

Upgrading the Women's Movement in Iran: Through Cultural Activism, Creative  
Resistance, and Adaptability

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A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in International Studies

University of Washington

2018

Committee:

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

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**Abstract**

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The purpose of this research is to identify and analyze the effects of the 2009 post-election state crackdown on the Iranian Women's Movement. Varying narratives of how the crackdown affected women's activism necessitate a better understanding as to how this social movement negotiates periods of repression. An examination of accounts and actions by women in Iran reveal this Movement to be fluid, adaptable, and resilient, utilizing different structures, strategies and tactics depending on the current political environment. This study demonstrates the ability of Iranian women to develop creative solutions for public engagement in repressive moments, including through everyday acts of resistance and by practicing cultural activism. Women in Iran work to transform culture in order to impel the state to make changes to discriminatory laws. Prevailing social movement theories help to explain some characteristics of the Iranian Women's Movement, but a more complex model is required to account for dynamic gendered social movements in non-Western, authoritarian contexts. This study reveals some of the theoretical gaps for explaining the way gender based movements navigate public space for activism under authoritarian regimes.

To my Mother, thank you for all your incredible support.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

IWM	Iranian Women's Movement
RM Theory	Resource Mobilization Theory
PO Theory	Political Opportunity Theory
CEDAW	Convention on Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women
NSP	New Social Movement Paradigm
NSM	New Social Movement Theory
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran

## **Introduction**

In 2008 I had the opportunity to travel to the Republic of the Islamic State of Iran for work. In a dimly lit restaurant in Tehran I met with an Iranian colleague, an older woman, to discuss our agenda for my visit. After some time our conversation turned to the issue of the state-mandated headscarf, or *hijab*, and in that talk she made a statement which has stuck with me. We were discussing some of the ways in which young Iranians push the boundaries of the dress code. She commented that we, (as Westerners) should not be fooled by any open displays of affection between men and women, or by the ways in which the women defiantly display their hair from under their scarves. “Things will never change,” she stated, and continued to explain that every spring young women push the limits on how they are legally allowed to conduct themselves, and every spring the local government reacts forcefully with an increase in arrests. The following summer, in 2009, when what came to be known as the Green Movement took to the streets to protest contested presidential elections, the government issued one of its most repressive crackdowns on civil society in the history of the republic which, it would seem, proved my colleague right. Thousands were imprisoned, and the powerful Women’s Rights Movement was among one of the most impacted groups.

The purpose of this study is to better understand how the Iranian Women’s Rights Movement negotiates periods of state repression. My research questions is: how did the 2009 government crackdown affect the Women’s Movement and how do existing social movement theories help to explain their tactics for survival during this period? Prominent human rights lawyer and Iranian feminist activist Shadi Sadr argues that the Movement weakened, and wonders “why the Women’s Movement, which many considered to be the

most vigorous social movement in Iran, went into retraction after the emergence of the Green Movement and subsequent government crackdown” (2012, 201). Nobel Laureate and human rights defender Shrin Ebadi, on the other hand, argues that the Movement continued to grow stronger in spite of harsh repression (Ebadi, 2010). With such competing views, how should we understand the effects of this period? Is the Movement to be understood as survivalist or as suppressed?

The extensive and violent crackdown on civil society, following the disputed reelection of Ahmadinejad specifically targeted women’s rights activists and women’s organizations in this period. The Women’s Movement in Iran, which has a long history of activism as a rights-seeking movement due to women’s status as second-class citizens, did not directly contest the elections and yet the state perpetrated acts of violence and mass arrests of female activists, journalists and human rights defenders.

Literature on how the events following the elections affected the Movement present multiple narratives for how individual activists and organizations fared this period of repression. I want to find out to what extent there may have been retraction and why, and to what extent the Movement was able to survive and adapt to this repressive moment. If there was retraction, how could this occur when the Movement was so strong? Why did the state target women when they (as a movement) did not directly contest the elections? How can social movement theory help develop a more dynamic and complex view of the Movement, and where do theoretical gaps exist for explaining these dynamics? How can we understand the events of 2009 as a moment of contention? Social movement theories tell us that political opportunity, resources, culture and identity are important to mobilization processes. How do these concepts help inform how the

Women's Movement mobilizes and sustains public engagement in period of repression? Civil society theory stresses the importance of a healthy democratic political environment for a healthy civic sphere. In repressive authoritarian regimes like Iran, how can the Women's Movement remain robust and survive in spite of its locale in a closed political setting? The research is designed to better understand these phenomena in order to discover the viability of this social movement to adapt, adjust and renegotiate demands in order to survive periods of repression. Further, this study attempts to understand how this sector of civil society in Iran, the Women's Movement in particular, is proceeding (or not) in the current socio-political climate.

This case is relevant to those who are interested in the dynamics between state and society in Iran, and who are interested in the ability of civil society to help promote human rights (including women's rights), and civism in the Middle East. This research hopes to make a contribution to scholarship on Iran and the Middle East, social movements, human rights, civil society, women in Muslim societies, political sciences in the Muslim world and gender relations in non-Western contexts. This study will also incorporate issues pertaining to refugee studies and the international humanitarian regime. To a lesser degree, elements regarding democratization studies will be useful to this study. This research appeals to scholars of the aforementioned fields as well as policy makers dealing in diplomacy and foreign relations approaches with Iran.

This research paper describes the paradox for how this robust Women's Movement was targeted, and how it appeared to experience diminishment in the post-election period. I will provide background for the rise and emergence of the modern Women's Rights Movement in Iran, an overview of the crackdown and some of the

internal dynamics of the Movement. I will include existing arguments for the Movement as weakened in 2009 and their suppositions as to why. I offer a description of the puzzle that asks how a powerful movement could experience diminishment as the result of this repressive episode and present the gap in explanations for how the Movement fared in the post-crackdown period. Next, I provide a description of my methodology before presenting the results. Finally, I present a discussion for how the findings in my research have implications for social movement and more generally civil society theory.

### **Background**

After the contested 2009 presidential elections in Iran and the resulting demonstrations carried out by the civic sector, the administration under former President Ahmadinejad carried out a brutal crackdown on civil society, which lasted well into his second term (Aarts and Cavatorta, 2013). Women activists and women's organizations were targeted during this time in a particular way, which according to some women activists resulted in a retraction of the Movement (Sadr, 2012, Tahmasebi, 2010). Significantly, the women's sector of civil society had been, prior to the elections, demonstratively at the forefront of the fight for human rights in Iran (Moghissi, 2012, Tahmasebi, 2010). Enjoying a period of growth and relaxed civic space in the 1990's under the reformist President Khatami, the Women's Movement, had grown strong and began to forge new paths for demanding certain rights from the Islamic Republic (Sadr, 2012, Aarts and Cavatorta, 2013, Moghissi 2012). The government under succeeding President Ahmadinejad however, implemented certain strategies that put great strain on the Women's Movement, including but not limited to the targeted crackdown (Aarts and Cavatorta, 2013, Moghissi, 2012).

There were many strengths from the pre-election period on which it would seem the Women's Movement could draw upon for survival; for example, the simple demand based strategy employed by groups like the Women's Coalition Movement, which has been described as "ingenious", and the One Million Signatures Campaign with its face-to-face, door-to-door strategy. (Moghissi, 2012). Shadi Sadr wants to understand "what factors and root causes prevented the Women's Movement from being elastic enough to adjust to the post-election environment," (2012: 201)? How could this Movement be experiencing diminishment despite its record for being one of the strongest, most innovative and influential sectors of civil society in Iran? Further, the Women's Movement, women's civic organizations, and individual female activists have been targeted, attacked and faced oppression in many ways and in many instances prior to the 2009 crackdown period. This begs the question, why was this moment in the history of the Movement so much more vulnerable on a widespread scale? It is important to address this paradox in order to reveal a deeper understanding of the state of civil society in Iran, as well as deeper understanding for the dynamics of women's movements in non-Western contexts.

### ***Basis for Women's Movement in Iran***

Gender assumptions in the Iranian constitution are based on equating biological difference with legal difference (Koohestani, 2012). Even in cases where legal rights are in place, such as the right to vote and the right to participate as a member of legislation—they have historically never been approved (Kelsay, 2002: 25). In addition to lack of equal legal rights to men, women experience "barriers to social, intellectual and educational growth" (Khorasani, 2009: 13). Institutions such as polygamy create mistrust

between women, as they often come to see other women as a threat to their marriage. This can and does contribute to low participation for many women in civic associations, especially in rural areas (Khorasani, 2009). There is a high rate of suicide rate among women due to their lack of rights and second-class status in Iran (2009). Other barriers to women's progress include "patriarchal social attitudes, conservative control of political institutions, society's construction of women's roles, the ways in which media and other institutions have framed gender issues, conservative male-centered readings of Islamic religious texts, the predominance of male-dominated institutions and the nature of the state" (Povey, 2012, 186-187). Further factors obstructing women's progress despite massive improvements in women's opportunities since the period of the Revolution include poverty, lack of education, and underemployment among women, especially in rural areas (2012). Women in Iran are lacking in constitutional agency, something that has been absent since the Constitutional Revolution, and this particular kind of agency was further diminished in the 1979 Revolution. Women are in need of norm, substance and form, all to be protected by the constitution (Koohestani, 2012). Legally requisite veiling and restrictions on gender relations have also been at the forefront of the Iranian women's dissention against the Islamic Republic (Moghissi, 2012, Khosrokhavar, 2012).

### ***Rise and Strength of the Women's Movement Before the 2009 Crackdown***

Women have a long history of activism going back to the post-revolution period. There is a "mutually reinforcing relationship that has organically grown between the Women's Movement and the general democratic struggle" (Victoria Tahmasebi-birgani, 2010: 79). The long history of women's activism has been characterized by women working toward improving their status in Iran, and a record of started and leading social

movements throughout Iranian history (Khorasani, 2009, Povey, 2012). Women participated in the 1979 revolution in Iran, and were encouraged to do so initially by the Supreme Leader and the clerics. However, once the new government was established and the re-Islamification efforts began, women began to experience a rollback of personal and political rights (Ardalan, 2013, Moghissi, 2012). The Islamic narrative for women's political participation was used as a "tool" to discriminate against women (Ardalan, 2013: 137). Certain freedoms such as the right to be a judge, choice over veiling, and segregation of the sexes in public were rescinded (Ardalan, 2013, Moghissi, 2012). Women's organizing in the first years after the revolution largely occurred in "religious campaigns and gatherings, networking, walks and demonstrations, and attending Friday prayers" (Ardalan, 2013: 138).

The second major "new social democratic movement" in Iran has been characterized as a Feminist Movement. This Movement arose during the Khatami administration era in the late 90's to early 2000's, at a time when the public space for democratic demands was more open (Khosrokhavar, 2012). In the 90's during the years of openness under Khatami, participation in the Movement began to shift and grow. "[T]he movement started from individual actions in the form of published essays and group gatherings and expanded by women's empowerment in literary circles, media, and collective actions" (Ardalan, 2013: 138). In the 90's and 2000s "when a democratic space was created, women grabbed this opportunity to struggle for their rights and recognition" (Rostami-Povey, 2012: 5, Povey, 2012). The Movement grew its influence over "women from all social strata" by top-down approach through Islamic feminism and bottom-up by way of women's groups, networks and activists (Mokhtari, 2016: 253). The boom of

women in media during this reform period resulted in expanding discourse on gender, Islam and feminism (in addition to family, law, employment and education) (Povey, 2012). “These publications...represented different forms of feminism including different forms of ‘Muslim feminism’ and tackled diverse issues...” (Povey, 2012: 188).

Khatami’s pro-civil society policies in the 1990’s encouraged unprecedented growth and development of the civic sphere and the number of new organizations swelled (Ardalan, 2013). This flourishing civic sector included amongst their ranks the Women’s Cultural Center, which was the first independent and non-governmental organization (2013). In 2003, Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer and human rights activist, was selected as the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. This moment was symbolic of the state of the Women’s Movement, which was “exponentially increase[ing]” (2013: 144). It was during this time that *Hamandashi* was also created—a forum for women’s groups and activists to network, organize and conduct discourse on women’s issues (2013).

Forcing women to fight for their civil rights has led to the “cultivation of civil legal instruments for helping women gain their ‘protected status’” – there has been a building of legal infrastructure since the revolution, for women’s rights and power in the court system (Osanloo, 2013:138). Mobilizing for legal change in the status of women was the primary priority of the *One Million Signatures Campaign*. With legal status as the focal point or catalyst, the argument reasoned that socio-cultural change would follow (Khorasani, 2009). The Campaign chose to focus on legal status instead of cultural or ideological issues because this is something that affects all women and therefore can unite all women behind one cause (2009).

The Women's Movement moved in the 90's from "individual consciousness to... collective consciousness," and then began using collective action to make demands (Ardalan, 2013: 139). Demands of the Women's Movement included the ability to freely take part in associations, end to polygamy, end to state-sanctioned domestic violence, inequitable child custody and inheritance laws, and more. (Khorasani, 2009). The Movement also adjusted strategy based on contingency – if one thing didn't work, then they would try another. The Movement was adaptive, realizing the greatest danger was in standing still (Ardalan, 2013). For example, the *One Million Signatures Campaign* was decentralized in structure, and this combined with legal demands made the Movement adaptable and capable of "rebuilding after each attack" (Ardalan, 2013: 149).

Because women were used by the state during the revolution as a galvanizing factor, women's issues were later used by women and larger civic movements to galvanize rights talks against the state (Osanloo, 2013). Raising discourse on subjects that affected women, making them more commonplace during the 90's and 2000's was one tactic employed by the Movement to help mobilize for change. "We managed to generate an influential discourse on subjects such as resisting violence, striving for gender equality and communicating with other social movements" (Ardalan, 2013: 139). Journalism and media were a major avenue for raising awareness, and women's writing and discourse exploded in the 90's with papers like *Zanan*, which was solely dedicated to women and women's issues (2013). This was a method that continued to be employed well into the 2000's with the *One Million Signatures Campaign*, for example, which combined door-to-door discourse with media in order to educate and generate support (2013). The Campaign used revolutionary strategies for mobilizing behind their demands,

in that it focused on being clear and logical, and above all it followed a “new ‘cultural-behavioral’ model of taking their message to the streets peacefully” (Khorasani, 2009: 41). This was done with the door-to-door method, rather than occupying public space with violent protest (2009). The physical format for the Movement was to organize through “seminars and conferences, educational workshops, public meeting” and the Campaign expanded by dispersing information on what they were trying to change (Ardalan, 2013: 144). “Even if the person refused to sign, they still received information from the solicitor about women’s rights in Iran” (Ardalan, 2013: 146).

### ***Innovation and Influence***

Two of the major signs of the strength of the Women’s Movement include 1. The ability of the Movement to develop and practice novel strategy and tactics, and 2. The powerful influence the Movement has had on other sectors of civil society. There is much evidence that other civic groups, social movements and activists began to borrow from and utilize tools of the Women’s Movement.

Returning to the *One Million Signatures Campaign* as an example, the significance of this Movement extends beyond its strategy, tactic and goals. The Campaign “may come to have an enormously broad and beneficial effect on the wider projects of promoting democratization and a firmly institutionalized rule of law in Iran....even if focused at first on matters primarily of concern to women, bid fair to have positive spillover effects on how public life generally is conducted” (Khorasani, 2009: 48). It was important that the OMS Campaign shared and discussed the face-to-face tactics with other civil society activists, rather than employing ‘philosophical discussions’ behind closed doors and in private (2009: 46). The *One Million Signatures Campaign*

became the new model for activism in Iran – for “civic solidarity” and democracy from the bottom up (2009: 42). “The [Green] movement for democracy used the strategies of the Women’s Movement—in particular those of the *One Million Signatures Campaign* in its work” (Ardalan, 2013: 150). The OMS Campaign is just one example of the influence of the Women’s Movement on other social movements. The two-point focused demands of the Women’s Coalition of 2009 are believed to have been influential in the Green Movement’s short banner “where is my vote” and that the pre-election demands led Ahmadinejad to add three women to his cabinet (Tahmasebi, 2012). The Green Movement utilized the experience of the Women’s Movement in “discussions on networking, multiple leadership and horizontal organization” (Ardalan, 2013: 140). Women also mobilized civil society groups in 2009 through the influence of networks like the Women’s Coalition, which has been applauded for its prudent and carefully considered strategy for demands in the pre-election period (Moghissi, 2012). The Coalition’s call for Iran to sign the CEDAW and the demands on the four candidates energized civil society and has been described as an “ingenious” approach (2012). The non-violence of the Women’s Movement influenced the same element in the Green Movement. Iran’s Green Movement owes much of its non-violent spirit to the women’s struggle, which was unlike other movements in Iran to date (Jahanbegloo, 2012, Tahmasebi, 2012). The Workers’ Movement, for example, has been typified as more militant in contrast to the Women’s Movement (Tahmasebi 2012).

The Women’s Movement is making a consistent attempt to broaden non-violent resistance so as to make it a fundamental moral value of Iran’s social and political life. This is a groundbreaking approach in the long history of civil struggle in Iran. Instead of reducing non-violence to simply a convenient strategy, the Women’s Movement’s aim is to turn it into an overarching ethical value that governs the process, the strategy, and the goal of people’s democratic aspirations (Tahmasebi-birgani, 2010: 84).

### ***Women's Movement-State Relationship Pre-2009 Elections***

Part of the significance of potential retraction of the Women's Movement in 2009, is that the Movement has faced many instances of violent crackdown and state attempts at repression before this point in history. Struggle against the state and some of Iranian society is not new to the Women's Movement. The series of crackdowns that began after 2005 by the Ahmadinejad government, for example, and the ability for the Movement to get back up again each time, raises the question – why 2009? Time and again, the Movement showed resilience and strength, and the ability to recover from the opposition it faced; the crackdown on International Women's Day gathering in 2006 for example, where even 80-year-old Simin Behbahani, a well-known poet, was beaten and many were arrested and sentenced (Ardalan, 2013: 140). It has been noted that there was a clear demarcation in 2005, when the Ahmadinejad conservative government came into power and authorities became harsher towards women (Ardalan, 2013). The celebration of International Women's Day subsequently became “police brutality against women day” because of the violent crackdown (2013: 144). In other words, in 2005 women's groups were being signaled that their gatherings would “no longer be tolerated,” yet the Movement persisted (2013: 145). “The fact was that during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first term as president in spite of all the state repression and shrinkage of public space, Iran's Women's Movement not only survived but experienced one of the most productive periods of its history over the past century” (Sadr, 2012: 200).

## ***Women's Participation in the 2009 Elections, Protests and Green Movement***

### *2009 – The Women's Coalition*

Haideh Moghissi describes the women's approach to activism during the 2009 elections as a well-thought-out strategy that mobilized many change-seeking individuals and groups within the civil society, including "thirty-five women's and social justice groups and over six hundred activists and intellectuals" (Moghissi, 2012, 191). These groups and individuals combined forces under the banner of Women's Coalition Movement (*jonbesh-e Hamgerai 'i*). This coalition made four very specific demands, including the demand to join the UN Convention CEDAW, which calls for elimination of discrimination against women (2012). The approach of the coalition helped to mobilize a variety of people before the elections even happened (2012).

As far as participation in the Green Movement and election protests, "aside from ordinary people, there were a considerable number of political and civil rights activists and journalists among the detainees," but not really women's group's activists (Sadr, 2012: 210). The leaders were afraid to participate in the form of women's groups, and so if they did it was as individuals. Transparency, a legacy from the Khatami era, may have prevented it from making any real feminist plans (2012). Women were targeted by the state as a technique of intimidation, but the government was more easily able to target them because their existing organizations were well known and registered with the state (Tahmasebi-birgani, 2010). Though women did participate largely as individuals in the 2009 protests, they did not do so in such an organized fashion through women's groups (Tahmasebi-birgani, 2010). One primary role women played during the protests was to work to prevent violence. For example, women would shield protesting men from police

brutality with their bodies in an attempt to minimize the violence (Sadr, 2012). Though the Women's Coalition didn't take part under its banner in the post-election protests, it helped provide inspiration for individual women to take part (Tahmasebi, 2012). There is plenty of media coverage/imagery and proof of Iranian women's involvement in the protests and the violence committed against them by the regime's "complex security military" (2012: 159). Evidence exists for a connection to be drawn between the simple pre-election demands of the Women's Coalition and the simple post-election vote demand of the Green Movement (2012).

***Women Targeted in Post-crackdown Period – what I knew before the research***

As specified in the section above, the Women's Movement and women's groups did not participate in the election protests in an organized way. Though individual women joined street protests, and the Women's Movement had more generally been arbiters for civic involvement, the Movement was not formally involved in the demonstrations. So why were women and women's groups targeted during the crackdown? It could be inferred that women and women's groups were of major interest to the government, based on the fact that they were so influential in the civic realm in the period leading up to the election. But also, more broadly, women's rights had become a main agenda since the 1990s, and therefore "the status of women in the family and society has remained a battleground between the conservatives and reformers" (Rostami-Povey, 2012: 4). Further, women were "used as prey to lure male politicians" into the light by accusing them of sexual relationships with male members of the opposition (Sadr, 2012: 200). During the crackdown itself women were specifically targeted for violence as a "technique of intimidation to create an atmosphere of fear among families" (Tahmasebi-

birgani, 2010: 78). “Security forces, too in contrast to past years, would not regard the ‘femaleness’ of these protesters as a cause to treat them less harshly [than men]. Consequently, a considerable number of women were killed, injured and detained...” (Sadr, 2012: 199). The targeted killing of women in the street was meant to intimidate traditional families of Iran, and this included routine rape/sexual assault of young women (and some men) in prison (Tahmasebi, 2012). There was institutionalized and “systematic rape” [of men and women] in the crackdown period in the jails (Mokhtari, 2016: 255). “Today in Evin Prison (as of 2013) in Tehran alone there are about 34 women who were involved in various fields of social and cultural activism” (Khorasani, 2013: 20). The crackdown continued beyond the initial months in 2009 or even 2010. In 2012, Noushin Khorasani, one of the founders of the *One Million Signatures Campaign*, was charged with “participation in street protests after the presidential election and for her role as editor of feminist school, and she received a year suspended sentence” (Khorasani, 2013: 20).

Problematic for women in this period was the inability to recruit new forces combined with “significant drainage” to the existing force. Fear of “detention and imprisonment, being barred from leaving the country, getting fired from work and becoming ‘unemployable’” were all elements of fear inhibiting the cause (Sadr, 2012: 215). After the protests against the elections “the escalation of security [measures] and police backlash led to an increasingly closed society every day. As a result, many of the civil society and women’s-movement organizations that existed before 2007 are no longer even heard of” (Khorasani, 2013: 20). Many went into exile after the crackdown, including Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi. Ebadi recounts her experience of

forced exile in her memoir *Until We Are Free*; she had not even been in the country during the election protests and still was persecuted. The government officially delegitimized her prize, portraying it as a vehicle of Western promotion. Her colleagues were arrested and detained, as well as her husband, who was forced to legally change their marriage to temporary (2016). Ebadi's life was evidently at risk after the crackdown, and she has never been able to return home since.

### ***Accounts of Activism in the Aftermath***

Khorasani recounts: "after the presidential election of 2009 and the post-election events and the ensuing popular 'green' movement, we became active under the banner 'Green Coalition Movement of Women Activists'" (2013: 20). Also known as the "Green Convergence of Women Movements," the Coalition operates in public as a 'Glass Circle', publishing minutes of its meetings (Sadr, 2012: 216). According to Sadr the outcome as of 2012 was that no real plans have been announced for the feminist agenda, and things "remained at the level of a discussion group" (2012: 216). Paralysis in and suspension of the Movement remain (2012). Even for those who make attempts to maintain activity outside the "Glass Circle," no new strategies by these members of the Women's Movement are known to date (2012).

### ***Explanations for Movement Diminishment***

Sadr and other scholars have suggested a variety of additional factors that may have contributed to a weakening of the Movement during the crackdown, including co-optation by the government, poor economic conditions exacerbated by sanctions placed on Iran by the U.S. and other western states, continued implementation of neo-liberal reforms that some argue hurt the economy and women's empowerment, problematic

leadership, internal disputes over the direction and methods of the Movement, a compromised message due to entanglements with the Green Movement's more broad message on representation, and more (Sadr, 2012, Tahmasebi, 2010, Moghissi, 2012, Povey, 2016, Povey 2016). Aspects that may continue to affect the Movement outside of the Movement's internal dynamics, such as the approach of the International Humanitarian Regime or US-led sanctions on Iran, necessitate a nuanced understanding of their impacts and perhaps unintended consequences.

This section takes a look at possible contributing factors in existing literature for diminishment in the Movement in 2009. It is important therefore when analyzing civil society in Iran to examine the triangular relationship between global geopolitics, the state and civil society itself (Fathollah-Nejad, 2013). An assessment of social movements in Iran needs to take into account external as well as internal viewpoints (Ardalan, 2013). "The contemporary Women's Movement has emerged out of Iran's experience of a contradictory modernity, uneven economic development, the development and nature of the state, the intervention of foreign powers and the role of opposition movements and reformists, including the important role played by the Islamic reformers in Iran" (Povey, 2012: 192). In the following I include overviews of some explanations for the retraction of the Women's Movement from the angle of state interference, from the internal angle—internal issues within the Women's Movement, and from the external angle—which includes Iran's international relations, as well as influence propagated by the Diaspora. "Women's activism must be contextualized within specific global and local political, economic and social contexts" (Povey, 2012: 191). The aim in examining and summarizing explanations for why the Movement went into retraction in 2009 is to then

be able to apply those explanations to the Women's Movement today and assess whether any of them still hold true. The specific triadic approach is still valuable when analyzing social or democratic movements in Iran. It will be ascertaining whether specific explanations within each of those separate parts of the triangular dynamic are still applicable today that my research will hope to address.

While we continued to exchange ideas and had discussions on the role of the youth in the movement, the power of the elders, the power relations inside the movement, and the intense pressure we felt from the anti-woman government, as well as weak organizing, resulted in an increase in the differences and conflicts amongst the activists and organizations. The pressure by the regime and our internal conflicts made the movement weaker and reduced our solidarity (Ardalan, 2013: 145).

### ***State Pressures***

It has already been outlined in previous sections of this paper, the ways in which the state sought to physically and mentally assault women activists and the Women's Movement in Iran before and during the 2009 election protests. But this again raises the question as to why at this particular juncture, when women have been at the brunt of state oppression for decades, would the state be so successful in throwing the Movement into retraction?

### ***The Crackdown***

The 2009 crackdown itself was so extreme across the board, even the clerics felt afraid to speak out against the violence. Not many members of *Ulama* came out and criticized, and the few that did delegitimize the state actions were extremely high ranking, and so were somewhat protected. The *Ulama* themselves were threatened by the hard-liners (Mokhtari, 2016: 262). As demonstrated in previous sections, systematic beatings in the street, rape while in custody of the police, and widespread arrests were prominent during the crackdown period.

### *Poor Environment for Civil Society*

A study released by CIVICUS in 2013 called “The Enabling Environment Index” assessed the condition of the arena for civil society in 109 countries worldwide. The index “examines the conditions within which civil society work. Using secondary statistical data, it ranks the governance, socio-cultural and socio-economic environments” of civil society in the included countries (Fioramonti, and Kononykhina, 2013). The study asks, “what are the conditions that strengthen this arena of participation” (2015: 474). The study focuses on two main concepts: function of civil society—providing nourishment or shelter, for example, and capability—freedom of association and opportunity for education, access to information, legal regulations, communication infrastructure, and collective cultural traits (2015: 476). The enabling environment is “a set of conditions that impact on the capacity of citizens (whether individually or in an organized fashion) to participate and engage in the civil society arena in a sustained and voluntary manner” (2015: 475). In other words, conditions that impact agency, which the study defines as “willingness to act to bring about change and pursue whatever goals or values a person regards as important” (2015: 476). The Enabling Environment Index ranks Iran as third from the bottom, out of 109 countries. (Fioramonti, and Kononykhina, 2013). “Iran, among those at the very bottom (0.31), exhibits the world’s worst governance track record for civil society (0.17). A lack of gender equality and the repression of civil liberties are the primary factors which restrict the space for and the potential of Iranian civil society governed by a President that openly threatens civil society” (2013: 14).

Poor civil society–state relations, inadequate legal protections of civil and political rights, and frequent violations of the freedoms of expression, association and assembly are the principal reasons that these countries have very low scores in the governance dimension (Fioramonti, and Kononykhina, 2015: 484).

### *Khatami Era Legacy*

During the Khatami era of openness and a state policy that encouraged the growth of civil society, much of the Women’s Movement moved above ground and publicized their agencies. Therefore “the 1990s saw the rise of Iran’s civil society and its constituent social movements, above all the women’s, students’ and labor movements” (Fathollah-Nejad, 2013: 46). For women’s groups, this meant registering as an official association with the state, and making themselves and their members known to the state.

In 2005, even in the face of smaller scale state backlash—the Movement only grew louder and seemingly stronger, with demands for constitutional change and coalition building with labor, students, and minorities. All of this activity and excitement and “focus on demands” may have caused women to miss what was happening in the government (Ardalan, 2013:139). Many members of the Movement thought they had nothing to hide during this period, because they thought of themselves as apolitical and that the era of covert operations (during the 80s) was over (Sadr, 2012). However, this meant that because they were publicized as NGOs under Khatami, they were unable to return to underground operations during Ahmadinejad’s terms. During his first term, the Women’s Movement was forced to regard the state to some degree as being legitimate in order to try to change some of the discriminatory laws. They also tried to stay apolitical and used the Internet for public space since there was no physical space left for organizing. The Women’s Movement attempted to depoliticize itself after being branded as being against national security, but this had adverse effects on the Movement. They

seemed to have blocked themselves from things political in nature but that concerned women in a “wider sense”; from, for example, government subsidies, public assembly, and minority discrimination (206: 2012). While the movement was attempting this approach, the state was building files on them (Sadr, 2012). What kept the Women’s Movement going in the “golden era” (before the elections) may have contributed to its ineffectiveness in the post-election era (Sadr, 2012). The openness of the Khatami era may have contributed to the ability of the government to effectively quash women’s groups after the protests in 2009 (Tahmasebi, 2012).

### *Co-optation*

Another one of the difficulties the Women’s Movement has faced since the post 2009-election crackdown includes the co-opting of some civil society groups by the Ahmadinejad administration, for example women’s groups like the Center for Women’s Participation, which was changed to the Center for Women and Family Affairs (Sadr, 2012). The organization not only underwent a name change, but was structurally modified as well. Internal squabbling and debates over issues such as public protest and constitutional reform and equal rights law are also cited as major explanations for decline (2012).

### *Neo-Liberalism*

The spread of Western Neo-liberalism in Iran has contributed to the hardship of women to organize, and in practical aspects of life such as employment; “all governments since the end of the 1980’s in Iran have embraced neo-liberalism, privatization and integration within the global economy, which has led to a rise in unemployment, decline in social services and a falling standard of living” (Povey, 2012: 184).

### ***Internal Factors***

A common and therefore important element found in the readings on women's activism and CSOs, is that there is a broad dispute occurring regarding the direction of the Women's Movement, which only became worse after the 2009 elections. This includes issues like political affiliation, ideology, coalition building, inclusion and exclusion, organization and structure. There have been divisions in the Women's Movement over strategy since the post-election crackdown in 2009 (Moghissi, 2012). What follows are some examples of the differing opinions within the Movement and within the literature produced by Iranian women.

Noushin Khorasani, a prominent member of the Movement, has been critical of the direction (or non-direction) the Women's Movement has taken; she has identified two factions of the Movement who are separate and against the Green Movement – the radicals (like revolutionaries) and the conservatives, who she says have alienated the women of the Green Movement and isolated themselves (Moghissi, 2012). Khorasani offers as an alternative the *The Green Coalition of the Women's Movement*. Haideh Moghissi agrees that conservatives and their approaches would be the kiss of death for the Women's Movement (2012). Moghissi lays out what she sees as the weak points of Khorasani's *The Green Coalition of the Women's Movement*, which are embodied by something termed the "new discourse". Two contentious points she makes about this discourse are, 1. The Green Movement is just one faction of the larger civil and political movement for democracy, and the independent voices of the Women's Movement must not be lost in the Green Movement—for the danger is losing sight of who is and what is the defining discourse and/or strategy, and 2. She disagrees on the point that specific

demands of the Women's Movement (equal rights to divorce, equal rights in the law), will be lost in ideological goals for secularism and democracy—she argues that the Movement should be inclusive of both simultaneously (2012). Parvin Ardalan warns about entangling different social movements, or subordinating one to another, and she advocates for “equitable recognition and alignment”—acknowledging that there has been a lot of conflict within the Women's Movement about how to position themselves against other movements or within or alongside (2013: 140). She writes “...we could all experience large-scale collective effort and stay focused on, and become active about, what we individually sought. Our diversity in ethnicity, social status, and class brought us a wide range of views but also created a wide range of obstacles and social problems” (2013: 143). Khorasani writes about the structure of organizing in terms of rural versus urban. There has been a problem with NGOs and the Women's Movement more generally with focusing on Tehran and hierarchical structure rather than being inclusive of the “local talent”. The [*One Million Signatures*] campaign seeks to avoid this by focusing on horizontal structure that shifts decision-making and power around between groups in the city and the provinces (2009: 67). She adds that there is also a tension and balance in the Movement between the top-down lobbying approach and the bottom-up approach which aims to inform and include a wide base of women (2009). Parvin Ardalan notes that the problems with this horizontal structure, which was used by the Women's Movement and borrowed by the Green Movement, was that there was horizontal suppression against all movements. In other words, the horizontal structure of the Green Movement incurred a horizontal backlash against all civil groups (2013: 150). Rostami-Povey raises issues of ideological binaries in the Movement. She argues that this

should not be about “East-West, tradition-modernity”, “West and Islam, or Feminism and Islam”—these dichotomies are ahistorical, too simplistic and don’t account for the diversity in feminism (2012: 6). She also makes the point that women are embracing their Islamic heritage, and that they can be Islamic and feminist at the same time; their fight for rights can be done within this framework (2012). Khorasani refers to the newest Women’s Movement generation as the fifth generation of feminists, which she identifies as the “circumstantial” feminists—these are the young participants (2009, 49). This generation distances itself “from struggles over political and religious authority” and doesn’t need to ensure that it is Islamic first and foremost. But they aren’t “anti Islamic either...[t]hey derive their legitimacy from the bottom up and from within their daily lives, not from an official ideology...[t]his sets them apart from the ‘Islamic feminism’ which seeks official blessing from the male ruling elite of the Islamic Republic” (2009, 50). Issues such as whether to gather in the streets and form peaceful public protests versus less conspicuous organizing were also subject to disagreement (Sadr, 2012). Some feared they would be accused of being revolutionary by utilizing this method, and preferred to hold private meetings—“indoor programs,” or to be active through writing and media (Ardalan, 2013: 145). Problems with leadership within the Movement sharpened in the post-election crackdown period; as many known leaders of the Movement were targeted for violence and arrest, it became difficult for those members to participate openly in those leadership roles for fear of such extreme retaliation by the state (Sadr, 2012).

## *Diaspora*

There is also much deliberation regarding the Iranian women living in Diasporas around the world, especially in Western nations. In some cases, those living in the Diaspora have a tendency to be radical and push for revolution, and therefore have a limited understanding of the delicacy of the situation (Moghissi, 2013). Some activists like Noushin Khorasani insist that the Iranian Women's Movement matters need to remain in the hands of local Iranian women rather than transnational women's groups, or the Movement will lose sight of values relative to their situation inside the borders (2009, 78). This is an issue that holds the attention of activists and civil society on a broad scale in Iran. On the issue of activists outside Iran in relation to the Green Movement, Fatemeh Haghghatjoo adds that "the exiled opposition typically represented the more radical constituencies of the movement and tended to seek regime change...that often collided with movement activists inside Iran...making the subject of international support a contentious issue among activists and reform leadership" (2016: 239).

## ***External Factors***

### *International Relations and US-led Sanctions*

Any proper understanding of the state-society dynamics between government and civil society in Iran "must take into account external pressures exerted on the country and hence the entire body politic" (Fathollah-Nejad, 2013: 39). One of the major external pressures is the impact of US confrontational policy towards Iran, and specifically the negative repercussions of US-led sanctions on regular Iranian people, rather than on the government. The situation with US-led sanctions is delicate and frequently hurts the general population more than the government (Haghghatjoo, 2016, Povey, 2016). The

effect of these policies may be to, in fact, “upgrade authoritarianism” rather than help to defeat or diminish it (Fathollah-Nejad, 2013: 39). The confrontational policies have an adverse effect on peaceful democratic movements in Iran, and the sanctions choke the civilian population in terms of economics while bolstering the authoritarian elements of the regime. The impact of the sanctions on women as workers has been negative, contributing to 70 percent of the population of Iranian women being unemployed (2013). Social movements in Iran generally oppose the sanctions, believing that it only contributes to regime resilience, worsening human rights conditions, and lack of freedom of information (Fathollah-Nejad, 2013). It is argued that sanction pressure by the West should be focused more on human rights in Iran rather than the nuclear situation (Haghighatjoo, 2016). Again however, the sanctions are not generally supported by activists inside Iran, for the fact that they have proven to be ineffective in changing Iran’s foreign policy, while harming the average Iranian (2016).

### *Western Agenda Stigma*

One widely held view by Iranians is that the West essentially uses Iranian women as an excuse for imperial type involvement in the Middle East (Rostami-Povey, 2012, Tara Povey, 2012). In other words, the “Neo-conservative agenda” of the West uses the discourse of the oppressed Muslim women to dominate the Middle East (2012: 186). Women’s activism in Iran challenges Western notions that are used as a basis for these interventions; notions that portray Iranian women as weak, as in need of rescue from the Iranian or Muslim man (Povey, 2012). “Far from accepting positions of subordination that are forced on them by society, women in Iran have challenged patriarchal institutions, fought for legislative and social change, and challenged conservative

interpretations of religious texts” (2012: 187). Further to the wide held belief of women inside the Movement that they have agency and have proven to be strong and capable, the firsthand experience with the impact of Western policies contributes to the view that linkages with international women’s solidarity groups should be treated with skepticism (Povey, 2016).

Issues of sensitivity surround the matter of human rights discourse in Iran, as it has come to be viewed as Western and imperialist—as part of the democratization agenda of the West (Mokhtari, 2016, Povey, 2016). During the Khatami era ‘rights discourse’ was couched in terms of Islamism, nationalism and citizenship; reformists and activists were unable to use the phrase ‘human rights’ because of the prevalent Western stigmatization (2016: 254). Victoria Tahmasebi-birgani discusses this as well in her 2010 article, tying treatment of civil society, especially that of women, to Iran’s interpretation of activism and civil society.

In the past thirty years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently crushed any voice of dissent, especially those of women, students and the youth, in the guise of the fight against Western cultural imperialism. As one of its most repressive measures so far, the Iranian regime has branded all cultural exchange and dialogue with Western NGOs and human rights organizations as acts of treason, and has detained hundreds of women academics, lawyers, social workers and civil activists under this false accusation (2010: 82).

### ***Gap or puzzle***

How could a powerful and influential movement go into retraction? Competing, or duel narratives portray the Movement as both weakened in this period and also as vigorous. Is there perhaps another explanation for how the Women’s Movement in Iran negotiated this period? This study makes an investigation into how and whether women continued to engage in activism in the immediate aftermath of the crackdown and onward. Is it correct that the government succeeded in affecting to suppress the Movement? In searching for evidence of continued resistance and agency I will assess

these assumptions. The reappearance of women in 2013 and 2017 to the election stage, along with subsequent examples of public contestation including recent street gatherings in protest of forced *hijab* indicate that a more in-depth explication may be required for how this Movement reacts to moments of repression.

### ***Definitions***

The 2009 Iranian post-election period refers to contestations and protesting conducted by a wide swath of Iranian people after Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was re-elected in the 2009 presidential race, which was regarded by many as rigged, and resulted in a state crackdown on civil society. Civil society in this case refers to, first, Iranian civil society, and second, the members and organizations of civil society who were particularly targeted in the 2009 post-election crackdown, including women and youth organizations, minority rights groups, human rights activists, journalists and lawyers, and to a lesser extent union and labor groups and activists. The crackdown refers to the governmental response in which the Islamic Republic performed an extremely violent and repressive series of arrests, beatings and killings of protestors in Tehran and in other major Iranian cities, carried out by police and the paramilitary *Basiji* militia. This period of violent suppression also meant the imprisonment, torture and rape of many, as well as forced exile and migration for many others targeted at this time. Women in particular were targeted for violence, both on the street and in post-arrest incarceration because of their particular symbolism to broader society.

The Women's Movement in Iran can be defined in a variety of ways over time, as it has changed throughout the last century in which women in Iran have been socially active. In more recent years, since the revolution and especially since the 1990's, the

Women's Movement has been focused on the fight for women's rights for equal legal and social status with men, and the fight against state sanctioned violence against women in the home and in their communities. Under current law in Iran, which is *Sharia* based, women do not have equal rights to men and are effectively classified as second-class citizens. Women have also been a strong participatory force in the broader democratic movements in Iran, including the Green Movement for participatory rights after the 2009 election period.

The effects of the crackdown on the Women's Movement refers to any resulting conditions or shifts in the Movement in the aftermath the repression of civil society in the post-election period. Known effects of the crackdown on the women's sector of civil society, composite of women's groups and rights activists, were evidenced by fracturing or remission of goals towards legal rights-seeking, and over time, cessation of public action for fear of violence and incarceration, and further erosion of women's rights because of the inability to effectively publicly regroup. The retraction has meant the closure of many women's groups, forced exile or hiding, imprisonment or execution of its leaders and members.

### **Methods**

My research methodology is a qualitative, bricolage approach, and my approach for analyses uses spiral method, data content analyses and coding. I started my research by collecting a variety of resources and listing them in Excel. These resources included web-links to a variety of sources pertaining to my research (*included in Appendix A*). Next, I grouped each of these resources by type and gave each group their own tab in the Excel document. Types include various news-media, human rights organizations, Iranian

CSOs and their websites, Iranian studies institutes and research portals, Middle East research institutes, and international organizations and agencies. Next, I developed a set of research questions (*see Appendix B*). I systematically went through each resource on each tab and combed them for related news and content based on my set of research questions, collecting those that were related to or appeared to help to answer the research questions.

I analyzed or determined whether each was helpful to my research questions, and took initial general notes on each as I collected or downloaded articles and published news items from all relatable organizations. These initial notes were then entered into Excel under the link to the related source or organization. If a source was not deemed helpful or useful to my research, it was noted here and I eliminated it from my data set. I typically included a note on how or why it was useful if I found it so. Some sites were too old, or were broken (either from age or because the government disabled them). In other cases, they just did not have useful information pertinent to this project.

If I found helpful content, it was downloaded and saved into a corresponding folder for that group type. As I downloaded the documents, I did an initial skim read-through of each, noting some of the major thematics that arose across these items based off the content I was looking for from my questions.

Much of the content found consisted of noteworthy news, interviews of and statements by prominent Iranian women activists and lawyers, articles and essays of analyses by Iranian women activists and lawyers, and reports on the Movement, human rights and civil society in Iran. I set the links to websites related to the Women's Movement and Iranian CSO websites aside to return to later during the analyses phase.

Next, I copied a list of all collected, downloaded items into their appropriate tab in Excel, below the initial summarized list of web links and organization names with short notations. Many of the articles and interviews, especially from the Feminist School, were translated from Farsi and many include first-hand accounts from Iranian women who were on the ground before, during, and after the crackdown. These documents were particularly helpful in addressing questions on how the Movement was affected or how it may have changed, adapted or shifted in the aftermath of the crackdown.

My data set includes 249 essays, articles, reports, interviews, statements from local and International NGOs, women's organizations and news-media. (*See Appendix C for a bibliographic list of each document*).

A note about blogs: I decided not to actively pursue blogs from Iranian women's websites, as they are too far reaching for this project, and too many of them were in Farsi which would have required the extensive use of a translator. Truly – looking at blogs could have been a project unto its own. I came across a great many that would have been good examples, but the set was too vast.

#### *Detailed Reading and Note Taking, Process of Discovery*

The next step was to go back through each item a second time, do a close read and take careful notes on each. As I read through each item I entered my notes into the Excel spreadsheet below each title. Again, using spiral method of analyses, I took another round of notes on a separate document, notating commonly occurring and key themes, concepts, phrases and words. Once the process of combing through the downloaded texts was completed, I examined the women's organizations' websites for content related to my research questions. I took notes on these and entered them into Excel as well. I also

watched three videos with interviews of Iranian women activists. There were many interviews posted on Tavaana, an E-learning institute for Iranian Civil Society, but many were in Farsi with no subtitles. I randomly selected three interviews that had English subtitles. I watched these, took notes on each and entered the notes into Excel as well.

As I took notes, I worked to assign and highlight key words inside the notes that pointed to key concepts, phrases and themes such as “state violence” or “Women’s Movement is peaceful” or simply “action”. I specifically looked for evidence of any type of action by women as individuals or as groups in the post-2009 period, noting it each time it occurred in the readings. These would receive a corresponding code word denoting more specifically the kind of action it was (contentious, public protest, statement making, coalition building, individual, informal, formal, etc.). The goal was to derive from the data set the new, as well as the current ways in which the Women’s Movement continued to be active and or express agency after the crackdown. I also paid attention to any information pertaining to explanations for women-targeted state violence, including types of suppression as well as state-Women’s Movement dynamics. Additionally, I looked for discursive themes within the texts sourced from women activists and journalists, and for key “hot topics” circulating within the Movement and the media.

Once I completed going through my entire data set, I read through my notes, cross-referencing and comparing. For a third time, I identified and made a list of key themes, concepts, phrases and words. From this list I developed a set of five meta-themes or concepts that were among the most prominent in my data set, but also related to my research question set. *(See Appedix D for sample of coding process).*

Next, I assigned color codes to these five key meta-themes I found recurring across the readings. I went through the notes and highlighted information in my notes with the corresponding theme color. I then created loosely formatted memos for each theme based on the collected notes. From the memos, I applied analyses for what the theme implicated in regard to my set of questions, then drew conclusions through analysis of themes, using social movement and civil society theory.

### **Results**

Before I started the research, I did not assume any outcomes about the Movement as successful or repressed or in retraction after 2009. I outlined what I knew before the research above, but did not have a predetermined notion of the Movement as being in retraction or not, and if so to what degree or in what fashion.

The process of reading, annotating and analyzing the set of texts I gathered for this research helped to elevate the conversation between academics, activists and NGOs and media on the subject of women's issues in Iran. The ongoing conversation about the status of the Women's Movement in Iran is still very much alive and growing every day. It was difficult to find a place to stop collecting articles beyond the initial data set, as new and interesting publications are available all the time. There were however, regardless of new documents I came across, a very prominent set of topics that emerged as I went through my set. Even if adding to the existing data set, it would be to elaborate or simply reify existing themes I was able to draw out from the information already examined.

The number of activists who publish formally, informally, or who write on the status of the Movement and the status of women's rights and demands is outstanding, and my surprise is indicative of the underestimation by Westerners for the prolific social

movement that Iranian women have constructed. Perhaps my surprise was derived in part from the fact that so much information was available in English. Members of the Movement work very hard to translate and convert texts for an international audience as part of a campaign to raise global awareness for women's issues in Iran. In addition to the efforts by the activists, international journalists have made concerted efforts to convey the situation of Iranian women to an international audience as well.

The combination of these works by Iranian women activists themselves, along with news reports and human rights reports has helped to allow a more complete story of the post-2009 Women's Movement to emerge. News media was useful in collecting information on legal developments as well as women's activities, while human rights reports illuminated ways in which the state and society continue to carry out discrimination against women, and finally the articles, essays, statements and reports by members and member organizations helped convey current discourse, important topics, internal debates, and exigencies and processes of the Movement. Coding each of these pieces and analyzing them as a whole contributed to a fuller picture. By connecting various common elements in the data I was able to tie ends together in the form of five meta-themes as below. The distillation of these meta-themes are an effort to relay and convey a more complete story of the experience of the Iranian Women's Movement and results of the crackdown as portrayed by Iranian women and those who report on this Movement. In an effort to acknowledge that the sources utilized in this research are in themselves social constructions, it is important to emphasize that any claims or conclusions are derived from intentionally crafted portrayals of women's experiences. Therefore a secondary layer of analysis should be applied, that which keeps in mind how

authors have particular audiences, which may inform how events and experiences are reported.

### ***Themes***

- 1. Women were targeted by the state because of their standing as leaders of civil society and perceived threat as a mobilizing force.*
- 2. Extreme State violence and arrests against women caused decline in public protest action, evidence of brief public retraction*
- 3. The Women's Movements' adaptive and creative strategy; the Women's Movement's experience with activism and demand making in periods of political repression has born out adaptability and creativity,*
- 4. Cultural Activism; the Movement seeks to achieve demands for rights by focusing on changing attitudes in culture and society*
- 5. Upgrading resiliency; the Iranian Women's Movement demonstrates durability, strength, and reemergence in the political sphere.*

Next, I will give overviews of each of the five key themes and include evidence from the data set for each of these insights. A note on the bibliography for the data set (Appendix C): in some cases the articles, essays or news pieces were located via the website of particular organizations (human rights or other), and they originated from another source. Where I could I followed the article back to the original source and created a citation based on that origin. In some cases, the original source was lost as a broken link, or could not be located on the website. In those instances I created a citation based on the website on which it was found, and noted the original source in the citation as well.

***Theme 1 – Women were targeted by the state because of their standing as leaders of civil society and perceived threat as a mobilizing force. The Women’s Movement was specifically targeted because the IRI feared the Movement’s capacity to mobilize other constituents of civil society against the state.***

One major theme emerging from the research regarded state motive for preemptively targeting the Women’s Movement before and during the crackdown period. The fact that the state targeted women is not necessarily new; that the state considered the Women’s Movement a powerful threat for mobilizing anti-regime forces emerged more clearly in the content I reviewed. Further, the Women’s Movement put itself in the spotlight for politically charged attention from the regime during the campaigning period. In the lead-up to the elections the Movement maintained its apolitical stance but had utilized the campaign to put forth demands. Putting the candidates on the spot to answer to these demands, including the incumbent president could have been interpreted as direct challenge to political leadership. It may have also have inadvertently shifted the Women’s Movement from the apolitical camp to political as far as the state was concerned.

This perceived challenge in conjunction with the considerable influence of the Movement over other sectors of civil society resulted in a fear driven assault on women. This attack on the Movement was not simply a product of misogyny and chauvinism, but an attempt to throttle a perceived threat to its legitimacy.<sup>1</sup> Regarded as a formidable source of agency within the civic sphere, the Women’s Movement was feared by the IRI as transformative power capable of contributing to the momentum of other constituents of

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<sup>1</sup> Nia, Gissou. “Iran Steps up Assault on Female Activists.” CNN.com, October 11, 2010. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/10/11/nia.iranian.women/index.html>.

civil society<sup>2</sup>, youth and university groups in particular, but also what came to be known as the Green Movement—pro-Mousavi voters and reformists.

That the Women's Movement possessed the might to mobilize other sectors of civil society against the state drove the state to preemptively organize a systematic offensive in the form of violence, imprisonment and surveillance.<sup>3</sup> Women were also many of the first to be arrested when protesting began, demonstrating that the state not only had them on the radar but also worried about the potential for the women to organize anti-regime forces.<sup>4</sup> In the pre-election period, Tehran's prosecutor general accused them of "supplying the political opposition with organizational and leadership skills and knowledge."<sup>5</sup>

#### *Women's Movement as Battle-hardened and Experienced*

Women have a long history of advocating for their rights in the face of state repression, which manifested a strong movement with a considerable repertoire of tactical tools and experience. "Iranian women have long demanded freedom and gender equality; they have employed both individual and group strategies, initiated various campaigns,

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Iran Human Rights Documentation Center Releases Report on Iran's Attempt to Dismantle the Women's Rights Movement." Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 9, 2010. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/press-statements/3139-iran-human-rights-documentation-center-releases-report-on-iran%E2%80%99s-attempt-to-dismantle-the-women%E2%80%99s-rights-movement.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Kakaee, Parisa. "Women's Movement: A Model for the Green Movement." Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, sourced from Gozaar: A Forum on Human Rights and Democracy, June 11, 2010. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/aadel-collection/12859-women-s-movement-a-model-for-the-green-movement.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Nia, Gissou. "Iran Steps up Assault on Female Activists." CNN.com, October 11, 2010: par 5.

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/10/11/nia.iranian.women/index.html>,

Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran." New Haven, CT: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 2010.

<http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/feed/publications/reports/3007-silencing-the-women-s-rights-movement-in-iran.txt>.

and faced insults, threats, arrests and imprisonment in the process."<sup>6</sup> In January of 2009, just before the elections, Shirin Ebadi called the Women's Movement "the strongest movement in Iran as well as the Middle East."<sup>7</sup> Many consider the Women's Movement to not only to have been the leading agent in Iran's civil society, but also the leading promoter of democracy in the country.<sup>8</sup>

In the texts I reviewed, women commonly self-identified and were characterized by their "high quality" activism. In other words the Movement possessed a sophisticated repertoire for engaging in rights-seeking. The quality of the Movement was unprecedented just before the election, demonstrated by their ingenuity for effective organizing and demanding making strategies.<sup>9</sup> Many Movement members and scholars argue that this quality was derivative of the many years of experience pushing on with their demands in spite of crackdowns and state pressure.<sup>10</sup> In years leading up to the 2009 crackdown, the Movement, battle-hardened from experience, had honed its skills and the stronger they grew the more they were regarded as a threat.

[W]omen were veterans of grass roots protest in environments of repression (top of page), which worried the regime that many had experience in mobilizing grass roots support and reaching media outlets in the face of heavy suppression. The Iranian regime recognized this connection and the danger presented by these veteran activists passing along their knowledge,

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<sup>6</sup> Gender Equality for Iran website. "Iran: WLUML Supports Call for Solidarity: Freedom and Gender Equality in Iran | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws, January 27, 2010: par2. <http://www.wluml.org/node/5902>.

<sup>7</sup> The Guardian. "Iran: Women's Rights Movement and Free Media under Attack | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws. January 31, 2009: par 9. <http://www.wluml.org/node/5032>.

<sup>8</sup> Tohidi, Nayereh. "Comparative Approaches to Civil Society: Women at the Forefront of the Democracy Movement in Iran." *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law* Vol. 7, no. Issue 3 (June 2005). [http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol7iss3/art\\_3.htm](http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol7iss3/art_3.htm).

The Feminist School. "Women and the Presidential Elections: Iran's New Political Culture." The Feminist School, September 1, 2009. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article331>.

<sup>9</sup> The Feminist School. "Women and the Presidential Elections: Iran's New Political Culture." The Feminist School, September 1, 2009. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article331>.

<sup>10</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Report on the Status of Women Human Rights Defenders — April 2009." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), April 16, 2009. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/04/whrdreport/>.

organizational expertise and experience to the larger yet somewhat-less-organized green movement.<sup>11</sup>

### *Green Movement Connection*

The conservative hardliners in the regime had consistently targeted women's groups and activists over time, but increased doing so since the 2009 election so as to deter women from helping the Green Movement.<sup>12</sup> The Green Movement, which emerged from candidate Mousavi's Green Party, campaigned about political participatory rights with its slogan "Where's My Vote". At the time of the protesting and violence, the Women's Movement and the Green Movement had no formal ties. The connection lay in the way the Women's Movement had influenced the Green Movement with, for example, its peaceful tactics, "key roles, the approaches, and methods" which all helped to strengthen the Green Movement.<sup>13</sup> "The experiences of the various women's groups fighting against injustice and discrimination in the past decade (through collaboration, cooperation, campaigns, and various coalitions) were collectively, consciously, and responsibly transferred by women onto the Green Movement."<sup>14</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran." New Haven, CT: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 2010: 17. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/feed/publications/reports/3007-silencing-the-women-s-rights-movement-in-iran.txt>.

<sup>12</sup> Nikou, Semira N. "Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh." The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>13</sup> The Feminist School. "The Statement by a Number of Women's Rights Activists Attending a Green Gathering in Commemoration of March 8th, with the Goal of Eliminating Discrimination and Violence to Establish Democracy." The Feminist School, March 13, 2010: par 8. [http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id\\_article=372](http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id_article=372).

Davachi, Azadeh. "On the Eve of 12th of June, a Historical Day for the Women Movement and the Green Movement: The Prospect of Iranian Women Movement after the Recent Uprising in the Middel East and North Africa: Interview Azadeh Davachi with Professor Ali Akbar Mahdi." The Feminist School, June 11, 2011. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article458>.

<sup>14</sup> The Feminist School. "The Statement by a Number of Women's Rights Activists Attending a Green Gathering in Commemoration of March 8th, with the Goal of Eliminating Discrimination and Violence to Establish Democracy." The Feminist School, March 13, 2010: par 11. [http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id\\_article=372](http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id_article=372).

Women's Movement was in fact considered by some to have been the "pioneers of the national opposition" against the IRI that came to be known as the Green Movement.<sup>15</sup>

That influence was enough to alarm the IRI, and with activists and organizations from the Women's Movement in plain view, they were easy to locate and strategically target. In fact, the government feared the Women's Movement to such an extent that it actually started to pursue suppressive tactics in advance of the elections. In a calculated and deliberate way "the incumbent regime increased its suppression of women's rights activists and organizations during the lead-up to the elections. It shut down offices, arrested and interrogated many activists, and prevented some from leaving the country."<sup>16</sup> The IRI directed its attention at women who were both very involved in the Movement as well as those who were minimally involved. Efforts were made to silence the leaders of the Movement and intimidate family and friends.

### *One Million Signatures Campaign*

In particular, the One Million Signatures Campaign was targeted by the government – with the end goal to damage or destroy the Campaign.<sup>17</sup> Members of the

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<sup>15</sup> Askary, Hooman. "Fighting for Women's Rights: An Interview with Mahnaz Afkhami." Arvesh Sevom, November 16, 2011: par 1. <http://www.arsehsevom.org/en/2011/11/fighting-for-womens-rights-an-interview-with-mahnaz-afkhami/>.

<sup>16</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran." New Haven, CT: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 2010: 13. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/feed/publications/reports/3007-silencing-the-women-s-rights-movement-in-iran.txt>.

<sup>17</sup> Kakaee, Parisa. "Women's Movement: A Model for the Green Movement." Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, sourced from Gozaar: A Forum on Human Rights and Democracy, June 11, 2010. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/aadel-collection/12859-women-s-movement-a-model-for-the-green-movement.html>.  
Amnesty International. "From Protest to Prison: Iran One Year After the Election." London, UK: Amnesty International Publications, 2010. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/mde130622010en.pdf>.

Campaign were sought out by the Iranian judiciary and summoned for appearance in court.<sup>18</sup>

Women's rights defenders, who have been particularly active in recent years, faced reprisals for their peaceful activities before and during the election, and the pattern of repression persists. The women's movement was named in the general indictment read at the first 'show trial' as being part of the 'velvet revolution'. Among those particularly targeted have been supporters of the Campaign for Equality, a women's rights initiative launched in 2006.<sup>19</sup>

The Campaign was among the most targeted because it was at the forefront of the Women's Movement itself and had demonstrated leadership and innovation for creating effective ways to promote women's rights. "The largest, most grassroots and influential one has been the One Million Signatures Campaign to change discriminatory laws."<sup>20</sup> The Campaign also drew the unwanted attention from the regime in the process of trying to garner public support it deemed necessary in order to both combat and influence the state.<sup>21</sup> The process meant the Campaign was very public and visible to the state even at the grass roots level.

### *Mothers of Laleh Park*

The Mourning Mothers, or Mothers of Laleh Park were also of particular note for having been targeted by the revolutionary guards. "Women campaigning for redress for human rights violations have also been targeted: members of the Mourning Mothers, a group of mothers whose children were killed in the post-election demonstrations and their

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<sup>18</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Targeting of Women's Rights Campaigners Seen as Effort to Silence Them." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), November 2, 2009. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/11/wrcsilencing/>.

<sup>19</sup> Amnesty International. "Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded." Amnesty International Publications, 2009: 31. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/48000/mde131232009en.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> The Feminist School. "Women and the Presidential Elections: Iran's New Political Culture." The Feminist School, September 1, 2009: par 14. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article331>

<sup>21</sup> Tavaana "One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran." Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

supporters, have been arrested on several occasions."<sup>22</sup> The Mothers of Laleh Park were one of the few women's organizations who continued to be publicly active well into the crackdown phase. They have been championed as fearless for their public gathering in Laleh Park in the face of state violence and harassment from the revolutionary guards, but this very act of being physically present made them readily available for targeting.

*Women as a Challenge to Legitimacy but also as Symbols of Authenticity*

There is another aspect or layer to the state targeting the Women's Movement, which played out as a common theme in the research. Women as citizens and as political subjects are particularly symbolic to the Islamic Republic. Much of the research revealed ways in which women were regarded as political subjects, whose bodies and rights were at the center point between conservative hardliners and reformist and moderates. Taking the issue of forced veiling as an example, hardliners cling to law as it is considered a symbol of state authenticity.<sup>23</sup> Legally forced veiling was introduced in tandem with the IRI, and control over the female body has been a major tenet of the IRI approach to social codes and mores. "Women, perceived as bearers of culture, became central to the political discourse that was to shape the society under the new regime."<sup>24</sup> From controlling a women's ability to ride a bicycle, or segregating in public spaces, to prohibiting free travel from the country—the state makes the claim as protectorate of the female and identifies itself as opposite from the West which seeks to use women's bodies as sexual tools.

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<sup>22</sup> Amnesty International. "From Protest to Prison: Iran One Year After the Election." London, UK: Amnesty International Publications, 2010:15. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/mde130622010en.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Askary, Hooman. "Fighting for Women's Rights: An Interview with Mahnaz Afkhami." Arvesh Sevom, November 16, 2011. <http://www.arshsevom.org/en/2011/11/fighting-for-womens-rights-an-interview-with-mahnaz-afkhami/>.

<sup>24</sup> Erturk, Yakin. "Iran: A 'Bloody Stain' on the Nation." openDemocracy, November 25, 2014: par 7. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yakin-erturk/iran-%27bloody-stain%27-on-nation>.

In Iran, women's bodies are a political subject; control over their bodies is a reflection of political power. Women's sexuality is a tool for Islamic conservatives to demonstrate their interpretation of Islamic ideology and identity.<sup>25</sup>

This further complicates issues concerning the dress code. For example; the *hijab* is not singularly an issue of women's rights—the right to choose what to wear has also come to be a matter of state identity. It further complicates women's quest for rights and control over their personhood, and draws special attention from the government in terms of reform. To relax laws particular to gender such as the dress code or freedom of movement, is to also have a discussion about moving the boundary line between traditional conservatism and moderation, raising issues of identity and power more broadly for the republic. "Imposing restrictions on women's dress has been a barometer - showing how far the authorities are willing to go to allow social freedom and give more rights to women."<sup>26</sup> The Movement, as a powerful social force with the potential to challenge regime legitimacy as tied to a symbolic representation of authenticity, resulted in a violent and extreme crackdown by the state.

***Theme 2 - Extreme State violence and arrests against women caused decline in public protest action, evidence of brief public retraction***

Part of my investigation included examining state action as portrayed within my data set. There was an overwhelming amount of discussion surrounding the violence, arrest and imprisonment of women activists in the time leading up to the elections and escalating in the period after. This included the effects that violence and mass arrest had on the Women's Movement, and the choices women were faced with during this time; to

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<sup>25</sup> Parsa, Fariba. "OP-ED: How Women's Rights Are Linked to U.S.-Iran Negotiations." *IPS Inter Press Services News Agency*. November 1, 2013: par 6. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/11/op-ed-how-womens-rights-are-linked-to-u-s-iran-negotiations/>.

<sup>26</sup> Fathi, Nazila. "Iran: Iran Moves to Roll Back Rights Won by Women | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, New York Times, September 19, 2004: par 12. <http://www.wluml.org/node/1661>.

stay and face arrest, which might mean unusually long prison sentencing and/or torture in detention, or they were forced to go underground or flee the country. The texts and web content I analyzed revealed that all three of these options took a toll on the Women's Movement. The strongest indicator that the state's violence and mass detention had an effect on the movement was in the clear reduction of women in open and public forms of activism (as compared with how present and visible they had been), and the drain on the force of women activists.

Numerous articles and reports issued lists of well-known activists and lawyers as well as lesser-known activists who have been arrested, often arbitrarily.<sup>27</sup> In an effort to discredit the leadership, extremely well known activists and lawyers were targeted for arrest and harassment including, for example, Shadi Sadr, Shirin Ebadi, Parvin Ardalan, and Noushin Khorasani.<sup>28</sup> "The arbitrary use of legal mechanisms to harass women's rights activists can be interpreted as an effort to silence them in the context of mass political unrest in Iran."<sup>29</sup> In the proceeding years, many reports have been released documenting the physical and emotional torture women suffered in detention and prison including widespread accounts of rape.<sup>30</sup> Some of the campaigns targeted included the One Million Signatures Campaign, the Stop Stoning Forever Campaign, the Women for

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<sup>27</sup> The Feminist School. "On the First Anniversary of the 12th of June Presidential Election, Still 30 Women Are in the Prison." Translated by Sahar Mofakham. The Feminist School, June 23, 2010. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article381>.

Amnesty International. "Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded." Amnesty International Publications, 2009. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/48000/mde131232009en.pdf>.

<sup>28</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran." New Haven, CT: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 2010. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/feed/publications/reports/3007-silencing-the-women-s-rights-movement-in-iran.txt>.

<sup>29</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Targeting of Women's Rights Campaigners Seen as Effort to Silence Them." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), November 2, 2009: par 3. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/11/wrcsilencing/>.

<sup>30</sup> Tomlin, Julie. "Social Media Gives Women a Voice in Iran." *The Guardian; Accessed through Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, September 22, 2011, sec. Life and style. <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2011/sep/22/social-media-women-iran>.

Equal Citizenship Campaign, the Women's Access to Public Stadiums, the National Women's Charter Campaign, and the Mothers for Peace Campaign (or Mourning Mothers, Mothers of Laleh Park).<sup>31</sup> In this process, "the incumbent regime...shut down organizations' offices, arrested and interrogated many activists, and prevented some from leaving the country."<sup>32</sup>

### *Types of Suppression*

Suppression of the Women's Movement extended beyond violence and arrest, although these two forms of suppression were the most heavy handed and most pervasive in my data set. Members of the Movement suffered harassment, surveillance, bans on practicing journalism, bans on practicing law, bans on travel, home searches, and arrests with convictions that carried abnormally and "unprecedentedly" long sentencing.<sup>33</sup> Many NGOs were raided and shut down and their websites filtered repeatedly. Change for Equality, the website of the One Millions Signatures Campaign, has been filtered by the

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<sup>31</sup> The Feminist School. "Women and the Presidential Elections: Iran's New Political Culture." The Feminist School, September 1, 2009. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article331>. Amnesty International. "Iran: Women Detained for Human Rights Activism." Amnesty International Publications, June 23, 2011. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/32000/mde130632011en.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. "Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran." New Haven, CT: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 2010: 13. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/feed/publications/reports/3007-silencing-the-women-s-rights-movement-in-iran.txt>.

<sup>33</sup> International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. "'My Husband Is Being Deprived His Most Basic Right,' Says Jila Baniyaghoub." Center for Human Rights in Iran. *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), July 15, 2010. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/07/jila-baniyaghoub-husband/>. Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Human Rights Defenders Prevented from Leaving Iran; Women's Rights Advocates Arrested." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), May 11, 2009. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/05/advocatearrests/>. Vakil, Sanam. "Iran's Women: A Movement in Transition." openDemocracy, October 19, 2010. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/sanam-vakil/irans-women-movement-in-transition>. Nikou, Semira N. "Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh." The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

Iranian authorities at least 21 times.<sup>34</sup> Freedom of assembly and expression were choked, minority women were targeted, and discipline of female students in university spiked.<sup>35</sup> Family members were also harassed and arrested—Shirin Ebadi’s sister, for example, was taken into custody.<sup>36</sup> Activists suffered heavy fines, job loss, state control and monitoring of daily life, relationships and communications, repeated summoning to court without proper warrant, and a discourse of violence in state media.<sup>37</sup> “The depiction of women... exaggerated and unrealistic... is a form of violation widely practiced through the media.”<sup>38</sup> Disrespect to women in general was common, even elderly women (by the Basijis and Revolutionary Guards) — in the case of the Mothers of Laleh Park for

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<sup>34</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Report on the Status of Women Human Rights Defenders — April 2009.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), April 16, 2009.

<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/04/whrdreport/>.

<sup>35</sup> Amnesty International. “Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded.” Amnesty International Publications, 2009. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/48000/mde131232009en.pdf>.

Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Report on the Status of Women Human Rights Defenders — April 2009.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), April 16, 2009.

<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/04/whrdreport/>.

Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Student Mistreatment And Gender Segregation At Mashad’s Ferdowsi University.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), January 6, 2011.

<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2011/01/student-mistreatment-and-gender-segregation-at-mashads-ferdowsi-university/>.

<sup>36</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. “Silencing the Women’s Rights Movement in Iran.” New Haven, CT: Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 2010.

<http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/feed/publications/reports/3007-silencing-the-women-s-rights-movement-in-iran.txt>.

Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Widespread Arrests of Women’s Rights Activists, Female Journalists and Relatives.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), January 5, 2010.

<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/01/arrests-womens-activists/>.

Amnesty International. “Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded.” Amnesty International Publications, 2009. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/48000/mde131232009en.pdf>.

<sup>37</sup>Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. “Iran Human Rights Documentation Center Releases Report on Iran’s Attempt to Dismantle the Women’s Rights Movement.” Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 9, 2010.

<http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/press-statements/3139-iran-human-rights-documentation-center-releases-report-on-iran%E2%80%99s-attempt-to-dismantle-the-women%E2%80%99s-rights-movement.html>.

Shojaee, Mansoureh. “A Journey to the Seven Loveless Realms of Violence on the Anniversary of Universal Day to Stop Violence against Women.” The Feminist School, December 7, 2009.

<http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article349>.

The Feminist School. “Statement by ‘Women Solidarity Committee against Social Violence.’” The Feminist School, May 27, 2010. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article379>.

<sup>38</sup> Shojaee, Mansoureh. “A Journey to the Seven Loveless Realms of Violence on the Anniversary of Universal Day to Stop Violence against Women.” The Feminist School, December 7, 2009: par 11.

<http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article349>.

example.<sup>39</sup> Human rights defenders were targeted in particular in order to create fear and prevent them from performing the act of defending women's rights.<sup>40</sup>

The excessive “use of force” and sexual violence against women after the election, including killings of protestors and execution sentences, was heavily emphasized in the literature, texts and web content.<sup>41</sup> “Although, the Constitution of Iran forbids the use of all forms of torture ‘for the purpose of extracting confession or acquiring information’, reports of torture and other inhuman treatment in various detention facilities in Iran were rampant.”<sup>42</sup> Regardless of the legal and peaceful methods of the Women's Movement, the state responded with what was often denoted in the materials as harsh and “illegal violence.”<sup>43</sup> The portrayal of the dichotomy between state violence and peaceful women was a common thread in the materials as well. Women were often equated as lawful while the state was performing “illegal” acts of violence and arrest against its citizenry effectively contributing to state de-legitimization.

### *Charges against women*

As part of the coordinated strategy by the state against the Women's Movement the state conducted thousands of arrests in which women were charged with being against national security,<sup>44</sup> “under the pretext of maintaining order and protecting national

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Report on the Status of Women Human Rights Defenders — April 2009.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), April 16, 2009. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/04/whrdreport/>.

<sup>41</sup> Amnesty International. “Iran: Election Contested, Repression Compounded.” Amnesty International Publications, 2009. <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/48000/mde131232009en.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Erturk, Yakin. “Iran: A ‘Bloody Stain’ on the Nation.” *openDemocracy*, November 25, 2014: par 14. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yakin-erturk/iran-%27bloody-stain%27-on-nation>.

<sup>43</sup> Khorasani, Noushin Ahmadi. “How Social Movements Can Change Iran.” *The Feminist School*, June 12, 2009. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article307>.

<sup>44</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Campaign Report on Human Rights in Iran since 12 June 2009 – Accelerating Slide into Dictatorship.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), September 20, 2009. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2009/09/report09/>.

security.”<sup>45</sup> Other charges against various women activists and lawyers included "waging war against god",<sup>46</sup> being an “agent of the west”,<sup>47</sup> “disruption of public opinion,” “propagating against the state”, and “endangering of national security.”<sup>48</sup> Others included "membership in the [organization] of Human Rights Activists in Iran,” and “assembly and collusion with the intent to commit crimes against national security.”<sup>49</sup> One activist for women’s and student’s rights, Bahareh Hedat, was arrested and handed down a 10 year prison sentence at Evin Prison's Women's Ward and charged with “insulting the Supreme Leader and the President,” as well as “acting against national security.”<sup>50</sup> One member of One Million Signatures Campaign was charged with “acting against state security, publishing lies, disturbing public opinion and contact with foreign web sites and media.”<sup>51</sup> This particular language used by the state to portray women as a threat to national security, and the accusations that they were attempting to bring about a “velvet

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Nikou, Semira N. “Iran’s Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh.” *The Iran Primer*: United States Institute of Peace, June 28, 2011.

<http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>45</sup> Mouri, Leila, and Muftah. “Iran: The Women’s Movement in the 21st Century | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures.” *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Muftah, August 2, 2010: par 3.

<http://www.wluml.org/node/6545>, <http://muftah.org/?p=221>.

<sup>46</sup> Nia, Gissou. “Iran Steps up Assault on Female Activists.” *CNN.com*, October 11, 2010: par 3.

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/10/11/nia.iranian.women/index.html>.

<sup>47</sup> Mouri, Leila, and Muftah. “Iran: The Women’s Movement in the 21st Century | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures.” *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, Muftah, August 2, 2010: par 20.

<http://www.wluml.org/node/6545>, <http://muftah.org/?p=221>.

<sup>48</sup> The Feminist School. “Women and the Presidential Elections: Iran’s New Political Culture.” *The Feminist School*, September 1, 2009: par 14. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article331>.

<sup>49</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Release Women’s Rights Activists.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), May 24, 2011: par 2. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2011/05/release-womens-rights-activists/>.

<sup>50</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “New Campaign: Ten Days With Bahareh.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), March 11, 2014: par 8. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2014/03/bahareh-campaign/>.

<sup>51</sup> Amnesty International. “Iran: Renewed Wave of Intimidation and Harassment of the Women’s Rights Activists Must End.” *Amnesty International*, November 5, 2009: par 8.

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/document/?indexNumber=mde13%2f117%2f2009&language=en>.

revolution” to overthrow the government was all part of a smear campaign against women and an attempt to validate detention and extensive prison sentences.<sup>52</sup>

### *General Violence, State Sanctioned Domestic Violence*

It should be noted that the violence was not by any means limited to women during this period. Constituents of the Green Movement and other protestors were afflicted. Extreme state violence, arrests and torture were widespread across civil society. What is particular about the violence perpetrated against women in this instance is the pre-existence of state sanctioned domestic violence (honor killings, for example) and legal violence against women (stoning laws for example), which serve to compound state violence. “Violence used to keep women in their strictly defined place in Iran is perpetuated by two main factors: (a) patriarchal values and attitudes favoring the norm of male supremacy, and (b) state-promoted institutional structure based on hard-liner interpretations of Islamic principles.”<sup>53</sup> Further, as previously established, women had been highly visible to the state in the time leading up to the elections which often made them more easily targeted than some other members of the Green Movement.

### *Effects – evidence of retraction*

The pervasive reports of violence and imprisonment throughout my research also bore evidence of their effects on the Women’s Movement. The sheer force of violence perpetrated by the state via *basiji* militia and revolutionary guards, and threat of arrest with imprisonment, torture and rape, had in fact achieved its intended effect to drive down women’s engagement in acts of resistance. This manifested in multiple ways

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<sup>52</sup> OpenDemocracy. “Iranian Women Human Rights Defenders: Challenges and Opportunities.” openDemocracy, April 14, 2015. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/leila-alikarami/challenges-faced-by-women-human-rights-defenders-in-iran>.

<sup>53</sup> Erturk, Yakin. “Iran: A ‘Bloody Stain’ on the Nation.” openDemocracy, November 25, 2014: par 7. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yakin-erturk/iran-%27bloody-stain%27-on-nation>.

including forcing activists to flee the country, move their activities underground or to go into hiding altogether. One veteran activist summarily pointed out that those active in the Movement had these three options: “to become inactive, to go to prison or to leave the country.”<sup>54</sup> In 2010 Iranian journalist and activist Leila Mouri wrote, “[m]any women activists have been arrested, imprisoned, tortured and sentenced to long prison terms, while others have left the country in fear of their safety. As a result, there has been a troubling decline in the activities and influence of the women’s movement, which some observers have considered the most potent agent for change in the country”.<sup>55</sup> Asieh Amini, a human rights activist who helped found the Campaign Against Stoning reported that “anyone who campaigns for women's rights or democracy is in great danger. Many activists are in jail. Others are scared. They are watched round the clock.” Amini has been in exile since the 2009 post-election crackdown.<sup>56</sup> In an interview with prominent activist Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh in 2010, she reported that she believed “that the women’s movement has faced a crisis of operation and so long as women’s rights activists have not had a chance to reconsider the structure, strategies, and statements of the movement, this crisis will continue.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. “Iran Human Rights Documentation Center Releases Report on Iran’s Attempt to Dismantle the Women’s Rights Movement.” Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, August 9, 2010: par 4. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/news/press-statements/3139-iran-human-rights-documentation-center-releases-report-on-iran%E2%80%99s-attempt-to-dismantle-the-women%E2%80%99s-rights-movement.html>.

<sup>55</sup> Mouri, Leila, and Muftah. “Iran: The Women’s Movement in the 21st Century | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures.” Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Muftah, August 2, 2010: par 3. <http://www.wluml.org/node/6545>, <http://muftah.org/?p=221>.

<sup>56</sup> Lehmann, Ana. “Iranian Women Are Second-Class Citizens.” DW.COM, May 27, 2013: par 9. <http://www.dw.com/en/iranian-women-are-second-class-citizens/a-16817367>.

<sup>57</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Abbasgholizadeh: Suppression Has Changed Iranian Women’s Priorities.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), March 12, 2010: par 7. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/03/abbasgholizadeh-suppression-has-changed-iranian-womens-priorities/>.

### *Hiding: a move to the Underground*

Surveillance caused many of the activists to go into hiding and underground.<sup>58</sup> The stress and pressure of being under such a heavy security lens made it harder for some activists to coordinate with each other,<sup>59</sup> and also caused the network of the Women's Movement to split into smaller groups.<sup>60</sup> Abbasgholizadeh reported that as of 2011 the One Million Signatures was still operating underground because of the government crackdown.<sup>61</sup> This move of many activists, activities and organizations to the underground is a subject to which I will return – for, as was evident from my research, this tactic also contributed to the ability of the Movement to continue to function in a slightly altered capacity.

### *Exile*

After the tenth presidential elections in Iran [2009] “there was a dramatic rise of migrations of Iranian activists in all spheres to other countries, which included women activists.”<sup>62</sup> The forced migration of many of the Women's Movement activists appears to be one of the most significant lasting negative effects of the crackdown on the Movement. In the course of my research I did not encounter one instance in which an activist who fled after the crackdown had returned to Iran. Most who left the country have set up camp in their new location and continued their activism from there in the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Jones, Rochelle. “Breaking Through the Iron Ceiling: Iran's New Government and the Hopes of the Iranian Women's Movements.” AWID, September 13, 2013. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/breaking-through-iron-ceiling-irans-new-government-and-hopes-iranian-womens>.

<sup>60</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Abbasgholizadeh: Suppression Has Changed Iranian Women's Priorities.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), March 12, 2010. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/03/abbasgholizadeh-suppression-has-changed-iranian-womens-priorities/>.

<sup>61</sup> Nikou, Semira N. “Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh.” *The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace*, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>62</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. “The Women's Movement Carries On,” March 19, 2012: par 7. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>

form of websites and international organizations, which they have joined or created.<sup>63</sup> Those who left have also become an important link in an international network for the Women's Movement inside Iran, advocating for Iranian women's demands in the global community in an effort to raise awareness.<sup>64</sup> That said, many activists reported that the loss of so many members who were forced to seek asylum elsewhere effectively contributed to the weakening of the Movement.<sup>65</sup> When asked directly what the effects of the crackdown were on the Movement, Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh stated that because of the [far reaching] suppression by paramilitary and intelligence organizations, prominent activists are "either in prison or have been forced to relocate; some of them are in refugee camps or banned from traveling abroad or have been dismissed from their jobs or universities where they were studying."<sup>66</sup>

Parvin Bakhtiarnejad, an Iranian women's rights activist, journalist and researcher argues in an article she wrote for the Feminist School "the departure of some women activists from Iran has in fact had a negative impact on the vigor and intensity of women's projects and solidarity."<sup>67</sup> There were many prominent members of the Movement who voiced similar sentiments in the texts I reviewed, and a great deal of them did so from outside the country in their locations of exile. The drain on the

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<sup>63</sup> Nikou, Semira N. "Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh." *The Iran Primer*: United States Institute of Peace, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>64</sup> Equality Now. "Interview with Soheila Vahdati Bana: Elevating the Issues of Iran's Women to the World's Stage | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, August 31, 2012. <http://www.wluml.org/news/interview-soheila-vahdati-bana-elevating-issues-iran%E2%80%99s-women-world%E2%80%99s-stage>.

<sup>65</sup> Cavagni, Elena. "The Green Movement and Avoiding Violent Opposition." *Arvesh Sevom*, August 28, 2013. <http://www.arshsevom.org/en/2013/08/the-green-movement-and-avoiding-violent-opposition/>.

<sup>66</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Abbasgholizadeh: Suppression Has Changed Iranian Women's Priorities." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), March 12, 2010: par 5. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/03/abbasgholizadeh-suppression-has-changed-iranian-womens-priorities/>.

<sup>67</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. "The Women's Movement Carries On," March 19, 2012: par 6. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

population of activists working from inside Iran's borders affected the ability of the Movement to keep an organized strength in the period during and directly after the crackdown. "Following the last presidential election...many women activists had to leave the country to avoid prison sentences. This left not only a void following their emigration, but also an atmosphere of fear."<sup>68</sup> Soheila Vahdati Bana, Iranian scholar and women's rights activist said in an interview. "Forced emigration always makes it harder for those who stay behind, reducing their strength and support while making it easier for the State to target them."<sup>69</sup> Shahla Sherkat, editor in chief of the women's magazine *Zanan-e Emrooz* (Women Today) wrote in an article that before they were shut down in 2015, it had been a struggle to find trained staff since many who worked for an earlier women's magazine, *Zanan* (Women), fled after its shutdown.<sup>70</sup>

*Shifts in Focus – Distractions from Women's Rights-centered Demands*

There are other ways in which the Movement changed in the immediate aftermath of the crackdown. One perhaps unintended consequence of state violence was a shift in focus for some activists from the apolitical to the political. Safety became a top priority after the politically motivated violence against women began. This effectively tied some constituents and groups more closely to Green Movement as some women began to participate in the "Where's My Vote" Campaign in solidarity against state violence. . The

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<sup>68</sup> Equality Now. "Interview with Soheila Vahdati Bana: Elevating the Issues of Iran's Women to the World's Stage | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, August 31, 2012: par 12. <http://www.wluml.org/news/interview-soheila-vahdati-bana-elevating-issues-iran%E2%80%99s-women-world%E2%80%99s-stage>.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid: par 21.

<sup>70</sup> Sherkat, Shahla. "Zanan-E Emrooz." Edited by Frances Hasso. Translated by Nazanin Shahrokni. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (November 1, 2015): 376–79. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3142625>.

concern was that this shift [at the time] sidelined women-specific demands.<sup>71</sup> Again,

Abbasgholizadeh below:

But in my opinion women's first priority at this time, especially in face of the severe suppression of people and Green Movement activists, is that many people have abandoned their efforts to change the laws and have moved toward fighting the politically violent confrontations, causing a large number of women's rights activists to become active in human rights organizations.<sup>72</sup>

Further, since 2009 the focus shifted to the status of female political prisoners and daily crackdowns on those still inside the country. The growing focus on political violence is exemplified by the expansion of attempts to stop state violence from local courts to the international arena.<sup>73</sup> In terms of demands, including gender-specific ones, the focus is greatly concentrated on releasing political prisoners from jail.<sup>74</sup>

The violence of the 2009 crackdown had succeeded in stopping the Women's Coalition demands from proceeding, effectively suppressing demands women were making in the political realm.<sup>75</sup> The shift in focus to Green Movement is the subject of much debate, as many have joined Green Movement to further democracy, and many activists worried that this would come at the expense of women's demands.<sup>76</sup> I will examine other ways in which the Movement has shifted or adjusted in the next section, as

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<sup>71</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Abbasgholizadeh: Suppression Has Changed Iranian Women's Priorities." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), March 12, 2010. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2010/03/abbasgholizadeh-suppression-has-changed-iranian-womens-priorities/>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid: par 9.

<sup>73</sup> Nikou, Semira N. "Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh." *The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace*, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>74</sup> Gender Equality for Iran website. "Iran: WLUML Supports Call for Solidarity: Freedom and Gender Equality in Iran | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." *Women Living Under Muslim Laws*, January 27, 2010. <http://www.wluml.org/node/5902>.

<sup>75</sup> Shojayee, Mansureh. "Women Continue Struggle for Rights Despite Barriers." *Rooz Online*, December 12, 2014. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/women-continue-struggle-for-rights-despite-barriers.html>.

<sup>76</sup> Nikou, Semira N. "Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh." *The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace*, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

this is an important characteristic of the Women's Movement in Iran – the ability to adapt to current political modes.

### *A Protracted Crackdown*

In a report released by Amnesty International in 2010 on the status of the situation in Iran one year after the crackdown, it is evident that the crackdown was persisting. The report covers torture and confessions, poor prison conditions, rape and sexual abuse, violence, trials, impacts, impunity and life in exile – all still occurring in high numbers one year later.<sup>77</sup> Neither had the situation improved for women; there was much evidence in the readings that the government was increasingly targeting women.<sup>78</sup> Inequality was reportedly worse after 2009<sup>79</sup> and there was increased discrimination in 2010.<sup>80</sup> “The regime continue[d] to systematically target the Women's Movement, whose leading campaigners [were] being silenced, imprisoned and exiled in increasing numbers.”<sup>81</sup> When Leila Aikarami, a human rights lawyer from Tehran was asked in an interview how the post-election unrest had impacted the One Million Signatures Campaign, she replied “There are more restrictions on women now and it is really wrong. Now everything is considered political and everything is going to be ‘a threat to national security.’”<sup>82</sup>

According to Parvin Bakhtimejad, discrimination and general conditions for women had

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<sup>77</sup> Amnesty International. “From Protest to Prison: Iran One Year After the Election.” London, UK: Amnesty International Publications, 2010. <https://www.amnestyusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/mde130622010en.pdf>.

<sup>78</sup> Nia, Gissou. “Iran Steps up Assault on Female Activists.” CNN.com, October 11, 2010. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/10/11/nia.iranian.women/index.html>.

<sup>79</sup> Nikou, Semira N. “Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh.” The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>80</sup> Gender Equality for Iran website. “Iran: WLUML Supports Call for Solidarity: Freedom and Gender Equality in Iran | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures.” Women Living Under Muslim Laws, January 27, 2010. <http://www.wluml.org/node/5902>.

<sup>81</sup> Nia, Gissou. “Iran Steps up Assault on Female Activists.” CNN.com, October 11, 2010: par 16. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/10/11/nia.iranian.women/index.html>.

<sup>82</sup> New Internationalist Correspondent. “One in One Million.” New Internationalist, October 22, 2009: par 12. . <https://newint.org/features/special/2009/10/22/leila-alikarami>.

gotten worse, but also social pressures, veiling and dress code issues, access to education, and labor was more restricted.<sup>83</sup> Leila Alikarami wrote,

Unfortunately, those who prefer to stay in the country and continue their struggles under the current political situation have no platform to voice their demands, and no space to freely carry out their peaceful activities. Although they have reorganized and changed strategies to be able to continue their tasks, state repression has had a negative impact on their activities.<sup>84</sup>

***Theme 3 - The Women's Movements' adaptive and creative strategy; the Women's Movement's experience with activism and demand making in periods of political repression has born out adaptability and creativity, enabling the Movement to continue performing acts of contention and rebellion in new and creative ways, including individual and everyday acts***

As discussed in the last section there were several key ways the Movement shifted in the aftermath of the crackdown. One of the overarching themes that emerged from the texts I reviewed, was that these effects—going underground and a reduction in overt, formal, organized public forms of protest, were actually demonstrative of the capacity of the Women's Movement to negotiate periods of repression by employing adaptive and creative methods. The Movement, which has a substantial history of dealing with state repression and crackdowns, has as a result developed a varying repertoire of tools in order to survive these periods. Decades of being forced to fight for legal, social and economic rights contributed to the growing numbers in the Movement, as Nasim Sartabandi explains “[o]ur attempts to defend our rights led to our having a larger

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<sup>83</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. “The Women’s Movement Carries On,” March 19, 2012. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

<sup>84</sup> OpenDemocracy. “Iranian Women Human Rights Defenders: Challenges and Opportunities.” OpenDemocracy, April 14, 2015: par 7. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/leila-alikarami/challenges-faced-by-women-human-rights-defenders-in-iran>.

presence as activists.”<sup>85</sup> But this experience has also ultimately equipped the Movement with the ability to navigate tumultuous episodes of backlash by the state— notwithstanding some amount of detriment—but so that the Movement is able to survive, and not only that, maintain some level of activism.

The Movement, prior to the 2009 elections, had developed strategies for coping with limited public space for activism. Susan Tahmasebi of One Million Signatures Campaign describes methods for coping in 2008:

As the space for our activism has become limited because of security pressures, we have identified other strategies for getting our message out. We have a website, where activists can write about their activities and discuss issues of importance to them. We have published several books on the Campaign. We conduct regular trainings on legal issues, train volunteers, hold seminars and conferences. We have increasingly been using the arts to reach out the public and our members have organized a series of street plays to raise awareness of the public toward our demands.<sup>86</sup>

These coping mechanisms were in place before the elections of 2009, demonstrating that women were extremely experienced in diverting action when options for activism were becoming less optimal. Throughout the data set there was a resounding recurrence of accounts of women’s self-redirection, reflective of the “resilience and adaptability of women's groups in Iran as they continue to challenge the state's monopoly on the women's rights narrative.”<sup>87</sup>

Knowing how to negotiate the “red lines” in the process of interacting with the state, and knowing when to pull back as a measure of preservation is a technique the

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<sup>85</sup> Tavaana “Interview with Nasim Sarabandi.” Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/interview-nasim-sarabandi>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>86</sup> Amnesty International. “Progress towards Women’s Rights in Iran.” Amnesty International, September 1, 2008: par 1. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2008/09/progress-towards-women-s-rights-iran-20080901/>.

<sup>87</sup> Begum, Rothna. “Challenging Iran’s Women’s Rights Narrative.” Human Rights Watch, Accessed through Women Living Under Muslim Laws, March 25, 2015: par 9. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/25/challenging-irans-womens-rights-narrative>.

Movement has acquired from experience.<sup>88</sup> This practice is something the Women's Movement had been employing prior to the 2009 elections—trying to carefully balance their public engagement by pushing the envelope but also staying aware of line stepping in order to avoid severe backlash. In more extreme moments of state oppression, instead of engaging the state directly in demand making, the Movement has demonstratively redirected its activity and energy to alternative spaces and forms of protest.

### *Public Protest in the Aftermath*

It is important to point out that formal and informal public protest (by women) did continue to take place after the crackdown. State violence and mass incarceration of women activists drew many women to public outcry, which took the form of sit-ins and other public gatherings, statements and letters to political offices, media and parliament. The Mothers of Laleh Park (Mourning Mothers) for example, who after the crackdown began to gather publicly on a weekly basis to silently protest the violence and mass arrests of the protestors. “Every Saturday they gather peacefully and every Saturday the police attack, beat, and arrest them. This excessive violence and repression by the government has sadly become routine in Iran – but has not deterred the Mourning Mothers. Courageously, they are defending their human rights and, ultimately, those of women everywhere.”<sup>89</sup> Another example of public protest was the use of International Women's Day to gather in 2010, which had been a historic marker for women to congregate in solidarity of rights campaigning. Although authorities deployed their

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<sup>88</sup> Sherkat, Shahla. “Zanan-E Emrooz.” Edited by Frances Hasso. Translated by Nazanin Shahrokni. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (November 1, 2015): 376–79. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3142625>.

<sup>89</sup> Ebadi, Shirin. “The Brutal Crackdowns Only Make Iran's Women Stronger.” *The Guardian*, June 8, 2010: par 8., sec. Opinion. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jun/08/brutal-crackdown-iran-women-protest>.

paramilitary forces and Revolutionary Guards to stamp out the gathering, women persisted in celebrating the day in any way they could.

Of course, as mentioned, violence against women became an important, if not the number one point of outcry and protest in the aftermath of the elections. Safety for women continued to feature prominently in the years after the elections, as conservative hardliners continue to institute policies that instigate both state and social violence against women. In 2013 for example, the state issued tightened restrictions for women under a new morality code, which led to a series of public acid attacks against women seen as being in violation of the new measures. There is a sense amongst many women and activists that if they cannot first be safe, and free of violence, they cannot continue to advocate for themselves in other demands.<sup>90</sup> So, in spite of the ongoing crackdown in 2009, women continued to issue announcements and declarations, hold round tables, make speeches and write articles condemning and campaigning against the violence and executions of political prisoners.<sup>91</sup>

However, the frequency and range of public contention in this period was evidently reduced. Sources from the content in the research report retraction in the assertion of legal rights demands in the public view and in the political venue. The demand-oriented style of the 2009 Women's Coalition for Demands, requesting to sign the CEDAW and to make constitutional revision to discriminatory law, was summarily brought to a halt. The debilitating violence affected a reduction of women's direct demands of the state for legal changes. Instead, issues of safety and imprisonment rose to

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<sup>90</sup> Vahidmanesh, Parvaneh. "We Won't Be Silenced: Iranian Women's Demands in Three Episodes." Payvand News (source Radio Zameneh), March 9, 2015. <http://www.payvand.com/news/15/mar/1052.html>.

<sup>91</sup> Shojaee, Mansoureh. "A Journey to the Seven Loveless Realms of Violence on the Anniversary of Universal Day to Stop Violence against Women." The Feminist School, December 7, 2009. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article349>.

the forefront because of the immediate need for their redress. Peaceful campaigns for constitutional reform became difficult to continue to deploy while women were being beaten, killed, imprisoned, tortured, raped and ultimately chased out of the country.

### *Spatial shifts*

In this period of repression the Women's Movement characteristically adapted to the closed political environment by shifting spatially, tactically, and topically. This next section covers observations found in my data that provide examples of such shifts. I turn first to ways in which the Movement shifted spatially, to the underground, online, abroad, and into rural territories of Iran.

### *Underground*

As established, the Movement shifted much of its activity underground or went into hiding. In doing so, the shift served as a measure of self-preservation. Because women had many times in the years prior shifted to secret and covert operations when the government sought to repress them, they already had the experience necessary to make this shift. Activist Nasim Sarabandi explains "repression went on systematically. We grew up in an environment where we learned to conduct our activism half openly and half in secret."<sup>92</sup>

Avoiding surveillance and arrest by keeping off the radar, activists and groups could continue their work without being completely inhibited. Many women's groups who remained intact in this period went out of their way to avoid the media in an effort to keep a low profile, thereby staying off the government radar.<sup>93</sup> Gatherings and

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<sup>92</sup> Tavaana "Interview with Nasim Sarabandi." Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/interview-nasim-sarabandi>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>93</sup> Equality Now. "Interview with Soheila Vahdati Bana: Elevating the Issues of Iran's Women to the World's Stage | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws,

celebrations, such as International Women's Day, were moved from public venues to individuals' private homes when government forces swarmed the streets to quash them.<sup>94</sup> Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh in fact makes the claim that the Movement's activity increased after the crackdown, but that members and organizations functioned in secret or underground by spreading "information through social media and various other networks."<sup>95</sup> One Million Signatures reported that they could no longer meet openly in this period. The danger was too great for public meetings and so instead they met in private garages where they conducted debates and workshops.<sup>96</sup> Post-2009 women "had to live in secret in order to survive and continue to be effective."<sup>97</sup>

### *Online*

A huge factor enabling the Movement to operate through underground channels was Internet and social media. Technology and Internet were already greatly utilized by the Women's Movement, and it was through these established networks that activists and organizations made a natural diversion. The Internet came to be a space to vent anger, and to continue to organize and publish articles and essays on a wide variety of women's issues. The Internet was also used to inform the outside world of the experiences of women inside the country and to raise awareness for the violence they were experiencing:

During the summer of 2009, when the regime opened fire on street demonstrators, hundreds of women gathered every Saturday at Laleh Park in Tehran to protest against the killings. Iranian women used the Internet to outline their demands, asking for the violence to cease, political prisoners to be freed, and the culprits to be tried and punished. This movement was

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August 31, 2012. <http://www.wluml.org/news/interview-soheila-vahdati-bana-elevating-issues-iran%E2%80%99s-women-world%E2%80%99s-stage>.

<sup>94</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. "The Women's Movement Carries On," March 19, 2012.

<http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

<sup>95</sup> Nikou, Semira N. "Iran's Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh." *The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace*, June 28, 2011: par 10.

<http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>96</sup> Tavaana "Interview with Nasim Sarabandi." Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/interview-nasim-sarabandi>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

welcomed by Iranians in exile, and in response, various groups were formed abroad to support the activists inside the country. These organizations still remain engaged throughout the world.<sup>98</sup>

Protests continued via social media and allowed women's organizations and human rights activists both inside Iran and in the Diaspora to organize mass protests using Facebook. It also allowed women inside Iran to put international pressure on the IRI by calling on the global human rights community to take action against Iran.<sup>99</sup> Websites were formed to support CSOs like the Feminist School, which was filtered more than 20 times, but could be set up again under a new address each time.<sup>100</sup> Women's magazines published online, allowing them to rebuild under a new address and name when the government shut their sites down.<sup>101</sup> Outrage over crackdowns on dress code could be expressed over Facebook and Twitter, and women could find networks of solidarity regarding issues related to the *hijab*. *My Stealthy Freedom*,<sup>102</sup> is an online movement founded on Facebook by an Iranian woman, Masih Alinejad, who fled Iran after the crackdown. Extremely popular, this site is a forum for women inside Iran to discuss their desire for the right to choose what to wear, and to post pictures of themselves scarf-less.<sup>103</sup> The Feminist School Website was another online venue for discussion, debate, news and articles on women's issues. "Women activists published various reports in media and social networks discussing and evaluating the women's

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<sup>98</sup> Baradaran, Monireh. "Mothers of Khavaran Lead the Cause to Seek Justice: Keynote Speech of Amnesty International USA Western Regional Conference 2011: par 1." Translated by Laleh Gillani. Justice For Iran, August 30, 2013. <https://justice4iran.org/publication/articles/>

<sup>99</sup> Parsa, Fariba. "OP-ED: How Women's Rights Are Linked to U.S.-Iran Negotiations." *IPS Inter Press Services News Agency*. November 1, 2013. <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/11/op-ed-how-womens-rights-are-linked-to-u-s-iran-negotiations/>.

<sup>100</sup> The Feminist School. "The Feminist School's Website Was Filtered for the 18th Time." The Feminist School, October 7, 2010. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article400>.

<sup>101</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Managing Editor of Banned Women's Publication Hopes for Reversal of Decision." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), April 27, 2015. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/04/shahla-sherkat-women-publication/>.

<sup>102</sup> Gray, Lucinda Homa. "Making Waves: Masih Alinejad." *New Internationalist*, July 1, 2015. <https://newint.org/columns/makingwaves/2015/07/01/making-waves-masih-alinejad>.

<sup>103</sup> <http://mystealthyfreedom.net/en/>

movement and the effects of the disputed 2009 presidential elections.”<sup>104</sup>

### *Rural Areas*

Part of the mission of the One Million Signatures Campaign was to utilize an anti-elitist, grass-roots style, horizontal structure. One method for building horizontally was through efforts to expand the Campaign outside Tehran to other cities for training, educational seminars and recruitment, and then into more rural areas. Their strategy was to educate and discuss women’s issues with recruits and signatories, and their tactic was to avoid hierarchical, centralized structures in order to 1. Keep from being crushed if the center was taken out, and 2. Be inclusive of a diverse population of women, and 3. To educate and bring discussion to places these issues may not have been openly debated. “During the post-2009 election period, One Million Signatures Campaign activity has become less intense and less publicized. Nonetheless, Campaign members have sought to strengthen the movement by recruiting activists who became active in the aftermath of the 2009 election.”<sup>105</sup>

There was a strong link to gains in rural communities for the Women’s Movement in the post-2009 election and crackdown. One Million Signatures continued to focus on rural communities during this time for the very fact that they were further from Tehran and more off radar than the capital and major cities.<sup>106</sup> This activism often took the form of “identifying and documenting gender issues in rural areas, such as child marriage,

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<sup>104</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. “The Women’s Movement Carries On,” March 19, 2012: par 4.

<http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Tavaana “One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran.” Tavaana. Par 17.

<https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed Thursday, June 7, 2018.

<sup>106</sup> Equality Now. “Interview with Soheila Vahdati Bana: Elevating the Issues of Iran’s Women to the World’s Stage | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures.” Women Living Under Muslim Laws, August 31, 2012. <http://www.wluml.org/news/interview-soheila-vahdati-bana-elevating-issues-iran%E2%80%99s-women-world%E2%80%99s-stage>.

genital mutilation, sex trade and forced immigration, prostitution and short term marriage.”<sup>107</sup> Other women and activists chose to focus on certain types of activism that was less charged, but that still helped women – and this took form as charity, work with children and environmental work in rural areas.<sup>108</sup> There has also been an interesting development in terms of political gains for women in rural areas in recent years. Fed up with poor economic circumstances and inefficient local governance, women have stepped up to the challenge in rural communities, and are making significant gains in elections for cities council on a countrywide scale. “Record numbers of women won seats in local elections four years ago [2009], and many are hoping to repeat that achievement this time round [2013]....the involvement of women on local councils has made an impact and it is here that they are clearly able to make a difference.”<sup>109</sup> Women have emerged in rural areas to campaign for elected office in order to “strengthen the position of women in society.”<sup>110</sup>

#### *Exile – Forced Migration and Remote Activism*

"During the following two years, many of the campaign activists had to leave the country, but continued to publicize human rights violations in Iran through the media, civic associations, and international organizations."<sup>111</sup> There is an extremely strong international Diaspora community for the Iranian Women’s Movement, and the community has continued to do what work it can to advocate for women from outside the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid: par 10.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Rahimpour, Rana. “Could Women Decide Iran’s next President?” *BBC News*, May 12, 2017: par 30. sec. Middle East. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-39885095>.

<sup>110</sup> Esfandiari, Golnaz. “In Remote Iranian Province, Women Make Gains At Ballot Box.” *RadioFreeEurope/RadioLiberty*, May 26, 2017: par 13. <https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-elections-women-make-gains-sistan-baluchistan/28510306.html>.

<sup>111</sup> Tavaana “One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran.” Tavaana: par 26.

<https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>.

Accessed June 7, 2018.

country. With so many prominent members forced into exile in 2009, they have continued their leadership roles by raising awareness with the global human rights community by opening new and joining existing CSOs, creating websites, and organizing protests. While there is some debate within the Movement on the value of utilizing outside and international support, for the reason that it gives the state fodder to make accusations of foreign collusion, many still see the value in pushing awareness from the local to the international stage in order to put pressure on the IRI to hold to international standards for women's and human rights. Below activist Mansooreh Shojayi comments on the dynamics for activism in exile:

In response to a question on the effect of these migrations on the women's movement and activists, women's issues Ms Shojayi said that "the movement for change in Iran is carried out through activists in Iran while efforts from outside the country usually take the form of support and publicity."<sup>112</sup>

### *Hot Topics*

Topical shifts and discursive shifts were among the various ways in which the Movement made adaptive turns after the crackdown. As fore-mentioned, issues of political prisoners and state violence became prominent, perhaps even dominant topics and subjects of campaigns directly after the crackdown began in 2009. Also, I touched earlier upon the issue of some women shifting their activism efforts from women-centered demands to democratic and participatory rights, by joining in with the Green Movement. While some women expressed great concerns for the loss of focus to women's demands in this shift, others saw it as beneficial to the Movement in that it works to generally elevate the focus on human rights, which is inclusive of women's rights. "The growing quest for democracy is finally becoming intertwined with women's

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<sup>112</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. "The Women's Movement Carries On," March 19, 2012: par 9. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

rights. This is indicative of a paradigm shift in Iran’s political culture and intellectual discourse.”<sup>113</sup>

Three other topics featured prominently in my research as areas receiving much focus for activism and focus in the news both inside and outside Iran. Dress code, (particularly the issue of forced *hijab*), women’s participation in sports and attending sports events, and finally parliament—were all frequently mentioned in the materials as points of contention, discursive hot buttons, and issues at which women directed their agency and action. These issues were already points of contention well before the election, but particularly the dress code and sports were unrelenting issues that seemed to garner even more energy from women on both a formal and informal level after the election and crackdown, as both subjects for campaign and for daily, individual, rebellion and activism. It became clear as I examined my data set that daily, individual and informal activism were an important part of the apparent adaptability and creativity of the Women’s Movement.

### *Hijab and Dress Code*

The issue of the dress code and the *hijab* is a very big one, with complicated factors, and a whole paper could easily be dedicated to this subject alone. I will include a few key pieces of information on this subject; the main objective is to highlight the fact that it remained a hot button issue for women after the crackdown, never relenting as a focal point in women’s activism, and as an avenue for women to show resistance and express agency. The subject receives frequent mention in my materials and serves as a

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<sup>113</sup> The Feminist School. “Women and the Presidential Elections: Iran’s New Political Culture.” The Feminist School, September 1, 2009: par 28. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article331>.

prime example of how women carry out creative, individual and informal forms of activism.

When women and CSOs talk about the issue of forced *hijab*, they often couch the subject within a "rights" discursive frame, as a violation of the “natural rights” of women and girls. Such violations occur in the work place, at school, and by way of harassment by morality police and incursions of violence by other citizens and the state. Forced *hijab* often spurs violent encounters between women and society in Iran. Women have been deprived of driving, traveling, access to medical services, structural and recreational facilities, and promotions, and experienced expulsion, lashing, imprisonment and fines.<sup>114</sup> Harassment and state violence over this issue alone has caused many women to flee the country.<sup>115</sup> That said, women continue to find ways to combat these harsh social and political measures. “Iranian women’s opposition to *hijab* has never dissipated. Their rebellion against observing *hijab* laws in its entirety continues on. Arrest and other forms of state violence have failed to force the masses to accept the policies and practice of *hijab* as intended by the Islamic Republic of Iran.”<sup>116</sup> Forms of rebellion and agency on the subject of dress code are vast and widespread; letting hair emerge from the front end of the veil is the most commonplace practice. Annual cycles of spring crackdown are also commonplace, when scarves become smaller and looser and there is inevitable backlash

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<sup>114</sup> Justice For Iran. “Thirty-Five Years of Forced Hijab: The Widespread and Systematic Violation of Women’s Rights in Iran,” Justice For Iran, March 1, 2014. <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Hejab-Report-JFI-English.pdf>.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid (13).

from the “morality police.”<sup>117</sup> I witnessed this myself when I was in Iran in April of 2008.

Another example of resistance to the dress code is the tactic where women have taken to wearing men’s clothes in public either as a disguise to attend sports arenas (as women are not permitted to enter sports arenas for events), or simply as a way of circumventing the dress code.<sup>118</sup> Many who travel outside the country to attend conferences or for international events choose to leave their *hijabs* off, even when they are high profile. There was an incident with a young woman who was banned from the Iran Chess Federation when she chose not to wear her *hijab* for a chess match she participated in, in Israel.<sup>119</sup> One prominent human rights lawyer, Nasarin Soutoudeh,<sup>120</sup> who had been banned from traveling out of Iran, filmed herself giving an acceptance speech for a human rights award without wearing a hijab. She was summarily fined for not wearing her *hijab* in the video.<sup>121</sup>

Documenting the desire to have the right to choose whether to wear *hijab* is commonly practiced as well. Through Facebook and YouTube and other sites on the Internet, women post pictures of themselves or take videos without their scarves on. There was one very popular video of five or six young people dancing to Pharrell

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<sup>117</sup> Kenyon, Peter. “Springtime In Iran Means The ‘Morality Police’ Are Out In Force.” NPR.org, March 3, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/05/03/476511439/springtime-in-iran-means-the-morality-police-are-out-in-force>.

<sup>118</sup> The World Staff. “A Cunning Plan to Break the Ban on Women at Iranian Soccer Matches.” Public Radio International, February 15, 2017. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-02-15/cunning-plan-break-ban-women-iranian-soccer-matches>.

Human Rights Watch. “Women’s Rights in Iran.” Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2015. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/28/womens-rights-iran>.

<sup>119</sup> ChessBase. “Iran Bans Teenage Chessplayers For ‘harming National Interests.’” Chess News, February 21, 2017. <https://en.chessbase.com/post/iran-bans-teenage-chessplayers-for-harming-national-interests>.

<sup>120</sup> The Feminist School. “Defiant Words from Jailed Lawyer on Hunger Strike: Nasarin Sotoudeh.” The Feminist School, December 22, 2010. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article420>.

<sup>121</sup> Batha, Emma. “Fed up with Iran’s Draconian Dress Code, Women Flout the Rules - Report.” Thomson Reuters Foundation News: Accessed through Women Living Under Muslim Laws, March 7, 2014. <http://news.trust.org/item/20140307181906-lsv4j/>.

Williams’ “Happy” in which not only are the girls’ heads uncovered, but they also wearing skirts and t-shirts, all of which are violations of the dress code (which not only requires the head to be covered, but also for women to wear a long coat, covering their figures—often referred to as a *manteau*). The video quickly incurred the wrath of the government and all of the participants were arrested for “illicit relations.”<sup>122</sup> My Stealthy Freedom, “in one year "attract[ed] nearly a million likes and the international recognition of a human rights award from the Geneva Summit for Human Rights and Democracy.”<sup>123</sup> Creator Alinejad believes that in a country where media is state-owned, social media provides a “platform to have never had a serious debate about their rights.”<sup>124</sup> Women in Iran are taking this opportunity very seriously, and finding their voice and agency within the freedoms of the Internet and social media. One interview I read told the story of a woman who posted a picture of herself without a scarf on My Stealthy Freedom, and whose husband slapped her for it. She continued to express that regardless it was worth it to her, that freedom of *hijab* is the single most important issue to women as a gateway to other freedoms. She believes if she doesn't gain the ability to wear what she wants none of the other discriminatory laws will be rectified.<sup>125</sup> These forums on social media also give the opportunity to raise awareness about the dangers of forced *hijab*—for women to tell their stories and bring to the forefront the fact that forced *hijab* can be dangerous for women as it often causes violence against women and young girls.

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<sup>122</sup> Human Rights Watch. “Women’s Rights in Iran.” Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2015. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/10/28/womens-rights-iran>.

<sup>123</sup> Gray, Lucinda Homa. “Making Waves: Masih Alinejad.” New Internationalist, July 1, 2015: par 1. <https://newint.org/columns/makingwaves/2015/07/01/making-waves-masih-alinejad>.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid: par 12.

<sup>125</sup> Vahidmanesh, Parvaneh. “We Won’t Be Silenced: Iranian Women’s Demands in Three Episodes.” Payvand News (source Radio Zameneh), March 9, 2015. <http://www.payvand.com/news/15/mar/1052.html>.

Smaller, everyday actions performed *en mass* have elevated the cause for choice of clothing for women in Iran; taking for example, a fad in 2016 where women were wearing *manteaus* with big words in English printed on the back with phrases playing on the British slogan “Keep Calm, Carry On”, (such as “Keep Calm, I’m Queen”.)<sup>126</sup> This seemingly benign act of wearing these garments are a way for women to demonstrate agency, to express themselves by inserting Western culture into the frame of the forced dress code. This small everyday type of act brought on the ire of the authorities who attempted to ban these *manteaus* and accused those sporting them of colluding with foreign enemies in waging a “soft war” or cultural war against the IRI.<sup>127</sup>

Another example of Iranian women employing smaller everyday actions of rebellion, which demonstrate agency, is the utilization of a new phone app that allows women to evade the morality police:

Earlier in February, an anonymous team of Iranian app developers came up with a solution to help young fashion conscious Iranians avoid the morality police with a phone app called “Gershad”...the app allows users to “report” the location where morality police are patrolling and warn unwary passers-by...the creators said they were fed up with being “humiliated” for what they wear.<sup>128</sup>

It is notable as well that the creators were women, developing and sharing technology to fight back against the Islamic dress code.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran. “Iran’s Conservatives Lash Out at New Female Fashion Trends.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), July 21, 2016. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/07/women-dress-code/>.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

<sup>128</sup> Monitoring, B. B. C. “Iranians Vent Anger at New Police Morality Unit.” *BBC News*, April 19, 2016: par 13., sec. Middle East. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-36086992>.

<sup>129</sup> Kenyon, Peter. “Springtime In Iran Means The ‘Morality Police’ Are Out In Force.” NPR.org, March 3, 2016. <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2016/05/03/476511439/springtime-in-iran-means-the-morality-police-are-out-in-force>.

## *Sports*

As mentioned above, women will dress as men in order to attend stadium game events as they are not permitted to attend. Once they smuggle themselves (if successful) into the stadium, women have also been known to video themselves at the games, which then get posted online. These videos will often go viral, and serve as a method to act individually and simultaneously show solidarity with the Women's Rights Movement.<sup>130</sup>

The issues of dress code and sports are intertwined, and dressing up as men to attend a sports match enables women to resist two areas of subjugation.<sup>131</sup> There was a particular incident recently that caused public outcry, when eight Iranian women were arrested for dressing up as men, with "closely cropped hair and caps to hide their faces" in order to attend a soccer match.<sup>132</sup>

With all of the clothing and head covering women can find it difficult to perform in many sports, but this is once again an example where women take the opportunity to find creative "work-arounds" in order to be able to express agency and adaptability. Many women will choose to participate in sports where they have more freedom of clothing. For example, rock climbing up in the mountains away from the morality police, allows women to dress more freely, and for them to climb together with men, two

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<sup>130</sup> The World Staff. "A Cunning Plan to Break the Ban on Women at Iranian Soccer Matches." Public Radio International, February 15, 2017. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-02-15/cunning-plan-break-ban-women-iranian-soccer-matches>.

<sup>131</sup> Hoodfar, Homa, ed. *Women's Sport as Politics in Muslim Contexts*. First Edition 2015. London, UK: Women Living Under Muslim Laws, 2015. <http://www.wluml.org/sites/wluml.org/files/Hoodfar-Women%E2%80%99s%20Sport%20as%20Politics%20in%20Muslim%20Contexts%20-WLUML%20site-fin2.compressed.pdf>.

<sup>132</sup> The World Staff. "A Cunning Plan to Break the Ban on Women at Iranian Soccer Matches." Public Radio International, February 15, 2017: par 1. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-02-15/cunning-plan-break-ban-women-iranian-soccer-matches>.

elements that would be forbidden if using a rock climbing wall at a gym.<sup>133</sup> Or women choose sports that are not as restricted by the clothing, like archery and skiing. For skiing, similar to rock climbing, this can be done away from cities where they are away from government purview.<sup>134</sup> And “women do archery because it is practical, they can wear *hijab* easily because of lack of physical movement, and mixed crowds are allowed in this sport.”<sup>135</sup>

Women also find work-arounds for the stadium ban, which is really about preventing men and women from gathering in mixed company. Women will instead go to tea bars and cafes and restaurants where the games are being playing on TV and gather with the men of their community there<sup>136</sup>. Or they will go to the practice session of Iran’s national soccer team, and watch from behind the fence at the Azadi sports complex. “They often buy tickets on the black market, or use their male relatives ID numbers to make purchases online.”<sup>137</sup> Though these may be relatively small acts, they are emblematic of the attitude and the will of the women in Iran to be able to participate, and to have the freedom to enjoy the same recreational activities of men; and it is representative of the small, everyday forms of protest they employ. The issue of the stadium ban is prominent on social media where women debate the issue and engage in dialogue over the stadium ban on Twitter with hashtag #LetWomenGoToStadiums.

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<sup>133</sup> StarTribune. “Women’s Rock Climbing Gains Foothold in Iran.” StarTribune.com, February 2, 2016. <http://www.startribune.com/ap-photos-women-s-rock-climbing-gains-foothold-in-iran/367177851/>.

<sup>134</sup> Erdbrink, Thomas. “Iran to Women: No Skiing Unless with a Male Guardian.” Washington Post, November 10, 2011. [https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/iran-to-women-no-skiing-unless-with-a-male-guardian/2011/11/10/gIQAQ878M\\_blog.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/blogpost/post/iran-to-women-no-skiing-unless-with-a-male-guardian/2011/11/10/gIQAQ878M_blog.html).

<sup>135</sup> Global Post, Iran Correspondent. “Iran: With a Bow and Arrow, a Little Bit of Freedom.” Public Radio International. October 8, 2010: par 5. <https://www.pri.org/stories/2010-10-08/iran-bow-and-arrow-little-bit-freedom>.

<sup>136</sup> Cohen, Claire. “World Cup Ban? Iran’s Women Just Don’t Care.” The Telegraph, Access through Women Living Under Muslim Laws, June 26, 2014. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/10927470/World-Cup-ban-Irans-women-just-dont-care.html>.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid: par 12.

Participants in the debate include women's rights groups as well as celebrities and every day women.<sup>138</sup>

Women were recently banned from riding bikes in public in Tehran, and the reaction was a force of defiance. Women began posting pictures of themselves riding bicycles all over Tehran on social media and on Twitter with the hashtag “#IranianWomenLoveCycling.”<sup>139</sup> Another young woman fought sports bans by petitioning with the Ministry of Sports over the right to train in motocross, and continued to pursue permission until she succeeded in acquiring the legal right.<sup>140</sup>

Women playing and watching sports is widespread, from the “secret and underground” pursuit of Jiu-jitsu in spite of discriminatory laws<sup>141</sup> to kickboxing,<sup>142</sup> and ninjitsu. “In a country where women's rights, including what they wear, are severely curtailed many have come up with a new way of channeling their rage.”<sup>143</sup> There are also countless petitions, protests at games, sit-ins to protest the ban, and protests against the detention of some women who attempt to attend games. Well-known activists and lawyers of the Women's Movement like Shirin Ebadi and Nasarin Sotoudeh have written letters to sports organizations like FIFA and FIVB, asking them to take a stance against

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<sup>138</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Women Prevented from Attending Iran's Premier League Finale.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), May 17, 2016. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2016/05/women-staduims/>.

<sup>139</sup> Guardian Cities Staff. “‘They Said Girls Don't Ride Bikes’: Iranian Women Defy the Cycling Fatwa.” *The Guardian*, June 12, 2017, sec. Cities. <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2017/jun/12/girls-ride-bikes-iranian-women-defy-cycling-fatwa-tehran>.

<sup>140</sup> Drea Sputnik. “Dream Big: Meet the First Female Biker in the History of Iran's Motor Sports.” *Sputnik International*, March 21, 2017. <https://sputniknews.com/society/201703211051821884-first-female-biker-iran/>.

<sup>141</sup> Nguyen, Andrew. “The Secret World of Female Jiu-Jitsu Fighters in Iran.” *Broadly*, April 13, 2016. [https://broadly.vice.com/en\\_us/article/3dxx5k/the-secret-world-of-female-jiu-jitsu-fighters-in-iran](https://broadly.vice.com/en_us/article/3dxx5k/the-secret-world-of-female-jiu-jitsu-fighters-in-iran).

<sup>142</sup> Sputnik Persian. “Meet the Iranian Kick-Boxing Female Superstar (PHOTOS).” *Sputnik International*, March 14, 2017. [https://sputniknews.com/art\\_living/201703141051580653-iranian-female-kick-boxer/](https://sputniknews.com/art_living/201703141051580653-iranian-female-kick-boxer/).

<sup>143</sup> Mangan, Lucy. “Iran's Female Ninjas: Fighting for Sexual Equality.” *The Guardian*, February 19, 2012: par 1, sec. World news. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/shortcuts/2012/feb/19/irans-female-ninjas>.

the IRI for not allowing women to attend stadium games.<sup>144</sup> In 2015, 481 activists “wrote an open letter to the interior and sports ministers as well as the head of the police to support the right of women to enter stadiums in the country to watch sports events.”<sup>145</sup> One mother organized a sit-in at Evin prison to protest the protracted detention of her daughter who had attempted to attend the Iran-Italy soccer match on June 25, 2014.<sup>146</sup>

### *Parliament*

Parliament was the third most common topic of debate, contention and mobilization in the data set. Indicative of the character of the Women’s Movement, a campaign was initiated in the lead-up to the 2016 elections titled “Campaign to Change the Male-Dominated Face of Parliament.”<sup>147</sup> This Campaign is a telling example of the Movement’s adaptability and creativity, with its new strategy to simultaneously highlight the demands of women for equality while “naming and shaming candidates with a history of making sexist remarks.”<sup>148</sup> Demonstrating that the Women’s Movement is “one of the most conscious social forces” they utilize an agency laden, realistic approach to spotlight

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<sup>144</sup> Wingard, Jessie. “Iran Ignores Human Rights Campaign, Bans Women Attending Volleyball Games.” DW.COM, February 19, 2016. <http://www.dw.com/en/iran-ignores-human-rights-campaign-bans-women-attending-volleyball-games/a-19060555>.

Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Activists Ask FIFA to Intervene to End Iran’s Ban on Women in Stadiums.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), February 25, 2015. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2015/02/women-letter-fifa/>.

<sup>145</sup> Radio Zameneh. “Iran’s Interior Minister Announces Persistence of Ban on Women in Stadiums.” Payvand News (source Radio Zameneh), June 14, 2015: par 5. <http://www.payvand.com/news/15/jun/1097.html>.

<sup>146</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Sit-in by Political Prisoner’s Mother to Protest Lack of Due Process.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), October 9, 2014. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2014/10/ghavami-mother/>.

<sup>147</sup> A group of women civil society activists. “A Campaign: Towards Transforming the Male-Dominated Face of the Parliament.” Translated by Parisa Asvadi. The Feminist School, November 8, 2015. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article538>.

<sup>148</sup> Amnesty International. “Iran: Women’s Rights Activists Treated as ‘enemies of the State’ in Renewed Crackdown.” Amnesty International, October 10, 2016: par 3. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/08/iran-womens-rights-activists-treated-as-enemies-of-the-state-in-renewed-crackdown/>.

the issue of women's representation in parliament.<sup>149</sup> The goal of the Campaign is to get 50 seats in parliament filled by women committed to fighting for women's rights (not simply by women who may not be representative of women's needs and demands).<sup>150</sup> The Campaign also uses the tactic of backing their goals up with constitutional rights framing. "All citizens irrespective of their gender are protected by the law and enjoy political, economic, social and cultural rights consistent with Islamic standards."<sup>151</sup> Statements the Campaign used in demand making and to spark discourse included slogans such as "change the harsh male-dominated face to fresh multi-dimensional faces."<sup>152</sup> Another important part of the Campaign strategy was to strive to also ensure that members of the opposite sex who are elected to parliament have a record of supporting women's rights.<sup>153</sup> The Campaign includes a committee formed to help women candidates by giving them assistance from the civil sector, work-shopping, writing bills for proposals on equal rights, engaging with political parties in order to network, and familiarization activities to introduce them to the public.<sup>154</sup> The committee worked to "name and shame" current and hopeful members by tracking the candidates on their viewpoints and by interviewing their female family members.<sup>155</sup> The Campaign

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<sup>149</sup> Shojaee, Mansoureh. "Violence in Middle East and The Parliamentary Election in Iran." The Feminist School, December 11, 2015. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article539>.

<sup>150</sup> A group of women civil society activists. "A Campaign: Towards Transforming the Male-Dominated Face of the Parliament." Translated by Parisa Asvadi. The Feminist School, November 8, 2015. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article538>.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid: par 4.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, par 7.

<sup>153</sup> Golnaz, Esfandiari. "Iranian Activists Campaign To Bring More Women Into Parliament." The Feminist School, November 4, 2015. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article537>.

<sup>154</sup> A group of women civil society activists. "A Campaign: Towards Transforming the Male-Dominated Face of the Parliament." Translated by Parisa Asvadi. The Feminist School, November 8, 2015. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article538>.

<sup>155</sup> Golnaz, Esfandiari. "Iranian Activists Campaign To Bring More Women Into Parliament." The Feminist School, November 4, 2015. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article537>.

also tactfully extended the election period by announcing its own establishment early on in order to “promote the right to take part in a free election.”<sup>156</sup>

The formation of ‘changing the Iranian parliament’s male face campaign’ before the beginning of election, is a progressive and thoughtful act towards promoting the right to political participation and free election, which is a bulwark for women to stand against the region’s violent politics. Looking at the rate of violent incidents in the region, this leading campaign illustrates Iranian activities women’s wisdom over existing controversial issues.<sup>157</sup>

### *One-off, Unique and Creative Forms of Individual and Daily Acts of Protest*

What follows next are several examples of other creative and individual ways women deploy resistance and agency in Iran.

#### *Underground Boutiques*

As a method to circumvent the pitfalls of economic hardship, Iranian women have started opening underground boutiques which allow female patrons to remove their headscarves, and to mingle freely with the opposite sex. They also allow the owners, who often run the boutiques out of their own homes, to earn income they might be getting left out of in the above-board labor market due to discrimination. “These underground ‘*maisons*,’ are exhibitivite of an everyday form of protest or rebellion against a “patriarchal society where they are discouraged from working or have to struggle to secure a decent job.”<sup>158</sup> The boutiques are operated in the realm of the everyday, in society and literally in the home of female proprietors. They rely on word of mouth to be passed between many women (and men) who share a growing desire for cultural change, and utilize work-arounds such as these to play those desires out in everyday action.

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A group of women civil society activists. “A Campaign: Towards Transforming the Male-Dominated Face of the Parliament.” Translated by Parisa Asvadi. The Feminist School, November 8, 2015.

<http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article538>.

<sup>156</sup> Shojaee, Mansoureh. “Violence in Middle East and The Parliamentary Election in Iran.” The Feminist School, December 11, 2015: par 10. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article539>.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid: par 7.

<sup>158</sup> Afzal, Sara. “Iranian Women Turn to the ‘*Maison*’ for Shopping and Sanctuary.” *The Guardian*, October 2, 2013: par 3, sec. World news. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2013/oct/02/underground-boutiques-forbidden-obsession-fashion-iran>.

### *Love Letters*

After the 2009 crackdown began and many male members of the Green Movement were arrested and put into detention, their wives and girlfriends did an interesting thing; they began a campaign to publish love letters to their husbands to show support and solidarity. It began with some of the younger women, but then spread to the older generation – this unique form of protest again showing the creativity women employ in finding new ways to protest.<sup>159</sup>

### *Campaign for Prison Library*

Female political prisoners began a campaign from jail to have a library installed in prison, demonstrating active campaigning for their betterment, and their straining forward to exercise agency and use their voices.<sup>160</sup>

### *Art as a Form of Activism*

When a bill was proposed in 2011 for new pieces of legislation regarding polygamy, “giv[ing] men the right to take a second wife without the permission of the first—women opposed to the articles organized a creative campaign traveling around Iran to talk to women whose lives have been adversely affected by their husbands taking second wives.”<sup>161</sup> The campaigners asked the women with whom they reached out to, to write their story on a piece of cloth which was later sewn into a large quilt—to be presented to parliament in opposition to the bill, along with a petition with 15,000

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<sup>159</sup> OpenDemocracy. “Iranian Responses to the ‘Arab Spring’: Appropriation and Contestation.” openDemocracy, February 29, 2012. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/ziba-mir-hosseini/iranian-responses-to-%E2%80%9Carab-spring%E2%80%9D-appropriation-and-contestation>.

<sup>160</sup> New Internationalist Correspondent. “One in One Million.” New Internationalist, October 22, 2009. <https://newint.org/features/special/2009/10/22/leila-alikarami>.

<sup>161</sup> Kellogg, Amy. “Agencies Question Need for Iran’s Family Protection Bill.” Fox News, November 29, 2011: par 1. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/11/29/agencies-question-need-for-irans-family-protection-bill.html>.

signatures of women who oppose the bill.<sup>162</sup> The act of putting each woman's story into this oppositional campaign is an example of investing the individualized and personal in protest of eroding rights.

Another example of utilizing creative artistic expression in collective protest occurred in 2010 when Noushin Khorasani made bookmarks with pictures of everyday women, with a written statement on their arms protesting against violence. She made these bookmarks in commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. "She wanted to show how people, despite their different backgrounds, could support the cause. And the photographs were supposed to portray ordinary people, not celebrities or prominent figures."<sup>163</sup>

#### *Raising Mehrieh (bridal dowry)*

In the same vein, there has been a growing phenomenon in rural areas where it is common for women to require a high *mehrieh*, which is a sort of reverse dowry, where in this case the man must pay the woman before the wedding. By demanding and even bargaining for a much higher price for wedding, the woman protects herself against divorce—she will be protected financially if divorce occurs.

#### *Personal Experience Transformed to Activism*

Professor and researcher Shirin Saedi writes, "experience shows us that drawing on our private moments to make public demands has been an effective way of claiming individual and collective rights in contemporary Iran, even if it generally leaves the

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<sup>162</sup> Kellogg, Amy. "Agencies Question Need for Iran's Family Protection Bill." Fox News, November 29, 2011. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/11/29/agencies-question-need-for-irans-family-protection-bill.html>.

<sup>163</sup> Bahramirad, Shirin. "The Women We Are." The Feminist School, March 10, 2013: par 3. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article497>.

state's authoritarian structures untouched.<sup>164</sup> This kind of “privatized resistance” carried out on an individual level demonstrates ways in which women in Iran carry on daily forms of protest even when overt public forums for protest are unavailable or inaccessible.

In one woman's example of taking on a cause in order to help advocate for women's rights, she turned her personal story of grief into one of action and activism. In accordance with custody laws in Iran, she lost her child to her husband's family after he died. Now she teaches women in rural areas about prenuptial agreements and helps women advocate for their rights before they get married.<sup>165</sup>

***Theme 4 – Cultural Activism; the Movement seeks to achieve demands for rights by focusing on changing attitudes in culture and society – this work in the social realm availed the movement of the ability to continue to be active in achieving rights in the aftermath of the 2009 election***

*Women's Movement is Grassroots, Bottom-up*

Another very common adjective members of the Women's Movement use to describe themselves is as a “grass-roots”, bottom-up movement. What this focus on grass roots fueled mobilization achieves, is to allow the Movement to focus efforts on changing cultural attitudes at the street level. The Movement recognizes the need to transform the minds of everyday people who still cling to discriminatory norms, doing so by working with people in the street, in their homes and workshops to do so. Mobilizing society behind women's demands is a step to approaching the political and legislative sphere.

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<sup>164</sup> Saeidi, Shirin. “Dead-Ends and Hurt Feelings Thanks to Marital Laws in the Islamic Republic of Iran.” openDemocracy, July 16, 2014: 27. <http://www.opendemocracy.net/shirin-saeidi/deadends-and-hurt-feelings-thanks-to-marital-laws-in-islamic-republic-of-iran>.

<sup>165</sup> Vahidmanesh, Parvaneh. “We Won't Be Silenced: Iranian Women's Demands in Three Episodes.” Payvand News (source Radio Zamaneh), March 9, 2015. <http://www.payvand.com/news/15/mar/1052.html>.

This is a major strategy of the Movement, working to transform society's traditional views; to change them "gradually and impel it to modern beliefs by shifting these patterns."<sup>166</sup> In this recruitment process, the Movement works to controvert certain traditional views that dominate, including the belief that the women belong in the home only, and the sole purpose of a woman is to please the husband and children.<sup>167</sup> As soon as points of views are shifted, the Movement is able to recruit men and women in their mission to change discriminatory laws. "There have been some serious setbacks [in the Movement], but the increasing presence of women in various socio-cultural arenas has made them a formidable force for social change in Iran."<sup>168</sup>

The strategy is to apply enough pressure from a base of substantial societal backing, so that the Supreme Leader and government will be pushed by a sort of soft coercion into constitutional revision.<sup>169</sup>

Despite severe pressure imposed by the government, women human rights defenders in Iran have been largely successful in broadening their allies by taking their demands into the street, and contextualising the concept of human rights in the everyday life of those who have experienced discrimination. Therefore pressure from society, and especially from women, may eventually compel the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, and the administration of President Rouhani, to revise the Constitution and other relevant laws such as civil and criminal codes to ensure human rights for Iranian citizens.<sup>170</sup>

Beginning at the grass roots level, the Movement interacts and informs society around them of women's demands. Through face-to-face, on the street mobilization, the

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<sup>166</sup> The Feminist School. "The Main Barriers of Feminism Movement in Iran." The Feminist School, March 3, 2010: par 5. [http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id\\_article=371](http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id_article=371).

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Davachi, Azadeh. "On the Eve of 12th of June, a Historical Day for the Women Movement and the Green Movement : The Prospect of Iranian Women Movement after the Recent Uprising in the Middel East and North Africa: Interview Azadeh Davachi with Professor Ali Akbar Mahdi." The Feminist School, June 11, 2011: par 9. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article458>.

<sup>169</sup> OpenDemocracy. "Will Iran's New Parliament Improve Women's Rights?" openDemocracy, May 2, 2016. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/leila-alikarami/will-iran-s-new-parliament-improve-women-s-rights>.

<sup>170</sup> OpenDemocracy. "Iranian Women Human Rights Defenders: Challenges and Opportunities." openDemocracy, April 14, 2015: par 8. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/leila-alikarami/challenges-faced-by-women-human-rights-defenders-in-iran>.

Movement is able to draw in support. Utilizing creativity, the Movement has found a way to employ dialogue between women in Tehran and rural areas as a means of cultural activism.<sup>171</sup> "We do believe in grassroots work. We want to work with women from all around Iran. When a mother in a village treats her son and daughter differently, you should work from that stage, and I don't think it's going to happen overnight."<sup>172</sup>

The Women's Movement in Iran recognizes that it must first work to transform the hearts and minds of the people, and then by gaining power through support in society they turn their attention to parliament and government to advocate for change. "This women's activism in society and the bottom-up pressure on the parliament and the clergy have been a success story for the independent women's movement. They reflect how even the conservative parliament can be pushed toward policies favoring women."<sup>173</sup>

Women work to reach a general, widespread audience in order "to exert pressure on lawmakers and as a means to raise the awareness of society at large."<sup>174</sup> Parvin Ardalan writes:

As secular women, it is not possible for us to work through a political party. Grassroots work is better. We want to raise awareness and achieve change from the bottom to the top. This is necessary to achieve deep change. Iranian society is so patriarchal that we need structural change and a democratic women's policy for all branches of society<sup>175</sup>

The One Million Signatures Campaign, which does not believe that current laws affecting women in Iran reflect social norms, emphasizes a grass roots approach to garner

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<sup>171</sup> Kellogg, Amy. "Agencies Question Need for Iran's Family Protection Bill." Fox News, November 29, 2011. <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2011/11/29/agencies-question-need-for-irans-family-protection-bill.html>.

<sup>172</sup> New Internationalist Correspondent. "One in One Million." New Internationalist, October 22, 2009: par 12. <https://newint.org/features/special/2009/10/22/leila-alikarami>.

<sup>173</sup> Nikou, Semira N. "Women Struggle in Parliament: Interview with Fatemeh Haghghatjoo." The Iran Primer, September 20, 2011: par 24. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/sep/20/women-struggle-parliament>.

<sup>174</sup> Tavaana "One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran." Tavaana: par 22. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>175</sup> Cleveson, Jenny. "Interview with Parvin Ardalan." New Internationalist, March 1, 2011: par 6. <https://newint.org/columns/makingwaves/2011/03/01/interview-parvin-ardalan>.

support for the Iranian Women's Rights Movement for legal equality.<sup>176</sup> The Campaign aims to "back its demands with a...popular following powerful enough to make lawmakers take notice and begin discussing...legal reform with representatives from the women's rights movement."<sup>177</sup> As leadership in the group intentionally avoids grounding in elitism, they rely on grass roots momentum.

#### *Horizontal Organization, Decentralized Power*

Conscientious efforts are made to avoid an elitist, hierarchical approach to mobilization, and instead the Movement focuses on creating a horizontal structure, intended to be inclusive of a diverse group of Iranian women, and to withstand severe moments of pressure exerted by the state.<sup>178</sup> The One Million Signatures Campaign, which was built as a flat, horizontal organization with power decentralized, is structured to allow different segments to grow independently.<sup>179</sup> The effect is to reduce weakness and reliance on only a few in charge.<sup>180</sup> But also, this produces greater memberships and support in a movement that encourages the type of activism that can be performed by everyday people rather than an elitist leadership with special resources. Enrolling everyday people into the Movement contributes to the steady cultural shift.

#### *How They Do It: Dialogue and raising awareness*

Strategies for continually edging the cultural transformation along include raising public awareness about women's issues and promoting societal equality through education and direct dialogue with ordinary and diverse citizens, through campaigns,

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<sup>176</sup>Tavaana "One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran." Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid: par 20.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.

<sup>180</sup> The Feminist School. "The Iranian Women's Quest for Equality: History, Strategies, & Demands." The Feminist School, June 10, 2010. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article380>.

articles, weblogs, books, sharing research findings and art, and lobbying efforts with community leaders.<sup>181</sup> "We want to stimulate society, for people to participate and express their opinions....We want this society to think about its civil rights."<sup>182</sup> By elevating women's issues, and identifying hidden ones, a climate of gender awareness has developed in Iran, which helps to pave the way for women in society and "lay foundation for demanding equal rights."<sup>183</sup> The immediate goal then becomes less sweeping, like a revolution, but aimed at creating a more just society.<sup>184</sup> Once the public is aware of the issues and once the public develops diverse points of view, tolerance is fostered, and then attention can be more easily turned to forcing the government to address these issues.<sup>185</sup> The Women's Movement believes that a wide cross-section of society must be rolled into the conversation, and occur between and "amongst people with different religions and beliefs."<sup>186</sup>

The magazine *Zanan-e Emrooz* (Women Today) sought to do just this; cultural change through raising awareness, and discussion was a primary mission of the magazine. The magazine, whose readers are one-quarter men reached wide swaths of the country, and had the objective to make society, women and government more sensitive to

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<sup>181</sup> Amnesty International. "Progress towards Women's Rights in Iran." Amnesty International, September 1, 2008. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2008/09/progress-towards-women-s-rights-iran-20080901/>.

<sup>182</sup> Shodjaie, Mitra. "Elections in Iran: 'Clear the Path for a Woman to Become President.'" DW.COM, April 17, 2017: par 8. <http://www.dw.com/en/elections-in-iran-clear-the-path-for-a-woman-to-become-president/a-38457852>.

<sup>183</sup> Equality Now. "Interview with Soheila Vahdati Bana: Elevating the Issues of Iran's Women to the World's Stage | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws, August 31, 2012: par 7. <http://www.wluml.org/news/interview-soheila-vahdati-bana-elevating-issues-iran%E2%80%99s-women-world%E2%80%99s-stage>.

<sup>184</sup> Tavaana "Interview with Nasim Sarabandi." Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/interview-nasim-sarabandi>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>185</sup> Equality Now. "Interview with Soheila Vahdati Bana: Elevating the Issues of Iran's Women to the World's Stage | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws, August 31, 2012. <http://www.wluml.org/news/interview-soheila-vahdati-bana-elevating-issues-iran%E2%80%99s-women-world%E2%80%99s-stage>.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid: par 21.

women's issues and gender discrimination. Articles were published regarding political office, management, work, and childcare, all designed to show society women were equal to men and to encourage and empower women "to redefine their positions and roles in society."<sup>187</sup>

*Street Action, Face-to-Face*

The face-to-face "street action" describes one of the locations for transforming cultural attitudes. Noushin Khorasani of the One Million Signatures Campaign talks about the feminine need for "spaces" to express demands, where women can come out of their homes and gather in support of the Movement.

Thus, it is appropriate to "reclaim" our share of the public space by adopting a street strategy. Street strategy, which is a peaceful and gradual process to change cultural values and to make urban space more effective, materializes in various forms. This Campaign situates itself in different public spaces of the city in order to effectively utilize urban space and to make the traditionally masculine public domain more feminine. It is through the creation of such spaces in avenues, streets, housing complexes and others that women can develop short-term communication bridges among themselves.<sup>188</sup>

Street action, which can take place in city parks or crowded neighborhoods, also takes place on the doorsteps of Iranian homes by various campaigns of the Women's Movement.<sup>189</sup> One Million Signatures, which collects signatures in support of changing discriminatory laws, in fact borrowed its strategy from an old Persian poem which reads "Gaze to gaze, face to face... Going house to house, door to door...Alley to alley, and street to street."<sup>190</sup> That the approach by this group is borrowed from a poem beloved by common Iranians is in itself a tactic for reaching across the divide and appealing to

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<sup>187</sup> Sherkat, Shahla. "Zanan-E Emrooz." Edited by Frances Hasso. Translated by Nazanin Shahrokni. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 11, no. 3: 378 (November 1, 2015): 376–79. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3142625>.

<sup>188</sup> Khorasani, Noushin Ahmadi. "The 'One Million Signature Campaign': Face- to- Face, Street- to- Street." *The Feminist School*, July 23, 2008: par 8. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article205>.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid: par 17.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

fellow Iranians. Couching the Movement in terms of “friendship and camaraderie” allows women who are working to transform the cultural norms to become more palatable to society. Khorasani, who was working with men (not women) on the issue of discriminatory laws through a teaching project describes a moment when this approach demonstratively had an effect: “Through those discussions I realized that this work – just raising awareness – is important because these men were aware of these laws. Some of these men did sign the petition after the session.”<sup>191</sup>

The Women’s Movement works to arrive at a common peaceful language with the goal to foster acceptance in Iranian society, in order to bring about reform in society by instituting the practice of tolerance.<sup>192</sup> Women perform this work in homes and parks as mentioned above, but also universities, production centers, factories, health centers, religious gatherings, sports centers, and public transportation centers.<sup>193</sup> Individual and everyday actions of resistance in the daily routine also embody this concept of culturally aimed activism.

Consciousness raising: Face to face meetings with women and men from different groups, listening to the general public, while providing information, promoting public interaction, were all methods that not only challenge the legal system, but also help confront people and their cultural patriarchal values on a daily basis.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> New Internationalist Correspondent. “One in One Million.” *New Internationalist*, October 22, 2009: par 15. <https://newint.org/features/special/2009/10/22/leila-alikarami>.

<sup>192</sup> Shojaee, Mansoureh. “A Journey to the Seven Loveless Realms of Violence on the Anniversary of Universal Day to Stop Violence against Women.” *The Feminist School*, December 7, 2009. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article349>.

<sup>193</sup> Tavaana “One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran.” Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>194</sup> The Feminist School. “The Iranian Women’s Quest for Equality: History, Strategies, & Demands.” *The Feminist School*, June 10, 2010: par 7. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article380>.

These practices help people to foster equal treatment in "everyday encounters".<sup>195</sup> These daily acts take place in the socio-cultural realm and in local society, but also in interactions within the family.

### *Soft Force*

In addition to public spaces, women also use their homes and private spaces as a place for advocating for demands and acting out resistance and agency, teaching their sons and daughters values that are in line with the Women's Rights Movement on a daily basis. Shirin Ebadi writes "[w]ith no leader or central office, for 31 years the Women's Movement has resided in every Iranian household that cares about human rights."<sup>196</sup> Analogous to that which Ellen Anne McLarney terms "soft force", in which she describes a process whereby Egyptian women wage a social struggle for Islamico-political beliefs within the home, by employing soft power or persuasive methods of cultural production and reproduction, and social network forming for the purposes of civic mobilization. She argues that the family, and therefore women are at the core of the development of the Islamic public sphere and Islamic politics. The Islamic family comes to be viewed as a way of struggling against the secular authoritarian state.<sup>197</sup> The Iranian family and Iranian women likewise are at the core of new social development and by extension reformist and democratic politics, struggling against hardliner conservative state policies. Through education in the home and motherhood, women are active in the private sphere in waging civic disobedience or rebellion against the state. Mothers and women cultivate new

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Shirin, Ebadi. "Iran: Shirin Ebadi: Women Will Bring Democracy to Iran | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws, IPS, Guardian, June 9, 2010: par 6. <http://www.wluml.org/node/6387>.

<sup>197</sup> *Soft Force: Women in Egypt's Islamic Awakening*, by Ellen Anne McLarney. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015. Xxiii + 269 pages. Bibl. to 294. Index to 312. \$27.95

attitudes inside the home. For example, when Khorasani photographed women with anti-violence messages for the bookmarks, she also took pictures at one of her own family events, where she saw an opportunity for activism in the home. She gathered all the members and one-by-one photographed them with written messages on their person of anti-discriminatory slogans. One relative put the written message on her little boys - so they would grow up believing in what these women were advocating.<sup>198</sup> Women in the Movement argue that family health and family structure are important in Iran, and therefore women believe in advocating equal rights because they “want to strengthen the family structure.”<sup>199</sup>

*Networking, Coalition Building: Utilizing the Human Rights and Democratic Discursive Frames*

The act of networking, coalition building and establishing solidarity with other social movements works to link the Women’s Movement in a common cause with other rights seekers, in effect putting those other movements on the side of the women by educating and building social capital toward their goals and demands. These tactics are part of an overall strategy of cultural activism. If linkages can be established between women and other activists and rights seekers, women are able to portray and confer their points of view onto other sectors of culture and civil society. Not only that, but they are able to roll those activists into their agenda. Mansoureh Shojaee emphasizes this technique in the 2016 Changing the Face of Parliament Campaign: “The movement, in the process of achieving its goals, of course, will principally affect the involved forces’

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<sup>198</sup> Bahramirad, Shirin. “The Women We Are.” The Feminist School, March 10, 2013. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article497>.

<sup>199</sup> New Internationalist Correspondent. “One in One Million.” New Internationalist, October 22, 2009: par 12. <https://newint.org/features/special/2009/10/22/leila-alikarami>.

arrangement in the region."<sup>200</sup> In other words, members of this Campaign emphasize as a solidarity building method, that regardless of the outcome, the process will be good for women and good for Iran as a nation.<sup>201</sup> The Women's Movement has called on all facets of civil society to demonstrate solidarity with IWM, promoting cooperation between them in order to advance women's demands.<sup>202</sup> Incorporating women's demands in a greater quest for human rights is one vehicle by which this purpose is achieved. Framing the Movement in rights based discourse—linking rights with other kinds of rights, helps to build cooperative social capital. The Mourning Mothers were one of the first women's groups to begin dialogue with other sectors of society. "With their actions, they have introduced the vocabulary of human rights into our everyday conversations and have enhanced our understanding of those unalienable rights."<sup>203</sup>

Further, what the Women's Movement works to establish is that women's rights *are* human rights, and thereby putting their rights up to other human rights issues as just as valuable. Under the Green Movement, a norm began to emerge that considered women's issues important for all of society. The Women's Movement is able to incorporate their demands into other causes because gendered demands pertain to "society at large" not just one group of women.<sup>204</sup> Further illustrating this point, the first

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<sup>200</sup> Shojaee, Mansoureh. "Violence in Middle East and The Parliamentary Election in Iran." The Feminist School, December 11, 2015: par 9. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article539>.

<sup>201</sup> Shojaee, Mansoureh. "Violence in Middle East and The Parliamentary Election in Iran." The Feminist School, December 11, 2015. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article539>.

<sup>202</sup> Tavaana "One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran." Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>203</sup> Baradaran, Monireh. "Mothers of Khavaran Lead the Cause to Seek Justice: Keynote Speech of Amnesty International USA Western Regional Conference 2011: par 15." Translated by Laleh Gillani. Justice For Iran, August 30, 2013. <https://justice4iran.org/publication/articles/>

<sup>204</sup> The Feminist School. "The Statement by a Number of Women's Rights Activists Attending a Green Gathering in Commemoration of March 8th, with the Goal of Eliminating Discrimination and Violence to Establish Democracy." The Feminist School, March 13, 2010: par 12. [http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id\\_article=372](http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id_article=372).

domestic website in Iran dedicated to women's issues ("*Women in Iran*") had the subtitle or slogan "Women's Rights are Human Rights."<sup>205</sup> The 2009 election demands and the reappearance of women on the 2013 presidential campaign making demands has helped to create this link between civic rights and women's rights. "The struggle for women's rights is central to the larger struggle for individual rights. It has become one of the four top issues in national elections."<sup>206</sup>

### *Solidarity with the Green Movement*

The Green Movement is representative of this amalgamation of Women's Rights meeting with societal more general human rights and democratic demands. The Women's Movement had already built a base of culture that bought into the belief that change was needed in favor of women's rights, and in 2009 the "patriarchal regime bolstered by the state disempowered young men who could feel a sense of kinship or solidarity with women."<sup>207</sup> After the initial crackdown period the Women's Movement and the Green Movement built an alliance called the Green Coalition Movement of Women Activists, in which they formally joined forces in the fight for human rights, women's rights and democratic representation.<sup>208</sup> The Women's Movement acknowledges that without conversation between these factions the less chance there is for transition to a more

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<sup>205</sup> Mouri, Leila, and Muftah. "Iran: The Women's Movement in the 21st Century | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws, Muftah, August 2, 2010. <http://www.wluml.org/node/6545>, <http://muftah.org/?p=221>.

<sup>206</sup> Esfandiari, Haleh. "The Women's Movement." The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace, August 1, 2015: par 23. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/womens-movement>.

<sup>207</sup> OpenDemocracy. "Iranian Responses to the 'Arab Spring': Appropriation and Contestation." openDemocracy, February 29, 2012: par 16. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/ziba-mir-hosseini/iranian-responses-to-%E2%80%9Carab-spring%E2%80%9D-appropriation-and-contestation>.

<sup>208</sup> Brazier, Chris. "Where Are They Now? Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani." New Internationalist, March 1, 2013. <https://newint.org/features/2013/03/01/noushin-ahamdi-khorasani>.

democratic society.<sup>209</sup> In a meeting between women and members of the Green Movement in 2010, discourse took place on how to collaborate so that the Green Movement could better account for women's demands with better support. The meeting resulted in a joint statement release inclusive of seven demands of the Women's Movement.<sup>210</sup>

Gender discrimination intersects with other forms of subordination – whether based on class, ethnicity, political orientation, religion, and so on. Thus, the peaceful resistance of women and men in defense of gender equality in all social spheres – legal, political, cultural, economical, etc. – has profoundly impacted the Iranian movement for democracy.<sup>211</sup>

The Green Movement is a paragon example of the Women's Movement's work to shift cultural attitudes and norms to reflect a more equitable society. The make-up of the Green Movement, that of a young, gender diversified population, that came of age when the Women's Movement was reaching a peak under the reformist period demonstrates how bit by bit the goals of the Women's Movement have ballooned and expanded to the general population. Shirin Ebadi wrote in 2010:

In the past year, the now famous Green movement has emerged and modeled itself on this seemingly unstoppable force. With women's rights activist at the helm, the Green network of groups and people is consistent in its demands for democracy and human rights.<sup>212</sup>

### *Activism with Dress Code*

In efforts to change dress code and *hijab* laws, women have made efforts to align the right to choose what to wear with human rights. "The My Stealthy Freedom

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<sup>209</sup> The Feminist School. "Statement by 'Women Solidarity Committee against Social Violence.'" The Feminist School, May 27, 2010. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article379>.

<sup>210</sup> The Feminist School. "The Statement by a Number of Women's Rights Activists Attending a Green Gathering in Commemoration of March 8th, with the Goal of Eliminating Discrimination and Violence to Establish Democracy." The Feminist School, March 13, 2010. [http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id\\_article=372](http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?page=print&id_article=372).

<sup>211</sup> Gender Equality for Iran website. "Iran: WLUML Supports Call for Solidarity: Freedom and Gender Equality in Iran | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws, January 27, 2010: par 2. <http://www.wluml.org/node/5902>.

<sup>212</sup> Ebadi, Shirin. "The Brutal Crackdowns Only Make Iran's Women Stronger." *The Guardian*, June 8, 2010: par 6, sec. Opinion. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jun/08/brutal-crackdown-iran-women-protest>.

Campaign is yet another example of the increasingly strident culture war between moderates and hardliners in Iran."<sup>213</sup> White Wednesday is for women who want to wear the veil but don't think it should be compulsory.<sup>214</sup> The White Wednesdays Movement, which is an off-shoot of the My Stealthy Freedom Campaign, focuses emphasizing the right to choose. Emblematic of the attempts at cultural transformation, there has been appeal to men to show solidarity, and many men have joined in support of choice.<sup>215</sup> "Iranian gender equality activist Soudeh Rad commented: '[this] brave act, generated from the grassroots, is the persistence of people to gather around one specific demand.'<sup>216</sup>

### *Religious Framing*

Utilizing religion as a discursive frame is also a method for approaching socio-cultural change. By couching women's rights in religious discourse, women are able to make women's rights more palatable to the conservative constituents of society, and to combat those in the religio-conservative camp who seek to controvert women's rights and conflate women's second-class status with Iranian-Islamic values. Many rights activists believe that religion and Islam are not at odds with women's rights. In spite of the fact that the majority of the force behind their discriminatory patriarchal laws and attitudes are generated out of the conservative clergy and reproduced by the religious and

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<sup>213</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "State-Run TV's Disinformation Encourages Violence Against Women." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), June 2, 2014: par 4. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2014/06/violence-against-women-encouraged/>.

<sup>214</sup> My Stealthy Freedom <http://mystealthyfreedom.net/en/>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

White Wednesdays Twitter <https://twitter.com/search?q=%23WhiteWednesdays&src=tyah>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>216</sup> Gray, Lucinda Homa. "Making Waves: Masih Alinejad." *New Internationalist*, July 1, 2015: par 5. <https://newint.org/columns/makingwaves/2015/07/01/making-waves-masih-alinejad>.

traditionalist parts of society, some women use religio-cultural values and arguments to bolster the argument for them.

There is no incompatibility between modernization and Islam, both can go hand in hand, so please do not fear religion and do not fear to engage with religious leaders to foster positive social change and human rights dialogue, even if religion will be the frame.<sup>217</sup>

Women activists situated themselves as at least being neutral in terms of a religious movement, but also often worked to assure that they are not anti-Islam. Muslim feminists are actively studying the Koran and using the religious texts as a “source of inspiration and a tool for fighting traditionalism among their own ranks.”<sup>218</sup> Haleh Sahabi dedicated her life to showing how within the context of the Koran men and women are equal. She made religious argument the basis for conveying her message to the “Religious-Nationalist public.”<sup>219</sup> The One Million Signatures, which includes many secular women as well (though most are Muslim), has also taken a “pro-dynamic interpretation” of Islam.<sup>220</sup> The message they seek to put across is that they believe in Islam, and that they are not working politically against the regime; instead they do not believe the laws are suitable to current social setting.<sup>221</sup>

Putting women’s rights in the context of Islamic beliefs allows the Women’s Movement to approach the more conservative sectors of society. The Movement fuses

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<sup>217</sup> Hamidallah-van Hees, Amal. “Letter to an Iranian Friend.” Arvesh Sevom, November 27, 2011: par 15. <http://www.arsehsevom.org/en/2011/11/letter-to-an-iranian-friend-complete-text/>.

<sup>218</sup> Davachi, Azadeh. “On the Eve of 12th of June, a Historical Day for the Women Movement and the Green Movement : The Prospect of Iranian Women Movement after the Recent Uprising in the Middel East and North Africa: Interview Azadeh Davachi with Professor Ali Akbar Mahdi.” The Feminist School, June 11, 2011: par 24. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article458>.

<sup>219</sup> The Feminist School. “Haleh Sahabi, A Searcher for Equality in the Holy Scriptures, Came to An Unholy Violent End.” Translated by Mina Siegel. The Feminist School, June 1, 2011. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article452>.

<sup>220</sup> Tavaana “One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran.” Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>221</sup> New Internationalist Correspondent. “One in One Million.” New Internationalist, October 22, 2009. <https://newint.org/features/special/2009/10/22/leila-alikarami>.

women's rights discourse with religious discourse, infiltrating further reaches of Iranian society.

A number of women's organizations have engaged in reinterpreting the Koran from a women's perspective. Instead of beginning with creation as a narrative of origins from women's rights and responsibilities, many of these sources place individual women, in her contemporary social concreteness, at the centre of their arguments.<sup>222</sup>

### *Successes in Cultural Activism*

The permeation of the Women's Movement in Iranian society is evident in the fact that the Movement is prominent in the world of analyses. From activist Susan Tahmasebi:

The interesting thing is that the demand for equality and legal reform is now commonly expressed by all...everybody is talking about whether they're committed to it or not, but this shows that everyone, including within the government, recognizes that women's equality and inclusion is a priority and demand, which requires responsiveness.<sup>223</sup>

Women have continued to hold the powerful influence over the civic sector that they did before the crackdown. Through their infiltration into society and persistent cultural activism, combined with the state's own de-legitimizing violence, women have continued to find space to engage in seeking demands. "The movement has established itself as a credible social force standing for women's rights in Iran so much so that both the state and society cannot escape its influences and demands."<sup>224</sup> The act of integrating demands of the whole society under a civic rights umbrella helps unite the Movement with other causes and gain power through solidarity. "Our demands have always been freedom and the elimination of all kinds of discriminations, be it in law, culture, or

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<sup>222</sup> Erturk, Yakin. "Iran: A 'Bloody Stain' on the Nation." openDemocracy, November 25, 2014: par 14. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yakin-erturk/iran-%27bloody-stain%27-on-nation>.

<sup>223</sup> Jones, Rochelle. "Breaking Through the Iron Ceiling: Iran's New Government and the Hopes of the Iranian Women's Movements." AWID, September 13, 2013. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/breaking-through-iron-ceiling-irans-new-government-and-hopes-iranian-womens>.

<sup>224</sup> Davachi, Azadeh. "On the Eve of 12th of June, a Historical Day for the Women Movement and the Green Movement: The Prospect of Iranian Women Movement after the Recent Uprising in the Middel East and North Africa: Interview Azadeh Davachi with Professor Ali Akbar Mahdi." The Feminist School, June 11, 2011: par 5. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article458>.

tradition."<sup>225</sup> The end result has been a steady momentum for women to carry on through repression. In an interview, journalist and human rights activist Asieh Amini makes the argument that there is a positive outlook to the crackdown in that it shook up some of the existing factions between social movements, and after the election, the emergence of the Green Movement served to reify the Women's Movement by adopting its tactics and becoming interwoven.

As I witness the role of the women's movement is becoming the subject of many analyses, or how the protest movements are adopting a non-violence approach, I see an extension of the women's movement in society, it's development and success, not it's interruption.<sup>226</sup>

***Theme 5 - Upgrading resiliency, the Iranian Women's Movement demonstrates durability, strength, and reemergence in the political sphere.***

*Resilience*

The final overarching theme in the texts I analyzed was the emergence of a dominant portrayal of the Iranian Women's Movement as resilient and robust rather than shrunken or suppressed. Overwhelmingly, the message conveyed by the members of the Iranian Women's Movement is that in spite of measures taken by the IRI in the post-election period, the Movement is just as strong now as it was before the crackdown.

Many women remain positive, believing that "the events after the 2009 disputed presidential elections and specifically the restrictions that have been imposed on any social activity and social groups have not resulted in a decline in the work of the

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<sup>225</sup> Ibid: par 5.

<sup>226</sup> Kakaee, Parisa. "Women's Movement: A Model for the Green Movement." Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, sourced from Gozaar: A Forum on Human Rights and Democracy, June 11, 2010: par 2. <http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/human-rights-documents/aadel-collection/12859-women-s-movement-a-model-for-the-green-movement.html>.

women's groups."<sup>227</sup> Members do acknowledge that conditions for women have worsened in some regards, due to a protracted crackdown by the Ahmadinejad administration and continuing efforts on behalf of the hardliners under Rouhani to further erode rights. However, there have also been gains for women and some members make claim that the Movement is stronger now than ever; that state repression in 2009 "enhanced their cause and legitimacy."<sup>228</sup> The majority of articles, websites, essays, statements and news utilized in the research support Shirin Ebadi's statement: "[h]owever, as we see time and time again, the harsher the repression, the stronger the movement grows."<sup>229</sup> With each new restrictive and discriminatory measure the hardliners put in place, women have reacted *en force* with all the tools in their repertoire, from public protest to organized coalitions and statement making, petitions, public demands, and informal and individual acts of rebellion. When local government in Tehran made the decision to deploy 7,000 additional undercover morality police in 2016, women reacted with louder and stronger campaigns against the dress code and forced *hijab*. And they are having successes. In December of 2017 Tehran announced newly relaxed regulations for the headscarf. Women will no longer be arrested or lashed for "*bad hijab*" and instead will be required to attend a morality class as repercussion.

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<sup>227</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. "The Women's Movement Carries On," March 19, 2012: par 12.

<http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

<sup>228</sup> Davachi, Azadeh. "On the Eve of 12th of June, a Historical Day for the Women Movement and the Green Movement: The Prospect of Iranian Women Movement after the Recent Uprising in the Middel East and North Africa: Interview Azadeh Davachi with Professor Ali Akbar Mahdi." The Feminist School, June 11, 2011: par 10. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article458>.

<sup>229</sup> Ebadi, Shirin. "Iran: Shirin Ebadi: Women Will Bring Democracy to Iran | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures." Women Living Under Muslim Laws, IPS, Guardian, June 9, 2010: par 4. <http://www.wluml.org/node/6387>.

Ebadi, Shirin. "The Brutal Crackdowns Only Make Iran's Women Stronger." *The Guardian*, June 8, 2010, sec. Opinion. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/jun/08/brutal-crackdown-iran-women-protest>.

There were countless accounts from members of the Movement and from those covering the Movement in various forms of media, claiming that the hardship the Movement faced at the hands of the regime did not mean a decline, that “the slowing and even the stopping of a Movement due to suppression and force do not equal its end and decline.”<sup>230</sup> Indications from members’ statements and the reported activities and wins by the Movement since 2009, produces a picture of the Movement as endured, strengthened, and more active than ever.

What follows are a few samples of statements by members and scholars of the Movement indicating resilience, and reinforcing the idea that being afflicted with state repression only serves to make the Movement stronger over time. Professor Yakın Ertürk, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, sociologist, and Middle East expert argues in an article that women continue to be very active regardless of state efforts to push them out of public engagement:

Although the Iranian regime has taken stringent measures to cleanse women as autonomous beings from public space, it has not succeeded in excluding women’s intellectual articulations and activism from public discourse. On the contrary, women have continued to actively contribute in many fields ranging from arts to sports, demonstrating their determination to challenge, resist and negotiate the boundaries of the imposed gender order.<sup>231</sup>

In an interview, Professor Ali-Akbar Mahdi, a sociologist and expert on Iranian culture argues that the more the government shrinks women’s rights and puts pressure on women by removing access to resources, the more women have impetus to respond with acts of resistance and the more the Movement gains recruits:

{T]he new restrictive environment and repressive policies, especially with regard to female attendance in and gender interactions within the academia, have deepened women’s

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<sup>230</sup> Cavagni, Elena. “The Green Movement and Avoiding Violent Opposition.” Arvesh Sevom, August 28, 2013: par 7. <http://www.arsehsevom.org/en/2013/08/the-green-movement-and-avoiding-violent-opposition/>.

<sup>231</sup> Erturk, Yakın. “Iran: A ‘Bloody Stain’ on the Nation.” openDemocracy, November 25, 2014: par 18. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/yakin-erturk/iran-%27bloody-stain%27-on-nation>.

grievances and causes, increased surplus anger, and contributed to the expansion of social capital – all necessary elements for future outbursts of change.<sup>232</sup>

Human Rights activist and researcher Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh adds that “All of the above struggles and challenges has strengthened women’s movement in Iran and we have come out of it much stronger and more resistant.”<sup>233</sup> As mentioned in a previous section, she also argues that women have increased activity since 2009.<sup>234</sup>

Sanam Vakil, Professor of Middle Eastern studies agrees and remarks in an interview, “[s]o far, the hardest actions of a powerful state - arrests, exile, legal sanction - have been unable to destroy the wellsprings of women’s awareness and agency, which continue to blossom in the face of great pressure.”<sup>235</sup>

Iranian Human rights activists Asieh Amini and Mansooreh Shojayi agree that the Women’s Movement has continued to be extremely active, maybe even more active than other social groups. They have continued with forming coalitions, making statements, writing letters and publishing articles. All of these forms of resistance continue to be utilized in spite of the large exodus of women activists from Iran and in spite of large numbers still imprisoned.<sup>236</sup> “In spite of all the pressures, women are visible in Iranian

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<sup>232</sup> Davachi, Azadeh. “On the Eve of 12th of June, a Historical Day for the Women Movement and the Green Movement : The Prospect of Iranian Women Movement after the Recent Uprising in the Middel East and North Africa: Interview Azadeh Davachi with Professor Ali Akbar Mahdi.” The Feminist School, June 11, 2011: par 9. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article458>.

<sup>233</sup> Abbasgholizadeh, Mahboubeh. “Iran: Identity, Women and Islam: Iran’s Case, A Presentation from the Asia Pacific NGO Forum of Beijing +10 | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures.” Women Living Under Muslim Laws, July 27, 2004: par 7. <http://www.wluml.org/node/1597>.

<sup>234</sup> Nikou, Semira N. “Iran’s Women Two Years after the Uprising: Interview with Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh.” The Iran Primer: United States Institute of Peace, June 28, 2011. <http://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2011/jun/28/iran%E2%80%99s-women-two-years-after-uprising>.

<sup>235</sup> Vakil, Sanam. “Iran’s Women: A Movement in Transition.” openDemocracy, October 19, 2010: par 18. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/sanam-vakil/irans-women-movement-in-transition>.

<sup>236</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. “The Women’s Movement Carries On,” March 19, 2012.

<http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

society...the women's movement continues its life as a principal social movement in the country."<sup>237</sup>

In an interview, activist Sussan Tahmasebi relays the activity of a group of independent Iranian women's groups:

[M]ade up of individuals that are not affiliated with the State - who are meeting on a regular basis since the election and gaining strength. These are 'movement activists who have suffered a lot of backlash in the last several years but they've been coming together consistently to try to see what they can do, what they want to do, and how they should move forward in this new environment.<sup>238</sup>

*Justice For Iran* argues in a report on the issue of forced *hijab* that women are fighting the dress codes just as hard as ever:

Despite [these] tough measures, Iranian women's opposition to hijab has never dissipated. Their rebellion against observing hijab laws in their its entirety continues on. Arrest and other forms of state violence have failed to force the masses to accept the policies and practice of hijab as intended by the Islamic Republic of Iran.<sup>239</sup>

### *Action and Agency*

It is clear that scholars and constituents of the Movement believe themselves to be strong, to have avoided real lasting retraction as a result of the severe crackdown they faced in 2009 and the ensuing years. How can this be measured in actual terms? Looking at the actions of the Movement and the agency women employ in resisting discrimination is where the overwhelming evidence exists that the Movement is vibrant. Below, I briefly relay some of the successes and signs of vitality of the Movement as they have unfolded. The actions included below are intended to demonstrate episodes of agency, and are not necessarily evaluated as "successful" according to their outcome. Rather, the

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<sup>237</sup> Euronews. "Iran's Women Discriminated against by Law." Euronews, June 7, 2013: par 3.

<http://www.euronews.com/2013/06/07/iran-s-women-discriminated-against-by-law>.

<sup>238</sup> Jones, Rochelle. "Breaking Through the Iron Ceiling: Iran's New Government and the Hopes of the Iranian Women's Movements." AWID, September 13, 2013: par 8. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/breaking-through-iron-ceiling-irans-new-government-and-hopes-iranian-womens>.

<sup>239</sup> Justice For Iran. "Thirty-Five Years of Forced Hijab: The Widespread and Systematic Violation of Women's Rights in Iran," Justice For Iran, March 1, 2014: 13. <https://justice4iran.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Hejab-Report-JFI-English.pdf>.

demonstrated agency is the yardstick with which these actions are considered a measure of progress. The formations of coalitions for example, could be interpreted as a sign of weakness, in that forming coalitions could be perceived as a sign that women are not strong enough as a group to forge on alone. However, the act of building a coalition is also demonstrative of the Movement moving forward, rather than sinking into retraction. Coalition building along with the other action items included below, are interpreted in this case as signs that the Movement is practicing agency through similar methods as it had the years prior to the 2009 crackdown. This helps to reveal the Movement as progressing rather than retracting.

#### *New Coalitions – the Green Coalition Movement of Women*

In the immediate aftermath of the elections and the rise of the Green Movement, women and members and relatives of the Green Movement developed the Green Coalition Movement of Women Activists.<sup>240</sup> Their first meeting took place in February 2010 on the first International Women’s Day after the 2009 elections, and the second gathering followed in April 2010. One purpose of the meetings is to find ways in which women-specific demands can be highlighted amongst Green Movement demands, in an effort to rectify concerns over women’s demands getting buried in democratic ideological demands.<sup>241</sup>

#### *One Million Signatures Carries On*

The One Million Signatures Campaign continues to be active; they continued to collect signatures after the 2009 crackdown in spite of being so heavily targeted by the

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<sup>240</sup> Brazier, Chris. “Where Are They Now? Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani.” *New Internationalist*, March 1, 2013. <https://newint.org/features/2013/03/01/noushin-ahamdi-khorasani>.

<sup>241</sup> The Feminist School. “The Slides of the Second Gathering of The Green Coalition Movement of Women’s Activists.” Translated by Sahar Mofakham. The Feminist School, April 22, 2010. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article375>.

Ahmadinejad administration. Even members who were forced to flee after the crackdown strive to build a solidarity network or community amongst themselves and those still residing in Iran in order help appeal to the global community.<sup>242</sup> And in spite of the crackdown the Campaign has succeeded in helping to create and promote equal rights discourse, now more commonplace than ever.<sup>243</sup>

### *Public Discourse and Publications on Women Issues*

Activist Mansooreh Shojayi argues that a sign that the Women's Movement is vibrant is the number of news websites, statements and analytical reports that continue to be produced, issued and published on women's issues. Sites including "The Feminist School, the Center for Iranian Women, and the site on the Family Protection Law are among those that vigorously publish reports on women's issues."<sup>244</sup> The proliferation of publications on women's issues is coupled with high quality discourse and academia on these issues, evidenced by the fact that Iranian scholars inside and outside Iran utilize women's magazines like *Zanan* and *Zanan-e Emrooz* as references in their studies and writings.<sup>245</sup>

### *Hijab and Dress Code*

As established, there has been a new wave of activity regarding the *hijab* and dress code laws. With the extreme popularity and massive participation in the My Stealthy Freedom Campaign, government and parliament could not avoid some kind of

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<sup>242</sup> Tavaana "One Million Signatures: The Battle for Gender Equality in Iran." Tavaana. <https://tavaana.org/en/content/one-million-signatures-battle-gender-equality-iran>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>243</sup> Jones, Rochelle. "Breaking Through the Iron Ceiling: Iran's New Government and the Hopes of the Iranian Women's Movements." AWID, September 13, 2013. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/breaking-through-iron-ceiling-irans-new-government-and-hopes-iranian-womens>.

<sup>244</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. "The Women's Movement Carries On," March 19, 2012: par 13. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

<sup>245</sup> Sherkat, Shahla. "Zanan-E Emrooz." Edited by Frances Hasso. Translated by Nazanin Shahrokni. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 11, no. 3 (November 1, 2015): 376–79. <https://doi.org/10.1215/15525864-3142625>.

reciprocal action. In 2015, parliament announced that it was suspending a new bill proposed to double down on dress code enforcement laws. According to the My Stealthy Freedom website, the reason for this is twofold; one – that pushing these laws through would further deepen the “chasm” between Iranian society and the government, and two – international pressure to ease such laws due to the pipeline between the Iranian population and the global community.<sup>246</sup>

As an offshoot of the My Stealthy Freedom Campaign, founder M. Alinejad began another campaign titled “White Wednesdays” intended for the Iranian women who want to wear a scarf or *hijab* but demand the *right to choose* whether to do so. Participants symbolically wear white head coverings on Wednesdays in solidarity of this demand. Since then, more daring and open displays of protest by young Iranian women have taken place. For example, some women have taken to standing in public squares and in heavy traffic areas with no scarf, only a white scarf fixed to the end of a pole as a flag of protest.<sup>247</sup> And, in even bigger news, this past December (2017), local government in Tehran announced that they would no longer be arresting women for “*bad hijab*”, nor will they risk public flogging, or have judicial cases brought against them, or be fined.<sup>248</sup> Instead, women will now be subject to code of conduct classes, akin to traffic school, as punishment for appearing in public without their head covering (or any other kind of improper dress).

### *Women and Sports*

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<sup>246</sup> My Stealthy Freedom Campaign. “MyStealthyFreedom - MSF.” My Stealthy Freedom, 2015. <http://mystealthyfreedom.net/en/campaigns/items/3291/>. Accessed June 7, 2018.

<sup>247</sup> Kasana, Mehreen. “Why This One Video Of A Woman Protesting In Iran Is Going Viral.” Bustle. Accessed May 30, 2018. <https://www.bustle.com/p/what-is-white-wednesday-iran-women-are-fighting-for-the-freedom-to-dress-how-they-want-7767786>.

<sup>248</sup> Donovan, Louise. “Women In Tehran Will No Longer Be Arrested For Not Wearing A Hijab.” ELLE, January 2, 2018. <http://www.elleuk.com/life-and-culture/culture/news/a40693/women-tehran-will-arrested-wearing-hijab/>.

Likewise there have been some developments in the battle over women's participation in sporting events. In 2015 Rouhani's cabinet announced plans to allow women to start attending some matches depending on the game.<sup>249</sup> The ease includes the ability of some women and families to attend certain kinds of men's sports matches. Since then there has been debate as to whether the lightened restrictions are actually playing out in reality.<sup>250</sup> While women have been seen at some volleyball matches, claims have been made that they were almost strictly foreigners.<sup>251</sup> Nonetheless women in Iran continue to campaign for their right to participate in sports and attend games, and are succeeding in keeping the conversation alive nationally and internationally.

### *Cultural Successes*

In 2012 women organized around the issue of "*Khoon-Bas*" (cease-blood) – the practice of offering a female family member to solve a dispute with another family, which was in the works to become a "National Heritage" tradition. *Khoon-bas* is "an inhumane tribal practice in which an innocent woman or sometimes a young child is put forward in the name of marriage and used as a means of reconciliation."<sup>252</sup> A group of women issued a statement, which resulted in the dropping of the project to register *Khoon-bas* as a nationally endorsed practice.<sup>253</sup>

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<sup>249</sup> Tehran Bureau correspondent. "Iranian Women and Sport: Every Obstacle an Opportunity." *The Guardian*, April 20, 2015, sec. World news. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/iran-blog/2015/apr/19/iran-women-sports-stadium-competitive-obstacles>.

<sup>250</sup> DW. "Iran Eases Ban on Women Visiting Sport Events." *DW.COM*, April 4, 2015. <http://www.dw.com/en/iran-eases-ban-on-women-visiting-sport-events/a-18361951>.

<sup>251</sup> Wingard, Jessie. "Iran Ignores Human Rights Campaign, Bans Women Attending Volleyball Games." *DW.COM*, February 19, 2016. <http://www.dw.com/en/iran-ignores-human-rights-campaign-bans-women-attending-volleyball-games/a-19060555>.

<sup>252</sup> Women Living Under Muslim Laws. "Iran: Iranian Women's Rights Activists Stop The Registration Of Anti-Women Tradition As 'National Heritage' | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures," October 12, 2012: par 6. <http://www.wluml.org/news/iran-iranian-womens-rights-activists-stop-registration-anti-women-tradition-national-heritage>.

<sup>253</sup> Women Living Under Muslim Laws. "Iran: Iranian Women's Rights Activists Stop The Registration Of Anti-Women Tradition As 'National Heritage' | Women Reclaiming and Redefining Cultures," October 12,

### *Legal Gains in Family Law*

Another gain for the Movement regards custody laws; previously, custody was automatically granted to the father once boys reached age 2 and girls age 7. However, the Women's Movement was able to win over a new law requiring court review and decision on custody in each case.<sup>254</sup>

### *Public Gathering*

Women also continue to organize in public protest against violence, for example, after a series of acid attacks in the city of Isfahan. Following the implementation of more stringent morality codes passed by parliament, women deemed to be wearing “bad *hijab*”, were targeted for attack. The Movement reacted publicly, in spite of the threat of violence, by demonstrating in protest in front of the parliament building.<sup>255</sup> Although the protest led to the arrests of some participants and imprisonment of one woman, the attacks stopped thereafter.<sup>256</sup>

As of 2013, public action has returned *en force*, so that it seems even in areas where some amount of retraction took place (in the political arena for example), women have grown back their activities in this realm as well. According to Tahmasebi, the

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2012. <http://www.wluml.org/news/iran-iranian-womens-rights-activists-stop-registration-anti-women-tradition-national-heritage>.

<sup>254</sup> New Internationalist Correspondent. “One in One Million.” New Internationalist, October 22, 2009. <https://newint.org/features/special/2009/10/22/leila-alikarami>.

<sup>255</sup> Shojayee, Mansureh. “Women Continue Struggle for Rights Despite Barriers.” Rooz Online, December 12, 2014. <http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/women-continue-struggle-for-rights-despite-barriers.html>

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

Iranian Women's Movement in the context of this new political environment is meeting openly now and making their demands known.<sup>257</sup> Amini agrees:

According to her activities related to information dissemination and publicity have in fact risen during this period in the sense that the media has shown a greater reception to such activities and reports. She believes that women activists outside Iran too responded to women's issues inside Iran with the same intensity that they had in the past.<sup>258</sup>

### *2013-2017 Presidential Elections*

Very significantly, women returned to the presidential campaign arena in 2013. They recalled their strategy from the 2009 elections, and once again used the platform provided by the presidential elections to issue public demands, utilizing leverage availed to them by their abounding presence at the voting polls.<sup>259</sup> Women formed a diverse and inclusive coalition called "Brain-Storming about Women's Demands" which included women from "within the ruling factions connected to the state who advocate women's rights; women activists within the civil society who work collectively within organized NGOs or semi organized networks; and individual women who defy sexism and resist in daily life in support of change for equality."<sup>260</sup> In 2017, again women released a statement prior to the election demanding an end to gender discrimination, and a call for women to fill 30 percent or more of ministerial positions.<sup>261</sup> The Coalition once again avoided supporting any particular candidate, although notably, Rouhani who was

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<sup>257</sup> Jones, Rochelle. "Breaking Through the Iron Ceiling: Iran's New Government and the Hopes of the Iranian Women's Movements." AWID, September 13, 2013. <https://www.awid.org/news-and-analysis/breaking-through-iron-ceiling-irans-new-government-and-hopes-iranian-womens>.

<sup>258</sup> Ghoreishi, Kaveh. "The Women's Movement Carries On," March 19, 2012: par 12.

<http://www.roozonline.com/english/news3/newsitem/article/the-womens-movement-carries-on.html>.

<sup>259</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Iranian Women's Rights Activists Use Elections as 'Opportunities' to Put Forth Demands." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), May 16, 2017.

<http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/05/iranian-womens-rights-activists-use-elections-as-opportunities-to-put-forth-demands/>.

<sup>260</sup> Tohidi, Nayerreh. "Women's Rights and Feminist Movements in Iran." *Sur - International Journal on Human Rights*, December 4, 2016: par 12. <http://sur.conectas.org/en/womens-rights-feminist-movements-iran/>.

<sup>261</sup> Center for Human Rights in Iran. "Rouhani: Delivering Human Rights After the Election." *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), May 25, 2017. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/05/rouhani-delivering-human-rights-after-the-election/>.

eventually elected was the only candidate responsive in his campaign to their demands.

“The last meeting and statements issued by this coalition, was about the ‘Required Criteria for the State Ministries’ that was signed and supported by over 600 individuals.”<sup>262</sup>

### *2016 Parliamentary Elections*

In 2016 the Movement utilized similar methodology in the 2016 parliamentary elections as they have for presidential elections with the construction of a formal organization (*Campaign to Change the Male-Dominated Face of Parliament*), and putting forth demands for women’s rights to take part in elections and to be represented by government. The Campaign’s commitment to these demands also works to achieve goals beyond participatory rights, in that

{P}romoting the right to political participation and free election, which is a bulwark for women to stand against the region’s violent politics. Looking at the rate of violent incidents in the region, this leading campaign illustrates Iranian activities women’s wisdom over existing controversial issues.<sup>263</sup>

Continually publicly pressing for participatory rights slowly etches into the foundation of traditional patriarchal values, and elevates other gender issues outside what is strictly political. The effect that this approach is taking is evident in the willingness of disempowered reformists who used to be critical of the Women’s Movement [to] now support them in order to gain popularity.<sup>264</sup>

### *Morality Plan under Ahmadinejad*

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<sup>262</sup> Tohidi, Nayereh. “Women’s Rights and Feminist Movements in Iran.” *Sur - International Journal on Human Rights*, December 4, 2016: par 13. <http://sur.conectas.org/en/womens-rights-feminist-movements-iran/>.

<sup>263</sup> Shojae, Mansoureh. “Violence in Middle East and The Parliamentary Election in Iran.” *The Feminist School*, December 11, 2015: par 7. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article539>.

<sup>264</sup> Davachi, Azadeh. “On the Eve of 12th of June, a Historical Day for the Women Movement and the Green Movement : The Prospect of Iranian Women Movement after the Recent Uprising in the Middel East and North Africa: Interview Azadeh Davachi with Professor Ali Akbar Mahdi.” *The Feminist School*, June 11, 2011. <http://www.feministschool.com/english/spip.php?article458>.

One success for women in Iran, (and an unintended consequence for the government under Ahmadinejad), was the further coalescence of women of different backgrounds under a united front. During his two terms, Ahmadinejad carried out an ongoing “‘Social Morality Plan’ (*tarh-e amniyat-eejtema’i*), which aimed to reinforce the rigid codes of dress.”<sup>265</sup> Rather than collapsing into intimidation, activists formed a united coalition of groups and individual activists from both the Islamic and secular camps in protest of the new plans.<sup>266</sup> The turning away from the regime by many traditional, conservative women as a result of its severe measures and violence has been one of the consequences of the policies of this administration. These measures combined with the violent crackdown in 2009 lead to the loss of regime legitimacy for many women, which resulted in new women joining the leagues in the fight for a voice and for justice.<sup>267</sup>

Many women have the sense that civil society in Iran has come alive again under Rouhani. They agree that there are still many restrictions but that it is not as bad as under Ahmadinejad.<sup>268</sup> Others still have complained that under Rouhani, in spite of hope that this more moderate president would help push change through, there has been a failure to turn over conservative laws and policies. In fact, there have been new and worse

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<sup>265</sup> OpenDemocracy. “Iranian Responses to the ‘Arab Spring’: Appropriation and Contestation.” openDemocracy, February 29, 2012: par 8. <https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/ziba-mir-hosseini/iranian-responses-to-%E2%80%9Carab-spring%E2%80%9D-appropriation-and-contestation>.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Gwertzmann, Bernard. “Reform and Women’s Rights Movements Intertwined in Iran: Interview with Isobel Coleman.” *Council on Foreign Relations*, June 24, 2009. <https://www.cfr.org/interview/reform-and-womens-rights-movements-intertwined-iran>.

<sup>268</sup> Tohidi, Nayereh. “Women’s Rights and Feminist Movements in Iran.” *Sur - International Journal on Human Rights*, December 4, 2016. <http://sur.conectas.org/en/womens-rights-feminist-movements-iran/>. Center for Human Rights in Iran. “Iranian Women’s Rights Activists Use Elections as ‘Opportunities’ to Put Forth Demands.” *Center for Human Rights in Iran* (blog), May 16, 2017. <http://www.iranhumanrights.org/2017/05/iranian-womens-rights-activists-use-elections-as-opportunities-to-put-forth-demands/>.

measures put into place after his election. This however, is generally the doing of the hardliners in parliament and clergy, who have worked to stifle Rouhani's efforts to make gains in women's rights. Even Ahmadinejad made an attempt during his second term to change law for women's attendance at sports arenas and was blocked by the hard liner clergy. Women politicians too, have been blocked when making efforts from within government, and have attracted a lot of criticism for their failure—however, it is not for lack of trying that they have been unable to make these changes. There remains a “paradox that exists in Iran between the state's regressive laws and policies against women, and the tireless and undaunted drive for change and equality by those who will not be denied.”<sup>269</sup>

Still, the message from Iranian women has been one of encouragement and hope. Women have not wilted into the background or ebbed into inactivity as a result of the crackdown. They have shifted away from activities that garner violent attention, and focused on other forms of resistance. Waiting out severe periods of turmoil, they re-strategized and reemerged with new and creative forms of activism. Iranian rights activist and ex-cabinet member Mahnaz Afkhami remarks that the Women's Movement is more advanced than the “outdated regime,” and this is the pervasive attitude of women activists in Iran that helps to propel them onward in their actions and successes.<sup>270</sup> Whether or not this Movement is in reality stronger than it was before the 2009 crackdown may yet be revealed, however if we are to examine the activity of the Movement prior to the election

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<sup>269</sup> Begum, Rothna. “Challenging Iran's Women's Rights Narrative.” Human Rights Watch, Accessed through Women Living Under Muslim Laws, March 25, 2015: par 10. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2015/03/25/challenging-irans-womens-rights-narrative>.

<sup>270</sup> Askary, Hooman. “Fighting for Women's Rights: An Interview with Mahnaz Afkhami.” Arvesh Sevom, November 16, 2011. <http://www.arsehsevom.org/en/2011/11/fighting-for-womens-rights-an-interview-with-mahnaz-afkhami/>.

and hold up recent examples of action and agency it becomes clear that the Movement has returned to a similar level of robust activity to that of the pre-2009 period.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this research was to make discovery about the short-term, as well as longer-term, effects of the 2009 post-election government crackdown on the Women's Movement in Iran. The results from a context analysis of essays, human rights reports, news-media, interviews of activists, and academic articles demonstrate the effects the Women's Movement included a brief retraction from civic activism in the political sphere but also in the longer view contributed to the adaptability, durability and resilience of the Women's Movement in Iran by "inoculating" the Movement through the experience of engaging in civic activism during a repressive episode. This contributes to the Movement's ability to survive and grow tactical solutions for activism in an authoritarian context.

To summarize, here are the key results derived from my research: the Women's Movement in Iran was targeted by the state because of the power and influence it wields over the civic sphere; extreme state violence, threat of imprisonment and torture caused brief retraction from overt public action in the political sphere; the Movement adapted and shifted as needed to survive, as a result of experience; this Movement practices cultural activism as a primary step toward achieving rights goals in the political realm, and according to the majority of the documents in my data set, the Movement is just as strong and active as it was in the pre-2009 election period as a result of its resilience. What do these findings tell us about the Women's Movement in relation to social

movement and civil society theory? How does this Movement fit with existing models? In a cross analysis with theory, how do these key findings help in understanding the significance of the effects of the 2009 government crackdown on the Women's Movement in Iran? This next section attempts to answer these questions and to assess ways in which current theories around social movements and the civic sphere may fail to address the dynamics of this particular Movement.

Much of social movement theory was developed on models that exist in Western contexts. Collective behavior, political opportunity, resource mobilization and even New Social Movement paradigm were all predicated on non-Muslim, non-authoritarian contexts such as the case presented in this paper. There are scholars who have interpreted some of the concepts from these various forms of social movement theory and applied them to non-Western and Muslim contexts (Bayet, 2005), and what the content I analyzed in the previous section shows, is that the elements of the Women's Movement in Iran can be understood utilizing various strands of social movement theory in unique forms adapted to this context. Because these models were developed for a Western context however, on the whole these theories also fall short in helping to explain the emergence and machinations of the Iranian Women's Movement.

The first part of this section takes a general look at these concepts against the Women's Movement, and then I will look more specifically at what the themes uncovered in this paper help to reveal about this Movement in terms of social movement theory. This section also seeks to look more specifically at how some of the key themes portrayed in the results sections illuminate concepts in social movement theory and how they may also require developing further theoretical explanations.

### ***Collective Behavior***

Collective behavior enrolls the concept of “shared values” which is valuable to the IWM, but the basic tenet that relies on the irrational actor makes this an untenable model for the IWM (2005: 892). Moments of street action or group protest are less spontaneous and emotional, and instead much more intentional and planned-out. That is not to say that emotion does not play a role in women’s activism in Iran. Participants however, are driven by real and rational grievance based on discriminatory practices by the state and society in Iran. Protest events may be highly charged with emotion, but they do not fit the out-of-control irrational actor of older collective behavior models of social movements.

### ***Structural Theories***

Nor are the participants cold, cost-analysis based participants of the models that followed, such as political opportunity and resource mobilization. The participants in this Movement act on tangible, real life grievances that have meaning beyond a cold calculation of benefit-participation. The driver to participate is based on shared grievance, with meaning and a shared identity around women’s human rights.

The formulation of grievances and the articulation of ideology are inseparable from cultural processes of framing, meaning and signification which are prior to any utilitarian calculation of costs and benefits. The use of informal, egalitarian forms of organization is best understood not as the result of a strategic calculus but as the expression of some of the core values of a given movement constituency (Buechler, 1993: 230).

Political opportunity and resource mobilization literature suggest that in order for a movement to mobilize, there either needs to be certain conditions, political opportunity, available resources (elite or powerful connections, money, political influence, etc.), or

both (Morris, 2000, Buechler, 1993). This next section explores how the Iranian Women's Movement may or may not fit with these assumptions.

### ***Political Opportunity Theory***

Political Opportunity Theory also has some value in understanding the Women's Movement in Iran, as well as some failings in trying to reveal causal factors for emergence and sustained action. This theory tells us that in order for a movement to emerge there must be a fissure or opening in the state apparatus allowing the movement to gain foothold and enter into to an open space for public action (Tarrow, 1994, Morris, 2000). In the 1990's during the Khatami era and Reform Movement, there was in fact a government project to encourage and grow Iranian civil society. Khatami intentionally aligned himself with the civic sphere, putting resources into growing civic groups, creating an environment in which a healthy civil society was permitted and encouraged to flourish. The Women's Movement, already active in more covert, disparate, individual and informal ways took the opportunity to grow its organizations and expand its tactical and strategic repertoire to include more formal public organizing. During the Reform Movement, civil society and the Women's Movement "enjoyed adequate resources (a massive rise in literacy and relative freedom of the press and of assembly) and political opportunity (support from the Khatami government)" (Bayet, 2005: 905). The political opening in this instance did not necessarily require a weakening in the state apparatus. Rather, the attempt to bolster the Khatami government by forming ties with civil society created an opportunity for growth in the Women's Movement. "Whenever such spaces become available due to changes and contradictions within the political system, women activists can and have utilized such small structural opportunities" (Tohidi, 2016: 84).

However, as revealed in the literature review, the consequences of the openness of the Khatami era indeed contributed to the ability of the government to later target and attempt to quash the Women's Movement with precision. As the Women's Movement grew stronger and expanded under Khatami, so did it also become more public by registering formal organizations with the state and by openly participating in public events. This therefore later allowed the state under Ahmadinejad to systematically target activists and organizations in the post-reform era. While the Reform Movement may have afforded the IWM a period of benefit, it came with an opportunity cost.

Further, a structural explanation for mobilization in the Women's Movement doesn't help to explain how the Movement emerged before Khatami, sustained activism after his last term, nor does it help explain how the Movement survived and continued to be active during and after the crackdown of 2009. Structural explanations also do not help to explain the re-emergence of women's activism in the political venue in 2013 while the repressive, anti-civil society administration of Ahmadinejad was still in power. Can hope that a new administration would usher in more moderation and freedom explain this? But without having the foreknowledge that such an administration would be elected, how does this account for women's elections activity even while Ahmadinejad's government was still in power? The state plays an important role in explaining some of the growth during the 90's but can't help us to understand how the movement emerged, sustained action beyond this period, or how it re-grew the willingness to be publicly active in the elections again in 2013.

***Resource Mobilization – Too Concerned with Money and Power***

That the political opportunity structure places emphasis on resources external to

the group is also problematic. Although the Movement calls on political figures to advocate for women's demands, it does not rely heavily on elite political figures or elite actors to mobilize the group.

Many "leaders" of the IWM are educated intellectuals and academics, (for example the founders of One Million Signatures Campaign, Zanan-e Emrooz magazine, human rights lawyers, etc.), but they make a specific point not to organize as an elite-led, structurally hierarchical movement (Khorasani, 2009). The Movement strives to "stay away from elitism and populism and also keep moving ahead pragmatically in the face of continuous repression by the hard-liners... it has maintained its homegrown roots and independence both despite and because of all the national and international pulls and pushes" (Tohidi, 2016: 85). This Movement is structured to be and is conducted as grass roots, bottom-up movement and the architects of this Movement work intentionally to keep the participation pluralistic, incorporating rural and non-elites to engage in right-seeking work in their own communities. Much of the skills involved were self-taught and homegrown, a repertoire of know-how in activism built out of decades of advocating for women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### *Cycles of Protest*

Tied to structural analyses of social movements are the concepts of "contentious politics," "protest waves" or "cycles of protest", which require a view of the Women's Movement activism as occurring in peaks or moments of contention (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005: 37, Tarrow 1994: 8). This is problematic for an analysis of the Women's Movement in Iran, first because of the over reliance on political opportunity, elite actors and external resources (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005). Second, this is a movement that

does not rely singularly on overt public forms of contention to express agency and resistance, nor does this Movement relegate all forms of activism to contentious events or street protest to communicate demands. Instead, the Iranian Women's Movement is constantly performing an array of acts both in organized and informal ways, on a daily basis, that which constitute a large share of activism against discriminatory laws and norms. Therefore, the IWM does not necessarily descend into action as this model is structured (into contentions moments). Asef Bayet writes of the Movement in earlier decades:

In sum, what underlined Iran's women's activism was not collective protest but collective presence. The women's movement drew its power not from the threat of disruption and uncertainty, as in the case of contentious politics; rather, it subsisted on the power of presence — the ability to assert collective will in spite of all odds, by circumventing constraints, utilizing what exists, and discovering new spaces of freedom to make oneself heard, seen, and felt (2007: 172).

Indeed, there are particular public events in which the Movement participated—for example the utilization of the election platforms in 2009 to put forth demands for rights. In these moments it may appear that the Movement is experiencing a peak of action because they take place in public view and may be more organized than other forms of resistance. However, it does not stop or slow its overall activity in the in-between periods, and so the descriptor “cycles” is not appropriate to this case. The concept of “protest cycles” is problematic for this Movement because of its reliance on overt forms of public contention; “contentious politics” which fails to recognize a huge swath of how this Movement is active. Not all of its activism is aimed at the state, nor does this Movement strive to displace the state—only to change laws within the current IRI framework. These theories have been criticized in the context of the US Women's Movements as well; “the contentious politics approach is limited by its theoretical and methodological bias toward the study of public tactics and events, often at the national

level, and its neglect of cultural and discursive tactics” (Taylor, 2005: 38).

### ***2009 Was Not a Contentious Event For the IWM***

Further, in the particular context of the 2009 election protest and crackdown, this was not a moment of contention or challenge to the state by the Women’s Movement. If we are to scrutinize this particular “event” as a contentious moment, we need to look at the causal factor. As established in the first key theme of the results section, the Women’s Movement, although publicly present during the elections with its demands for equality, was not directly challenging the state—only putting forth rights demands on the political stage. The state perceived the IWM as a threat for its potential to bolster other reformist movements who were denouncing the elections as illegitimate (particularly what came to be the Green Movement). However, this cannot truly be classified as a contentious moment on behalf of the IWM as this Movement did not directly contest the election in any organized capacity.

That the IWM was targeted for fear of a tangentially related movement also brings up another point of interest. It was known to me from background research that the Women’s Movement had grown strong in the years since the Khatami era and that it wielded much influence over the civic sector. However, it wasn’t clear to me until the process of discovery during content analysis, that the state targeted women to the degree that it did out of fear of this influence on reformists; this was an unexpected discovery.

The uniqueness of this particular event in exemplifying the IWM as a sort of “third party” to the dynamics between state challengers and state repression, necessitates a better framework in social movement theory to understand systems in which multiple

strands of repression occur out of one contentious event, or when a state targets all civil society as the result of challenge by one segment. The Women's Movement was in essence tangled up in the battle between the state and the Green Movement contention. Further, the Women's Movement was itself caught up in the ideological underpinnings of the Green Movement, as activists began mixing democratic ideologies with feminist ideologies of the IWM Movement.

Further, although the IWM operates in the civic sphere, it also spills into the political sphere because of its cultural alignments with other social movements and activists. The act of expanding the crackdown to the Women's Movement unintentionally recruited many active women into activism in the democracy camp, and brought some inactive women out into the world of activism.

### ***Avoiding Direct State Contention in Authoritarian Contexts***

When discussing this Movement under the analysis of Political Opportunity Theory it is important to acknowledge that this Movement does not work to overturn the regime. Rather, it works to change the laws within the existing framework. Though the IWM engages in coalition building with other civic movements considered reformist or political, for the most part the Women's Movement makes an effort to remain apolitical, refraining from taking sides in elections.

That the IWM makes a point of self-identifying as apolitical is emblematic of this context for social activism in the parameters of an authoritarian state, where state practices of extreme force against citizenry are typical. For fear of state violence and imprisonment, movements in authoritarian, non-Western contexts may avoid using direct interaction with the state in order to avoid such confrontations. Instead, practices of

alternative forms of activism are developed which avoid overtly or directly engaging the state.

Even in cases where a movement desires to ultimately transform the state, or in the case of the Women's Movement, wants to change laws that are drafted and executed under the state apparatus, cultural activism can be a better venue to begin transformation (Tuğal, 2009). Western models are wanting for further explanation of how social movements negotiate activism in these authoritarian contexts, in which the state is capable of committing human rights abuses and carries out "illegal" violence against its own population in moments of challenge.

### ***Demonstrating Adaptability with Alternative Forms of Activism in the Daily Routine***

There were some indicators in my background research that the Movement had become adaptive in the years prior to the crackdown. The degree of fluidity, creativity and individualization in daily life was unexpected. The IWM has developed a strong ability to adapt to repressive circumstances due to decades of experience negotiating the terrain of an authoritarian environment. The Movement has demonstrated creativity in developing alternative forms of activism other than overt, state-targeted action. Per Asef Bayet, activism is defined as "extra-ordinary, extra-usual practices which aim, collectively or individually, institutionally or informally, to cause social change" (2005: 893-4). The ability of the Movement to simultaneously engage in public action as well as individual and informal actions enables the Movement to have a space in which to flow in moments of repression and violence. In periods of extreme state repression of civic activism, shifting topical focus or spatial focus helps the Movement to sustain and continue its "civil engagement while shielding them from government intimidation

during a time when social activism of any kind [is] dangerous” (Rivetti and Moheimany, 2015: par 15). As many CSOs are forced to close doors, individual members and loose networks look to other avenues to continue their work and new spaces to engage.

It follows that those CSOs that have survived display a strong ability to adapt to ever-changing circumstances by “upgrading” their networking activities or their focus...repression and civil society activism have coexisted, thanks to coping strategies...in a sense, civil society activists in Iran have upgraded their tactics in order to adapt to, and resist, authoritarian constraints. (2015: par 15)

One way the Women’s Movement demonstrates adaptability is by moving away from overt public forums (like elections) in moments of repression and diverting action to the daily routine. By constructing an “alternative everyday routine...some social movements attack both society and state through denaturalizing every day life and constituting an alternative everyday routine” (Tuğal, 2009: 429). This form of cultural activism is one that is applied consistently over time, and to which focus can be applied more heavily when public spaces for activism become closed.

The constitutions of a hegemony via the strategic transformation of habits unfolds in contexts as varied as the street, the workplace, the teahouses, and the conference hall...which concentrates on repetitive conversations, oral debates, readings (of newspapers, books, pamphlets), education, rituals, and routinized everyday practices, and which only infrequently leads to explosions” (2009:430-7).

The IWM employs this tactic when, for example, they open underground boutiques where ordinary people can go and perform ordinary acts of shopping while hidden from state view. Women can remove state-mandated clothing and scarves, shoppers can buy Western style clothes, socialize in mixed company, make money “under the table” and reinforce practices and norms of resistance through conversation.

Even openly public actions like those carried out by women in rural communities, who are slowly infiltrating political office, are effectively transforming what is normal in everyday life through daily acts that normalize women in public office. Running for

election—the Campaign itself—works to change the norm for who constitutes a political figure in municipal elections, and as they win more often the norm is solidified within the community. They are slowly transforming what is normal in everyday life.

Individual acts of defiance against the dress code and forced *hijab*, as they start to occur more frequently in the civic realm, embody this type of transformation of society through the daily routine. Actions such as letting the scarf slide further back on the head so that more hair shows and appearing in public daily with the *hijab* worn in this fashion, alongside more daring forms of resistance, such as the one employed by a young woman last year who stood bareheaded in busy Tehran intersection waving a white scarf (part of White Wednesdays Movement), collectively work to challenge the norms around the women's dress code as perceived in the civic realm. These acts help to unite women who share a similar attitude about state control over their choice of clothing, and to ignite conversation with and transform the minds of those whom do not already feel this way. Eventually, the state is forced to acknowledge and potentially act on public grievances that crawl to mass proportions. “Looking from this perspective, Iranian women could be said to subvert or resist, in their everyday practices, the state policies that tended to undermine women's rights” (Bayet, 2007: 169). By deploying a power of presence, women form collective identities in everyday locations, which work to incrementally encroach “into the power base of patriarchal structures.” (2007: 171). This type of daily activism is precisely what many constituents of the Women's Movement utilized after the 2009 crackdown in order to remain active and express agency.

### ***Historical Context***

The Iranian Women's Movement is inextricably linked to a historical context, a connection which some strands of structural theory ignore or downplay (Morris, 2000). When analyzing the emergence of the Iranian Women's Movement however, we cannot make discovery without contextualizing in historical (and by default geopolitical) background. The Women's Movement as it existed prior to the revolution is substantively different than post-revolutionary women's activism in Iran for the reason that the relegation of women to second-class citizenry in 1979 changed the goals of activism for women, and potentially changed the level of and types of participation. Although women in Iran have a long history of equal rights activism and collective action dating back to the "movements around constitutionalism and democratic nation-state building" at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, creation of this regime and establishment of a Sharia-based rule in which women's rights were diminished or taken away in "almost all spheres of life" has impelled the Women's Movement into the rights seeking activism the Movement engages in today (Tohidi, 2016: 78).

As important to the historical context of the Women's Movement, is the complicated geopolitical relationship between Iran, US and other Western nations. These international dynamics have their own effects on Iranian women's activism.

The tenuous relationship between Iran and the West born out of history of Western involvement in Iran and the Middle East, including the CIA backed coup of 1953 which deposed a democratically elected leader and put in power an unpopular shah, fostered anti-American, anti-Western sentiment and contributed to the causal factors in the 1979 revolution. A thread can then be drawn between actions carried out by Western

nations and the emergence of the Women's Movement, which was built around a fight for legal rights under the new Islamic Republic.

Further to that, this interconnectedness affects how women engage in activism. On one side, the state connects women's activism with Western intrusion as part of a "velvet revolution," which in turn, informs women's approaches to activism by motivating them to avoid relying too heavily on outside or international help in their rights campaigning.

### ***Structural Explanations Lack Culture, Framing, Human Agency***

Some scholars make an intervention in the Political Opportunity and Resource Mobilization theories by pointing out the under emphasis on culture in accounting for emerging and continuing social movements. "As a result, scholars underestimate the ability of challenging groups to generate and sustain movements despite recalcitrant political structures and heavy repression...preoccupation with powerful external elites has left key determinants of collective action in theoretical darkness" (Morris, 2000: 447). As part of the criticisms leveled at structural explanations for underestimation of culture, scholars point to the lack of attention to collective identity (Buechler, 1993). Proponents of political process theories started to recognize that an intermediary element was missing from the structural model, one that accounted for ways which brought participants into the fold through shared meaning (Morris, 2000). "Hence, the call to bring culture back in to the study of collective action is one way of summarizing much of what is missing in the conventional RM framework" (Buechler, 1993: 230). Part of the argument for the focus on cultural dynamics to be incorporated in social movement theory is importance of the role of human agency. "Assumptions in current theory lead its

proponents to gloss over fundamental sources of agency that social movement groups can bring to the mobilization process, cultural framing, tactical problems, movement leadership, protest histories, and transformative events” (Morris, 2000: 445). The New Social Movement paradigm, which makes an attempt to correct the slight of culture, identity and agency, is also useful in helping to explain aspects of the IWM, including its process of mobilization around a shared grievance and resulting collective identity, as well as the ability of the Movement to be active in spite of intense periods of repression.

Some of the features of social movements ... especially those of the “new social movements” do exist in the recent trajectory of the collective women’s activism in Iran such as framing, networking, campaigning, generating discourse or symbols (hence collective identity), lobbying, mobilizing, and collective protests (though all in small scales) (Tohidi, 2016: 80).

### ***New Social Movement Paradigm***

Some of the elements incorporated in the NSM Paradigm like the focus on culture and identity, fluidity, inclusion of both formal and informal activism and networking, horizontally structured movements, placement of social movements in the civic sphere, discursive and cultural framing, a subjective and self-reflexive participant, are useful to analyzing the Women’s Movement in Iran. First however, there are some basic issues with this theory that are also problematic.

### ***NSM Theory for Explaining Emergent Conditions***

The first complication when applying NSM Theory to the IWM lies in the central claims of the nature of New Social Movements and why they develop. Theorists of the NSM Paradigm settle on two core assumptions; that these movements are a product of the post-industrial, post-material age, “and are seen as fundamentally different from the working class movements of the industrial period” (Pichardo, 1997: 412). As a result, these movements are believed to embody a “value shift” from grievances concerned with

economic and political issues to those that concern “quality of life” grievances. The idea rests upon developmentally Western model claims that “Western nations have reached a point of economic and political security in the modern age” so that they no longer mobilize around concerns outside “personal growth and self-actualization” (Pichardo, 1997: 421).

While women’s grievances could be characterized as “quality of life,” as they are derivative of a civil rights based movement, post-industrialism and post-materialism are not the cause for a focus on women’s issues. Further, Iran as a nation does not fall under the rubric of being economically and politically secure. While the Women’s Movement may not be centered on the goal of removing the IRI from power, there is plenty of political contention by other reformist movements in Iran. Further, Iran and Iranian women in particular are far from economically secure. Recent protests in December 2017-January 2018 by the general public over economic issues including unemployment and inflation are evidence of this point (Rowan, 2018). “Moreover, the rising inflation...budget deficit, unemployment, and overall economic hardship caused by the government’s mismanagement and reckless spending on the one hand, and the expanding international sanctions, political isolation, and even a threat of military attack on the other, brought many in Iran to the verge of despair” (Tohidi, 2016: 82).

Further, women’s social and legal rights demands concern their political status and lower economic positions as second-class citizens. Their demands cannot be separated from economic and legal-political issues. The value shift therefore from “redistributive (working class movements)” to “lifestyle concerns” does not translate to this circumstance (Pichardo, 1997: 412).

### *State Intrusion into Civic Sphere*

The NSM Paradigm also makes the assumption that the New Social Movements emerge as a reaction to the “state’s attempt to control the civic sphere” (1997: 420). “NSMs are also reactions to the expansive (growth oriented) nature of post-industrialism, which needs to neglect the social costs of growth to maintain profitability” (1997: 420). In other words, civil society grows to protect the public sphere from state intrusion on community, identity and other cultural concerns. “But the mere presence of NSMs in non-Western nations argues against both hypotheses-of state intrusion... and value change” (1997: 425). Iran cannot be said to have gone through the same post-industrial economic, post-material security change upon which NSM assumes movements to emerge. The conditions for emergence in NSM therefore do not align with the IWM because the post-industrial qualifier doesn’t fit, nor does this particular state-society relation involving government intervention into daily lives within the context of generally secure national environment. This is an authoritarian state that exercises overt forms of control and intrusion in all aspects of the lives of its citizens. That these movements are thought to be a self-defense against social control due to “capital accumulation” or “commodification of social life“ is not applicable to this authoritarian non-Western context (1997: 420). The IWM does not follow this line in the NSM Paradigm that pertains to reclaiming the control and identity from the “colonization of the lifeworld by the state and the market in post-industrial societies” (Bayet, 2007:170). In an

authoritarian state like Iran, government controls go far beyond the civic sphere where it also infiltrates markets and politics.

### ***Rooted in the Civic Sphere***

The NSM Paradigm doesn't help to explain the conditions for emergence of the IWM, but the placement in NSM theory of the New Social Movements in the civic sphere does have some worth in analyzing the nature of the IWM. This Movement is indeed a civic-based movement, working to create socio-cultural change in order to achieve legal rights. It cannot be classified as an economic or politically based movement. In NSM theory:

The civic sphere, where culture resides, which had traditionally been seen as being dominated or determined by the economic sphere, is now seen as a locus of social protest. This "liberation" of the civic sphere has brought to focus the realization that the civic sphere is an area of contention just as are the economic and political spheres (Pichardo, 1997: 425).

Because the IWM engages in cultural activism and works to change socio-cultural attitudes about women and their rights, it is important to acknowledge that this Movement is in fact rooted in the civic sphere.

### ***Participants***

The NSM Paradigm makes the claim that the constituents are generally from the "new middle class" because they are not tied to corporate profit motive, but rather they come from "academia, arts, human service agencies" (1997: 417). Some scholars of the IWM have argued that this Movement is primarily middle-class Iranian women (Tohidi, 2016). However, the IWM Movement, especially in the case of the One Million Signatures Campaign, works to reach out to women of all social classes and in all parts of the country (both urban and rural) (Khorasani, 2009). It could be claimed that many of

the women who could be considered the Movement's "leaders," those who engineer much of the strategic and tactical innovation come from an intellectual middle class including lawyers, journalists, and academics. However, this is not what binds this Movement together, as women's issues are not class issues.

The NSM Theory also holds that new social movements can also carry high levels of diversity, particularly in Western examples of women's movements (Buechler, 1993, Bayet, 2005). Likewise, the IWM incorporates quite a diverse constituency, as evidenced in the way the Movement utilizes such a wide array of tactical strategy based on context and who is committing the act. This includes urban organized action as well as rural individualized and informal action; women from all walks are part of this Movement. Wealthy women, women from lower socio-economic levels, homemakers, working women, students, and religious and secular women all participate in this Movement. As iterated above, Iranian women have found ways to remain active in periods of repression through informal and individual activism. This kind of activism takes place in homes, on the street and in cafes and is carried out by a diverse group of women.

So what can account for cohesion and emergence of the IWM if not based on class, and does not rely on political opportunity and external resources? Proponents of the NSM Paradigm argue that what binds new social movements is the development of a collective identity based on particular grievance, ideologies and cultural framing (Buechler, 1993, Pichardo, 1997). The New Social Movement Paradigm may be able to help account for ways in which IWM mobilizes around shared meaning in spite of state obstacles and movement diversity.

***Movement Emergence: Constructing Collective Identity – Based on Grievance***

Grievance and collective identity, ideology, and culture are recognized in the NSM Paradigm as key features to emerging social movements. Earlier assumptions in RM and PO Theory that downplayed grievance may have missed a fundamental cause for the emergence of movements. The “construction of grievances may be the critical step which allows members of socially dispersed groups to begin to mobilize for action” (Buechler, 1993: 222). IWM is defined more by common values about women’s rights than economic or political grievance or class division. Women’s status as second-class citizens, their lack of access to resources, discriminatory legal status, state sanctioned violence against women, and other gender-specific issues unite women behind common grievance that affect all women in Iran. “The formulation of grievances and the articulation of ideology are inseparable from cultural processes of framing, meaning and signification” (1993: 230). The modern IWM has formed around a grievance based on the loss of rights originating at the formation of the IRI, including legal, social, economic, political, and educational rights. The discriminatory laws affect women across class lines and across other forms of identity such as religion, therefore drawing in a diverse constituency.

The issue of diversity in the Women’s Movement has the potential to be problematic in the process of organizing, when ideologies are fundamentally at odds with each other (Buechler, 1993, Bayet, 2005). Also, women’s movements can be complicated for the fact women do not always mobilize based on gender alone, which can create a challenge when trying to recruit membership (Buechler, 1993). Conflict due to competing ideologies like those derived from religion versus secularism may arise, and women may not be motivated to action without an adjoining identifier such as being a mother, battling

discrimination under family law, or a student who is experiencing discrimination at university.

Participants in the contemporary social movements come from diverse backgrounds and experiences, and do not in that sense form a coherent unit. Yet certain fields of their interests and values may converge over a particular issue or grievance. And it is these 'partially shared' interests or values (in addition to other requisites) that ensure collectivity (Bayet, 2005: 902).

### ***Ideology and Framing***

Ideologies, though they may be diverse within the Women's Movement, can coexist with the help of binding frame (Buechler, 1993). "[I]deology encompasses the ideas, beliefs, values, symbols and meanings that motivate individual participation and give coherence to collective action" (1993: 222). Further, ideology is a critical component for "fostering collective identity" (1993: 223). A feminist ideology helps to underpin the IWM as a gender-based movement, and a human rights ideology helps to pull together multiple gender-based grievances as pertaining to women's rights or civil rights. These meta-ideologies highlight ways in which discrimination affects all women in Iran. Adding frames that overlap with ideology or add another layer help create identity within the Movement, as in the examples above—a motherhood family rights frame or a student rights frame. Or, for example, portraying women's actions as legal and peaceful, and the state as illegal and violent in its treatment of women, helps to further mobilize the community against discriminatory practices. "Through frame alignment movement organizations attempt to reach out to people with similar grievances, to clarify ambiguities and to make larger recruits" (Bayet, 2005: 902-3). Frames are used to unite people with different ideological orientations under a similar grievance.

Depending on the context, different frames and ideologies are used by the Women's Movement to work to build a "community of support" and social capital in

terms of trust, communication and understanding (Buechler, 1993: 230). “New Social Movement theorists argue that social movements emerge from activist networks or social movement communities that create viable and shifting collective identities to sustain commitment within and between protest cycles” (Staggenborg and Taylor 2005: 44). What allows them to transcend internal diversity is the formulation of ideologies and cultural framing which give meaning to a collective identity.

It is important to note that without the common and concrete grievances held by women around legal rights and social norms, the utilization of framing and ideology would not be enough to mobilize or hold the Movement together. The prevalent, everyday experiences of discrimination and lack of rights are the common denominator that characterize and bind this Movement. As the Movement ebbs and flows between various forms of activism and under various political environments, the real and shared grievance remains constant. Framing specific grievances related to discrimination under a frame helps to affirm the cause for legal and social rights demands. Ultimately, smaller grievances can be used with framing to motivate individuals to join the cause for the greater grievance. In other words, a mother can be motivated to join in the general cause for women’s legal rights in order to gain the family rights that directly affect her situation. Based on women’s existing grievances over legal rights, rights to their bodies, freedom of movement, family law rights, and more, these frames and ideologies are applied to create shared meaning and collective identity.

A collective identity built on shared grievance is what unites women’s disparate actions under the umbrella of one social movement. Women may organize formally or informally as groups, organizations or as individuals, acting in concert to achieve the

same goals. This is the basis for what constitutes a “movement” and for how we can categorize these separate entities as a “Women’s Movement”.

### ***Constructing a Collective Identity***

Collective Identity is a core feature in New Social Movement Theories (Buechler, 1993). The IWM helps to grow a community of support and create collective identity by educating women (as well as their male family members and friends) about women’s rights. Utilizing more generalized ideology and framing around “human rights” helps to unite constituents around legal rights activism with a clear set of demands. They create a structure that can be inclusive of a diverse set of women by finding a way to make the grievance, frame and demand applicable to all. One Million Signatures does this by going door to door to talk about ways in which women suffer as a result of state legal discrimination, as well as social discriminations (Khorasani, 2009). Through education and discussion they work to incrementally build social capital with common understanding, common language and an identity built around this rights ideology, emphasizing that all women are affected one way or another. This is how collective and informal and individual action can be mobilized around a collective identity within a diverse constituency.

### ***Cultural Framing and Coalition Building***

Similarly, the human rights or civil rights frame can be used to form coalitions with other rights based movements (like the Reformist or Green Movements). “The incidence of coalition building is not uncommon. United fronts typify the organizational form of such deliberate but ad hoc alliances. Here, the parties, aware of their differences, come to work together on certain perceived common objectives” (Bayet, 2005: 902).

Using the human rights narrative and frame to form coalitions with other members in the civic sphere acts as more general cultural framing, contributing to the transformation of societal attitudes over time (Morris, 2000). In the IWM “a pragmatic, social democratic or liberal democratic human rights framework has become the common denomination for collaboration and coalition building” (Tohidi, 2016: 84).

Not only is the civic realm the target of transformative action, but it can also be the locus for a community of support for the Movement and its demands. Cultural activism works to recruit to a community of support. “Equally important is the internal dynamics of movements themselves. Social movements transform their own environment, their relationships with surrounding social and political forces and institutions, society, their constituency, and the state, which in turn affects their own existence” (Bayet, 2005: 898). Cultural activism is an important avenue for the IWM to transform social attitudes with legal change as the end goal. This way they are able to avoid (when needed) overt contention with the state by working from the ground up.

### ***Collective Identity in Non-Western contexts***

Further, the existing models for New Social Movements in the civic realm need to be developed to consider the complexities of non-Western contexts. Scholars of Middle Eastern social movements call for more work to be done to address the “core democracy bias” in New Social Movement Theory (Tuğal, 2009: 426).

Although such 'culturalists' as Jasper, Johnston and Klandermans, and notably Alberto Melucci, productively perceive social movements as resulting from processes of negotiation and communicative actions, nonetheless their models, like those of others, are rooted in and orientated towards the highly differentiated, technologically advanced, and politically open societies. Their 'Westnocentric' orientation undermines their ability to account adequately for the dynamics of social activisms in the societies of the global South (Bayet, 2005: 893).

Asef Bayet’s concept of “imagined identities” also helps to explain why and how

individuals might participate in the Women's Movement in moments of repression (2005). When women's rights organization are broken up or public space for activism is too dangerous and individuals take it upon themselves to either perform acts of resistance in the home or on the street, an imagined shared identity contributes to the sense of community even when no formal group or visible actions are available to build solidarity.

Restricted political opportunity (because of repression) and lack of resources are likely to limit the effectiveness of consensus mobilization....Imagined solidarities are usually the characteristic of societies with an authoritarian polity, where the effective exchange of ideas and communicative action in the public disagreements (2005, 903).

This shared identity, which can be said to be "imagined" when separate actors act in concert regardless of their ability to meet, is tied together through common grievances over discriminatory legal and social policies. Formal organizations, informal networks or groups as well as individual and informal actors are bound under this grievance-based shared identity. This helps us to conceive how the Women's Movement sustains action regardless of the political climate. Bayet argues that social movements are highly dynamic, "fluid and fragmented collectives...in constant flow and motion" (Bayet, 2005: 897). As such, the Women's Movement is organized in a segmentary fashion, having "several, sometimes competing, organizations and groupings), "polycentric" (have multiple and sometimes competing leaders), and "reticulate" (are linked to each other through loose networks)" (Tohidi, 2016: 80). Particularly as a result of the authoritarian environment in which they exist, this structure allows parts of the whole to keep working when other parts are quashed. Further, this structure may require some "imagining" in terms of sharing interests across segments of the Movement in order to keep active when formal networking and organizing is not possible. This is why "despite intense repression at the state and societal levels, personality frictions, ideological divergence, and

differences in strategy and tactics, Iranian gender activists have often converged in practice to collaborate over their common goals” (Tohidi, 2016: 84). Identity formation around shared grievance and imagining solidarity in periods of repression informs the way the Movement not only emerged, but also how the Movement sustains action and remains resilient in spite of poor environments for civic action.

### ***Balancing Feminist Ideology in the Islamic Republic***

Because the Women’s Movement utilizes “liberal democratic” rights framing, it continually works to balance this identifier with the context of anti-Western attitudes that see this beliefs system as intrusion of foreign elements (Tohidi, 2016:84). Again, the use of apolitical ideology and legal rights framing helps to counter this connection, by reinforcing the idea that this Movement does not seek regime change, only legal change for women within the existing structure. Likewise, many women activists work with religious ideology, reinterpreting *Shari’a* in to order rectify religion and women’s rights seeking. This helps to portray the Movement as not being anti-Islam or anti-religion. This is important when doing outreach to the community in that it keeps that element of cultural commonality, making the Movement’s demands more palatable across a broad base of society.

### ***Resilience as a Sign of Upgrading***

Experience with investigating new avenues for participation and civic engagement contribute to the ability of the Movement to survive these periods and regrow damages incurred during crackdowns. This Movement has demonstrated great durability and resilience, the result of a sort of continued inoculation process with each incident of state violence and repression. Part of my inquiry at the start of this research

included questions around how such a strong movement could be quashed to the point of retraction. What was unexpected in my results was not only that the Movement indeed continued to be active to some degree even directly after the crackdown, but also that what appeared to be retraction because the Movement shifted to less visible venues (online and underground, etc.), was actually the Movement learning to use available work-arounds and grow resiliency. Civil society and particularly the Women's Movement in Iran experienced "the weakening of the infrastructures of activism but also, at the same time, the strengthening of their resilience" (Rivetti, 2016: par 8). Concomitant with practice of straining for rights against authoritarianism and closed civic space is the growth of the Movement's repertoire, strength and defiance.

This helps us to understand why this Movement stepped back into the political sphere during the 2013 elections, bravely putting forth demands during the campaign just as it did in 2009. The degree of human agency displayed by the IWM cannot be underestimated either. "Despite much constraint and pressure, women did not give up but kept on pursuing those interests, which in turn followed serious normative and legal consequences...the women who felt stifled by the coercive moralizing of the government resisted patiently and fiercely" (Bayet 2007: 171).

Further, as Civil Society Theory suggests, the Women's Movement is positioned in the civic realm to protect the public (women) from state authoritarianism and repression. There is much debate over the nature of what civil society can look like and where it can be said to exist or even be robust. Some theorists have claimed that a healthy civil society cannot exist in authoritarian contexts because it needs to have some support from the state or at least a healthy environment (analogous to the PO model for social

movements). However, this Movement shows us that there can be substantial strength, demonstrating civic health, in social movements and civil society in authoritarian contexts due to a durability or “tolerance” grown by such movements and by the civil sector. I would therefore argue that successes of movements and civil society cannot be solely measured by the environments in which they engage in activism, but instead by their reactions to repression and ability to continue working in such closed political and repressive contexts.

[S]ocial movements may also succeed in terms of changing civil societies, behavior, attitudes, cultural symbols and value systems which, in the long run, may confront political power...these observations are directly related to the continuity, success or failure of social movements. The weakening of or even a halt in a social movement activity does not necessarily mean its failure, if all or part of its objectives are met (Bayet, 2005: 898).

At the start of this study I had underestimated the degree to which the Movement remained active after the crackdown, and the degree to which it recovered in areas where damage was done or where the Movement had gone dormant. The greatest loss it would seem to this day is the exile of so many of the Movement’s architects and prominent members. There were no indicators within the texts I analyzed that those who fled after the crackdown were returning to Iran. Fortunately, many young new recruits have come into the fold, as the Movement continues its cultural activism, and continues to develop new and creative forms of participation.

### ***Limitations***

My inability to travel to Iran to conduct interviews placed great limitations on this study. Utilizing second-sourced interviews was helpful in getting a remote ear on women’s voices in Iran, however I would have additionally liked to run my findings and conclusions by current Iranian activists inside Iran to verify misreadings or misconceptions I might have garnered in my analysis. Further, live interviews may have

helped in discovering more of the unique and new ways women continue to express agency and commit acts of resistance in Iran today. Likewise, my inability to read or speak Farsi contributed to my lack of more in-depth resources. Fortunately, many of the websites run by and articles written by Iranian women are translated to English, however there were many more I was unable to utilize due to this limitation, which could have provided more dimension to the results. Additionally, while I did find that the formulation of collective identity around common grievances helped the Movement to unite in collective action, I believe there is more room for discovery regarding diversity within this Movement. While I encountered much discussion in the literature review about internal divisions in the Movement prior to the crackdown, there was little discussion in the texts I analyzed for this study. This deserves more attention in further research on this Movement. Finally, at the time of this writing, an important new development has emerged for Iranian geopolitical relations, which is sure to affect women in Iran and their quest for greater rights. The recent announcement of withdrawal of the US from the nuclear deal under the administration of Donald Trump is expected by many experts to have very negative consequences on the people of Iran. The implication for increased sanctions on an already economically strained country, and particularly women who tend to suffer the brunt of such economic hardships, is bound to inform some changes for the Movement. With greater time and resources, I would have liked to include more in this study on how international relations affect the Women's Movement and specifically the withdrawal from the nuclear deal.

The research for this study sought to discover the effects that the 2009 government crackdown on civil society had on the Iranian Women's Movement, and to

reveal theoretical implications for social movement and civil society theories.

Contradictions in literature on the Movement necessitated further inquiry into whether or not the Movement had entered a period of retraction as a result of the crackdown.

Ultimately, what I hoped to achieve was a better understanding of the ability of the Movement to make advances in the fight for legal rights, and a better understanding of the state as capable of leveling enough damage so as to render women inert.

Further, by analyzing the Movement against existing theoretical models, I hoped to make contributions to understanding its emergence and sustainability, in order to make predictions about how women would fare under future repressive moments.

The research revealed the Women's Movement in Iran to be fluid and adaptable, and that it embodies a certain type of resilience grown out of an authoritarian context, but also that it is particular to and fortified by being a gender-based movement.

The transformation of Iran in 1979 to a theocratic state with discriminatory law ignited women into action in defense of their rights. Women have one of the longest protest traditions in modern Iran, which has imprinted the Movement with decades of experience. The legacy of the Movement and the repressive conditions in which it formed under an authoritarian government has contributed to its resiliency. This requires a view that converges gendered understandings, Muslim states, and authoritarian regimes.

The process of emergence and mobilization through the construction of collective identity based on gender grievance also works to strengthen the Movement's ability to unite in spite of internal diversity. Pluralism in ideology and a geographically diverse constituency help to create a strong foundation, enabling women to withstand state repression. These characteristics contribute to forming a robust coalition and inform how

women, though temporarily diminished in particular ways after the crackdown, did not stop working towards goals, so that when elections came around again in 2013 they bravely utilized the election platform to once again put forth demands.

An array of theories can be culled to contribute to an understanding of how women carry out activism in Iran, in part because their adaptability has enabled them to utilize different methods depending on the context and political environment. This Movement utilizes openings in the political apparatus when available, but also has a viable cultural venue to engage in acts of resistance and to work to transform social norms. New social movement theories that focus on the civic sphere help with part of the story, but the state also remains an important aspect to theoretical understandings about the Women Rights Movement in Iran. Ultimately, the end goal in transforming socio-cultural norms is to garner enough momentum to compel changes in discriminatory law within the state legal system. Importantly, varied forms of activism allow the Movement to be in constant motion, rather than turning in a cyclical fashion from emergence, then repression and disappearance, and then to re-emergence. “This particular strategy of Iranian women to achieve equal rights offers an opportunity to perhaps rethink what it means to be a woman activist, or what may constitute a women’s movement, under authoritarian regimes in contemporary Muslim societies” (Bayet 2007).

Further research is needed to develop a model for movements that are simultaneously affected by repression while upgrading their resiliency within non-Western authoritarian contexts. Additionally, the model should account for particular ways gender based movements have their own specific reactions to state violence and repression in the context of religio-political, theocratic states like Iran, where women are

legally relegated to second-class. We need a new explanation for how social groups shift modes of activism when the political environment changes or closes. Further, theoretical models need to incorporate an explanation for how movements experience repression as a by-product of other movements contending state legitimacy, such as the broad backlash against civil society in 2009. Finally, as Tuğal suggests, New Social Movement Theory may need to bring the state back into analysis of movements to address these particular authoritarian contexts (2009).

Coming back to the discussion I had with my Iranian colleague in 2008, when she insisted that things would never change for women in Iran – the recent change to laws in Tehran regarding punishment for “bad *hijab*”, from whippings and imprisonment to morality schooling, show that this Movement is indeed making advances one step at a time. Slowly but fiercely women in Iran are moving the goal posts in spite of constant actions taken by conservative hardliners to thwart their efforts. The inability of the state to permanently quash the Women’s Movement in 2009 informs the likelihood that future repressive moments will not be able to either.

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## **Appendix A: Initial Resource List for Data Set**

### Human Rights Organizations

Amnesty International  
Aresh Sevom (Third Sphere)  
EENA Home Page  
International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran  
Iran Human Rights Documentation Center  
Iran Rooyan (*Farsi for Growth or Development*)  
Justice for Iran  
The Clarion Project  
The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law ICNL  
Women Living Under Muslim Laws  
Iran Primer

### News Media

Euro News  
Iranian Civil Society Resource Center (ICSORC)  
New Internationalist Magazine  
Open Democracy  
Rooz Online  
Pars Times  
Iranian Women's Media Resources  
Zameheh

### Iranian CSOs, Women's Organizations and websites

The Feminist School  
Zanestan  
Communication Network of Women NGO's in I.R. Iran CNWN  
Change for Equality (website for One Million Signatures Campaign)  
Green Party of Iran (Environmental)  
Mourning Mothers  
My Stealthy Freedom  
Tavaana  
Women's Citizenship Center  
Green Coalition of Iran  
The Feminist School Website

### International Agencies/ Organizations

Council on Foreign Relations  
United Nations

### Research Institutes

Association for Iranian Studies (Iran Nameh)  
Foundation for Iranian Studies

John Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies

Middle East Institute  
Pew Research Center

Research Portals

The Iran Data Portal  
The Iranian Directory

Journals

Foreign Affairs Journal  
Middle East Journal

## **Appendix B: List of Research Questions for Data Set**

1. How did the 2009 Post-election government crackdown on civil society in Iran affect the Women's Movement?
  - a. What were effects of crackdown on movement short term?
  - b. What were effects of crackdown on movement long term?
2. What kind of action did the state take against women as the crackdown progressed?
3. Why was 2009 different than previous crackdowns on WM?
4. Was there really a retraction of the Women's Movement in this period? What is the evidence of retraction?
5. If retraction occurred, in what manner – what form did this take?
  - a. Is the movement in retraction, and if so how is it adjusting?
  - b. What are the signs of activity?
  - c. How did women shift their activity after the crackdown?
  - d. What spaces did women move into to continue to be active?
6. If there was a retraction, is it over? Have they pulled out of it?
  - a. If the Women's Movement has pulled out of the retraction, in what way has this manifested?
7. If there was no retraction, how did the Women's Movement continue to operate in the face of heightened repression and suppression?
8. What actions did women and women's groups take after the elections?
  - a. What kind of protest, contestation and or activism did they take part in after the elections?
9. Is the movement episodic or entrenched? Did they recover, re-plan and re-enter?
10. What is the evidence of how the state is treating women and civil society now?
  - a. Activity by state – hardliners versus moderates?
  - b. What is the Iranian state policy under the Rouhani administration, and is there evidence of actual warming? Co-optation?
  - c. To what degree is the discourse by the state that connects women with western imperialism still being promulgated?
11. How are state relations with the US and the west affecting the movement now?
12. Are activists still in exile? If so, do they still feel too unsafe to return?

13. What is the status of leadership in the movement? Have internal divisions grown, or is there more unification?
14. Are more groups opening or are more closing? Are they co-opted or independent?
15. What kind of discourse is being circulated about the movement now (in media and by women)? What is the discourse between women (within the movement) now? Still distancing from politics?
16. What is the status of women's rights? Any improvement?
17. What is the current capacity for agency?
- a. *Through discourse*
  - b. *Through unity and coalition building*
  - c. *Through education*
  - d. *Through Art and Culture*
  - e. *Through Religious discourse*
  - f. *Through Media and Journalism*
  - g. *Through judicial participation*
  - h. *Through Executive participation*
  - i. *Through policy groups/ advocacy*
  - j. *Through parliament*
  - k. *Through legislation*

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**Appendix D: Sample of Coding Process**

<b>Key Phrase or Key word</b>	<b>Analytical Codes</b>
clothing – English words on manteau	Dress code/ everyday action/ rebellion
Parliament Campaign – “name and shame “your veil is your battleground”	Action/ hot topic / new tactic (shift) Dress code/everyday action/ rebellion
Women’s movement – leading civil society “pioneers”	Influence
“threat to national security”	Targeted, state violence
crackdowns daily	Focus shift
stopping state violence	Focus shift
rights discourse in religion	Cultural activism
posting to My Stealthy Freedom	Dress code/ action
campaign for prisoners like Heydat	Action, formal organizing
Dressing up as boys as strategy	Dress code/ action/ adaptive
Underground clothing and shopping boutiques	Adaptive/ everyday action
transformative power	Influence
face to face, door-to-door	Cultural activism
Still a principal social movement	Resilience