.3
Total	278	100.0

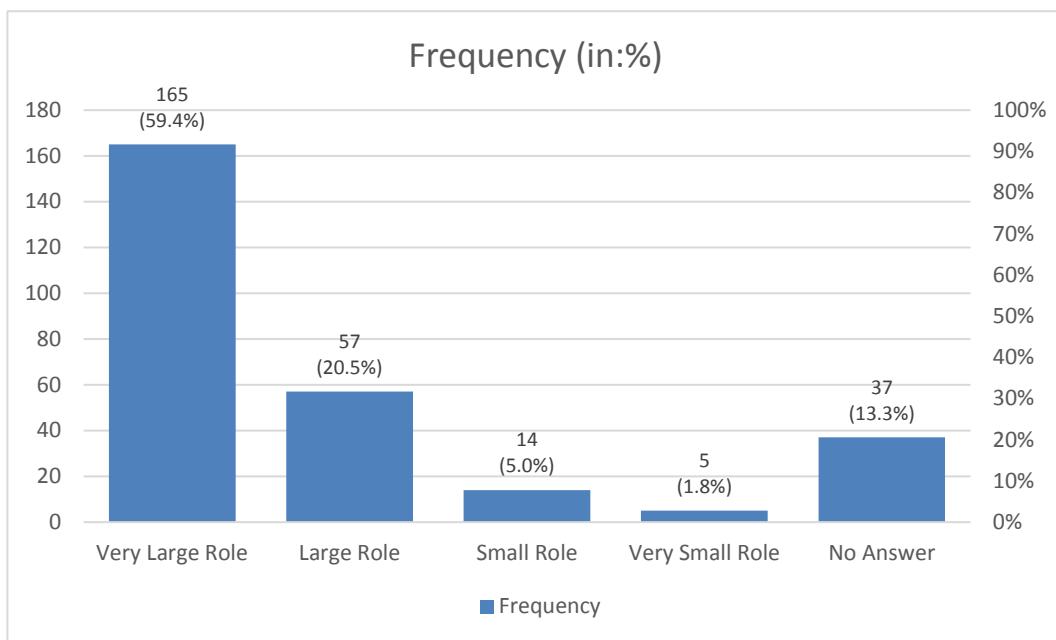


Figure 3 Role Social Networking on Internet encouraging people to Participate in 2009 Election

### **9.17 Distribution of the role of micro social movements in the Green Movement**

In your opinion which of the social movements in Iran was the most effective in shaping the Green Movement?

**Table 20 Role of micro social movements in the Green Movement**

Role of micro social movements in the Green Movement	Frequency	Percent
Women's movement	35	12.6
Labour movement	3	1.1
Students' movement	72	25.9
All three had the same role	104	37.4
Missing	64	23.0
Total	278	100.0

The table above shows that (37%) of respondents believe student, women and labour movement had a role shaping the Green Movement. However (26%) believe the student movement was the most effective movement in shaping the Green Movement and (13%) believe the women's movement was the most effective shaping the Green Movement. Only (1%) credit the labor movement. Some respondents added explanations such as: "general dissatisfaction, not any one movement", "none in any serious manner considering the population nationally",

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“The Green Movement was beyond all these movements”, “general movement of democracy” and “all three contributed, first, women, students, and next workers. Some 23% did not respond.

### **9.18 Which of the tools was the most effective in covering the Green Movement's news?**

**Table 21 Most effective tools for covering Green Movement's news**

Most effective tools for covering Green Movement's news	Frequency	Percent
National TV	3	1.1
International TV	36	12.9
Newspaper	1	0.4
Internet	183	65.8
Mobile phones	21	7.6
Radio	2	0.7
Missing	32	11.5
Total	278	100.0

The table above shows that (66%) of respondents believe Internet was the most effective tool in covering the Green Movement's news. Second rank was international TV with (13%). Respondents considered Iran's National TV, newspapers and radio broadcasts insignificant in news coverage of the Green Movement: radio less than 1%, National TV 1%, newspapers 0.4%. Some 8% of respondents considered mobile phone effective covering Green movement's new. About one-tenth of participants did not answer the question.

Some respondents provided additional explanation, such as “Victim's Family interviews with a broad media, Facebook (Internet)”, “I do not believe in the green movement and do not accept it as a movement”, “I believe foreign television and the Internet and Mobile were the most important tools and they played a huge role in covering the Green Movement's news”.

## 9.19 Used Email to get information about the women's movement in other countries

**Table 22 Used Email**

E-mail	Frequency	Percent
Always	98	35.3
Often	32	11.5
From Time to Time	27	9.7
Rarely	22	7.9
Never	21	7.6
Missing	78	28.1
Total	278	100.0

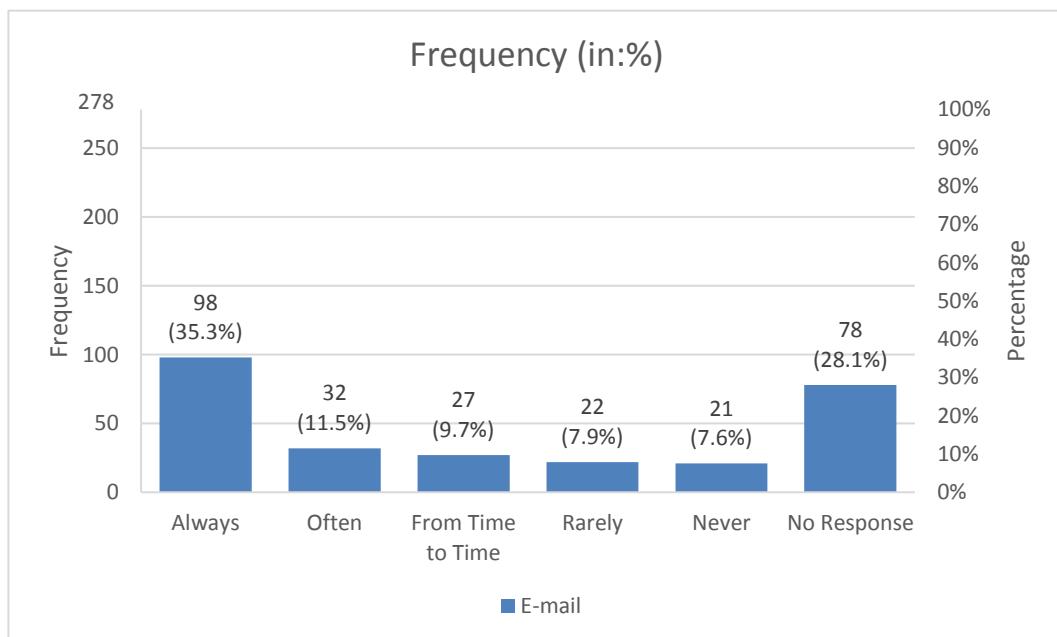


Figure 4 E-mail

As the data in the table shows, more than 35% always use e-mail to get information about the women's movement in other countries. In addition, more than 10 % often use e-mail for the same purpose. And 10% from time to time used e-mail. Almost 8% never (and 8% rarely) used e-mail to get information about the women's movement in other countries. More than a quarter of the survey participants did not answer this question.

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## **9.20 Used Newspapers / Magazines to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table 23 Used Newspapers / Magazines to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

Newspapers / Magazines	Frequency	Percent
Always	17	6.1
Often	14	5.0
From Time to Time	33	11.9
Rarely	25	9.0
Never	52	18.7
No Response	137	49.3
Total	278	100.0

As the data in the table shows, only 6% always use Newspapers / Magazines to get information about the women's movement in other countries; 5% often use Newspapers/Magazines for the same purpose; and 12% from time to time. While almost one-fifth selected 'never', about one-tenth chose 'rarely' use Newspapers / Magazines to get information about the women's movement in other countries. Over half the survey participants did not answer this question.

## **9.21 Used Governmental Iranian TV Channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table 24 Used Governmental Iranian TV Channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

Governmental Iranian TV Channels	Frequency	Percent
Often	4	1.4
From Time to Time	6	2.2
Rarely	14	5.0
Never	99	35.6
No Response	155	55.8
Total	278	100.0

Only 44% responded to the question. Among the 123 respondents, 80% never used governmental Iranian TV channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries. Only four respondents (1.4%) stated that they use

governmental Iranian TV channels often to get information about the women's movement in other countries.

## **9.22 Used Foreign Iranian TV Channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table 25 Foreign Iranian TV Channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

<b>Foreign Iranian TV Channels</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Always	26	9.4
Often	30	10.8
From Time to Time	51	18.3
Rarely	29	10.4
Never	26	9.4
Total	162	58.3
Missing	116	41.7
Total	278	100.0

According to the table above, 59% of respondents answered this question. Some 41% did not answer this question. Almost 9% never use foreign Iranian TV channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries. The usage distribution was fairly similar for all viewing levels of frequency.

## **9.23 Used International TV Channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table 26 Used International TV Channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

<b>International TV Channels</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Always	31	11.2
Often	35	12.6
From Time to Time	48	17.3
Rarely	26	9.4
Never	26	9.4
Missing	112	40.3
Total	278	100.0

According to the frequency distribution table above, half of the participants in the survey to varying degrees use International TV Channels to get information about the women's movement in other countries. Only about 9% do not use it at all. Just over 40% did not answer the question.

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## **9.24 Used Iranian Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table 27 Used Iranian Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

<b>Iranian Radio</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Always	1	0.4
Often	3	1.1
From Time to Time	7	2.5
Rarely	17	6.1
Never	99	35.6
Sub-Total	127	45.7
Missing	151	54.3
Total	278	100.0

As the data shows, 35.6% of participants never use Iranian Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries. Some 6% rarely use Iranian Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries. The total percentage of interviewees who use Iranian Radio more often than “rarely” was 4% (“always”: 0.4%; “often”: 1.1; “from time to time”: 2.5%). Over half (54%) did not answer this question

## **9.25 Used International Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table 28 Used International Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

<b>International Radio</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Always	17	6.1
Often	14	5.0
From Time to Time	42	15.1
Rarely	35	12.6
Never	40	14.4
Sub-Total	148	53.2
Missing	130	46.8
Total	278	100.0

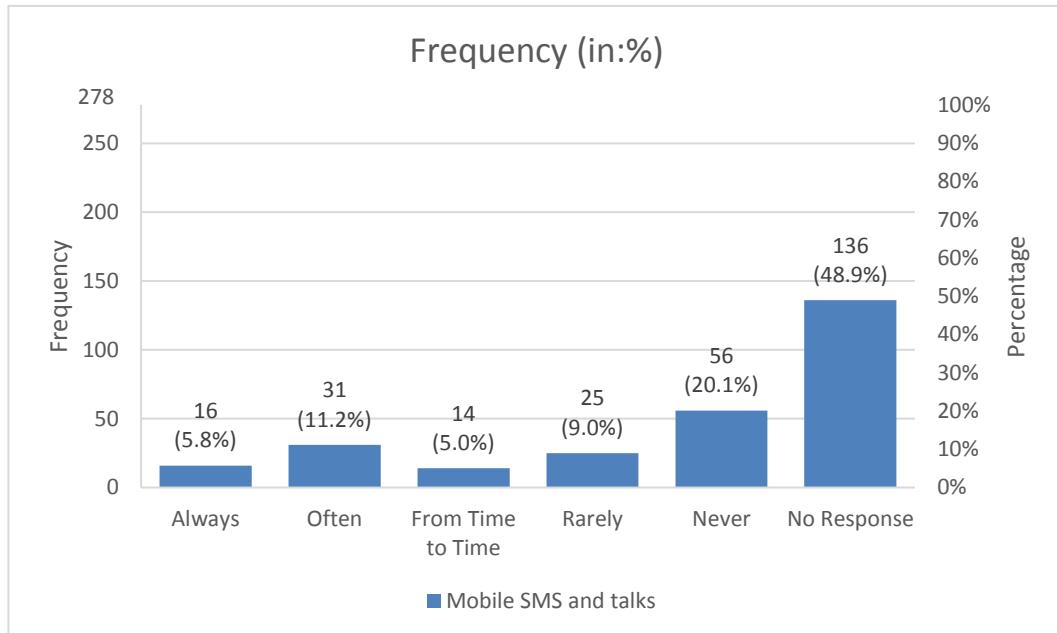
As table above shows, less than 40% of the participants use International Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries. Among them

6% always 5%, often 15% from time to time and about 13% rarely use International Radio to get information about the women's movement in other countries. While 14% never listen to international radio for this purpose. Moreover, almost 47% did not answer this question.

## **9.26 Used Mobile SMS and talks to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table 30 Used Mobile SMS and talks to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

Mobile SMS and talks	Frequency	Percent
Always	16	5.8
Often	31	11.2
From Time to Time	14	5.0
Rarely	25	9.0
Never	56	20.1
Sub-Total	142	51.1
Missing	136	48.9
Total	278	100.0



**Figure 5 Used Mobile SMS and talks to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

The table above shows that over a quarter (30%) of respondents use mobile phone to varying degrees (Always, often, from time to time or rarely) to get

information about the women's movement in other countries by using SMS and calls. 20% never use it for this purpose. In addition, almost 49% did not answer this question.

### **9.27 Used Internet to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

**Table29 Used Internet to get information about the women's movement in other countries**

Internet	Frequency	Percent
Always	161	57.9
Often	38	13.7
From Time to Time	24	8.6
Rarely	3	1.1
Never	6	2.2
Missing	46	16.5
Total	278	100.0

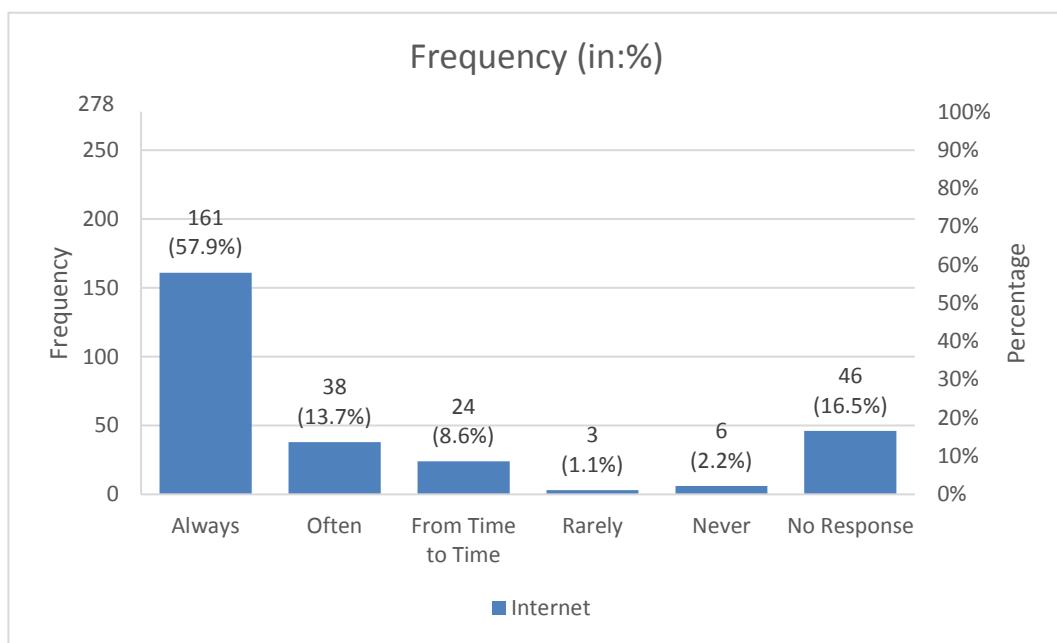


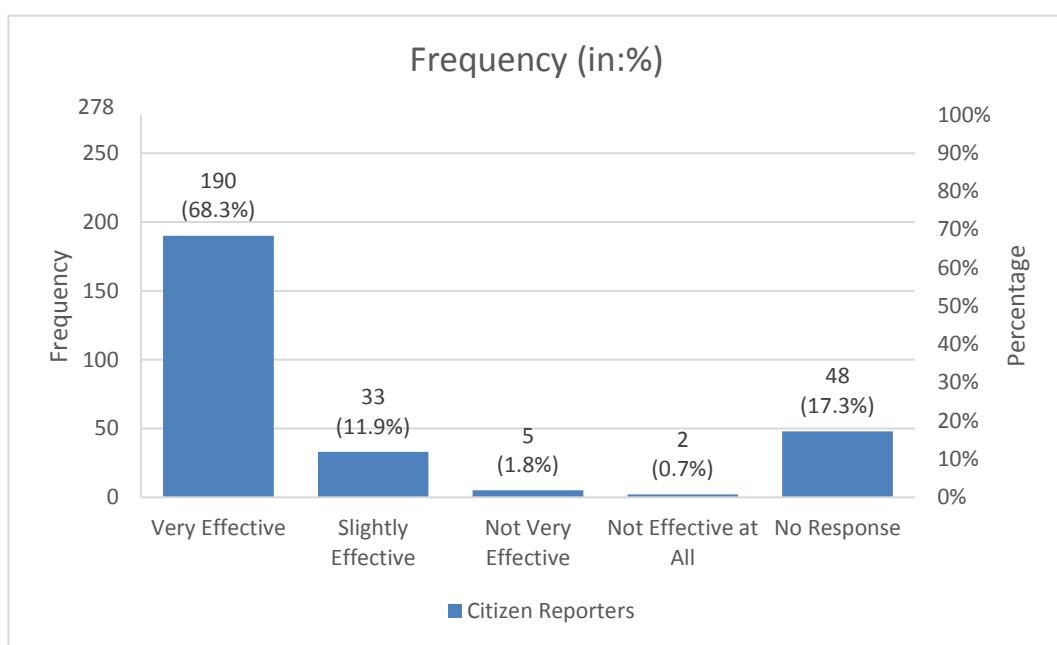
Figure 6 Internet

The table above indicates that a majority of respondents (81%) use the Internet to get information about the women's movement in other countries. Among them (60% always (13%) often almost (9%) from time to time and only 1% rarely. A few respondents (2%) stated they never use Internet to get information about women's movement in other countries.

## 9.28 Effectiveness of citizen reporters covering news during election 2009

**Table 30 Effectiveness of Citizen Reporters in covering the news during the Election 2009**

Citizen Reporters	Frequency	Percent
Very Effective	190	68.3
Slightly Effective	33	11.9
Not Very Effective	5	1.8
Not Effective at All	2	0.7
Missing	48	17.3
Total	278	100



**Figure 7 Effectiveness of Citizen Reporters in Covering News during Election 2009**

The table and chart above show the majority corresponding (68%) consider citizen reporters as very effective in covering the news during the election 2009. 12% consider to a certain extent of effectiveness of citizen reporters in covering the news during the election 2009. Less than 1% said there is no role for the citizen reporter in covering the news.

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## **9.29 Participated in the 10th Iranian Presidential Election in 2009**

**Table 31 Participated in the 10th Iranian Presidential Election in 2009**

<b>Participated 10th Iranian Presidential Election 2009</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	162	58.3
No	87	31.3
Total	249	89.6
Missing	29	10.4
Total	278	100.0

In the survey (58%) of respondents stated that they would participate in the 10th Iranian Presidential Election in 2009. While (31%) answered no and one in ten did not respond to this question.

## **9.30 Plan to participate in 11th Iranian Presidential Election in 2013**

**Table 32 Plan to participate in 11<sup>th</sup> Iranian Presidential Election in 2013**

<b>Plan to Participate in 11th Iranian Presidential Election 2013</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	33	11.9
No	169	60.8
Do not know	45	16.2
Missing	31	11.2
Total	278	100.0

The data above show the distribution of people who (at the time of survey) plan to participate in the 11th Iranian Presidential Election in 2013. The table indicates 61% had no plan to participate in the election 2013, only 12% answered yes and 16% did not know. A few days before the election many who had planned to boycott the election changed their minds.

### 9.31 How important was the Women's Coalition in creating the Green Movement?

**Table 33 Women's Coalition in creating the Green Movement**

Women's Coalition in creating the Green Movement	Frequency	Percent
Not at all important	5	1.8
Not very important	13	4.7
Slightly important	42	15.1
Strongly important	100	36.0
Totally important	67	24.1
Total	227	81.7
Missing	51	18.3
Total	278	100.0

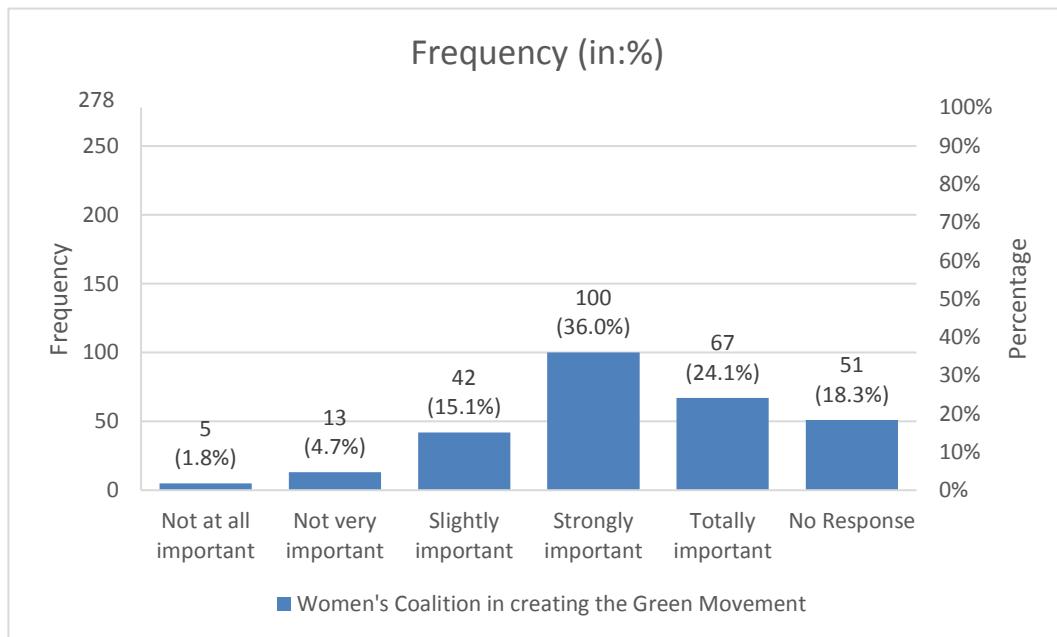


Figure 8 Women's Coalition importance in creating the Green Movement

### 9.32 Analysis of Research Hypotheses

For an analysis of research hypotheses: The data were analyzed inferentially utilizing the chi –square test in SPSS (23.00) software,  $p<0.05$

### 9.33 Main hypotheses of the primary research

The primary research has been structured to test the following hypotheses:

1. There is a relation to be a feminist and usage of media.
2. There is a relation between willingness to participate in women's movement

and usage of media.

3. There is a relation between being a feminist and believing in secularism.
4. There is no relation between age and usage of new media to follow the Iranian women's movement.
5. There is relation between using Internet and participating in the 10th Iranian Presidential Election in Iran.
6. There is a relation between using Internet and participating in the 11<sup>th</sup> Iranian presidential Election.

### **9.34 Hypothesis 1: There is a relation a relation between being a feminist and usage of media.**

**Table 34 Case Processing Summary**

	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>Do you call yourself a feminist? *</b>	223	80.2%	55	19.8%	278	100.0%
<b>How often do you currently use new media to follow the Iranian women's movement?</b>						

**Table 35 Cross tabulation Feminist \* New Media**

		How often do you currently use new media to follow the Iranian women's movement?				Total	
		Daily	2 or 3 times a week	2 or 3 times a month	less than once a month		
Do you call yourself a feminist?	Yes	100	29	10	8	147	
		73.5%	65.9%	45.5%	38.1%	65.9%	
	No	36	15	12	13	76	
		26.5%	34.1%	54.5%	61.9%	34.1%	
Total		136	44	22	21	223	
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

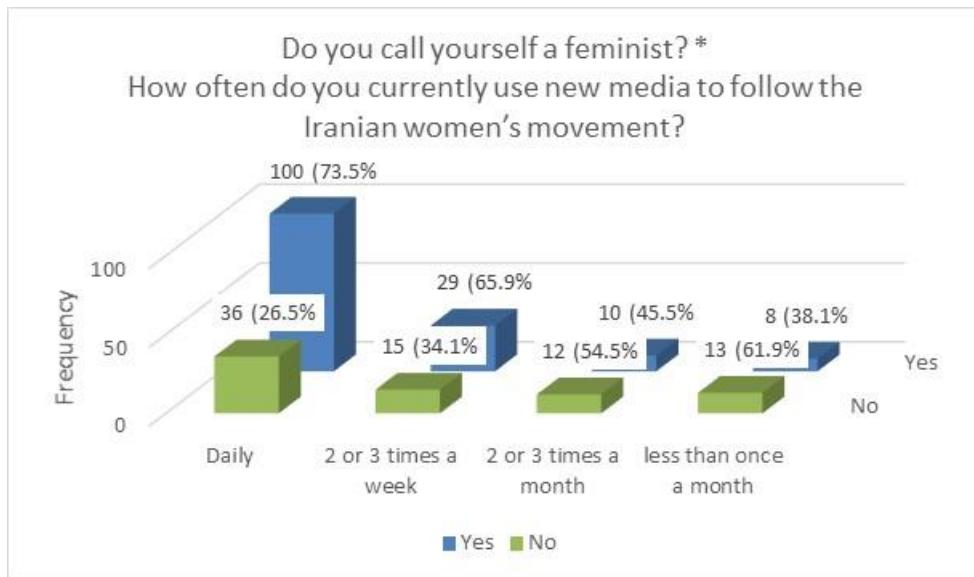


Figure 9 Crosstabulation Feminist \* New Media

From the table and corresponding graphs, it appears that there is a relation between to be a feminist and usage of media. Using the chi-square test on the tabular data gives the following results:

**Table 38 Chi-Square Tests**

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
<b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>	14.844a	3	.002
<b>Likelihood Ratio</b>	14.255	3	.003
<b>Linear-by-Linear Association</b>	14.266	1	.000
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>	223		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 7.16.

**Table 36 Symmetric Measures**

Table (26.1.4) Symmetric Measures		Value	Approximate Significance
<b>Nominal by Nominal</b>	Phi	.258	.002
	Cramer's V	.258	.002
<b>N of Valid Cases</b>		223	

H0: There is no relation between being a feminist and usage of new media.

H1: There is a relation between being a feminist and usage of new media

Considering the results obtained at the level of 0.05. Since the calculated value of the Chi-Square test is (14.844) and P=.002 less than 0.05 Thus, we reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is a significant relationship between being a feminist and usage of new media.

### **9.35 Hypothesis 2: There is a relation between willingness to participate in women's movement and usage of media.**

**Table 37 Case Processing Summary**

Case Processing Summary	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
<b>What is your relation to the women's movement in Iran? * How often do you use the Internet?</b>	242	87.1%	36	12.9%	278	100.0%

**Table 38 what is your relation to the women's movement in Iran? \*How often do you use the Internet? Cross tabulation**

What is your relation to the women's movement in Iran?	How often do you use the Internet?		Total
	Daily	2 or 3 times a week	
Women's Rights activist	82	6	88
	35.5%	54.5%	36.4%
Supporter	121	2	123
	52.4%	18.2%	50.8%
Neutral	12	2	14
	5.2%	18.2%	5.8%
Opposed to feminism but supporting women's rights	15	1	16
	6.5%	9.1%	6.6%
Opposed to feminism and the women's rights movement	1	0	1
	0.4%	0.0%	0.4%
Total	231	11	242
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

**Table 39 Chi-Square Tests**

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.680a	4	.154
Likelihood Ratio	6.279	4	.179
Linear-by-Linear Association	.007	1	.933
N of Valid Cases	242		

a. 5 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .05.

**Table 40 Symmetric Measures**

Symmetric Measures	Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.166
	Cramer's V	.166
N of Valid Cases	242	

H0: There is not a relation between willingness to participate in women's movement and usage of media.

H1: There is a relation between willingness to participate in women's movement and usage of media.

Considering the results obtained at the level of  $\alpha= 0.05$ . Since the calculated value of the Chi-Square test is (6.680) and  $P=0/154 > 0/05$  Therefore, we accept the null hypothesis. Thus, we conclude there is not a significant relationship between the women's movement in Iran and usage of new media.

### **9.36 Hypothesis 3: There is a relation between being a feminist and believing in secularism.**

The third hypothesis claims that there is a relation between being a feminist and believing in secularism.

**Table 41 Case Processing Summary**

Case Processing Summary	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Do you call yourself a feminist? * [State and religion have to be separated]	247	88.8%	31	11.2%	278	100.0%

**Table 42 Cross Tabulation**

Cross Tabulation		[State and religion have to be separated] Do you agree with the following statements?				
		Yes	No	Don't Know	Total	
Do you call yourself a feminist?	Yes	157	1	0	159	
		66.8%	20.0%	0.0%	64.4%	
	No	78	4	2	88	
		33.2%	80.0%	100.0%	35.6%	
Total		235	5	2	247	
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

**Table 43 Chi-Square Tests**

Chi-Square Tests	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.807a	3	.005
Likelihood Ratio	13.010	3	.005
N of Valid Cases	247		

a. 6 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 71.

**Table 44 Symmetric Measures**

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approximate Significance
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.228	.005
	Cramer's V	.228	.005
N of Valid Cases		247	

Based on the results obtained at the level of 0.05, since the calculated value of the Chi-Square test is (12.807) and P=0/005 is less than 0/05 Thus, we conclude there is a significant relation between being a feminist and beliefs in secularism. This research hypothesis is confirmed.

### 9.37 Hypothesis 4: There is no relation between age and usage of media to follow the Iranian women's movement

**Table 48 How often do you currently use new media to follow the Iranian women's movement? Cross tabulation \* How old are you?**

		How often do you currently use new media to follow the Iranian women's movement?					
		Daily	2 or 3 times a week	2 or 3 times a month	less than once a month	Total	
<b>How old are you?</b>	16-20	0	0	1	1	2	
		0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	4.3%	0.8%	
	21-25	2	0	0	1	3	
		1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	1.2%	
	26-30	21	4	1	2	28	
		14.3%	7.7%	4.3%	8.7%	11.4%	
	31-35	35	15	8	8	66	
		23.8%	28.8%	34.8%	34.8%	26.9%	
	36-40	23	16	8	7	54	
		15.6%	30.8%	34.8%	30.4%	22.0%	
	41-50	14	0	2	1	17	
		9.5%	0.0%	8.7%	4.3%	6.9%	
	51-60	17	6	1	0	24	
		11.6%	11.5%	4.3%	0.0%	9.8%	
	61-70	30	11	2	2	45	
		20.4%	21.2%	8.7%	8.7%	18.4%	
	71-80	4	0	0	1	5	
		2.7%	0.0%	0.0%	4.3%	2.0%	
		1	0	0	0	1	
		0.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.4%	
<b>Total</b>		<b>147</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>245</b>	
		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	

**Table 45 Chi-Square Tests**

	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>
Pearson Chi-Square	37.834a	27	.081
Likelihood Ratio	44.243	27	.020
N of Valid Cases	245		

a. 25 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .09.

Table 50 Symmetric Measures

		<b>Value</b>	<b>Approximate Significance</b>
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	.393	.081
	Cramer's V	.227	.081
N of Valid Cases		245	

According to the results obtained at the level of  $\alpha= 0.05$ , since the calculated value of the Chi-Square test is (37.834) and since P-value is larger than the significance level ( $P=0.081 > 0.05$ ) then, we cannot conclude that the observed data are statistically different from the expected values. Thus, we conclude there is no a significant relation between age and usage of media to follow the Iranian women's movement. Therefore, this research hypothesis is not approved. When reading this table, we are interested in the results of the "Pearson Chi-Square" row. This tells us that all range of age and usage of media to follow the Iranian women's movement

### **9.38 Hypothesis 5: There is relation between using the Internet and participating in the 10th Iranian Presidential Election in Iran.**

**Table 46 Table Cross tabulation**

<b>How often do you use the Internet?</b>		<b>Did you participate in the 10th Iranian Presidential Election in 2009?</b>		<b>Total</b>
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
	Daily	146	80	226
	2 or 3 times a week	6	6	12
	2 or 3 times a month	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>		152	87	239

**Table 47 Chi-Square Tests**

<b>Chi-Square Tests</b>	<b>Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b>
Pearson Chi-Square	2.804 <sup>a</sup>	2	.246
Likelihood Ratio	3.042	2	.219
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.389	1	.122
N of Valid Cases	239		

a. 3 cells (50.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .36.

According to the results obtained at the level of  $\alpha= 0.05$ , since the calculated value of the Chi-Square test is (2.804) and since ( $P=0.246 > 0.05$ ) the observed data are statistically different from the expected values. Thus, we conclude there is not a significant relation between using the Internet and participation or non-participation in the 10th Iranian Presidential Election in Iran. When reading this table, we are interested in the results of the "Pearson Chi-Square" row. This tells us that, company or non-participation in the election does not depend on Internet usage.

**9.42 Hypothesis 6: There is relation between using the Internet and participating in the 11th Iranian Presidential Election in Iran**

**Table 48 Participation in the 11th Iranian Presidential Election in 2013. Cross tabulation**

How often do you use the Internet?	Do you plan to participate in the 11th Iranian Presidential Election in 2013?				Total
		Yes	No	I don't know yet	
Daily	16	30	152	42	240
2 or 3 times a week	1	1	9	2	13
2 or 3 times a month	0	0	1	0	1
Total	17	31	162	44	254

**Table 54 Chi-Square Tests**

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.922 <sup>a</sup>	6	.988
Likelihood Ratio	1.285	6	.972
N of Valid Cases	254		

a. 7 cells (58.3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07.

According to the results obtained at the level of  $\alpha= 0.05$ , since the calculated value of the Chi-Square test is (.922) and since ( $P=0.988 > 0.05$ ) the observed data are statistically different from the expected values. Thus, we conclude there is not a significant relation between using the Internet and participate in the 11th Iranian Presidential Election 2013 in Iran<sup>480</sup>. Therefore, this research hypothesis is not approved. The results of this hypothesis are the same as the previous hypothesis, that means participation or non-participation in the election does not depend on Internet usage.

<sup>480</sup> Presidential elections were held in Iran on 14 June 2013. Hassan Rouhani won with a landslide victory, elected in the first round of voting with 50.71% of the votes.

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## **Chapter 10 Discussion and Conclusions**

As a political activist and member of the women's movement in Iran since the beginning of the 1979 Iranian Revolution, I faced the shock of losing the social and individual rights of women under the Shari 'a law. Concurrently I witnessed – and participated directly and indirectly in many women's ongoing activities to confront and eliminate discrimination and inequality. In this context, certain questions constantly occupied my mind, such as: What are the barriers to women's equality? In which periods and under what circumstances have women been able to make their voice better heard? What parts of the activities of the women's movement have been less visible in academic research? In this regard, I have tried, by studying the women's movement in its historical and political context, while describing the activities of women in different periods, to look for answers to the theoretical questions and to identify the factors affecting the failures or successes of women's rights activists in different periods. The Iranian women's movement, while it has been influenced by social movements, has also provided the ground for integration and change in political relations and political struggles. The core research aimed at investigating the nature of these interactive dynamics.

The fundamental specific issue studied in this study is the impact and the method of the use of new techniques on women's movement in Iran. The introduction of the Internet into the lives of the people made fundamental changes in the struggles of the activists of the women's movement in Iran; it also brought up new questions. What role has the new media played in promoting public awareness of women's demands? How would the women's movement in Iran, as a sub-movement, through the new media, affect the macro-democratic social movement? What role has the new media played in the diversity and plurality of the women's movement? To help address such questions, primary research was conceived and completed, to increase understanding of the relationship between the level of participation in virtual social networks and the activities of the women's movement.

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For clarity about the scope, reference in this study to “new media” refer to media carried over the Internet platform which provide services to end-users over that platform<sup>481</sup> and with an ostensibly social character. These include Internet sites and services such as email and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Google+ and specialized social networks like LinkedIn and Digital Telephone Services. The study scope does not include non-social Internet services, such as online banking, even if such might be construed as “new media”; while that may be true from other theoretical or technical perspectives, it is not relevant to the key goals and aspects of the scope of this study. It is further not my intention to embark on academic argument attempting to establish static or dogmatic boundaries of “new media.” Therefore, this is a pragmatic working definition and it is precisely the highly dynamic and relevant living nature of this problem that excites my interest.

Similarly, for clarity, references to “the Internet” should be understood to refer to the nature of the Internet as experienced in the moment and context described. Such references do not by any means pretend to make simplistic grandiose static declarations that apply for all time. The Internet is complex and dynamic and continues to evolve at lightning speed.

I have chosen the impact of new media on the women's movement in Iran for three reasons. First, about two decades after the revolution, despite the constant activity of women to eliminate discrimination against them, their voices were not heard due to government control of the media. This is because radio, television and newspapers were highly male-oriented, ideological and patriarchal. The activities and productions of these media were aimed at promoting and legitimizing discrimination in all fields against women. Second, after the introduction of the Internet into the everyday life of people, fundamental changes were made in the manner of individual and social interactions and social groups beyond any former time and space limitations. And as a result of rapid social change in the light of new media and their impact on social movements, it is important that its effects on the

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<sup>481</sup> The technological means of delivering an Internet platform can be diverse, including telephone cables, glass fiber cable, satellite, radio frequency and other means.

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modus operandi of the women's movement also be studied. Finally, the third and especially important reason is that the experience of the Iranian women's movement in using new media can make contributions to further enrich the global women's movements, especially women's movements in the region and for women in countries under Islamic law due to their cultural, social and political similarities.

In the government of the Islamic Republic, the old media was based on a variety of discrimination and exclusion of women. In the use of the old media, gender was the main focus of discrimination. Even the faces of women without hijab were eliminated from old media such as TV and newspapers. However, due to repression, political obstruction and media monopoly, it was not possible to explicitly address all aspects of the people's lives. As a result, women's rights activists began to form women's circles. By 2003, everything in the media had become much more uniform; news about "dissenting" women's activities was rarely transmitted. Therefore, in this treatise, I compare and discuss the status of women's movement in Iran when they were denied access to the media with the age of communication technology and show how the new media affected women's movement and extended the reach of their voice beyond their geographical boundaries.

Furthermore, the Internet due to its initial potential and technological features, such as relatively low barriers to entry, easy access, affordability, centrifugal and inclusive environments, brought about a context comparatively free of the current discrimination and restrictions in the old media. As a result, those who were disregarded in the old media increasingly acquired access to information and were increasingly able to express themselves. This phenomenon accelerated particularly with the rapid introduction of new apps<sup>482</sup> for mobile devices such as rapidly increasingly available smart phones – such as Viber, WhatsApp, Skype and others

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<sup>482</sup> A mobile app or mobile application is a computer program or software application designed to run on a mobile device such as a phone/tablet or watch. Apps were originally intended for productivity assistance such as Email, calendar, and contact databases, but the public demand for apps caused rapid expansion into other areas such as mobile games, factory automation, GPS and location-based services, order-tracking, and ticket purchases, so that the "app platform landscape" has diversified and there are now millions of apps available. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile\\_app](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mobile_app)

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along with the popularization of Twitter, development of Instagram. These and other technological developments precipitated changes and ultimately social paradigm shifts, not only among female activists but also among other users of virtual social networks.

In describing the facts, we rely on evidence and our understanding of the phenomena in the world is changing and evolving. Concerning the use of the Internet and its role in social movements since its inception, there have also been numerous and contradictory views and opinions. Therefore, this research, while analyzing various perspectives on Internet's impact on civil movements in general, focuses on a specific scope of impacts in a period of historical and technological significance: the effects of the use of the new media in the Iranian women's movement in a time interval of ten years.

In this regard, in addition to reviewing the research on the women's movement in Iran, as well as my personal observations and experiences from the women's movement, I conducted face-to-face qualitative interviews with 18 Iranian activists for women's rights. The majority of these women and men are living in different exiles while some of them live and work in Iran. The interviews were collected in Farsi and translated into English. I interpreted the interviews following the standard approach to interpretation. In addition, the results of the online questionnaire were answered by 278 Iranians at home and abroad, which was analyzed using the software for statistical analysis SPSS Statistics<sup>483</sup>.

The men and women selected for interview are social and political Iranian activists from inside and outside the country, of different ages and backgrounds. They are not a homogenous representation of Iranian society as a whole. Some experienced the pre-revolution era; some only the post-revolution era. But all had something in common: they all knew the women's movement well. The diversity

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<sup>483</sup> SPSS Statistics is a software package used for interactive, or batched, statistical analysis. Long produced by SPSS Inc., it was acquired by IBM in 2009. The current versions (2015) are named IBM SPSS Statistics. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SPSS>

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of social and political background of the interviewees helped me to study the women movement in Iran from different perspectives.

In the first chapter, I discussed my background and explained the research objective to investigate the women's movement challenges and obstacles, and strategies of women movement activists to express their needs. It discusses related points such as research and data collection methods, literature review and research limitations. It explains in broad lines how the Iranian women's movement emerged, developed and become successful against all problems and oppositions, and has expanded geographical and virtual scope in the fight against discrimination against women.

For over 100 years, Iranian women activists have been actively visibly fighting discrimination to secure equal rights to men. The Iranian women's rights movement is in fact considered as one of the historically longest-sustained struggles for women's rights. To help review the Iranian women's movement in such a long historical timespan, it is sub-divided into discrete historical time periods. First, the Iranian women's movement during the Constitutional Revolution, 1905–1925, due to its significant impact on making rules and first Iranian constitution<sup>484</sup>. Second, the Iranian women's movement during the Pahlavi Dynasty, 1925–1979, fighting hijab due to fundamental disagreements with clerics. I reviewed the history of Iranian movement protests during the Constitutional Revolution and Pahlavi era and women's condition post revolution in 1979. Third, the Iranian women's movement during the Islamic Revolution, 1979 to present, in which a theocratic government imposed all possible restrictions and discrimination against women.

The historical events from political and social aspects at different eras have been reviewed to expose male authoritarianism against female empowerment, as well as male tendency to assert and maintain control over unequal and inequitable power structures. In my analysis of the 1905 Constitutional Revolution era, I discussed how women interacted to form female forums to defend the

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<sup>484</sup> Constitutional Revolution (Enqelāb-e mašrūta), took place between 1905 and 1911. The revolution led to the establishment of a parliament in Persia during the Qajar Dynasty.

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Constitutional Revolution's values along with women rights. The Iranian women's movement in this era is a subdivision of larger Iranian national movement for the independence of the country from imperialism, which ultimately led to drafting and implementing the first constitution. Women's rights to education, voting and political engagement were the core and essence of activities in this era. Activities focused on female empowerment to remove discriminatory laws against women, publishing articles and books to reflect women voices, and promoting solidarity in women's movement activism by joining women NGOs or political parties.

Other activists put education for women and establishing schools as top priority. In spite of diversity in priorities and techniques, there was a collective unity of social voice and momentum demanding social and cultural changes that aspired to change anti-women cultural and traditions.

Regarding the women's movement in the Pahlavi era, I discuss how the intellectual and cultural atmosphere was dominated by nationalism and secularism and religious values were disputed severely among intellectuals and women's movement pioneers. Although Reza Shah acted secularly to modernize the education system, he had limited success when it comes to women's rights mostly due to the clerics' disagreement and traditions. Despite significant improvements in the status of women during the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah, such as the establishment of women's voting rights and family law reform, the clergy remained opposed and tried to reverse these efforts.

Closer examination of the women's movement also reveals a historical understatement of the vitality of women's discourse both before and after the revolution. This is due to a relative complexity that results from a variety of cultural, social and ideological (religious and non-religious) factors. Careful examination of the historical course of women's movement indicates that three serious obstacles have prevented the recognition of women and contrasted with the interests of women.

The most obvious factor in Iran suppressing historical reality – not coincidentally is precisely the reactionary clergy, patriarchy and autocratic

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governments suppressing the emergence of social and political equality. Various groups of women activists, facing such obstacles, emerged according to the forced conditions of their eras, with correspondingly different responses and methodologies.

Because of the interference and influence (domination) of Shiite religion in the social, cultural and even political affairs in Iran, any opposition to Islamic discourse, with its doctrinaire theological and political sexism, also had potentially large impacts and repercussions for the women's movement. Due to the continuous opposition of closed-minded clerics to women's right activists, for a complex variety of reasons, it seems undeniable to state that such "religiously justified tyranny" is the most deterrent factor in the growth and impending the progression and realization of women's equality goals. The clergy considers women's equality as contrary to Islamic law and thus, the clergy stands in direct opposition to the equality of women and has organized its power to control women and place them as subordinates with political and social disadvantage.

Another factor resisting and failing to acknowledge women's demands has been institutionalized traditional infrastructures of patriarchy. Patriarchal infrastructures exist from past to present, in physical experience and virtual cyberspace. Women's movement actions emerged through cultural activities and awareness raising in opposition to patriarchal disenfranchisement.

After the Islamic revolution, the theocratic government severely confronted, repressed and suppressed any demands for equality based on Islamic discourse. Women's rights were not recognized; women's demands were neglected. Religion was officially used as a tool to legitimize any form of discrimination against women. In the Islamic republic, the three aforementioned powers (religious tyranny, autocratic government, patriarchy) coexist as levers of pressure on women' rights activist to prevent them from acting. Many activities have been criminalized. These discriminatory levers have been enforced against women after the 1979 Islamic revolution. As a result, in some cases the Iranian women movement had to

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repeat their 1960s demands, and in some cases even had to repeat demands made in the pre-constitution era over a century earlier.

Regarding the status of women after the revolution and the challenges of women activists confronting the authoritarian-theocratic-patriarchal system, I describe the nature and identity of the women's movement based on diverse demands. I demonstrate that the women's movement in Iran does not have an ideological character. The movement can be much more accurately characterized as secular, diverse and democratically robust. In contrast to opinions of some Iranian scholars living abroad, the women's movement in Iran also cannot be simplified as "Islamic feminism." Unlike countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Turkey and in fact most Islamic countries which practice "Islamic feminism" to show that Islamic sharia supports and confirms women's rights, Iranian women's activists have been demonstrably seeking to eliminate religious conflicts in drafting laws. In fact, activists in the Iranian women's movement, to a significant degree, aspire to achieve separation of religion and state.<sup>485</sup>

Examples of specific issues discussed in this study are trends in the formation of women's circles during the crackdown, a lesser-known period of women's activity in Iran that merits more research. Women active in dissent were excluded from political, social and cultural activities; they responded by establishing independent women's groups (circles). Such circles were often formed by women with a left-wing background, aimed at raising awareness, educating and "enlightening" at the height of political repression during the first and second decade of revolution.

Women used circles to create solidarity, articulate and raise demands and mobilize a need to create an independent women's movement. The helped build the grounds for active participation in the women's movement during the reform period.

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<sup>485</sup> The concept as known in English-speaking countries is "The separation of church and state" a philosophic and jurisprudential concept for defining political distance in the relationship between religious organizations and the nation state. Conceptually, the term refers to the creation of a secular state (with or without legally explicit church-state separation) and to disestablishment, the changing of an existing, formal relationship between the church and the state. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation\\_of\\_church\\_and\\_state](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_church_and_state)

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The common features of all these circles were single-sex and their background diversity and pluralism.

In the darkest days after the revolution, the proliferation of women's circles provided a means for dissident women who had been humiliated and had their identity denied, to stay engaged and keep the women's movement alive. These circles, in addition to criticizing the sexist behaviors of the sovereignty of the Islamic Republic, also challenged patriarchy in political organizations. Through these circles, the post-revolution generation became acquainted with concepts such as gender awareness, gender sensitivity, discrimination, patriarchy and sexism. The circles were able to keep the International Women's Day (8th of March)<sup>486</sup> as a symbol of the stability of the women's movement against the fake history told by government.

The tendency to form women's circles arose in large part in response to a marginalized situation where women were faced with a lot of discrimination, oppressions and problems arising from a theocratic system. Due to the domination of the dictatorship and theocracy, social movements did not have the opportunity to garner an open action to express their wishes, even in the 1990s, when the women's movement gradually moved into a more open space. Every discourse about women was considered doctrinaire (and political) disagreement with Islamic laws and sharia. Therefore, many women activists gave priority to issues where they could act in more pragmatic ways and be less at risk of being ostracized as overtly confrontational. Such issues included the status of women in the labour market, promoting awareness of women about their ostensibly alleged rights, the right to study in various academic fields. Some critics criticized women's rights activists for prioritizing issue, including why the Iranian women's movement did not pay more attention to rights of LGBTQI and the issue of hijab.

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<sup>486</sup> International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated on March 8 every year. It is a focal point in the movement for women's rights. After the Socialist Party of America organized a Women's Day on February 28, 1909 in New York, the 1910 International Socialist Woman's Conference suggested a Women's Day be held annually. After women gained suffrage in Soviet Russia in 1917, March 8 became a national holiday there. The day was then predominantly celebrated by the socialist movement and communist countries until it was adopted in 1975 by the United Nations. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_Women%27s\\_Day](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Women%27s_Day)

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Despite such obstacles and criticism, the women's movement was by no means ineffective. For example, homosexuals have been expressing their existence and criticizing and condemning the brutal Islamic laws against homosexuality, and with the help of new media were able to form independent movements. Regarding hijab, since the beginning of the revolution a mass movement against hijab has been in progress. In recent years, with access to Internet, additional campaigns by women's rights activists were created to fight hijab.

By reviewing historical events, the history of the Iranian women's movement and lessons learnt, activists realized that they needed media to reflect their voices. Whenever women had access to media and independent civil society organizations, they have succeeded in gaining the will of politicians and on the battlefield of daily life they have increasingly raised knowledge of sexual and gender-based rights. In view of struggles to be able to assert identity, integrity and autonomy, these are not negligible achievements.

This research also shows that as the Iranian women's movement integrated its use of Internet and new media, government and power holders lost a degree of control over media. The Iranian women's movement, with diversity integrated into its goals and techniques, has continued to facilitate and promote diverse alliances for change in the direction of equality. Activists crossed social forbidden boundaries and red lines. For example, activists brought into the public domain the concepts of homosexuality and white marriage (the French definition of white marriage (*'mariage blanc'*) is a marriage without consummation; whereas white marriage in Iran describes, not without irony, the exact opposite: a couple cohabiting and having sex but without being officially married. Despite conservative Shia rule, from the beginning of the 21st century such practice has become increasingly commonplace particularly among younger couples.<sup>487</sup>

Access to the Internet has accelerated civil movements. Social mobilization via social media and has generated political actions and protests in social media. In the

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<sup>487</sup> "Can Iran 'control' its cohabiting couples?". BBC. 10 December 2014. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30391593> Retrieved 29 May 2016.

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third chapter many topics are discussed including leadership methods of women activists in One Million Signatures for the Repeal of Discriminatory Laws campaign. It also looks at the convergence of two different and effective movements in the large-scale people's democracy activities in 2009 called The Iranian Green Movement.<sup>488</sup> Activities involved more assertively challenging candidates regarding women's needs, expressing oppositions in feminine language, developing peaceful methods of expressing disagreement and horizontal leadership in social media.

One of the important characteristics of women's activist groups in social media specifically in the One Million Signatures campaign, which distinguished it from other groups – was the use of combined activity and communication in both physical and social environments. Using new media created a communication infrastructure that developed discourse among group members. One of the creative activities of the women's activist movement was face-to-face communication in different public places such as parks, salons, hospitals, schools, universities, public transportation, private parties, in the mountains and neighbourhood, in public places like seminars, internal conferences, and international conferences. One of the issues emphasized by women activists was to astutely recognize the value of new media, while simultaneously being cognizant of the digital divide and paying attention to women who for any reason were not (yet) familiar with Internet and social media. The One Million Signatures campaign reached a relative balance combining face-to-face communication and mainstreaming and mobilization in social media. Consequently, and quite significantly, the Iranian women's movement evolved from a somewhat salon-style elitism into a mass movement.

The fourth chapter focuses on the mechanisms of using social media affairs. The mechanisms include conversation rooms, weblogging, cell phones, social media and applications used by women activists from 2003 to 2013. During this time period women activists used new media effectively to increase women's

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<sup>488</sup> Period sometimes referred to, particularly by western media, as the Persian Awakening or Persian Spring

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voices and develop in-group and between-group communications. Usage trends of Internet by political and civil activists shows that Internet usage by women activists did not have a linear trend but occurred in stages with lots of fluctuation.

For example, after the suppression of civil activists in 2009 in the period of The Green Movement, the women's movement focused on using social media as an alternative media and developed campaigns and broader online movements in social media to coordinate collective action in the right time and right place.

The Internet also provided new and unique opportunities for political, civil and women activists, as training ground to develop skills and capacity. New media made it possible to expand social groups and social discussions in new media contexts with more democratic network structures. Cross-border communication through social networks in digital space quickly became possible. This chapter shows how women activists changed their fighting strategies as the Internet network grew pan-border and effectively became worldwide and in some ways even globalized. Activists brought up women's issues against government censorship. Different audiences composed of different individuals and group characteristics became familiar with women's issues and created spaces in which people accepted each other and became more collaborative. Even some people who had been silent during times of tyranny felt empowered to become more vocal and increase participatory activity.

This research further aims to explore impacts of new media on women's activities in relation to issues of diversity and plurality. Chapter 6 discusses how new media has acted as an agent in these regards. This chapter has been written based on qualitative interviews with social activists, and in particular women's activists, present as individuals and/or as members of groups on social networks, such as Instagram, Facebook, etc. This provides greater insights into identities and dimensions of individuals in a dynamic social fabric. The diversity of participants and ease of use/access of new social media provided a multivocal (multi-voice) platform for the women's movement that further animated vitality, directions and contributions to outcomes.

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In addition, introducing the concept of identity, I discussed and studied the collective identity of the variety and diversity of the Iranian women's movement based on the theory of recognition of Axel Honneth. Honneth believes that self-realization is due to the autonomy of the individual, which depends on the mutual recognition of the people of society in three areas: Love and affection (in friendship and family relationships, etc.); rights (equal rights); and solidarity (in the social sphere, work and employment). Honneth considers the moment of social action when social subjects feel injustice; this sense of injustice occurs when expectations of individuals in their recognition of life, work, and community environments by others are negated, harrowed or suppressed. This can in turn lead to activity (fight) to be recognized to access conditions where they are equally accepted and get recognized in the three above mentioned areas.

Similarly, it is important to realize, that because of the pan-social pervasive nature of injustice that the personal experience of it can arise in almost any aspect of life. This in turn gives rise to diversity and plurality of responses at micro-levels, but that are in fact also response against larger macro-injustice.

In countries under Islamic law, multiple discriminations are imposed against women such that the expectations of Iranian women, in the larger context, are not being met in all three areas.<sup>489</sup> Consequently, Iranian women experience dissatisfaction with the status quo based on the level of gender awareness. Compared to their counterparts in other middle eastern and Islamic countries, Iranian women, due to their high level of education, awareness of gender rights and access to feminist movements around the world through the Internet, are less willing to submit to doctrinaire Islamic laws, traditions and adherence to patriarchal culture in family and community. They are involved in an on-going process insisting that their identity and rights be recognized by their family, community, society and most importantly the Islamic government.

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<sup>489</sup> Of course, instances can be found where individual or group expectations are being met. Exceptions can even be exploited for propaganda and political purposes to suppress diversity and resistance and to impose conformity with the status quo.

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The widespread demands of women are rooted in sexual and gender-based discrimination against women that became even more formalized in post-revolutionary years when many discriminations were legalized. The verity and extent of oppression and discriminations against women led to the formation of multiple branches and tendencies within women's movement with different gender and identity approaches and as a result simultaneous participation of women in various movements. For example, a member of the women's movement may at the same time be a member of the student movement, ethnic movements, and so on, and thus appear with multiple identities on many stages of civil campaigns. The women's movement has diversity in the contexts of Pragmatism and field theory. It is an example of sub-social movements with unity of diversity and plurality.

It should also be noted that the diversity and variety of the women's movement are themselves products of situations that illustrate contradictions between the normal policy of the state and the interests of various sectors of women's society. The diversity of these movements suggests that the social and political scene in Iran has become more heterogeneous and complicated since the revolution. In the Islamic Republic, the principle of promoting women was based on "Islamic standards", and the identity of secular women and minorities was not only denied, but also dealt with contempt by the government.

Even in some cases, the demands of women who belong to sovereignty and believed in the Islamic Republic are not recognized. Therefore, due to diversity of demands, the diversity of the women's movement can be seen in a broader pluralistic context inclusive of structural contradictions. While most women seek individual and social freedoms like abolishing forced hijab laws, part of the sovereigns are also bargaining with authorities to gain political power.

The research also shows how the Iranian women's movement, through the creation of diverse social networks based on the diversity of perspectives for discussion, information, and formation of campaigns, competed with each other while pursuing the same, similar or different goals. For example, numerous activist campaigns on the elimination of forced hijab operate in parallel and in a network in

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which each uses their own methods. While they agree on the fact that compulsory hijab imposes discrimination against women, they use different methods to eliminate this discrimination. This diversity and plurality are not only reactions to governance game policies, but responses to all existing inequalities and contradictions. The nature of cyberspace, in the period under study, amplified and accelerated this diversity and plurality discourse.

Concerning the effects of the Internet on the diversity and plurality of the women's movement in Iran, the findings of this study suggests with the potential of cybercrime and social networking, they have created a multiplier effect on a wider range of civil society activists and women's rights activists.

Interview analysis also showed that young women in Iran first became acquainted with a category called the Women's Movement through social networks. They referred to women's rights activist's websites in Iran. By joining campaigns such as "One Million Signatures Campaign", they realized their identity as "Women's Movement Activists." Interviewees widely reported that if there was no Internet, then they would probably not be aware of women's issues and it would be very unlikely for the women's movement to be in its current status.

Furthermore, the diversity in the movement of women in cyberspace and physical space, in addition to the plurality of discourses surrounding a chain of women's demands, are predominantly moving in the direction of democratizing society. The reality of the women's movement in Iran is not a simplistic coherent static set of demands. The diversity of demands and approaches reflect vital, living, democratizing processes at work to change the status quo, to fight for recognition and to influence system politics and cultural change.

So, as we have seen, the broad-based proliferation of platforms on Internet can lead to both centralization (such as witnessed in the "One Million Signatures Campaign") and simultaneously greater diversification and divergence of activists of the women's movement. This can be construed as democratizing in the sense of simultaneously being able to accommodate diversity, plurality, give voice and

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create popular mandates for political direction. This interplay of diversity, Internet and democracy merits further investigation.

This process takes place in a pragmatic space that on some level must be meaningful to participants in order to be effective. Discussion about democratizing is not intended to idealize or romanticize, however it is widely perceived as a global, historically validated means to meaningful improvement on the status quo. While the democratizing aspects of cyberspace has the potential to facilitate interactions between activists and platforms to exchange ideas, the process remains nonetheless vulnerable to many generic issues that precede the Internet. For example, some spaces may increase risk of multi-rupture and difficulty in agreement on a topic due to incompleteness of discussions, participants overwhelming or confusing discussion, or even bad actors.

Studies conducted in this research show that use of new media by women's movement activists is on one hand a function of agnostic technological advances; and on the other hand, changes in rigorous domestic policies of cyberspace and physical space.

One of the characteristics of tyrannical governments is that they do not tolerate a variety of political and social ideas and perspectives; therefore, they try to keep the community in singularity. In the scope of this study, Internet content production was not exclusive and not (yet) within the unilateral power of the government to total control. Totalitarian regimes predominantly apply their strongest levers: oppressive politics to keep hegemony on the media. It is understandable that nothing stands still: new technological innovations arise that are expressions of political aims. There is on-going interplay of cat-and-mouse dynamics. Some women activists from Iran tried to adapt their practices in cyberspace to advancements in communications technology yet had to overcome some serious barriers such as filtering, website shutdowns, monitoring and identifying cyber activists, prosecuting Internet users, hacking activists' sites and emails, and accessing information and correspondence. Chapter 6 analyzes many ways government copes with civil rights activists in cyberspace, including setting up

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cybercrime, penetrating virtual social networks, enforcing the "Halal Internet" as alternative to the global Internet, and creating "national" virtual social networks such as FaceTime and Fars Twitter as an alternative to their international counterparts.

Chapter 7 explores different perspectives on the impact of new media on social movements as it relates to the effects on the women's movement in Iran. History records going back over two thousand years document statements along the lines that, "The pen is mightier than the sword" with iterations of this theme across the millennia.<sup>490</sup> New media is a digital form of pen. From a historical perspective there is justification to look critically at new media, to assess how it functions as catalytic agents of change in on-going processes and outcomes.

Regarding the role of new media in modern social movements, we face two major and contradictory views. Some sociologists find the Internet useful to solve all communication problems and look at the cyberspace highly optimistic and consider it as a substitute for physical space. For example, some analysts have a predominantly optimistic perspective and praise the role of new media in the democratization of society (Shirky, 2010; Aday et al., 2010). In contrast, others have a more pessimistic view on the role of the Internet and consider it as a barrier to action in the community's objective atmosphere and even dangerous for civil society activists. For example, Morozov, a critic of the so-called "Cyber Utopians," claims in his book, *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom* (2011) that the view of Western governments and policymakers regarding Internet's role in extending democracy and the impact of Internet freedom on the democratizing trend is naïve.

The writer and author Malcolm Gladwell made headlines around the Internet in October 2010 with a short essay "*Small Change: Why the revolution will not be*

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<sup>490</sup> Assyrian sage Ahiqar reputedly lived during the early 7th century BC, coined the first known version of this phrase. A copy of the Teachings of Ahiqar, dating to about 500 BC, states, "The word is mightier than the sword." [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_pen\\_is\\_mightier\\_than\\_the\\_sword](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_pen_is_mightier_than_the_sword) retrieved 05 December 2018

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*tweeted*"<sup>491</sup> in which he speculated that the effect of social media was maybe being overestimated in terms of the Arab Spring. Critics elsewhere have described Gladwell as prone to oversimplification<sup>492</sup> rather than cogent analysis supported by facts. His claim merits a brief analysis.

For starters, it is pertinent to note that the title of Gladwell's essay is reference to the expression "*The Revolution Will Not Be Televised*" that had become a popular slogan and iconic meme in the Black Power movement in the USA in the 1960s<sup>493</sup>. It became poem and song by Gil Scott-Heron, recorded for Scott-Heron's 1970 album "*Small Talk at 125th and Lenox*. "<sup>494</sup> Scott-Heron's implication was that real change would be taking place outside of the view of mainstream media. Gladwell in 2011 updated a popular meme by replacing "will not be televised" with "will not be tweeted." But wordplay alone does not necessarily constitute truth.

In fact, revolutions have been televised and television has been a catalyst in revolution. In the USA, nearly real-time TV news coverage of the civil rights era's Birmingham Campaign, the "Bloody Sunday" event of the Selma to Montgomery marches, and graphic news footage from Vietnam brought horrifying, moving images of the bloody reality of armed conflict into living rooms for the first time, acting as potent catalysts that in turn precipitated further and significant political change of status quo.<sup>495</sup> Shocking televised coverage is credited by many as among the key reasons the United States was compelled to make political reconciliations and withdraw from Vietnam.<sup>496</sup> <sup>497</sup> It is impossible to overstate the impact of the

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<sup>491</sup> Gladwell, M. (2010). Small change. Why the revolution will not be tweeted' The New Yorker, 4(2010), 42-49.

<sup>492</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malcolm\\_Gladwell#Reception](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malcolm_Gladwell#Reception)

<sup>493</sup> Stokely Carmichael (1967). *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*. Random House.

<sup>494</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Revolution\\_Will\\_Not\\_Be\\_Televised](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Revolution_Will_Not_Be_Televised)

<sup>495</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterculture\\_of\\_the\\_1960s](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Counterculture_of_the_1960s)  
<sup>496</sup> Since the beginning of the World War II, television gradually became familiar to the public. At the end of the war, it began to be manufactured in large-scale. In 1950s, only 9% of American home owned a television, but this figure rose dramatically to 93% in 1966. In a survey conducted in 1964, 58% US respondents said that they "got most of their news" from television. Television, therefore, became the most important source of news for American people during the Vietnam era. ... many iconic pictures of the war such as The Execution of a Vietcong Guerrilla or The Napalm Girl exerted a negative and lasting influence on the public feeling. As the war became uglier on [televised] screen, its public support also declined significantly.  
<https://theyvietnamwar.info/media-role-vietnam-war/> retrieved 07 December, 2018

<sup>497</sup> Parting words from Walter Cronkite: His famous Vietnam commentary, originally aired on a special CBS News broadcast Feb. 27, 1968. Retrieved

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televised shocking events in Birmingham, credited with becoming the Civil Rights Movement's most important chapter and transitional in the social and political landscape of the USA.<sup>498</sup>

Gladwell tried to link his views to the sociologist Mark Granovetter's model of weak-tie and strong-ties<sup>499</sup>, writing:

Our acquaintances – not our friends – are our greatest source of new ideas and information. The Internet lets us exploit the power of these kinds of distant connections with marvelous efficiency. It's terrific at the diffusion of innovation, interdisciplinary collaboration, seamlessly matching up buyers and sellers, and the logistical functions of the dating world. But weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism.

Gladwell also cited Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations* (2008)<sup>500</sup>, describing how Shirky maps “weak-tie” value to new media:

Shirky considers this model of activism [new media] is an upgrade. But it is simply a form of organizing which favors the weak-tie connections that give us access to information over the strong-tie connections that help us persevere in the face of danger. It shifts our energies from organizations that promote strategic and disciplined activity and toward those which promote resilience and adaptability. It makes it easier for activists to express themselves, and harder for that expression to have any impact. The

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<https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=106775685?storyId=106775685&t=1544140585814>

<sup>498</sup> Historian Glenn Eskew wrote that the campaign "led to an awakening to the evils of segregation and a need for reforms in the region." Garrow, David (1986). *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference*. William Morrow and Company. p.94  
Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights (ACMHR) vice president Abraham Woods claimed that the rioting in Birmingham set a precedent for the "Burn, baby, burn" mindset, a cry used in later civic unrest in the Watts Riots, the 12th Street riots in Detroit, and other American cities in the 1960s.

McWhorter, Diane (2001). *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, the Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*. Simon & Schuster. p.437

Wyatt Tee Walker wrote that the Birmingham campaign was "legend" and had become the Civil Rights Movement's most important chapter, "the chief watershed of the nonviolent movement in the United States. It marked the maturation of the SCLC as a national force in the civil rights arena of the land that had been dominated by the older and stodgier NAACP." White, Marjorie, Manis, Andrew, eds. (2000) *Birmingham Revolutionaries: The Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights*. Mercer University Press, p.68

It is also important to note significant change in activists' processes and power dynamic. It was "the chief watershed of the nonviolent movement in the United States. It marked the maturation of the SCLC as a national force in the civil rights arena of the land that had been dominated by the older and stodgier NAACP." (White & Manis, p.74)

<sup>499</sup> Granovetter, M. S. (1973). "The Strength of Weak Ties" (PDF). *The American Journal of Sociology*. 78 (6): 1360–1380. doi:10.1086/225469. JSTOR 2776392.

<sup>500</sup> Shirky, C. (2008). *Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations*. New York: Penguin Press.

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instruments of social media are well suited to making the existing social order more efficient. They are not a natural enemy of the status quo. If you are of the opinion that all the world needs is a little buffing around the edges, this should not trouble you. But if you think that there are still lunch counters out there that need integrating it ought to give you pause.

Gladwell claims that new media connections are too “weak-tie” on their own to mobilize high-risk revolutionary activity. He concludes that activity in cyberspace alone is unlikely to lead to social-political changes unless there is a “strong tie” component, such as common action in the face-to-face physical space.

Although Gladwell amplified these concepts, he did not originate them. Such ideas were being debated prior to Gladwell’s article. Four months prior, David J. Rothkopf, Professor of international relations, political scientist and journalist, had posted similar views in *Foreign Policy*<sup>501</sup>,

It’s hard to separate the twaddle from the Twitter these days. So let me help. *The New York Times* today has [a story](#)<sup>502</sup> about how the State Department recognized the importance of twitter to the opposition in Iran and is promoting new technologies to support U.S. diplomatic interests. Elsewhere in the same paper, my friend, the tech savvy, ever thoughtful Tom Friedman has a [column](#) talking about how Twitter and Facebook and other social networking sites are new tools of dissent in the Middle East. CNN has also run a number of stories on the same phenomenon. ... New media are playing a vital role in dissolving authoritarianism. But there are few overstatements quite as grand as the idea of a Twitter Revolution. The websites enable. **But revolutions require courage, physical confrontation and risk. Twitter is Paul Revere on his horse. But don’t underestimate the very old fashioned flesh and blood requirements of real change.** ... I offer this point about the irreplaceable nature of real vs. virtual interaction because I am at the end of a ten day trip around the world to meet with clients and get a feel for what’s going on in Europe, Asia and Latin America.

In short, the discussion is indicative of the debate that the role of new media was meriting in the context of world-class media, with prominent and influential

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<sup>501</sup> Rothkopf, D. J. (2009, June 17). There’s no such thing as a virtual revolution.... *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved December 07, 2018, from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2009/06/17/theres-no-such-thing-as-a-virtual-revolution/>

<sup>502</sup> Landler, M., & Stelter, B. (2009, June 17). Washington Taps Into a Potent New Force in Diplomacy. *New York Times*. Retrieved December 07, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/17/world/middleeast/17media.html>

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commentators on all sides. For the record, a lot of the discussion is blanket statements. Gladwell refers to “most active and most effective” but he does not provide hard data or metrics. Even if such claims prove true in part or whole, he makes little or no effort to reflect on complex interplays of context, other factors or dynamics. He says nothing about other key stakeholders, such as the government.

A part of the problem is that commentators often rely on secondary sources and are at greater risk of simplifying, convoluting facts and stories. With all respect such claims are often speculative arm-chair musing that rely on anecdotal or empirical impressions to make inferences. Gladwell neatly juxtaposes “new media” and “people on the street” to fit “weak tie” and “strong tie” models. Conjecture is not uncommon in mass journalism where a premium is placed on novelty or plausibility. It may indeed lead to valid and valuable knowledge. But he has not supported his plausible theorizing regarding new media with hard field data or rigor. Correlation does not imply causation. By giving more attention to articulating pat theories, rather than testing them, he risks misleading himself or others about real dynamics or veracity.

A year after Gladwell wrote his article, he was a guest in a public forum.<sup>503</sup> Where the interviewer asked, “about a year ago you wrote about how the effect of social media was being maybe overestimated in terms of the Arab Spring and I'm wondering how in the last year you're thinking on that has changed?” Gladwell replied,

I don't think it's changed at all I mean I was skeptical that social media was this catalytic force that we're saying it was here ago and then we had you know Egypt, Tunisia, Libya on and on and you know everyone got all excited about its role in Egypt and then the sort of data began to emerge and now we discover for example my favorite little tip that was **a study that showed that the protests were most active and most effective once the Egyptian government had shut down the Internet, yeah, once**

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<sup>503</sup> Has Malcolm Gladwell Opinion on Social Media and the Arab Spring Changed? 5min 21aug2012 - The New Yorker writer and author Malcolm Gladwell made headlines around the Internet when his essay "Small Change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted" was published in October 2010. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6j7YvDXotpo>

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**people were off their devices on the streets, they act.**

In fact, Gladwell misunderstood the study. This was not entirely his fault, as it had been over-simplistically summarized elsewhere, such as a summary that appeared in the *New York Times*<sup>504</sup> on 29 August 2011,

THE mass media, including interactive social-networking tools, make you passive, can sap your initiative, leave you content to watch the spectacle of life from your couch or smartphone. Apparently even during a revolution.

That is the provocative thesis of a new paper by Navid Hassanpour, a political science graduate student at Yale, titled “**Media Disruption Exacerbates Revolutionary Unrest.**”

Using complex calculations and vectors representing decision-making by potential protesters, Mr. Hassanpour, who already has a Ph.D. in electrical engineering from Stanford, studied the recent uprising in Egypt. … His conclusion was, not so smart, but not for the reasons you might think. “Full connectivity in a social network sometimes can hinder collective action,” he writes.

Hassanpour demonstrates that people were using new media and in the streets. The Egyptian government disconnected communication. People experienced greater sense of confusion, outrage, injustice, denial of legitimacy. The media disruption exacerbated the situation. The streets were their known ongoing recourse, where protest continued to escalate.

Hassanpour writes, “Conventional wisdom suggests that lapses in media connectivity - for example, disruption of Internet and cell phone access - have a negative effect on political mobilization. I argue that on the contrary, **sudden interruption of mass communication accelerates revolutionary mobilization and proliferates decentralized contention.**”

This is a profoundly different conclusion than what Gladwell was purporting. Gladwell claims new media impedes people from acting, because “new media ties are too weak.” Hassanpour does not seek recourse to “strong or weak tie theory;”

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<sup>504</sup> Cohen, N. (2011, August 29). In Times of Unrest, Social Networks Can Be a Distraction. New York Times. Retrieved December 07, 2018, from <https://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/29/business/media/in-times-of-unrest-social-networks-can-be-a-distraction.html>

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his study is based on data and his explanation derives organically from data. After people lost their new media connections, the situation on the streets exploded. The new media connections were in fact a fundamental, integral and catalytic factor in subsequent events.

My research contributes to this discussion by bringing an academic focus and hard data to look at real-world use of new media in complex landscapes. This includes looking at activities taking place in concert in both new media and physical space, such as “The One Million Signatures Campaign”. I am similarly just as interested in the inter-relationships and impacts of new media even when it is being used in non-coordinated ways as part of larger democratizing activities.

The results of my primary research quantitative analysis questionnaire as well as analysis of the content of interviews in this study show that most activists of the virtual space are political and social actors in the physical space as well and use the new media as a tool for mobilizing and organizing street protests by civil activists and political. Those who take part in practical mass action in real space, often have active social and political activities in cyberspace and use the Internet and social networks to increase the effectiveness of their activities. People have, indeed and in fact, been actively tweeting revolutions.

I provide examples how important the new media is in the process of fighting for freedom in Iran. “My Stealthy Freedom” is an online movement initiated in 2014 by Masih Alinejad, an Iranian-born journalist and activist based in the United Kingdom and the United States. This movement started from a Facebook page My Stealthy Freedom where women from Iran post their photos without scarfs, and by the end of 2016 page has surpassed one million Facebook likes. The initiative has received wide international and national coverage and has been both praised and criticized. This campaign is addressed to women who willingly wear the veil, but who remain opposed to the idea of imposing it on others. Many veiled women in Iran also find the compulsory imposition of the veil to be an insult. By taking footages of themselves wearing white, these women can also show their disagreement with compulsion.

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Another example is the Girls of Enghelab Street, a series of protests against compulsory hijab in Iran. The protests were inspired by Vida Movahed, an Iranian woman known as the Girl of Enghelab Street, who stood in the crowd on a utility box in the Enghelab Street (Revolution Street) of Tehran on 28 December 2017, tied her hijab, a white headscarf, to a stick, and waved it to the crowd as a flag. She was arrested on that day and was released temporary on bail a month later, on 28 January 2018. Some people believe that Movahed's action was based on Masih Alinejad's call for White Wednesdays, a protest movement that the presenter at VOA Persian Television started in early 2017. Other women later re-enacted her protest and posted photos of their actions on social media. These women are described as the "Girls of Enghelab Street" and "The Girls of Revolution Street" in English sources. Some of the protesters claim that they did not follow Masih Alinejad's call.

After consistent opposition from social activists, the police of Tehran has softened its staunch code on the headscarf. The announcement came from General Hosseini Rahimi, the Tehran police chief, as it would be no longer arrest of women for not observing the hijab. Whether true or not, this was the first time the Islamic government softened their language.

There are three major elements in the new movements. First, importantly local support for the new movements have been shown by Hijab-wearing women, non-hijabis, and male allies. Second, the new movements rely tremendously on social media and new media to deliver their messages and familiarizing people with their goals. Finally, and most importantly, most of the supporters to these new movements are from young post-revolution generation. They have been raised based on Islamic values and have never had the pre-revolution experience. While the country was isolated from the international communities, it was the new media which helped them to get familiar with the free world values. One thing for sure, no one can stop them, because they are born in the Internet era and they know how to use the new media.

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Findings of quantitative and qualitative research gives us better understanding of the impact of the new media on women's movement.

Chapter 9 presents quantitative analysis of data and research hypotheses through statistical analysis using the software SPSS the significance level in this research was considered equal to 0.05

In the quantitative analysis section, we found tangible findings, including that in the demographic data: 2.5% of the respondents, did not consider themselves as a woman or a man. In this section, we found interesting distributions of respondents in terms of location, education and age range of participants. 10% of the participants in the survey are from the village, 75% have a bachelor's degree or higher and 66% are in the age range of 26-40 years old, which is predictable due to the young population of Iran and corresponds to the reality of the community. I want to highlight that while more than 75% of the participants were female, the majority of respondents (53%) follow the women's movement on a daily basis through the Internet. Another point that highlights the importance of the Internet to access information is that 66% of respondents believed that the Internet covered the news of the people's protests during the Green Movement, while only 1% believed in the accuracy of news from national media such as the national television.

In addition, the studies performed to test the hypothesis of this research with the help of chi-square test at the alpha level of 5% (confidence interval) shows that there is a meaningful relationship between feminist identity and the use of new media. There is a significant relationship between being a feminist and belief in secularism. While there is no meaningful relationship between education and feminism, similarly, there is no meaningful relationship between the level of education and the use of new media and this hypothesis, has also been rejected, which may not reflect the reality in society. This result might be due to the fact that this study did not include people who were illiterate or poorly educated. Future studies are necessary to confirm or reject this conclusion

There is meaningful relationship between gender of participants and following the women's movement through the new media, meaning that women are more

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inclined to use the new media to access information and news on the women's movement.

Finally, one of the findings of the research that we did not expect was that there was no meaningful relationship between participation or the lack of participation in the 10th presidential election and the use of new media. As for the participation in the eleventh presidential election, we have come to a similar conclusion: there is no meaningful relationship between participation or non-participation in elections and the use of new media. One of the reasons for this is the compulsion to choose between bad and worse that some of the voters in the last minutes will decide to participate in the election, which so-called say the choice between bad and worse. However, this assumption may also be re-examined in future investigations.

Findings in the present study show that social networks allow the widest possible range of civil society activists and activists of the women's movement to expand, in addition, it helps the democracy movement in Iran by increasing public oversight of government performance, diversity, and pluralism, action, goals and multiple voices.

In summary, the Internet, and new media in particular, has impact on the Iranian women's movement on three levels: organizational, personal and social. It has also impacted the dynamism. The organizational level contains communication within the women's movement, communication between different movements, and the relationship between student, teachers, and workers movements. The peak of optimal use until the study was conducted by women's activists from 2003 to 2013, using the Internet as a platform for organizing the collective actions in demonstrations. In the absence of public meetings, activist kept their intra-group and movements connections through emails, forums, and social media. It was through these platforms that alliances and campaigns such as "The Coalition of No to Family Bill" were formed at a broad level.

At the personal level, the Internet gave Iranian women in general and women rights activists specifically the opportunity to post their ideas and comments in the form of articles and writings without being worried to go through censorship on

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their personal blogs, websites and social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and Telegram. Among the effects and consequences of using these virtual networks, we can mention the generalization of women's issues and the crossing in the elitism in the women's movement. The unknown and regular women who had no background in women's movement have become part of women's movement just by opening a personal account on social network platforms like Facebook. They expressed themselves and their opinions, participated actively in conversations around a specific subject or shared their personal life experiences with other.

Similarly, the Internet in the social sphere opened new doors to women through the expansion of transnational communication between activists inside and outside the country, as well as between transnational movements and international movements. Some examples are the possibility to attend online courses at various academic levels without any restrictions on age and place as well as the possibility to participate in the virtual network between the groups that expanded social communication.

It is worth mentioning that the use of new media has entered a new phase, which is certainly different from the previous decade. The new media apps emerging every day and communication technology is advancing on a daily basis, some of which may not last for months, some might be being replaced by other apps or bought by bigger companies.

As a result of the social and political changes after the green movement, a large part of the influential women activists were forced to emigrate which coincided with entering a new generation of activists. This impacted social movements and especially the women's movement in Iran dramatically. Such changes merit further study in the future.

Cyberspace is not the same as physical space, but it is no less real or important in ongoing struggles for political and social equality. Skype, Paltalk and other tools transfer and share images, videos, voice and video conferencing in private, group or public platforms, as technological tools of modern life. These tools continue to

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evolve. It is of vital importance that the struggles for political and social equality navigate such change as pro-actively as possible.

There are examples of how such electronic tools such as mobile technology are evolving not only women's rights activists but society. For example, citizens can now document and make public a large number of movies. Every citizen with a mobile phone can act as a reporter to record events. A striking example of this was the murder of Neda Agha Soltan (June 15th, 2009), during the post-election protests in Tehran, shot by the Iranian paramilitary organizations. Her death was captured on video by bystanders and broadcast over the Internet. The video became a rallying point for the opposition. The videos spread across the Internet virally, quickly gaining the attention of international media and viewers. Discussions about the incident on Twitter, using a hashtag of #neda, became one of the "trending topics" by the end of the day on 20 June 2009. The man next to her, saying her name: "Neda, don't be afraid. Neda, do not be afraid. [Obscured by others yelling] Neda, stay with me. Neda stay with me!"

Agha-Soltan's death was "probably the most widely witnessed death in human history," according to Time magazine and the videos were awarded the George Polk Award for Videography in 2009.

The women's movement in Iran has made extensive use of new media. Neda's death is one dramatic instance in this, in an on-going history: it reminds us that a simple mobile device is capable of registering unforeseen events and can be used as every citizen's weapon on revealing the harshness of a government. It further reminds us of her place in history, in a chain of relationships, like millions of other women striving for equality and social justice, whose impact will continue to be felt and beyond any question of a doubt whose contributions will continue to evolve in historically meaningful ways.

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**Declaration of Independence.**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis and that I have not used any sources other than those listed in the bibliography and identified as references. I further declare that I have not submitted this thesis at any other institution in order to obtain a degree.

Rezvan Moghaddam