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Everyday Peace: Iranian Women's Movement and Peaceful Transformation

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ABSTRACT

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Women's life and rights in Iran have encountered several challenges, and Iranian women have made considerable efforts to transform society and increase gender sensitivity in times of patriarchal rules and culture. This thesis sheds light on how Iranian women's movement and women resisting models have sought to transform society. The research approaches the topic from the perspective of peace and conflict studies and through the studies that deal with slow peace, bottom-up peace building, and conflict transformation theories. The analysis of this research begins by discussing the forms of women's activism through feminist discourses and observes how women's movements have emerged locally and historically. It then turns to the models and strategies through which women have been resisting and transforming from one form of identity to another, at the same time, transforming society through their bottom-up activities.

The data of this research comes from nine narrative interviews with different members of the women's movement who are living in Iran. The data is analyzed by using narrative analysis tools and classifying narrations to different themes. The findings show that these women focus on changing the discriminative interpretations and male-centered readings of Islamic laws and regulations. Iranian women challenge armed patriarchy by their unique strategies such as bargaining with patriarchy. They challenge the political system at a slow pace and with their lights off. These women contribute to the process of resisting and transforming society regardless of their political and religious backgrounds, ideology, and social class.

Moreover, women activists attach a positive value to family, motherhood, femininity, and what they view as stereotypes while they ask for changes in patriarchal laws. They do not see religion itself as a source of restrictions but rather the interpretations of religious texts and patriarchal culture, which result in unacceptable gender relations. Accordingly, this thesis expands the notions of patriarchy in the context of religion and culture. This thesis concludes by suggesting that women's unity is a crucial issue within the Iranian women's movement. According to the findings of this thesis, Iranian women's rights activists from different backgrounds need to shape their unity to make changes in patriarchal rules and to increase gender sensitivity in society.

Keywords: women's movement, Iran, peaceful transformation, slow peace, bottom-up peace buildings, and slow violence.

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1.Introduction

I hear some sounds from the train of domination. We, women, try to put ourselves in between the doors of this train to let some air come in and make more spaces for women.[1]

This research is a journey from the perspective of a woman who was born and grew up in Iran after the Islamic revolution and spent her childhood during the Iran-Iraq war in Tehran. Women's rights have been an essential part of my life, and many of the ideas I explore here have come through my lenses. From childhood, women's rights issues have been a matter of hot debate around our kitchen table. My mother is a lawyer, and she was a law student at Tehran University when the Islamic Revolution happened. She left the university for three years during the first months after the Islamic revolution for a time, which was also called the Cultural Revolution. At that time, the government decided not to allow women to study law at universities, and they believed that there would be no need for women's lawyers or judges. Some years later though, politicians retreated and allowed women to study law at the universities. However, in those days, a woman could not be a judge in an Islamic system. The state power assumed that women could not bring justice to the court, as they considered them as more emotional in comparison to men. My mother continued her studies and became a lawyer in spite of all the boundaries that she was constantly encountering. As I remember, all the time, she was looking for a way to bargain with a judge in the court; sometimes judges did not let her enter the court because of her gender.

Times passed, and Iranian politicians changed their policy to a more moderate version. However, issues such as women's right to divorce, child custody by mothers, women's blood money (*diyeh*)[2] , and their participation in civil society and politics, etc., have remained challenging issues. When my generation graduated from school and was preparing for passing university entrance exams, boys had better opportunities to be placed at the universities in comparison to the girls. I was 22 years old when I started my job as a journalist. At that time, I was looking for a utopia, like the other members of my generation. I remember a time when our chief editor asked me to wear a black scarf and a long black Mantou at work. Although, I grew up in a religious family, "color" was not

[1] Minoo, 10th of January 2018

[2] Blood money *(diyeh*) is the amount of money that a murderer or one who has made bodily harm has to pay to the victim or their family as compensation. According to the articles 294 and 300 of the Iranian Islamic penal code, blood money or compensation given for a female victim is half of the male victims (Ahmadi Khorasani 2009).

the issue of restriction to my mind. That chief editor was a young man with open-minded attitudes to politics, not to women. Women journalists who were working with him tried more to change his opinion; however, the time and politics did not allow him to be more amenable to our demands. Ahmadinezhad came to power, the Green Movement[3] was suppressed, and we had to leave our jobs. Now more than ten years have passed and continuously I see how Iranian women try to negotiate the issue of equality in their own ways.

In this research, I have chosen to focus on the micro-level and reveal the individual voices from inside the country. These voices are parts of the women's movement in Iran. My networks in this research are unique, and they are from different parts of the movement. I have tried to cover different generations as well as different political and religious backgrounds. The cultural and political situation in Iran has created some unique features where access to people is concerned. One should have some prior connections: friends of friends, or friends of the family should know you; only then will people trust you and allow you access. I tried to use my journalistic connections and some familiar names to gain the trust of my interviewees. The research is based on nine open-ended narrative interviews with women activists and NGO leaders. I conducted these interviews during January 2018 and February 2018, and one of them in June 2018. When I began to arrange my interviews, I could get a micro sketch of the whole situation and realized how Iranian women activists do their job under abnormalities.

As we become famous, state power starts to monitor us.[4]

Additionally, during my stay in Iran for data collection, some Iranian people began protests against the economic policies that the state was taking. At the same time, some Iranian women also started protests against compulsory veiling. Those demonstrations affected the data gathering process of this research and some of my interviewees postponed our meeting to another time or refused to do it. This research aims to find the characteristics of women's movement in Iran, and sheds light on women's strategy in response to legitimized violence. This thesis explores how these women sought to transform society peacefully. This research wants to elaborate on how Iranian women activists shape their ways of resistance against totalitarian strategies from a peace study perspective. As Mac

[3] The Green movement began in 2009 after presidential elections when the voters were looking for their votes by a slogan: "where is my vote?" The state power suppressed this peaceful movement and the movement's leaders have been placed under arbitrary house arrest (Kamalipour 2010: 254).

[4] This quote is from one of the women activist's attitudes, who did not agree to be interviewed by me. However, our phone conversation lasted more than half an hour.

Ginty (2013) asserts, women like other single individuals can define peace on the ground, and they can find and recognize the possible and proper way to sustain it. This is precisely what this thesis seeks to examine. Interviewees for this research show the readers how Iranian women themselves see their experiences, and how they have built their identity as women's rights activists in Iran.

Women's rights activists in this research shared their personal stories as independent actors. They discussed their approaches in helping other women in asserting their rights. These women try to explore the possibilities of coexistence between feminism, Islam, and cultural traditions through their experiences of being a woman in the Iranian society. Such research is valuable as it gives us significant insights into the real lives of the women and lets the readers know about Iranian women activists' attempts to establish their identity as a woman. When they lower their voices to make sure nobody else hears them, I see how Iranian women want to go forward "with their lights off."[5] They trusted me in a time when they did not even trust the walls. I feel responsible to share their voices impartially and have not let the pen make any changes to their voices**.**

1.2. Structure of the thesis

There are six chapters in this thesis, including the introduction (Chapter1), in which I discuss the reason for looking at this topic and what makes it important for me. In the first contextual chapter (Chapter2), I discuss the theoretical frameworks which are used in this thesis. These conceptual frameworks are everyday peace and bottom-up peace building, feminist peace, slow violence, structural violence, patriarchy, and conflict transformation. In Chapter Three, I discuss my methodology, in which I justify my data collection process. I also discuss the reasons behind using narrative interviews and my positionality in this research. Then I elaborate on the data analysis process as well as the ethical considerations. In this chapter, I also provide information about my participants, the organizations, and the cities and times in which I conducted my interviews.

In Chapter Four, I look at the women's movement through a historical perspective to better understand the movement. I point out that the women's movement began at the end of the nineteenth century and the time of constitutional revolution in 1905-1911. Then I refer to Pahlavi's reign and Reza Shah's 'women's awakening program'. Besides, I provide some information about women's status before and after the Islamic revolution in 1979 and the time of male-dominated laws

[5] I took this description from "Shahla", one of my interviewees. This interview was on 13th January 2018

under the direct control of the clerics. This chapter looks at the factual grounds for elaborating why Iranian women activists are reluctant to be labeled feminists.

In Chapter Five, the analysis chapter, I discuss how the specific themes emerge from my research material. I found similar themes in how my participants define women's movement in Iran, how they resist the totalitarian system and their approaches in response to the legitimized violence. I did not define these themes before I conducted my interviews. Themes emerged during the transcription process. In this chapter, I refer to women's voices by putting their words under specific topics. The main thematic categories that are introduced in this chapter are feminism, Islamic feminism, the discourse of equality and justice, circle of trustworthy women, patriarchal culture and women resistance, the functions of women's NGOs, and women in politics. There is a sub-theme that is bargaining with patriarchy as a strategy.

In the last chapter, I draw my conclusions and findings by summarizing my arguments. I argue that Iranian women's main focus is on changing the discriminative interpretations and male-centered readings of Islamic laws and regulations. I show how they challenge armed patriarchy by their unique strategies such as bargaining with patriarchy.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Introduction

Part of the theoretical framework in this research revolves around three concepts relevant to the women's movement: everyday peace, bottom-up peace building, and slow violence. The other conceptual tools for analysing the research materials are structural violence, feminist peace and patriarchy and conflict transformation. I try to use these theories and relate these concepts to the research questions. Through this theoretical framework, I try to show how women situate themselves in different public and private temporalities. Besides, I try to shed light on their reactions, experiences, and their interactions with political authority and the historical background of the country. In this respect, it is worth referring to what Mac Ginty suggests: "identification of everyday peace indicators can contribute to a conflict transformation process by encouraging individuals and groups involved to interrogate the bases of conflict and to envisage what peace might look like" (Mac Ginty 2013: 61).

2.2. Everyday peace and Bottom-up Peace building

The orthodox approach of peace building focuses on liberal institutionalism. However, this approach has been criticized for its indifference to the locals and the people who are embedded in these structures. On the other hand, the concept of an 'everyday peace' strives to take into account the agency and activity of those groups who are habitually marginalized or excluded; it uses their experiences as the basis for a more receptive way of understanding peace (Berents & Mcevoy-Levy 2015: 119). As orthodox and statist research agendas frequently concentrate on institutions and traditional views security and peace, it becomes theoretically subversive. Everyday peace, contrarily, draws on ideas of vernacular and human security. Thus, it is much more context-specific and involves the interpretations and choices made by individuals and communities as they travel across life (Mac Ginty & Firchow 2016: 309).

"Everyday peace is not a destination, rather it is always in the process of becoming" (Berents & Mcevoy-Levy 2015: 124). It allows communities to identify the ground realities of peace (Mac Ginty 2013: 62). Roger Mac Ginty (2014: 549), defines everyday peace as the regular practices used by individuals and collectives in the journey of life in a severely alienated society that may suffer from ethnic or religious divide; such a society may, furthermore, be disposed to episodic direct violence in addition to protracted or structural violence. The concept of 'everyday peace' has been part of a critical research agenda that seeks to recognize the agency and significance of actors at the sub-state level (Mac Ginty & Firchow 2016: 309).

The space of the everyday is a political space; here the most marginal and discards of formal political discourses find collective meaning and organize in response to conflict, violence, and exclusion (Berents & Mcevoy-Levy, S. 2015: 116). Indeed, it inevitability extends to the role and life of ordinary people and their everyday contributions to peace processes (Brubaker & Cooper 2000, cited in Pickering 2007: 3). As Mac Ginty (2013: 62) asserts, bottom-up research can shed light on the role of minority groups such as women and their everyday practices to rebuild their lives and their contribution to peace. Hence, this type of research seeks to include all the voices, political and ideological, in society. The exclusion of minorities can be a significant hindrance in accessing sustainable peace and making institutional reforms (Pickering 2007: 2).

As such, looking at individuals and their lives and hearing the voice of them on the ground provides 'defensible data'. These kinds of data are valuable as individuals are confronted with several political, cultural, and historical constraints (Laitin 1998) in their everyday life and their contribution to peace (Pickering 2007: 12). According to Ginty & Richmond (2013: 773), women's

activists can be defined as everyday peacemakers when they resist and strive for political awakening and question the role of the state and its hierarchical system in their everyday practices. In comparison to top-down approaches, the importance of including the micro-level data and hearing their stories is that they have different perspectives. Individuals "have a different position to power, the power to write, to over-write and be heard" (Mac Ginty & Firchow 2016: 309).

In recent years increasing attention has been placed on the 'everyday' as a site for peacebuilding and resistance (Berents & Mcevoy-Levy 2015: 116). As Mac Ginty & Richmond (2013: 763-4) assert, "the 'local turn' is associated to the critical approach to peace and conflict studies and has been heavily influenced by critical and post-structural theory, postcolonial scholarship and practice, interdisciplinarity, as well as a range of alternative ethnographic, sociological and action-related methodologies". According to their arguments, a particularly important role has been played by scholars and practitioners from the global South in the emergence of the local turn, as well. Indeed, the latter has become to be regarded as a necessary exercise to understand the changing conditions of peace: understanding the critical and resistant agencies that have a stake in a subaltern view of peace, how they act to uncover or engage with obstacles, with violence, and with structures that maintain them.

This thesis uses a theoretical approach to analyse deeply fragmented societies (Mac Ginty 2014). This thesis uses everyday peace as "everyday diplomacy or people-to-people activities to move society towards conflict transformation" (Vaittinen 2017: 157). I refer to the notion that "politics of peace," as Jabri asserts, "is located primarily with individuals, communities, and social movements, involved in critical engagement with the multiform governance structures, as well as non-state agents, they encounter in their substantial claims for human rights and justice" (Berents & Mcevoy-Levy 2015: 124).

2.3. Feminist Peace

In doing this research, I was faced with the question of whether *feminist peace* traditions are applicable in analysing the research material. Although using the traditional feminist approach can be very limited and exclude those women activists who do not define themselves as feminists, a feminist peace approach can be applicable here in the sense that all the women in this research are engaged in feminist work by helping each other and improving the society. Indeed, I apply the theory of feminist peace to analyse the data of this thesis.

As (Wibben.et al 2019: 86) puts it, feminist peace research is a new and innovative branch of the social sciences. Feminist peace is transdisciplinary as well as intersectional and normative. "Although it draws from disciplines such as peace and conflict research (in and outside of international relations) as well as feminist security studies, it also differs from them in terms of research scope and research design" (Wibben.et al 2019: 86). However, according to Confortini (2006: 334), there would be some dangers in merging feminist and peace projects. She asserts that "While I agree that there are dangers in merging feminist and peace projects, I believe that feminism and peace studies have much in common and should not disregard the contributions they can each make to the other's field."

As Confortini (2006: 334) argues, many feminists and peace theorists share a commitment to new thinking and alternative ways to look at problems. She adds: "they both address issues of identity and human needs as opposed to power politics and they acknowledge the existence of multiple realities and cultural and historical differences in worldviews." According to (Wibben.et al 2019: 100) "Feminist peace is multiple. It is spatially-temporally layered, endlessly complex, and emergent phenomena, in the constant process(es) of becoming".

Confortini (2006: 333) argues that feminism can benefit Galtung's theory of violence which is valuable for feminist peace studies too. As Wibben.et al (2019: 86) puts it, "feminist peace research asks questions about unequal gender relations and power structures within any given conflict environment". According to Sjoberg (2013: 176, 181), feminism reframes what counts as threats to peace, redefines the concept of peace itself, and makes important suggestions on how to seek peace based on gender analysis. Feminist theorizing of peace suggests many transformative observations when "feminist perspectives focus a critical lens on the meaning of peace, often making invisible violence visible". As Wibben.et al (2019: 90) puts it, Boulding (2000) asserts that feminist scholarly tradition of peace research looks at violence and peace as a spectrum. Thus, peace becomes a dynamic concept one that is constantly in the making, a process laying the bases for relationships of support within 'multiple worlds' (Vellacott 2008 & Ling 2014 cited in Wibben.et al 2019: 90). In other words, feminist peace research methodologies "open the spaces of our collective (but not coherent) imagination" and "compel us to act/theorize in prefigurative ways", to imagine and create together (in our theories and practices) the world we want to see (Wibben.et al 2019: 90).

Claire Ducanson (2016) refers to feminist peace as an inclusive, expansive and transformative notion. According to Ducanson, "in terms of inclusivity, all society members should empower, and feminist peace considers the everyday needs of the people at the same time that try to make life worth living" (Ducanson 2016, cited in Donahoe 2017: 212). In this respect, "A key characteristic

of feminist peace research is its grounding in everyday lives. It asserts that actions at the micro-level are intimately connected to and intertwined with macro-level events (Wibben.et al 2019: 101). Additionally, as Vaittinen.et al. (2020: 188) argue, drawing its strength from feminist theory and feminist activism, feminist peace research aims to throw light not only on the unseen but do so in a way that becomes a basis for change and redress. It also then becomes a tool for the improvement of people's lives and progress towards gender equality.

I refer to the notion that feminist peace can help us better comprehend "violence as a complicated process through which social relations of power are built, legitimized, reproduced, and naturalized" (Confortini 2006: 356). Besides, feminism thereby defines new approaches in making peace and looking for peace (Sjoberg 2013: 185).

2.4. Slow Violence

Another concept that is relevant to this thesis is slow violence. Rob Nixon (2011) elaborates about slow violence in his book *Slow Violence and Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon argues: "slow violence is a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, attritional violence and that is typically not viewed as violence at all. Instead, slow violence is incremental and accretive" (Nixon 2011: 2). The term slow violence is far from the traditional explanation of violence where violence needs to be explosive and visible (Pain 2018: 387). Nixon and his slow violence project try to clarify political and literary forms of resistance to slow violence as it gives voice to "the environmentalism of the poor," a term coined by sociologist Ramachandra Guha (Carruth 2013: 848).

Although Nixon concentrates on the environmental issues in his project, his theory has significant relevance to peace and conflict studies as well. Nixon considers the gradual effects of globalization and situates his theoretical approach to Galtung's (1969) structural violence (Pain 2018: 387), which overlaps with slow violence (Vaittinen 2017: 46). Galtung (1969) defines structural violence as a condition of social injustice and inequality especially in the distribution of power (Vaittinen 2017: 41).

I take Nixon's (2011) definition of slow violence as a point of departure to examine various types of violence that women experience, which are, in many cases, far from the definitions of direct violence.

2.5. Structural Violence

The term structural violence, which originates in the writings of Galtung (1969), as indicated above, is another conceptual framework that I want to apply in analysing my thesis material. According to Galtung (1969), “structural violence is silent, it does not show—it is essentially static, it is the tranquil waters. In a static society, personal violence will be registered, whereas structural violence may be about as natural as the air around us. Besides, by structural violence, the unequal political system produces the harm” (Vaittinen 2017: 159).

In this respect, the members of the dominant culture become habituated to inequality, and as a result, society does not consider structural violence as violence. Galtung defines structural violence as the violence that is about the structure of society where some people, such as women in some communities, may be considered less than human and may experience worse treatment (Price 2012: 6). In these structures, the dominant culture does not let all the members of society access their basic needs, and groups of people suffer from the uneven distribution of power and resources (Confortini 2006: 372).

Applying gender lenses to shed light on different incidents shows how various sectors of social life are affected by the mutual relationship between violence and (gender) power relations (Harders 2011: 135). In the same manner, structures of domination and hidden power relations have crucial roles in our everyday practices (Confortini 2006: 388-9). In terms of uneven access to resources and power through gender lines, “there are fundamental hierarchical relations and all societies today are patriarchal” (Iadicola and Shupe 2012: 384).

In this respect, as Confortini (2006: 341) argues it is crucial to see violence as a process that occurs through social practices while considering all complexities and contestations behind the violence. In addition to this, peace also needs to be seen through social processes. As Clasen (2006) argues in the "Gendered Peace Index": “by a process-orientated conception of peace, we can evaluate how peaceful our society is” (Clasen 2006 cited in Nair 2016: 71). This process has several steps which start from security and securing physical existence for all women and men in society. The peace process also includes stopping any kind of violence. It prepares the capacities for living a good life under the values of gender justice at the same time that considering conflict transformation (Harders 2011: 136).

I refer to the notion of the “violence triangle” by Galtung (1990). In the “violence triangle”, violence is direct, structural, or cultural and Galtung's focus is on systems and structures of inequality (Confortini 2006: 356). On one hand, as Breins (1998) considers, gender equality is a precondition

for a culture of peace (Jordan 2003: 248), and on the other hand "peace involves nothing less than transforming the structures that exacerbate inequalities" (Duncanson 2016, cited in Donahoe 2017: 122). Consequently, I see how women in this research look for their rights while encountering different parts of the violence triangle.

2.6. Patriarchy

The word patriarchy originates from the Greek word "patriarch," which refers to both head of the family and head of the race (Edström 2014: 79). While defining the term "patriarchal," Sylvia Walby (1989), Iris Young (2003), Raewyn Connell (1990), and Wendy Brown (1995) point out that policies may be considered patriarchal when they mark men and women as different (Andrews & Shahrokni 2014: 154). Patriarchy pervades throughout different levels of society, from the political and religious levels to social, and economic levels. Moreover, it has a function in various spaces such as urban and rural (Nkealah 2013: 221). According to Edström (2014: 79), the logic working at the core of patriarchy is an emphasis on exclusive, linear, masculine descent of attribution, legitimacy, power, and meaning. In the process, it delineates the connected and legitimate group, excluding and devaluing all 'others'.

As Kohli (2014: 61) puts it, from a theoretical point of view, the issue of private and public patriarchy needs to be reviewed. Kohli refers to Sylvia Walby (1990) as one of the scholars who expands these concepts. Walby advances the idea of private and public patriarchy in her book *Theorising Patriarchy* (1990). According to Walby (1990) western society has developed in the last 100 years from private to public patriarchy. "In public patriarchy," she argues, "women have access to public arenas, and individual patriarchs within their families may no longer exploit them. They may still be exploited by men through their subordination in public arenas of employment. On the other hand, in private patriarchy women are controlled by male patriarchs within their homes" (Walby 1990 cited in Kohli 2014: 61).

Kohli (2014: 61) also look at the transformation of private patriarchy to public patriarchy. kohli argue that the intertwined process of private and public patriarchy and the way that they co-exist should be investigated in different societies. Accordingly, private patriarchy reproduces inequality and control women's choices not simply at the household level, but at a wider community level and in the job markets through job discrimination and gender segregation of women.

Besides, according to Edström (2014: 73), as patriarchy pertains to gendered power, different arguments on the kinds of power that it proposes should be examined: "these may be termed as

power over, power to, power with and power within". According to Edström (2014), the levels for analysing gendered power in a gender system are internal (personal), interpersonal, institutional, and ideological levels. Indeed, the ideological level becomes crucial in patriarchy, for it is at that level that male supremacy is naturalized and affects the way we internalize gender.

According to Nkealah (2013: 222) patriarchy and its detrimental effects on the lives of women are central to feminist studies. Feminist theory points to the higher prevalence of male domination towards women in society for measuring patriarchy. Pam Morris holds that in patriarchal cultures, women's needs are regarded as secondary, and "the patriarchal oppression of women takes many forms and operates through various media, including the law, education, employment, religion, the family, and cultural practices." In the same manner, Kaplan (1994) argues that power is maintained by men through ideologies of gender inequality (Nkealah 2013: 222).

The literature of intersectionality looks at patriarchy from a different standpoint. As Patil (2013: 847) puts it Kandiyoti (1988), Pilcher (2004), and Whelehan (2004) have criticized the traditional feminist concept of patriarchy. Their focus is on a number of interrelated dimensions of patriarchy. According to them, patriarchy as a term for denoting gender inequality or gendered power relationships between women and men, homogenize and totalize gender oppression (Patil 2013: 847-850).

Patil (2013: 850) refers to different critiques of patriarchy. According to her, recent critiques have focused on interrelated dimensions. As Patil (2013) puts it "Perhaps the central critique concerns patriarchy's unidimensional conceptualization of gender, its dichotomization of gendered individuals into women and men, and its neglect of differences and power relations within each category." Besides, she also refers to the critiques which focus on such neglected issues as race, class, nation, culture, and sexuality. According to her research, a second major critique concerns patriarchy's universalization of the dichotomy between gender and its connected assumptions across time and space. Besides, the use of the term "patriarchy" has also been critiqued as tautological. According to Patil (2013: 851), patriarchy itself becomes an explanation for gendered power relations. In this case, patriarchy is assumed to be the reason for gender inequality. By this line, patriarchy as a term does not consider whether it is possible to constitute or reconstitute patriarchal arrangements.

Similarly, Ghvamshahidi (1995: 135) refers to the works of Mohanty and colleagues (1991) that warn scholars about the danger of presenting women of the global south as victims of their own traditions. Instead, they argue that women must be studied as subjects and agents. Ghvamshahidi

argues that patriarchy should be examined in a specific reality where ideology and material life in a specific culture interact. As she puts: “Patriarchy can be seen as a set of beliefs and attitudes toward all phenomena generating roles and regulations that determine a distinct arrangement for the relationship between men and women. It is neither static nor monolithic; it shows modifications and variations across socioeconomic system culture, and time” (Ghvamshahidi 1995: 137).

Deniz Kandiyoti is one of the scholars who try to identify different forms of patriarchy through an analysis of women's strategies in dealing with them. As she puts it: “I will argue that women strategize within a set of concrete constraints that reveal and define the blueprint of what I will term the *patriarchal bargain'* of any given society, which may exhibit variations according to class, caste, and ethnicity” (Kandiyoti 1988: 274). She also emphasizes the powerful influence of such bargains on the shaping of women's gendered subjectivity. Strictly speaking, Kandiyoti’s (1988: 275) concept of a ‘patriarchal bargain’ determines the nature of gender ideology in the different contexts and sheds light on specific forms of women's active or passive resistance in the face of their oppression. Patriarchal bargains are neither uncontested nor immutable, but “susceptible to historical transformations”.

In particular, women may reinforce particular traditional or humiliating practices to this bargain to gain new rights (Andrews & Shahrokni 2014: 153). As Kandiyoti puts it, the analyses of women's strategies might shed light on the nature of patriarchal systems concerning culture and class, race, gender. She explains that these coping strategies can show how men and women resist, accommodate, adapt, and conflict with each other over resources, rights, and responsibilities.

In my view, according to the theoretical arguments, the traditional feminist concept of patriarchy is problematic, as it regards patriarchy as static and all-encompassing; as a result, it does not take into account the plurality of identities, contexts, experiences, and affiliations within them. I argue that through co-existence and intertwining of private and public patriarchy in the geography that “classic patriarchy” (Kandiyoti 1988) is still alive. Thus, I adopt Kandiyoti’s 1988 term of bargaining with patriarchy. This term refers to women’s strategies to conform to the demands of patriarchy to gain some social, political, or benefits.

2.7. Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation is a dynamic process (Väyrynen 1991:6) and a holistic and multi-faceted approach in managing conflicts (Lederach1995, cited in Miall 2004: 6). The conflict transformation approach tries to present something new to human thinking and interaction (Francis

2002: 59). It deals with the social roots that are the cause of collective violence to support justice and reconciliation (Reimann 2004, cited in Reich 2006:18–19). It is an intended or unintended approach with invisible progress; it is not only about adjusting competing interests (Väyrynen 1991: 6). Conflict transformation is a general and comprehensive approach, addressing a range of dimensions. It aims to develop human capacity and to support structural changes. This process does not look to facilitate outcomes in the time of settlements (Miall 2004: 17). Transforming conflicts may occur as a result of repeated experiences that come from historical experiences (Wallensteen 1990 cited in Väyrynen 1991:129).

Conflict transformation includes a number of dimensions from micro, local, grassroots, and short-term dimensions to macro, global, elite, and long-term (Miall 2004: 18). And as Väyrynen argues many unresolved conflicts may find their solution only through the process of transformation (Väyrynen 1991: 6). Miall asserts that contemporary conflicts are asymmetric and have their roots in inequalities of power and status (Miall 2004: 3). Indeed, the process of transformation would involve promoting concrete steps towards gender equality as well (Harders 2011: 149). In conflict transformation, the role of local actors and individuals as bottom-up sectors in peace building activities and the people who are involved in the conflict is crucial (Shrock-Shenk.et al 1999: 52). In other words, bottom-up sectors as a critical principle of transformation (Ropers 2000) can strengthen local capacities for peace (Reich 2006: 27). Conflict transformation theories are associated with every day and historical changes that transform collective violence in terms of its scope, nature, and function (Väyrynen 1991: 6).

Put simply, conflict transformation requires groups of locals who respect others by making more space for them (Shrock-Shenk.et al 1999: 52). These local partners are local peace building actors and lively networks of actors. NGOs are a good example of local actors, which are independent of the state. They are also independent of political parties and focus on community-oriented purposes and seeking nonviolent actions (Reich 2006: 10, 27). In this respect, John Paul Lederach (1994) represents different levels of conflict transformation as a pyramid of ‘grass-roots' society, a middle layer of relatively influential people, and a minimal top level of leadership. According to his arguments, the middle layer can have an impact on those above and below them (Lederach 1994 cited in Francis 2002: 33). Following Lederach, NGO practitioners advocate a sustained level of engagement over a more extended time. They seek an in-depth understanding of the roots of conflict, working closely with people both within and outside the conflict parties. They try to open a space for dialogue, sustain local or national conferences and workshops on paths towards peace. In the same manner, NGOs identify opportunities for development and engage in peace

building, relationship-building, and institution-building over the longer term (Miall 2004: 14).

In terms of the relationship between gender issues and conflict transformation, it is worth referring to the idea of cultural violence, which is introduced also by Galtung (1990). According to him, contradictions in the structure of society can result in conflict and cultural violence. According to Galtung, "those aspects of culture exemplified by religion and ideology, language, art, and empirical science which can be used to justify and legitimize structural violence and when the act of direct violence and structural ones are legitimized and accepted in society"(Galtung 1990: 291). Indeed, lasting peace cannot be achieved without the transformation of the culture that surrounds us (Shrock-Shenk.et al 1999: 52). Hence, conflict transformation also means cultural transformation for all of us (Francis 2002: 82). Cockburn (2004) clarifies the relationship between gender relations and conflict transformation and argues that war and peace mark extremes on a gendered "continuum of violence" (Harders 2011: 133).

Francis (2002: 77) refers to the traditional exclusion of women from inheritance rights, or female genital mutilation as examples of cultural violence against women. According to Francis maintaining such traditions in African societies is considered an essential way of resisting the cultural imperialism of the West. However, Harders (2011: 150) argues that cultural relativism gives oppressive regimes leeway to hide human rights violations behind "traditions" (Harders 2011: 150). This point of view supports what (Galtung 1996: 196-197) argues about changing the moral color of the act from red wrong to acceptable green or at least to yellow/acceptable as one way of cultural violence.

According to Galtung (1996: 196-197), the use of power and the legitimation of the use of power in violence studies are about two problems: the use of violence and the legitimation of that use. “The study of cultural violence highlights how the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society. According to Galtung another way of cultural violence is “by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent. This is more easily done with some forms of violence than with others. Hence, peace studies need a violence typology, in much the same way as pathology is among the prerequisites for health studies” (Galtung 1996: 197).

Francis (2002: 91) argues that conflict transformation is implemented in several steps. Awareness-raising is called the first step in conflict transformation, which includes political awareness, awareness of interpersonal and group dynamics, and self-awareness that can consist of women's awareness as well. As Clasen (2006) argues, women's awareness can be regarded as a door to a

peaceful society, whereas in a peaceful society, women and men can live with their various roles and identities. The process of raising awareness would involve those organizations that are promoting concrete steps towards gender equality and creating manifold livelihoods and perspectives for men and women (Harders 2011: 147-149).

Thus, women in traditional societies are affected by the strict boundaries set through patriarchal cultures and rules. These boundaries can start a conflict. According to Galtung's conflict triangle model: “Violence can start at any corner in the direct structural-cultural violence triangle and is easily transmitted to the other corners” (Galtung 1990: 302). Eventually, conflict transformation considers conflict as a catalyst, a door to change, and the process of engaging with and transforming the relationships. This approach suggests that conflicts should be transformed gradually and should include a variety of actors. However, as Miall (2004: 17) argues, the exact impacts of conflict transformation activities on the conflict are not clear yet.

Besides, looking at what Väyrynen (1991) argues about conflict transformation and his stress on dynamic terms in transforming the conflict is relevant here. As Miall (2004: 5) asserts “his approach is primarily analytical and theoretical but is also suggestive of the types of intervention that peacebuilders should be considering”. Väyrynen (1991: 6) in a chapter of *To Settle or to Transform?* proposed that conflicts could be transformed by four types of change:

• actor transformations – internal changes in parties, or the appearance of new parties;

• issue transformations – altering the agenda of conflict issues;

• rule transformations – changes in the norms or rules governing a conflict;

• structural transformations – the entire structure of relationships and power distribution in the conflict are transformed.

According to Reimann (2000), the concept of constructive conflict transformation is a comprehensive and holistic approach for the transformation of cultural and structural causes of conflict (Reich 2006: 17). This transforming process needs to consider the characteristics of traditional and modern societies in terms of authority and submission. Indeed, when ‘modern' cultures emphasize equality, ‘traditional' societies tend to emphasize hierarchy (Francis 2002: 61). In the situation of supervisor influencing or terminating supervisee, it might lead to oppression in the broader social structures (Shrock-Shenk.et al 1999: 35).

One crucial factor here is that “peace” does not have the same relevance to all cultural systems (Salem 1994). For instance, in some societies, the notions of "justice" or "social justice" are more

relevant, and then activists who strive for such visions are thus known as "justice activists" and not peace activists (Reich 2006: 12). To sum up, international concepts need to adapt to the local context in dialogue with those women and men who challenge the gendered regulations and restrictions of their societies.

I see the notion of conflict transformation by considering the characteristics of traditional and modern societies in terms of authority and submission. I refer to the notion that conflict transformation means cultural transformation (Francis 2002: 82 and Shrock-Shenk.et al 1999: 52). Besides, I refer to different levels of conflict transformation and consider that the local activists can suggest sustainable answers to the dilemmas of cultural sensitivity and cultural relativism in their particular contexts.

3. Methodology and ethical discussion

This chapter introduces the methodological tools in this research. I discuss my methodology in which I justify my data collection process, the reasons behind using narrative interviews, and my positionality in this research. Then I elaborate on the data analysis process besides ethical considerations. In this chapter, I provide information about my participants, the organizations, and the cities and times in which I conducted my interviews (see Appendix B). For the data gathering process, this thesis uses in-depth narrative interviews. In this chapter, I introduce the methodological tools in this research which are thematic and narrative analysis tools and I argue how to categorize data in different themes.

3.1. Data Collection

For conducting this research, I traveled to Iran and interviewed women activists who have been active in the women's movement in Iran. I worked on the hypothesis that an interview in social studies is not just a window on social reality; it is a sample of reality (Czarniawska-Joerges 2004: 52). To access these samples of the realities and understanding the context from the perspective of women who have been living and acting as independent women rights activists in Iran after the Islamic revolution, I decided to gather some primary data. The possibility of collecting these testimonies through face to face interviews from inside the country is rare. Most of the researches in this field are done by women activists who have been in exile for years after the Islamic revolution and do their research from long physical distance.

This research is based on nine in-depth and open-ended interviews completed during January, February and June 2018 in Iran. All the interviewees are living in the capital city of Tehran except one, who lives in the city of Mashhad. These women range in age from 28 to 93 years and come from different parts of society with different religious and political backgrounds. All the respondents have university degrees and had work experiences in various fields such as a schoolteacher, a Quranic teacher, a member of the parliament, a journalist, a university teacher, an entrepreneur, and a specialist doctor. All the women in this research have a connection to women's NGOs as founders or active members. While I did not ask them to introduce themselves separately, they referred to their qualifications and careers in the course of our conversation.

Accessing special people and interviewing them in Iran need some prior connections; you must be known to friends of friends, or friends of the family, and only then you would be allowed admittance. I tried to use my journalistic connections and some familiar names to let the interviewees trust me. I recorded all the interviews except one of them and transcribed approximately 30 hours of recorded narrations (see Appendix B). I conducted interviews in Persian. When I had completed my interviews and returned to Finland, I began to transcribe the interviews myself. Since this research depends on my participants' narratives, I decided to use their quotes as much as the capacity of this thesis would let me. I have tried to let my interviewees speak for themselves. The translation process was a difficult phase for me because transferring the meanings and feelings from one language to another is not easy when words carry different emotions, although they have the same meanings. First, I decided to translate the parts of these narrations according to their relevance to my specific research question. Soon I realized that I cannot do that as they all try to shed light and conceptualize the ongoing women's movement in Iran from various approaches. For this reason, I just dropped some repetitions and similar notions that different activists narrated and excluded some specific thoughts that have less relevance to the research in this phase.

3.2. Interviews

In peace and conflict research, scholars try to transfer the voices of micro-levels, especially by narrative turns (Mac Ginty & Firchow 2016: 309). A narrative interview is an influential tool for recollecting the personal experiences (Scheibelhofer 2008: 405). As Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett argue, personal narratives-autobiographies, oral histories, life history interviews, and memoirs are essential research tools for understanding the relationship between people and their societies

(Gansel & Vanderbeke 2012: 182). As Brouneus (2011: 130) puts it, by doing an in-depth interview, the researcher becomes an active listener and tries to lead conversations in an extended discussion. In peace studies using in-depth interviews is more common for understanding the challenges, possibilities, and risks of peace at grassroots levels According to Alasdair Mac Intyre (1981- 1990), social life is a narrative; indeed, narratives are useful tools that they can open a path to the most typical form of social life (Czarniawska-Joerges 2004: 15).

Narratives are the central mechanisms for meaning-making for people and they can open a window into human interactions (Riessman & Quinney 2005: 392). Narratives can provide insight into the variety of lived experiences by unfolding the meaning experienced by society's members (Bamberg 2012: 3). According to Ochs et al. (1996), narratives consist of components that include setting, internal response, consequence, and reactions. It is very crucial that by narrations, respondents try to construct an identity for themselves (Stewart & Maxwell 2010: 37). In this respect, while I was conducting in-depth interviews, I recognized that all my respondents preferred to narrate their long-term experiences in the women's movement. I explained the subject of my research when I called them up to arrange the time for our meetings, and then in the meetings, they told their stories in their narrative styles.

An explanatory note seems appropriate here. In some of these interviews, my method was a combination. In the first phase of the interview, I asked open-ended questions. Then in the second phase, I asked some limited semi-structured questions that allowed for a focused dialogue. This combined method, which is called a problem-centered interview, is methodologically interesting. This method gives freedom to the interviewee to structure the narration at the beginning according to the relevant settings. Then the researcher can set up specific questions that are especially relevant for the research focus at the later stages of the interview (Scheibelhofer 2008: 403). In this respect, I defined the topic for my interviewees; however, as a researcher, I stayed flexible during the interview process, adapting the plan according to what came up during the interviews. Then in case, specific themes relevant to the topic did not come up in their narrations, I asked them some specific questions.

For instance, I asked one of the women about her definition of Islamic feminism. I asked one of the other women to evaluate herself in the feminist structure although I let them continue in their way in telling their stories. My aim was gaining further insights into their stories while at the same time I was aware, as Scheibelhofer (2008: 408) puts it, that the researcher should not ask questions that are not logically related to what had been said earlier. During these interviews, I realized that how these women differ from each other in terms of sharing their experiences (cf. Möller 2011: 75).

Indeed, I gave sufficient space to my interviewees to express themselves, and I did not interrupt them during their conversations. Accordingly, some of the interviews lasted for more than 4 hours which made my transcription process very lengthy. These narrations have considerable worth for my research and can open a new path for me in researching women's movement in Iran.

3.3. Data Analysis

As indicated by Polkinghorne (2007: 407) narrative research is the study of stories. In the narrative analysis, meanings, and the way of using those meanings are crucial (Bamberg 2012: 5). The beginnings of narrative analysis can be traced back to studies of the Bible, Talmud, and Quran (Czarniawska-Joerges 2004: 14). In this research, I applied the narrative and thematic analysis as analytical approaches. Through narrative analysis, one can access the knowledge which is not recognizable clearly in the stories. Understanding what takes place between the narrator and analyst and between analyst and audience can enrich the findings (Gansel & Vanderbeke 2012: 182). Besides, by using the thematic method, I try to transfer the women's stories explicitly with limited reflection on the narrations' implicit meaning. As Vaismoradi et al. (2016: 100-101) argue, the creativity of the researcher is an integral part of these kinds of analysis. Polkinghorne (2007: 483) refers to the researcher's creativity and explains that in analysing the narrative interviews, the researcher tries to apply cognitive processes for recognizing patterns and similarities in texts.

In the same manner, I find similar patterns that the interviewees put in their narrations. then I divide these narrations into the different themes to find the relations and the way that they complete each other. According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016: 101), themes are the product of data analysis that yields practical results in the field of study. The theme is used as an attribute, descriptor, element, and concept which enables researchers to answer the research question. In this respect, narratives try to embody the themes of the cultural contexts and the way that they are developing (Czarniawska-Joerges 2004: 52). In this thesis, themes have emerged after the interviews and in the transcription process. When I started transcribing the recordings, I wrote down all the conversations in Persian. Then I had nine transcription documents in Persian, and I re-read my data several times. I did not use any computer-assisted data analysis programs because I was already familiar with the materials and I understood and recognized the main points of focus. Indeed, I realized that the interviewees used similar themes. Then by looking at my primary research question, and after several times reading the materials, I found and highlighted similar themes in each transcription document.

These thematic categorizations for analysing the result of this research according to the transcription phase are *Feminism*, *Islamic Feminism*, *equality and gender justice*, *patriarchal culture and women's resistance models, women's NGOs, the circle of trustworthy women, women in politics.* There is also a sub-theme that is *bargaining with patriarchy as a strategy.*

In the analysis phase, I decided to use "quotes" to highlight the women's perspectives in their own words. Quotes can also enhance the readers' understanding of who they are and can increase the credibility of the reporting (Craig 2006: 84–88). Pierre (1997) suggests the term “transgressive data”, which considers emotional and sensual data in methodological exploration (Mallozzi 2009: 1051). In this respect, in this thesis, I have tried to explain such details about the surroundings and feelings of these women as much as I could; however, this was not enough. Indeed, I used quotes as a helpful tool to transfer the meanings. I used quotes from the interviews to illustrate the themes.

About using quotes, I am aware that there are ethical challenges in choosing quotes and about deciding on how to corroborate them (Craig 2006: 88). As Allmark et al. (2009: 49-53) argue, the interviewer usually has control over which quotes are used, how they are used, and how they are interpreted. Using quotes has some weaknesses; here the researcher should consider the ethical issues as well. For instance, many interviews concern matters that are sensitive and which might potentially harm both interviewees and interviewers. Moreover, friendship and sharing the same gender with the interviewees sometimes make the interviewees narrate in greater detail and exhibit a high level of involvement in the topic. In this respect, considering the issue of privacy is very crucial in using the quotes in qualitative research.

3.4. Ethical Discussion

> "Although all scholars attempt to be non-directive, all research has a footprint especially in the translation of narrations from another local language to the English language especially in human subjects, and these may have a risk of distorting (consciously or unconsciously) the expressions, motivations or feelings of the researched" (Mac Ginty & Firchow 2016: 321).

Considering the sensitive nature of peace research, qualitative research particularly fieldwork and in-depth interviewing suffers from a variety of technical and methodological challenges. Brounenus (2011: 141) stated the importance of ethical informed risk assessment and ethically informed decision-making in all stages when conducting in-depth interviews in peace research studies. Avoiding research fatigue, minimize the risk of doing harm, protecting the interview data,

analyzing data with care, and deciding on when and what to publish are ethical considerations in doing qualitative research in peace study. Security is another important ethical issue and the main responsibility of the researcher is to assess and ensure the security of the population under study. Besides as Skinner (2014: 186-187) suggests these kinds of research can become emotionally draining, which may lead to difficulties in separating emotions from ethics. Skinner describes her feelings during her field research as follows: “at best, I felt helpless; at worst, I felt voyeuristic”.

In this research, I try to consider all these ethical issues; however, I know that there will be some biases when I am writing about my country. One of the other ethical issues in this thesis is from the gender perspective, that of, a woman interviewing women. Women interviewing women still involve complex issues such as social status, the positionality of insiders and outsiders, interviewer self-disclosure and interviewee's voice (cf. Mallozzi 2009: 1052). indeed, the issues of positionality and power relations should be considered as well. My positionality as an Iranian woman was with me during this research from conducting the interviews to transcribing, as well as during the translation process and analysis. As Sultana (2007: 377) argues about her fieldwork in Bangladesh, “I was acutely aware of my class and educational privilege. As such, I was simultaneously an insider, outsider, both and neither. The borders that I crossed, I feel, are always here within me, negotiating the various locations and subjectivities I simultaneously feel a part of and apart from.” Although I have tried to put aside my personal feelings and priorities, I am an Iranian woman who has been experiencing the same challenges as the interviewees of this research have. I am aware of the probable biases that I might have and tried not to analyse according to those priorities and tried to be careful about neutrality.

Having grown up, studied, and worked in Iran, I have intimate knowledge of the cases. I interviewed women in my own country with my own language. Indeed, on one hand, I have been insider academia to the field. On the other hand, I was an outsider as I am not a member of any of the women's NGOs or political activists neither women's rights activists. Indeed, as Dincer (2017: 85) puts it while taking an interview, the statutes of insider or outsider are not fixed, and my positionality is consequently transferred during the interview process. Accordingly, “a negotiation of shifting positions where the binary structures suggested by the role differences of interviewer خand interviewee in the interview situation mask the more dynamic interactions actually at play in that situation” (Griffin, 2016 cited in Dincer 2017: 85).

Similarly, in her studies on women’s movement in Turkey as an insider, Dincer (2017: 85) argues, “although I felt like an insider and/or outsider during the interviews, I argue that these positions were not fixed and that no one could be a complete insider/outsider to someone else or to a

community but rather that these positions are partial, as everyone has several similarities and affiliations but also differences based on gender, age, class, education, ideology and other facto." Besides, Fleming (2018: 315) refers to the challenge of access to privileged information as an insider (some of which may be personal or incidental). He insists that such access is critical. Thus, insiders need to reflect on whether it is ethical to use their 'inside knowledge' for research purposes or not. According to Fleming, as an insider, the researcher does not need to spend time getting to know the nuances of the context of the research. This turns out to be the real advantage during the analysis and interpretation phase of the research process.

However, as Andrews & Shahrokni (2014: 157) argue, in this situation choosing the relevant data would be a challenging issue. In line with their argument during their fieldwork in Tehran, I was careful not to depend too heavily on my taken-for-granted understandings of respondents' statements and gestures and I preferred to keep my opinions to myself. At this instance, immediate transcription of the interviews was one of the strategies to address this problem. I have followed this guideline in my own way. Although I did the full transcription after I came back to Finland, after each interview I listened to the recordings and complete my interview diary. By this method, I negated any unnecessary exclusion of particular data or judgment and I consciously did not consider all the details. By positioning myself as an outsider, I did not allow my familiarity with the subject to lead me to compare the interviewees' statements in the transcription phase; neither did I allow myself to classify the data or prioritize some points of view over others.

Besides, the translation process has been a particular challenge in this thesis. I had 30 hours of recorded interviews. I wrote down the conversations in Persian. By using my mother tongue, I tried to understand the exact meaning of words. Then during the translation phase, I put my efforts to translate the meaning of the words as precisely as I could. I am aware that some words might transfer different meanings in another language. According to Brouneus (2011: 141-143), by doing an in-depth interview in social science researchers are confronted with various responsibilities. More than the way of doing the research, the researcher should consider the challenges which come with the consequences of the study. The ethical golden rule here is not to harm (Wood 2006: 379). Consequently, a researcher must assure the interviewees that the research does not put them at any higher risk. In this respect, this research may encounter some sensitivity in terms of religion and state.

According to ethical rules, I informed my interviewees that they had a right to stay anonymous and to withdraw at any time. None of my interviewees except two of the women asked me to anonymize them. They all were aware of the processes of this research and how I would use their voices. They

all knew that this study and the thesis will be available to the public after publication. I used their short names and changed two names as I thought their specific discourses might put them at risk.

3.5. The Interviewees: The individuals behind these narrations

A note of caution here is that this research does not claim to be a representative account of the whole women's rights activism in Iran. This research does not claim that these women I interviewed represent women's rights activism in Iran in general. I don't aim to homogenize women's rights activism in Iran by generalizing the idea of these women. But rather this research aims to provide a detailed understanding of the women's rights issues based on my participants' perspectives and offers a snapshot of the challenges in the contemporary women's movement in Iran. Although the women's rights activists in this research consider "equality" beyond their positionality, they are individuals who seek women's rights and gender equality from their own points of view and experiences. There would be probable different and critical points of view about women's rights activism and women's movement in Iran particularly from the women whose political affiliations are much different from my interviewees. For example, according to my observations and other scholars some women's rights activists in the diaspora who had been in exile for a long time, in many cases, do not support efforts of women activists in Iran and have deep-seated anti-Muslim biases (Sameh 2014: 171).

These women I interviewed have different political and religious backgrounds but all of them are Muslim, educated, have high-level social interactions, and live in major cities. Indeed, they can be considered as middle-class elite women. Although as Tohidi (2016: 84) puts it, the women's movement in Iran " has a long way to go to reach various classes and ethnic or religious minorities among the wider populace in small towns, provinces, and rural areas", access to the broader sketch of the women's rights activism in Iran needs more diversity in interviewees particularly in terms of their social class, religious and political affiliation, and gender perspective.

3.5.1. Minoo

Minoo is a women's rights activist and a member of the Council of Nationalist-Religious Activists (Melli-Mazhabi) in Iran. This political organization advocates political reform and greater

democratization in Iran, which has been banned from activities by the Islamic Republic. Minoo is one of the founders of "Mothers for Peace" NGO, a grassroots group that works unofficially. She is the board member of the “Center to Defend Prisoners' Rights”. These centers are banned in Iran. Besides, Minoo has been arrested and detained for her political activities several times, and now, in addition to her six-year prison sentence, she is banned from political and civil activities for two years. I interviewed Minoo on 10 January 2018 in Tehran.

3.5.2. Beti

Beti was born in one of the central cities of Iran. She was a history school teacher before the Islamic revolution in Iran, and she continued working as a school teacher after the revolution. Beti stopped working for four years after the Islamic revolution for some political reasons; she went back to her career after that. She started her charity NGO some years after the revolution, and she has been looking for securing better status for women. She insisted on standing far from politics in her statements; however, she believes Iranian life is interconnected with politics as people are *experiencing political religion under the religious state*.[6] She wanted to be anonymized in this research, and Beti is an adopted name by the researcher for her. I interviewed Beti on 20 June of 2018 in Mashhad.

3.5.3. Shahla

Shahal is one of the pioneers of the women's rights movement in Iran. She is the director of *Zanan* (women's magazine), the first independent journal which has been focusing on women's issues from 1991. Shahla calls *Zanan* magazine as her “daughter.”[7] *Zanan* consistently covers women's issues, but in a way that Iranian society considers taboo. The magazine was shut down several times by the state power, and Shahla was accused of promoting feminist views in her magazine. In January 2008, during the Ahmadinejad presidency in Iran, this magazine was closed. In June 2014, after six years of silence, this magazine was permitted to publish again by a new name, *Zanan e Emrooz* which means women of today. I interviewed Shahla on 13 January 2018 in Tehran.

3.5.4. Gorji

[6] Beti, 20th June 2018
[7] Shahla, 13th January 2018

The Quranic interpreter, Gorji, was the first and only female member of the “Assembly of Experts for the Constitution,” the body that revised the Iranian constitution at the inception of the 1979 Islamic revolution. She is the founder of the first Women's NGO (Institute for Women Studies and Research) in Iran. She has made a unique Quranic interpretation of women in Islam and in times of political Islam. She has not returned to politics after she left in the early 80th. Gorji has meetings and Quran classes with women at her home five days a week. Now she is 95 years old and some of her students have been coming to her place for 40 years, and every week. Most of these women are educated and social activists. There are some women’s rights activists, women of NGOs, civil society activists, and women of politics among her students. I attended her classes for two weeks to gain a proper insight into the attitudes of a woman who is considered as the first Islamic feminist in Iran, by many scholars. Gorji’s home and classes are like a women's non-governmental organization. While some women talk and concentrate on charity activities to support vulnerable groups of women, the other women share their attitudes about women's rights and social experiences to solve women's problems. I interviewed Gorji on 19 January 2108 in Tehran.

3.5.5. Fatemeh

Fatemeh is 44 years old, and she is the founder of an NGO, Mehrafarin, which concentrates on female-headed households. Mehrafarin is a charity organization that provides living services to street children and children with poor family support. Mehrafarin also attempts to find jobs for single mothers who need support and make them financially independent after 2 years of using charity’s services. Fatemeh started her NGO 13 years ago with her funding. She is a rich woman and decided to put one-fourth of her wealth to charity activities. Her NGO covers more than 14000 people around the country. She is a young entrepreneur and is a member of the city council in the city of Tehran. She is a member of the chamber of commerce, where all the other members are men. She started her professional activities in male-dominated places such as a chamber of commerce and has unique experiences in tackling with the patriarchal culture in her everyday experiences. Fatemeh is a mother of four children. She is a proper example of a working mother who mobilizes to civil society while taking care of her family. I interviewed Fatemeh on 2 February 2108 in Tehran.

3.5.6. Safie

Safie is a social activist and gynecologist and a member of the IPPF (International Planned

Parenthood Federation). She is one of the founders of the "Family Health Association of Iran." This NGO started to work 24 years ago and concentrates on sex workers, addicted women, domestic violence, and women of HIV. Besides, it covers highly hazardous areas in the south of Tehran and supports 16,000 women. Safie is a professional activist who has an extraordinary practical experience. She was working at the Health Ministry in Iran for some years, and she has made considerable attempts to enact some laws on women's health. I interviewed Safie on 18 January 2018 in Tehran.

3.5.7. Mari

Mari is a middle-aged researcher who is active in diverse women's NGOs in Iran and conducted some research on women in NGOs. She had different occupations through times in women's centers and gives a full description of the status of women's organizations. She participated along with NGOs in many crises and had a particular and practical perspective toward women's situation in some disasters like earthquakes. She shared some stories from rural communities in the border region in Iran. She asked to be anonymous in this research. I call her "Mari" in this research. I interviewed Mari on 18 January 2018 in Tehran.

3.5.8. Tayebe

Tayebe is a parliament member, unlike almost all the other interviewees in this research who are independent of political power. She has a good reputation as a parliament member who concentrates on women's rights. In parliament, she tries to make changes in some discriminative laws for the benefit of women. Some of the interviewees in this research have referred to her efforts in the middle of our conversation. Besides, she is a member of the Women Studies NGOs. I interviewed Tayebe on 1 February 2018 in Tehran on the third floor of a new building of the Parliament. Her room in the Parliament was shared by four reformist women parliament members. I could not record this conversation because the parliament security person did not allow recorders inside the parliament. Tayebe has a different appearance in comparison to the other women in politics who wear *Chador*[8] in Iran.

[8] Chador is a kind of the veil which covered women from head to foot, which is usually in black color (Abrahamian 1982: 140).

3.5.9. Sara

Sara is a woman from the younger generation in comparison to the other interviewees. She was studying political science at the university and has an NGO about environmental issues with her husband. Sara is active in one of the political parties in Iran and narrated her specific experiences in political parties. Through her attitudes, this study will access the perspective of a young activist who did not experience the times of the Islamic revolution. I interviewed Sara on 2 January 2018 in Tehran.

The next chapter looks at the Iranian women in the political and social context from a historical perspective. In the following section, I will explain the different historical phases in the emergence of women's movement in contemporary time in Iran. In this chapter, I start from the time of the constitutional revolution in 1906 and end at the time after the Islamic revolution.

4. Historical context

It is not possible to understand the current Iranian women's movement without considering the history of the movement from the nineteenth century, during which a significant organized step was taken in shaping the women's movement in Iran. During this time women were looking for changing their social conditions through political action and by opposing the Reuter concession of 1872 and the Tobacco Protest (1891–1892) (Mahdi 2004: 427). According to historians, the formation and growth of women's associations, the publication of some weekly or monthly magazines[9] from 1910 to 1932 (Janghorban et al. 2014 cited in Mahdi 2004: 429), in addition to the women organized reaction to Reza Shah's women's awakening program (compulsory unveiling project in 1934) (Abrahamian 1982: 140) and the formation of women's organizations after Reza Shah time (Mahdi 2004: 433) are significant examples of the emergence of women's movement in Iran.

The next phase of women's movement was during the time of the Islamic revolution in 1979, the time of male-dominated laws under the direct control of the clerics. In this particular time, on the one hand, the women's movement in Iran looked for legal reforms and tried to change the patriarchal culture and aim for equality. On the other hand, ruling Islamists denied the existence of such a women's movement and started accusing women's activists as followers of westerners (Tohidi 2016: 80). Indeed, as Najmabadi (1997: 27) argues, women activists became more

[9] women's magazines in the mid-1930s.

conservative because of those attacks against feminism, and West phobia made women activists distance themselves from any identification with feminism.

4.1. Constitutional Time

> *Bibi Khanoum Estarabadi's*[10]*book*, Ma Ayeb al-Rejal[11] (*The Vices of Men*) [12]*, in 1894, is the first feminist manifesto in the history of Iranian women's movement. She asks women to be modern inside the stereotypes. Estarabadi asks women to think about the male-dominated culture about women's rights to divorce.*[13]

Reviewing the history from the constitutional revolution in 1905-1911 to the modernization period, the time of the Islamic revolution in 1979 and the post-revolution time can provide some factual grounds for elaborating the reasons why women activists were reluctant to be labeled feminists. In respect to these facts, it is clear why the ruling authority accused women's rights activists of being followers of the West and why these women do not consider themselves feminists. To pursue this line of reasoning, one can trace two paths in history. First, many Iranian people have had an anti-imperialist inclination because of the massive effect that Britain, Russia, and America have had on Iran. This anti-imperialist inclination is mainly related to the role of CIA and British Intelligence Service in supporting the coup in 1953 against the Mossadegh government [14] (Tohidi 2016: 77). The second path was that of not recognizing women's rights to vote and the trend of male-dominated rules. When in 1906, the nationalist movement succeeded in establishing a constitution demanding the "equality of all citizens in law," women were considered in the same classification as criminals, minors, and the insane, and were not included in the category of "citizen" (Mahdi 2004: 429).

In finding the roots of the emergence of the women's movement, considering the constitutional revolution as a time when women officially started to look for their rights is important. However,

[10] Estarabadi established the first school for girls (*Dooshizegan*) in Iran in 1906 (Javadi & Floor 2010).
[11] Ma `ayeb al-Rejal (The Vices of Men) by Bibi Khanoum Estarabadi, was written in 1894. This book is one of the first records of a woman writing on women's issues in the nineteenth century and outlines how men should behave. This book creates the vivid image of the debate on the norms of gender and sexuality in upper-class Iranian society at the end of nineteenth century Iran. The book was written in a crucial time for Iranian society. See Leer (2016).
[12] Bibi Khanoum Estarabadi, 'The Vices of Men' in *The Education of Women and the Vices of Men. Two Qajar Tracts*, Translated from Persian (Javadi & Floor 2010).
[13] Beti, 20th June 2018.
[14] Mossadegh was the first secular and democratically elected Iranian Prime Minister and it is assumed as the first experience of the Iranian people in having a national state during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Abrahamian 1982).

before constitutional time, there were pioneer women who talked about women's rights in private meetings and inside small communities. They especially were comparing themselves with westerners (Abrahamian 1982: 333).

Beti, as a history teacher, refers to those historical memories and continues:

> *During the Tobacco protest, women in the Haram did not let the king go inside the Haram. They followed religious leaders' commands. It is a proper illustration of how religion and culture were interrelated with women issues 100 years ago. Those women were not feminists. They accepted different stereotypes, even gendered and sexual stereotypes. In their minds, equality did not have the same meaning as today. They followed their demands in their unique approach.*[15]

Before the constitutional revolution, Iranian women had an essential role in different mechanisms such as the tribal system, the royal system, and the capitalist system.

Beti elaborates about the role of the women inside the tribes through the following arguments:

> *In tribes, women had different roles as mothers and "Bibi". Bibi was an aged woman who had a leading role inside the family and in small communities in old Iran. It is a piece of good evidence that shows women did not separate from politics at that time. Bibies and the other women inside Haram had some effects on politics. Those women tried to improve their tribe's position in the royal system by their role as a king's wife."*[16]

4.2. Pahlavi Time

Pahlavi applied a western-oriented modernization approach, which started in 1925 with Reza Shah Pahlavi and ended in 1979 with the downfall of his son Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. As Mahdi (2004: 430) asserts, the modernization program had different aspects. Reza Shah forcefully ordered women to be unveiled. Then women who followed that order were accused of doing an act contrary to Islamic ethics. In response, during Pahlavi's modernization process, many women stayed at home because of the traditional and religious beliefs. Indeed, the debate on unveiling women in Iran remains a hotly contested one in Iranian historiography (Kashani-Sabet 2005: 30). In this respect, how women situated themselves in this project should be evaluated.

[15] Beti, 20th June2018
[16] Beti, 20th June2018

Abrahamian (1982) elaborates about this historical time in his book, *Iran between Two Revolutions*. During the modernization project, Reza Shah was seeking a new Iran, with enough connotations with his image of the West, and with a focus on bringing out women to public life without the veil. Reza Shah did the same as Mustafa Kemal did in Turkey by bringing about several social reforms systematically. However, he did not follow any formulated blueprint for modernization. He was looking for a country without clerical influence, foreign intrigue, nomadic uprisings, and ethnic differences and with European-styled educational institutions. This new Iran would value westernized women active outside the home and modern economic structures (Abrahamian 1982: 140). For instance, the royal system asked women to replace their traditional clothes with modern Pahlavi European style clothes. "Reza Shah as a father of the nation invested a one-year income from oil in importing western dresses for women. He asked women to walk in the streets wearing *Pahlavi's hats*"[17]. According to Abrahamian (1982: 152), Reza Shah's modernization project was sparked by the introduction of the Pahlavi hat as an international fashion icon. However, that project was followed by strong reactions from the *Ulema*[18].

Through this modernization project, women received many benefits from the king, such as family support court, birth control law, schooling, hospital, and nursing. They could work in factories and gained job identity also. However, this emancipation project was full of contradictions. For instance, in that time the law regarded men as the legal head of the family, men could have four wives at a time, and women did not have the right to vote (Abrahamian 1982: 140).

Minoo describes this period in the following manner:

> *King's claims about modern women were not pragmatic. The king's tyranny was asking women to be "Fariba," which means beautiful and charming. Royal women just did some charity activities. Indeed, Iranian women had two approaches in response to that project. On one hand, some women denied modernity and fought against that. On the other hand, some women were marginalized after being involved in the modernity project.*[19]

According to Abrahamian (1982), Iranian women's situation was different in comparison to women in the West. Although in the West, women came out to work in factories as cheap workers, in Iran, there were no infrastructures and factories for women to work. They came out with their modern

[17] Beti, 20th June 2018
[18] *Ulema*: Clergy
[19] Minoo, 10th January 2018

dresses and *Pahlavi hats*. In response, the traditional system did not welcome these modern styles and Pahlavi's modernization process made many women stay in their homes because of their religious beliefs. Indeed, Reza Shah's command for unveiling women had severe adverse effects on women's movement to the society (Mahdi 2004: 430), especially when the *Ulema* did not allow women to be outside without the veil. For example, according to some accounts, some traditional families did not send their girls to school because of the issue of the veil. Indeed, many women became *stay-at-home women*[20] as a result of the modernization project.

Beti refers to that historical period and to Ulema's points of view:

> *In my opinion, and according to history, the modernization period had worsened the status of some Iranian women. They did not go out of their homes for shopping either. Many women preferred to sit behind the doors in that period. Some argue that religious leaders were prohibiting women from social participation and education. It is not true; Ulema were not against women's education since they did not stop women during the constitutional time when women wore men's clothes to fight. Ulema were not against women's literacy. The majority of women who were in the Ulema houses had literacy. Ulema pointed out at other sides of the modernization process by Reza Shah, which asked women to be colonial actresses. Ulema believed that those schooling systems were anti-religion. They did not oppose women's education at the macro level.*[21]

Shreds of evidence show that during the period of external modernity, Iranian people experienced police repression instead of women's emancipation. There are several accounts in the national archives about confronting officials and women. For instance: "officials testified that veiled women had come outside in the evening. According to national archives, the head of security forces had confronted them and subsequently confiscated and burned their chadors" (Kashani-Sabet 2005: 44). Additionally, evidence suggests that the political power asked its high-ranking officials to bring their wives unveiled to office parties. They risked fines unless they paraded their wives unveiled through the main streets (Abrahamian 1982: 140). In the same manner, I can refer to my grandmother's memories of those days. During Reza Shah's time, she and her friend went out with a scarf at night since they thought that there would be fewer threats of monitoring by the officials. However, one time, an *azhan* man (name of the official policemen in Pahlavi time) stopped them

[20] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[21] Beti, 26th June 2018

and put their scarves on fire, and they had to come back home with Pahlavi hats.

Minoo refers to some memories of the experience of women in those days:

> *In those days, my grandfather was building a big public bathroom in their house in the north of Iran. Local women came there across the roofs of their houses because they did not want to appear in the public areas without the veil*.[22]

4.2.1. Second Pahlavi Shah

After Reza Shah and in the time of second Pahlavi Shah, Iranian women finally obtained the right to vote during the White Revolution. Mohammad Reza Shah[23] tried to continue his father's attempt to modernize Iran after 1953, and he initiated the White Revolution (Abrahamian 1982: 168). Accordingly, some symptomatic improvements happened, and Iranian society experienced an increase in the number of women in executive positions, family laws were modified, and women got the privilege of being a judge in 1975. All those attainments encountered several contradictions as women's emancipation project was under a male-centered repression. In the same manner, women could not express anything in opposition to decisions taken by men (Mahdi 2004: 433). As Mahdi (2004) argues, middle-class women did not welcome those benefits, and they were reluctant to participate under the king's tyranny.

The following narration by Minoo is a brief account of this claim:

> *I was a 26 years old woman when the Islamic revolution happened. I had the right to vote from the age of 18, and I could participate and vote in two elections before the Islamic revolution, but I did not participate in elections at all. My father did not vote either; however, he was a lawyer. My mother did not vote in that system, and she was educated too. My aunts and all educated women around me did not participate in any elections in those days. On the contrary, these women filled the prisons because they were looking for real democracy"* [24]

According to the available statistics, in the last years of Pahlavi time (1978), Iran had 323 female political prisoners. In the last years of Pahlavi, 42 female guerrillas lost their lives in the streets

[22] Minoo 10th January 2018
[23] On September 15 ,1941, Reza Shah abdicated in favour of his twenty-one-year-old son, Crown Prince Muhammad Reza, and went into exile (Abrahamian 2008: 97).
[24] Minoo, 10th January 2018

when fighting with military forces (Mahdi 2004: 433).

Beti makes revealing statements in this respect:

> *Before the Islamic revolution, I was a schoolteacher in the mornings and then became a political activist in the afternoon. Iranian women benefited from that modernity for being educated; however, women were looking for more than that. They were demanding freedom, which is continuously looking for that nowadays. I did not vote before the revolution, the same as after the Islamic revolution. None of the systems can satisfy us. Not a religious tyranny, not a westerner's modernity.*[25]

Minoo also refers to the situation of women and their choices during the modernity time:

> *We had two options, wearing colonial dresses and miniskirts, or being the symbol of traditional and superstitious religion. None of them was our choice either.*[26]

4.3. Times of the Islamic Revolution

> *Time passes, various improvements have happened; however, the Iranian political system does not consider women, as much as they should.*[27]

According to Paidar (2002: 3–13) women became a significant force for change during the post-revolutionary transitional period of 1979-1981 while they were demanding interaction with political organizations. During the pre-revolution time, women from different religious backgrounds tried to show their unity. In this respect, they applied the same religious themes in their massive movement against Shah and in their way of resistance. In that time, Iranian women of all classes and ideological backgrounds participated in the demonstrations where some younger, secular women wore the *chador* (Afkhami 1994, Azari 1983, cited in Mahdi 2004: 433). Media reportages from those days illustrate in most cases women in the protest wearing *chador*. It seems that during that time *chador* became a more general, symbolic, and accepted veil style for women.

However, as Paidar (2002:14) argues, those women did not know that after the revolution Ayatollah

[25] Beti, 20th June 2018
[26] Minoo,10th January 2018
[27] Gorji,19th January 2018

Khomeini would force them (in any beliefs) to Islamize their appearance in public, not as a revolutionary act but as a new imposed lifestyle. Although Ayatollah Khomeini stated that gender relations were the key to social change, a few months after the victory women's appearance, behavior, and most aspects of women's position had been subjected to intervention and Islamized by revolution's agents. Indeed, women had to be desexualized outside their houses to protect the Islamic nation from corruption. The terms laid down for proper dress and forced veil made women demonstrate against the forced use of *hijab* immediately after the Islamic revolution (Mahdi 2004: 435). The issue of the veil has been a topic of hot debate since the Islamic revolution in Iran. As Afshar (1996: 18) argues, the veil has been a non-negotiable symbol of the Islamic society since 1979. Women's *hijab* has ideological functions for the Iranian political system. Women's veil has been the only ideological tool for the political power to define their Islamic society since 1979. State power assigned their ideological approaches to veil and it became the "clerics' immediate political project" (Zahedi 2007: 75-89).

According to the interviewees of this research, although a few months after the revolution on the 8th of March 1979, women demonstrated against the compulsory veil, slowly the *law of compulsory hijab* became the agenda of state power. In this respect, Iranian society encountered massive contradictions about women's veil inside the political system. Women's desire to participate in politics and social activities made them obey the *law of compulsory hijab* (*hijab e ejbari)* and "religious revolutionary women complied with this law as well as seculars"[28]. In this respect, the comparison between two parallel perspectives of Islamists and secularists about the veil would be useful here. Paidar (2002: 37) claims that both seculars and Islamists have had the same approach in response to veil from different lines. According to her, "In the 1930s, most secularist feminists kept silent about (if not condoned) the compulsory unveiling of women by the state". Then in a similar reaction during the 1980s most Islamist feminists behaved timidly when hijab was forced on women by the system.

It is worth referring here to some memories to have a more precise idea about the veil as a state power agenda in Iran. One of my interviewees refers me to one evidence. Seven years after the Islamic revolution in 1986, Hashemi Rafsanjani[29] warned the *bihijaban* — women who do not obey the law in their veil style and do not cover their hair completely — to stop resisting the compulsory veiling rule. In that speech, he warned *bi-hijab* women that if they do not follow the law entirely,

[28] Beti, 30th June 2018
[29] Iranian cleric and politician, who was president of Iran from 1989 to 1997

there would be a court for them, which would send them to the specific camps.[30] "Those threats did not happen and many believe that Hashemi made those statements in response to the extremists' pressure on him"[31]. These kinds of memories illustrate the attitudes of political power through women's *hijab* in Iran. Minoo has revealing statements about compulsory hijab. In the middle of our conversation, one man rang the doorbell. Minoo asked me to stay alone for a moment, and she went rapidly to wear her *mantou* and a white light headscarf. This made her reflect on the women's lifestyle and the issue of the women's *hijab* inside our political system:

> *Islamic republic does not tolerate women's lifestyle. The state power should believe that lifestyle is our human right. Why, when Sharia does not ask non-Muslim to wear hijab, state power forces them to wear. It is pure dictatorship! It is a revolutionary dictatorship.*[32]

Minoo continues:

> *When Prophet Mohammed asked the hijab for women, it was like a campaign of identity for Muslim women. There was not imposed on women at that time. Hijab should not be compulsory according to our religion. According to the Quran, Christians, Jewish, and Muslims can live beside each other, and in this approach, Islam is a secular religion. Islam is a secular religion and accepts plurality and diversity.*[33]

It is fascinating that in response to these challenges, Iranian women's veil style has become the most robust resistance model in front of the Islamic State. Although the state power in Iran tries to define its ideal Islamic society through the notion of women's veil, "Iranian women do not give the state the Islamic presentation".[34] In this respect, Minoo compares the Iranian women's veil style in general with women in Pakistan or Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Paidar (2002: 15) argues that Iranian society has encountered civil resistance and disobedience against the morality police and challenged the authorities over the color, size, and shape of their veil (*hijab*) from the first day of the Islamic revolution. Iranian women have been challenging the state power at the micro-level and have chosen to be different in comparison to what is expected from them. Although these women are suppressed, they continue protesting compulsory veiling.

[30] Cited in Jomhouri Islami Newspaper, Tehran. in 1986
[31] Beti, 30th June 2018
[32] Minoo,10th January 2018
[33] Minoo,10th January 2018
[34] Minoo,10th January 2018

Regarding veil style, Iranian women have experienced other unusual terms. In addition to forced *hijab* in public, women's veil style became an important issue and a matter of difference, particularly in politics. Indeed, some women in politics change their veil style to *chador* since it has been the more acceptable veil style inside the political culture in Iran. These women wear *chador* when they want to enter politics. In Iran, there are just a few women in high-level politics who do not wear a *chador*. *Chador* has been a prominent veil style inside the Iranian political culture after the Islamic revolution. In many cases, *Chadory* women, mainly in politics, transfer ideological meaning, and politicians prefer women with the *chador*. Masoume Ebtekar[35] and Laya Jonaidi[36], who are working in the cabinet as vice presidents, are good examples. They have changed their veil style and become *Chadory* women when they were chosen to be in the Cabinet. One journalist asked Jonaidi about the reason for this change in her veil style. Jonaidi made a bold and revealing statement: "President asked me to do this because of the cabinet protocol, and I respected him"[37]. This protocol does not exist anymore. It might be a hidden protocol of the government which evaluates women's capabilities to sit around the tables in politics.

Shahla refers to power relations in Iran:

> *There are some unofficial obstacles and filters for women to enter the political system in Iran. Women's competency would be considered after the veil issue. Women in Iran must wear an acceptable veil style to be approved by men in politics.*[38]

One of the other women interviewed for this thesis explains about her attempts to change the usual style of veiling. Fatemeh argues:

> *I believe in Hijab. However, at the same time, I think that women should have a right to choose at least the color of their clothes and their hijab style. It is our right. I broke the taboos in changing the usual trend of wearing black color in official positions. I received several positive reactions from women inside the city council and municipality for wearing colorful clothes.*[39]

These experiences show how small issues sometimes open more doors for women in a male-

[35] Ebtekar is vice president in women affairs.
[36] Jonaidi is vice president in legal affairs.
[37] Esfandiari (2017)
[38] Shahla, 13th January 2108
[39] Fatemeh, 2th February 2108

dominated system. Several other issues also show how patriarchy tries to expand its domination and control women. In addition to the *law of compulsory hijab*, many changes have happened under the Islamic system when ruling clerics replaced the monarchy. After the Islamic revolution, the Islamic state revoked the Family Protection Law of 1967, and along with compulsory veiling, women were banned from some specific work. It followed population rise, but the population of women in the labor force was reduced. Besides, women's access to judiciary occupations was prohibited by the new political system. Women lost their right to divorce and child custody, and the minimum age of marriage for girls was lowered to nine years (Kian 1995 and Mir-Hosseini 1996, cited in Kian 1997). Indeed, according to some scholars, "we cannot expect gender equality systematically for those days" (Moghadam 2002: 1137–38).

However, the expectation of having gender equality under the Islamic system has been debated for many years. According to those debates, it depended precisely on the political system's interpretation of religious texts in favor of women. In this respect, as Mir-Hosseini (2011:68) elaborates, to clarify the term of gender equality under the Islamic system, first, you should answer the question of "whose religion?". This question is raised by Islamic feminists, and I will discuss Islamic feminism in the coming chapters as well. In Iran, where the political system has various interpretations of the religious texts, one might encounter several contradictions in terms of the law. Indeed, women's rights activists have tried to shed light on these challenges for years. For instance, while article 9, principle 3 of Islamic Republic Constitution Law deems it obligatory for the government to eliminate all the existing discriminations against women and men to secure women's rights (Koolaee 2008: 1), article 1105 of the Iranian civil law [40] assume men as the legal head of the family (see Appendix A). This law opens the path for different kinds of interpretation of women's rights. Then, these interpretations lead to several contradictions.

Women's status and women's movements in the aftermath of the Islamic revolution in Iran are confronted with several ups and downs. For instance, on one hand, Ayatollah Khomeini, in a declaration issued on 12 March 1982 in *Sahifeh-i-Nur* encouraged Islamist women's activities to follow their demands in the public sphere, "God is satisfied with women's great service. It is a sin to sabotage women's activity in the public sphere" (Kian 1997: 77). On the other hand, women's movement encountered substantial exclusion of secular and independent women after the revolution (Mahdi 2004: 435). There are also other incidents about asking women to be active in the public sphere. During the time of the referendum for the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, in a sermon to a group of women, members of the Society of Women of the Islamic Revolution, on

[40] From Iranian civil law, translated from Persian to English language (Mansour 2016)

12 July 1980, affirmed that “all of you [women] should vote. Vote for the Islamic Republic. Not a word less, not a word more. You have priority over men” (Kian 1997: 77). More than those statements, Ayatollah Khomeini chose a woman[41] for a military position, “which has been something rare inside the Iranian political system”[42]. That kind of women's participation has not happened again. These historical events are typical cases that show after the Islamic revolution, "women's role has been crucial, but women's contribution not recognized" (cf. Donahoe 2017).

Indeed, in the imagination of the actual picture of women's status after the Islamic revolution, looking at the realities and practical experiences of women on the macro and micro scale, are important. In this respect, Koolaee (2009: 404) argues that Iranian women, who had crucial roles in the victory of the Islamic revolution, looked for their demands, democracy, and human rights through respect to religious modernism. She believes that these women have been involved in all the developments that followed. Indeed, an explanatory note seems appropriate here that in the years after the Islamic revolution, Iranian women have contributed to the process of political change for the third time in history. In these years women with different ideologies, social classes, and religious backgrounds have tried to cooperate in demanding their rights (Mahdi 2004: 435). As Paidar (2002:7) argues “in no other historical period as in the Islamic Republic there has been such potential for women leaders, both Islamist and secularist, to assume leadership positions and mobilize masses of women, albeit around varied and sometimes contradictory gender demands”.

In reviewing the historical stages, the Iran-Iraq war and its vast effects on women's status should be considered, too. One year after the revolution, Iranian society experienced the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88). This war functioned as one of the crucial factors in changing the usual trend of women's participation in politics, social sectors, and women's employment. Mobilizing Iranian men and the country's resources to the battlefields helped advancing women’s participation in society. Indeed, women accessed jobs in the civil service and four women[43] entered the first parliament in 1980.[44] Women could access education and employment (Kian 1997: 78). However, women were still confronted with several obstacles at that time.

Then during Hashemi Rafsanjani's presidency (1989-1997), economic liberalization and integration into the global economy was the political agenda. Hashemi was looking for the (re)establishment

[41] Marzieh Hadidchi Dabagh
[42] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[43] AzamTaleghani, Maryam Behrouzi, Gohar Sharia Dastqeyb and Fateme Sediqi (Kian 1997: 80).
[44] Azam Taleqhani, who became known as Islamic feminists was elected to the first Majlis, differed from other women parliamentarians and mainly addressed women's issues. She is a daughter of the famous cleric and she is a well-educated political activist who was a political prisoner under the Shah. Her quest for social justice brought her into contact with the plight of women (Kian 1997: 80).

of a capitalist society. Indeed, there was a rapid increase in women's employment and 38 per cent of employees in the public sector were women (Moghadam 2002: 1137, 1140). According to the women I interviewed, during that time, the Iranian political system has been dramatically changing its approach towards women's rights and women have been facing a system that considers women's issues as political ones. Although women were able to gain some achievements in those days, civil law was not changed by the political power in favor of women, and male-dominated laws and perspectives continued to overwhelm society. Women suffered from male-dominated rules and patriarchal culture where their rights to divorce, child custody and accept blood money (*Diyeh*)[45] were not recognized either. Women's participation was under other pressure in those days. It was argued that women should choose jobs that are more suitable for their physiological makeup (Moghadam 2002: 1141). In response to this approach, women also have changed their strategies from defensive to offensive ones in the years after the revolution (Mahdi 2004: 439).

Minoo remembers those days:

> *The president asked Enghelabioun (Iranian revolutionary actors) to wear modern clothes and have a modern lifestyle. In those days the state power wanted to reach international standards in women's issues. Indeed, the daughter of the president, Faezeh Hashemi[46], became a prominent woman in seeking women's rights. Faezeh made some statements about women's rights to choose their clothes and asked for women's rights to ride a bicycle in public. Iranian society welcomed those kinds of debates. Then, Faezeh could enter the parliament by high votes. Indeed, Iranian women experienced open political space, and women started to ask for some changes in the rules.*[47]

According to the women in this research, those political approaches during Hashemi's time in order to make an open atmosphere for women were a kind of "show off"[48] to the internationals. At that time state power tried to benefit from liberal economics and globalization policies at the international level. Indeed, despite all the political changes in women's issues during that time,

[45] Blood money or *Diyeh* is the amount of money that a murderer or one who has made bodily harm should pay to the victim or their family as compensation. According to Article 294 and 300 of the Iranian Islamic penal code, blood money or compensation given for a female victim is half of the male (Ahmadi Khorasani 2009: 128).
[46] Faezeh Hashemi is the younger daughter of Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani Iranian famous politician. Faezeh Hashemi entered politics in the course of the 1996 election for the Fifth Majles. She was the only woman on the lists of the Kargozaran e sazandegi (Servants of Construction). Faezeh brought excitement and glamour to the 1996 elections because she broke the unwritten dress code for women politicians by wearing-underneath the obligatory *Chador*- jeans. Faezeh advocated women's rights from official tribunes in Iran (Mir-Hosseini 2001).
[47] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[48] Minoo, 10th January 2018 and Beti, 30th June 2018

women did not receive greater social and political rights at the macro-level. In this respect, women's equal right to education in Iran is a good example. Although the equal right to education has led to a dramatic increase in the number of women in high-level education with a 60 per cent rate, women have not accessed a high level of employment or representation in political decision-making (Tohidi 2016: 74). Indeed, real women's participation was not there.

Tayebe refers to this fact and argues:

> *Our attempts to spread education from the bottom of the society were successful; however, these women have not entered workplaces.*[49]

4.3.1. Reform Time

During the later part of the 1990s, the new political movement which was asking for reform was shaping in Iran. Students, intellectuals, and women have been the main actors of this reformist movement and have been looking for political and social freedoms by insisting on women's rights. In 1997, the liberal cleric Mohammad Khatami came to power, and the gender relations changed in this government (Moghadam 2002: 1142). President Khatami assigned *Masoume Ebtekar* as vice president for environmental affairs and *Zahra Shojaee* as vice president for women's affairs. In Khatami's time, Iranian women experienced changes in social and legal policies. Women, as well as university students and civil society, experienced a more open political atmosphere. Indeed, a group of liberal Muslim and secular women began to problematize the equalitarian verses of the Qur'an and hadiths. They questioned the monopoly of interpretation of these texts by male jurisprudents (Kian 1996, cited in Mahdi 2004: 440). According to the women I interviewed, in those days Iranian women were looking for their rights by insisting on expanding civil society and asking for new interpretations in religious texts. They started to ask for a new interpretation of Islamic texts by referring to human rights issues.

The ratification of the Convention of Elimination of all kinds of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was another crucial issue that emerged during Khatami's time. However, the Guardian Council rejected it because of their interpretation of Islamic values (Koolaee 2009: 411). During those days, women experienced a golden time in demanding their rights and at the same time,

[49] Tayebe, 1st February 2108

women experienced more political freedom. In this respect, according to the women I interviewed, many believe that the *real* kind of women's movement after the Islamic revolution was shaped during the reformation phase and under President Khatami. At that time, President Khatami had to respond to the dual pressures of women's expectations and the international demands on gender (Paidar 2002: 13). Reformist government and parliament members made considerable efforts to answer to women's demands by amending some articles of civil law that were against women's rights (see Appendix A). They started to criticize civil rights articles about inheritance, divorce, child custody, and insurance. Finally, it would be worth mentioning Shirin Ebadi, one of the Iranian women's rights activists. During Khatami's time, she won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003, and it was a great triumph for women in Iran.

4.3.2. Ahmadinezhad Arena

In 2005, the atmosphere of reform was replaced by the coming of an extremist president, Mahmoud Ahmadinezhad (2005-2013), who systematically ignored women's rights and demands. In October 2006, Ahmadinejad called on Iranian women to return to the family and devote their energies to their primary responsibility of raising children (Barlow & Akbarzadeh 2008: 22). Accordingly, the government changed the name of The Center for Women Participation Affairs to the "Center for Women and Family Affairs". This approach shows the way that political power operates. That government was considering women only under the family structure (Koolaee 2008: 4).

By resisting the male-dominated context and challenging government policies, women's activists continued to demand their rights. Indeed, activists began the "Campaign for the Collection of One Million Signatures to Reform Discriminatory Laws against Women" during that time. The campaign was a gathering held to mark Iranian Women's Unity Day. According to Ahmadi Khorasani (2009: 13), this gathering was in Tehran's Haft-e-Tir Square and started in June 2006. It was an extraordinary and peaceful gathering where a variety of groups of women came together to ask for equal rights and reform in discriminative laws. However, "The meeting is forcibly broken up, and 70 men and women were arrested" (Ahmadi Khorasani 2009: 163).

Women in the campaign pursued adherence to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, although the government and the parliament were opposed to the convention. Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, one of those women, wrote a book about this memorial incident named

Iranian Women's One Million Signature Campaign for equality: The Inside Story[50]. She states, "the goals of the campaign were initially to collect one million signatures through door-to-door direct contact, gatherings, and the Internet in support of changes to discriminatory laws against women and to promote dialogue and discussion among women and men in meetings and public seminars and conferences" (Ahmadi Khorasani 2009,128). Besides, Minoo, one of my interviewees, who was a member of this campaign refers to her memories of that day. She remembers how state power interpreted that event as a political issue.

Minoo claims that defining a non-political feminism inside Iran is not possible:

> *Any activity regarding women's problems is assumed as a political issue. By this approach, state power always accused us of doing something against the government*.[51]

In the same manner, other interviewees of this research argue that Ahmadinezhad considered women's issues as a political issue. According to them, women's NGOs were considered a threat to national security at that time and several NGOs and civil society organizations stopped working. In the same manner, Kolaee (2008:9) one of the members of the reformist parliament (2000-2004) in her article "Iranian Women after the Reform Era" criticizes the political approaches during Ahmadinezhad time. She argues that "even the female members of the extremist parliament, insisted on considering women just under their family tasks". She asserts that extremists changed the phrase of *equal opportunities* in the text of the law of public education. According to her, extremist parties in the parliament focused on women's dressing at that time and they ignored the issues of gender equality and gender justice. That political atmosphere and the radical approach finally resulted in a vast suppression of the women and civil society during the Green movement in 2009.

[50] The statement of this campaign has been signed by the Following groups: The Feminist School, women's commission of Tahkim Vahdat (Strengthening Unity), Committee of Human Rights Reporters, Farasoo Association, Pars Women's Association, Change for Equality in Isfahan, Campaign for One Million Signatures in Qom, The National Association of Women Entrepreneurs, Defenders of Women's Human Rights, Mothers for Peace, Network of Volunteer Lawyers, Women's Committee of Islamic Associations in East of Iran, Women's Committee of Ahoorayi's Children of Iran, Women's Department of Islamic Association of Sharif University, Committee of Women and Children's Supporters Campaign in Azerbaijan, Association in Support of Citizenship Rights Campaign for One Million Signatures in Italy, Women's Committee in Support of Human Rights in Germany, Art and Culture Center, Rahavard Association, Human Rights Committee of Islamic Associations in East of Iran, Iranian Refugees Council in Bremen, Independent Society of Iranian Women in Austria, Campaign for One Million Signatures in Austria, Network of Iran human rights defenders in Germany, Iranian Women's Association in Montreal (Ahmadi Khorasani 2009 :174).

[51] Minoo, 10th January 2018

After Ahmadinezhad, Iranian people elected the more moderate President, Hassan Rohani, in 2013. Although Rohani promised to include at least one woman in his Cabinet during his elections campaign, he did not introduce any women in his cabinet in August 2013. According to Tayebe[52], since the first year of this government, women activists had been concentrating on reaching 30 per cent representation of women in politics as politicians, ministers, and parliament members. Tayebe refers to Shahindokht Molaverdi as one of those women who entered the Rohani's government. She became a Vice President for Women's Affairs and Family. Molaverdi concentrated on women's rights issues, and she insisted on greater women's participation. Indeed, Molaverdi tried to change some discriminative laws during the second government of Rohani. However, unofficial pressure made the president choose another woman for women's affairs.

One of the other critical issues during this moderate government was the ban of the *Zanan* magazine in 2014. Women activists expected that Rohani would let women have their magazine during his government. Shahla, the chief editor of *Zanan* magazine and one of the famous women's rights activist, explains the situation:

> *Zanan had an article about white marriage (Ezdevaje Sefid)[53], which is now an essential phenomenon inside Iran. Our magazine was stopped by state power because of that article, for six months. Other media who were closer to the state power also wrote about white marriage but Zanan should not. Zanan's article asked why the Law does not consider these illegal families? Zanan wanted to ask the Law for the support of women and children of these families. But we were banned from mentioning the names of these families even.*[54]

According to Golestan (2018: 4), 9 per cent of young urban adults in Iran live in white marriage. However, the existence of white marriage is not reflected in formal statistics and national surveys in Iran. White marriage is a growing phenomenon in Iran, which requires systematic research and investigation. As Shahla asserts, the Law in Iran does not consider these families; however, these kinds of families have become more frequent and prevalent in Iranian society these days. The law does not support women or men and probable children of these families either. Silence concerning these kinds of families might have several victims then. Children of these families cannot have

[52] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[53] "White marriage" (Ezdevaje Sefid) is a phenomenon in contemporary Iran whereby young heterosexual middle-class Iranian women and men choose to live together without any religious and legal documentation (Golestan 2018: 2).
[54] Shahla, 13th January 2018

identity certifications as their parents' relationship has not been officially registered.

In summarizing this chapter, it is worth referring to some critical points of view. According to my investigations and according to the women I interviewed, there are numbers of women's rights activists particularly in the diaspora who insist on regime change as the only option for Iranian people and Iranian women to have more rights. By this logic, there are also some scholars and women's rights activists that accuse women's activists in Iran of compromising with state power. They do not believe in any reform in the Iranian political system. As Sameh (2014: 184) puts it, for those critics "Iran has been framed as space where change is impossible, both by parts of the Iranian diaspora, cynically removed from the complex everyday life of Iranians inside Iran, as my interviewees pointed out and by members of both conservative and progressive sectors of the West who seek different kinds of dangerous interventions 'on behalf of' the Iranian people".

Indeed, those critics are trying to use the women's issue as a pretext to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Review the Iranian history shows that they have the support of the same imperial power which previously toppled Iran's popular government in 1953 and supported the Pahlavi dictatorship before the Islamic revolution. According to the women I interviewed and the historical chapter in this thesis, this approach emanates from the profound ignorance about Iranian history, and the outcome of these kinds of strategies might result in more pressure on women inside Iran. In this respect, one can refer to the problematic political relationship between Iran and the US and substantial economic sanctions against Iran. These sanctions have effects on the political atmosphere in Iran and women's rights issues as well. Politicians, even the moderate ones, are changing their approaches from being supportive and being open to social change into resisting models against social reforms. They are insisting on saving the country and the Islamic government in these drastically unpleasant times, and women are at the frontline of this pressure. The US has focused on changing the political system in Iran.

5. Analysis

In this chapter, I will present an analysis of the women's narrations by using narrative and thematic analysing tools. This chapter aims to shed light on the characteristics of women's movement in Iran by examining what kind of strategies women's rights activists apply and how they react to legitimized violence. The analysis is based on theoretical frameworks on everyday peace and bottom-up peace building, slow violence, and structural violence. This thesis follows the theory of conflict transformation to explore how these women sought to transform society peacefully. This

research also follows the discussion of patriarchy and feminist peace to elaborate on how Iranian women activists shape their identity and how they shape their ways of resistance against totalitarian strategies from a peace study perspective.

5.1. Feminism

-Are you a feminist?

-Shahla: No, not that much.

- But You are doing a feminist act.

-Shahla: I have my approach and definition. NO, I don't include myself in these definitions. I don't assume myself as a feminist. I have my approach through women's rights and equality. I always try to consider women's demands inside the Iranian context.[55]

When I decided to shed light on the contemporary women's movement in Iran, I assumed that it would be feminist research. I tried to find women's rights activists who are acting concretely inside the civil society. These women are looking for women's rights and have a proper reputation inside the Iranian women's movement as independent activists. After visiting and interviewing them, I found that although they are doing feminist work (See Donahoe 2017: 8 in the context of Northern Ireland), they do not assume themselves to be feminists. These women are pursuing their demands in new and unique ways and ask for another label for their activities, which would be more related to their local definitions and activities.

Put simply, the collective experiences of women that I interviewed show they try to promote the society while at the same time respecting the family's stereotypical values. Some of the women activists that I interviewed reacted to the word "feminism" severely and asked to call them women rights activists. According to these women, political actors in Iran also have sensitivities to the word feminism as a westerner notion.

As Minoo asserts:

I do not consider myself under the ideological structures of Western feminism. It is not true

[55] Fatemeh, 2nd February 2108

that those who advocate equality, and women's rights must necessarily be feminist. If feminism is about fighting for equality, my activities are close to them; however, Iranian women need another label for their movement.[56]

However, having so much reluctance to be named a feminist has several reasons. For instance, the word feminism does not have a Farsi (Persian) equivalent, and feminist is a western import into Farsi (Paidar 2002: 12). More than that, as Tayebe explains, "Feminism is a concept that seculars defined for the first time in Iran."[57] Indeed state power has sensitivity about this word and any activities under this label. Being a feminist is a "fashionable label"[58] in many countries and one would be proud of being called so. On the contrary in Iran feminist is a person who follows westerners and tries to motivate women to destroy their family's stereotypes. Shahla's recollections show how the state power agents perceive the term feminism in Iran.

Shahla refers to the time that she was at corps information police to explain about one of the articles in her magazine in the following statements:

Interrogator: Are you feminist?

Shahla: How do you define feminism?

Interrogator: Feminists are women who come from the West and teach women (like you).

Then you and your friends teach the other women to be like westerners.

Shahla: No, by this definition. I am not a feminist.

Interrogator: I am sorry for you. You cannot defend your ideas because you are afraid.

Shahla: It's not a fear. I have no solidarity with your definition. I don't understand it either.

Then I referred him to the practical evidence in the last parliament. The parliament chief asked one of the women in the parliament to try for 30 per cent of women's participation for the next parliament election. And I continued: You see, the parliament chief has been asking for a feminist act, too. Is it true? If you assumed him to be a feminist, then I would assume myself as a feminist as well. [59]

[56] Minoo,10th January 2108
[57] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[58] I borrowed this definition from Shahla through a personal interview on 13th January 2108.
[59] Shahla, 13th January 2108

It is a brief explanation of the situation in Iran. However, listening to these women show that they often have critical attitudes towards feminist discourses. For instance, at the end of our conversation with Minoo, she asked: “Am I a good woman? Am I endorsed in western standards or not?” I heard these kinds of sentences several times during the interviews and in between the women's narrations. They insist on not comparing their experiences with the experience of women outside the Iranian context.

Tayebe refers to the current situation of women's activists and the state’s reaction to them:

> *Many of our activities through gender equality and gender justice have consistency with feminism. Indeed, Iranian women's attempts in seeking their rights can be located under this umbrella. However, nobody dares to have these kinds of claims when state power might accuse us of being a westerner's follower.*[60]

Patricia Misciagno's definition of "de facto feminism" might be a proper definition for parts of the activities that these women. De facto feminism refers to non-self-identified feminists by emphasizing what these women do pragmatically for the feminist goals. Misciagno (1997) refers to the ideological divisions in the women's movement, and the notions which classified feminists as "free lovers" or "anti-family" as reasons which prevent these women from having any inclination to assume themselves as feminists (Misciagno 1997, cited in Moskop 1999). As Paidar (2002: 37) argues, “the political orientation of pragmatic feminists tends to be moderate, based on recognition of difference and not for making limits and drawing lines as it seeks to build across differences.”

Shahla defines herself through this pragmatic framework:

> *I am an Iranian Muslim woman who has her own religious beliefs; however, I do not want to separate our way from the laic women. All of us are seeking the same issue; equality.*[61]

Tayebe, in the following statements, brings to good focus these notions:

> *The political system in Iran assumes that all feminists are secular. This system does not agree with the combination of feminism and Islam. They do not believe in "Islamic feminism" and do not accept this combination even as a word. Indeed, women must tackle with political*

[60] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[61] Shahla, 13th January2108

resistance and opposition against feminism and feminist actions.[62]

According to the data from this research, whatever one labels these women activists in Iran, they all try to empower Iranian women. Although the women I interviewed do not consider themselves feminist, they are doing feminist work as they all focus on women helping the other women to catch up (cf. Donahoe 2017: 10). It is what Iranian women experienced throughout history where they have been demanding their rights in between the layers of patriarchal culture and religion. Historically, women have been looking for the enhancement of women's rights concerning marriage, divorce, and child custody all the time, and these principles have been the objective of women activists in Iran (Moghadam 2003: 78). Accordingly, Iranian women activists that I interviewed do not consider themselves feminists, Islamic feminists, or political actors; they assume themselves as *equality seekers*. Their lives and the circumstances in which they operate show a detailed image of what they are doing for improving women's status in Iran. These women are looking to make social changes in their community by giving visibility and voice to the other women in society (cf. Confortini 2010: 7).

For instance, during our conversation in Minoo's intimate and cozy house with different kinds of wooden and textile handicrafts, she answered my curiosity by stating:

Local women are making all these handmade crafts. These women are everywhere, north, south, east, and west of the country.[63]

The imagination about Minoo's perspective about the movement was completed when the phone rang. "Esfandiar" was on the phone. Minoo explains to me:

He brings some handmade winter socks every week on Fridays. Her wife knits these socks, and I try to sell the socks for him by networking with other women. Their economic situation depends on this money, so they start calling me from Saturday[64] *morning and ask for the money. I will pay him in the middle of the week, and this process restarts every week.*[65]

In the same manner, Beti refers to the situation in the Kermanshah, the city in the west of Iran.

[62] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[63] Minoo,10th January 2108
[64] The first weekday in the Iranian Calendar
[65] Minoo,10th January 2018

Kermanshah suffered from earthquakes in December 2017 (one month before our conversation). Beti insists that those women try to save their families. According to Beti and other activists in this research, poverty these days has a feminine face in Iran, especially in rural areas. Beti expands this notion in the following statements:

> *They (women) sat in front of their collapsed houses to prove their ownership of their property. This is the only thing that they have. If one asks them about the reason, they would say there is no man alive in our family. One of them was insisting that she wants to support her family. It is what they have been doing all the time.*[66]

Similar to what Berents & Mcevoy-Levy (2015: 119) argue, this experience and many others are good examples of women's practices of everyday peace when considering marginalized groups of women. These activists are contributing to the everyday practice of unique feminine work in which they help other women to support their families. The unique journey and everyday practices of the women that I interviewed, show how they try to shape their unique resistance model everywhere and everywhen that they could. These women try to find their ways through different stages in between the power holes. It can be analysed under the term which is called 'local turn' of peace and conflict research. As Podder (2015) puts it, these approaches develop understandings of how "simple everyday activities present the realm of the possible" (Vaittinen 2017: 158) in promoting society.

On the contrary, Some Iranian scholars, especially those living outside the country after the Islamic revolution, try to critique women's rights activists who are in Iran. They categorize women activists in Iran into the Islamic feminist and state feminist and doubt the existence of women's movement in Iran. They try to put up reasons for explaining the failure of the movement before and after the Islamic revolution. According to their claims, during the pre-revolutionary time, the Iranian women's movement never developed the sociological characteristics necessary for a successful social movement (Mahdi 2004: 437).

Tohidi (2016) elaborates these critiques in her article, Women's Rights and Feminist Movements in Iran. Critics of women's movement in Iran claim that after the revolution, Iranian women lacked strong organizational structure in mobilizing, challenging the state, and making political changes (Tohidi 2016: 79). In the same manner, some question the possibility of the Iranian women's movement in confronting patriarchal values (Mahdi 2004: 438), although according to this research

[66] Beti, 30th June 2018

and those of other scholars, this movement is existing and doing well, and more than that becomes an encouraging model inside Iranian society (Tohidi 2016: 80).

According to Tohidi (2016: 86) " feminists and women activists in many countries have been using at least three groups of strategies to empower women and bring about egalitarian changes: women's policy machinery within state institutions, building an issue advocacy network outside of formal institutions, and developing grassroots women's movement practices that are aimed at cultural production, consciousness-raising, and knowledge creation." In this respect, Tohidi explains that it is very difficult for Iranian women's rights activists to apply all these strategies because they have faced different political and structural barriers in the patriarchal, and authoritarian political system. By this reasoning, women's rights activism in Iran is very fragmented and lacks a fixed and structured network[67] because of the political suppression that exists in their everyday practices as women's rights activists. This research refers to several examples shed light on strategies of the political domination that try to exclude women and neglect women's rights activism. Indeed, independence women's rights activists cannot shape any long-term structural network like other countries.

The women in this research insist on their unique way of looking for their rights and equality and try to show how their way is different from international standards. They are tackling several problems which in many cases are not understandable to those who are living outside the country. These women who are living in Iran and have daily interactions with the women right's issues in their everyday life, consider themselves as "Iranian Muslim women" who look for women's better status. For instance, Minoo and Tayebe refer to one evidence about the parliamentary election in Iran. According to them in that election, women's rights activists tried to gain 30 per cent of women's participation. Minoo argues that "It was a paradoxical and complicated situation that we seek more participation and inclusion of women in the state power in Iran when, at the same time, we do not agree with the political power policy".

By referring to my investigations, women I interviewed, and other scholars, in this research I use the term women's movement to refer to independent women's rights activism in Iran. The women's rights activists that I refer to them are looking for justice and gender equality. Women in this movement insist seriously on holding distance from the state power and be an independent women's rights activist. And their essential goal is looking to raise gender sensitivity and gender awareness

[67] For example, 'Feminist school' is one of the women's rights activists' network in Iran. However, the last post on the webpage of this network was published 4 years ago.

inside Iranian society.

5.2. Islamic feminism

Shahla, who for the first time introduced Islamic feminism in the Iranian context in her magazine, *Zanan*, has a revealing statement about the term Islamic Feminism:

> *In my opinion, Iranian women encounter unique experiences here in this region. I do not agree to categorize women as secular or Islamist feminists. If feminism is about reducing discrimination and removing tyranny towards women, everyone with any religion and beliefs can be a feminist. Women in Iran perform outstanding acts of bravery to lessen gender discrimination. Each of us can define our way through feminist discourse. Every region can have specific kinds of feminism. Women in Iran can benefit from other countries' experiences while they need to seek their demands according to our context and our local experiences. In each religion, region, and any way of thinking, women can define their local way of looking for women's rights.*[68]

Some scholars argue that Iranian feminism was born at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a secular movement. Accordingly, Iranian feminism has undergone several transformations and has moved from state feminism during Pahlavi time to Islamic, Muslim feminists, and secular (Vanzan 2012: 3). This transformation in their identities from one to another is a reaction to the structure of power inside Iran (Fazaeli 2007: 7). According to Vanzan (2012: 3), Iranian women's cooperation confirms this judgment that despite all the ideological differences, all the feminists' categorizations in the Iranian context have been trying to benefit all women. Similarly, as Moghadam (2002: 1143) puts it, there are different occasions when "Islamic" women and "secular" women cooperate.

In describing the term Islamic feminism, Margot Badran, a historian of the Middle East and Islamic societies, defines Islamic feminism as a *door of passage* into a culture. Badran argues that Islamic feminism is an invention of Muslim women in different societies and cultures. According to Badran, Islamic feminism is an identity for women and affects women's lives. According to her, it opens a debate between various types of feminists and Muslim and non-Muslim women about Islam

[68] Shahla, 13th January2108

and women (Badran 2002, cited in Kynsilehto 2008: 97). Besides, Mir-Hosseini (2011: 9) argues that Islamic feminism emerged in over 1990s as “an unwanted child” of political Islam. According to Mir-Hosseini Islamic feminism became an “inseparable part” of political Islam over time. In this respect, Moghadam (2002: 1143) argues that the debate about Islamic feminism began in February 1994, by Najmabadi's lecture at the School of Oriental and African Studies, the University of London. In that lecture, Najmabadi describes Islamic feminism as a reform movement that opens an interaction between religious and secular feminists.

As Vanzan (2012: 3), an Italian scholar, argues Iran is “the birthplace and laboratory” of Islamic feminism. Moghadam (2005) argues that Islamic feminism functions in opening a door of discourse in the Iranian civil society and between secular and religious thought (Moghadam 2005, cited in Kynsilehto 2008: 99). According to Paidar (2002: 22), during the years after the Islamic revolution, some Islamist women activists had changed their attitudes and slowed down the level of their resistance to the concept of feminism. They started to apply Islamic feminism as a term that could protect their approaches through feminism. In this respect, those religious women believed that they could ask for their rights without betraying their identity as true believers under the Islamic feminism term. In the same manner, Vanzan (2012: 3-8) argues that the Iranian Islamic feminists have been trying to consider themselves under the religious feminist category while looking for justice and equality.

Mir-Hosseini (2011: 1-3) refers to the roots and consequences of the emergence of Islamic feminism in Iran. She is one of the pioneer’s Iranian scholars about the term Islamic feminism. She refers to two crucial events in 1979. First, she refers to the Islamic revolution in Iran as a reversal process of secularization and its effects on women activists' attitudes about religion and feminism. Second, she mentions the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) by the UN. Mir-Hosseini tries to shed light on different sides of Islamism and the relationship between political Islam and feminism. She clarifies different interpretations of Sharia between Muslims and westerners. She argues that while westerners understand *Sharia* as patriarchal laws and cruel punishments, the majority of Muslims interpret it as an essence of justice. In the same manner, Tohidi (2002: 171) argues, “the role of religious texts and various theological currents and interpretations (modernist traditionalists) should not be overemphasized. Women's daily lives, their social status, a way and extent of enforcement of the legal and religious (Sharia) codes are determ local customs and by historical, socio-economic, and political factors (especially state policies) of each society more so than by the religious texts and theological debates”.

On the contrary, some scholars criticize the compatibility of feminism with Islam. These secular and socialist feminists do not give validity to Islamic sources for solving women's problems. They ask for the separation of the state and its legal codes from Islam (Barlow & Akbarzadeh 2008: 32). They reject the existence of variation within Islam and argue that Islamic bias against women is at the heart of the tradition of women's subjugation in Muslim societies. In their views, Islam and feminism are incompatible (Ghoussoub 1987, cited in Paidar 2002: 29). This idea was discussed in the First International Congress on Islamic Feminism which was held in Barcelona in 2005. One of the women scholars in that congress insisted that the project of reinterpreting Islam and challenging patriarchy cannot be realized under the ideological state of the Islamic Republic in Iran (Barlow & Akbarzadeh 2008: 34). In the same manner, Moghissi (1999: 126) asked, "How could a religion which is based on gender hierarchy be the framework for the struggle for gender democracy and women's equality with men?"

In analysing the different sides of these kinds of claims, this thesis seeks to shed light on how women I interviewed situated themselves in these frameworks pragmatically. Women in this study have stressed local patterns. These women define themselves under the specific indicators which exist inside the Iranian context. For example, Shahla insists on women's unity and refuses to use any label for women in the movement. She does not agree with any categorization about Iranian women. According to her "Women will lose their unity through these categorizations. If women lose their unity, they cannot resolve Iranian women's plights.[69] All these women that I interviewed put greater priority and value on seeking women's rights to present their identity. They deny the feminist term for their movements. Similar to what Vanzan (2012: 4) and Moghadam (2002: 1158) puts, these women that I interviewed are looking for a strategy to combine women's rights, local culture, and adverse political situation. They try to make more space to breathe. As Paidar (2002: 4) asserts, these women have been taking collective action, and insist on localizing international trends in the context of politics and religion while respecting cultural stereotypes. Indeed, there would be no difference whether they regarded themselves as Islamic feminism or not, when the goals are the same. Minoo indicates that "I am an Iranian Muslim woman who is looking for equality and justice"[70].

She argues about Islamic feminism in the following statement:

> *"I do not agree with using the Islamic feminism term for our movement. Some add Islam to everything and define it again; it would be a paradoxical combination. It is better to find*

[69] Shahla,13th January2108
[70] Minoo,10th January 2018

another word or definition for us. In my opinion, Islamic feminism rests on rather weak foundations. I think now Iranian women are in the post-structural feminist phase. I prefer post structures more than structures. Structures ask me to be a white western woman when post-structural feminism considers women's experiences and identity as a Muslim Algerian, Turk, Tajik, Iranian, or an Armenian woman.[71]

In the same manner, Gorji, one of the interviewees in this research, is also reluctant to define herself under the feminism or Islamic feminism umbrella. She is the first woman in politics after the Islamic revolution in Iran. Many scholars in published articles and books have regarded Gorji as the first Iranian Islamic feminist. I asked her several times about her definition of women's attempts in Iran. The following statements are the only sentences where she refers to the term feminism in the context of Islam in four hours of conversations.

She tries to apply intersectionality approaches in her arguments:

According to the Islamic perspective, in looking for women's rights, there is no need for feminism. In the Quranic texts, one cannot find any differences between women according to their religion, race, or color. The Quran addresses all human beings, women, and men, equally. If by using feminism or Islamic feminism, one seeks equality, Islam is more than that. In the Quranic text, the priority is for women. Quranic texts refer to women like Mari (Jesus Mother) and Asieh several times. Quran considers women's rights as well as men.[72]

Then Gorji refers to the claim that Islam is against women's rights and continues: "from where these claims come? According to the religious texts, women are considered as the reason for human creation after God, so how God can give them fewer rights in comparison to men."[73]

Minoo's arguments is a bold and revealing statement for summarizing this part:

It is no matter which kind of labeling you will use for women. The critical issue is the existence of rights and equality that all the women are looking for. [74]

[71] Minoo,10th January 2018
[72] Gorji,19th January 2108
[73] Gorji,19th January 2108
[74] Minoo,10th January 2018

5.3. The Discourse of Equality and Gender Justice

> *There would be no justice at all when ideology wants to govern one nation.*[75]

According to my observations and experiences in Iran and that of all the women that I interviewed, Iranian society has encountered a considerable sensitivity to the term "equality*"* from state power. As the analysis from this thesis indicates, equality is a target for the women's movement in Iran. There is no difference between whatever labels women use for their movement; they insist on equality. On the contrary, state power insists seriously on changing the term *gender equality* to *gender justice* regarding women's issues. Many incidents show how political power tries to maintain their distance from westerners by this reasoning and insist on gender justice. State power claims that by gender justice, differences between men and women would be taken into account. By this reasoning, women would get access to the opportunities that would be proper for them. In response to this approach, women's rights activists ask who decides about these abilities and properties while even "state power In Iran does not offer any definition or indicators for defining gender justice"[76]. Paidar (2002: 18) refers to this approach and argues that the theoretical basis of these claims about justice and equality comes from the work of Ayatollah Motahari.[77] He rejected the call for equality by citing biological differences between men and women. Motahari called for equal but different rights in the beginning years of the Islamic revolution.

Shahla refers to this approach in her argument:

> *Political power puts more emphasis on justice in comparison to equality. Justice for political power in Iran means everything is considered in its appropriate situation. Now, women want to know who can explain these appropriate terms and measures?*[78]

[75] This argument is the reaction from one of the women activists to the meaning of my family name. My family name is Edalati and "Edalat" means justice in the Persian language.
[76] Tayebe, 1st February 2018
[77] His arguments are accessible through his book *Systems of Women's Rights in Islam and The Hijab Issue* (Motahari, 1974)
[78] Shahla,10th January 2018

In Iranian civil law, men are the legal heads of the families (see appendix A).[79] In this system, justice means that men have more opportunities since men have more responsibilities in comparison to women. However, women activists in this research believe that "justice comes after equality"[80]. They ask some simple questions about this paradox. For instance, Minoo notes, "why women are equal in punishment when they are not equal in their rights?"[81] It is clear that, in a case of equal opportunity, one can choose where to be, what to do and what to say.

Shahla indicates briefly about this challenge:

> *Women's rights activists are challenging the political system because religion in this system is the state religion. Islam considers both men and women equally and Quranic text indicates equal rights. Then why do some try to impose their interpretation on the society in the name of religion?*[82]

Women activists whom I interviewed argued that justice would be accessible if women had equal rights and as Beti insists: "justice is resting on equality."[83] It is worth mentioning that according to articles 20-21 of the constitutional law[84] in Iran, men and women have equal rights. However, "there are no related regulations to guarantee these articles"[85]. State power in Iran follows the patriarchal discourses which try to assume women as vulnerable agents in the society. According to this lining, strong men can support vulnerable women.

Tayebe makes the revealing statement about this issue:

> *In definition, gender justice considers the differences between men and women and includes the abilities of both. However, in practice, something else has happened. Women in Iran are encountering two choices; follow the stereotypes or follow their abilities.*[86]

[79] Article 1105 of Iranian civil law assumes men as the legal head of the family, from *Iranian Civil Law*, translated from Persian to the English by Mansour (2016).
[80] Mari, 18 th January 2018
[81] Minoo, 10 th January 2018
[82] Shahla, 13 th January 2018
[83] Beti, 20 th June 2018
[84] Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran (1989 Edition), Translated to English language by Papan-Matin (2014).
[85] Tayebe, 1st February 2018
[86] Tayebe, 1st February 2018

5.4. The Circle of Trustworthy Women

> *Iranian women's movement is like a tribe. Some could enter the tribe when the others are not allowed.*[87]

The everyday life of the Iranian people intertwined with politics and religion. Iranian social life, sports, and women issues are always matters of political debates. As Beti indicates state power asks us not to take part in touchy issues:

> *The political power imposes its domination everywhere.*[88]

Women that I interviewed believe that there is a low level of trust between them and state power. "Iranian society does not experience trust in contemporary time; state power does not trust its nation and especially women. Women are like minorities in our political culture"[89]. In this respect, there are some unique terms inside Iran. Iranian women use the term *circle of trustworthy women* inside the political system. According to my interviewees, only specific women have been circulating in different political positions in Iran after the Islamic revolution. Because of this monopoly, only a limited number of women have been part of the power after the Islamic revolution. These women do not let other women compete with them and encroach on their monopoly. The circle of trustworthy women, in many cases, does not allow any new civil organization representatives to join the women's agenda unless they are from this monopoly. In the same manner, many of the women in the trustworthy circle have NGOs or are NGO members. Indeed, one can see the traces of this monopoly everywhere.

Sara refers to this in the following manner:

> *New faces might disappear soon. Indeed, Iranian society should interact with specific women in the power loop all the time.*[90]

[87] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[88] Beti, 20th June 2018
[89] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[90] Sara, 2nd January 2108

In order to find the roots of this approach one needs to shed light on why the Iranian ideological state trusts particular groups of women. This is because "those trusted women believe in specific elements and principles of the political system"[91]. As Beti notes, after the Islamic revolution, "state power excluded 23000 women from their jobs and social activities".[92] According to her and other women in this study, although the Islamic revolution has been trying to provide some facilities for women's participation in general, at the macro-level the state power cooperates with women who believe in the state power ideology. In the same manner, those accepted women just trust themselves.

Minoo describes this trend by saying:

> *They do not trust us. State power trusts in Khomeini's lover's [93] women and considers them as its relatives.*[94]

Although the circle of trustworthy women has had the same goals in improving women's status, those trusted women do not let others be in their groups and do not support independent women activists.

Beti criticizes this approach and argues:

> *If women do not support themselves, then what kind of feminists are we?*[95]

Data suggests that the Iranian political system trusts specific and limited numbers of women, who become available to do duties. By this logic, one woman is appointed for various duties. For instance, Masoumeh Ebtekar was appointed as a vice president for environmental affairs during President Khatami's time (1997 –2005). She was appointed again for environmental affairs during president Rohani time (2013- 2017). Then during the second government of President Rohani in 2017, Ebtekar was appointed for another field and she became vice president in family affairs. On

[91] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[92] Beti, 20th June 2018
[93] Khomeini's lover is a term that Minoo and Beti, interviewees in this research used to refer to the individuals who faithfully follow the Imam Khomeini's path. According to Rizaty (2010) Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, the officials in charge of the regime have always said that they follow Ayatollah Khomeini's Path.
[94] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[95] Beti, 20th June 2018

the contrary, independent women who can go inside the politics after passing several filters are easily ignored by the political power, because "they are others."[96]

Minoo, as an independent women rights activist, refers to her experiences in tackling with this approach:

> *We* [activists] *have celebrated the 8th of March, in our homes after the Islamic revolution. During President Khatami's time and in the open political atmosphere in those days, I asked the government officials to have a public place for our forum for March 8th. They did not accept that request, because we were not from them. However, we tried to join them to show our unity in the movement. We are listening to their voices all the time. On the contrary, independent women have had no opportunity to be heard from the state power tribune after the Islamic revolution.*[97]

According to my research, political power in Iran has a pre-judgment about women's issues and considers women issues as a political subject. Indeed, they cannot let women who have critical attitudes about state ideology or against the political system be in the circle of trust. Political power in Iran tries to control the women's movement by defining the women's monopoly when just special women have the right to go forward. State power insists that the women in the monopoly are very exceptional and different. Beti named the circle of trustworthy women as part of the state power as they receive financial support and could conduct different workshops, classes, and participate in international conferences.

Beti asserts:

> *My friends and I are insisting on being Muslim women, so they (political power) consider us as their opponents and do not like to include us. Reformist women as Khomeini's lover were accepted by the state power, although they had critical attitudes. They are assumed as part of the state power.*[98]

Beti continues her statements about the women in the state power monopoly by saying:

[96] Tayebe, 1 February 2018
[97] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[98] Beti, 20th June 2018

But I believe that those trusted women have improved the rate of gender sensitivity in our society. Honestly, their attempts have had positive effects on women's issues and women's rights in Iran. [99]

According to this argument and other similar statements from the women that I interviewed, again, the notion of unity comes up. These kinds of reports are good indicators that show how independent Iranian women's rights activists insist on having solidarity even with the women in the state power monopoly. They try to reach their aim which is improving women's status in Iranian society. In the same manner, they insist on the crucial role of ordinary women in breaking the monopoly of trusted women. In this respect, according to my data, women's NGOs have a crucial role as they seek to add different voices to the movement. These independent voices are looking for women's rights and "strive to exceed obstacles, make women status better, change patriarchal laws, and interact with local women and families"[100].

As Francis (2002: 8-11) puts it, supporting people's power and democracy at all levels increases participation and helps people in all sectors of society to find their voice. According to my research, ordinary women from the public sphere try to go forward while maintaining their distance from politics and be independent of political power. These ordinary independent women have their own religious beliefs and political attitudes. They are everywhere, from families to universities, from workplaces to public spaces. These women start their activities from the bottom of society and try to make changes in the principles of patriarchal society. In the following sections, this research sheds light on the practical strategies that these women apply in response to patriarchy.

5.5. Patriarchal culture and women's resistance

Iranian women accept stereotypes while they are looking for equality and justice.[101]

When I began to collect data in 2018, some young women in Iran were protesting compulsory veiling. They put their scarves on a piece of wood and stood in the central streets of different cities.

[99] Beti, 20th June 2018
[100] Mari, 18th January 2018
[101] Beti, 20th June 2108

Security police arrested many of them. Although police released some of those young women immediately, some others were sentenced to prison with sentences ranging from one month to one year. Nasrin Sotoudeh, a prominent Iranian human rights lawyer and women's right activists, tried to support these young women legally. In the months following her activities, she was arrested, and she has now been sentenced to 38 years in prison and 138 lashes.[102] This is a "harsh patriarchal strategy"[103] for women's rights activists in Iran according to the respondents in this research. As Minoo asserts, "state power and patriarchy's responses to women's rights activism in Iran is kind of a revolutionary dictatorship."[104] Women reshape their resistance models in response to these challenges. For instance, Nasrin refused to wear a hijab in prison meetings. She refused to attend the court as she could not have her self-selected lawyer.[105]

Kandiyoti (1988: 274) argues that patriarchy is probably the most overused and under-theorized concept in feminist research. Patriarchy is present in many societies; however, the nature and extent of patriarchal practices vary from society to society according to the prevailing culture. In Iran, also, cultural norms present more difficulties and women encounter cultural barriers and patriarchal stereotypes. According to the accounts of the women I interviewed, in Iranian society, like many others, supporting the family's values becomes a tool of restriction. These values expect a woman to be a housekeeper, a stay at home mother, marry a man as a duty, and raise the children. It is the typical story for many educated women also. At workplaces too, women have to respect the patriarchal stereotypes. National TV programs also reinforce these stereotypes by telecasting beautiful Iranian women as ideal and dutiful wives dedicated to taking care of their husbands and family.; however, in reality, a socially active woman does not match with these stereotypes.

Shahla refers to this phenomenon inside Iranian society:

> *"traditions and culture ask an active woman to be a good wife. They accuse working mothers of not caring about their kids and families. One can imagine then how would be the situation for non-educated women in rural families.*[106]

Besides, Iranian civil law assumes men as the legal heads of the family. Women need to ask their husbands permission to study or work (see Appendix A). Moreover, the family's culture and the

[102] Guardian, 19th 2019
[103] Beti, 20th June 2018
[104] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[105] Sanchez et al. (2018)
[106] Shahla,13th January 2108

role of law in supporting these gender discriminations are very crucial. In this respect, Article 1114 of Iranian Civil Law says: "the woman should locate in a house that her husband determines unless man gives this authority to his wife." Article 1117 also mentions that "the man can forbid his wife from the job that is incompatible with the family situation" (Mansour 2016). Similar to what Donahoe (2017: 36) argues about Northern Ireland, law and politics and everyday life of the people in Iran are intertwined. Accordingly, in this society, religious and political beliefs are synonymous and any variation from the standards might lead to women being accused of doing something against religion and culture. As Evason (1982) argues, this kind of life for women means life in "armed patriarchy." These gender relations in power and society are implicated in the construction of various types of violence (cf. Confortini 2010: 23) against women activists, which can stop women from continuing their path and waste their energy and lose their creativity. However, the experiences of women I interviewed show that these constraints make women find new ways to resist.

Gorji refers to her memories of encountering this male-dominated culture during the first year of the revolution:

> *I was invited to give a speech as a member of the constitutional assembly. Then, at the end of the meeting, I was confronted with some challenging questions. Those questions were coming from patriarchal and medieval beliefs. They asked me: Are you a permanent wife of Mr. Beheshti or Mr. Banisadr?*[107] *Those questions clarified their points of view that women should be the wife of a famous politician, to be considered. That male-dominated culture did not consider women independently. At that time, I understood what was behind their questions. My answer was: No, I am not. I am the wife of a shoemaker, and I am proud of that. In their minds, women cannot have a voice unless her husband or her father is famous. I was a successful woman; however, in their understanding, I should have a family tie with an important man.*[108]

Gorji tries to show how the male-dominated system targeted women's self-esteem. She sheds light on how political policy uses religious arguments for supporting the statements against women. In

[107] Beheshti and Banisadr were famous and important politicians in the first year after the Islamic revolution. Banisadr became the first president after revolution. Beheshti was a chairman of the Council of the Islamic Revolution, and the Assembly of experts after Revolution. See (Shoor 2013)

[108] Gorji, 19th January 2108

this respect, she refers to several incidents to show how the male-dominated system use wrong religious interpretations to hold back women:

> *They claim that they do not consult with women because women are not wise enough! It is not Islam. In the Quran, in several verses, God talks to women.*[109]

Gorji was the only female member of the constitutional assembly after the Islamic revolution. She was part of the committee in charge of writing the constitutional law. She shares this memory:

> *One of the male members of the assembly, who wore cleric clothes, made a speech against me. At that time, a wireless microphone was not available. He walked through a big room and came behind the microphone. He argued that this meeting is a sin because one woman sits beside all of us. He asked me to leave the meeting. In response, I accused him that he had not read the religious texts once although he wore a cleric's dress. I referred him to the Quran where God speaks about Maryam, Asiah, or the prophet's wives. I referred to my votes (I had one million and 700 votes, and that man had just about 500 thousand votes) and asked them to leave the meeting. After that, a long silence came over the meeting.* [110]

Gorji calls the men in politics in Iran as "men's tribe."[111] The latter have their authority through society. The explicit reason for this is the experience of women in contemporary times and different situations:

> *"Those men who could not tolerate me being with them in the meeting, some years later made speeches in favor of women's rights. Indeed, I decided to leave this politics which is overwhelmed by many contradictions".*[112]

These experiences support the idea that the role of women in politics is a tool to move from private patriarchy to public patriarchy (Walby 1994) and women's participation in politics can be considered as a tool for transformation in gender relations (Moghadam 2003: 71). Gorji's narratives pertain to the early years after the Islamic revolution; however, it does not seem that even 40 years later any significant changes have taken place in the system concerning women's issues. Fatemeh, who has been working in one of the male-dominated sections of Iranian society, makes a proper

[109] Gorji, 19th January 2108
[110] Gorji, 19th January 2108
[111] Gorji, 19th January 2108
[112] Gorji, 19th January 2108

statement about the current situation and male-dominated culture:

> *I was pregnant when I was a candidate for the chamber of commerce election. At that time, some of the men in the chamber of commerce had a gender perspective on the situation, and they did not consider women's abilities and experiences. One of those men called and asked me to leave the competition. He was insisting that they did not want a woman to be between them.*[113]

By perpetuating this type of patriarchal gender relations, the male line is responsible for property, residence, and descents, as they have authority inside the family-circle, while women's principal role is marriage and childbearing. In Iran, according to the women that I interviewed, women see and feel the footprints of the patriarchal tactics in their everyday life however much they try to forge links between transformation of their community and respecting their family's structure. Women in Iran confront public patriarchy in the process of the move from home to society. Patriarchal culture assumes family as the primary place for women to be situated in. This culture is supported by male-dominated regulations and compels women to go back home and save their families. In this respect, Donahoe (2017: 9) refers to the experience of women in Northern Ireland. She argues that the patriarchy considers women as the gateway to the family, which would affect women and their subjectivity. In response to this patriarchal tactic, Iranian women respect the stereotypes and do not ignore their domestic roles while moving and mobilizing to society. In this respect, Minoo refers to some recent statistics[114] about young Iranian women's priorities. These priorities are employment, security, and marriage. Indeed, having a family and mobilization in social life both are important issues for women in Iran.

Minoo indicates her respect for the structure of the family several times in her statements:

> *Women are more ideological and stand on their beliefs to save their families.*[115]

Referring to the Northern Ireland women's movement, Donahoe (2017: 120) argues: "Women are more specialized in bringing ethics, religious, political, and cultural divides and are more collaborative in comparison to men. Women use their role as mothers to cut across international

[113] Fatemeh, 2nd February 2108
[114] Minoo shows me some unprinted research and statistics about women's priority which was produced recently by some activists in Iran. It is not official research and I do not have a right to use them in my research more than what she herself referred to.
[115] Minoo, 10th January 2108

borders and internal divides." In the same manner, Iranian women do not see the family as a basis of restrictions, although state power wants to impose this interpretation on society. In many cases, Iranian women desire to support their families in the time of political suppression. Minoo explains how she withdrew from social activity to support her family when her husband was in prison. She believes that "family is a center of resistance in a system that is ruled by authority".[116]

According to my analysis, in some cases, mobilization to society and going back home to support the family have a similar meaning for women. They can shape their resistance models through this mobilization. A good number of activists I interviewed shed light on the role of the family as an influential structure for women's resistance. They believe that family has a concept and produces a feeling in our culture. Beti, as an activist, discloses her definition of the family structure:

> *Family is like a shelter for Iranian women, not a prison, like what Simone de Beauvoir believes. Women have their way, and women define their resistance model through family structure.* [117]

Gorji refers to her memories from more than 40 years ago to show her cooperation with the family structure:

> *My husband and I were living together with my husband's family in one big house. One day my mother in law told my husband that your wife leaves the house immediately after you leave in the morning. His answer was: Yes, and sometimes she leaves sooner. My husband made all the doors open for me, and I had enough freedom to go on vacations alone, even go abroad. My husband and I both were religious people and learned from our religion that women's activity and participation are not against religion. Unfortunately, this issue is not resolved for some men and families after many years and with too many modernities.*[118]

As Tayebe elaborates, political power prefers to put women inside the family structure. According to her, insisting on women's place inside the family structure is the excuse political power for ignoring women's rights, and it is their patriarchal tactics:

> *More than two million housewives in Iran do not have any insurance. Women in parliament could not persuade the other parliament members to support the plan of making social*

[116] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[117] Beti, 20th June 2018
[118] Gorji, 19th January 2108

insurance for mothers who have more than three children even. Although Iran has 160 thousand women who are the head of the family and must run their families without any partners, there are not any regulations to support these women. Then how one can ask for rules for socially and politically active women in this structure. This system does not support women in the family even. How can one talk about feminism in this system? Who are we? Good housekeepers or social activists?[119]

When society is engaged with this type of gendered restrictions, women can contribute to slow peace, and they can be considered as everyday peace builders. "Inverting Rob Nixon's (2011) concept of slow violence, as gradual and out of sight, dispersed across time and space, and attritional, everyday practices contribute to what Donahoe (2017) terms slow peace. Peace that is gradual and out of sight by virtue both of it being outside of elite processes and because everyday practices are banal; dispersed across time and space, carried out by local actors and communities rather than concentrated informal processes; and finally, slow peace is a process of accretion (rather than attrition) through community development, capacity building activities and other kinds of social investment in communities that are stabilizing" (Donahoe 2019: 99).

Besides, Donahoe applies Mac Ginty's argument about everyday peace and holds that in local and community levels of peacebuilding in which everyday peace is defined, women are more involved. "Everyday peacebuilding activities are often associated with women**,** not because these tasks ought to be performed by women but because they are empirically recognized as care work: A collection of practices that are feminized despite being necessary at all levels" (Donahoe 2019: 99).

Women's experiences in this research show how they are working together to strengthen each other and build more capacity in their society. They have been trying to increase gender sensitivity through their everyday practices. In this respect, Shahla, one of my interviewees believes that in many cases, nobody cares about women when they try to care about the whole society. Nobody recognizes what they do, although they are struggling for achieving other women's rights. Data from this research illustrates how Iranian women are living with the mixture of several paradoxical and controversial issues. These data show how women in Iran form their mode of resistance to help other women.

Fatemeh makes a revealing statement in this respect:

[119] Tayebe, first of February 2108

My resistance would be a great victory for groups of women in the Iranian society.[120]

There are some other challenges that women encounter inside the Iranian context. As Fatemeh claims "some restrictions are just for women in Iran"[121]. For instance, women's experience in the field of sport in Iran furnishes one of the concrete facts about how patriarchy tries to spread its domination on women. According to this research, Iranian women are now successful in different fields in the sport.

For example, Kimia Alizadeh is Iran's only female Olympic medalist in taekwondo. At Rio 2016 Summer Olympics, she captured the bronze medal. Shahrbanoo Mansouriyan claimed five gold medals at the World Wushu Championships Elahe Mansurain also captured gold medal 2010 World Wushu Championships. Many other sportswomen won International medals in Asian championships. Zahra Nemati is an Iranian Paralympic and Olympic archer. At the 2012 Summer Paralympics in London, she won two medals, individual gold, and team bronze.[122]

State power has accepted the presence of women in different fields. However, the veil issue has been a controversial issue in international competitions for them. Besides women activists demand "positive discrimination" [123] to enforce women's situation in the sport. However, "parliament male members do not agree with that".[124]

Concerning sportswomen, Iranian society experiences other challenges. For example, the national TV programs—the only TV that Iranian people have—do not cover the competitions in women's sport, either nationally or internationally. Also, "although Iranian women are accepted being in the sport, they cannot enter the football stadiums to watch the games"[125]. In response to this limitation, women have formed their resistance model. Some Iranian girls who are football lovers have changed their appearances to look like a boy to enter the stadium. This has led to huge debates in Iranian society. State power refers to ideology and religious limitations to stop women's entrance to stadiums. These kinds of logic are not accepted by the majority of religious people even.

Minoo believes that state power wants to show its domination through women by making these kinds of unusual restrictions for them:

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[120] Fatemeh, 2nd February2108
[121] Fatemeh, 2nd February2108
[122] Ministry of youth affairs and sports in the Islamic Republic of Iran available online at: msy.gov.ir .
[123]Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[124]Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[125] Minoo, 10th January 2018

Women are in cinemas, theatres, or many other situations. State power asks women to be police officers. But they cannot let women enter the stadiums to watch a football game.[126]

Patriarchy uses politics to make massive restrictions on women while trying to use women and their triumphs in its favor. Indeed, women must tackle different challenges from state power when they ask women to be their agents. Shahal refers to these kinds of challenges:

Political power accuses us of being the voice of westerners. On one hand, I must be at the court to explain the last content of Zanan in some cases. At court, they ask, why do you mention the name of this disease? Why do you mention particular words such as sexual harassment and sexual relationships in the magazine? On the other hand, when they want to show-off the rate of women's participation in international conferences, they ask us to publish another number of Zanan magazine.[127]

According to the women that I interviewed, the patriarchal culture in Iran works as an exclusive actor in practice, and there is no difference between extremist parties or the reformist ones. According to this research during the last parliamentary election in Iran women activists insisted on 30 per cent of women's participation. In response, the state used different patriarchal tools to exclude women. Some members of the *men's tribe*[128] argued that "women are not skillful enough to be in specific positions"[129] and applied the term "meritocracy as a strategy to exclude women".[130] Referring to women's merit can be seen as a patriarchal tactic to make women leave the tables. As a good number of activists told me, patriarchy targets women's self-esteem when there is no opportunity for women to get skills at the workplace. The patriarchal culture does not let women be active in workplaces as much as men; thus only 16 per cent of women in Iran have careers. It is not comparable to the number of women who are educated and pass high-level degrees. According to national statistics, 65 per cent of the university chairs belong to women.[131] Sara, as a young woman in Iranian society, believes "Many of the men themselves do not have enough merit. Then

[126] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[127] Shahla, 13th January 2108
[128] Gorji one of the interviewees in this research use this term to explain men in politics in Iran.
[129] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[130] Mari, 18th January 2018
[131] Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology's Institute for Research and Planning in Higher Education: https://irphe.ac.ir/

how those men can decide about women's abilities and sufficiency?" [132]

5.5.1. Bargaining with patriarchy as a strategy

> *There are various times in our history that women cooperated with Ulema to have more rights.*[133]

Some researchers doubt if women in Iran can challenge and revise family laws since this law comes from religious texts (Moghadam 2003: 82). On the contrary, this research shows that Iranian women's rights activists, especially those who prefer to concentrate on grassroots changes inside Iranian society, try to find special tools and solutions to make the status of women better.

Shahla's statements would be an appropriate snapshot of the situation:

> *I have been publishing this magazine (Zanan) for 30 years. I have concentrated on women's rights for years. I claim that women's rights activists in Iran have been continuously working on the same issues from 30 years ago up to now. Women's rights activists have been bargaining with state power around the same problems for a long time. Women continue going forward. Women should do it even when they are in a tight situation. Yes, a convenient approach would be trying to erase the plights or be afraid to do anything in the existing context.* [134]

According to the data collected for this thesis, bargaining with state power and religious leaders has been one of the particular strategies that these women have used. The women that I interviewed argue that women's rights activists strategize within a set of real constraints and bargain with religious leaders to get some rights for women. As Kandiyoti (1988: 275) asserts, these bargains with patriarchy can lead to historical transformations that open new areas of struggle. Similarly, one of the women that I interviewed refers to her struggle in make changes through bargaining with power. She believes that bargaining with religious leaders has been the leading and the only approach in making change.

[132] Sara, 2th January 2108
[133] Beti, 20th June 2018

Hence it is necessary to analyse the process of women's strategies in bargaining with religious leaders. In this respect, Iranian women insist on a specific way to negotiate with Ulema. Indeed, they want the religious leaders who have authority inside the political system to hear women's voices and demands. It so happens sometimes that religious leaders say that they do not know about women's plights. Sometimes religious leaders might pretend that they are not aware of the specific challenges that women face. Bargaining with religious leaders would be an appropriate strategy in making them acknowledge women's plights in society. In this respect, Safie refers to the Iranian law of Abortion in the Times of Hardness and Danger[135] as an excellent example of what has happened through bargaining with religious leaders.

Safie recollects making a change in the law of abortion:

> *I tried to convince religious leaders first to take their Fatwa*[136]*(their moral judgments), before taking it to the parliament and ministry. For eight months, every day, I came to the supreme leader's office to have his signature for making a change in this law. Finally, I could prevail upon him and do that. The supreme leader had answered on the other side of a torn paper that I wrote the question. According to his fatwa, abortion would be acceptable in the time of hardness before the week 18th of pregnancy.*[137]

Safie refers to different layers of patriarchy by saying:

> *My friends asked me to do not put myself in danger. The health minister warned me about those activities and said that they could not support and stand behind me.*[138]

She asserts that some men who should mediate between women and religious leaders become a strong hindrance and do not allow women to have the opportunity to transfer their voices. They don't even allow women to talk with religious leaders. Safie believes that the law of abortion needs more changes because there are no regulations to support abortion after being raped and explains: *It was a huge triumph. However, parliament members changed and restricted that fatwa. Parliament members interpreted 'times of hardness' to a specific condition that would endanger*

[135] In Islamic law, abortion is not acceptable at any time, and the law of Abortion in the Times of Hardness was a big change inside the system that laws come from Sharia
[136] Fatwa: religious pronouncement (Abrahamian 2008)
[137] Safie, 18th January 2108
[138] Safie, 18th January 2108

the mother or child's health. It can have diverse interpretations, from hard economic situations to health problems.[139]

These triumphs shed light on the capacities of the Iranian women's movement in confronting patriarchal culture and structures and changing laws. However, some critics argue that these women cannot openly criticize religious values supporting patriarchy (Mahdi 2004: 438). In this respect, Shahla also insists on the role of bargaining with religious leaders and criticizes those who believe that Iranian women cannot make any changes in this context.

Shahla asserts:

> *Iranian women can, and they made many efforts, and they will continue to do so. If one thinks that Iranian women cannot make changes in this context, we should have prepared a grave for ourselves many years ago.*[140]

An Iranian civil rights code comes from Islamic laws and Islamic jurisprudence *fighh*. Indeed, it would be inevitable that any reform and change would happen through Ulema command and with communication and interactions with Ulema. It is worth pointing out that many of the problems that women are facing in Iran, are rooted in the Family Protection Law of 1967, and the implementation of a civil code based on the Islamic law. According to this law, the patriarchy grants overwhelming privilege to men (Kian 1997: 81). As Shahla puts it, "Women in Iran feel and touch the footprint of this law in all parts of the family's life. Families do not need any chairman at all".[141] Moreover, several rules follow this law; for instance, a woman cannot go abroad without her husband's (head of family) permission. The law of marriage, divorce, and parental authority are the other critical laws in this respect. Women I interviewed refer to this discriminative law in their statements and insist that women cannot tolerate this faulty law anymore. Mari refers to the situation that an addicted husband can take his wife's money through domestic violence when that husband is head of the family by law.

Shahal refers to one of the incidents of this faulty chain in the following manner:

> *In recent years in some regions, some women experience acid attacks as domestic violence.*

[139] Safie, 18th January 2108
[140] Shahla, 13th January 2108
[141] Shahla, 13th January 2018

Then a weird issue came up. According to family law, a woman as a victim needs to have his husband permission for admission at the hospital.[142]

By referring to the discriminative law which says women cannot go abroad without their husbands (head of family) permissions (see appendix A), sportswomen, women politicians, university teachers, or parliament members should have their husband's permission to go abroad. As one of the parliament members argues, recently, women in parliament tried to change this law to facilitate the exit of women from the country. However, patriarchy accuses them of doing something against religion. According to Tayebe "This reform will consider specific groups of women, such as scientific and cultural elite women, economic activists, athlete's women, and sick women who want to go abroad for particular reasons".[143] However, the women that I interviewed criticize the idea of making changes in this law as this idea just considers elite women. Indeed, some questions arise, and one could ask, who is eligible to choose the elite women? In the amendment of this discriminative law, again, ordinary women are excluded. Indeed, women might encounter another discrimination if they are categorized into elite women and ordinary women by the law. According to this research, these kinds of changes might minimize the challenges but do not solve them.

Besides, the law about *blood money* for women is another issue that is "detrimental to women's status in society".[144] Women's rights activists try to change it by bargaining with patriarchy as this law is "humiliating"[145] for women. According to this research, some changes have happened about this law. For instance, the Iranian insurance system compensates women equally in a road accident but "it is not sufficient".[146] The other discriminative law is the minimum age of marriage for girls. According to this law, the minimum age of marriage is 13 years old for girls and 15 years old for boys. Exceptional cases before these ages can be permitted under the observation of the family court.[147] Some activists tried to increase the minimum age of marriage for girls to 15 years; however, they have not succeeded yet.

Tayebe refers to the parliament member's reactions for changing this discriminative law and explains:

[142] Shahla, 13th January 2108
[143] Tayebe, 1st February 2018
[144] Beti, 20 th June 2018
[145] Tayebe, 1st February 2018
[146] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[147] Article 1041 Iranian civil Code

Social-cultural commission at the parliament does not agree with the increase in the age of marriage. They claim that changing culture will solve this problem. Our experiences show that making proper and supportive laws would change the wrong cultures too. Those Parliament members insist on their understanding, and their voice is louder than ours.[148]

As Beti notes, "Iranian women struggle to move up because of the lack of opportunities"[149]. This statement is a proper snapshot of Iranian women's attempts during these 40 years after the Islamic revolution. Shahla's long quotes below summarize this argument:

Honestly, many issues have changed after the Islamic revolution and at least the levels of personal freedom for women have changed. Iranian women remember days that women were challenged about wearing long boots in the streets even. It seems ridiculous now but women in Iran had these kinds of debates before. In addition to all these practices, one cannot deny the little by little amendments in divorce law, which have been a considerable achievement for Iranian women. I can refer to Ayatollah Khomeini's fatwas (judgments) about martyr's wives and child custody during the Iran-Iraq war. According to that judgment, women could have their children's custody after their husband's death in the war. This law was generalized to other women as well. Before that, grandparents or brother in law (husband's brother) had a priority to mothers according to the child's custody law. I remember that when women's activists asked Ayatollah Khomeini's attitudes about women's rights to divorce, Khomeini answered that if a man bothers his wife, then she (woman) has a right to divorce; however, Ayatollah was also afraid of some radicals inside the country.[150]

Correspondingly, women activists try to show how their contribution has led to positive changes, although they must compensate for that. According to this research, Iranian women believe that challenging the power at least leads to a boost in gender awareness, in face of male-dominated rules. According to the women I interviewed, women have encountered several ups and downs during history. Although sometimes women's plights become a secondary issue in Iranian society, women start again at their own pace and through a peaceful approach. As Shahla asserts, "some happenings in history are like a light; nobody could turn them off forever."[151]

[148]Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[149] Beti, 20th June 2018
[150] Shahla,13th January 2108
[151] Shahla,13th January 2108

5.6. Women's NGOs and the Role of NGOs in society

> "We do not know what difference women would make; however, we do know that without the inclusion of women, there is very rarely an inclusion within such a process of any gender equality" (Chinkin 2002, cited in Donahoe 2017: 108).

This research shows that women's NGOs in Iran have faced many ups and downs, at the same time suffering from a lack of related regulations. The memories and actual experiences of women in the non-governmental organizations show how the situation is blurry for them. From one government to another, women's NGOs have encountered considerable changes in the state policies. For instance, according to the Third Plan for Development (2000) and the 6th parliament point of view, NGOs received a large budget for training women and concentrating on rural women to facilitate the process of democratization (Koolaee 2008: 3). As Mari, one of the women that I interviewed, says, "President Khatami turned on the light on the NGOs." However, the president who came after him, Ahmadinezhad, considered NGOs as a threat to national security and banned 11,000 NGOs in one night. Indeed, NGOs have been confronted with "expansion and extraction policies" [152] through time.

Incidents show that "State power is afraid of NGOs, and Iran does not have welcoming policies through NGOs" [153]. State power controls women's NGOs, although women's NGOs try to act more than their capacities despite all these boundaries. Mari, who has a long experience in investigations about NGOs in Iran, argues that "women's NGOs in Iran have the characteristic of the Iranian women and encounter long-term prohibition."[154] Moghadam (2003: 85) also asserts that women's organizations like Iranian women's organizations are affected by many classifications, from gender to politics, from race to social class and they are on the forefront to be shut-down. According to the data collected for this thesis, these obstacles faced by women's NGOs make them change the nature of their actions from time to time. Indeed, women's NGOs work under different labels, specifically charities. Similar to what Donahoe (2017: 187) says about women in Northern Ireland, many of the women's NGOs in Iran do not straightforwardly concentrate on women's rights. In many cases, women's NGOs look for kinds of participation that have a relation with care work while they are

[152] Fatemeh, 2nd February2108
[153] Fatemeh, 2nd February2108
[154] Mari, 18th January 2018

seeking power to compete for authority or control.

I reviewed the history of women's NGOs activities, visited the NGOs web pages, and talked to women who are active in NGOs. According to these investigations, I realized that in Iran there are several women's NGOs that shifted to charity and entrepreneurship activities when the political system wanted to stop them from concentrating on women's rights. It is worth mentioning that although women's NGOs shift to charity fields, they try to help other women to enhance society's capacity and facilitate women's empowerment. Women of NGOs deal with real women's plights, and "they decide to be a voice of particular groups of women."[155] "They cover geographies that the government cannot cover".[156] According to my interviewees, women's activists in Iran seek more rights for women and ask for gender equality by running NGOs, by running women's magazines or by holding group classes and meetings. They feel the responsibility to increase the gender awareness of all women. The individual experiences of women in NGOs show that the obstacles could not make the civil society activists stop. However, as Mari asserts, "all the civil society activists cannot continue at the same pace. Some cannot tolerate the limitations when others continue their path and can adapt to the existed situations."[157]

Safie believes that patriarchy tried to expand its domination over women and women's NGOs. She explains

this challenge in the following statements:

President Rohani insisted on interaction with NGOs. The Ministry asked their deputy ministers to have interactions when one deputy in the family health center does not let one woman of an NGO enter his room for four years. In his opinion, NGOs are westerners' spies. Nobody could believe that these experiences are our everyday practices. NGOs must tackle a lack of information, cultural poverty, and gender biases. One NGO must pass so many cultural hindrances to be alive as an NGO.[158]

NGOs suffer from lack of education, economic autonomy, insufficient funding, financial independence from the state power, lack of necessary regulations and information, and substantial bureaucratic regulations. Many of the women activists in NGOs criticize the financial restrictions

[155] Fatemeh, 2nd February2108
[156] Safie, 18th January 2108
[157] Mari, 18th January 2018
[158] Safieh,18th January 2108

and bureaucratic regulations as the main restriction in their activities.[159] Safie refers to this phenomenon by saying "women are tired of so much bureaucracy, and it makes us lose our focus and aim. The role of NGOs as the third sector of civil society is not given importance in Iran. According to the data collected for this research, there is no definition of civil society in the law. There is just a "short sentence that refers to non-governmental organizations inside the party's rule, and these sentences have been used by NGOs as the only legal regulation to regulate their establishment and expansion"[160]. Mari, who has been working in NGOs for many years, criticizes the lack of relevant rules for NGOs and insists: "There is no policy to consider this indispensable component of the civil society in Iran. When there is no definition in the law, then NGO might encounter an arbitrary approach."[161]

As a good number of activists told me, women's NGOs in Iran like any other sector in Iranian society should tackle the issue of religion and political division too. In looking at NGOs in Iran, a comparison between grassroots women's activities in NGOs and political participation would be informative. As Donahoe (2017: 128) argues, when women started to look for the rights and demands through women centers in the 1980s in Northern Ireland, they were looking to change their status. Women's centers have had their own identity and their personality embedded in a unique local history. Similarly, the stories of Iranian women activists and their experiences in NGOs show how these women try to create their specific identities by concentrating on one aspect of women's plights. Besides, as Shahla notes, "women's NGOs can act as wings of a government" in solving the problems. According to the women I interviewed, they prefer to move from the bottom-up. They believe that just focusing on women's political participation will exclude most Iranian women who are not in politics. In their arguments, male-dominated politics concentrates on women's political participation as a sample of women's involvement in general while politics ignore women's plights at the micro-level. Correspondingly, the interviewees of this research try to show how women's activists shape their activism under the circumstances that have been blurry for a long time. In this respect, Shahla admires Iranian women's activity in helping each other and says, "There are wonderful women with remarkable ideas in *Iranian society.*"[162]

Shahla's argument about her dreams to have an NGO would be an appropriate explanation of what women

[159] According to individual research by Mari about the limitation of women's NGO, which was done a year before our conversation, during 2016-2017 in 12 cities in Iran.
[160] Mari, 18th January 2018
[161] Mari, 18th January 2018
[162] Shahla,13th January2108

do on the ground:

> *I do not just publish a magazine in this office. This magazine works as an NGO in many cases. When women see our attempts in Zanan (women magazine), they come here and ask for help. Many of them do not have enough money to go to lawyers or consultants. We ask the help of our specialized friends as much as possible. Nowadays, there is an Afghani girl in the Zanan office. This Afghani girl is a victim of domestic violence, and her husband cut her nose! Zanan's journalists try to collect some money for her surgery soon. Many of the magazines and newspapers do the same in Iran; they try to support women as much as they can.* [163]

In Iran, women's NGOs are the first actors in the civil society that concentrate on the subject of taboos in Iranian society. Data collected for this research show that women's NGOs in Iran involve vulnerable groups of women such as addicted mothers and their children, homeless women, trafficked women, and sex workers. These target groups are usually ignored at the macro level. According to Mari, it is rare that at the high level of society, somebody from the official tribunes refers to the plights of these vulnerable groups of women. Safie, one of the women that I interviewed, explains her long-time pragmatic approach to help vulnerable groups of women inside society. Safie tackles social taboos which Iranian women must face in their everyday life in Iran. According to her arguments, there are some issues that political power is not willing to consider. "Some of the parliament members have denied the presence of sex workers". [164]

Safie refers to her activities in the following arguments:

> *My NGO is working with sex workers and trying to make them aware of their rights. After the awareness process, they would ask for a proper job, insurance, education, and identity. Many of the sex workers have no birth certificate or identity cards even. NGOs and women organizations pay more attention to these notions than governmental actors. NGOs should have the right and sufficient support to do these duties.*[165]

As Donahoe (2017: 85) argues NGOs are valuable assets in civil society and can fill the space that exists between the individual and the state and can bridge societal cleavages, create public virtues

[163] Shahla,13th January210
[164] Safie, 18th January 2108
[165] Safie, 18th January 2108

and foster social cohesion. NGOs are working as a glue that binds society together. They can change male-dominated rules and political atmosphere and with the help of NGOs, women can achieve their collective goals and gender equality. On the contrary, the data collected for this research show state power does not trust women and considers women's issues threatening. My interviewees indicate how political power resists women's issues and regards women's rights activism as an act against national security and considers women's NGOs as its enemies. Similarly, women's practices show that women of NGOs in Iran do not trust political power.

Safie explains how political power monitors NGOs' activities in Iran. Her NGO concentrates on family planning. She argues that family planning is considered as an act against national security because the state power tries to motivate people to have more children. Indeed, she must explain her activities to the high-level officials' members, several times:

> *"Even family planning for vulnerable women in the risk groups is not accepted. Sometimes state power accuses us of doing something political and following westerners because my NGO is a member of IPPF (International Planned Parenthood Federation), which is in London. I should also answer them that why this organization is in London and why they are supporting us.*[166]

Besides, the data collected for this research shows women's NGOs in Iran have vital roles in rural areas where domestic violence is high. In these areas, women suffer from traditional family rules. Mari refers to some of her observations in the West or the East of Iran. The people of these regions are more traditional and have religious and political sensitivities about women's issues. According to Mari's fieldwork patriarchal stereotypes are more severe in these regions in comparison to the other parts of Iran. Indeed, women suffer from various aspects of male-dominated culture. According to Mari the realities of living as a woman in the different areas of Iran are varied. In the south and the north of Iran, women's participation is better in comparison to the west and the east of Iran.

Mari narrated her fieldwork experiences in border regions in the east and west of Iran in the following manner:

> *Religious obstacles, patriarchal culture, and stereotypes do not let women have different ideas with their men. In Kurdistan and some other border cities in Iran, women wear such*

[166] Safie, 18th January 2108

colorful clothes and dance with men in their celebrations (which is not common in Iran). It seems that they have a happy life although they have experienced an influential patriarchal culture. These women prefer that their husbands say the first and the last word. It is too strange for them that a woman starts talking when there is a man at the meeting. These women let men decide for them. Women's empowerment should start from these local women. However, it is fascinating that in the participatory project in this unique region, local women have a strong will to participate. My experiences show that these women trust in women's NGOs.[167]

In non-governmental centers, women's activities are very diverse (see, for example, Moghadam 2003: 85). Women's NGOs in Iran follow this diversity, and their activities vary from research and women's studies to entrepreneurial activities, charities, and NGOs looking after women's rights. According to my research, in Iran, there are some specific centers, such as Hawzeh, in which ordinary women have considerable involvement. Hawzeh is a religious center where people can get religious education. Nowadays they have become places where women from rigid religious and traditional families prepare themselves for social participation. Some observations show "local women from religious and traditional families try to start their education after marriage from Hawzeh"[168]. Minoo conducts individual research about these centers. According to her findings, these women do not want to stay at home and their *husbands* let them go to Hawzeh. This research sheds light on the role of the *husbands* as one of the main actors in the patriarchal culture. According to Minoo, these centers can be a good start for particular groups of women to be mobilized in society, specifically for a group of women who have no opportunity to participate in other centers. The role of these public spaces in increasing the women's awareness of their rights needs further research, though this does not fall within the scope of this dissertation.

5.7. Women in politics

I am an equality seeker, and at the same time, I am a Muslim woman who cannot tolerate this much gender discrimination. I try to challenge political power and ask them to let women enter the political system. I challenged them because the state power confiscated different

[167] Mari, 18th January 2018
[168] Minoo, 10th January 2018

ideas, such as peace, Palestine issue, and justice. Many ideas in Iran are now considered political issues and located inside the red lines. Many current issues in our daily lives are intertwined with politics.[169]

The quote above demonstrates that all issues in Iran are politicized. Similar to the political atmosphere at the macro-level, political parties in Iran have the same approaches towards women issues. Women I interviewed argue that in addition to extremists, the reformist parties do not consider women participation as important as men. "Political parties' demand for improving gender equality is limited to a specific time such as election times"[170] and when politicians need women votes to enter parliament or city council. According to women I interviewed, politicians in Iran focus on women's demands in order to have women votes. In this respect, during election time, Iranian national TV programs focus on women's rights and the vital role of women inside Iranian society and try to motivate women to vote. Presidential candidates promise to introduce women ministers in their cabinet and change male-dominated laws and facilitate women's participation[171] in different parts of society. However, after they win, women do not experience definite changes in their status.

As Koolaee (2008: 10) argues, patriarchy dominates the interpretations of religion and rules, and political power tries to keep women just for household duties. She argues that women's involvements in other opportunities are against the patriarchy will. Therefore, women who are involved in politics should tackle male face politics[172] to be in the election's lists. For instance, most parties have no women's names in their lists. The Iranian parliament has 17 women members among 290 members,[173] and women have gained this by considerable effort. In the same manner, as Tayebe one of the women in parliament notes, reformist parties insist on women's rights and gender equality; however, there is no woman in their central council. The patriarchal culture inside the political parties does not accept women as leaders in specialized organs of the parties even. These shreds of evidence show that "Iranian women have a long path to go."[174]

According to data collected for this research, women exclusion in politics and civil society responsibilities follow the same trend as other sectors inside the Iranian system. In the same manner,

[169] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[170] Beti, 20th June 2018
[171] Beti, 20th June 2018
[172] Minoo, 10th January
[173] Form the Parliament web Page: https://en.parliran.ir/
[174] Tayebe, 1st February 2108

women are just welcome to involve themselves in women-related issues, and parties do not consider women's involvement in other matters. The political parties and low level of women's participation shed light on the footprints of the patriarchal culture in political parties as well. In this respect, one of the activists whom I interviewed discussed the idea of dropping the women committee from one party. Through this committee, that party tries to give women equal rights and equal opportunities to be in the other committees as well. She believes that dropping the women committee might result in dropping women from the party. According to her, considering women to be inside just the women committees demonstrates one of the patriarchal strategies which concentrate on women's self-esteem.

Besides, as a good number of activists told me, the glass ceiling has a specific function in the Iranian political system. One of the problematic and controversial issues in this respect is the law, which does not let women be president in Iran. There have been several debates about article 35 of the Presidential Election Law[175] in Iran, which directly quotes article 115 of the Constitution law. This Article says, only *Rajal-e Siyasi* (man of politics) can be president. According to this article and the state power's interpretation, women cannot be president inside the Iranian political system. The male-dominated interpretation from the Guardian Council *(Shoray-e-Negahban)*[176] specifies that women cannot be president; however, they can choose the president (Koolaee 2008: 10). *Rajal* is the plural of the word *Rajol* in the Arabic language, which means "man." However, in the Arabic language and religious text, *Rajal* is used to address both men and women in the plural.[177] Monireh Gorji was the only female member of the constitutional assembly after the Islamic revolution, which was writing the constitutional law. Gorji criticizes the failure in the interpretation of article 35 of the Presidential Election Law, and considers it as the main weakness in the Iranian political system in the following statement:

> *It is not true that only men could be president in Iran. "Rajal" does not include just men. It is a big lie. I have been trying to clarify this understanding; however, all the people in authority*

[175] According to Constitution of Islamic Republic of Iran (1989 Edition): Chapter Three - Candidate and Voter Requirements Article 35 of the Law on the Presidential Election- in the part of candidate's requirements says candidates should be a "REJAL" of religion and political background (Papan-Matin 2014)

[176] The Council of Guardians is the authority that is responsible for supervising all elections including the presidential elections and consists of six *faqih* (religious jurists) appointed by the religious leader and six laymen nominated by the head of the judiciary and approved by the majlis, the Islamic Consultative Assembly (the parliament). The interpretation of Islamic laws and regulations by the members of the Council of Guardians and some Islamic jurists has in practice disqualified women from running for presidential elections. Similar interpretations have been used to argue against women becoming deputy presidents, cabinet ministers and local governors (Kadivar 2016: 137–152).

[177] Gorji, 19th January2108

in politics are men with the same way of thinking and understanding. It comes from their mistakes about their interpretation of women's rights in the Quran and Islam. I challenged many of them and made several meetings and arguments about this issue for several years.[178]

In this respect, it is worth mentioning Azam Taleghani,[179] who called for social justice and pointed to women's plights (Kian 1997: 20). She has been trying to challenge the Iranian political system and increase civil society's sensitivity about women's right to be president in Iran. She has been registering as a candidate for presidential elections since the first years after the revolution. Taleghani's approach is an appropriate example of Iranian women's struggle to change male-centered readings of Islamic laws and regulations. Since 1979, there have been some other women that have signed up as presidential candidates. However, all the female candidates have been rejected by the Council of Guardians *(Shoraye Negahban)* by their male-centered interpretation of the constitution and the Shariah (Kadivar 2016: 137).

Gorji critiques this regulation process inside the political system and asks for new definitions and regulations according to the contemporary situation of society and women in Iran. She refutes any relationship between suppression of women and religion during our conversations*:*

I have been trying more to change stereotypes; however, I could make a few changes. Islam let us make these changes. Indeed, I try to argue about making some reform in the Quranic interpretation of women's status. Some helpful changes are made but they are not sufficient.[180]

In Iran, where all the interpretation of laws and religious texts are according to male interests, women experience unreasonable resistance[181] towards their participation in political power. The data collected for this research show that the interpretation of religious discourses, patriarchal culture, and insufficient law all reinforce each other in opposing women. As Tayebe asserts, "some specific positions are just defined for men and work as a private backyard for men."[182] In summarizing this part, it is worth referring to one of the contradictions in involving women in

[178] Gorji, 19th January2108
[179] Daughter of well-known cleric Mahmood Taleghani, AzamTaleqhani was a member of the first parliament after revolution and she is a well-educated political activist who was a political prisoner under the Shah. She combined her gender sensitivity and political ambitions to find a political group called Women's Society, a research group called the Iranian Islamic Women's Institute, and to start publishing a magazine called *Payam-I-Hajar* in 1979 (Kian 1997: 80).
[180] Gorji, 19th January 2018
[181] Beti, 20th June 2018
[182] Tayebe, 1st February 2108

politics in Iran. Mahmoud Ahmadi Nezhad Iranian, one of the most fundamentalist presidents in Iran, introduced women ministers in his fundamentalist cabinet when moderate presidents before or after him could not do that. Women activists that I interviewed believe that Ahmadinezhad tried to manipulate society by this decision[183]. My interviewees insist that focusing only on having women's ministers cannot solve the women's plights[184] and cannot change women's status. According to them, these politicians in the Iranian political system are looking for some exhibitive[185] actions and they might pretend that they are not aware of why women activists insist on women's participation in high-level decision making[186]. Accordingly, this research shows that politicians in Iran do not look for making pragmatic changes in their patriarchal strategies in excluding women at the macro level, although some positive changes happen at the micro-level.

6. Conclusion

In the final chapter of this thesis, I will summarize the key findings of the research and present the conclusion to the analysis. I will also give some thoughts about possible future research ideas related to the topic. This research aimed to find the characteristics of the women's movement in Iran, to shed light on women's strategies in response to legitimized violence, and to explore how women transform society peacefully. This research analyses the challenges faced by the contemporary women's movement in Iran and women's lived experiences of everyday peace-building from the bottom-up perspective to peace-building. This thesis applies "slow violence" and "structural violence" as frameworks to analyze the research data. The analysis has been made in light of the theories of everyday peace and bottom-up peace-building (Mac Ginty 2013; Mac Ginty & Firchow 2017), feminist peace (Confortini 2006; Sjoberg 2013; Ducanson 2016), structural violence (Galtung 1969), slow violence (Nixon 2011), patriarchy (Walby 1989; Kandiyoti 1988), and conflict transformation theory (Väyrynen 1991; Lederach 1995).

6.1. Findings

Prior studies about women's movement in Iran noted that women's lives and rights in Iran have received considerable attention since the time of the Islamic Revolution and its aftermath (Kousha

[183] Beti, 20th June 2018
[184] Tayebe, 1st February 2108
[185] Minoo, 10th January 2018
[186] Mari, 18th January 2018

2002: 6). Prior studies support the idea that current women's movements in Iran have their roots in the directed mobilization of the revolutionary era (see, e.g. Paidar 2002: 7). Adding to those studies, the present study tries to determine the characteristics of women's movement in Iran after the Islamic revolution from the perspective of the women who have been living in Iran after the Islamic revolution.

This study confirms the women's role in escalation and de-escalation level of violence (cf. Reimann 2004 cited in Reich 2006: 27) since there is clear nexus between gendered injustices and collective and individual violence (cf. Harders 2011: 147). The findings of this thesis show that Iranian women concentrate on equality and justice in the context of a patriarchal culture. They challenged the patriarchal structure of society, male-centered rules, and politics by their activities. Indeed, conflict might be inevitable here when these women are referring to preferences, values, and lifestyles of the groups of people who have authority in the society (cf. Schrock-Shenk.et al 1999: 52). This conflict stems principally from the cultural orthodoxy that frames human relationships in competition and domination, rather than cooperative terms (Francis 2002: 3).

The data highlight that, Iranian women in the movement persistently try to value justice and uphold the need for change in their activities (cf. Francis 2002: 81), which would lead to conflict transformation. Conflict transformation for women in Iran can start from being aware of discriminations and transforming in rules. The findings of this research support the idea that in the transformation process women consider traditions and cultural stereotypes. In line with this finding, international concepts need to adapt to the local context in dialogue with those women and men who dare to challenge the gendered rules and restrictions of their societies. My findings indicate that local activists could suggest sustainable answers to the contextual dilemmas of patriarchal culture.

According to the findings, women activists who are living inside Iran and have daily interactions with the women's rights issues in their everyday life, consider themselves as *equality seekers*, and they are pragmatically looking for equality between the cultural traditions, patriarchal culture, and religion. A comparison of the findings with those of other studies confirms that although women activists in Iran are doing feminist work, they do not assume themselves to be feminists either Islamic feminists.

The findings of this thesis assert that these women are insisting on their local patterns and pursuing their demands in a new and unique way. These women define themselves under the specific indicators which exist inside the Iranian context. Women in this research try to show how their

approach is different from international standards. In consonance with my findings, one cannot put Iranian women's rights activists under specific categories, when they have been transforming through Islamic feminism to secular one at the same time and practice some hybridity. They are transforming from one form of feminism to another, transforming from a feminist to a women's rights activist and equality seekers. The findings explain that this transformation is not happening through a long history, or after many years; these transitions might happen several times during women's lives as activists. Findings show that Iranian women put more priority and value on seeking women's rights to present their identity.

This thesis contributes to our understanding of how women's rights activists try to shape their way of resistance to help other women. My findings indicate that women strategize within a set of concrete constraints which can reveal and define *bargaining* as a strategy through patriarchal culture. Bargaining with patriarchy (Kandiyoti 1988) has been one of the particular tactics that Iranian women have used. They have been bargaining with religious leaders while their critics accused them of compromising with power. It is their strategy to have some cooperation with the state power since they want to achieve a better status for women. This research showed that bargaining with patriarchy helps in making historical transformations and open new areas of struggle. According to the findings of this thesis, women's rights activists in Iran are looking to make inroads between the layers of power inside the oppressive system. They can face patriarchal culture and changing laws through bargaining with religious leaders, although some scholars believe that Iranian women cannot make any changes in this context. Indeed, the findings of the current study do not support the previous research that has questioned the existence of women's movement in Iran.

This research does not approve the claims that after the Islamic revolution Iranian women have been lacking from the strong organizational structure in mobilizing, challenging the state and making political changes (see e.g. Tohidi 2016: 79). In general, therefore, it seems that women are working together to strengthen each other and build more capacity in their society. They increase gender sensitivity through their everyday practices and form their way of resistance in-between the mixture of several paradoxical and controversial issues. Findings indicated that the Iranian women's movement in Iran increases society's sensitivity to the terms of equality and justice. One important finding is that women's rights activists in Iran try for more participation and inclusion of women within different spheres of state power when, at the same time, they don't agree with the political power. According to my findings, an essential goal for women's rights activists in Iran is raising gender awareness inside Iranian society.

A note of caution here is that the political system in Iran trusts on specific groups of women and Iranian women encountering the term *circle of trustworthy women* inside the political system. By this monopoly, just a limited number of women have been inside the power after the Islamic revolution. Consequently, those trusted women do not let other women (independent women) come up with them and be part of their monopoly. One interesting finding is that the Iranian political system holds a monopoly of power to enact slow violence against women. According to this critical finding, patriarchal culture is reinforced by male-dominated interpretations of law and religion and it receives benefits from society's sensitivity about anti-imperialist attitudes. It thus accuses women's rights activists of being westerners' followers and run the train of its monopoly and just let the circle of trustworthy women participate in politics. Indeed, similar to what Nixon (2011) elaborates, this violence is typically far from the traditional explanation of direct violence in terms of visibility and can be considered under the definitions of slow violence.

In light of this thesis, it can be argued that state power in Iran considers itself as the only justice-centered agent and benefits masculinity at different levels. Indeed, the power relation uses male-dominated regulations by reference to one article in the Iranian civil law. This law assumes men as the legal heads of the family and runs several tactics to legitimize violence against women. The current data highlight the importance of applying the term cultural violence which is introduced by Galtung (1990). Similar to his arguments, the findings of this research approve that the political system in Iran uses terms such as religion, ideology, and family structure as a leeway to justify and legitimize structural violence.

This finding is unexpected when it suggests that women in Iran respect cultural stereotypes, and they try to make links between the transformation of society and respecting their family's structure. Iranian society experiences mass movement and mobilization of women within the community asking for civil rights; at the same time, they do not ignore their domestic roles. The contribution of this study has been to confirm that by looking at the micro-level and hearing the voice of women activists, we are encountering kinds of "defensible data" (cf. Mac Ginty 2013: 62). Such instances occur when they are looking for everyday emancipation while they resist and struggle for gender and political awakenings and question the role of hierarchies in the political system in their everyday practices. At the practical level, this research found how women respond to the train of domination by their models of resistance. They try to contribute to making changes, although they must compensate for that. These women believe that challenging the power at least leads to a boost in gender awareness.

Women in this research shed light on how they situate themselves in between different constraints

while they refer to their triumphs and their successful strategies in interactions with the patriarchy. Consequently, the results of this research support the idea that analyzing the women's movement in Iran needs to consider women in a broader dynamic context, the context that both impose limits on them and provide opportunities for them (cf. Pickering 2007: 15). The empirical findings in this study support the idea that these women contribute to slow peace (cf. Donahoe 2017). Findings also show that Iranian women are engaging in local and community levels of peacebuilding. Put simply, these women like other individuals try to find the possible and proper way to sustain peace; this is what precisely everyday peace (Mac Ginty 2013) is looking for.

This empirical research on contemporary women's movement in Iran suggests that Iranian women activists are looking for having unity. I have heard this phrase "having unity" several times during the fieldwork. Insisting on unity is a bold and revealing statement about the importance of creating solidarity from the perspective of an independent Iranian women's rights activist. Indeed, one of the reasons for transforming from one form of identity to another for women's rights activists in Iran is to refuse any categorization that would lead to fragmentation. A further study could assess the role of Iranian women's solidarity and the necessities and the importance of shaping unity between activists outside the country and who are living inside Iran. This study has raised important questions about whether women's solidarity as a concept and as a strategy can respond to the strategies the totalitarian system uses. It could usefully explore this particularly from the points of view of the women activists who have been in exile after the Islamic revolution while concentrating on women's activist attitudes who are living in Iran.

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APPENDIX A

Iranian Civil law and women's status[187]

1. Marriage law

Article 1105 of Iranian civil law: In relations between husband and wife; the position of the head of the family is the exclusive right of the husband.

Article 1042 and Article 1043 of Iranian civil law: The marriage of a girl who has not married previously is dependent on the permission of her father or her paternal grandfather even if she has reached the full age of majority. If, however, the father or the paternal grandfather withholds the permission without justifiable reason, the girl can refer to the Special Civil Court giving full particulars of the man whom she wants to marry. According to this law, the terms of the marriage and the dowry money agreed upon and notify her father or her paternal grandfather through that Court. The Court can issue a permit for marriage fifteen days after the date of notification to the guardian if no response has been received from the guardian to satisfy refusal.

Article 1117 of Iranian civil law: The husband can prevent his wife from occupations or technical work, which is incompatible with the family interests or the dignity of himself or his wife.

2. Divorce

Article 1133 of Iranian civil law: A man can divorce his wife whenever he wishes to do so.

3. Child custody (Hizanat)

According to Article 1169 of the Iranian civil law, the children always belong to the father. This article says that a mother has custody rights of a son until he reaches the age of two. Mother has custody rights for daughter until she is seven (Article 1169).[188] However, in 2003, this law has been changed according to reform in Family law. Indeed, after divorce, the priority of caring for the boy and girl until the age of seven is transferred to the mother by the Civil Code and the Family Protection Act. According to this law after the age of seven, children are granted to the Father until the child reaches adolescence (9 years for the girls and 15 for the boys), and then the child can make

[187] I have borrowed some laws from Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani. Civil law articles are from Iranian civil law, translated from Persian to English language by Mansour (2016).

[188] From Iranian civil law, translated from Persian to English language by Jahangir Mansour, 2016

an independent decision.

4. Age of criminal responsibility

The age of criminal responsibility for girls is nine lunar years (8 years and nine months). For boys, it is 15 lunar years (14 years and six months) (Article 1210 Civil Law; Article 49 Islamic Criminal Law; Article 219-213 Criminal Procedure Code).

5. Citizenship

According to civil law, articles 976 and 964, women cannot transfer their citizenship to their kids if they marry a foreign man. Recently Iran's legislative vetting body has ratified a bill that allows children born to Iranian women and foreign men to obtain Iranian nationality. The Guardian Council in June had rejected the proposed legislation on security grounds, requiring changes that would allow background checks on foreign fathers. On July 15 in 2019, the parliament amended the bill to condition granting citizenship to children. This new law has one exception, which is about security problems, and the family should be clear from any security issue. The approval of this law was announced by Guardian Council spokesman Abbas Ali Kadkhodai on Wednesday 2th October 2019, in the Republic News Agency.[189]

6. Blood money- *Diyeh*

In Iranian law, a woman's life is worth half that of a man. If a woman who is five months pregnant with a boy has an accident and loses her life, then the amount of money paid for the woman is half that paid for the male fetus inside her (Articles 294, 300 and 301 of the Islamic Penal Codes).

7. Inheritance

According to civil law, after the death of the father and mother, sons receive twice as much of any inheritance as daughters receive. If a man who has a wife and children dies, the wife inherits one-eighth of her husband's wealth. However, if they do not have any children, the wife inherits one-fourth of her husband's wealth (Articles 899,900,907,906, 909, 946 of the Civil Code and the

[189] See Aljazeera 2th October 2019

Articles 630 and 220 of the Islamic Penal Codes).

8. Bearing witness

In cases where a female witness is accepted, the testimony of two women equals that of the one-man effect (Article 74, 75, 118, 119, 128, 137 and 171 Islamic Criminal Law; Article 230 Legal Procedure Code).

APPENDIX B

List of the interviewees, Time and Places

	Date	**Place**	**Length of the Interview**
1. Sara	2.1.2018	Tehran	One hour and 30min
2.Minoo	10.1.2018	Tehran	Five hours and 32 min
3. Shahla	13.1.2018	Tehran	Two hours and 17 min
4. Mari	18.1.2018	Tehran	Two hours and 15 min
5.Safie	18.1.2108	Tehran	Two hours and 50 min
6. Gorji	19.1.2018	Tehran	Four hours and 45 min. This interview was in two separate parts, two hours and 15min in the morning and 2 hours and 30 min in the afternoon.
7. Tayebe	1.2.2018	Tehran	Two hours and 30 min
8.Fatemeh	2.2.2018	Tehran	Two hours and 22min
9.Beti	20.6.2018	Mashhad	Four hours and 12min