My Camera is My Weapon: The Discursive Development of Iranian Women and Cyber-Feminism

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to look at the major socio-political shifts and stages that Iranian women have experienced from the establishment of the 1907 Constitution until the recent 2018/2019 White Wednesday Campaigns, which saw women take to the streets and remove their hijab as a means of protest against the current government. By examining the role of different veiling practices throughout the last century, this study situates our current scenario, in which women are using their smartphones to organize and make a statement politically, and considers its implications on Iranian society through the role of social-media and Cyber-Feminism.

Keywords

Feminism, Social Media, Iran, Cyber-Feminism, Hijab

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The 2009 Green Movement introduced Iranian citizens to a new type of activism- a political protest movement through social media. A combination of internet and political movements emerged under the influence of new technologies; Iranian citizens now had a medium, or so-called "cyberspace," to argue either for or against the Iranian Government's favor. However, women benefited the most from these social media platforms, finally finding an outlet for the expression of Cyber-Feminism.

Before Cyber-Feminism can become an active platform for women to achieve equal rights and equality, the cyberspace it exists within allows Iranian women with an opportunity to communicate with one another, to inform and exchange information, and conduct research about different types of Western Feminist Movements, which includes the relationship between identity and gender. Dialogue between self and others could open up new horizons for creating a sense of self-consciousness. The internet transcends the more limited statist national identity to explore, live, illustrate and act on such an identity (Karimi 229)

In Iran, women's role as agents of modernization, which has included reaching particular social and political gains, and is the driving force behind their continuous drive to achieve women and equality rights under the Islamic Government's has persisted but it has gone through various stages since the Constitution was first established in 1907, considering the various women's movements establishes between then and now in the political and socio-cultural spheres. Controversies have emerged around women's roles and gender roles and how they have functioned and been constructed, especially among the determined, progressive youth since the reformist period which began during President Khatami's term in office from 1997 till 2005.[1] This raises the question of which factors have influenced disputes about gender in the Iranian public?

Iran has been at the center of at least three competing gender discourses: the fundamentalist discourse, the religious revisionism, and the secular feminist discourse. While the second and the third discourses have successfully introduced practices against discriminatory conditions, they are experiencing a crisis in the representations of

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[1] The Iranian reformists (Persian: اصلاح‌طلبان, romanized: Eslâh-Talabân) are a political faction in Iran. Iran's "reform era" is sometimes said to have lasted from 1997 to 2005—the length of Khatami's two terms in office.

women's interests. This is partly due to the elaboration of other dichotomies, where personal and social identities are mingled while platforms for action are mostly based on religious attitudes (Sadeghi 210)

Women began to gradually become conscious that by participating in different political discourses and movements, they learned how to manifest a rebellious nature, which allowed them to move forwards with more buoyancy. Theirdetermined progressiveness developed significantly during the reformist period and under the persecution of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency in 2005. Just it had happened directly after the Islamic Revolution, Iranian political media outlets and other "social" outlets, such as newspapers and magazines, were under attack if they contained any form of reformist policies or "reformist aesthetics." After the Green Movement, new platforms provided Iranian citizens with a space to voice their concerns and forced the government to impose new controls over its citizens. This technique, used in nations such as China, implements a new structure of suppression (and sometimes necessary control), which allows the internet and social media platforms to control citizens' right to use the internet or other social chat-apps. It also allows the government to control civil unrest, which might disrupt the society, such as organizing protests (Downing et al. 272).

In 2014, Masih Ali-Nejad, an exiled journalist launched a woman's campaign against the law of compulsory veiling, called "My Stealthy Freedom." This campaign became a platform for both online activism and online dissemination of offline activism that allowed Iranian women to be heard by the rest of the world and by Iranian hardliners to either remove or loosen the laws of the veiling practice. Soon after establishing the MSF Facebook page, Ms. Ali-Nejad attracted viral attention, and women in Iran began deliberately removing their hijabs and posting them on this website or directly through to the director of the campaign, Ms. Ali-Nejad.

Let me be clear, there are two Irans: one is 'on the map'- where you see women in hijab. The other is illegal-where women sing, dance, take off their scarves. Everything they are banned from [doing] they do underground. I determined to strengthen 'illegal' Iran and portray the country's 'real identity' through social media...' My Stealthy Freedom' is a mirror to look in and see that those women who protest against the forced hijab are not isolated in doing this, it allows them to talk to other who support them and want to end this discrimination (Interview with Masih Ali-Nejad, BBC News, 2014).

Throughout this paper, a historical narrative of discourses for and against women's new roles is presented to shed light on these issues. The discourse of women's equality and participation has become modernized, especially in terms of advocacy for women's active presence in Iranian society alongside men, and tries to adopt an approach rather like that of Western cultures. This paper shows how Iranian women have led changes in Iranian culture and will demonstrate their engagement with the Iranian government. Mulling over these social conditions, we might see the importance of changes in the situation of Iranian women and youth for our understanding of Iranian social development more generally. These changes trace trends in religious fundamentalism and their interaction regarding women's issues in Iran, in particular,

their veiled identity and the nature of their presence in society, including the extent to which women are visible or invisible on social media.

The main objective of this paper is to reveal the importance in the historical context of the medium of social media, which has become the most powerful tool of activism and (self-)protection amongst women in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and to understand how "veiled" constitutionalism has now given way to "unveiled" social media platforms, and thus how the modernization of the female body and identity, which was mixed and unstable throughout the decades has now become firmly rooted and freely accessible through the means of social media platforms and activism via Cyber-Feminism.

Constitutionalist Era: The Centrality of Women's Education (1907–1924)

The valorization or not of the veil (hijab) became a visible social division, and for individuals, an aspect of self-identity and a mark of the other. The formation of the first Iranian parliament in October 1906, in which nationwide elected delegates formulated the first draft of the national Constitution. Although women participated in the victory of constitutionalism and parliament's formation, their voices remained ineffective/unheard and their status marginalized. "When the Majles approved the establishment of Iran's first national bank without any help from foreigners, women raised money and donated their jewelry. In the December 16, 1906, issue of the newspaper *Edalat*, Sayyed Jamal al-din Vaez, addressing an enthusiastic crowd, said, "'Constitutionalism will not take roots without financial support. Everyone must contribute what he can.' Suddenly, loud voices were heard among the women in the crowd. The impoverished women removed their earrings and offered them as support for the scared movement."[2] Yet, when they requested that the parliament consider gender equality and the establishment of schools for both boys and girls, the parliament ignored their request and told them that they should not intervene in political issues that were regarded as being in the male realm. Despite such refusals from officials, women continued activities in public to stand for their rights. For example, in January 1907, in a women's meeting in Tehran, some plans were proposed to improve females' conditions, particularly in the field of education. A magazine titled *Danesh*[3] ("knowledge" in *Farsi*) was released in Tehran, addressing feminine issues—but not political topics, to be permitted to continue its work, in an agreement with officials. In addition to establishing schools for girls and creating women's associations, activists insisted that the parliament should acknowledge such associations officially, and this was discussed in the parliament in March 1908. Whereas

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[2]https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/04/iranian-women-and-the-struggle-for-democracy-i-the-pre-revolution-era.html

[3]*Danesh* (Persian: دانش; DMG: *Daneš*; English: "knowledge") has been the title of seven different Persian periodicals published since 1882. This digitized journal *Danesh* was a Persian women's journal which was edited in Teheran. It was published weekly from 1910 until 1911 (1289–1290 A.P.) in 30 issues.[1] The editor was the wife of Dr. Hosseyn Khan (Kahal)[2] and the daughter of YaqubJadid al-EslamHamadani.[3] Her own name is not known.

a few delegates, like Vakil al-Raya, Ali-Akbar Dehkhoda, Hasan Taghizadeh, and Mirza Morteza-Gholi made statements in favor of recognition of women's associations, this proposal was rejected and dismissed with this justification that it was inconsistent with principles of Islam(Afary 70–73).

While the first girls' school in Iran had been established by American missionaries in Urmiah in 1835, Iranian Muslim girls were not allowed to register. Naser al-Din Shah[4] granted permission to enroll girls in schools later; nonetheless, girls' education was not widely accepted by the public. In addition, modern schools came under tough attacks by traditionalist clerics. Only after the constitutional revolution, thanks to the efforts of reformist activists, Christian missionaries, and members of parliament, were a few girls' schools opened, in cities such as Tabriz, Isfahan, Shiraz, and Bushehr (McElrone 308). Moreover, several women's magazines started to publish at that time, most of which cited the advantages of women's education for national autonomy and development. *Danesh* and *Shokufeh*[5]were major cases of magazines that, following the constitutionalist revolution in 1907, found an opportunity to speak out about women's issues, with a focus on education (Kashani-Sabet 31–32).

Rise of Reza Shah in 1925 to Coup in August 1953: Towards Political Participation

The intellectual movement that advocated women's rights from 1907 to 1924 continued after Reza Shah Pahlavi's coronation, in 1925. During the period between constitutionalism (1907) and the beginning of Reza Shah's reign (1925), women's issues mostly involved education and schooling and were reflected in magazines and the activities of public associations. For example, magazines such as *Farhang*and *Farangistan*published articles with subjects related to women, but most of these publications were banned by Reza Shah's state in 1935(Kashani-Sabet 32–34). Reza Shah adopted a top-down approach toward women's issues that aimed to modernize their way of life, similar to their European counterparts. The conflict between reformists and traditionalists flared up when Reza Shah implemented a policy of mandatory unveiling of women in January 1936 (Sedghi 61–62).

In addition, new clauses were added to laws related to marriage and family in the years 1928, 1931, and 1938. These amendments altered legal conditions in favor of women, in particular when the Family Protection Law[6] was passed. Owing to these

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[4]Naser al-Din Shah Qajar was the Shah of Qajar Iran from September 5, 1848 to May 1, 1896, when he was assassinated. He was the son of Mohammad Shah Qajar and MalekJahānKhānom and the third longest reigning monarch in Iranian history, after Shapur II of the Sassanid dynasty and Tahmasp I of the Safavid Dynasty.

[5]After *Danesh*, published in Tehran in 1910/1911, Shokufeh (Persian: شکوفه; DMG: Šokufeh; English: "Blossom"), the next Persian magazine for women was established in 1913. The editor was Maryam Amid Mozayenol-Saltaneh, the daughter of Aqa Mirza SayyedRaziRa'is al-Atebba, a high-ranking medical advisor at the Qajar court.

[6]In 1967, Iran adopted a set of progressive family laws, the Family Protection Act, which granted women family rights ; these were expanded in the Family Protection Law of 1975. The act was annulled in 1979 after the Islamic Revolution when Sharia law was re-introduced, but it stands out for

alterations, polygamy became illegal. However, *siqeh*(temporary marriage, often for sexual purposes, whose legality is a distinguishing characteristic of Shiism)remained legal. Furthermore, the adjudication of family matters was granted exclusively to the (secular) courts under the supervision of the Ministry of Justice; it had previously been under the control of religious judges (Rostam-Kolayi 169). By the 1940s, fear of the left's influence saw Mohammad Reza Shah abolish the Unveiling Act previously implemented by his father. The abolishment of the Unveiling Act allowed women to choose whether to be veiled. Following the same progressive program, Mohammad Reza Shah sent "agents of development" to rural villages across the country to educate women on their rights. Despite some headway being achieved through the Shah's modernization program,[7] women felt that although they had more freedom in choosing whether to be veiled or not, there were negative connotations and discriminatory policies attached to the notion of veiling in Mohammad Reza Shah's Iran. However, not every woman felt this way. The *Tashkilat-e Zanan Iran*[8](Iranian Women's Party Organization) was one of the most radical women's organizations during the 1940s. The party published a journal in 1945 called *Our Awakening*, dedicated to exploring various issues that did not just focus on the "veiling" issue but focused on other socio-political factors surrounding women that included the exploitation of female workers in factories, nurseries for working mothers, and equal pay.

During Reza Shah's reign, the number of girls enrolled in school was on the rise. Women began to enter the public sector as educators. Although there are no comprehensive demographic statistics on women's employment in Reza Shah's period, women comprised around 23% of the employed in urban areas in 1956 (Sedghi, 2007, pp. 69–70). Women were first admitted to university in Iran in 1936. These changes were interwoven with goals such as nation-state building, national identity, socio-economic development, and modernization; at the same time, Reza Shah brought women's issues under the all-out surveillance of the state (Sabahi 102). Reza Shah's reign ended in 1941 when Iran was invaded by the forces of the Allies during World War II. They sent him to exile on Mauritius, and Mohammad Reza, his oldest son, took the throne.

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having been ahead of their time, particularly in a Muslim-majority country.

[7]The White Revolution (Persian: انقلاب سفید Enqelāb-e Sefid) or the Shah and People Revolution (Persian: انقلاب شاه و مردم Enqelāb-e Shāh o Mardom) was a far-reaching series of reforms in Iran launched in 1963 by the Shah, which lasted until 1979. The program was built, especially to weaken those classes that supported the traditional system. It consisted of several elements, including land reform, sale of some state-owned factories to finance the land reform, construction of an expanded road, rail, and air network, a number of dam and irrigation projects, the eradication of diseases such as malaria, and the encouragement of industrial growth.

[8]The Democratic Organization of Iranian Women (DAW; Persian: تشکیلاتدموکراتیک زنان ایران) is women's wing of the Tudeh Party of Iran.Led by Maryam Firouz, it was founded in 1943 as the 'Organization of Iranian Women' (OIW) (Persian: تشکیلات زنان ایران, romanized: Tashkilat-iZanan-i Iran) and joined Women's International Democratic Federation in 1947.

The Confrontation of Modernity and Tradition over the Definition of Womanhood in the Domain of Culture (1953–1979)

After the military coup in August 1953, only organizations under the authorization of the state were allowed to continue their work. The government centralized all women's organizations, integrated their management, and depoliticized their demands. For example, 14 women's associations were merged into a Federation of Iranian Women in 1959, later replaced by the Organization of Iranian Women in 1966, which worked until the end of 1978, just before the outbreak of the Islamic revolution, in February 1979. The activities of women's associations were largely limited to charity and social services over this period (Mahdi 432).

Generally, during the period between the 1907 constitutionalist revolution and the coup of 1953, two main concerns could be identified in the discursive conflicts between modernists and traditionalists over women's issues: education and politics. Education has underlain the first phase, from 1907 to 1924, while the second phase, which began with Reza Shah's crowning in 1925 and ended with the 1953 coup, was characterized by women's entrance into public organizations and the implementation of mandatory unveiling. These modernizing policies adopted during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign extended, in some ways, to the broader trend of secularization initiated by his father. These policies increasingly marginalized the Islamists. By deploying female high school graduates to the provinces as members of a "Literary Corps," the government helped support development plans implemented from 1963 to the end of the Pahlavi regime in 1979. Aside from promoting rural education and development, a common national identity based on the Persian language could also be established through such programs (Sabahi 197). Following the White Revolution, women were finally granted the right to vote in 1963, although anti-shah feminists were against this newly developed reform-believing in the presence of hypocrisy under a so-called dictatorship (Monarchy). They called this new freedom to vote a pawn on the chessboard of Shah's propaganda. However, there was a very little progressive movement that did take place during this period and no official women's movement until the Islamists uprising before the 1979 Revolution.

Some critical accounts emerged that conflicted with Westernized perspectives on women's issues. Ali Shariati, promoting the concept of "Westoxification,"[9] viewed women's issues within the theoretical framework of cultural imperialism. In opposition to Western-like models of womanhood shown in the media or adopted as part of the modern stratification of society in public, some viewswere articulated by those with religious associations, inspired by their beliefs. Such interpretations aimed to criticize modern forms of womanhood, which were deemed threatening to indigenous ways and

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[9]Westoxification (*gharbzadegi* in Persian) was popularized in intellectual discussions in the 1960s and 1970s in Iran, particularly by an essay titled "Gharbzadegi"by Jalal Al-e-Ahmad; this term was used to criticize the imitation of modern Western culture.

Islamic feminine roles. Modernists identified Western modes of womanhood with freedom of choice, progress, and individual rights; traditionalists associated them with immorality, indecency, and Western cultural domination.

From this viewpoint, granting civil rights to women was perceived as a kind of cultural dominance of Western imperialism that aimed to turn women into "Western dolls" and "sexual objects" to avoid a male counter-narrative. Ali Shariati (1933–1977) was one prominent theoretician who stood against modern or European forms of life, which were being accepted more and more in urban areas in Iran (Paidar 181). In Shariati's opinion, European countries and the U.S. disseminated their values, freedoms, ethics, and culture via mass media, deceiving women as to their true rights and interests, which were neglected.

However, after the Pahlavi monarchy fell in 1979, proponents of the traditional model of the feminine according to the Islamic code of ethics, came to dominate culturally and politically, so that modernized images of Iranian urban women were marginalized and suppressed. As a result, pictures of veiled women, who exemplified authentic models of the feminine from the viewpoint of Islam, proliferated in magazines, other media, and public spaces. Such a political and cultural image of womanhood, focusing on piety and abstinence, was even more increasingly publicized when the Iraq–Iran war broke out in September 1980.

From 1979 to the Late 1990s: Revolution, War, Reconstruction, and Reform

The image of women was reconstructed after the 1979 revolution, and women's socio-economic position became restricted by the ideology of the revolution. Ruhollah Khomeini's anti-Shah campaign was largely supported by women; however, these women were situated within an almost entirely domestic sphere, and were included in the movement largely so they would contribute to societal issues; any political right, including the right to vote, was believed to affect the moral status of women in society. Although this was Khomeini's point of view, in a contradictory move, the regime also encouraged the participation of women in the revolutionary process. This ambivalence became the basis of an institutionalized contradiction plaguing the Islamic republic from 1979 until now. Women's participation in the 1979 revolution was not framed in terms of emancipation but rather cleared the way for women to engage actively in the public sphere. This was part of a broader social trend, as active members of various parties, including communists, socialists, liberals, and Islamists, protested the monarch's policies.

Following the Islamic Revolution, women were silenced, and they regressed socially, failed to achieve equal rights, and became subject to compulsory veiling. After the implementation of this law, the regime stated that compulsory veiling was necessary to prevent women from being harassed, amongst many other religious reasons. It was believed that veiled women were not only a symbol of the cultural transformation of society but a sign of morality, which was signified by control of female sexuality

(Moghadam, 1995).

In contradiction to the Western-looking modern image of the typical woman shown in pre-revolution media, the revolutionaries presented a role model adapted from the life of Fatemeh, the youngest daughter of the Prophet Muhammad;[10] this ideal type had been reflected in particular in Ali Shariati's book *Fatemeh is Fatemeh*[11]. The conservative-revolutionary version of womanhood she represented was used to contradict modern theories about women's s roles in society, which Shariati viewed as reducing women to erotic objects who lacked agency and had no choice except to be mere consumers. When the 1980–1988 Iraq–Iran war broke out, a Fatemeh-like image of the Iranian Muslim woman, who represented ethical traits such as sacrifice and devotion, became the core of national policies toward women's issues (Ferdows 284–286). Although a large number of women, with various political propensities, religious or secular, had participated in revolutionary protests along with men, the post-revolutionary course of events proceeded in a way that resulted in the enforcement of compulsory hijab and abolition of some previous privileges, such as the Family Protection Law of 1967. In addition, the minimum marriage age for girls decreased from 15 to 13(Higgins 480).

Although women continued in this period to engage in feminist and political roles when it came to expressing their ideologies through magazines, the women's movement struggled to gain traction during the Iran–Iraq war and the reconstruction period between 1989 and 1997. The movement did not begin to enjoy any real momentum again until the Presidency of Mohammad Khatami during the reformist period in 1997. This momentum emerged due to the student movements that gave life to various women's organizations[12].

After the Iran-Iraq war, women's publications began circulating again, with looser censorship laws confining them to a box. *MajallehZanan*[13] (Women's Magazine) run by secular feminists was birthed in 1991. Its run came to an end in 2008, after being in circulation for 16 years once Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. After his term came to an end, the publication was brought back to life. Although the word, *feminism,* created tension and sensitiveness amongst the religious authorities, *MajallahZanan*stood its ground and claimed to be the only Feminist magazine in Iran during their reign. However, other magazines around that time covered women's rights.

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[10]Fatemeh was the youngest daughter of Prophet Muhammed.

[11]In this book, a kind of manifesto of femininity, Fatemeh is described as the authentic model of womanhood particularly from the Shi'a point of view, contrasting the Westernized women who had become increasingly common especially in urban public spaces, raising moral concerns among conservatives.

[12]During this period, 55 women's NGOs were established in various social, cultural, and political fields in Iran, and by the end of the reformist period, 450 women's NGOs had been established in Iran, another example of women's progress and modernization after the Islamic Revolution.

[13]A monthly women's magazine published in Iran, founded by ShahlaSherkat. It was the only Persian women's magazine in the country. The magazine ceased publication in 2008, but was relaunched on May 29, 2014.

AzamTaleghani,[14]who was the daughter of Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleghani[15] and also head of the Society of Islamic Revolution for Women**,** was explicitly concerned with women's political roles. She published a magazine named *Payam e Hajar***,** an Islamic journal which was dedicated to women's rights, which contributed to the discussion of women's problems (Kian 80).AzamTaleghani was especially opposed against the death of Zahra Kazemi, an Iranian-Canadian Photo-Journalist, arrested for allegedly taking photographs of Evin Prison and demonstrations taking place in 2003[16]. Kazemi was allegedly raped and tortured during her detention and died after nineteen days under custody, cause of death, stroke. Mohsen Saiedzadeh wrote pseudonymous articles from a feminist perspective in magazines such as *Zan-e Rooz*[17]and *Zanan.*

From the late 1980s, this trend in the press allowed secular activists like MehrangizKaar and Shirin Ebadi to seek the goal of gender equality alongside Islamist reformists. This current of reformism was accepted among both some clerics and high-ranking political figures, specifically after the Eslahat Movement, whose candidate, Mohammad Khatami, won the presidential election in 1997. It confronted conservatives who favored closing the magazines (Keddie 425).

2009 Green Revolution and the Emergence of Cyber-Feminism

In the 19th century, the Iranian Poet, Tahirih, was one of the very few women to defy the laws of oppression and the act of veiling. She became an activist after removing her veil publicly in front of men, insulting the tradition which was created by the religious rulers of her time. She not only insisted but, persisted in challenging the Islamic Law as demonstrated when she converted to another religion- the Babi religion[18]. Her constant stance against the covering of the female's body and face broke the 'curtain[19]' customs and she revealed her head and face in front of the all-male gathering who had

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[14]1943–30 October 2019.An Iranian politician and journalist who was also the head of the Society of Islamic Revolution Women of Iran and a member of the Iranian parliament.

[15]Sayyid Mahmoud AlaeeTaleghani also Romanized as "SeyedMahmūdTāleqānī"; 5 March 1911 – 9 September 1979) was an Iranian theologian, Muslim reformer, democracy advocate and a senior Shi'a cleric of Iran. Taleghani was a contemporary of the Iranian Revolutionary leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and a leader in his own right of the movement against Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. A founding member of the Freedom Movement of Iran, he has been described as a representative of the tendency of many "Shia clerics to blend Shia with Marxist ideals in order to compete with leftist movements for youthful supporters" during the 1960s and 1970s.

[16]The 2003 Iranian student protests were a series of nationwide rallies and student protests in Iran against president Mohammad Khatami and demanded more liberal democratic reforms and justice over the deaths in the Iran student protests, July 1999. Massive protests and General strikes first began on 12 June, when anti-government demonstrators chanted slogans against president Mohammad Khatami and his reign in power.

[17]A women's weekly magazine published in Tehran beginning in 1965, when it was an immediate success.

[18]The Bábi Faithis an Abrahamic monotheistic religion which professes that there is one incorporeal, unknown, and incomprehensible Godwho manifests his will in an unending series of theophanies, called Manifestation of God

[19]In previous Islamic custom's, circa 18-19th century, (especially in Iran), women were only allowed to interact and hold conversationsfrom behind a curtain with men.

met to discuss, ironically, breaking away from the Islamic Religion. Tahirih's rebellious nature and ideologies were almost unspoken of during that era, yet she took it upon herself to violate the male public space and Islamic ideologies. Tahirih was arrested and allegedly accused of murder, placed under house arrest, and executed at the age of thirty-six (Mahmoudi 17). Centuries later, after the Islamic Revolution, new online social media, such as blogs, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, became a platform for women, just like Tahirih, to express their concern for women equality, rights, and the practice of veiling. Since 2001, Iranian leaders have been aware of avoiding any media-induced unrest. However, after the 2009 Green Movement, they concluded that social media had become a weapon against their power (and that they could also use it to their advantage). In particular, religious clerics finally began to understand that social media had become a powerful weapon, both for and against their ideologies.

In June 2009, Iran was faced with another historic shift, as state news sources reported that incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had won a presidential political race that many Iranians viewed as compromised. Ahmadinejad's victory, which was called fraudulent by many of Iran's citizens definitively affected the "Green Movement" uprising that followed and the concerns of its participants. June and July 2009 marked exhibits and rallies in the open lanes, squares, and grounds of Iran's urban areas.

However, it was not until Neda Agha-Soltan's killing[20]that social media was intensely used as a political tool to spread information amongst activists who mourned her death, especially women. Becoming a martyr of the Green Movement, women began protesting against the government after picking up their camera phones, removing their hijabs, wearing the color white, dancing in streets, singing without male company, and expressing their sexuality and identity through social media.

During this period, cyber-conflict (and actual riots) emerged between activists and government officials, in what was known as the "soft war." Ronald Deibert and RafalRohozinski (2010) categorized three different forms of "generational techniques" that emerged during this period. The first focused on censorship and filtering browsing content while also monitoring Iranian citizens' activity in public online spaces at the same time. The second combined the control of cyber-information produced by websites, or better yet, coined as "cyber-attacks."In the third, the government applied direct physical pressure to intimidate the Iranian citizens, which, unfortunately, resulted in many casualties.

In this way, the 2009 Iranian presidential race and its outcome revealed the intensity of web-based social networking to help shape political resistance, for there would not have been such an intense crackdown on both the social-media front and on the demonstrations which saw many innocent lives lost. Iran is a clear case of the new

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[20]In June 20th, 2009, after finishing up from her music lesson, a young woman and her music teacher walked right into the middle of a protest march against the newly elected government. A few minutes later a Basij militia shot and killed Neda Agha-Soltan, Neda became an influential image, an icon, for women in Iran who became hungrier than ever.After the death of Neda, activists gathered and mourned her death, as the government banned mourning ceremonies, refusing to hand over her body back to her family and cancelling her funeral

role online life can play in nations with unfree political systems, where the opportunity for political expression is restricted.

Social media's advancement puts forth questions of communicative technologies' role and their relationships with socio-political engagement within Iranian cyberspace. Iranian women's movements within this frame have produced a strong reaction within Iranian patriarchy. The roles of social media and cyber-feminism explore how the women's movement has achieved a dynamic in which anti-patriarchal elements have mobilized in both the real and the virtual world. Social mobility has flourished within cyberspace and cyber-feminism; it has provided a platform for the women's movement to lead social change and clash with the Islamic Government through protest videos on social media platforms (in particular Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter).

Gholam Khiabany notes in *The Importance of 'Social' in Social Media: The Lessons from Iran* (2015) the positive reaction to individual blogs and websites which support secular Feminists and showing the activism of women in Iran is firmly identified with the ferment in Iranian culture since the 1990s. Women have slowly become the heroes of contemporary Iranian reformist developments and everyday society by not being afraid to stand against the government; this includes fighting against the clerics, removing their hijab, refusing to be made the object of the male desire. So, by representing the liberation of women's rights and freedom they choose to wear the color white.[21]

Footage surfaced of a young woman, Vida Movahed[22], standing in the middle of Enghelab Street (Revolutionary Street) in Tehran on December 27, 2017, waving a white headscarf and publicly protesting the compulsory hijab law. Furthermore, on July 31, 2018, footage emerged of two young women who had filmed a man harassing and threatening them for not wearing the compulsory hijab/veil This footage was made available online during the women's protests against compulsory hijab between 2017 and 2019, known as the *Girls of Enghelab Street* which has done much to show directly through online media how patriarchal ideology has been imposed upon women in Iran, especially regarding the Islamic dress codes; more women began reacting similarly, filming their protests; hence creating the "White Wednesdays" campaign, encouraging women to wear and then remove white headscarves and wave them against the government.[23]

After the emergence of "White Wednesdays," random Iranian women also started filming their day-to-day lives amongst anti-reformists in the general Iranian society. This

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[21]Using the hashtag #whitewednesdays, citizens have been posting pictures and videos of themselves wearing white headscarves or pieces of white clothing as symbols of protest.

[22]Girls of Enghelab Street (Persian: دخترانخیابان انقلاب) was a series of protests against compulsory hijab in Iran. The protests were inspired by Vida Movahed (Persian: ویدا موحد), an Iranian woman known as the Girl of Enghelab Street (Persian: دخترخیابان انقلاب), who stood in the crowd on a utility box in Enghelab Street on December 27, 2017, tied her hijab, a white headscarf, to a stick, and waved it before the crowd as a flag.

[23]My Stealthy Freedom is an online movement started in 2014 on a Facebook page, wherewomen in Iran posted photos of themselves without scarves as a protest against the compulsory hijab laws in the country. By the end of 2016 the page had surpassed 1 million Facebook likes. The initiative has received wide international and national coverage, and has been both praised and criticized.

campaign was called "Our Camera, Our Weapon." The clips contextualized how women are using social media to fight for cultural change and gender equality, the relationship between cyber-feminism and social media reflects the sheer velocity of the shifts Iranian women have experienced since the establishment of the 1907 Constitution.

Conclusion

Collective identity and "shared awareness" go hand-in-hand. Cyber-Feminism is not just a Cyber-Space for women and feminists to upload videos to Masih Ali-Nejad or to establish protest campaigns against the Iranian Government. It is also used as a platform to empower women and present them with an opportunity to fashion an identity. As Susannah Stern (2008) argued in her essay, *Producing Sites, Exploring Identities: Youth Online Authorship*, this platform has provided chances for Iranian Women to self-reflect and manifest a form of self-realization about their sexuality, bodies, ideologies, and much more.

Social media allows women's movement groups to combine these two qualities and either use them for or against the nation (Fuchs 781). Beyond the "veiling campaign," which has existed at varying levels of intensity for decades, women have come together to join forces and facilitate other campaigns within the Iranian legal system, such as the anti-stoning campaign[24]and demonstrating against the imprisonment of Shirin Ebadi.[25]

Veiling is a complicated issue that will not be solved anytime soon. The notion of "Islamic feminists" captures the orientation of reformist women who are Muslim believers. However, the "other side" of this context, that of the Islamic Republic's clergy and establishment, believes not just in Islam per se but in a strong interpretation of Shari'a law. Islamic feminists work together within Islam's framework to end discrimination and gender inequality. The second group of Iranian feminists is the liberal secularists, those who believe in human rights and democratization; aside from the state and establishment. However, both sets of Feminist parties believe "for the equal treatment of citizens before the law, including equal rights and obligations. In other words, secular feminists believe that the state and civil society should protect the civil, political, and social rights of men and women equally"(Mahmoudi 17). However, Islamic feminists believe that this equality should still uphold and follow traditional Islamic codes, such as veiling.

Cyber-Feminism has allowed women activists to spread their feminist negotiations, including the liberation of thought, freedom of speech, freedom of expression, and the liberation of the female body through Cyber-Space, even though they live alongside an oppressive government that will not budge, yet. What this platform has

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[24]Iran's female legislators are demanding an end to death by stoning as a punishment for adultery, saying it has harmed the country's image. The women do not disagree with adultery being considered a crime but say the punishment should be milder.
[25]Shirin Ebadi is an Iranian political activist, lawyer, former judge and human rights activist and founder of the Defenders of Human Rights Center in Iran.

achieved for Iranian women has gone beyond government censorship- as more and more brave women are coming forward, who understand the power structures at play and understand the true threats of being arrested and imprisoned. But through all of this, they have found unconditional freedom through voice and image in social-media, conformed to intellectual ideas, and found liberation through the diasporic sphere of activism.

The crisis of representation that women face by articulating self-expression and self-identity is not entirely solved through the different social media platforms that allow Cyber-Feminism to progress, but it does allow the women of Iran some-what of a manifesto to use their voice to address issues that impair their rights as free-human-beings and show how they stand against oppression, even if it is just through the lens of a smartphone or any other form of social media.

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The Article