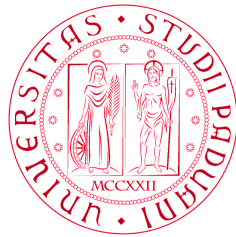# UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI PADOVA

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE, LAW,
AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

**Master's degree in
Human Rights and Multi-level Governance**

GENDER APARTHEID IN THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN: THE INTERSECTION OF RELIGION AND HUMAN RIGHTS

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A.Y. 2022/2023

Acknowledgements

To the brave Iranian women who have risked their lives for the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, and to those who should still be here today. Thank you for your courage.

To the heroic Elaheh Mohammadi and Niloufar Hamedi, who are facing death sentences for their journalism. Thank you for igniting a revolution.

Thank you to my supervisor, Professor Olga Breskaya for her guidance in writing this thesis.

Thank you to my beautiful best friends, Deri, Lois, and Mariona.

Above all, thank you to my azizam. Thank you, Elham, for everything.
You are my inspiration. عاشقتم ,من مديون شما هست

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Introduction

Within the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Islam, gender, and politics are inextricably intertwined. Women's bodies and social standings have become synonymous not only with freedom, serving as both a yardstick of liberty and a foundation for democratic aspirations, but also as fiercely contested battlefields for political chess. Concealing femininity to impede its proliferation has evolved into a key strategy for guaranteeing the continued governance of the country under the Ayatollahs and, ever since the onset of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran's mullahs have found themselves deeply invested in delineating the boundaries of women's rights and roles, undertaking incalculable measures to enforce gender-based discrimination under the guise of implementing Islamic law. From the veiling of any sign of femininity to the prohibition of its very expression, women's bodies pose a direct threat to the totalitarian regime, which is why the women-led revolution sparked in late 2022 has had a destabilising effect on the dictatorship's delicate equilibrium. This thesis will explore the exploitation and manipulation of women's bodies for political purposes as a tactic employed by the ex-monarchy and the mullahs alike throughout the course of modern Iranian history by developing a theoretical foundation rooted in intersectional feminism, legal pluralism, and care ethics, before tracing the social and political history of Iran from Reza Shah Pahlavi to Ali Khamenei, unpacking the country's Constitution and Civil Code and underlining the women's rights abuses that they have produced. Women's expected role in society is examined, as is the weaponization of morality, and how this distorted definition has inadvertently led to Iran's first women-led revolution in September of 2022. The thesis concludes by performing and deep diving into an analysis of 25 semi-structured interviews with Iranian women to provide a platform for the voices that the Islamic Republic of Iran's governing officials are trying so adamantly to silence.

Despite the Islamic Republic's implementation of gender apartheid, women in Iran have continuously resisted the discriminatory system in place, valiantly rising on multiple occasions only to be met with brutal retaliation. During nationwide protests in 2019 that called for regime change known as Bloody November, the government cut off internet access and carried out a heinous massacre of its people, resulting in the loss of more than 1.500 lives over a three-day period. The purposeful obstruction of this information being

diffused kept the massacre from reaching the world community, silencing any possible outrage. When the internet was restored and no one abroad had been made aware of the state-sanctioned bloodbath, hope for change within the country's borders vanished. In September 2022, however, a promising shift began to take shape after the regime's 'morality police' murdered a 22-year-old Kurdish woman named Jina (Mahsa) Amini for allowing a few strands of hair to fly free from beneath her compulsory hijab. In doing so, they ignited a wave of demonstrations across both the nation and the diaspora, galvanising the Iranian people, who are demanding justice and an end to the oppressive policies that restrict their personal freedoms and basic human rights. Facing tear gas, bullets, water cannons, mass arrests, death sentences, and assassinations, Iranians poured into the streets, passionately demanding their freedom and an end to the totalitarian regime that has suffocated their home for the last four decades. The collective desire for liberty is palpable, spotlighting an unwavering commitment to change. The ongoing revolution not only poses a formidable threat to the regime's authority, but it also marks a historic moment as the first-ever woman-led revolution in Iranian history.

The revolutionary shift is now underway as men and women work together in an inspiring show of solidarity to achieve gender parity that goes beyond legal obligations and has further served as a source of inspiration to members of other traditionally oppressed groups, including ethnic, gender, sexual, and religious minorities. After decades of persecution by the Islamic Republic of Iran, these minority groups are finally in a position to challenge the intolerant policies of their government; working in tandem with their Persian counterparts to promote the ideals of a pluralistic and diverse democratic society. It is worth noting that the current wave of protests distinguishes itself from its predecessors in 2009, 2017, and 2019, in that its underlying cause of dissatisfaction is not solely rooted in political or economic determinations. Notwithstanding, people hailing from various economic backgrounds and holding divergent political views have come together in this movement, ignited by the resounding slogan of 'Woman, Life, Freedom.' This revolution has garnered worldwide attention, receiving backing from prominent figures in the realms of entertainment, sports, and social media who denounce the Islamic Republic of Iran's present gender apartheid and stand in solidarity with the movement. Young people are at the forefront of the movement for women's rights and freedom, and they show no sign of slowing down despite crackdowns, internet restrictions, and arrests. Young school girls

have demonstrated incredible bravery by standing up to authorities from the dictatorship and chanting 'death to the dictator' on school grounds, removing their obligatory hijabs, and raising their middle fingers to photos of the Supreme Leader. They have been confronting male officials fearlessly, unfurling warning banners on motorways, marching through the streets chanting anti-government slogans, burning their headscarves, and chopping their hair on social media, demanding, through rebellions both big and small, the end to this murderous regime. Their resolute resolve acts as a potent catalyst, encouraging other protesters to keep going despite the odds.

Nika Shakarami, a teenage art student, vanished during the demonstrations after being pursued by security personnel. Later, her body was discovered with evidence of head trauma, but authorities denied any wrongdoing, claiming that she fell from a rooftop. Hadis Najafi posted a TikTok message during the demonstrations expressing optimism for a renewed Iran. She was shot in the head a few hours later. Sarina Esmailzadeh, 16 years old, recorded herself asking "'Why did I have to be born in Iran?'" (Wright 2022). She was then beaten to death while participating in a protest. Ironically, the government's retaliations have only succeeded in strengthening the resolve of the mourning masses, which is emboldened with each new atrocity perpetrated by their government. The Islamic dictatorship, merciless in its crackdowns, has made it abundantly clear that women pose a vital threat to the regime. The terrain of resistance against the mullahs has highlighted the strength and determination of Iranian women in their quest for freedom, rights, and secular democracy and Amini has become an emblematic symbol of the revolution. Despite killing these young women and over 500 other demonstrators, including 60 children, the flame of revolution has continued to flow across the country, as well as around the diaspora (Newsroom 2022). The authorities have arrested nearly 30,000 individuals, imprisoned about 20,000 young people, and sentenced hundreds to death as of December 2022 (Newsroom 2022).

Not only do these practices, which undergird the erasure of women from the public sphere and are justified in the name of religion, propagate gender inequality, but they also serve as instruments for consolidating the regime's authoritarian control. The overarching research question guiding this study is thus: How do patriarchal cultural norms, legal restrictions, and systemic discrimination in the Islamic Republic of Iran that are justified in

the name of Islam perpetuate the erasure of women from the public sphere and consolidate political power? Moreover, what are the implications of these practices for Iranian women's human rights and their resistance efforts?

On the basis of this question, the hypothesis proposes that the erasure of women from the public sphere in the Islamic Republic of Iran is a deliberate state strategy to preserve religious virtue and strengthen its totalitarian rule. This hypothesis asserts that the state enforces a gender apartheid policy that severely restricts women's access to education, employment, and political participation by employing a multifaceted strategy that incorporates patriarchal cultural norms, legal restrictions, and systemic discrimination. By eliminating women from the public eye, the regime maintains patriarchal power dynamics and consolidates its control over the populace by working in tandem with the larger system of government. The research seeks to reveal the intricate workings of patriarchal cultural norms, legal restrictions, and systemic discrimination. By shedding light on these mechanisms, the broader implications for women's human rights in the country come to light. In addition, it seeks to investigate the ways in which Iranian women navigate and resist the oppressive regime, defying their erasure and making themselves visible. By addressing the research question and testing the hypothesis, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the intersectionality of religion, human rights, and gender in the Islamic Republic of Iran, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the complexities at play and informing advocacy efforts to promote gender equality and justice for Iranian women.

Chapter 1 builds the theoretical substructure necessary to study the ongoing erasure of women within Iran's theocratic dictatorship. It begins with an intersectional feminist analysis, drawing on the works of eminent scholars including Crenshaw, Tronto, and Lépinard. This analytical framework enables the mapping of the intersectionality of gender apartheid, revealing the interconnected systems of oppression that contribute to women's marginalisation. Lépinard's insights on power dynamics, moral beliefs, and ethical considerations within feminist movements highlight the ways in which the spirit of the resistance gains traction, allowing for feminist engagements and undertakings from all backgrounds to unearth common ground that can result in a positive political metamorphosis when applied to the Iranian revolution. Meanwhile, Crenshaw's work on

intersectionality and how different forms of oppression intersect provides a useful framework for analysing how the experiences of Iranian women are shaped by a range of social, political, and economic factors, and the work of Joan Tronto underscores the significance of empathy and moral considerations in politics, especially when building feminist policy. In addition, the negotiation of legal pluralism in Iran is investigated, with a focus on the interaction between Shari'a law and the Iranian legal system, exposing how these legal systems complement or contradict one another. The chapter then examines the intersection of Islamic beliefs and human rights in modern Iran by examining the complexities, tensions, and potential alignments between Islamic beliefs and the pursuit of gender equality and women's rights in the country by analysing the evolving comprehension of Islamic teachings and their interaction with human rights standards. The chapter concludes by tracing the origins, controversies, and contributions of Islamic feminism to the advancement of women's rights in Iran. Recognising the multifaceted efforts of thinkers and activists who challenge patriarchal norms and advocate for gender equality within Islamic teachings, the chapter adds nuance to the exploration of women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran by highlighting the diverse perspectives and debates encircling Islamic feminism, thus laying the groundwork for the chapters to follow. This chapter's analysis contributes to scholarly discussions on religion, human rights, and gender by highlighting the urgency of confronting the intersecting challenges Iranian women face and advocating for their empowerment and liberation within Iranian legal and social contexts.

The second chapter of this thesis examines the persistence of religious gender segregation in Iran from the Pahlavi regime to the establishment of the Islamic Republic from a historical and political perspective. The objective of this chapter is to illuminate how patriarchal continuity and political instrumentalization have contributed to the perpetuation of oppressive gender norms and the consolidation of the regime's power. Understanding the historical and political factors that have contributed to the persistence of gender segregation in Iran is the central research question governing this chapter in an effort to determine their implications for the human rights of Iranian women and their resistance efforts. Chapter 2 engages in a multidimensional approach, analysing various aspects of the historical and political context of gender segregation in Iran. It begins by scrutinising the transformation of Persia under the Pahlavi dynasty, delving into the forces that influenced gender norms. The analysis offers essential insights into the historical

origins of patriarchal continuity and the ways in which political power structures have influenced gender relations in Iran. The chapter then traces the evolution of legal developments in both Iran's civil code and constitution to highlight the developments that have had a lasting impact on women's rights. Additionally, this chapter evaluates international human rights reports that document the status of women in modern Iran to offer insights into the systemic obstacles Iranian women confront to put into context the phenomenon of religious coercion, examining how the state has used religion as a repressive instrument to suppress dissent and enforce gender segregation. It sheds light on how the regime manipulates religious institutions and doctrines to justify attaining its objectives, regardless of whether or not they comply with international human rights law. By exploring these crucial factors, Chapter 2 reveals the mechanisms that have contributed to the persistence of religious gender segregation in Iran. It provides a thorough analysis of the relationship between patriarchal continuity, political instrumentalization, and the consolidation of power, paving the way for a more comprehensive comprehension of the obstacles women confront in Iranian society and the resistance movements that have emerged in response.

Moving forward, the third chapter explores how, through a web of religious authority, social standards, and official institutions, Iran's Islamic Republic has weaponized its command of women's so-called purity and virtue. The investigation begins with a look at morality as a concept, acknowledging its complexity and following its history from its first lexical definitions through its codification in legal systems. To fully grasp the social norms and expectations that regulate women's behaviour in public and private settings in Iran, one must have a firm grasp of the moral frameworks ingrained in Iranian society. The ramifications of purity laws for women's freedom and agency are examined, along with the theological and ideological foundations that support them. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the ways in which every aspect of women's bodies and sexuality are controlled and regulated by the state by deconstructing the social constructions surrounding female purity. The existence and actions of the morality police in Iran contribute to the weaponization of morality within that environment and the section examines their function in maintaining segregated places for men and women and in controlling what women may and cannot do in public. The tactics employed by the morality police, such as clothing code enforcement and public surveillance guarantee the minimised agency of half the country's

populace to incite fear and harbour control. Sexual assault stands out as a disturbing example of morality being weaponized as a tool for political repression and the chapter goes on to study acts of sexual violence committed by state actors, security forces, and regime agents, revealing how these acts help to maintain gender inequality and enforce authoritarianism under the guise of a morally just system.

Chapter 4 studies the transformative potential of the present-day Iranian revolution led by women, challenging patriarchal power structures and promoting women's rights and gender equality. This chapter examines the significant events, movements, and individuals contributing to the paradigm shift in Iran that has shook both the country and the international community. The chapter unveils the pervasiveness of gender-based violence and the ongoing struggle for justice by illuminating the state's role in perpetuating violence against women and the urgent need for accountability and change. It emphasises the need to address not only legal and institutional obstacles but also social and cultural factors that perpetuate systemic gender apartheid. The chapter also addresses the poisoning of Iranian schoolgirls and its implications for the rights and well-being of girls, as the power they harness is immeasurable. It emphasises the need to recognise and address the gender-specific effects of policies and practises that perpetuate inequality and limit girls' development and empowerment opportunities and highlights the agency and tenacity of Iranian women and their contributions to political change.

Finally, Chapter 5 functions as the thesis' fulcrum, tying together the various lines of investigation explored in earlier chapters. This chapter enriches the comprehension of the intersection of gender apartheid, religion, and human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran by giving voice to Iranian nationals and allowing their experiences and perspectives to resonate directly from the source through the conduction of 25 qualitative interviews. These interviews serve as a bridge between the theoretical frameworks, historical analysis, and empirical evidence discussed in earlier chapters, thereby grounding the research in the lived realities and aspirations of those directly affected by gender inequality and religious governance while supporting the original hypothesis. These narratives humanise the statistical data, legal frameworks, and academic discourse, thereby reminding us of the individuals at the core of this thesis. By amplifying the voices of Iranian women, the chapter adds a layer of empathy, compassion, and urgency to the analysis, nurturing a

deeper connection with the topic. It transcends generalisations and stereotypes to disclose the complexities and subtleties of women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The stories these women chose to disclose revealed their combined resiliency, agency, and aspirations and highlighed their ongoing struggles for justice, liberty, and gender equality. Chapter 5 thereby emphasises the significance and urgency of the research by incorporating the perspectives of Iranian nationals into the larger narrative. It accentuates the need for human-centred, inclusive approaches to comprehending and confronting gender apartheid. The interviews provide a potent lens for investigating the intersections of religion, human rights, and gender in the Islamic Republic of Iran, facilitating a more holistic analysis. In addition, the fifth chapter encourages the reader to consider the ethical dimensions of women's rights research and advocacy within the country's confines. It underscores the responsibility of researchers, policymakers, and society to respect and honour these stories by showcasing the courage and vulnerability of the participants who shared their experiences. The chapter encourages critical self-reflection and highlights the significance of amplifying marginalised voices, centering their experiences, and creating spaces for their agency and empowerment on a global scale.

Methodology

The study's cohort comprised twenty-five Iranian women who were born prior to and subsequent the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The selection of participants was conducted through purposive sampling, with the objective of encompassing a broad spectrum of experiences and viewpoints. All participants have provided informed consent. For the purpose of maintaining confidentiality, the subjects have been allocated fictitious names. The recruitment of participants was conducted via personal networks and virtual communities of Iranian women. The study involved participants of varying ages, ranging from 25 to 72 years old, and diverse educational backgrounds. Capturing the diversity of experiences and perspectives of Iranian women was deemed significant. The anonymity of the participants was upheld during the entirety of the research process, and their confidentiality was duly honoured.

The data was gathered through a semi-structured interview method consisting of a predetermined set of eight to ten questions, depending on whether or not the participant was old enough to have experienced life in Iran before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The interview questions were formulated in accordance with the research inquiries, with the intention of investigating the participants' encounters with the morality police, infringements on human rights, and the position of women within Iranian society. The questionnaire was formulated with the intention of eliciting comprehensive and refined answers. Prior to their distribution, a select group of participants were utilised to pilot the questions in order to verify their lucidity and efficacy. The data collection process involved conducting interviews through two modes of communication, namely face-to-face and telephonic interactions. The respondents were provided with the opportunity to select the mode of the interview that they found to be the most convenient. The majority of interviews were carried out in Farsi, the mother-tongue language of the participants, and subsequently rendered into English by a proficient translator to guarantee the precision of the translation. The interviews were conducted with the explicit consent of the participants, and subsequently, the transcripts were subjected to analysis. The duration of the interviews varied between 30 minutes to one hour, contingent upon the participant's accessibility and inclination to divulge their experiences.

The research focuses on examining the convergence of religious freedom and women's rights, alongside the effects of moral policing and compulsory hijab legislation on the everyday experiences of women. Furthermore, the aim is to acquire a deeper understanding of the difficulties that emerge while attempting to reconcile faith and feminism and to investigate the feasibility of a political Shari'a framework in conjunction with women's rights. The primary objective of the study is to draw insights from the varied experiences of Iranian women, with the aim of identifying potential pathways for advancement and reform. Additionally, the research intends to foster a better understanding of the intricate interplay between gender and politics in present-day Iran. The following were the interview questions used:

1. What have been your personal experiences with the morality police in Iran?

2. What kind of human rights violations have you experienced in your everyday life?

3. How do you see the interaction between religious freedom and women's rights?

4. What are the most problematic issues for you when these intersect?

5. How do you consider morality linked to the role of women in Iranian society?

6. If you had to choose between faith in Islam and what we consider 'women's rights', would you be able to choose?

7. Is a political Shari'a system compatible with women's rights?

8. From your perspective, what should happen in Iran in order to secure a future with abundant human rights for Iranian women?

9. What were your feelings when transitioning into wearing a mandatory hijab after the revolution?

10. From a women's rights perspective, how has life changed for you before and after 1979?

Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data gathered from the interviews. The methodology used in this study entailed the discernment of recurring patterns or themes within the data that pertain to the research inquiries. Following the transcription and translation of the interviews I engaged in a thorough review of each transcript in order to identify potential themes. The themes were subsequently categorised and encoded to ascertain the repetitive patterns in the collected data. I then employed a combination of inductive and deductive methodologies to discern patterns and themes in the collected data. The inductive methodology necessitated the identification of themes that surfaced from the

data, while the deductive methodology involved using the research inquiries and the pre-existing literature to steer the analysis. The study's participants were provided with their individual transcripts and instructed to review them for precision. Additionally, they were invited to offer feedback on the themes that were identified during the analysis.

The study was carried out with strict adherence to ethical principles, considering the possible hazards that may arise from expressing dissent towards Iranian authorities. In light of the political sensitivity surrounding the matter, I implemented precautionary measures to safeguard the well-being of both the participants and myself during the course of the study. Individuals in Iran are subject to considerable risks if they choose to express discord towards the government, which may include being detained, incarcerated, subjected to bodily harm, or even execution. To protect their confidentiality, aliases were given to each interviewee. Prior to conducting the interviews, all participants were provided with informed consent and were duly apprised of the potential risks associated with their participation in the research, while maintaining that their identity will remain anonymous. For these reasons, even the translator must remain anonymous. I have implemented measures to ensure the confidentiality and safety of the participants. This includes maintaining a low profile and abstaining from disclosing any identifiable information regarding the participants or the study to individuals outside of the research team. I took measures to guarantee that the interviews were carried out in a secure and protected setting, and all necessary steps were taken to take care of the confidentiality and safety of the respondents throughout and following the interviews.

Chapter 1:

A Study on the Erasure of Women's Rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran Exploring the Interaction Between Legal Pluralism and Shari'a Law

This chapter will build the theoretical substructure necessary to study the issue of women's rights within Iran's theocratic dictatorship. It will initiate by analysing the existing indispensable literature on feminism, Islamic studies, and the intersection of the two when studied from a human's rights perspective, emphasising a window for continued research which considers how the image of the Islamic Regime is preserved by maintaining power over the half of its population that identifies as female. It will commence by diving into the theory of intersectional feminism and highlighting what it may offer from a theoretical lens, especially when infused with moral politics. Intersectionality is the recognition that people are moulded by a variety of identities that overlap with one another, including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation. For successful tactics to combat gender apartheid and women's erasure in Iran, it is crucial to comprehend the multidimensional character of women's experiences. Subsequently, it will consider religious literature and the spectrum of definitions that persist when weighing the importance of religion, taking into account the concept of legal pluralism and its link to Shari'a law.   A spectrum of legal systems coexist and affect one another, but the dominance of Shari'a law in Iran's legal system is tactfully used to ostracise and harm. The literature on feminism, Islamic studies, and their relationship will also be examined through the prism of human rights to map out the regime's theological justification for gender apartheid in Iran as a method of retaining its reigns over half of the population. Next, it will sprinkle the notions of universal human rights into the equation, considering how they take shape when power dynamics make themself visible, before questioning how, more specifically, Islam and human rights interact. Finally, it will study the evolving role of Islamic Feminism and how it interplays with each theme. This research will also provide a critical examination of Islamic feminism's attempts to eliminate discrimination against women and improve gender equality in Iran. Islamic feminism's recent efforts to reinterpret Islamic texts in favour of gender equality face a serious obstacle posed by the dominant interpretation of Shari'a law. By analysing its evolving role, however, the subsection will garner light on the possibilities and limits of religiously-based feminist movements given the current context. This theoretical framework will develop the foundation of the research

to come by drawing attention to the tremendous role exerted by women in Iran, past, and present and aiming to comprehend on how the erasure of women is legitimised in the name of religion to maintain the reputation and capacities of the dictatorship.

1.1 Mapping the Intersectionality of Gender Apartheid in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Intersectional Feminist Analysis Through the Lenses of Crenshaw, Tronto, and Lépinard

This section examines the interconnectedness of gender apartheid in the Islamic Republic of Iran by referencing the work of renowned feminist academics such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Joan Tronto, and Éléonore Lépinard. Using Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality to guide its development, this section investigates the ways in which women in Iran confront intersecting forms of discrimination based on their gender, religion, ethnicity, class, and other axes of oppression. It also examines how Tronto's care politics and care ethics have shaped the oppression experiences of Iranian women. This section concludes by analysing Lépinard's intersectional transnational feminism to assess the efficacy of international solidarity and activism in advancing women's rights in Iran. This subchapter attempts to provide a comprehensive assessment of the overlapping dimensions of gender apartheid in Iran by combining various feminist views. It emphasises the importance of placing women's experiences at the centre of any conversation regarding gender inequity in Iran's legal system. This section concludes with insights into the possibility of feminist work to resist gender apartheid in Iran and enhance women's rights.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality has earned scholarly acclaim for its promise to shed light on the multifaceted nature of oppression by focusing on the ways in which many oppressive systems and social identities overlap and interact. Since Iranian women under the Islamic regime face numerous forms of discrimination due to their gender, religion, ethnicity, and political opinions, Crenshaw's theory is especially pertinent to the study of their experiences. Iranian women suffer numerous forms of oppression, and an intersectional analysis can provide light on their unique struggles and the tactics they employ to overcome them. Moreover, it sheds light on the ethical considerations that may have inspired the regime's treatment of Iranian women, both past and present, taking into account cultural and religious traditions. In light of this, applying intersectionality to the study of Iranian women living under the Islamic regime can shed light on how the intersection of multiple forms of oppression shapes women's experiences and how the

intersection of identities may have an effect on ideas of religious freedom and morality. This first subsection will examine the theory of intersectionality to evaluate feminism, women's rights, and religious liberty from a human rights perspective. Initiating the research in this manner will illuminate how diverse identities intersect across generations and religious orientations, influencing women's access to their rights.

Crenshaw introduced intersectionality in 1989. In her work, she coined the term to accentuate the ways in which multiple systems of oppression team together to create unique forms of discrimination based on all the identities/societal sub-groups that one may belong to. Crenshaw put forth that the oppression faced by white women at the hands of the patriarchy was unproportionate with that faced by women of colour to highlight how sociocultural categories, like class, sexuality, ethnicity, and disability, can accumulate, forming a domino effect that further marginalises minority groups (Lykke 2012:50). King refers to this phenomenon as 'multiple jeopardies,' insinuating that those who belong to various minority groups face discrimination on various levels   (King 1988:46). Marginalising identities have 'a multiplicative effect' on the individual affected, which is why, from an intersectional perspective, gender discrimination cannot, and should not, be studied as an anomaly. Doing so only reinforces the narrative of feminism, which has consistently dominated the West by pursuing issues that are meant to envelop women's issues while failing to take into account the differences amongst women that lead people to have entirely different experiences under the clutches of patriarchal injustice (Lowe 2019).

This created a more multifaceted way of engaging with feminism and improving women's conditions, as it illustrates how each experiences discrimination differently depending on their circumstances. This has encouraged a dialogue for change that avoids universalising and generalising the female experience. Crenshaw's intersectionality has paved the way for Transnational Feminism, the Fourth Wave of Feminism that we are in the midst of, which rejects a universal idea of the patriarchy that violates women's rights in one way and one way only. This is a tool, as it forces those in positions of power to take more specific measures for bettering the lives of each subgroup, to eventually improve women's condition as a whole. For example, we can label Third World feminist struggles based on the common differences that bring them together. This means that although each woman in the Global South undergoes suffering and discrimination, it can still be closely tied to the same systems of power that make their lives more difficult (Crenshaw 1989). If

we can locate the common aggressor, whether that be in a political or legal sense of the term, we can then work through an intersectional lens to improve rights and standards of living across the table. Additionally, given that we have these multiple identities, intersectionality is a tool in that it does not force women to constrain themselves to one singular label. The intersection of identities makes it easier to obtain recompensation for violations undergone. Intersectionality also makes it possible to pinpoint the most marginalised identities and make a conscious effort in safeguarding their rights moving forward (Crenshaw 1989).

Therefore, by examining the theory of intersectionality in the theoretical framework, we can develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of Iranian women, who face multiple forms of discrimination and marginalisation based on their gender, religion, ethnicity, and socio-economic status. By recognising the various intersections of these identities, we can better understand the challenges faced by Iranian women and develop effective strategies to promote gender equality and women's empowerment within the Iranian context. Incorporating an intersectional perspective is essential for developing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of gender, religion, and human rights in Iran. The theoretical framework's emphasis on intersectionality underscores the importance of recognising the multiple forms of oppression faced by Iranian women and provides a solid foundation for the research that follows.

In the fight for women's rights, diverse lenses and backgrounds have culminated to create an array of ways to define feminism, given that every individual affected by the patriarchal hold maintains their definition of the term, of the struggle, and of what merits political commotion. As underlined by Lépinard, there is animosity within the feminist community that stems from power dynamics that decide whose voice will sustain the most considerable echo. Is it possible to sustain a discourse about emancipation and individual agency that cuts across borders when the experiences of Occidental feminists do not resonate with those of the rest of the world? Rather than cavilling over the intricacies and fallacies of solidarity and white-washed liberal feminism, Lépinard argues that the most effective way of moving forward is to use these power hierarchies to paint a fuller picture. As feminism spreads its wings globally, it is an injustice to profess that it may be reduced to something as transparent as an individual's agency. Gender equality is becoming increasingly associated with both secularist and anti-Islamic discourses in the West;

however, in doing so, it is ostracising a considerable portion of the population (Lépinard 2020:2). Rather than waging war within the feminist project by labelling activists as either 'liberal and emancipated' or 'veiled and chained,' a more productive way forward is to delve into how women become the focus of attention within political frameworks (Lépinard 2020:10). In doing so, the spirit of the resistance gains traction, allowing for feminist engagements and undertakings from all backgrounds to unearth common ground that can result in a positive political metamorphosis. Liberal feminism exudes whiteness, thereby casting those deprived of that privilege into the shadows (Lépinard 2020:2). To engage in a proper discussion, it is necessary to identify the moral susceptibilities that have, piece by piece, constructed the backbones of the heterogeneous feminist movement that we see today. In such a manner, we can identify aggressors from the bedrock, and follow this up the hierarchy to better comprehend how each strand of feminists responds to the threats these aggressors pose. "Only then may we understand what is at stake—politically and morally—what is being lost, and what might be found (Lépinard 2020:11). Lépinard builds upon Crenshaw in using disparaging identities to push forward but stresses the need to comprehensively grasp the underpinnings of the feminist fight, for, without a solid base, the political project will lack the structure required to grow.

History is saturated with feminist disputes that try to designate what makes one a 'good' feminist. These controversies have most often been associated with "the importance and political significance of race, class, sexuality, attitudes toward pleasure, sex work, and the definition of femininity heralded by popular culture," (Lépinard 2020:11) yet they make little progress in the long term, given that they "entail a moral appeal" (Lépinard 2020:11). The outcomes of the feminist fight weigh heavily on the moral interests of those invested, for these principles are the building blocks with which we may develop a more progressive future. Politics, like human relations, are intrinsically linked to one's moral and ethical beliefs. The advancement of the feminist project thus relies on identifying the overlap between morals and politics to understand the power structures that forge disparities in accountability and liability (Lépinard 2020:12).

Joan Tronto (2020) asserts the main problem with political jargon is not the absence of policies or opinions, but the overwhelming lack of ethos. Tronto goes on to explain that American ideologies of the 19th century divided life into two spheres: that of the public realm and that of the private (Tronto 2020:10). The former was coupled with the idea of

masculinity, while the former was deemed to belong to feminine duties (Tronto 2020:10). Ever since, empathy, along with other emotions, were written off as womanly and thus, not to be intermeddled with politics. Ignoring the intertwinings of morality, politics, and power is detrimental to igniting change (Tronto 2020:3). Historically, women have not been the ones leading heads of state, creating laws or rallying crowds. It has always been men who lead and it has always been men who stand in front of podiums. This has been treated as normal for so long that it has infiltrated the thoughts of voters, creating internalised sexism across the globe, to the point of when a woman throws herself into the political sphere it is not uncommon to encounter citizens met with discomfort and feelings of confusion, using these feelings to cast their ballots. Female candidates are subject to violence, lack of resources, and damaging stereotypes regarding their capabilities, including the presumptions that females are more compassionate and emotional, while males are tougher, virile, and capable of operating the brutish world of politics. The omnipresent fear of emotional sentiment is often what critics use to dismiss women in politics, but Tronto argues that "once we realise that moral arguments have a political context, we begin to recognise how boundaries shape moralities" (Tronto 2020:6). Thus, for feminist policies to have an impact, it is indispensable to form a worldview that takes others into account. Tronto's work theorises whom we consider morally similar to ourselves and whom we categorise as morally distant (Tronto 2020:13). Moral discrepancies are understood very differently depending on the culture that they are subsiding in. If we fail to account for the distance, both physical and metaphorical, between feminists of all walks of life, it only creates taller obstacles and deepens the privilege gap that divides feminists - enhancing the voices of Western feminists and silencing the rest of the world. Moral politics entails distinguishing the fine line that determines egoistical acts and altruistic acts (Tronto 2020:14). Lépinard (2020) asks her audience:

> When reasoning about the reasons to ban or accommodate, for example, Islamic headscarves, whose situation and welfare are put at the centre of our attention and care? While many white feminists voice their concern or care for other women, these are often distant others, abstract figures who secure white feminists' privilege to universalize their experiences as women and define who may be considered a "good" or a "bad" feminist subject. If caring is to be equated with treating other well, it must be grounded in a concrete relationship. (Lépinard 2020:13-14)

The goal is thus not to erase differences across the feminist spectrum, as that would be counteractive to Crenshaw's theories on intersectionality, but rather to reconceptualise how feminists place themselves in advocating for rights that affect 'the other.' To do so, Tronto and Lépinard agree that the way forward is by infusing care ethics into the fight to recognise "privilege and power, to dismantle hierarchies" (Lépinard 2020:14). It's not evident for non-white feminists to identify themselves in a feminist movement dominated by the West, given that the ethical contexts vary so drastically. A veiled woman fighting for the right to let her hair blow in the wind will find her sympathisers in the West to be vainglorious unless there is a sense of care politics embedded in the human rights they are defending. Feminist thinkers must thus prioritise abridging the gap that separates their world views– pinpointing the ethics that diminish the divide as well as the power schemes that draw them further apart to make any significant progress (Tronto 2020). Care relations driven by internal morals define how feminists may work with one another to attain the goals they epitomise, from both an individual and a societal viewpoint (Tronto 2020). Lépinard's insights on power dynamics, moral beliefs, and ethical considerations within feminist movements can help to shed light on the complexities of the situation in Iran. Meanwhile, Crenshaw's work on intersectionality and how different forms of oppression intersect can provide a useful framework for analysing how the experiences of Iranian women are shaped by a range of social, political, and economic factors. The work of Joan Tronto highlights the significance of empathy and moral considerations in politics, especially for feminist policy. Tronto says that the historical separation of public and private realms based on gender stereotypes has resulted in a lack of acknowledgement of emotions and empathy in political discourse, which has contributed to the marginalisation of women in political leadership positions. This marginalisation is worsened by harmful assumptions regarding women's political talents, as well as violence and a lack of resources faced by female candidates. Instead of universalising experiences and determining who may be called a 'good' or 'bad' feminist, Tronto's work underscores the need for a more inclusive worldview that accounts for moral variations and divisions between feminists and politicians alike. In this context, Lépinard's phrase emphasises the significance of tangible relationships in caring for and treating others well, as opposed to abstract concepts. This is essential for comprehending the influence of patriarchal cultural norms, legislative constraints, and institutional discrimination in the Islamic Republic of Iran on the

eradication of women from the public sphere and the consolidation of the regime's authoritarian authority. It also illuminates the ramifications for Iranian women's human rights and resistance movements, which demand a more nuanced and inclusive approach that takes moral differences and distances into account. By drawing on the insights of these authors we may provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges that Iranian women face and offer recommendations for promoting gender equality and human rights in Iran.

1.2 Unpacking the Complexities of Islam, Human Rights, and Legal Pluralism in the Islamic Republic of Iran: An Intersectional Analysis

This second subsection examines the problematic relationship between religion, human rights, and legal pluralism in the Islamic Republic of Iran from an intersectional viewpoint. In this chapter, we apply Kimberlé Crenshaw's theoretical framework to analyse the ways in which Iranians' religious beliefs and practices shape their perceptions of gender, race, and socioeconomic status. The chapter begins by exploring Linda Woodhead's fuzzy set theory of religion, which not only provides a comprehensive understanding of Iran's complex religious context but also emphasises the need to consider the interaction of multiple legal systems when considering human rights. Researchers who have studied the impact of cultural norms on individual rights, such as Max Weber and Eugen Ehrlich, are frequently cited. Here, these theoretical frameworks will be employed fully to navigate the connection between gender discrimination and religion, the law, and human rights in Iran's judicial system. Understanding the complex interplay between religious bigotry and discrimination against women requires attention to the ways in which many social identities overlap. Human rights professor Bryan Turner and human rights researcher Malcolm Waters are included in this chapter to emphasise the significance of social and cultural aspects in shaping human rights. An intersectional lens is required for understanding and responding to human rights abuses in Iran.

To study Islam's impacts on women's rights in Iran would be insufficient without developing an understanding of the ways in which religion, as a whole, snakes its way into the human experience, making it, at times, impossible to divorce the two entirely. Linda Woodhead, Professor of Sociology of Religion at Lancaster University, proposes five concepts of religion that can assist greatly in pinpointing all the shapes and forms that

religion can manifest. In this first category, religion embodies culture (Woodhead 2011). Within the culture category, lodges belief and culture, which may be the most popularly accepted definitions regarding politics and legal writing; however, to what extent can one define belief? Can one's beliefs limit another? (Woodhead 2011) This being said religion is solely associated with the belief in certain concepts, theories, and characters to better digest and perceive our time on Earth, agreeing to emulate the teaching of the given religion because it underlines beliefs that one holds to be true and divine. At times, as Woodhead highlights, this wholehearted form of belief and meaning can pave the way for believing in supernatural forces that play their own role in giving the religion deeper meaning (Woodhead 2011). It is a form of belief that intertwines with experimental science, given that there is no concrete evidence to support religion, and instead, gains traction through engaging followers' senses and trust in their core belief.

Of the possible religious concepts, none of them is mutually exclusive but rather complement each other. The multiplicity of meanings reflects the diversity of experiences, circumstances, and applications. James Beckford (2003) advances the social constructivism hypothesis, which asserts that religion is a social construction that is subject to an agreement amongst various groups. With regards to the theocratic authoritarianism that rules over the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is perhaps most important to focus on the notion of identity, for identifying what comprises religion and what does not can shine a light on the profound impacts they may personify politics and society.

Positivist perceptions of religion are also popular, in which believers attempt to quantify their beliefs using scientific instruments, like membership numbers, to bolster their faith (Woodhead 2011: 123). Critiques, like Richard Dawkins (2006) dismiss religion based on these principles, stating that, "religion is primarily a matter of assent to false beliefs which fly in the face of scientific evidence" (Woodhead 2011: 123). In the same realm, religion can offer enhanced meaning to the human experience, while providing cultural order for those it serves. While similar, this contribution to the conversation enlarges the concept of culture to something all-encompassing, far more widespread and enveloping than a mere belief system. This vision of religion, as put forth by Woodworth, has a bearing on all aspects of life. Peter Berger (1967) writes in his book The Sacred Canopy, that given the utter chaos the state of the world often finds itself in, humans use

religion as a set of eyeglasses that permit them to see with more clarity to make sense of the pandemonium and confusion that we may find themselves in. It is through religion that believers find a way to enhance their vision. Clifford Geertz's essay on 'Religion as a Cultural System' (1966) takes a comparable stance. For him, religion consists of '(1) a system of symbols (2) which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men (3) by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' (Geertz 1971:4)." Émile Durkheim maintains that religion and identity cannot be separated (Woodhead 2011: 128). Combined with Weber, they maintain that religion plays a part in establishing common values amongst a given group. On the same note, Parsons (1935) places religion on an even higher pedestal, making it impossible to divorce from the society in which it derives power, in that, to him, values and meanings are anchored to the foundation of his sociological reasoning (Parsons 1935). This is, as we see above with Tronto (2020), given that one's values and morals are what will govern their actions, their choices. And, ultimately, the morals that will push them in every aspect of life and politics. While Weber did not see modernisation and religion as compatible. He claims that religion can never cease to exist because it is so deeply ingrained in the system to maintain homeostasis (Woodhead 2011: 125). Religion and historical religions carry out, therefore, a key role since they provide the system with a source of ultimate legitimacy that no other social system can provide. Religion thus plays a lofty role in controlling the system, and if left unchecked, could effectively paralyse other aspects of the society at hand. Nonetheless, Parsons envisioned a future for values and religion if the masses could transcend their values from their beliefs (Woodhead 2011: 125).

To illustrate the clash between identity and the state when religion comes into play, the Islamic veil has grown to symbolise not only identity politics but also the reigns the Islamic Republic of Iran holds to maintain its grasp on the country. As we will see, women's bodies play a crucial role in the identity construction of the Islamic Republic. In the eyes of the Ayatollahs, it is up to the women of Iran to defend an alleged cultural virginity understood as a resistance to Western domination and a vehicle of cultural continuity for future generations. The key idea behind this theory was the value placed on women as cultural keepers, maintainers of social harmony, and bulwarks against colonial

oppression; however, given that religion plays a central part in one's identity, it is not to be imposed by a higher power for political motives. Azar Nafisi, the author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran,* offers her perspective on the mandatory veiling that took precedence after Iran fell into the hands of religious clerics:

> The mandatory veil was an attempt to force social uniformity through an assault on individual and religious freedoms, not an act of respect for traditions and culture. By imposing one interpretation of religion upon all its citizens, the Islamic regime deprived them of the freedom to worship their God in the manner they deemed appropriate. Many women who wore the veil, like my own grandmother, had done so because of their religious beliefs; many who had chosen not to wear the veil but considered themselves Muslims, like my mother, were now branded as infidels. The veil no longer represented religion but the state: not only were atheists, Christians, Jews, Baha'is, and peoples of other faiths deprived of their rights, but so were the Muslims, who now viewed the veil more as a political symbol than a religious expression of faith. Other freedoms were gradually curtailed: the assault on the freedom of the press was accompanied by censorship of books—including the works of some of the most popular classical and modern Iranian poets and writers—a ban on dancing, female singers, most genres of music, films, and other artistic forms, and systematic attacks against the intellectuals and academics who protested the new means of oppression. (Zanganeh and Nafisi 2008:5-6)

The objective of such beliefs and behaviours, according to the Durkheimian paradigm, is to develop a collective identity, similar to the purpose of partisan action or ardent support for a sports team (Woodhead 2011:128). Religion's symbols also serve to remind us that we are merely insignificant components of a much broader totality and through engagement in religious observances, the individual becomes imprinted with the collective conscience and starts to feel the demands of the group's expectations. Our beliefs are frequently made up after the fact to maintain our sense of belonging to a specific group. In these iterations of functionalism—the classical version, proposed by Durkheim and the structural-functional version proposed by Parsons, a consistent theme emerges: religion is a

potent factor in social stabilisation, as it manages to provide society as a whole or a part of it with profound mechanisms for mitigating psychological, social, and political contingency (Woodhead 2011:128). Durkheim argues that law is a social phenomenon that represents all fundamental forms of solidarity (Woodhead 2011:129).

Hypothesising religion as discourse, Brown (2000) supports the claim that religion is a measurable collection of ideas and practises by using popular religious literature, sermon attendance, journals, relics, books, and pamphlets in lieu of survey data. Brown (2000) investigated the extensive influence of religion on narrative and language. The collapse of the evangelical narrative, according to Brown (2000), is at the heart of secularisation. This myth helped individuals, especially women, make sense of their circumstances by grounding them in the larger narrative of sin and salvation. By reducing religion to a set of assertions, speech may perpetuate the logocentric bias prevalent in academia when seen through a reductionist lens. This line of reasoning may lead back to the common understanding of religion as a set of rigorous rules and regulations. Foucault is able to construct far more refined understandings of religion because he expands the scope of discourse to include institutionalised knowledge and practises as well as the power relationships they engender. In terms of ideology and mystification, a Marxist perspective shares the notion that religion is fundamentally an issue of culture; however, it differs from other views in that it considers religion to be a mystification that hides the contradictions that are inherent in social and economic existence. As a consequence of this, religion functions as both a symptom of and a contributing factor to estrangement. It is an "opiate" that alleviates only by diverting its adherents to the actual conditions of life, and as a result, it inhibits efforts to enact change (Marx and Engels 1969). Religion is also considered to be, above all, a part of tradition and memory. Brown (2000) believes that religion should be eliminated from scientific investigation and, instead, integrated into cultural studies. Some people believe that religion should be given special respect because of the distinctive traits and purposes it serves in people's lives, rather than just because it is part of a larger cultural category. Those who portray religion as a matter of tradition have a unique opportunity to stand out from the crowd by emphasising the continuity of their beliefs from the past to the present. After being largely overlooked following Halbwachs' (1992) revelation, the importance of collective memory in determining the social reality of the present has been resurrected.

One of the key issues facing the human rights movement is defining how to interact with religious communities. According to Ignatieff (2008), for human rights to be really global, it must address profoundly local concerns and take into account a variety of ideas and beliefs that may conflict with or seem to defy its appeal to international norms. If internationally recognized human rights laws are to be considered universal, their applicability must be demonstrated in every situation, but especially in those in which state policy is influenced by religion. On the endless path of human growth and modernization, the secular human rights movement occasionally views traditional religious movements as outmoded and views itself as current. Some claim that it runs the risk of considering itself as superior and opposed to other cultures and norms, reflecting culturalist methods that aim to build a hierarchy between civilizations and ideas. Human rights activists may be tempted to dismiss these faiths and cultures as barriers to economic or human rights modernity rather than working to ingrain the human rights project into various faiths and cultures and to legitimise human rights norms within religions rather than alongside or in opposition to them. Turner and Waters launched the conversation on the sociology of human rights at the tail-end of the twentieth century, thus giving way to two discourses on the role of human rights in religion (Breskaya et. al 2022: 420).

As one of the earliest sociologists to focus on human rights, Bryan Turner (1978) adopts a broader, more anthropological perspective, basing human rights on human embodiment and the common vulnerability of mankind. According to Turner (1978), Durkheim's point of view did not take into account the rights of people and instead focused more on maintaining social cohesiveness. Human rights, according to Turner's (1978) overarching sociological theory, may be seen as a collection of universal principles since all humans have a similar ontology based on their shared physiological vulnerability (Turner 1978). Even if there are enormous variances in how people feel about pain and humiliation from one culture to the next, it happens to everyone. According to Turner, advances in medicine and technology won't be able to change the reality that we, as humans, are inherently vulnerable (Turner 1978). He further argues that despite the fact that people may not have a common culture, they are inherently connected together by the dangers and perturbations that come from their inherent fragility and the precariousness of the institutions they establish to compensate for it, aiming to portray one of the major

paradoxes of human rights by emphasising the precariousness of institutions (Turner 1978). Institutions like the state have been essential for ensuring security and individual rights, but they also pose serious risks to human rights when they fail to do so. In most cases, civil war and anarchy are the root causes of tyranny at the state level, which in turn leads to human rights abuses. Human rights institutions constitute an additional layer of protection against harm since our own are so flimsy.

Due to increasing globalisation and structural changes that, to some extent, erode security measures, society's protective structures are in disarray. When it comes to human rights issues brought on by globalisation, many nation-states just aren't equipped to deal with the magnitude of the problem. Effective human rights institutions are necessary to support the security provided by citizenship and to contribute to making this protection more universally valid in light of the increasing interconnectedness of people (Turner 1978). Moreover, if sociology is to be a viable discourse of this transnational phenomenon, it must do more than just advocate for improved social protection from nation-states; it must also maintain the institutional grounding of human rights and fundamental human obligations. Thus, sociology may aid in the establishment of a more efficient human rights system by shedding light on the multifaceted cultural and social setting in which human rights abuses occur. Turner makes a strong case that patriarchal lenses and the moral rules they impose are the necessary contexts for understanding issues like violence against women, stating that neither legal action nor civil rights education will be adequate to solve human rights concerns because they fail to address the structural factors that produce this collapse of masculine power (Turner 1978). Turner (1978) argued in favour of foundational moral principles rooted in human frailty, the sheer unpredictability of social institutions, and moral sympathy, while Waters (1996) conceptualised the role of human rights as matters of social constructs and tools of sociopolitical relations that give rise to contending foundationalist and constructionist approaches.

Malcolm Waters points out that Turner's research does not provide a clear concept of human rights (Waters 1996). He goes on to say that formal definitions are crucial for correct assessments, and for making sure that the human rights discourse is as reflective as possible of actual social conditions. Additionally, the genesis of human rights may be readily located through the use of formal definitions. According to Waters, human rights

arise organically through social interactions as a result of a certain historical and social setting, and they may only include demands and entitlements that a political society acknowledges as basic to the humanity of its members (Waters 1996). Human rights, he continues, are an institution built by humans, and as such, they are rooted in a particular society and era. They do not, in Waters' view, always imply claims against the state (Waters 1996). For a claim to be considered part of human rights, it must be widely acknowledged as essential to the humanity of members of a given political society. Said rights come to light from specific trade-offs among competing political interests. Waters acknowledges that political interests have a considerable impact on the codification of human rights under this social constructivist perspective on the topic of human rights. For Waters, the incapacity of the state to successfully pursue its own interests abroad may be traced back to the inception of the human rights movement. Human rights legislation will become more widely applied to the degree that the mechanisms by which they are developed unite power groupings representing a variety of interests. The degree to which elite and public interests cross or even coincide is directly proportionate to the degree to which human rights legislation is successfully enforced. No matter how far human rights have been institutionalised, there will always be calls for further safeguards and benefits (Waters 1996).

1.3 Negotiating Legal Pluralism: Examining the Intersection of Shari'a Law and the Iranian Legal System

Human rights and Islamic belief and practice in Iran necessitate an intersectional approach that takes into account the role of diverse social identities and how they connect with Islam. As seen in subsection 1.1, social justice groups have widely adopted Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept for understanding how individuals' intersecting and interacting social identities shape their lived experiences of oppression and discrimination. The interaction of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status with Islamic beliefs and practices in Iran creates nuanced experiences of marginalisation and discrimination, and an intersectional perspective can help shed light on these dynamics. This subsection will analyse how legal pluralism comes to offer a framework for conceptualising how different legal systems, such as Shari'a and secular law, may or may not coexist in the same society. The concept of legal pluralism provides a valuable framework for examining the interplay between various legal systems and their effect on human rights by acknowledging the possibility of conflict and

tension between them. Both Bryan Turner and Malcolm Waters, as seen in 1.2, stressed the significance of cultural and historical elements in developing religious beliefs and practices, as well as the socially constructed aspect of religion. This view emphasises the many different ways Shari'a can be interpreted and acknowledges that the social, political, and economic systems of a country like Iran have an impact on how Shari'a is put into practice there. Religion, according to Turner and Waters, is not something fixed and unchanging, but rather a set of beliefs and practises that change through time and are influenced by their particular historical and social environments. Human rights in a world of competing legal frameworks necessitate a close look at the phenomenon of legal pluralism, which is why legal frameworks, as stressed by Max Weber and Eugen Ehrlich, have a significant bearing on the junction of religion and human rights, and this section explores that impact. Their writings illuminate the significance of legal systems in recognising and protecting human rights and throw light on the role that legal frameworks play in shaping the link between religion and human rights. Hence, the study of human rights in the context of diverse legal systems requires an understanding of legal pluralism. The Islamic Republic of Iran's many different social identities and how they interact with Islamic beliefs and practices, as well as the country's multiple legal systems and the potential for conflict and tension between them. This method acknowledges the significance of legal frameworks in determining the link between religion and human rights, as well as the socially constructed aspect of religion and the variety of Shari'a interpretations within the borders of Iran.

Cultural and religious pluralism is on the upswing in modern cultures as a consequence of globalisation. Pluralism refers to the coexistence of multiple groups and ideologies within a society, and the idea that these different groups can coexist and cooperate despite their differences. Given the growing diversity of faiths, and each individual's religious affiliation is highly prized, so, contrary to prevailing forecasts of a decrease in religious practice, religion is playing a more significant role in public life at the start of the 21st century. The people in control face both difficulties and possibilities as a result of this. Burial customs, religious instruction, and women's rights are only a few of the contentious issues that have led to tensions between the state and religious groups. Many of these disagreements have centred on whether or not religious freedom is essential, and if so, to what extent it should be protected when certain religious practices threaten to

infringe on the rights of others. Due to the dynamic character of modern life, most countries' laws, norms, and the planning and usage of public spaces have either established or revised limitations of religious freedom. While the case of Iran is peculiar, in that its entire legal system is rooted in its belief in Islam, the overlap between Shari'a law and the country's ratification of international human rights treaties provides a case for legal pluralism that must be studied: do the religious implications of the Islamic Regime's constitution leave space for human rights? Can the two coexist in a way that benefits both the state and its citizens?

Legal plurality refers to the phenomena of normativity in which formal and informal norms from the local, national, and international levels overlap, compartmentalise, intermingle, and impact one another throughout the global arena. While it may have thought that the law could operate independently of other social normativity, the presence of competing standards shows otherwise. It forces us to break out of the box the standard has us in and discover unrestricted spaces to innovate in. It's also important to remember that complexity is worth thinking about rather than trying to oversimplify while advocating for an introspective and critical analysis of normative plurality via the perspective of the sociology of law's theorization of legal pluralism. Moreover, legal plurality must consider the different institutions, behavioural norms, and actors that come together to create the judicial system. Weber argues, famously, that the existence of law "depends on the availability of an organized coercive apparatus for the nonviolent exercise of legal coercion. This apparatus must also possess such power that there is in fact a significant probability that the norm will be respected because of the possibility of recourse to such coercion. Today legal coercion by violence is the monopoly of the state" (Weber 1978: 314).

In contrast to Weber's views, modern academics see the Shari'a as an open and adaptable legal system. Sunni and Shi'ite sects follow different Shari'a, and understandings of Shari'a differ immensely between countries, lending to wide spectrums of interpretations of the Shari'a. Defining Shari'a as 'law' does not do justice to its function as a complete system of ethics. Shari'a is decentralised and local, leaving particular matters up to the interpretation of mullahs and rabbis. That Shari'a is not the same as state law and is more akin to common law is something that Max Weber acknowledges (Possamai 2015: 5).

Shari'a, like secular law, develops and changes throughout time in response to new circumstances, such as the fact that Muslims today confront difficulties that cannot be handled by looking backwards (Possamai 2015: 5). To comprehend the issue of power, one must comprehend Islamic theology, which is extreme monotheism. To prevent a single person from attaining power, it was necessary to accept plurality and, by extension, chance. The separation of topics of study and academic specialisation accompanied the rise of Islamic intellectual thinking. Due to their expertise, approach, stress on God's will, and commitment to textualism, they were accorded legitimacy and approval. In this manner, despite the absence of a single source of authority, it became feasible to assert with some confidence in Islam whether a person was authoritative and if their perspective was acceptable or standard. There are hazards associated with an adaptive system of authority: one extreme is a lack of structure, which makes authority ineffective, and the other extreme is an excess of structure, which converts authority into authoritarianism.

Law may assume many different shapes and sizes, and this fact has long been acknowledged, analysed, and theorised upon within the sociology of law. Eugen Ehrlich's ideas have been influential in shaping the concept of legal pluralism. The Austrian sociologist came up with the notion of 'living law' in reaction to the idea of a state-centric legal system. Based on the idea that law is inherently independent of the state, Ehrlich promotes what he calls a 'scientific view of law' that emphasises behavioural foundations. *Living law* posits that institutions and persons tasked with enforcing the law are not the only factors that influence and modify it. Understanding how social norms and cultural values mix with legal institutions and religious doctrine to produce oppressive conditions, this theory may be applied to the religious repression of Iranian women. Since the Islamic Republic adopted a strict interpretation of Shari'a law, human rights violations against women have been common in Iran, particularly in the areas of marriage, divorce, and inheritance, where women are systemically degraded and treated as second-class citizens. These norms are influenced by cultural and social traditions, as Ehrlich's concept of living law explains. In Iran, the legal position of women is strongly affected by conservative religious values. The belief that women should be submissive to men, for instance, is engrained in the Islamic regime's cultural and religious traditions and reflected in the laws that regulate women's rights and responsibilities. According to Ehrlich, the law is a fundamental component of every functional human society, since it is a matter of social

order that can be found wherever human beings congregate. These collective efforts to establish social order give rise to the origins of law. Therefore, normativity might be seen as synonymous with legality. To emphasise that such living law cannot be reduced to the formal norms of state law, whether codified or not, Ehrlich draws a distinction between choice norms and organisational norms. Professionally, lawyers are primarily concerned with criteria for making decisions. The sole reason these rules exist is to resolve disputes, and they only cover a tiny part of the legal system's background. The vast majority of conflicts in society are resolved outside of the judicial system.

Ehrlich argues that the internal/external rules of the numerous associations that make up the social fabric are what arrange social life via organisational norms. This is known as *functional fit,* which entails the interconnectivity and reciprocal support of diverse social institutions in the interest of social order. Many other kinds of organisations fall within this category, such as labour unions, religious communities, political parties, social movements, and others. Organisational norms, which play a crucial role in the regulation of social life, call for sanctions that are often much more effective in the event of infringement, such as the expulsion of recalcitrant members from the association concerned, while formal law, to which professional lawyers are solely devoted, remains conditioned by the physical coercion imposed by state courts. The influence of religious leaders and organisations reinforces this prejudice against women. By granting the religious establishment extensive control over Iranian legislation and policy, the government has effectively increased their dominance. Thus, orthodox religious organisations have been allowed to maintain their practices of discrimination against women. Examples include recent arrests and fines for women who violate gender stereotypes by, for instance, dancing in public or wearing a headscarf that does not comply with the government's strict clothing restrictions. The normative truths at the centre of social life, rather than the state, are the source of the legal authority by which law is established. Ehrlich's theories can be applied in the context to better understand the roots of religious repression against women in Iran.

According to Ehrlich's theory of functional fit, all social structures in society serve a beneficial purpose and contribute to the smooth operation of society. Women's repression in Iran is a joint effort of the state, religion, and the law. Using religion as a justification,

the government enacts and the legal system enforces restrictive restrictions that keep women in subservience and out of the public eye. Ehrlich's theory also emphasises the interdependence of several social institutions in maintaining social order. Cultural norms and customs in Iran frequently favour women's subjugation and are often in accordance with the government's and court system's support for the religious repression of women. As a result, women's rights and liberties are eroding, and they have less opportunity to criticise the status quo or participate in public life. Furthermore, Ehrlich recognises that social systems can evolve and change through time to satisfy changing needs. Despite substantial protest and efforts from women's rights advocates, Iran's Islamic oppression of women remain largely unaffected. This shows the interdependence of various social institutions in Iran, including the government, religion, and legal system, all of which promote patriarchal power structures that continue to exist despite efforts to remove them.

Ehrlich further argues civilians can find law in places besides the state, courts, and tribunals. That abstract legal ideas like contract, property, and sovereignty could be used to generate concrete legal propositions was a central tenet he disagreed with in Weber's theory. Given the extent to which living law is meant to serve its local community, he deduced that the purpose of law in every society is to create and preserve the order found in living law, making law a social reality above all else. Undoubtedly, in countries like Iran where Islam is the sole recognised state religion, Islamic law comes to dominate every field of social life, infiltrating every element of a citizen's existence. Pluralism exemplifies itself in the Iranian context when international law and Islamic law coexist, even if they find themselves in continuous conflict. By emphasising the relevance of social norms and cultural values in the formulation of *living law*, the theory explains how institutionalised religious views oppress women and impede gender equality in Iran. In the context of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we can push forward with Ehrlich's hypothesis that pluralism pits civil society against the nation-state.

1.4 Islamic Beliefs and the Intersection of Human Rights in Contemporary Iran

The intersectional method discussed previously is expanded upon in this subsection as the connection between Islam and human rights is examined. The common perception that Islam and human rights are incompatible at their core is challenged in this section.

Those who believe that Islam promotes human dignity, equality, and respect for basic freedoms counter others who believe that Islam is inherently incompatible with human rights ideals. Islam, according to scholars like Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im and Khaled Abou El Fadl, can be utilised equally to defend and oppose human rights. On the other hand, some academics argue that Islam is intrinsically violent, tyrannical, and incompatible with human rights. These people include Samuel P. Huntington, Daniel Pipes, Bassam Tibi, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, and Steven Emerson. This subsection aims to weigh these competing interpretations in order to grasp a better feel for the nuanced nature of Islam's place in the broader context of human rights and legal pluralism. As noted before in this thesis, this investigation is essential for comprehending how Islamic beliefs and practices interact with diverse legal systems to affect human rights in Muslim communities, especially in the context of Iran.

The junction of Islam and human rights has been a topic explored at length by many scholars over time. Certain individuals argue that religion is fundamentally inharmonious with the concept of human rights, but there are those who profess that it champions both dignity and respect for basic freedoms. Samuel P. Huntington argues that Islam is a violent religion, as bloodshed characterizes both its boundaries and interior (Huntington, 1996, p.39). Daniel Pipes similarly asserts that Islamic law contradicts human rights principles since it seeks to impose radical ideology on all of society (Pipes 2002: 18). Nonetheless, some scholars contend otherwise; Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im argues that promoting equality, freedom, and justice are fundamental tenets in the promotion and protection of human dignity within Islam-An-Naim clarifies despite any cultural or historical hindrance faced by Muslim societies does not mean internal compatibility with Human Rights has been compromised (An-Na'im 1990:158) An-Na'im further argues that while there may be cultural and historical factors that have hindered the implementation of human rights in Muslim societies, this does not mean that Islam itself is incompatible with human rights. Similarly, Khaled Abou El Fadl argues that "Islam, like any other religion, can be mobilised in different directions, and it can be used to support human rights as much as it can be used to oppose them" (Abou El Fadl, 2001:13). Abou El Fadl suggests that the interpretation of Islamic law can be flexible and evolve to better promote human rights. Bassam Tibi argues that "The human rights discourse is not only foreign to Islamic civilization but also incompatible with the basic values and principles of Islam" (Tibi, 1999, p. 18). Tibi suggests that the Islamic worldview is fundamentally different from the

Western conception of human rights and that this difference makes it difficult to reconcile the two. Similarly, Ayaan Hirsi Ali argues that "Islam is not a religion of peace, but a political ideology of conquest that aims to impose its hegemony over the entire world" (Ali 2015:97). Ali suggests that Islamic law, or Shari'a, is inherently oppressive towards women and minorities and that this makes it incompatible with human rights principles. She further suggests that the problem with Islam is not limited to a few extremist groups, but is a fundamental issue with the religion itself. Additionally, Steven Emerson argues that "Islam is not a 'religion of peace' in the conventional sense, but rather a doctrine of warfare" (Emerson 2002:20). Emerson suggests that Islamic law allows for violence and aggression against non-Muslims and that this is a major barrier to the promotion of human rights within Muslim societies. He further argues that Islam is a major source of terrorism and political violence in the world today.

An-Na'im affirms that he would always prioritise his commitment to religion over his commitment to human rights, but that, in theory, they should be able to exist in unison. In his view, believers should be empowered to uphold these human rights on religious grounds. An-Na'im defines *human rights* as "moral and political entitlements that are due to all human beings equally by virtue of their humanity, and without any distinction on such grounds as race, sex, religion, or national origin" (An-Na'i'm 2011:59). Humans are creatures of individual agency, who should be able to conform to the philosophy of human rights based on their own willingness to do so while being conducive in establishing an ever-evolving definition and lending a hand in ensuring its application on a localised level.

Individuals are assigned 'determined factors' upon their arrival on Earth, given that their place of birth, race, family income, and sex are matters of haphazard – one has no say over the psychological, social and economic factors that sway us (An-Na'im 2011:60). An-Na'im goes on to explain his perception of the 'internal life,' which he defines as the place where humans can find the courage to stand for their rights, taking the necessary risks to protect them. Moral courage assists in resisting oppression and negotiation (An-Na'im 2011:60). It can also be perceived as a way in which to propel others. However, everyone cannot be expected to defend their own rights, for victims may not have the means at their disposition to do so. This requires external resources and protection to step in when called upon to do so but can lead to the risk of becoming the object of others' advocacy rather than a subject. Religion is what An-na'im says is his source of courage.

His way of finding dignity and self-determination, knowing his rights, is fuelled by the support felt within the religious community he belongs to.

Shari'a law, An-Na'im goes on to explain, gradually evolved "during the first three centuries of Islam through human interpretations of the Qur'an and Sunna of Prophet" (An-Na'im 2011:63). The two work with one another by using the Qur'an as the base of law, and the Sunna (the hadith) to extract clarity and inspire direction when the Qur'an is not sufficiently clear. It came to be through the weaving together of Sunni and Shia customs and bodies of law. The divergences in their respective practices were accountable for a wide range of conceptions, meaning that any discrepancies in the law were then amended by "the founding jurists" who were then granted permission to apply "their independent juridical reasoning" (An-Na'i'm 2011:63). Furthermore, in times of doubt, scholars are permitted to fall back on local norms that can guide lawmakers to make the appropriate call under the principles of Utihad (An-Na'i'm 2011). This is known as itihad, but, predictably, uncountable amounts of itihad have, over the years, led to uncountable interpretations of what should and should not be considered acceptable under Islamic jurisprudence.

Throughout the colonial occupation of the Muslim world, Shari'a principles were uprooted by European-imposed legislation that promoted positive obligations of the State, like economic and social rights that require often extensive actions and expenditures to discharge the obligations that they impose. In essence, European mandates argued that natural rights were too abstract and that change could be made through positive rights and formal legislation. Kant's pamphlet 'Perpetual Peace' (Kant 1991) builds a theory of international liberalism in which all individuals have equal moral worth, and in which an abuse of rights in one part of the world is felt everywhere (Kant 1991). The core tenet of liberalism, in Kant's eyes, is that the promotion of human rights is inextricably linked to the promotion of democracy and good governance. Unless human rights values are embedded in state-based institutions, they will not be durable (Kant 1991). A widespread critique in international relations theory is that liberalism is, essentially, utopianism. The legal systems marked by colonialism often continue to enforce the policies prescribed to them, but it is necessary to note that Shari'a law governed the social and economic sectors in both pre and post-colonialist societies (An-Na'i'm 2011).

As for the current discourse on human rights and Islam, An-Na'im explores a key controversy which exists among scholars of Islam and human rights. He draws on the work of Mawdudi (1976), who offers an infamous critique of 'western' human rights in favour of an Islamic-specific conception. He argues that the western conception of human rights is limited in theory and hypocritical in practice, asserting that Islam established human rights many centuries before the West and according to a much superior conception. The right to life, security, freedom, and justice are basic Islamic rights, in his view, 'human rights in Islam' are conferred by God, and cannot be withdrawn, amended, or changed by any government or legislative assembly in the world. Contributing to this debate, An- Na'im argues against the statement:

There is no practical or realistic way of forcing governments to uphold rights simply because some scholars say God has decreed those rights. If governments are made to do this out of fear of political opposition, then how is that different from the model of "Western democracy" that Mawdudi rejected? (An-Na'im, 2011:64)

To refer to Islam in a very general sense, like the way that Mawdudi (1976) does, can be deceitful when taking into account the vast spectrum of diverging schools of Islamic jurisprudence. Other scholars such as Baderin (2005) add to this and discuss the view that the West deem Islam incompatible with human rights law. He supports An-Na'im in saying that human rights law can be compatible with Islamic law and that there is a necessity for open dialogue to find a common ground. There has been a call for a critical study of the Qurʾan and a re-evaluation of human rights from an Islamic perspective made by several scholars. He groups this under the subheading of 'progressive Islam'. Omid Safi, one of the founders of this approach, argues that "being a Muslim means affirming the humanity of all human beings, regardless of their religion, race, gender, and other factors" (An-Na'i'm 2011:65). He calls for the practice and positive use of ijtihad to promote a critical and progressive interpretation of Islam that enforces justice and equality worldwide.

A paradox is thus born between insisting on the right of Muslims to assert a religious foundation for human rights, without being able to establish the existence of such

a foundation in current Islamic discourse on human rights (An-Na'i'm 2011:60). There is no alternative to accepting people's own foundations for human rights, so, whatever difficulty may arise in grounding human rights in religion must be addressed. There is a blatant need to 'reframe' the human rights project: focusing on transforming the attitudes of Muslims regarding the social and religious meaning of human rights, and not in terms of the application of Shari'a as the established law of the state (An-Na'i'm 2011:66). While human rights may undeniably be rooted in religious reasoning for many, they should not infiltrate entirely at the governmental level. An-Na'im puts forth that "Shari'a can only be freely observed by believers, and its principles lose their religious authority and value when they are enforced by the State" (An-Na'im 2011:67). There is an ever-present urgency to deconstruct the relationship between human rights, and Shari'a and governance to juxtapose the two; however, "such legislation will be difficult for the general population to resist or even debate when state law is presented as a divine command" (An-Na'i'm 2011:67). The way forward is by reconfiguring the positive elements of rooting human rights in religion, not a state-based and realist one.

1.5 The Contested Concept of Islamic Feminism: An Overview of Its Origins, Controversies, and Contributions to Women's Rights in Iranian and Muslim Societies

Islamic feminism has been the subject of significant controversy in recent years, with scholars and activists studying whether or not feminist principles are consistent with Islamic teachings. In an effort to oppose patriarchal practices and establish gender equality within the Islamic setting, Islamic feminism promotes a feminist interpretation of Islamic scripture and law. Some individuals assert that Islamic teachings are incompatible with feminism, but others say that feminism is an essential component of Islam. utilising Iran as a case study, this part will investigate the historical evolution of Islamic feminism, its guiding principles and objectives, and the reception and execution of these ideas in contemporary Muslim nations. We will examine the difficulties that have been addressed and the criticisms that have been levelled against Islamic feminism by both traditionalists and secular feminists. The efforts of Islamic feminist movements and intellectuals to advance gender equality within the Islamic framework and to combat patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings will also be explored. Secondly, we will examine how Islamic feminism has altered things for Muslim women and how it might change things for women everywhere in Muslim societies.

In the waning years of the nineteenth century and the beginning decades of the twentieth, there arose a powerful countermovement against colonialism and an equally potent wave of nationalism sweeping across Muslim nations. It was from within these turbulent times that Islamic feminism emerged as a force to be reckoned with. The goal of this movement is to harmonise feminist concepts with Islam (Badran, 2006). Prominent Muslim feminists like Qasim Amin in Egypt and Fatima Mernissi in Morocco spearheaded the first wave of Islamic feminism, which was defined by the fight for women's education and suffrage (Badran, 2006). The 1980s saw the emergence of a second wave of Islamic feminism, one that attempted to remove not just the legal and political obstacles to women's equality but also the social, economic, and cultural ones (Barlas 2002). Both secular feminist thought and practice and Islamic reform movements like the Islamic revivalism of the 1970s and 1980s inspired this tidal wave (Barlas, 2002). As a movement that challenges patriarchal readings of Islamic scriptures and traditions while also advocating for gender equality and justice within a religious context, Islamic feminism has been a powerful agent of change in Muslim communities (Abu-Lughod, 2002). Yet, it has been met with resistance from conservative and traditionalist groups who see it as a challenge to established gender roles and family structures and a departure from genuine Islamic principles (Badran 2006). Due to this, Islamic feminists have debated whether Islamic feminism should be founded on a critical engagement with Islamic sources and traditions or a more extreme rejection of them (Barlas 2002). In sum, Islamic feminism is a significant and nuanced junction of Islamic teachings and feminist ideals, and it continues to expand and affect debates about gender and Islam in Muslim cultures and beyond (Abu-Lughod 2002).

The study of Islamic feminism is paramount because the intertwined relationship between religion, politics and gender in nations with a Muslim tradition necessitates it. The fight for women's rights within Islam is at the heart of this movement that stands against conservative, patriarchal interpretations of Shari'a law. Kassam (2017) argues that Islamic feminism comprises various ideas employing religious teachings to promote equal opportunities for females; thus, studying its history offers insight into how Muslim women have tackled oppressive perceptions regarding their role under Islam while fighting diligently for equality from within entrenched socio religious framework. Notably significant among these countries where change has been sought through activism are those like Iran whose adoption of Shari'a Law post-1979 Revolution stripped Iranian females'

liberties drastically as previously alluded to. Yet these same oppressed groups rallied together utilising 'Islamic Feminism' - by uniting – to voice disapproval over repressive government policies whilst challenging orthodox beliefs about subjugation supported by some quarters invoking faith itself. Mir-Hosseini's work on feminist movements contends further stating how use and promotion based on principles & thought processes connected or affiliated with Islamic tenets can bypass established male-centric ideologies thereby leading towards substantial benefits In seeking out strategies adopted By female activists who worked tirelessly^and still push today way beyond legalistic mechanisms alone illustrates just why deeper understanding related-to-the many varied methods used must remain front-and-centre-of such scholarship now more than ever before given impact made historically: A powerful campaigner empowering Women alike-Islamic feminisms symbolism far-reaching drawing strength-as-it-does-from-women& men-alike both converts-and otherwise-inside-borders-Iran offering hope dignity Liberty.& Justice across socio-religious strata remains essential not only-scholarly endeavours but also in real-life scenarios around the world wherever misinterpretations of patriarchy place constraints upon half population globally imperative ideological debate centred-around-feminist concepts transcends nationalities boundaries themselves.

In Iran, both religious and secular women who seek equality within the limitations of the Qur'an have made Islamic feminism the dominant paradigm (Ansary 2015: 138). Islamic feminism strives to disrupt established gender theories inscribed in religious scripture that objectify women and justify their belittlement and degradation. (Ansary 2015: 138). Women have always been a sensitive talking point in Islam and Islamic feminism is oftentimes viewed as an oxymoron more than a political theory. Is it possible to absorb the words of the Qur'an and personify what it means to be a feminist simultaneously? The term itself finds its origins in Iran around the turn of the 20th century when magazines began to point out how sexist interpretations of the Qur'an had seeped themselves into written law. *Zanān* Magazine (Women in Farsi) was founded in 1992 by Shahla Sherkat in Iran, who had initially supported the Revolution efforts before realising she, as well as many others, had been deceived. She campaigned in favour of feminism within an Islamic framework and helped spread the term *Islamic feminism* like wildfire.

Afsaneh Najmabadi and Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Iranian academics at the time, have been associated with the phrase, as they took pride in conceptualising a vision of feminism

that enveloped Iran. Islamic feminism demands a reading of Islam free from gender discrimination to effectively provide a pathway for the evolution of the status of women in countries dominated by Islam. It aims to benefit both men and women, releasing them from the shackles of sexist prejudices incited by religion. Islamic feminism was born as a means of encouraging women's agency onto the playing field. Women were significant in the 1979 Revolution in Iran, hoping that the removal of the monarchy would allow them to voice their concerns to the newly blossoming Islamic Republic and have these queries integrated into the rules of law. Muslim women who have made significant contributions to the feminist movement in Islam come from a variety of academic backgrounds, with some holding advanced degrees in the humanities or hard sciences while others specialising in religious studies. Amina Wadud, an African-American theologian and convert to Islam, was an early adopter of this movement of reinterpretation of texts, along with many other intellectuals from the Arab and Muslim worlds, such as Asma Barlas. These academics attempted to combine both the theoretical groundwork of the Islamic Regime, which cited the Qur'an as the only veritable authority and the needs of women who, while committed to their religious identities, were discriminated against under Shari'a law. Theories are born out of a need for change, and in the case of Islamic feminism, the catalyst was a compulsion to give men and women equal footing in the Muslim world. As Stephanie Latte Abdallah says, there is a need to divorce the idea "of female emancipation as contingent upon some form of secularisation" (Latte Abdallah 2010:20).

These Islamic feminists view the Qur'an as dynamic rather than static, arguing that certain claims made within it need to be challenged unequivocally. This is clear, for instance, with polygamy or with the practice of *daraba*, in which a man physically abuses his wife. Surah An-Nisa 4:34 of the Qurʾan:

> (4:34) Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has made one of them excel over the other, and because they spend out of their possessions (to support them). Thus righteous women are obedient and guard the rights of men in their absence under Allah's protection. As for women of whom you fear rebellion, admonish them, and remain apart from them in beds, and **beat** them. Then if they obey you, do not seek ways to harm them. Allah is Exalted, Great.

has a long history of sparking controversy amongst feminist and human rights scholars. The line of content allows for a degree of *daraba,* which, depending on the translation, can be interpreted in a multitude of ways– the most common of which grants men permission to beat disobedient wives. Amina Wadud, an American theologian and author; however, initially explored the word's polysemy in her first book, with one of *daraba*'s meanings being 'to depart,' and then thoroughly refuted the idea in her second, Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam (2006), in line with the egalitarian principles and spirit of the Qur'anic text (Badran, 2010).

Azza Karam (1997) argues that Islamic feminists are so controversial because they themselves are conscious of the discrimination faced by women, both across the Muslim world and in the diaspora, and make it their mission to dismantle the obstacles they face through Islam and its teachings. To a certain degree, they associate the hardships faced by women with their insistence on placing themselves on equal ground as men, rather than considering themselves as complementary beings. These Islamic feminists, as Karam explains, consider that a true and dignified Islamic society would ultimately address the queries of women and contribute to their well-being and empowerment. For Islamic feminists, the way for a given government to move forward is already spelt out in the principles of Islamic jurisprudence. They argue that Islamic readings are susceptible to evolving mindsets to please the status quo of different time periods, given that the hierarchy principles of Islam are rooted in promoting peace and causing no harm to others.

The same ideas have been used to push for women's equal rights. As many Muslim scholars have sought to explain, the advancement of women was critical to Islam's fundamental message. According to Leila Ahmed, the moral rulings recommending the impartial treatment of women were parts of the Islamic message that were ignored in the body of laws that took shape in the Abbasid dynasty and subsequent eras (Ahmed 2021). The specific substance of the laws formed from the Qur'an depended largely on the interpretation the lawmakers chose to adopt and the components of the complex expressions they chose to prioritise (Ahmed 2021). Ahmed contends that the Qur'an and various hadiths teach that men and women are equal in God's eyes and that all humanity must meet the same moral standards (Ahmed 2021). An egalitarian perspective of human

biology is provided throughout the Qur'an and hadiths, with both the male and female playing an equal role in the process of conception. Because of these and other elements, many people believe that Islam offers a moral code founded on the idea of gender equality (Ahmed 2021).

Just as there are thousands of ways to interpret the teachings of the Qur'an, there are thousands of ways to fight for the advancement of women. Universalism shrouds the public from being able to associate the two, and while the theory is still gaining traction, it has and continues to face serious resistance. The term is controversial on many ends, with some scholars believing that it undermines Islam by coupling it with a liberal interpretation of feminism, while others cannot fathom how the two concepts could ever be juxtaposed.

Prior to the 1979 Revolution, Iran was eyed by the rest of the world as a hub of cultural progress, where women were shedding their hijabs in favour of mini-skirts. The Shah's vision for Iran was one of modernity and westernisation, but to what extent does the amount of skin a woman is permitted to flaunt correlate with her state's levels of development (Rahbari et. al 2019)? This period was monumental for laying the bedrock of Islamic Feminism, as it associated modernity with the rejection of Islamic traditions. Leila Ahmed puts forth that this phenomenon is nothing but a guise for colonialism to infiltrate the minds of Islamic thinkers (Ahmed 2021). Ahmed depicts a fork in the road in Islam that provides for two distinct interpretations of gender and gender discrimination in the context of religion. The first path embodies social norms, codes, and regulations (Ahmed 2021). These regulations go on to influence politics and monopolise legal debates, while the other path involves an ethical approach. This second path is attributed to the ethics of Islam, and the interpretations of it that differ from that of present lawmakers. According to Ahmed and other feminist scholars, In other passages in the Qur'an and the hadiths, an egalitarian perspective of human biology shines through, in terms of male and female contribution to conception (Ahmed 2021). These and other elements have given rise to a widespread belief that it is inherent in Islam a spiritual and ethical message inspired by the concept of gender equality. It is this egalitarian reading of the text that explains how Islamic feminism qualifies as a philosophical belief. On a similar note, Ahmed constructs a vision of two feminisms: one derived from the west that finds solace in secularism and

western ideology, and one that challenges it head-on by giving a voice to feminists who ground themselves in the teachings of the Qur'an (Ahmed 2021).

Ahmed suggests that an unbiased reading of the Qur'an exists, one where women and men are considered each other's equals; however, the parts of the text emphasised in public policy were chosen at the discretion of lawmakers. In the same realm of thought, Asma Barlas is fighting to popularise an antisexist reading of the Qur'an (Ahmed 2021). According to her, Muslim women should not be made to erase their religious identity in order to conform to secular feminism. Barlas argues that "In a sense, then, it is the very inclusivity of feminism—its attempt, as a meta and master narrative, to subsume and assimilate all conversations about equality—that I find both imperialising and reductive" (Sirri 2021:26). She directs her attention towards reforming the standard reading of Islam. According to Barlas, both the Qur'an and diverse passages from the hadiths narrate worlds where men and women are seen as equals in front of God. Similarly, Wadud claims that God's purpose in placing humans on Earth was to personify his beliefs and actions, then any so-called sexist passages in the Qurʾān are not divine, but dependent on the continuation and evolution of the passage of time. She further claimed that the Qur'an actually encouraged gender equality inside the family, the workplace, and the religious community as a whole. The act of deciphering the Qurʾān in a new light aligns with Islamic feminist ideals, as it strives to redefine the sacred text and empower Muslim women. This approach acknowledges that liberation can be achieved without forsaking one's cultural identity or embracing Western political ideologies. Its ultimate aim is to elevate female voices within Islam while fostering autonomy and genuine representation for all members of this community.

Outside of the interpretative construction of such works and texts, the question of how widely these works and reference books are read, how much of an influence they have, and how much religious authority they serve to build for women arises. Islamic feminists' work has long been criticised by Islamic academics and ignored by reformists, but it has piqued the interest of secular or religious feminists, as well as a few rare intellectuals specialising in Islam (Badran 2010). While these scholars base their work on several scriptures, including the Qur'an, the hadith, and the fiqh, they ultimately rely on the Qur'an as the ultimate authority. This makes it easier for them to criticise texts that are the creation

of jurists (the fiqh) or that have been transmitted through a human channel (religious tradition), and the sayings of the Prophet (the hadith) (Badran 2010). Therefore, the essential distinction between Shari'a, the way that God revealed to the prophet via the Qur'an, and fiqh, the attempts by mankind to interpret this route into legal standards, was first re-established. Shari'a is the law God delivered to the prophet Muhammad (Mir-Hosseini 2010).

Feminist theologians are competing intellectually to establish themselves as leaders in the religious community, gain recognition, and secure a position within existing institutions. One of the most crucial issues facing these Qur'anic interpreters is determining whether the holy text can have an exact meaning or whether the text already conveys an intrinsic, basic meaning that interpreters merely fill in. Despite this, Ahmed, Barlas', Webb and Wadud's dedication to reworking our understanding of the Qur'an is riddled with fallacies. Karen Bauer refutes Barlas's claims that the methodology of other Muslim feminists calls into doubt the divine origin of the Qur'an. According to Bauer, "To read some of the verses as though they are in conflict with others seems, to me, to discount the cohesiveness of the text" (Bauer 2016:127). Feminist interpreters, according to Hidayatullah's analysis, pay close attention to the historical context of the language and evolution of the Qur'an, and they separate the universal moral principles of the Qur'an from its particular and contextual utterances, but, "to state, as Barlas does, that the text makes no reference to sex or gender inequality, is to ignore the verses that enshrine such inequality" (Bauer 2016:127).

Meaning is, inevitably, shaped by its context (Bauer 2015:19). Each interpreter reflects the gender roles and expectations of their time. Factors like individual thinking, ethical concerns, cultural customs, and reliance on scientific arguments all play a role in shaping these perspectives (Bauer 2015). On the other hand, as Bauer points out, by analysing these works, we may see broader tendencies (Bauer 2015: 24). Islamic feminists who normalise the more sexist views inscribed in the Qur'an are at conflict not only with those of their forebears but also, more importantly, with the Qur'anic narrative itself. Azizah Al Hibri, the first Muslim American woman to hold a position as a law professor in an American university, claims that patriarchal attitudes towards women in Islam are deeply ingrained, exacerbated by traditional ijtihad doctrines which aim to maintain gender

imbalances and subordinate women within society (Al-Hibri 2000). As more men relay the ropes of ijtihad to one another, female empowerment grows contradictory to public advancement (Al-Hibri 2000).

The most persistent problem within the Islamic feminism discussion is the tendency to dismiss all standardised readings of the Qur'an without basing their writing on any fundamental work (Jawad 2003:124). Naturally, all interpretations of the Qur'an will be personalised to the reader, but there is a dangerous line between challenging the patriarchal lens that typically dominates the conversation to women the chance to become more involved in their religious journeys, and assuming that the Qur'an is in place to benefit the advancement of women. Nonetheless, the Islamic Feminist perspective offers a contemporary reading that attempts to "restore the humane aspect of Islam which underpins Islamic social justice for all human beings" (Jawad 2003:124).

Chapter 2:

Patriarchal Continuity and Political Instrumentalization: A Historical and Political Inquiry Into the Endurance of Religious Gender Apartheid in Iran From the Pahlavi Regime to the Islamic Republic

Forty-four years after the foundation of the Islamic Republic, questions remain about the nature of a government that calls itself both a republic and an Islamic government while being neither (Shirali 2015:xiii). The unpopularity of the Shiite clergy has augmented incrementally since their establishment, as the fraudulent nature of the Ayatollahs began to unravel. Religion and women have been used, historically in Iran, as a means of political social control in which religion makes hidden deals with the political establishment. The government adopts forceful methods to ensure the continued dominance of religion regardless of the guaranteed backlash. This chapter will go on to explore not only the historical and political motives for making women into political weapons but also the international human rights declarations that the Islamic Republic has either refused to ratify or entirely disregarded despite its signature being present.

2.1 Persia Transformed: A Historical and Political Analysis of Iran Under the Pahlavi Dynasty

Exploring the Socio-Political and Historical Landscape of Iran During the Reign of the Pahlavi Dynasty: An Analysis of the Domestic and International Factors that Shaped the Iranian Political and Social Identity from 1925-1979.

Women and gender are the subjects of one of the most acrimonious and passionate disputes in post-revolutionary Iran. This topic presents a direct danger to the Islamic Republic since gender issues play a significant part in the regime's self-understanding. Those who share this view think that women are bound by God to assume the roles of housewife and mother, to labour mostly inside the home, and to have minimal legal rights outside of the realm of their male relatives. Numerous regime ideologues feel that the ideal Islamic society is one in which men and women do not associate outside the house. Women's agency has historically been at the forefront of Iran's agenda, both before and

after the Islamic Revolution and while manipulated in contrasting ways, women have perpetually been a source of power for those steering the country. Either to access advantageous allies in the West or to maintain the reigns of power by oppressing, and ultimately covering, half of the population. Overall, "there exists a general consensus in Iran that whatever the legacy of the revolution's political agenda or economic goals, its deepest impact will be on Iran's social order. Such a prediction is most relevant when observing Iran's women" (Vakil 2011:14). Azar Nafisi mirrors this sentiment, by saying that "If you want to know how much a society is changing, look at the women" (Vakil 2011:14).

In 1936, Reza Shah Pahlavi adopted his most unorthodox policy: the abolition of the hijab and all female veiling. Numerous secular and metropolitan women in the nation applauded this notion, but it eventually harmed the women's rights movement as a whole by eliminating freedom of expression, an essential element of religious identity that, while influenced by Western ideals, is in itself a form of religious repression targeting half of the country's population. Most women who identified as feminists at the time supported the policy because they viewed it as a progressive and effective way in which to combat clerical sexism head-on, whilst the ulema has used the order to imply that the women's movement aims to disrobe women, stripping them of what they consider morals and purity. The regulation had a minimal direct impact on the lives of rural women given the state's limited presence in agrarian areas and the fact that they continued to wear traditional attire despite intensified police presence in metropolitans where "there were occasional instances of authorities resorting to beating a woman or removing her veil by force" (Ansary 2015:44). This, in contrast with the Iran of the present day, where Jina (Mahsa) Amini was brutally beaten to death by morality police in September of 2022 for not covering every last strand of her hair with her state-mandated hijab, exemplifies the extreme lengths, both past and present, taken to puppeteer women for whatever the interest of the state may be during the timeframe.

The blockade on the hijab was not necessarily adopted to grant women greater personal freedom but to place Iran on the world stage, and grant Reza Shah more leeway when dealing with foreign affairs. Ashraf Pahlavi, Reza Shah's daughter, affirmed that her father

[...] was determined to westernise Persia… to bring it into the twentieth century…To do this, to make [Persia] prosperous and powerful, he could not afford to leave out women. (Ansary 2015:44)

Reza Shah understood that he could use exploit women's rights to his advantage, gaining respect from the West, even if he himself admitted that asking his daughter and wife to remove their hijabs in the public eye for the first time was "[...] the hardest thing [he] ever had to do," but that it was ultimately necessary to plant the seeds of change, to exemplify, to the rest of his country, what he believed was the future for Persian women in order to become a World power (Ansary 2015:44). Sanam Vakil (2011) asserts that as a result, many individuals felt compelled to avoid public activities. According to Vakil (2011), the regulation forbidding the veil and its stringent enforcement not only failed to offer absolute freedom to women of the lowest classes but also pushed many to entrust their husbands and children with traditionally performed public responsibilities. Sedghi echoes this sentiment, claiming that

In Iran, unveiling and re-veiling policies represented the two sides of the same coin. Both policies were coercive, and both used women's bodies by unveiling and re-veiling them for specific political objectives. This process involved power struggles among men to enhance their own sense of politics and masculinity. (Sedghi 2020:103)

From that moment forward, wearing a veil was viewed as a show of dignity and support of tales favouring old rites, as opposed to a sign of cultural inferiority in comparison to Western standards. For other women, the veil has grown to symbolise rebellion against what they see to be a colonial onslaught and Western control. Nevertheless, notwithstanding Reza Shah Pahlavi's efforts, the secularisation of education and the encouragement of women to enter the workforce had far more to do with a modernization agenda connected with Western perspectives than with female independence or a movement in social status.

Despite the fact that secularisation made education and economic possibilities more crucial for the country's growth, Iranian women continued to fulfil their primary responsibilities as wives and mothers. It was evident that a cultural and social split still existed, even though societal change was making dramatic leaps forward from a legal perspective. Women's education was vital for Iran since it would contribute to the welfare of future generations. The formation of a modern nation-state was thus contingent on women's access to paid employment and social involvement. In spite of the Shah's efforts to modernise the country, women were expected to continue doing traditional housewife duties since his changes were cosmetic and had not yet permeated the fundamental gender patterns in society.

After ascending to power in 1942, his son and successor, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, popularly referred to as *the Shah* (King), took more forceful action, stringing women's rights efforts together to fuel his dominion. His reign saw a streamlined modernization programme based on Western models, which the clergy saw as detrimental to the Islamic community. In turn, the confrontation between the clergy and the state intensified discernibly. In 1966, the government rebranded the small number of existing women's organisations "the Iranian Women's Organisation," with the Shah's sister at its helm. Women's liberation and family law reform remained at the forefront of the struggle for women's rights. Women's enfranchisement came to be in 1963, against the wishes of many religious groups. The first major overhaul of family law occurred in 1967 with the passage of the Family Protection Act and its subsequent amendment in 1975, which represented a watershed point. This legislation revised the regulations of polygamy, divorce, and shared parental responsibility for young children. Polygamous marriage cases are now heard in family court, and polygamous marriages needed approval from either a judge or the previous wife. Advancements in family law revealed that there are ways for asserting the legitimacy of rights, albeit with various degrees of success depending on the social, legal, and religious constraints existing in each country. The clergy actively opposed the Pahlavi-era programme and the Family Protect Law changes issued by Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi were heavily criticised for being anti-Islamic and intended to separate Muslim spouses. These accusations were made because, under the altered law, mothers were granted the legal right to seek divorce and child custody if their children so choose.

The Shah's efforts to extend its legislation's influence outside the city lines became a defining characteristic of his reign. In addition to continuing to invest in an authoritarian state and openness to be vulnerable to growing foreign influence, the monarch pursued a dominant and hegemonic approach, co-opting the social structure in his favour; this, in turn, impacted and was influenced by gender discourses. (Sedghi 2020:101) Sedghi asserts that the Iranian government's efforts to elevate the position of women resulted in a reorganisation of patriarchal relationships in Iranian families, businesses, and schools. The government frequently associated economic disparity with gender inequality, resulting in the misconception that monetary action would be sufficient to remedy the issue. Relationships with the Pahlavi government, which established policies and supported or discouraged political engagement, legislation, and social control, influenced the social position of women. The manipulation of gendered issues is a means by which the state seeks legitimacy and, at times, gives it continuity and maintains its authority, both within the confines of the country, and by construing an unparalleled image for itself on the world stage.

In an effort to construct the image of a modern and democratic country to use as leverage against other world powers, the Iranian State began marketing itself on the basis of women's issues. Women are, of course, strategic in establishing and eliminating international relations. In the wake of the White Revolution of 1963, the Iranian State began to market itself on the basis of women's issues as a strategy to establish and eliminate international relations. According to Ansary (2015), women's suffrage had been requested as early as 1951 and 1952, but it was not granted until the White Revolution. This revolution marked the beginning of the Shah's approach to expediting change in the kingdom, which was far more decisive and effective than that of his father. The Shah's policies were characterised by privatisation and women's authority, as noted by Sedghi (2007). The Shah's concern was most of all with maintaining contact with middle- and upper-class women since they were the most likely to gain from his legislative projects, which aimed to modernise the nation on a national scale. To further consolidate women's demands and depoliticize them, the centralization of women's organisations was the next step toward uniting leadership, as noted by Paidar (1995). Despite the government-controlled women's groups remaining and affecting women's activities for

decades, various 1940s-era organisations were targeted for elimination in the early 1950s as a result of the Shah's intense antipathy against independent parties. In essence, women's petitions were only vested as long as their aims were consistent with those of the Pahlavi administration. To oversee the nineteen independent groups, the Federation of Women's Movement was created in 1959, which subsequently developed into the High Council of Iranian Women, holding far greater influence, as noted by Haeri (1997). From 1966 through 1978, Mahnaz Afkhami served as a major official for the Iranian Women's Organization (WOI), the successor organisation, as noted by Mir-Hosseini (1999). The marketing of women's issues by the Iranian state was a strategic move in establishing and eliminating international relations. The objective of the Shah's strategies was to update the country on a comprehensive level, emphasising communication retention with women from affluent social statuses. The centralization of women's organisations was done to unite leadership and depoliticize women's demands. The High Council of Iranian Women held significant influence, and Mahnaz Afkhami served as a major official for the successor organisation, the Iranian Women's Organization.

During the reign of the Shah, the Women's Organization of Iran (WOI) saw a substantial rise in its influence as the state continued to increase the number of women in executive roles and postings, extending women's opportunities in the public realm, and even appointing female judges (Afary 1996:38). However, Sedghi (2013) argues that the state exploited women's problems as part of the westernisation narrative, using women's issues to promote Iran's modernization efforts on an international level. Sedghi (2013) also contends that the WOI's focus on charity activities and the formation of professional units rather than addressing structural problems facing society limited the organisation's impact on bringing about structural change for women's issues. Despite criticism from Shia theologians, the state continued to enact legislation to protect women's rights. In 1975, legislation was enacted protecting parental rights for women, loosening limitations on abortion, and making the surgery-free for anybody who sought it. In the same year, Mahnaz Afkhami was appointed to lead the fight for the advancement of women's rights (Ansary 2015: 57). Afkhami emphasised a connection between her work and the increasing number of global discussions on women's and men's roles in society, which she believed to be a result of the modernization-driven trends. The role of men in positions of authority also played a significant factor in women's rights. Historically, women's demands were

more likely to be granted with the facility if men in positions of authority backed them and saw potential in them based on their personal ascents to power. In other words, despite advancements in gender roles, women remained powerless until they acquired legal safeguards (Sedghi 2020:103). In summary, the state's exploitation of women's issues for modernization efforts and the WOI's limited impact in addressing structural problems faced by society highlights the need for continued efforts to protect and advance women's rights. Despite advancements, legal safeguards remain crucial for women to achieve empowerment and true equality.

Following Reza Shah Pahlavi's ousting in 1979, the Islamic Republic administration quickly implemented discriminatory measures that reversed any progress made in women's rights over the previous seventy-five years, despite the fact that some women played crucial roles in the revolutionary process that led to the formation of the new government (Ansary 2015:82). The new regime's cultural and religious conservatives saw women's status as a crucial issue, which was used to win over their support before the creation of a new Constitution (Ansary 2015, p. 82). Under Ayatollah Khomeini's rule, the political system adopted a two-tiered structure. The supreme leader, who legitimised his rule through supernatural power, headed the powerful theocratic structure, while the smaller democratic structure was made up of the presidency and parliament (Abghari 2008). According to Abghari (2008), the supreme leader's power is absolute, and he reports to no one. The twelve members of the Council of Guardians, who serve as constitutional guardians, ensure that any legislation passed by the elected parliament is in line with their interpretation of Islam (Abghari 2008). Although the President, Parliament, and Assembly of Experts are elected by the people, they have the authority to determine who can and cannot run for office. The Supreme Leader is also responsible for appointing or approving the armed personnel forces, the head of the judicial system, the Council of Discernment, and forming the Council, which means that the Iranian government and parliament are largely controlled by an unelected elite (Abghari 2008). In essence, the political and religious control established under Khomeini's regime had an immediate and profound impact on democracy and women's rights, resulting in the complete reversal of any progress made in the preceding seventy-five years (Ansary 2015:82).

According to Ansary (2015:90), the implementation of Shari'a law, which promotes male dominance in all areas of life, was a key factor in the re-Islamization of Iranian society and the relegation of women to subordinate positions. The introduction of repressive measures and a national purification campaign intensified this process. One of the most significant changes made to the Constitution was the reduction of the age of majority for girls to nine years old and for boys to 14 years old, as Ansary (2015:90) notes. It was thus made possible for girls as young as nine years old to be wedded if they have engaged in wrongdoing that merits adult punishment. Ayatollah Khomeini furthered the idea of women's inferiority by declaring their incompetence in serving as judges, and how two female witnesses' testimonies equate only to one male witness (Sedghi 2020:104). This was followed by the separation of beaches, public transit, and athletic events between men and women, according to Sedghi (2020:104). In 1979, a constitutional amendment granted men the unilateral right to polygamy and divorce, as well as parental authority and responsibility as the head of the household (Ansary 2015:91). Severe consequences were enforced for those who defied the mandate of wearing a veil. As noted by Welle (2020), in 1983, females who left their hair uncovered received a sentence to endure 74 lashes; whereas fourteen years later, individuals failing to comply with this regulation could face imprisonment for up to two months long. Women convicted of prostitution or adultery face the death penalty, stoning, or beating. Women from modern, westernised middle-class backgrounds who did not comply with the Islamist moral code were effectively forced to withdraw from public life if they disagreed, according to Ansary (2015:91). These women ensured the advancement of the latter, who were typically from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, had lower levels of education and were more committed to traditional customs and beliefs. The jihadist women who allied themselves with power by claiming to be the legitimate successors of the Revolution also realised that all women, regardless of their beliefs or backgrounds, were impacted by the defeats (Ansary 2015:91).

As aforementioned, one of the first discriminatory measures adopted against women was a ban on female judges working in the administrative services of the Ministry of Justice. The feminist newspaper Zanan began the first public debate on the right of women to be judges in 1992 (Ansary 2015:9). This disagreement was shortly followed by another, this time over who can become a mujtahid (the title offered to clerics with the authorization to interpret sacred texts) (Abghari 2008). Due to the Islamic system, only the

mujtahid is entitled to function as a judge, and only the faqih (the highest level of mujtahid) is permitted to propose the modification of existing laws or the creation of new ones (Abghari 2008). Since they were taken up by the women's press as a whole and afterwards by women deputies in the Majles, these debates have never left the public sphere and include all of civil society's actors. Within two weeks of assuming office, the Supreme Revolutionary Leader Ayatollah Khomeini revoked the Family Protection Law (Ansary 2015:91).

It is Ebadi's stance that the laws in Iran not only infringe upon human rights but also maintain a practice of gender bias within their legal system. Amongst some of the earliest discriminatory actions taken against women was barring them from serving as judges for administrative services under the Ministry of Justice. A prominent advocate for human rights and Nobel Peace Prize winner, Shirin Ebadi delves into much detail on this topic regarding discrimination towards Iranian women while discussing her own personal experiences with it. In "Until We Are Free," she recounts her experience as a female judge before the revolution, stating that "when the Islamic Republic came to power, I was relieved of my post as a judge solely on the grounds of gender" (Ebadi 2016: 16). This personal experience highlights the initial discriminatory measure adopted against women and the exclusion of women from key positions of power. Furthermore, Ebadi goes on to describe how the changes in the legal system impacted her own family. She states that after the revolution, her sister, who was a prosecutor, was also dismissed from her position and replaced by a male prosecutor (Ebadi 2016: 16). This not only affected her sister's livelihood but also highlights the broader issue of how these legal changes impacted women's economic empowerment and independence. Ebadi also describes how the legal changes affected her own clients. Having worked as a lawyer specialising in human rights, she was well aware of how discriminatory laws can affect women. She narrates an incident where a woman who faced domestic violence and rape at the hands of her husband could not seek separation due to legally sanctioned restrictions imposed on them, stating that "it was only after her husband granted her a divorce that she was able to get custody of her children and start a new life" (Ebadi 2016: 42). Ebadi's individual encounters and narratives are an invaluable source of understanding regarding the consequences legal alterations have had on women's rights in Iran. The musings she pens underscore several

means by which these civil liberties were impeded, as well as their detrimental influence on female economic self-determination, vocational aspirations, and fair play.

By abolishing gender equality, the state promotes an Islamic identity that is intrinsically anti-imperialist and anti-Western, while simultaneously contributing to the invisibility of women's bodies, gender segregation, and institutionalised injustice (Sedghi 2020:104). Similarly, the regulation of women's bodies benefits patriarchal power systems. The veil regulates the sexuality of women while affirming the chaste and submissive demeanour demanded of all of them by those in power (Sedghi 2020:103). Given that the Islamic Republic depicts the subordinate position of women and the veil as core characteristics, any change would pose a threat to the homeostasis of the system. While the problem of women in Iran has religious roots, it is also fundamentally political and intrinsically linked to the regime's sense of identity (Sedghi 2020:103). Similarly to how the regulations governing women enforced by Mohammad Reza Shah were depicted as a threat to national security, women are the public symbol of the nation's honour, but feminism, which is associated with the West, represents decadence and sin. In fact, in his book Occidentosis: A Plague from the West (غرب زادگی), originally published surreptitiously in Farsi in 1962, Jalāl Āl-e-Ahmad contended that the modernization of Iran was responsible for the country's cultural collapse (Ansary 2015:96). He stated that occidentosis was an illness transmitted by women and that it was necessary to protect the population from it (Ansary 2015:96). Since the Islamic Republic's establishment in 1979, the hijab has ensured this obligation. The new leaders of the country assert that it protects everyone, men and women alike, and grants them immunity. Ahmad put forth that the "westernised version of the 'emancipated' Iranian woman would lead to swelling an army of lipstick and power aficionados" (Ansary 2015:96). This veil, which modernists considered a sign of cultural underdevelopment, symbolises freedom from the Western paradigm once offered by the Pahlavi dynasty.

2.2 The Evolution of Religious Liberty in Iran's Constitution and Civil Code

A Historical Analysis of the Interplay between Islamic Law and Modern Legal Systems in Defining Religious Rights in Iran

Due to the broad engagement of women in the revolution and the hijab's enhanced significance as a revolutionary symbol, the authorities could not entirely overlook women's responsibilities as political players (Keddie 2000: 409). The constitutional drafting committee, composed of male clerics and just one woman, avoided language that would suggest women's equality by asserting that if God had deprived women of certain rights then no earthly force could ever alter the Constitution. In the preamble to the 1979 Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the biologization of women, whose only value now lies within the context of the family, is expressly sanctioned. The Islamic Republic consolidates authority, represses resistance, and maintains women's subjugation by combining the current framework of the government with its religious dogma.

The codification of protections for women's personalities is an eminent example of religion's instrumentalization of government (Sedghi 2020:98). Despite the significance of maintaining a mother's parental rights, women remain underrepresented in politics and public administration. Article 3 of the Iranian Constitution of 1979 articulates the role of the state, beginning, first and foremost, with "the creation of a favourable environment for the growth of *moral* virtues based on faith and piety and the struggle against all forms of vice and corruption." Article 14 reinforces the duties of the state

In accordance with the sacred verse ("Allah does not forbid you to deal kindly and justly with those who have not fought against you because of your religion and who have not expelled you from your homes" [60:8]), the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and all Muslims are duty-bound to treat non-Muslims in conformity with ethical norms and the principles of Islamic justice and equity and to respect their human rights. This principle applies to all who refrain from engaging in conspiracy or activity against Islam and the Islamic Republic of Iran (Constitution of Iran 1979)

and Article 20, which underlines the rights of its citizens, includes references to equality before the law; however, there are clear references to the necessity to limit the numerous rights of women as defined in the Constitution in accordance with Islamic principles. In fact, Article 4 of the Constitution already stipulates that all legislation must be in conformity with Islam. In addition, while Article 20 states that

All citizens of the country, both men and women, equally enjoy the protection of the law and enjoy all human, political, economic, social, and cultural rights, in conformity with Islamic criteria, (Constitution of Iran)

Article 21 subsequently intervenes on family values, which restricts women to housework in order to safeguard the social institution of the family, emphasising that the "government must ensure the rights of women in all respects, in conformity with Islamic criteria" (Constitution of Iran). This phrasing suggests that women are entitled to "their rights, as long as those rights conform to the dictates of the patriarchal religious establishment" (Ansary 2015:92).

Despite the meagre safeguards offered by these rights, most are systemically dishonoured. No longer are women's rights, particularly those pertaining to marriage, child custody, and discrimination, considered apart from men's rights. Iranian civil law further restricts personal freedom, making inheritance and travel impossible. Due to his standing over his wife, the husband has the legal authority to restrict her freedom of movement. The woman may not choose where she lives directly as her domicile must be that of her husband (Article 1005 of the Iranian Civil Code). Passports for international travel, for instance, need the husband's written consent for the wife. The same rule applies to hotels: unaccompanied women must get authorization from their husbands or the authorities. The restrictions on women's mobility are exacerbated by state-enforced clothing regulations. Women are required to wear the hijab in public, and refusal to do so is punishable by up to two months in jail and a substantial fine. Long before the revolution, women ceased to wear veils in public in 1936, when the Shah outlawed them in an effort to modernise the country. In revenge, the Islamic government's obsessive efforts to avoid the westernisation of mores put hijabs back on women shortly after their ascent to power.

Legal personhood, for instance, is not equal between the sexes due to the Constitution's imposition of Islamic principles. Women's testimony is worth half as much as men's, their "blood prices" are half as much as men's, girls as young as 13 may marry, but they cannot vote until they are 18, and they need permission from their father or husband to travel internationally. Once elected, women in the Iranian parliament have the same voting rights as males; yet, just six per cent of the house is actually composed of

women (WorldBank 2021). Despite this, punishments derived from interpretations of Shari'a law persist in their implementation. Examples include the use of stoning or whipping as penalties for women who commit adultery and amputation of appendages such as hands or fingers in instances where theft has occurred.

Furthermore, Iranian civil law comprises a multitude of topics such as contracts, property ownership and transferal, inheritance laws, family regulations and instances in which torts have been committed. This set of legal statutes was put into place during the late 19th century with heavy influence taken from both Islamic tradition and The Napoleonic Code.While it has undergone several revisions throughout its history since then until the present day usage continues to persist; this codex remains an essential tool for all who practise or wish to learn about Iranian jurisprudence today. It must be noted however that there are certain provisions within Iran's Civil Code (1928) which appear discriminatory towards women – these examples include but may not be limited to:

1. Marriage: Under the Civil Code (1928), the minimum age for a girl to marry is 13, while the minimum age for a boy to marry is 15, with the option of getting a court waiver for those younger. Under Article 1041, a girl as young as nine can be married with the consent of a male guardian and a judge's approval. Before pursuing further education or leaving the house, a wife must ask for her husband's approval under Article 1048. Iran's marriage laws are typically affected by traditional and cultural conventions, which may give priority to the husband's interests and limit the wife's rights.

2. Divorce: The Civil Code (1928) grants the husband the unilateral authority to initiate divorce, but the woman may only get a divorce in certain conditions via the court system. In accordance with Article 1134, a husband may unilaterally dissolve a marriage by saying "I divorce you" (*Talaq*) three times or by announcing his desire to do so in front of a court. This may leave women with little or no input and without proper safeguards for their rights and interests. Article 1137 permits the husband to unilaterally withdraw the divorce rights of his wife.

3. Inheritance: The Civil Code (1928) stipulates uneven inheritance distribution, with male heirs getting a greater proportion than female heirs. In most circumstances,

according to Article 986, women inherit half as much as males. If a man dies and leaves behind a wife and children, for example, the wife would get just one-eighth of the overall inheritance, while the children would receive the remaining seven-eighths.

4. Child custody: Male children above the age of two are automatically awarded to their father upon divorce, whereas female children over the age of seven are assigned to the mother. In the event of a divorce, fathers above the ages of two for boys and seven for females are automatically awarded custody under Article 1137.

5. Witness: In a court of law, women's testimony is just half as reliable as that of males. Article 998 considers the testimony of one male to be comparable to that of two women in a court of law.

6. Guardianship: Under Article 1102, women are regarded legally incompetent and must have a male guardian make decisions for them. This includes the ability to get married and travel.

7. Property ownership: After marriage, a wife's assets are transferred to her husband, and she has no legal claim to them without his permission as per Article 1098. For a woman to lawfully transfer property ownership in Iran, she needs to obtain the agreement of her male guardian or husband.

8. Blood money: According to Article 772, a woman's life is only worth half as much as a man's in cases of homicide or injury. The Islamic legal concept of "blood money," also known as "diya," is a monetary reward given to the family of a murder victim.

9. Marriage age: Article 1039 stipulates that the minimum age for a boy to marry is 15, although a girl may marry as young as 13 with the agreement of her father or male guardian. There is a gender discrepancy in marriage rates, which can have detrimental effects on girls' health, education, and overall well-being if they are married off too early or against their choice.

10.   Polygamy: Under Article 1049, a man is allowed to have up to four wives at the same time, while a woman is not allowed to have multiple husbands. This can leave women at a disadvantage in relationships and can reinforce patriarchal attitudes and gender inequalities.

11.   Adoption: Under Article 1147, only men are allowed to adopt children, and single women are not allowed to adopt at all.

12.   Employment: Under Article 1115, a husband has the right to prevent his wife from working if it is deemed to be against the interests of the family.

13.   Rape: Under Article 638, a rape victim must provide four male witnesses to the act in order to press charges, making it difficult to prosecute cases of sexual assault.

14.   Sentencing: Under Article 508, the sentence for a woman found guilty of murder is half the sentence that would be given to a man convicted of the same crime.

15.   Citizenship: Under Article 995, a woman married to a foreign national loses her Iranian citizenship, while a man does not.

16.   Civil rights: Under Article 1103, a woman's legal rights are restricted, and she is considered legally incompetent without the permission of her husband or a male guardian.

17.   Education: Under Article 1112, a husband has the right to prevent his wife from pursuing higher education if it is deemed to be against the interests of the family.

18.   Travel: Under Article 1048, a woman must obtain her husband's permission to travel outside the home.

19.   Marriage annulment: Under Article 1139, a husband has the right to annul the marriage at any time, while a wife can only do so in limited circumstances through the judicial system.

20.   Child support: Under Article 1145, a husband is only required to provide a limited amount of financial support to his wife and children after divorce.

21.   Dress code: Under Article 638, women are required to wear modest clothing in public, including a hijab covering their hair and a loose-fitting overcoat known as a manteau.

22.   Family planning: Under Article 1087, a husband has the right to prevent his wife from using birth control or undergoing sterilisation without his consent.

23.   Employment benefits: Under Article 1143, a husband is not required to provide alimony to his wife after divorce, and she is not entitled to a share of his retirement or other employment benefits.

24.   Freedom of association: Under Article 998, women are restricted from participating in certain social and political activities and forming organisations or clubs without the permission of a male guardian.

25.   Reproductive rights: Under Article 1088, a woman is not allowed to have an abortion without the consent of her husband, even in cases of life-threatening circumstances.

2.3 Analysing Human Rights Reports on the Status of Women in Contemporary Iran

Examining the Intersection of Religious Gender Apartheid and State-Sponsored Oppression in Relation to Women's Legal, Social, and Political Status with Respect to International Conventions Rooted in the Upholding of Human Rights.

Iran has signed several human rights treaties, which encompass the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention on the Rights of Children and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Liberties. In addition to these agreements are also included with international covenants that address social welfare services like those proposed in Economic Social Cultural Rights conventions as well as with anti-slavery

legislation such as The Abolition Of Slavery Treaty. However, they have yet to participate in discussions relating to gender equality via their absence from The Elimination Of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women Convention. The Iranian family law is in direct conflict with these international human rights agreements, both those it has recognised as valid and those that its government refuses to sign, even though they have grown into international yardsticks that allow for progress in the field of human rights to be measured and compared amongst one another in an effort to encourage the upliftment of human rights.

In the year of Iran's Islamic Revolution, the General Assembly of the United Nations established an agreement known as CEDAW. This document has become a global model for women's rights and secured ratification from 189 nations. The quest for stability, democracy, and progress is what leads one to seek out freedom and justice which are fundamental principles sought after worldwide. Gender equality forms not only Goal 5 but also serves as a cross-cutting principle on how global politics should be steered within UN Sustainable Development Goals that delineate roadmaps until 2030. After officially adopting it in 1981 post its creation in 1979, CEDAW reiterated equal treatment ideals pertaining to both genders being important simultaneously. Some governments' concerns show that ratification does not always indicate support for these objectives, undermining the Convention's core assumption of nondiscrimination against women. Several Muslim-majority countries have challenged items they believe are derogatory to their religion. Despite the absence of religious language in the official text, several countries with Muslim populations have expressed reservations about their ability to fully uphold women's equal rights under Article 2. This provision mandates states take necessary steps to eliminate gender-based discrimination in their legal frameworks and societal norms. These responses may not go far enough towards restoring full citizenship for women within these nations based on existing disparities between genders that fall outside legally defined systems of oppression or exclusion from social spheres where men hold power over decision-making processes affecting both sexes equally. Iran has not joined the CEDAW (1979). In fact, upon its first appearance on the political stage, clerics contended that signing such a document would set the West up for World domination in that the

> The Convention, which denies any difference between men's and women's rights and duties, is in fact a grave step by the UN towards establishing Western dominance and global hegemony of Western materialistic culture . . . . And unfortunately, some of the people in charge, particularly women, are for ill-founded and baseless reasons trying to persuade Iran to join a convention that guarantees problems with religious jurisprudence. (Moghadam 2004:8)

Nonetheless, Iran's failure to neither sign nor ratify the Convention does not give it the rationale for not adhering to and executing its requirements, according to ZakerSalehi (2020). The reason is that the "sexual non-discrimination Principle has reached international custom and is, therefore, binding" (ZakerSalehi 2020: 323). Furthermore, Iran ratified the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (1966) in 1980, both of which safeguard women's rights. Thus, in the 1989 amendment to the Constitution, greater emphasis should have been placed on women's rights, and a number of topics, such as political participation, should have been clarified (ZakerSalehi 2020: 324). ZakerSalehi (2020) elaborates, stating that the CEDAW should be considered an "extension of the treaty-based obligations of governments," in which, as a result of time, global events, and other international concerns, the duties of member states with regard to the treaty to which they have acceded go beyond their initial pledges, requiring them to conform with new or different standards (ZakerSalehi 2020: 324).

Women in Iran are presently engaged in a political war against conservative religious authoritarians. They are engaged in a fight for personal liberty and social fairness that exudes courage and the burning desire to revel in gender equality. It is of utmost importance, not only to comply with legal statutes and uphold religious beliefs but also to vociferously oppose the abhorrent notion of internalising women's voices and imposing muteness under the guise of spiritual agendas. The global basis of fundamental rights offered to member states and a tool for feminist movements throughout the world, the CEDAW's (1979) power resides above all in its reference dimension and action plan. The tireless battle for parity surpasses geopolitical borders, customary conventions, and communal practices to emerge as an integral constituent of the global endeavour

committed to safeguarding universally acknowledged human entitlements. Through systematic discrimination of personal status regulations, the Islamic Republic of Iran breaches the CEDAW (1979) treaty had it decided to agree to its terms and conditions that risk allowing women and men access to equal ground.

In areas including marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody, the Iranian Civil Code has laws that discriminate against women. Under Iranian law, for instance, a woman's testimony has just half the weight of a man's, and she must acquire the consent of a male guardian for many elements of her life, including travel and employment. The sections of Iran's Civil Code that discriminate against women in areas such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody breach the following articles of the CEDAW (1979):

● Article 2, calls on state parties to undertake to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms.

● Article 16, which requires state parties to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and family life.

Moreover, with regards to marriage guardianship, in Iranian law, a virgin girl must obtain permission to marry from her father or paternal grandfather (Moghadam 2004:5). This virginity clause is entirely independent of a girl's maturity or whether or not she has reached the age of puberty (Moghadam 2004:5). In cases when the guardian declines consent without lofty rationale, a civil court may issue an order granting the petitioner authorization (Moghadam 2004:5). This is a violation of multiple international human rights treaties and regulations (Moghadam 2004:5). The right of adults of legal marriageable age to enter into marriages of their own free will is recognised in Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 23 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and Article 1 of the Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage, and Registration of Marriages (Moghadam 2004:5).

Islam and feminism, according to Ziba Mir-Hosseini, an Iranian legal anthropologist, are not inherently incompatible; rather, it is the structural, linguistic, and societal contexts in which each ideology is lodged that cause friction (Moghadam 2004:7) . The issue stems, according to Mir-Hosseini, from conventional Muslim jurists' outmoded

and patriarchal interpretation of the Qurʾān and Islamic Shari'a law (Moghadam 2004:7). While the Islamic legal tradition maintains that the sources of law, such as the Qurʾān and Sunnah, are sacred, the law itself is not. As such, they must be contested when they fail to serve half of the population (Moghadam 2004:7). With regards to the laws established governing marriage contracts, Mir-Hosseini explains that

> With the marriage contract, a woman comes under her husband's isma (authority, dominion and protection), entailing a set of defined rights and obligations for each party; some have a moral sanction and others have legal force. Although the boundaries between the legal and the moral are hazy . . . those sanctions with legal force revolve around the twin themes of sexual access and compensation, embodied in the concept of tamkin and nafaqa. Tamkin (submission, defined as unhampered sexual access) is a man's right and thus a woman's duty; whereas nafaqa (maintenance, defined as shelter, food and clothing) is a woman's right and a man's duty. A woman becomes entitled to nafaqa only after the consummation of marriage, and she loses her claim if she is in a state of nushuz (disobedience), (while she has the right to refuse sexual access until she receives it in full). It is essential to note that a woman retains full control over the disposal of her property and management of her affairs. The contract establishes neither a shared matrimonial regime nor reciprocal obligations between spouses; the husband is the sole provider and owner of the matrimonial resources and the wife is the possessor of her own wealth. The only shared space is that involving the procreation of children, and even here a woman is not expected to suckle her child unless it is impossible to feed it otherwise (Moghadam 2004: 7).

Violence against women: The Islamic Republic of Iran has been found to be lacking in its efforts to effectively combat the substantial amount of violence that women face within the country. Violence against women, including but not limited to domestic abuse, sexual assault and genital mutilation is rampant throughout Iran; these actions violate various articles as set forth by CEDAW (1979).

● Article 2, which calls on the states party to undertake to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms.

● Article 5, which calls on states parties to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, intending to achieve the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

● Article 6, which requires the state party to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to suppress all forms of traffic in women and exploitation of the prostitution of women.

● Article 12, which requires states parties to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of healthcare in order to ensure, on a basis of equality of men and women, access to health care services, including those related to family planning.

Iranian women are continuously confronted with discrimination in the workplace, including lower pay, fewer chances for advancement, and bans on some kinds of labour. The country's Labour Code also has discriminatory measures against women, such as permitting businesses to pay women less than males for the same labour. With this in mind, Kergoat describes the phenomenon in that "gender division of labour, which is a form of social division of labour, assigns men to the sphere of production and women to the sphere of reproduction" (Kergoat 2001: 78-88)." It is not obligatory for a woman to obtain approval from her spouse in order to engage in work activities. Nevertheless, it is within the possibility of said spouse to limit their partner's job opportunities despite what has been stated by Article 6 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) enacted back in 1966 - this article grants all individuals the independence required so as they may decide which employment path would best suit them. Articles of the CEDAW (1979) that are violated by the discrimination women encounter in the workplace, such as lower pay, restricted possibilities for advancement, and prohibitions on specific kinds of labour, are as follows:

● Article 2, which calls on states parties to undertake to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms.

● Article 11, which requires states parties to take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment.

● Article 11.2, which requires states parties to prohibit discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, including wage discrimination.

Restrictions on political participation: Iranian women encounter formidable hindrances to political involvement. Denying them the chance to campaign for public office and constraining their capacity to engage in political groups or movements represent significant barriers. These impediments undermine a number of articles established by CEDAW (1979), which demand equal rights among men and women, including access to participation in government affairs without any discrimination on gender grounds.

● Article 2, which calls on states parties to undertake to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms.

● Article 7, which requires states parties to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country.

● Article 8, which requires states parties to take measures to ensure the participation of women on equal terms with men in the political and public life of the country.

Restrictions on freedom of expression: Iranian women face limitations when it comes to expressing themselves and engaging with cultural or intellectual activities. Among these restrictions is the inability for them to perform in public through singing, as well as attend specific events without being accompanied by a male guardian who has granted permission beforehand. The restrictions faced by women in their freedom of expression and ability to participate in cultural and intellectual life, including the ban on singing in public and attending certain cultural events without male guardian permission, infringe the following CEDAW (1979) articles:

● Article 2, which calls on states parties to undertake to eliminate discrimination against women in all its forms.

● Article 5, which calls on states parties to take all appropriate measures to modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women, with a view to achieving the elimination of prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea

of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

● Article 13, which requires states parties to eliminate discrimination against women in their access to culture and to participate on equal terms with men in cultural activities.

The Islamic Republic of Iran violates the framework of the CEDAW (1979) convention methodically, perpetuating discrimination against women and denying them their basic human rights.

2.4 Religious Coercion: State Repression and the Abuse of Religion in Iran

When State Power and Religious Repression Join Forces: An Overview of Repressive Tactics Employed by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Name of Religion.

Research has demonstrated a positive correlation between religious freedom and other crucial socioeconomic elements such as press freedom, civil freedoms, the health of democracies, the absence of conflict, the advancement of women, economic equality, and material affluence. Non-democratic states, such as Iran, frequently employ religious repression to keep control. Various policies, such as repression, co-option, and legitimization, can accomplish this. Local authorities in Iran frequently impose religious restrictions that are either in line with or at variance with the government's national goals, despite the fact that most non-democratic states contain religious freedom provisions in their constitutions. Religious repression requires time, energy, and resources to maintain, and in extreme cases like that of Iran, can lead to international sanctions. In addition to being more effective at sustaining political stability and silencing opposition, less violent kinds of repression are typically less noticeable. By attacking religious organisations, the Iranian government has discovered that it can establish greater control over public and political areas, shape public perception about the state's legitimacy, and rein in groups that are either politically disengaged or apolitical. By crushing tiny religious groups, the state can fortify its power over dominant religions. The Iranian government employs religious repression to keep control and exert influence over its population. To preserve political power and rule religion in its interests, the state frequently reverts to the restriction of

religious liberty and the persecution of certain religious organisations. The potential outcomes of stringent religious practices can have extensive impacts, extending beyond an individual's own beliefs. These limitations present a noteworthy danger to fundamental principles such as justice, neutrality and transparent dialogue that is crucial for the betterment of society.

The repression of religion in Iran is a perennial subject of dispute. As a method of maintaining order and establishing control over its subjects, the state frequently persecutes and restricts its inhabitants' religious freedoms. Max Weber's sociological concepts provide a valuable foundation for investigating the causes and consequences of religious persecution in this context. According to Weber, religion in modern society has several purposes, including expressing individual and community conscience and participating as a public actor; however, religious freedom is positively correlated with numerous important societal aspects, such as press freedom, civil liberties, the durability of democracy, low levels of armed conflict, gender empowerment, income equality, and wealth, which is why states frequently seek to control religion and its role in society. Governments in non-democratic regimes such as Iran frequently use religious persecution to maintain power. A multitude of approaches can be utilised to attain this objective, such as subjugation, integration and affirmation. Through focusing on faith-based groups, most notably women within these communities; governments have the opportunity to sway popular perception regarding their legitimacy while also manipulating complacent or resistant factions. To further consolidate its power, the state frequently suppresses minority religions in favour of more widely practised ones. Understanding the dynamics of religious persecution in Iran is aided by Weber's thesis of "monopolisation of religious ideals." This thesis contends that governments usually strive to establish a religious monopoly, which has the effect of diminishing religious variety and restricting citizens' rights to freely practise their faith. This is especially visible in Iran, where the government rigorously regulates religious practice and punishes individuals who do not conform. Weber's idea of legitimation also sheds light on the origins of religious persecution in Iran. The presumption is that states will utilise religion to protect their rule and keep the peace. The Iranian government has realised that it can control and benefit from people's religious beliefs and behaviours by actively repressing religious organisations and imposing tight restrictions. Max Weber's sociological perspectives reinforce the inner workings of

religious persecution, notably in Iran and especially in regard to women. The consequences for democracy, peace, and equality are significant when the government opposes religious freedom and targets, specific faith-based groups. Weber offers a comprehensive understanding of how religion intersects with state power and societal dynamics. His analysis sheds light on the root causes behind such repression via mechanisms like monopolisation of spiritual beliefs or leveraging religion as an instrument for political gain.

Furthermore, the idea of living law promoted by Eugen Ehrlich clashes significantly with Shari'a law and creates a rift between them. Living law is presented as an alternative to traditional legal systems that are rigid and unyielding. Within Muslim society, Shari'a governs various aspects such as criminal justice, civil disputes, and commercial transactions. The key disparity stems from their sources of power in creating laws; while living law adapts over time based on customs and traditions within communities responding to social conditions or needs, Islamic consensus is founded on teachings derived from Qur'anic scripture along with the actions of the Prophet Muhammad makes up the foundation for all forms related to Shari'ah jurisprudence including its concepts regarding permanence or fragility through changes made during interpretation periods held annually known as Ijma'h sessions. Their divergent approaches extend towards legislative processes necessary for enacting legislation where organisms evolve organically whereas one system relies upon codified principles making it less flexible than living ones when compared to today's shifts occurring globally especially since they solely rely upon fixed morals coming directly out of Divine Creation rather Than Human Imagination– which means accommodating change can also become challenging if not impossible without losing fundamental values altogether leading us into ethical dilemmas at larger scales caused due lack adaptability/ flexibility needed addressing modern societal tensions effectively enough under both frameworks simultaneously being utilised side-by-side would result in ultimate chaos. Therefore, these two schools cannot coexist harmoniously considering different perspectives concerning morality/cultural differences seen across societies worldwide, thus rendering understanding cultural diversity essential more so now than ever before.

Chapter 3:

The Weaponization of Morality: The Role and Impact of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Control of Women's Purity and Virtue in Public and Private Spaces

This third chapter bridges the gap between the theoretical frameworks of the first chapter and the historical and political study of the Islamic Republic presented in the second. The clerics' obsession with policing women's behaviour to maintain Islamic law's strict moral standards has deep political roots. Hence, it is crucial to understand the development and application of morality in Iranian law and culture to put the position of women in Iranian politics and society into context. This section attempts to provide light on how the concept of morality is used to legitimise governmental repression and control, especially with regard to women, by examining various meanings of the term.

3.1 The Concept of Morality: From Lexicons to Legal Codes

From its dictionary definition to its legal usage, this section explores the many ways in which morality can be understood. It delves into the ways in which morality can be interpreted differently based on one's cultural and religious background. This section discusses the difficulties of enforcing a single moral standard in a culturally heterogeneous community, using the example of Iran, where morality is strictly policed by the government. The implications for personal liberty and human rights are also called into question, as is the constitutionality of the state's participation in morality enforcement.

Morality is a complex and disputed concept that has been subject to various interpretations throughout history, from formal definitions in dictionaries to laws. It can be understood differently based on cultural values, social norms, or political circumstances. The significance of morality in the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot be overlooked as it often serves as justification for policies suppressing certain individuals' liberties– particularly women's freedoms. Although such actions are deemed necessary by some who argue they protect religious virtue and preserve traditional customs their impact becomes wide-ranging concerning gender equality issues and human rights violations within society. This subchapter seeks a detailed investigation into how codes relating to erasing women from the public space exist according to both dictionary and legal standards while

legitimising this practice which will shed new light onto interwoven aspects between power dynamics intersecting through culture/religion/politics leading towards nuanced understanding ushered regarding oppressive nature flourishing under authoritarian regimes similar across various spheres. Through utilising diverse perspectives rooted in deep interdisciplinary scholarship offered up across multiple sources available; suggested strategies employed by these groups seeking maintenance over authority come front-and-centre challenging readers' moral compasses and causing productive reflections surrounding intersections where ethical/legal /political dimensions converge concerning continuing obfuscation around female visibility considering current atmosphere existing within Iranian civil-society at large. Ultimately this analytical exegesis aims simplistically toward enriching comprehension found involving complicity in male-dominated societies presently sustaining suppression whilst endorsing inequality via undermining humanity itself.

Morality, defined by Webster as "acting in conformity with a system of principles or standards about concerns of right and wrong," has played a crucial role in human society, providing a foundation for providing people with a universal set of ethical principles to steer their behaviour and guide personal decision-making (Webster 2023). Its importance stems from its association with higher spiritual ideals or objectives which have been deeply ingrained into traditions for centuries. Despite its significance, morality has been the source of heated discussion and dispute. This is especially true when considering the cultural and historical differences in morality. Some people think morality is something built into humans, while others think it changes with time and location, as stated in the book Living Law (Living Law 2021). Especially in authoritarian settings like Iran, where morality is often used for political benefit, this discussion has expanded to include the ways in which morality is used for such objectives. The environment in Iran is infused with an overwhelming sense of terror and domination as a result of the implementation by The Islamic Republic of Iran to utilise moralistic principles as leverage to suppress women's ability to express themselves freely, while also smothering any forms of political disagreement. "The Iranian regime exploits morality as an alibi to restrict the space of political protest, particularly among women," says Mohanty (Mohanty 2019). Using morality in this way for political ends undermines its central function of making communities more peaceful and just.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran presents itself as promoting morality, but this disguise leads to limitations on women's actions and appearance that severely and strategically hinder their participation in the public eye. Women are denied access to education and employment due to strict societal norms governed by fear-inducing punishments for even minor transgressions against these rules. This narrow-minded approach has caused significant economic and social damage with limited growth potential within many spheres such as labour force integration or artistic expression; all from being justified under religious purity standards imposed upon people who live here day-to-day without any say over what they believe is right or wrong according to existing cultural expectations which varies depending on which culture one identifies most closely affiliated themselves at present time through self-identification practices.

3.2 The Dangerous Preoccupation with Female Purity in Iran's Religious Governance

This section delves into the mullahs' concern with chastity and how it affects their perception of women's worth. This section analyses the interpretation of female purity in Iranian society by reviewing religious and cultural literature and examines how the control of women's bodies stemming from an obsession with virtuousness has served to restrict their agency and contributed to the maintenance of gender inequity in a national grand scheme to erase women from the public sphere. The subchapter concludes that the mullahs' emphasis on women's virginity contributes to the maintenance of patriarchal power systems and the perpetuation of gender-based violence in Iran. The subchapter sheds light on how religious and political authority have been used to sustain patriarchal structures of power in Iran by examining how women's bodies and autonomy have been controlled and governed throughout the country's history. Authoritarianism and theocracy join hands in this chapter to pervertedly take control of every aspect of women and their bodies. The perversion of the mullahs is exposed in this subchapter, as to highlight the hypocrisy of the IRI's government.

The institutionalisation and religious legitimization of male sexual power were two of 1979's most far-reaching effects. The revolution, as noted by Kian Tajbakhsh, "institutionalised and religiously legitimised male sexual domination at a time when liberty

was beginning to take shape in a predominately phallocratic and patriarchal culture" (Tajbakhsh 2000: 57). The ramifications of this emphasis on purity and morality for Iranian society were far-reaching, especially for the protection of personal liberties. Iranian society's obsession with purity and morality has shown itself, in part, through the country's stringent control of sexual behaviour. "The authorities discuss sex openly, using precise and normative terminology that presupposes that all encounter between a man and a woman is sexual, while simultaneously enforcing restrictive regulations and demeaning eroticism and femininity," writes Ali Mirsepassi (Mirsepassi 2011: 78). "At the same time, they enforce restrictive restrictions and denigrate eroticism and femininity" (Mirsepassi 2011: 78). As a result of these overbearing rules and restrictions, many young people have taken to openly ridiculing preachers and breaking laws. Iran does not have a history of moral tolerance or abstinence, but sexist standards and a religious emphasis on subjugating women have ensured the country remains a phallocracy. According to Homa Hoodfar, "the revolution did not usher in an era of gender equality, but rather saw the entrenchment of male power and a deepening of the subordination of women" (Hoodfar 2011: 129). Because of this, women's rights are routinely disregarded and infringed, and they are often considered to be of lower social status than males.

The intricacy of gender and sexuality in Iran is deeply enmeshed with the country's cultural and religious values. Despite imposing firm surface-level morals, the sex work enterprise still exists within the Islamic Republic of Iran. As mentioned, the cultural dogma of female virginity and male sexual prowess persisted in Iranian society even before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The Iranian feminist Chahdortt Djavann, in her book "Les Putes Voilées N'iront Jamais au Paradis" (Veiled Whores Will Never Make It to Heaven), examines the prevalence of prostitution in Iran and how it relates to the country's socio-political context. Djavann argues that Shiite Islam reinforces gender hierarchies in Iranian society, and it perpetuates a double standard that allows men to engage in sexual activities outside of marriage while punishing women for the same behaviour. She writes,

> In Iran, the principle of the virginity of women has such a powerful hold on the collective consciousness that a woman who is no longer a virgin before her wedding is considered an insult to the honour of her family, who will never be able to redeem themselves in the eyes of society. (Djavann 2003: 25)

This cultural and religious dogma has led to the stigmatization and marginalisation of women who engage in premarital sex or sex work. Djavann argues that Shiite Islam reinforces gender hierarchies in Iranian society and perpetuates a double standard that allows men to engage in sexual activities outside of marriage while punishing women for the same behaviour. She states, "men have the right to enjoy themselves before marriage, to explore their sexuality, while women must be virgins" (Djavann, 2003: 23). This double standard creates a situation where women who engage in premarital sex or sex work are stigmatized and marginalized, while men are not held to the same standards.

Djavann also notes that the sex work industry in Iran is not solely driven by poverty or economic need. Rather, it is fueled by the sexual desires of Iranian men who seek to fulfil their fantasies and desires outside of marriage, highlighting the contradictions between the strict moral codes imposed by the Islamic Republic and the realities of Iranian society. She writes:

> The middle-class men of Iran have needs that go beyond those of the lower
> classes; they are more educated, more cultured, and more open-minded, and
> they don't want to be limited to one woman, not even to two, or three.
> (Djavann 2003: 35)

Djavann notes that the sex work industry in Iran has become more organized and sophisticated over time. She writes, "Prostitution is a lucrative business in Iran, and it has become more organised in recent years. Brothels are no longer hidden in the back alleys but operate openly in the city centres" (Djavann, 2003: 33). The work of Djavann illuminates the connection between sex labour and other forms of discrimination within Iran, including but not limited to economic hardship, substance dependence, and coerced transport. She states, "Many women enter the sex work industry in Iran as a result of poverty, addiction, or trafficking. They are often exploited by pimps and brothel owners, who take advantage of their vulnerable situations" (Djavann, 2003: 29). The cultural dogma of female virginity and male sexual prowess has persisted in Iranian society for centuries, even before the Revolution. Djavann argues that these cultural and religious beliefs continue to shape societal norms and behaviours and reinforce gender hierarchies, claiming:

In Iran, the principles of virginity and male sexual prowess have become so intertwined with the national identity that they have become an integral part of the cultural fabric. (Djavann, 2003: 24)

Djavann's book provides a powerful critique of the socio-political context of sex work in Iran. She challenges the dominant narrative that reduces the issue of gender and sexuality in Iran to a simple dichotomy between tradition and modernity, and instead emphasises the complex intersections between religion, culture, power, and oppression. Her work highlights the urgent need for a more nuanced understanding of the realities of Iranian society, and for policies and interventions that prioritise the rights and well-being of marginalised women.

Shi'ite Islam redefines and reinforces the moral framework of the intimate life of believers. Regardless of religion, phallocracy prevailed in all strata of Iranian society. In the 1970s, the dogma of female virginity until the wedding night persisted, as did the image of the virile, seductive and sexually initiated man. These contradictions fuel the sex work industry in Iran, which only further pushes women into the outskirts of society. The adoption of the jurisprudence of Shi'ite Shari'a Islam following the establishment of the Islamic Republic snatched individual freedoms from Iranians; but, at a time when Europe was experiencing sexual emancipation, the Khomeini victory erected values justified by religion that pushed forward the phallocratic norms of society. Explaining the licit and the illicit in the sexual field is a favourite exercise and a speciality of choice for the Ayatollahs and doctors of Islamic law. Khomeini himself wrote a breviary on this subject that enters into illicit detail about the ways in which to reveal to good believers the imperceptible limit set by religion to permissible sexual pleasure.

Khomeini's book, "Tahrir al-Wasilah," contains detailed and explicit discussions on various aspects of sexuality, including incest. Within a certain instance, Khomeini deliberates on an occurrence in which a male is ensnared amid the devastation of an earthquake with his maternal aunt. As they approach their demise, they engage in coitus. Khomeini argues that because the man and his aunt had no other options for companionship or survival, their actions are permissible under Islamic law. The instance

being presented here spotlights the emphasis of Khomeini's interpretation of Islamic law, which values what it claims to be a man's biological needs above ethical principles surrounding sexual conduct. The sexual practices of clerics and Islamic regulations concerning sexuality are far removed from the ideal of chastity those same men advocate for in women, but the valorisation and recognition of the pleasures of the flesh go hand in hand with the affirmation of the essential superiority of male virility and its rights. Legitimised by new legislation based on Islamic jurisprudence, the dominant phallocratic ideology offers a plethora of paradoxical tendencies that continue to find fuel in a legal system that refuses to acknowledge the existence of women as human beings. In addition to discussing the permissibility of sex with one's aunt during an earthquake, Khomeini also mentions other sexual acts that may occur during such an event in his book, stating that "if somebody falls on a woman in such a way that his sexual organ enters hers, then both of them will be killed" (Naqavi 1994: 221). He also addresses the issue of masturbation during an earthquake, stating that "if someone masturbates during an earthquake and this causes the collapse of a building on people who are in it, then he is guilty of their murder" (Naqavi 1994: 223).

Furthermore, Khomeini's book also discusses the permissibility of temporary marriages or sigheh, which is unique to Shi'ism. According to Khomeini's teachings, it is acceptable for couples to enter into sigheh marriages under certain circumstances. These may include pre-determining the duration of the marriage and the financial compensation offered to the woman involved. Nevertheless, such unions are often taken advantage of by affluent men who wish only for casual sexual encounters with no emotional ties or repercussions from society at large. Given that a woman's virginity is a necessary element to marriage, "sigheh legally wraps premarital sex in an Islamic cloak," but while "a married man can have as many temporary wives as he wants, and up to four permanent ones, and can break the contract anytime he wants, [...] women cannot" (Sciolino 2000). The significance of a woman's virginity is emphasised here, as is the obsession with a woman's 'purity'. The sigheh might run anywhere between one hour to ninety-nine years and does not need any legalisation or documentation beyond an informal agreement between the couple. What the Islamic Republic of Iran is doing is furthering the torture and control of women behind closed doors and in the name of religion. Permanent and temporary marriages are recognised by the religious authorities of Iran according to Iranian law.

Women are taught to assume that the sigheh is a valid marriage and that the male will treat her as his legal husband, but this is not the case. Typically, a man would offer monetary rewards to a woman in exchange for sexual favours. After the establishment of mullahs' control, sigheh use surged. The religious justification supplied for this practice by Iranian officials and imams is noteworthy as it is typical for 'devoutly religious' Muslim men to prey on impoverished women. As a sort of retaliation, some men would attempt to blackmail them into a short-lived marriage. Numerous first-hand testimonies describe how Iranian officials and judges exploit jailed women by promising their release in exchange for a sigheh. Some are manipulated into forming a sigheh with a judge because virgins on death row cannot be executed as they would go to heaven. These short-term marriages provide men with a potent tool to prevent women from filing rape allegations against them; furthermore, the man believes that his actions towards the woman are condoned by Islam and God. He sees it as an act of virtue because he will be rewarded for it in Heaven. While men can enter into multiple short-term marriages, women cannot do so according to Islamic teachings. Though Iran's strict moral laws exist, they have not dissuaded prostitution from occurring within its borders due to cultural biases and religious beliefs which sustain gender inequalities and support hypocrisy between genders. The severe moral codes imposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran have not deterred the sex work industry in the country. Instead, the prevalence of prostitution is fueled by deeply rooted cultural and religious beliefs that reinforce gender hierarchies and perpetuate double standards. Khomeini's work sheds light on the complexities of sexuality in Iranian society, and highlights how Islamic jurisprudence has been used to justify and perpetuate phallocratic norms.

In response to complaints by mullahs that an ice cream commercial breached public morals in the summer of 2022, the Iranian Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance issued instructions to the nation's art and movie institutes prohibiting the use of female actresses in advertisements (Farda 2022). Domino, an Iranian ice cream business, was forced to delete its advertisements because they depicted a woman driving while consuming the frozen dessert (Farda 2022). The declaration was deemed provocative by Iranian leaders and a government agency subsequently claimed that the advertisement was an insult to women's values and a "promotion of immorality" (Farda 2022). Moreover, in 2023, "an Iranian mullah has warned women against peeling aubergines lest it inspire improper

thoughts." (The Economist 2023). The preoccupation with labelling everyday activities as sexually perverse demonstrates the extent to which clergy members wish to invade every possible aspect of the female experience for them to grow in power by depriving others. Charlie Hebdo, a French satirical newspaper notorious for its controversial caricatures of political figures and, most notably, its depictions of the Prophet Mohammed, has landed itself in hot water on several occasions and even made it the target of a mass shooting in 2015, published a special edition paper dedicated to the protests in Iran that aimed to highlight the irony of the Iranian regime: purist clergymen hypnotised by their desire to govern the female body. After the publication of the journal, Charlie Hebdo issued a statement clarifying its intentions:

> Because, in 1979, Iran created an illusion, that of a society run entirely by religion. Fear and repression may have made people believe that this religious utopia has succeeded. But in reality, behind the veils and the public executions, demands and urges have been simmering that cannot be smothered for ever. What do the mullahs understand about desire, yearning or ardour? Probably not much. Their obsession, and their only pleasure, is controlling others, which they can only achieve through intimidation, dissuasion and repression. They are incapable of helping their fellow-citizens towards fulfilment because they themselves are unfulfilled. When you have got yourself stuck up such a dead end, the only way out is to make others pay for your frustrations. The mullahs are repressing young Iranians' urges because they have never gratified their own. (Sourisseau 2023)

In the Islamic Republic, the burden of male sexuality falls time and time again upon the shoulders of its women.

3.3 The Morality Police: Enforcing Gender Segregation by Regulating Women's Bodies and Behaviours in Contemporary Iran

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has empowered a group known as the Morality Police to enforce the country's rigid view of Islamic morality. Under the pretence of keeping the peace, the Morality Police harass women who they believe are

breaking the rules by, for example, wearing inappropriate clothing or associating with men who are not members of their immediate family. This section of the chapter looks at the ways in which the Morality Police have affected women throughout time and how things stand right now. Furthermore, it investigates the connections between the Morality Police and the preceding section's discussion of the cultural preoccupation with women's morals and purity. This section tries to illuminate the broader concerns of state repression and gender apartheid in the Islamic Republic of Iran by studying the function of the Morality Police in Iran's political and social landscape, as covered in earlier chapters. As demonstrated in Chapter 1's examination of religious justifications for gender discrimination and Chapter 2's historical and political analysis of women's erasure, the focus of the morality police on policing women's bodies and behaviour reinforces the belief that women are inferior and perpetuates systemic discrimination against them. This part also investigates the intersections between gender and political power in Iran by examining how the acts of the morality police contribute to political control and repression.

The 1979 establishment of morality police as a tool for regulating the behaviour of women and enforcing severe norms imposed on civilians, officially entitled the "Guidance Patrol" or "گشت ارشاد," was created with the goal of enforcing Islamic dress codes and other values in the public realm. According to Shahi (2009), "The Guidance Patrol was formed in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution as a way of bringing order to the streets and enforcing Islamic norms and values" (Shahi 2009). Shahi further notes that the Guidance Patrol was put in place as an ad hoc organisation made up of volunteers motivated by an internalised sense of religious duty who wanted to play an active role in building an Islamic society from the grassroots. Mahdi (1989) further emphasises the motivations of the early members of the Guidance Patrol. These volunteers saw themselves as "the guardians of Islamic morality" and were willing to use force, if necessary, to enforce their beliefs (Mahdi 1989).

Not only did women's attire and behaviours become a major focus of this morality police, but so did every other aspect of their appearance, from painted fingernails to an open manteau to loitering with a man other than her brother or father (Safavi, 2014). In Vakil's (2011) words, "The morality police is a mechanism of social control, tasked with enforcing Iran's public code of conduct." This morality police has been known to harass,

arrest, and even physically assault women who refuse to conform to their standards of dress and behaviour. Amnesty International (2016) underlines that women who do not adhere to strict clothing requirements are publicly humiliated or assaulted. According to Human Rights Watch (2015), "the morality police have wide discretion and have operated without fear of penalties or punishment," rendering the neighbourhoods and public spaces dangerous, particularly for women who are routinely subjected to police harassment for being perceived as immoral or irreligious. Moreover, the regime has utilised the morality police to suppress political opposition and dissent. Political adversaries are routinely labelled as immoral or un-Islamic and punished as a result (Akhavi, 2000). This strategy has stifled politicians and activists alike. Shirin Ebadi, the Iranian Nobel Peace Prize laureate and human rights activist, has shed light on the discrimination faced by women in Iran in her book "Until We Are Free." In the book, she explains that the Islamic Republic's legal system allows for the imposition of harsh penalties on women who are found guilty of moral crimes, such as adultery or sex outside of marriage, which are difficult to prove and often rely on the testimony of witnesses who may have ulterior motives (Ebadi 2016). These penalties can range from lashes to stoning by fostering an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

Most affected by the morality police's efforts in Iran have been women, who are subject to strict laws regarding their behaviour and dress. The police have helped to preserve and even increase patriarchal practices and attitudes, inhibiting women's capacity to participate in public life and develop in the job. As a result of their efforts, society has grown more repressive, and a culture of fear has formed in which individuals live in constant fear of being punished for tiny violations of social standards. Among their assigned duties is ensuring that all Iranian women wear the mandatory hijab. Sadly, in many instances, human rights breaches, such as acts of violence and harassment against women, are undertaken in the guise of following these standards. In Iran, the morality police can penalise women for not covering their hair and body in public. The penalties may vary from a warning to incarceration. There have been instances of morality police officers physically assaulting women over improper hijab wear. This is the case with Narges Hosseini, a young woman who was arrested in Tehran in April 2018 for removing her hijab and thus 'exposing herself' in public.

In July 2018, Maedeh Hojabri was arrested for posting footage of herself dancing without a headscarf on social media. After Hojabri's detention, other women posted videos of themselves dancing online in her support; this became a global phenomenon and helped her ultimate release on bail. A young woman called Shima Babaee was arrested in Iran in 2014 for nothing more than wearing a messy headscarf. The morality police are accused of assaulting her and fracturing her leg. In 2018, morality police allegedly detained about 7.000 persons, predominantly women, for violating wardrobe rules. During these arrests, women are repeatedly subjected to verbal and physical assault. Women who are perceived as wearing immodestly or using cosmetics have also been targeted by the morality police. Another woman was detained for wearing torn trousers. With their actions, the morality police perpetuate harmful stereotypes and reinforce gender inequality in Iranian society. The morality police are removing women from public life and limiting their freedom of expression by targeting women based on their appearance and enforcing stringent wardrobe laws.

It is a grave issue when the authorities assigned to uphold moral values are not made answerable by the judicial system. This deficiency of supervision poses difficulties for those who strive for justice or vengeance, causing more instances of abuse and aggression towards females. These upholders feel justified in defying rules at odds with their ethical principles as they don't have any trepidation about facing repercussions from law enforcement agencies which only worsens an already bad situation further. Their mere existence of the morality police and the persistence of such tactics demonstrates the challenges encountered by anyone attempting to improve gender equality and human rights in Iran. Crimes perpetrated by Iran's morality police have had severe effects on Iranian women's lives. A young woman named Reyhaneh Jabbari was executed in 2014 for allegedly killing a man who attempted to sexually assault her. This instance is among the most notorious examples of their actions. Within and outside of Iran, activists have denounced Jabbari's execution, calling it an injustice and a violation of her most fundamental human rights. The morality police have been known to use violence and intimidation to enforce the modest dress code for women. In 2007, for instance, members of the morality police harassed and battered numerous women who wore makeup and did not adhere to the strict dress code. Similarly, in 2016, a group of women were imprisoned for 'immoral conduct' after dancing in a public park. Moreover, the regime has utilised the

morality police to repress political dissent and protest. In 2018, numerous Iranian women who opposed the country's mandatory headscarf regulations were imprisoned and charged with 'inciting prostitution.' Some of the jailed women alleged that they had been physically and mentally assaulted.

The morality police have been used to enforce patriarchal standards and goals, restricting women's participation in public life and advancement in the workplace. Women who are found to be in breach of these behaviour norms are frequently prohibited from finishing their schooling or gaining successful employment. The Islamic Republic of Iran's morality police has been especially active in their pursuit of people who violate the nation's prostitution ban. Even though prostitution is illegal in Iran, women suspected of engaging in sex work are routinely imprisoned and mistreated by the police.

Women accused of violating stringent behavioural rules have been detained under the pretence of prostitution. In a particular case in 2017, several dancing ladies were arrested on suspicion of involvement in this illegal trade at an exclusive event. Similarly, another young lady was sentenced to death four years earlier after prosecutors found her guilty despite insufficient evidence against the accusation levelled at her. On top of randomly imprisoning and penalising suspects without due process, authorities often keep watchful eyes over suspected female sex workers- tapping phone calls or going undercover just as examples with which they conduct their surveillance operations. The collective efforts put forth by these morality police units resulted in negatively affecting those believed involved to be partaking in illicit activities including physical assault and rape while confined under arrest; others had public floggings or fines imposed beyond reasonable payment terms ultimately leading fellow citizens towards trepidation about conducting themselves freely outdoors publicly now posing concern depending on actionable outcomes from any contract made between them all - significantly hindering feminine participation within society both locally and globally alike.

Since 1979, women in Iran have been beholden to unspoken cultural standards regarding their behaviour when out and about. Regulations explicitly banning the activity of singing, dancing or riding bicycles and motorbikes by females do not exist; however, they are frequently detained, fined or even imprisoned for participating in such activities on

a routine basis (Moghadam 2011). The foundation for these restrictions lies in social conventions that believe female motion can rouse sexual desire within men – necessitating a woman's burden to control male libido at all times (Afkhami 1994). According to Afkhami (1994), authorities often penalise women who display behaviours viewed as unfitting or inappropriate because proper execution of unwritten regulations is sometimes inconsistent with no clear criteria. For instance, Iranian women may be taken into custody despite having broken no express legal prohibition against singing/dancing publicly per Human Rights Watch (2012); similarly, there exists nothing officially barring the use of motorcycles/bicycles yet fines/imprisonments still occur from time to time. It's worth noting here how behavioural expectations of genders heavily influence societal norms- it serves more than official statutes/laws as seen through Moghadam's observations indicating these custom-based policies persist despite political/social evolution over time. Troublesome though this situation appears, certain signs indicate resistance/progression among ladies residing therein / striving towards further rights and liberties (Kian 2018)

In addition to the acts of the morality police, there have been instances in Iran of private individuals using violence to impose their morals. Saeed Hanaei, an Iranian serial murderer who targeted women he thought to be prostitutes, is one such example. Hanaei was found guilty of killing at least sixteen women and condemned to death in 2002; however, his case sparked controversy in Iran due to the moral arguments he provided for his crimes. Hanaei said he was carrying out God's purpose by killing 'immoral' women, and he even referred to himself as a 'moral warrior' in court. The dispute surrounding Hanaei's case exemplifies Iran's intricate interplay between morality, legality, and justice. This predicament has left many Iranian women feeling imprisoned and helpless, as they are stuck between the government's rigid moral norms and the risk of violence by individuals who believe they are carrying out God's will. Women accused of participating in immoral activity are subjected to both state-sanctioned punishment and extrajudicial violence, creating a double victimhood situation. Many civilians, including Saeed Hanaei himself, viewed his conduct in the case as legitimate, making it a contentious topic. Although the Iranian government condemned Hanaei's murders and that he was ultimately executed, certain members of Iranian society considered him a hero and a moral warrior. Some believed that the government was not doing enough to combat rampant immorality; hence, they interpreted Hanaei's actions as a form of vigilante justice. They viewed Hanaei as

intervening and battling for his beliefs, the Islamic and Iranian cultural values. Conservative and religious organisations in Iran embraced this viewpoint, viewing Hanaei's actions as a noble stand against the corruption and immorality of the modern world. Others recognised parallels between him and the Shi'ite hero Imam Hussein, who likewise fought against persecution and injustice. In Iran, morality, law, and justice are linked, as seen by the discussion over Hanaei's case. Even while the government has a perspective on morality, there are still individuals and organisations in society that view themselves as moral arbiters and feel compelled to enforce that position via force if necessary. This condition makes it difficult to establish a balance between the preservation of the rule of law and the protection of societal norms and standards. The peril of associating morality with vigilante justice is illustrated by Hanaei's narrative. The acts of the morality police and individuals such as Saeed Hanaei highlight the need for a more nuanced view of morality and the state's role in enforcing it. The preservation of societal norms and standards is undoubtedly a crucial task, yet it must be executed within the bounds of legal frameworks and established mechanisms of justice and retribution. Failure to do so carries the risk of propagating a culture where acts of violence and repression become permissible under the guise of moral righteousness, consequently resulting in a society that is both inequitable and morally deficient.

The perverse morality in Iran poses a threat to the rights of women and religious freedom. The country's moral code is based on Islamic ideals that are enforced with violence by state-approved entities, as well as extralegal groups who believe they carry out God's will. Iranian women face many roadblocks when trying to go about their day-to-day activities publicly due to these standards. Women in Iran can be punished by the morals police for breaking laws demanding them cover themselves from head to toe while outside or showing hair under scarves. Despite advances made regarding gender equality worldwide where there are still several prominent positions prohibited for females such as judge seats and Friday prayer leaders leaving much left fighting over Equality Rights. These restrictions too often reflect patriarchal norms emphasising men society's not just social but political dominance suppressing female participation which facilitates ensuring sustaining control among officials holding office according to public belonging has seriously criticised this practice citing it serves to silence debate surrounding key inequalities further eroding civil society efforts aimed at tackling obstacles towards

reaching greater gender equity goals. Iranian policymakers argue that limitations must exist if upholding values associated with Islam Republic truly matters strictly adhering policy within administrative body bolstered traditional practices worsens through limiting, even more, an already challenging task ahead causing problems related like Freedom of expression opposition assertiveness etc perverted sense of justice attributed to law authorities links immorality directly punishing anyone standing against its principles including activists seeking change results official persecution victims being targeted time again. It would most certainly actuate progress toward achieving egalitarianism allowing all individuals respect regardless established beliefs cultures perspectives; however only achieved reforms modify current distorted outlook significantly challenge stifling status quo outrightly rejecting ideas improve overall societal welfare ones endangers smudges lines between accountability reparation injustices perpetrated far along everybody stands gain fairer dealing altogether no one loses sight Humanity rightly deserves so until positive strides occur future looks bleak indeed lacking hope brighter days eventually come although recognising challenges shall continue because changing deeply rooted culture attaining goal parity represents monumental achievement contradictory stigmatic descriptions need never enter equation instead replacing pithy insights conveys impossible true stride result outcome opening doors previously closed doing away antiquated misguided methods perspective emulation empowerment afforded transformative reform currently absent barely considered without acknowledging ongoing crises

3.4 Violating Women's Bodies: Sexual Violence as a Weapon of Political Repression

This section analyses how the Islamic Republic of Iran has deployed sexual assault as a political strategy against women, further pushing them into the deepest corners of society. It describes the regime's use of sexual violence in both public and private contexts as a tactic of oppression and control. Sexual violence, including rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence, is explored along with its repercussions on the lives of Iranian women. This section discusses sexual assault against women in Iran, together with the larger context of maintaining the reigns on women in everything they pursue.

Contrary to the morality that the Islamic Republic purports to promote, rape has been one of the most terrible types of abuse employed against political detainees in Iran.

According to human rights groups and survivors of sexual assault, political prisoners, particularly women, have been subjected to rape as a method of punishment, intimidation, and humiliation. The offenders are frequently members of the security forces, including as the Revolutionary Guards, the police, and the Basij, a government-supporting paramilitary group (Movahedi 2019). Human rights campaigner Narges Mohammadi of Iran claims that "Rape has become a tactic of political repression in Iran, and it is used to destroy the will of political prisoners, particularly women" (Kermani 2016). Ayse Gül Altinay (2007) argues that rape is a kind of patriarchal violence committed against women to establish dominance over them and their bodies. Rebecca Gould (2012) posits that rape is employed as a means of state terrorism to quell opposition and safeguard the powerful from scrutiny. The employment of sexual assault by the Islamic Republic of Iran for political purposes flagrantly disregards international human rights regulations. It violates both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights alongside, more pertinently, Convention against Torture which explicitly forbids any such behaviour. The Iranian government has been widely criticised by various humanitarian agencies across different countries for its inaction regarding these offences. Multiple groups have pressured them to take appropriate steps towards penalising those involved since it constitutes an egregious violation of humanity's basic right to security (Human Rights Watch 2012). Ali Khamenei has approved of raping and torturing political captives (Violence Against Women and Girls 2013). According to reports, Khamenei has defended these regulations by stating that political dissidents cannot join paradise if they do not preserve their virginity (Violence Against Women and Girls 2013). Assaults of this nature demonstrate the double standard prevalent in Iran, where the governing class preach morality while indulging in flagrantly immoral conduct.

The hypocrisy of the Islamic Republic is unveiled by the fact that persons who claim to support moral ideals perpetrate these acts of sexual assault. Although the dictatorship proclaims to be a crusader for morality and integrity, these instances prove that its authorities are indifferent towards the consequences of their conduct. In addition, the fact that these women are being persecuted for their political ideas or actions demonstrates the regime's use of morality as a tool to suppress dissent and maintain control. It is utterly cruel to employ rape as a means of political power, and Khamenei's endorsement thereof serves only to demonstrate the abuse of jurisdiction aimed at domination over a particular

demographic. Khamenei's use of rape as a means of repression has assisted him in maintaining power by spreading fear and frightening political opponents. This political exploitation of rape in Iran exacerbates the isolation and marginalisation of women. Khamenei's use of sexual assault and rape against political dissidents reinforces the power dynamics between the sexes in Iran. Maintaining a system of gender inequality, the dictatorship is purging the public sphere of women who reject the status quo and demand additional freedoms and human rights.

It is thereby reasonable to question the relevance of morality in light of the Iranian regime's hypocrisy and double standards. When those in positions of power can openly violate the very moral norms they profess to uphold, it's legitimate to speculate about what the purpose of morality is. The fundamental aims of Iran's morality police and other control mechanisms are regime maintenance and the exertion of control over women. Through the implementation of strict dress codes and penalties for disobedience, the authoritarian regime suppresses female voices by curtailing their fashion choices. As a result, these measures impose confinement on women's physical movements as well as limit their freedom to speak out in public forums. The regime's overwhelming propensity to resort to rape and sexual assault is only one illustration of the lengths it will go to maintain power. However, this representation of morality is not aligned with the ideals upheld by the UDHR; true morality relies on equity, impartiality, respect for human worth and self-respect rather than external imposition. When individuals in positions of authority fail to be held accountable for their actions it highlights an urgent need for increased transparency over governing behaviour. The perversion of moral principles used as coercion or control diminishes society's adherence towards them resulting in abuse at every level from those who hold all responsibility while controlling such values. It does not matter that the Iranian government promotes its hypocritical views because what matters here must transcend authoritarianism—what holds most significance instead are higher levels of accountability which can ensure greater fairness within systems where abuses have taken place before without consequence against violators ultimately losing sight due course having been perverted into simply serving tyranny through means like these types manipulation tactics using omni-powerful leaders we see today everywhere globally – punishment more frequently applied when a breach occurs will prevent future misconducts enabling users thereof to demand suitably justice righted injustices whether affecting

innocents' rights dignity under any violation type imaginable happening today anywhere worldwide.

Chapter 4:

The Emergence and Impact of the Female-Led Revolution in Iran and Its Transformative Role in Challenging Patriarchal Power Structures

4.1 The Murder of Jina (Mahsa) Amini: An Examination of the State-Sanctioned Violence Against Women in Iran and the Ongoing Struggle for Justice

An Emblematic Case of State-Sanctioned Violence Against Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran; the following subchapter is a summary of The Time's breaking report exposing how the State, over the course of three days, murdered Jina (Mahsa) Amini for the crime of letting a few strands of hair fly in the wind (Callaghan and Khodakarami 2023).

Jina (Mahsa) Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, was detained and ultimately murdered on September 16, 2022 in Tehran after being discovered wearing what the regime considers 'inappropriate' clothing: a black hijab positioned just above her hairline, a long black-and-white patterned coat and white trainers. Officers drove her to the Vozara police station and informed her that she would be participating in an hour-long hijab instruction within the station. She pleaded with the two female officers to release her, but they struck her with their batons instead. She was transported to the hospital after falling at a police station and experiencing a medical emergency at the hands of the officers. Six months later, an investigation revealed that the morality police ridiculed Amini as a 'Bollywood starlet' and waited 45 minutes before sending for medical assistance after Amini collapsed. The female morality police officers laugh as the other fifty to sixty inmates beg them to call for help. According to Iran International, when Amini refused to exit the van upon arriving at the detention centre, a male officer struck her in the head. Several female detainees rushed to Amini's aid, but their efforts went unnoticed. One of the police officers insulted the other women for pleading for assistance and suggested that Amini had feigned passing out. As they watched Amini lying on the floor, the other female detainees begged the officers to call for medical assistance. Two police officers who appeared to be trained in first aid assisted Amini in raising her legs while they checked her pulse.

The lobby commotion was loud enough to attract the attention of the police, who eventually arrived on the scene to investigate (Callaghan and Khodakarami 2023). The release of the first female prisoners occurred around 20.00, when two police station employees, one of whom appears to be trained in first aid, eventually arrive to check on Amini and call an ambulance. Officials from the morality police yelled and cursed as they ordered the captives to calm down. Friends and relatives of dozens of inmates had waited for hours outside the station's main entrance; hearing cries emanating from within, they began angrily pounding on the gates and demanding to know what was happening. After Amini was apprehended, her brother Kiarash and her cousins took a taxi to Vozara where soldiers beat them with batons and attempted to disperse them with pepper spray upon their arrival. Kiarash questioned the patient's identity, but the guard at the gate insisted that it was one of their soldiers who had been hit in the eye with pepper spray until Kiarash retrieved a photo of Mahsa from his mobile device and presented it to the liberated women. When the ambulance was finally called, a physician examined the unconscious Amini's vital signs and performed CPR.

Kiarash located a top surgeon to perform emergency surgery on Amini; rushing her to intensive care, where her prognosis was grim. The Tehran police issued a statement denying that Amini had been abused and stating that she had been hospitalised due to a heart attack. In the video, Amini is seen unconscious and intubated on a hospital bed, with blood dripping from her right ear and two heavy bandages tightly wrapped beneath the back of her head. Amini's mother, Mojgan, cried as she described her daughter's acceptable attire that day: a manteau looser than usual, a head scarf three metres long, and no makeup. The Iranian authorities desperately attempted to conceal the news by claiming that Amini fainted at 19:30 and that an ambulance was immediately dispatched. Three days after Amini's arrest, the Tehran police issued a statement denying reports that he had been assaulted, referring to them as 'hostile media assertions' (Callaghan and Khodakarami 2023).

Approximately seventy-two hours elapsed before her passing and in the aftermath of her murder, multitudes congregated outside the medical facility and throughout the streets of downtown Tehran in an uproar chanting 'Death to the dictator!' as their denunciation towards the hospital's Instagram post offering condolences to the Amini

family (Callaghan and Khodakarami 2023). Demonstrations commenced in Saqqez before rapidly proliferating into neighbouring provinces bordering both the Caspian Sea and Gulf of Oman locales. Niloofar Hamedi and Elaheh Mohammadi, the female journalists who first broke the news about Amini's critical condition in the hands of the morality police, have been imprisoned and charged with promoting propaganda. They are facing death sentences.

Disbelief at the news of Amini's death sparked vehement demonstrations. These protests were not only a response to her barbaric treatment, but also a call to end the Islamic regime that Iranians claim has starved them for decades, dehumanising its own people. The enforcement of religious regulations in Iran is purportedly aimed at preserving ethical and moral standards; nevertheless, Amini's murder and those that followed exposed the invalidity of this claim. Amini posed no discernible hazard and merely exhibited self-assertion by resisting the tyrannical regulations imposed on women since Khomeini's ascension to power. The reprehensible actions perpetrated against Amini are primarily indicative of a demonstration of authority rather than a sincere regard for ethical or Islamic principles, underscoring the paradoxical aspect of implementing morality standards in Iran. By her death, advocates for human rights and gender equality were invigorated, and the urgency of fighting back against the systematic murder and erasure of women in Iran became impossible to ignore. Not only this, but the impunity of the Islamic Republic of Iran came to light on the world stage and Iranian women gained international backing. The slogan *Woman Life Freedom* (زن زندگی آزادی) carries tremendous weight and resonance. This motto expresses the fundamental needs of women for liberation from oppression, safety from assault, and parity with men.

Amini's murder is not an isolated incident under this cruel regime and dictatorship. Inhumane acts of intolerance, violence, and brutality have been dished out by the regime's authorities to their own people on several occasions. Mistreatment and abuse of women by the morality police are only a few examples of human rights abuses that have been covered up and justified by official propaganda. The Islamic Republic employs the use of violence and intimidation to stifle dissent and muzzle its opponents, but the people of Iran are, despite all odds. fighting for democracy and justice– for women, for life, and for freedom. The international community must back them and hold the government accountable for its human rights atrocities.

4.2 Charting a Path Forward: Examining the Political, Social, and Economic Factors That Will Shape the Future of Iran and Its Impact on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

Masih Alinejad, a renowned Iranian-American journalist and women's rights activist is well aware of the value of her voice. She has been living in exile from Iran since 2009 given her open criticism of the Islamic Republic's treatment of women and the role of the mandatory hijab in this. Khamenei, afraid of women in positions of power, rages against her in his speeches and on multiple occasions has sent hitmen to try and seize her in her New York home, for "'Women of Iran are his biggest enemy,' Alinejad says (Rajvanshi 2023). "'He's scared of us more than anything.'" She likens the mandatory hijab in Iran to the Berlin Wall of the Islamic Republic's regime (Rajvanshi 2023). In her eyes, "If we tear this wall down, the Islamic Republic won't exist" (France 24 2022). In the same way, in which the Wall symbolised the ideological divide between East and West during World War II, the mandatory hijab embodies the gender apartheid that fuels the mullahs running Iran. According to Sadjadpour, Khamenei knows that:

> rescinding compulsory hijab will be a gateway to freedom and will be interpreted [...] as an act of vulnerability, not magnanimity. That Iranians will not be placated merely with the freedom of dress but will be emboldened to demand all the freedoms denied to them in a theocracy– including the freedom to drink, eat, read, love, watch, listen and, above all, say what they want. (Sadjadpour 2022).

In an interview with TIME magazine, Alinejad parades the faces of two young slain Iranian women, "16-year-old Sarina Esmailzadeh and 17-year-old Nika Shakarami" who were merely protesting for their basic human rights. After their state-sanctioned assassinations they became martyrs, but "'Why don't people pay attention to women when they're alive?'" she begs (Rajvanshi 2023).

The apprehension of the mullahs is primarily directed towards women in high rankings. Despite the killing of Amini and over 600 demonstrators, including 60 children, the flame of revolution has flowed across the country, as well around the globe (Newsroom 2022). Amini has become an emblematic symbol of the revolution. The authorities have arrested nearly 30,000 individuals, imprisoned about 20,000 young people, and sentenced

hundreds to death (Newsroom 2022). The struggle for women's rights has a long-standing history spanning several millennia and manifests in inconspicuous ways, such as the significant reduction in the fertility rate following the Islamic Revolution. Specifically, the fertility rate has plummeted from 6.53 children per woman in 1979 to 1.7 in 2020, as reported by the World Bank in the same year. Notwithstanding the revolution, the government annulled the nation's domestic family planning initiative, deeming it a Western influence, and instead embraced a pro-natalist position. Furthermore, the phenomenon of secularisation from a grassroots level can be interpreted as a form of individual resistance against the population control policies imposed by the government.

Contemporary women are challenging gender-based and male-dominated norms and limitations. In 2016, approximately 33.3% of young women obtained a bachelor's degree, which represents a significant surge from the 1.5% who achieved the same feat in 1976 (*School enrollment, Tertiary, female (% gross) - Iran, Islamic rep.* 2022). Notwithstanding the regime's decision to reduce the legal age of marriage for girls to 10, the mean age at which women enter into their first marriage has decreased from 19.7 in 1976 to 24 in 2016 (WorldBank). The emergence of the feminist movement was catalysed by the initiation of a petition against laws deemed discriminatory towards women in 2006. Subsequently, amidst Ahmadinejad's contested re-election, a significant number of individuals manifested their backing for the Green Movement.

The contemporary movement for freedom, which was once an internal protest against the dictatorship, has now evolved into an overt anti-regime revolution championed by the younger generation. The attainment of gender equality between men and women necessitates the provision of sex-based liberties, the establishment of rights that are not in violation of Islamic law, the assurance of political rights, and the granting of behavioural autonomy. The concept of freedom involves the endeavour to attain individual self-governance and a society that is characterised by liberty and democracy. Men and women have collaborated in demonstrating against theocratic authoritarianism, with the youth assuming a prominent role in the movement. The Iranian diaspora, numbering three million individuals worldwide, has adeptly navigated the digital age and emerged as a crucial component thereof. Despite attempts by the ruling mullahs to suppress dissent by propagating the notion that the West poses the greatest danger to Iran, it is in fact the mullahs themselves who pose the greatest threat to the nation's future.

According to Dr Nayereh Tohidi's analysis, the involvement of Iranian women's movements and activism has played a crucial role in the grassroots secularisation of Iran. She underlines how Iranian women have challenged conventional religious norms and practices through their agency and grassroots initiatives. They have achieved this by reinterpreting and reappropriating religious texts and traditions in a manner that aligns with their aspirations for gender equality and contemporary values. According to Dr Tohidi, the secularisation process in Iran involves a redefinition and reconceptualization of religion's societal role, particularly with respect to gender equality and women's rights, rather than a complete abandonment of religious identity or religion itself.

Given these numbers, sociologist Asef Bayat writes that for decades, Iranian activist women were subjected to a "women's non-movement" (Bayat, 2019). It was difficult for mass grassroots movements to thrive, he argues, because of the authoritarian and oppressive nature of the Iranian environment (Bayat, 2019). Bayat claims that the state practices of gender segregation and compulsory veiling can be combated by secularisation from the bottom up, such as increased female participation in the workforce and decreased fertility rates (Bayat, 2019). Despite the significance of the "power of presence" and the commonplace nature of women's resistance in shaping women's agency, recent developments suggest that the activism of Iranian women has transcended its conventional origins (Bayat, 2019). The current trend of women's collective activism in Iran displays the typical features of social movements, including framing, networking, campaigning, creating discourse or symbols for collective identity, lobbying, mobilising, and engaging in large-scale collective protests (Bayat, 2019). In a conservative Islamist clerical state where sex segregation and legal and practical discrimination against women are pursued, it is noteworthy that women have achieved remarkable intellectual success, even surpassing males in higher education. Despite women's academic achievements, there remains a disparity in their access to employment opportunities, economic and professional growth, and political representation. (76)

4.3 Silenced Bodies, Stolen Futures: An Analysis of the Ongoing Poisoning of School Girls in Iran and Its Implications

Since November 2022, more than one hundred educational institutions have experienced multiple attacks. The initial reports of chemical intoxication emerged from the

province of Qom and disseminated to other regions. There have been more than 450 attacks across 139 cities (Amnesty International 2023). The occurrences have led to the hospitalisation of innumerable school-aged girls, with symptoms including respiratory distress, nasal and pharyngeal irritation, cardiac arrhythmias, migraines, nausea, fatigue, emesis, and limb paresis. Some parents have withdrawn their girls from school due to apprehensions regarding their well-being. Since the initial accounts of the attacks came to light, authorities have endeavoured to downplay their magnitude, without undertaking comprehensive, unbiased interventions to curtail them. In March, police detained a total of 118 individuals following the determination made by officials that the primary cause of the poisonings was the act of smuggling stink bombs (Amnesty International 2023). As of April 14, the Minister of Health made a statement indicating the lack of conclusive evidence regarding the alleged poisoning of schoolgirls. The Minister suggested that a significant proportion of the reported symptoms, which have resulted in over 13,000 schoolgirls seeking medical treatment, may be attributed to stress and misbehaviour (Misic 2023). The symptoms of schoolgirls were dismissed by other administrators as manifestations of anxiety, excitement, and mental contagion (Misic 2023). Individuals such as parents, schoolgirls, teachers, and reporters have reportedly been subjected to physical attacks, acts of intimidation, and detainment as a result of their expressed concerns regarding the government's perceived inadequacy in addressing the issue of poisonings or their coverage of related events. Amnesty International reports that millions of Iranian schoolgirls are in danger of losing access to education, health, and potentially their lives as a result of the intentional deployment of chemical weapons against their schools (2023).

The poisonings seem to be a component of a broader scheme carried out by religious extremists to penalise female students for their peaceful involvement in statewide protests advocating for the Woman Life Freedom movement (Kenny 2023). Additionally, the perpetrators targeted the students for their acts of rebellion, such as refusing to wear hijabs in public while donning school uniforms (Kenny 2023). As a result of governmental inactivity and the stifling of public dissent, a significant number of Iranians hold the belief that the assaults are the handiwork of state-affiliated entities or individuals aligned with pro-government vigilante groups. The laws and policies in Iran that exhibit discrimination and dehumanisation towards women and girls have the effect of enabling certain individuals and groups to engage in violent behaviour. Reza Pahlavi stated in a tweet that:

آمران حملات سازمان‌یافته به مدارس دخترانه ایران، همان‌هایی هستند که فردای فاجعه
۵۷، فرخرو پارسا را به جرم گستراندن آموزش و تحصیل زنان به قتل رساندند. مقابل
رژیمی که چون گرگ درنده به جان فرزندان ما افتاده، هوشیار و هم‌بسته باشیم، متشکل
شویم و از دختران آینده‌ساز ایران حفاظت کنیم.

He condemned the regime for its deliberate attacks on girls whose only crime was attending primary school classes, for the regime's biggest fear can be, time and time again, traced back to the advancements or regressions   of its female population. Pahlavi advocates for heightened awareness and solidarity in opposition to the current regime, with the aim of safeguarding the future of Iranian girls who are poised to play a pivotal role in the development of the nation.

The Prince makes reference to Farrokhroo Parsa, a distinguished physician who held the esteemed position of Minister of Education during the tenure of Amir Abbas Hoveida. It is noteworthy that she was the first woman to hold a cabinet ministerial position. She was an outspoken supporter of women's rights in Iran. In 1980, during the onset of the Islamic Cultural Revolution, she was subjected to execution by firing squad in Tehran. Reza Pahlavi has made reference to the organised poisoning of school girls, drawing a comparison between these tragic events and asserting that the individuals responsible for these attacks are the same extremists who carried out the execution of Parsa. He draws a comparison between the governing system and a predatory wolf that engages in the indiscriminate killing of innocent beings (Pahlavi 2023).

During the initial hearing of the trial, the presiding judge presented the charges against Mrs Parsa in the form of an indictment. According to the report in Ettelaat, she was charged with the following offences:

> plunder of public treasury; causing corruption and spreading prostitution in
> the Ministry of Education; [...] using her function and position to break the
> laws and make the education system reliant on imperialist culture; being
> close to Nasiri, who was executed; having an unlawful relationship with her
> office Director. (*Farrokhru Parsa: One person's story* (no date)

Farrokhroo Parsa's court sentence was written with the intention of undermining her reputation and credibility. The assertion specifically singled out Parsa's gender and included numerous sexist and disparaging allegations that impugned her personal attributes, ethical standards, and principles. The unfounded allegation of "propagating prostitution" within the Ministry of Education employs pejorative terminology to censure and suppress Parsa on account of her gender, a strategy frequently employed against women in male-dominated societies. The accusation served to reinforce the perception that Parsa was a morally bankrupt and unscrupulous individual who exhibited a lack of concern for the well-being of her constituents. Such linguistic and attitudinal expressions sustain a culture of misogyny and gender-oriented aggression.

Alinejad attributed responsibility for the school poisonings to the regime, contending that it seeks to retaliate against young people for their participation in demonstrations. Numerous parents have expressed on social media their reluctance to enrol their female children in school as a means of safeguarding them. However, Alinejad has urged male students to refrain from attending classes at their respective schools and universities on Saturday as a show of solidarity with schoolgirls.

The Islamic Republic has refuted allegations of complicity in the poisoning incident. Ahmad Vahidi, the Minister of the Interior and military commander of the Revolutionary Guards, has stated that the administration has not yet been able to identify the assailants and is lacking eyewitness accounts. This statement pertains to a government that frequently employs extensive surveillance measures to identify and eliminate dissidents, regardless of their location within or outside the country. There is a growing belief among the Iranian populace that the government is responsible for the recent attacks, which are perceived as a retaliatory measure against the prominent involvement of young Iranian women in the Woman, Life, Freedom Revolution.

Schoolgirls have taken a prominent role in demonstrating against the authoritarian regime and religious symbols of the Islamic Republic of Iran. They have engaged in acts such as removing their mandatory hijabs, burning images of past and present supreme leaders, and posting anti-regime messages throughout school premises. The Iranian government has attributed blame for recent accusations made by the Iranian people to autonomous groups; however, such groups do not exist. The militias in Iran that are

purportedly autonomous are actually connected to the country's security apparatus, specifically the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Iranian government employs these militias as a means of shifting responsibility for human rights violations that occur within the nation. In the autumn of 2014, the Iranian regime attributed a series of acid attacks targeting women in Isfahan to hardline 'autonomous groups,' which were allegedly motivated by a desire to combat perceived immorality (Serjoie 2014).

The targeted individuals of the acid attacks were exclusively female and were situated in the driver's seat of their respective vehicles at the time of the assaults (Serjoie 2014). Although the attacks have been verified by authorities, a conclusive number of fatalities remains a point of disagreement. All perpetrators involved in these incidents drove motorcycles to conceal their identities by wearing helmets. The occurrence of violence led to the rapid dissemination of fear in Isfahan and other major urban centres and there were significant accusations that Iranian morality patrols, associated with conservative Islamic groups, were accountable for the surge of assaults (Serjoie 2014). Some were sent menacing messages from unidentified sources prior to the acid assaults, cautioning them that women who exhibited 'non-Islamic' appearances and clothing would be singled out for attack (Serjoie 2014).

The current chemical attacks seem to have been planned and executed by security personnel within the governing regime, indicating a recurrence of historical events. The Iranian population holds the belief that the primary impetus behind such attacks by the regime is to induce a sense of terror and penalise the Iranian society, particularly its women, with the aim of thwarting any potential future uprisings. Given Khamenei's statement in October 2022 regarding the efficacy of punitive measures in addressing youth-led protests, the present development seems to have been foreseen. Despite constituting a blatant infringement of human rights, the Islamic Republic employs these attacks as a means of gauging the extent of global forbearance. Masih Alinejad told the Guardian:

> In my opinion, this chemical attack is revenge by the Islamic Republic against the brave women who [rejected] the mandatory hijab and shook the 'Berlin Wall' of [Ayatollah Ali] Khamenei. As the Islamic State Iranian regime hates girls and women, I call on women across the globe – especially schoolgirls – to be the voice of Iranian students and call on the leaders of democratic countries to condemn this series of poisonings and isolate

Khamenei's regime. I call this biological terrorism, and it should be investigated by the UN. We need an outside organisation to investigate as soon as possible (The Guardian 2023).

<div align="center">Chapter 5:</div>

<div align="center">Voices of Iranian Nationals: Exploring Experiences and Perspectives on Women's Rights in Iran Through Qualitative Interviews</div>

5.1 On Morality: Both the Police and the Burden

The first theme of this analysis explores the many facets of morality in Iranian culture, paying particular attention to the place of women and their interactions with the morality police under the Islamic Republic. This chapter seeks to clarify the multifaceted relationship between morality, gender norms, and the realities of women in Iranian society by interacting with human narratives and insights, aiming to illuminate the delicate interplay between morality, social control, and the lived experiences of women in Iran through first-person testimonies, thereby advancing the overall understanding of the dynamics of morality at work in the Iranian environment. The morality police, as introduced in Chapter 3, is highly controversial. Although Iran claims to uphold Islamic values, many women, even those who follow the Islamic dress code, have been harassed, abused, and arrested by the morality police. The personal experiences shared by these individuals reveal how the morality police have impacted the daily lives of regular citizens while bringing attention to the human rights issues that arise from the morality police's daily actions. Out of twenty-five interviewees, nineteen had personal accounts of arrest and torture at the hands of the morality police that they were willing to reveal to us. Phebe, mid-interview, came out with the statement:

> "For the sake of propaganda, the morality police exist. Any bad government that wants to promote something will come up with this facade to pretend they are doing really well. After the revolution, they started a war with Iraq, and they sold it as a very holy war, promoting it as a holy thing, the holy defence, for they think they are from God, even though they were also attacking. The Islamic Republic dragged the war out for eight years. They marketed it as something holy and used that to cover their sins, like a shield. They wanted people to believe the regime was something from God. This regime is rooted in these holy symbols, so they need these symbols, like the

hijab and the morality police, to keep the blood pumping through their veins. What makes me hopeful is that if women continue to not wear the hijab, the government will lose something so crucial for them, the symbol of their goodness."

Nova, 38 years old from Tehran, shared a personal account of being detained on two separate occasions by the morality police in Iran. During her commute, an unknown woman seized her hand and urged her to accompany her to the morality police. Nova, who had consistently adhered to hijab regulations, was apprehended and transported to the police station alongside a group of other detained women in a van. She was detained for one hour and released following a mandatory safety check involving the affixation of safety pins and a total inspection of her attire. Nova was apprehended for the second time during a summer three years ago when her manteau was open owing to the sweltering temperatures. The police confiscated her phone and bag without lawful authority to search and coerced her with the threat of overnight detention if she contested their actions. After being brought to the police station, she was placed in the same location as Amini would be brought to years down the line. She was then separated from the other detained women and subjected to verbal humiliation. The police destroyed her initial outfit and made her stand for a mugshot because her ankles were visible during the detainment.

In another interview, Phebe, who is now 37 and left Iran six years ago to study in Europe, expressed her innate fear of the morality police and other law enforcement officials in Iran. This fear was not limited to gender-based concerns but extended to all aspects of policing. She clarified that in her small town, it wasn't the morality police who requested her to cover her hair, but rather a distinct local police force. The officer threatened her with arrest. She asserted that the police in Iran prioritise arresting citizens over ensuring their actual safety. On the same note, a different interviewee alleged that the morality police are specifically instructed to shame and verbally abuse girls who are detained for not wearing the proper hijab. Nonetheless, this woman recounted an event that took place on a family holiday eighteen years prior. While out for a walk with her female relatives, they came across a group of boys smoking. They asked the boys for cigarettes. The interviewee described how smoking outside as a girl was culturally prohibited: "It wasn't a normal thing for girls to do, even smoking outside was prohibited culturally for girls to partake in."

She also explained the harmful cultural attitudes that the morality police held towards women who smoked, stating that:

> "if you smoke in front of boys they'll think you're willing to do anything sexually for them because you don't have the right morals."

When the police encountered the interviewee and her cousins smoking outside, they asked them what arrangement they had made with the boys and whether they were planning on having sex with them. The police then began to beat them with bats:

> "They started to beat us with bats. I had black bruises on my body- one on my arm, one on my leg, one on my back. I really felt my arm was broken. It took months to heal."

They also insulted her and threatened to imprison her for six months:

> "They told me that because it was none of their business they started to insult me, I said no wonder this regime is going downhill, it's because of officers like you. They said they recorded me and they said it would cost me 6 months in prison."

The police further escalated the situation by threatening to harm the interviewee's academic career and insulting her parents:

> "They told me don't worry about the university, we're going to put you in jail. They took our bags and started to insult our parents. They said this is what they gave to society because you are so indulgent with society. They called us whores. And that we were rotten. Had we been boys they wouldn't have cared."

Bahar, now 35, was also arrested in her early twenties "on allegation of 'having an intimate conversation with a male citizen overtly.;"

Sabnam disclosed that she had been detained by the morality police three or four times. Other than improper hijab wear, while studying at the University of Tehran and conversing with her male classmates, a police officer inquired about their relationship. The woman stated that they were only classmates, but the officer threatened to report her and jeopardise her academic success. The problem required her father to visit the university and address it. The most perilous event, however, was when she was arrested for being in the company of her boyfriend, resulting in their arrest. She was petrified that they might have to marry each other because she had heard that it was a common consequence for couples who were caught together. The police requested the presence of the parents, but only allowed the father to come, not the mother. She ended her relationship with her boyfriend due to the emotional distress caused by the experience and the anxiety of encountering the police in public, fearing they might belittle her again. In general, she conveyed that her experiences with the police in Iran left her feeling traumatised and insecure.

One woman mentioned the time she bore witness to the detention of a young woman who was accompanying her 6-year-old niece to the doctor. The woman was stopped for not wearing a hijab and clarified that she was simply accompanying her niece to the doctor and that her hijab had unintentionally slipped off her shoulders. The morality police did not believe her explanation and took her away in their van, abandoning the child alone on the street in a crowded intersection, showing no concern or remorse for the actual safety and welfare of innocent individuals.

Another woman, 39 years old and living in Tehran presently, shared an anecdote from when Khatami was president in which she was arrested alongside her boyfriend for being out in public together. They told her that having a boyfriend/girlfriend was a crime.

> "It caused me a lot of trouble as my family and my boyfriend met each other for the first time in the police station. They were not meant to know we were dating"

Over the last eight years, Zaara, a 59-year-old woman, has had several run-ins with the morality police in Iran. She was arrested and taken to the police station for improperly wearing the hijab, where they humiliated her, saying that she was too old to be so

disobedient. Zaara's choice to no longer wear a scarf following Mahsa Amini's slaughter is a sign of the growing disdain and outrage felt by Iranian women towards these limitations, as well as the ongoing human rights violations they encounter regularly. She is aware of the risks but is willing to take them with the goal to pursue freedom and justice.

Shirin opposes the term 'morality police' and suggests referring to them as 'hijab police' instead, as their primary goal is to ensure that women wear the hijab as required. She clarifies that the term "morality" is used to create an impression of ethical behaviour, but in truth, people's fundamental rights are being violated. She explains that women can be arrested by the morality police without any reason, even if they are just doing their regular activities. Shirin is questioning who is the real culprit in this situation– the women or the morality police who are depriving them of their rights and dignity. Although Shirin hasn't been arrested by the morality police herself, she reveals that her daughters have faced abuse first-hand. She is always concerned about their safety when they are in public. She mentioned how the police are notorious for raiding people's homes without consent and taking away items like video tapes, cassettes, and even chess boards that are considered 'immoral' and therefore forbidden. She maintains that the morality police is an extension of the oppressive conduct, which is intended to keep society, particularly women, under control.

Shadi, who is 40 years old and identifies as religious, talked about her encounter with the morality police that took place two decades prior. Shadi, now a professor, a university student at the time, was smoking in public while wearing her hijab. She was approached by the morality police, and despite covering her hair, they tried to arrest her for holding a cigarette and asking a man to light it for her. The morality police used a baton to hit her, which only goes to show the arbitrary nature of the morality police's enforcement of women's behaviour and how violent and aggressive their methods are. It is not a matter of protecting Islamic tradition, but of controlling how women are allowed to exist in society. Shadi followed the hijab, but still experienced violence and aggression at the hands of the morality police, showcasing again the irony of their morality, how they violate fundamental human rights for the sake of fostering an environment of fear where women are treated as second-class citizens.

Of those without firsthand experience, a 43-year-old woman, exiled for the last three years, shared that "I have not had direct experience with the morality police in Iran yet; however, I am always stressed when I see the morality police." The same sentiment is shared by a 36-year-old woman who claims "I have not been arrested yet by the morality police, but I have always felt scared and insecure when they were around, however, almost all the women around me have been arrested by the morality police at least once." Finally, a 72-year-old woman shares "I didn't have any experience with the morality police, but almost all the young ladies close to me have been arrested by the morality police at least once, and the first damage it causes is that it destroys their self-esteem."

According to Mina, in Iran's religious society, there is an expectation for women to become mothers and if a woman decides not to marry or have children, it is "as if she has a deficiency." Despite being praised for their motherhood, women do not have custody rights over their children. She went on to state how:

> "if immorality is pinpointed in the society, it is the women's fault, and even in the case of treason, women pay much more than men."

During the conversation, Zaara made multiple references to society's unwritten rules, unfair treatment, and societal expectations for girls to maintain their family's reputation, even in the presence of relatives. These unwritten rules were a recurring theme through many of the interviews, as the notion of morality finds creative ways to control its women. Unprompted, 69-year-old Bahar, who is part of Iran's Christian-Armenian minority expressed her frustration with the burden that women are subjected to carrying, stating:

> "Morality is just a fictive thing. It is the craziest thing that I must be responsible to cover my hair so a man doesn't get tempted. That is the most harmful thing you can do to a woman. Why don't you teach men to cover their eyes, why is it that everything a woman does is provocative and tempting? Why is it our responsibility? Cover! Cover! Cover! Why should I have to cover? Close your eyes!"

Nazanin shared an anecdote from junior high school where she had a principal who worked for the morality police. She used to go around and check girls' bags to find things that could be considered un-Islamic. It could be as simple as a colourful pen that she interpreted as hostile to Islam, or even a newspaper that she would label as propaganda. The girls were not allowed to wear white socks, for, according to her, white was an exciting colour, even though there were no boys at school. She expressed her anger surrounding the fact that a girl cannot exist without being made out to be a sexual figure. Phebe compared morality to a circus, saying:

> "We can lie and say all the girls are virgins and pure and good, but it is just a mask. Girls start to have sex very young but they just hide it, and it can lead to very bad things because everyone is hiding it. People just have a double life in general: they drink at home, they party, they have sex. They just pretend that they don't."

Sabnam also discussed the unspoken rules in her community, highlighting virginity as the key marker of being a "good girl" or a "good woman". When questioned about why this rule only pertains to girls and not boys, the answer she was frequently met with was "because it is what God has said." Afsaneh reported how daunting the task of finding a gynaecologist is, as sex outside of marriage is considered a grave sin.

There is a cultural taboo against women laughing aloud or showing happiness in public in the Islamic Republic of Iran that many interviewees brought up. The theory is based on the assumption that women's exuberance and laughing could be interpreted as provocative or vulgar, going against the expected modesty and virtue associated with their imposed femininity. This cultural ban against women laughing is a reflection, yet again, of a larger patriarchal mentality that aims to govern and control every aspect of women's behaviour and appearance. It supports the idea that women should be restricted to particular roles and adhere to traditional norms of femininity that limit a woman's most basic bodily independence and self-expression.

The never-ending objectification of women is sustained by a complex web of societal norms, legal frameworks, and cultural constructs. Women's intellectual prowess,

accomplishments, and aspirations are eclipsed in favour of being reduced to objects of sexual desire by rigid dress codes, constrained personal liberties, and limited agency. The effects of this ongoing dehumanisation go far beyond one's immediate environment. The morality police promote a culture that normalises abuse, mistreatment, and prejudice by relegating women solely to their outward appearance. This toxic environment breeds apprehension and subservience, restricting women's freedom of speech and active participation in civic affairs. As a result, Iranian women's collective power is essentially restrained, hindering their ability to control their own destiny and impeding the progress of the entire population. The struggle to end Iran's dehumanisation of women demands a multifaceted assessment that acknowledges the complex relationships between faith, custom, and political decisions. A climate of equality can only be fostered by passing egalitarian laws, which must be done in order to reverse prejudiced practices. Furthermore, cultural changes are essential, necessitating a critical examination of prevalent notions of womanhood and embracing their equality as autonomous beings. Only through such radical actions can the collective power of Iranian women be strengthened, propelling the nation towards a more just and liberal future. In addition to being an insult to human dignity, objectifying women in every possible sense in the Islamic Republic of Iran is a formidable roadblock to group empowerment.

5.2 On Religious Freedom and Women's Rights

When asked about what kind of women's rights violations they have experienced in their everyday life, Nova's account shed light on the widespread and ingrained gender-based discrimination and human rights abuses written into law, as explored in Chapter 2. Through her own experiences, she has discovered how these injustices are subtly continued and accepted in daily life. In fact, many interviewees made a point of mentioning that so many of these abuses fly under the radar because they have become so normalised that it is easy to forget that they are forms of oppression, like Phebe who claimed that "On a lot of occasions, [she] didn't even feel that things were going against [her] human rights because [she] thought it was the way it should be." Malakeh also said that "harassment on the street, and being underestimated at work are [her] daily experiences."

Many interviewees spoke of the gender pay gap and the limited opportunities for women in government work. For instance, one's parents began working in the same bank at the same time. After a couple of years, her father became the manager of the bank but her mother was always, for 25 years, a simple clerk solely because she was born a woman. Sabnam gave an example of the entry exam used for university admissions, where boys receive higher scores than girls even if they answer the same questions correctly. According to her statement, if a boy and a girl answer the same questions correctly, the boy will be given the opportunity to attend university while the girl will not. Sabnam talked about the gender pay gap as well and shared how she was paid less than her men counterparts for doing the same job. She stated that the reason for the salary inequality is the belief that men should financially support their family members, thus stripping women of the right to financial independence. In addition, Nova explained how the legal system and inheritance allocation in Iran do not even try to mask their systemic gender bias. It is a violation of the principle of equality before the law that a woman's testimony is valued at only half of a man's and that the inheritance of two women is equal to that of just one man. Women must seek approval from their fathers or husbands even for simple things like travelling, limiting their involvement in public activities and only strengthening gender inequalities. While some of the married interviewees stated that their husbands' open-mindedness allows them to enjoy equal treatment within the context of the home, this experience is by no means universal. A woman's access to her human rights should never be dependent on the willingness of her husband. The same logic can be applied to fathers.

Upon being asked how she sees the interaction between religious freedom and women's rights, Nova's response emphasised how Islamic teachings and laws in Iran result in limitations on women's rights and liberties. She spoke of child marriage in Iran and how despite international human rights standards requiring the minimum age for marriage to be 18, girls as young as 9 are allowed to marry. She argues that Islam is to be a personal belief, not one to be exercised for running a country, stating that "If I am half a man it is because of Islam."

When examining the intersection of Islam and women's rights within the Iranian context, it is crucial to take into account the various viewpoints that are present and understand how lived experiences can lead to dissatisfaction and apprehension regarding

specific interpretations of the Islamic faith as expressed by some of the Iranians who took part in this study. She expressed her conviction that there exists a discrepancy between Islam and human rights and attributed a range of violations and discriminatory practices that are present in Iran to Islamic teachings, including gender inequality, polygamy, and the practice of stoning. It is imperative to recognise that the aforementioned perspectives are representative of her personal encounters and outlooks after growing up in a theocratic dictatorship. Incorporating these viewpoints can provide us with a more profound comprehension of the intricate interplay between religious convictions and the rights of women within the State. When engaging in discussions about Islam and gender equality, it is crucial to exercise sensitivity and nuance. It is important to acknowledge that there are diverse interpretations of Islam and that some individuals are actively striving for gender equality within the context of their religious beliefs.

Mehrnaz highlighted the significant disparity between men's and women's rights in Iran, stating:

> "In the field of inheritance, I know that a woman's rights are half of a man's,
> in the notary public A woman is half of a man when it comes to the custody
> of children, the priority is with the man."

She also expressed frustration with the lack of protection for women, stating, "I really don't think of positive rights, we have almost no protection law!" Mehrnaz emphasised the limited information available to her but noted that the examples that came to mind were predominantly negative. Afsaneh holds that Iranian women are not given their fundamental rights, such as the ability to choose their own clothing and participate in everyday activities without limitations. She expressed her fear of using public transportation due to the possibility of being arrested by the morality police and receiving fines for not wearing a hijab even while in her own vehicle. Afsaneh mentioned that according to Shari'a law, premarital sex is prohibited for Iranian women and they are not allowed to participate in it. Moreover, fundamental rights related to reproduction are prohibited, along with the act of dancing and singing out of happiness as they go against the mullahs' teachings.

Afsar expressed how domestic violence and honour killings are two major problems that women in Iran must deal with. The majority of Iranian women, including herself, have all experienced sexual violence at some point, either physically or verbally. She claims that women who report this violence frequently do not receive the necessary support; instead, those men who commit acts of violence are encouraged, like in the Saeed Hanaei case. As an illustration, she made reference to Sajjad Heydari, an Iranian man who beheaded his 17-year-old wife in an honour killing, who received an eight-year prison term, while a different woman received a death sentence for murdering her abuser. Bahar then alluded to the severe emotional toll inflicted on Iranian women time and time again, linking it back to being valued at half a man's worth. She expressed how knowing that society views her, and all women, as less valuable simply because of their sex can result in lower self-esteem, lowered aspirations, and a pervasive sense of not being truly human because the playing field is never in their favour.

A calculated strategy used by the government to assert control and advance its own political interests is, in effect, this deliberate undervaluation of women, who are valued at half what men are. The dictatorship uses the continued devaluation of women as a tactical tool to keep control and subjugate the female population, increasing its power by fostering a sense of inferiority and lowering women's perceived worthwhile stifling dissent and resistance. In the end, this calculated manipulation of women's value is used to maintain and advance political power. The devaluation feeds into a status quo of gender apartheid, which supports the preexisting social structure even more. This, in turn, fosters a patriarchal society that upholds conventional power structures by restricting the rights and freedoms of women. By trying to keep things as they are, the government reduces the possibility of societal upheaval and challenges to its authority. The backlash has been apparent ever since Amini's killing. The State and Shari'a-sanctioned policy of valuing women at 50% of what men are worth creates an ironic situation in which a smokescreen is used to give the impression that progress is being made at times, like during limited legal reforms or token representation under more 'progressive' presidents, while actually maintaining entrenched inequalities. By giving women a minuscule amount of autonomy within set parameters, these symbolic actions enable the government to exercise control while upholding the pretence of gender equality, as they know deep down that no matter

what changes on the surface, they have still valued women as just half a man. This notion of being worth 'half a man' was mentioned in nearly every interview.

One interviewee stated that the blending of religion with culture and tradition is a significant cause of women's rights abuses in Iran. She brought up the topic of dress codes and expressed that it goes against human rights to not be able to dress as one chooses. The interviewee mentioned the segregation of elementary schools by sex and stated that it once again goes against human rights, the way she sees it. The interviewee brought up the issue of girls feeling pressured to get married at a young age, explaining how some families are afraid their daughters will get into relationships and cause a scandal, so they push them to find a husband early on, even if the girls are talented and intelligent. "As a woman, we don't generally have a loud voice," she says. Sabnam echoed this sentiment in saying that achieving gender equality for women is not possible within any religion, including Islam. She pointed out specific verses from the Qur'an that promote the idea of women being subordinate to men. For example, one verse suggests that women should focus on domestic work while men should pursue work outside the home. She also brought up the topic of polygamy and notes that Iran ranks number one in honour killings worldwide. Sabnam argues that the inherent power dynamics in these religious teachings make it impossible to achieve gender equality. As she states, "By this relationship there is no way to have equality."

According to Muazzez's interview, in Islam, women are not expected to have any duties at home except for being sexual objects for their husbands and taking care of the child. She also mentioned that women can receive money for breastfeeding and a monthly salary from their husbands. Similarly, Shadi's response focused on how the customary beliefs and systems have resulted in the dehumanisation, inferiority, and overall sexualisation and objectification of women. They are seen as instruments for fulfilling men's wants and wishes. She, like others, provided examples of limitations imposed on women in their community, such as not being allowed to ride bicycles, singing out of fear that women's voices are too erotic, or entering sport stadiums. According to Phebe, in the Islamic Republic of Iran's interpretation of Islam, women are not considered valuable individuals but rather as means for producing offspring and satisfying men's desires. She spoke of a well-educated woman demonstrating on national television how women are

expected to wash their husbands' feet when they return home from work. She stated that in order to work at a university in Iran, one must be willing to sell their soul to the regime:

> "Anywhere you want to go you should have certain criteria and prove that you accept and love this system, this regime, and you would do anything for them because if you want to teach at the university you need to be brainwashed and willing to serve men."

Shirin added that:

> "women are considered slaves or maids, they are literally second class citizens. And [the Islamic Republic of Iran's interpretation of] Islam justifies this systematic discrimination against women."

Mahnaz, who may be considered more religious than Phebe and Shirin, claimed that "real Islam does not differentiate between men and women. Religion can interact with women's rights." This being said, she did not find that Iran's governance is actually representing 'real' Islam. Kyra, likewise, said that "Islam has been used to justify the oppression and subjugation of women [in Iran], while real Islam promotes women's empowerment," assuming the state of thinking put forth by Islamic feminists discussed in Chapter 1.

Muazzez put forth her frustrations that women in Islam need their husband's permission for everything; however, due to the infrastructure that the Shah established before the revolution in terms of women's rights, some families in Iran treat their wives and daughters with respect. Despite this, women can still be barred from their basic rights by their families whenever they want. Mehezbeen reiterated that Islamic laws, from her perspective as someone who has lived in Iran before and after Khomeini, do not grant women freedom and require them to seek guidance from a Shari'a ruler, even for minor matters, implying inferiority in terms of intellect and decision-making abilities. The argument made is that Islam and women's freedom are incompatible because religious beliefs take precedence over everything else, potentially leading to sacrifices being made in the pursuit of those beliefs. Mehezbeen followed by saying:

"In general, Islam and women's freedom are two contradictory principles. Because freedom is taken from you and religion is a prelude to everything, and as a result, everything can be sacrificed for religious beliefs."

A few interviewees opened up about their limited knowledge of their rights. Golnara mentioned that "as an Iranian woman I do not have enough knowledge about my rights. We are kept in ignorance." She believes that women's rights are suppressed due to fear, saying, "Maybe because they are afraid of women." Golnara also mentioned several daily life violations, such as compulsory hijab, lower monthly salary than men, and limited social freedom. She further discussed the differences in treatment between girls and boys in her family, with her brother having obviously more rights and privileges. For example, "My brother can have a girlfriend and go out with his friends, but I, as a girl, had no rights." She also shared how her father had control over her every decision and that she was not allowed to travel before marriage or be out after sunset because she was a girl. One woman said:

"As someone who lives in Iran, I am not familiar with my rights, however, nowadays due to the development of social media and the shrinking of the world, I became more familiar with human rights violations happening in Iran."

Parvin also admitted that while she does not "have enough information about the Islam of Muhammad's time, the Islam we see does not give any freedom to women and their rights are always violated."

From Zari's observations, women are frequently criticised for being "irrational" and "not intelligent enough" to make sound judgments. Gender stereotyping is not only unjust but also detrimental as it restricts women's possibilities and strengthens prejudice against them. The suggestion is that decision-making roles lack diversity and representation because women's experiences and perspectives are not valued. Zaara's remarks on women being perceived as too emotional to handle leadership roles highlight the urgent need to embrace Tronto's care ethics mentioned in Chapter 1. As Zaara asserts, mullahs have used the belief that women are not capable of making logical decisions to support their argument

for why women should not hold powerful positions like judges or lawyers. Tronto's ethical approach prioritises empathy, understanding, and cooperation in politics, as opposed to other approaches that may differ in their emphasis. She believes that politics should give more importance to taking care of vulnerable individuals and groups, and that emotion is a strength, not a weakness. Tronto's approach acknowledges the significance of women's perspectives and their unique experiences, valuing their contributions. Zaara's statement demonstrates how the lack of empathy in politics has led to a culture that continues to promote gender inequality and ignores the needs and issues of women.

When asked what issues arise when women's rights intersect with Islam, Nova shared a personal experience about her parent's divorce, where her mother faced various challenges due to Shari'a laws. Her mother had asked for a divorce, but her father made it difficult for her to be independent. They had to settle an agreement where the father was meant to give money to her for the living expenses of raising three children, but because he was a man and harnessed all the power, he convinced the court to not have to pay anything to them. Nova believes that this is a clear example of how Islamic laws are not in favour of women's rights and human rights. She thinks that Islam and human rights contradict each other. While she has had no contact with her father since the divorce many decades ago, she is still, technically, his possession and would need to be contacted for important matters. Sabnam, who studied law, had been seeking equal rights from an early age. However, when she brought up questions regarding societal issues, people often referred her back to the rules imposed by Islam. She mentioned having had two separate boyfriends who asked her hand in marriage, but she refused because, even if she loved them, she could not accept becoming her husband's property. Afsaneh also mentioned how some consider a woman's worth to be complete only once she is married, reducing her aspirations and goals exclusively to her role in society as a wife. Nova said:

> "I never wanted to marry in Iran, because even the best man would still then
> have power over me. All my mother wanted for me was to be independent
> so that I would be the only one in control of myself."

Moreover, when asked about when women's rights and religious freedom intersect, the overwhelming sentiment was that pronounced by Atri, who emphasised the value in

recognising both liberties. She expressed that people should be allowed to freely practise and promote their religion or belief, as long as it does not infringe the rights and freedoms of others. Afsar recognised that religious freedom has the potential to positively affect women's rights in theory. In the Iranian context that she knows, however, it frequently reinforces gender stereotypes, discrimination, and bias. The effect of this can differ depending on how religion is understood, social customs, cultural traditions, and the legal and political climate. Afsar puts forth that we must find a fair approach to safeguard both religious beliefs and women's rights. However, she thinks the country must undergo a secular revolution to find this balance. For Ari, "Unfortunately, the laws that discriminate against women and violate their human rights in [her] nation have their origins in Qur'anic verses. To ensure that both religious freedom and women's rights are protected, it is important to balance these interests and work towards finding solutions. This can involve educating religious people about human rights and gender equality, engaging in interfaith dialogue, and working to create laws and policies that protect the rights of women." Mehezbeen said how, from her perspective, "in general, Islam and women's freedom are two contradictory principles. Because freedom is taken from you and religion is a prelude to everything, and as a result, everything can be sacrificed for religious beliefs." Malakeh followed with, "When religious freedom and women's rights meet, there is no room for criticism. In religion, everything is so sacred that if there is an objection to it, it will be accompanied by a great cost" to express her wariness about the two liberties colliding. Shadi mentioned how she likes "to believe in Islam that men and women are equal, if it is not, [she] cannot accept it."

As Bahar put it:

> "The Ayatollahs are afraid of women's power. And they know that if they allow for any form of temptation, those women can do a lot. How many women were burned at the stake for being perceived as witches? We see it time and time again: religions are afraid of collective female power."

The interviewees' levels of religiousness were quite varied, with some being very faithful to Islam, and others self-identifying as atheists; nonetheless, every interviewee was asked, based on their experiences living under Islam's Islamic Republic, whether, in a

theoretical scenario, they could choose between their faith in Islam or women's rights. Out of 25, 24 replied women's rights. Kyra responded, instead, "I do not want to be in a situation where I have to choose between my basic rights or my faith. This situation is because of the Islamic Republic's regime, not Islam."

5.3 On Shari'a Law

Sabnam posited that the Islamic Republic's fundamental basis is rooted in its opposition to the United States, claiming that the legitimacy of the government would be compromised if it were to address its conflicts with America. Sabnam affirms that the act of endowing women with their rightful entitlements would result in a reduction of Islam's influence within the governing structure. This would lead to a shift in its status from a systemic concern to a personal one. Sabnam references the fourth provision of the Iranian constitution, which stipulates that all legislation must be grounded in Islamic principles, while simultaneously recognising the right of individuals to exercise autonomy in their religious convictions. In addition, Sabnam argues that these regulations of discrimination function to uphold a hierarchical structure that privileges men, garnering their devoted support while simultaneously exerting control over half of society and reinforcing the existing power dynamics in the society. She espouses the belief that a government devoid of religious influence is ideal and posits that the provision of equal rights to women would result in a reduced prominence of Islam within the governing system.

Building upon this perspective, Phebe emphasised that Shari'a and women's rights are incompatible, asserting that a legal system that considers women as half the worth of men cannot ever be inclusive. Phebe extends this argument beyond women's rights to encompass the broader spectrum of human rights, asserting that the fundamental principles of equality and dignity are compromised within such a framework. Afsaneh delved into the historical roots of misogyny in Islam, highlighting the need for legal avenues to safeguard women's rights. Afsaneh argues that the Shari'a system represents the most extreme form of a misogynistic structure, exacerbating gender inequality and impeding women's pursuit of justice and the ability to challenge prejudiced customs. Shayana voiced doubts regarding the political implementation of Shari'a, suggesting that it has been devised by men to establish a dichotomy that benefits themselves, declaring that the regulations within this

system confine women to conventional roles, limiting their prospects for progress and hindering their individual development. According to Shayana, these prevailing conditions are incongruous with the fundamental principles of gender equality. She alluded to Qur'anic verses that make reference to the recompense of companionship in Paradise. These verses are occasionally interpreted as a pledge of attractive partners for men who adhere to the guidance of Allah. When analysing these verses, it is crucial to exercise meticulous interpretation, taking into account the Qur'an's overarching teachings that underscore the spiritual benefits available to all adherents, rather than reducing women to mere objects of conquest.

Mehezbeen posited that ideological systems or regimes, regardless of their nature, whether they are Islamic, religious, or communist, are fundamentally incongruous with the rights of individuals. The argument hypotheses that the efficacy and pertinence of these ideological systems have come to a standstill in contemporary society. This viewpoint advocates for a discerning attitude towards the constraints and deficiencies of different ideological frameworks, accentuating the importance of alternative methods that give precedence to personal liberties and adjust to evolving societal and governmental contexts.

Shirin drew attention to the issue of honour killings, also known as shame killings, in Iran. Specifically, she cites Article 630 of the Islamic Penal Code in relation to this matter. As per Shirin, article 630 permits a man to take the life of his wife and her supposed partner in the event that he witnesses his wife engaging in adultery. This provision not only sustains the occurrence of violence based on gender but also reinforces the belief that women are simply possessions to be controlled and used to uphold men's honour. This notion is in direct opposition to the core tenets of comprehensive women's rights, which include gender equality, autonomy, and bodily integrity. Atri, in her interview, stated the following:

> While political Shari'a claims that it is compatible with human rights and women's rights, I believe it has not guaranteed the rights of men and women to an equal degree. As someone who was born a Muslim and has studied the Qur'an, the central religious text of Islam, I don't believe that political Shari'a is or even can be compatible with women's rights, and it doesn't recognize gender equality and women's empowerment. Although the

interpretation and use of Shari'a are not uniform across the Muslim world, violations of women's rights can be clearly seen in the Islamic Republic of Iran. Political Shari'a systems exclusively favour men in so many aspects: allowing men to have multiple wives and stoning women for doing the same; giving the custody of the children to the father or the paternal grandfather; the female's blood money being half the man's wergild; sons inheriting double the share of daughters…

Of course, as Darya repeated:

"interpretations of Shari'a can vary, and there are voices within Islamic scholarship advocating for a more egalitarian understanding of Islamic principles that aligns with women's rights."

The interviews conducted provide further insight into the intricate relationship between Shari'a law and women's rights. The central focus of this discussion pertains to the extensive authority wielded over the female anatomy via the construction and implementation of Shari'a law within the Iranian context. The imposition of religiously-motivated restrictions on women's bodies reinforces existing power imbalances, indicating that the primary aim is not individual spiritual development, but rather the maintenance of male dominance.

5.4 Voices From Those Who Experienced the Islamic Revolution

Of those interviewed, a handful were of a ripe-enough age to have experienced Iran before it became the Islamic Republic that it is now. Bahar contemplated her time in Iran prior to the Islamic Revolution, sharing mixed feelings about the liberties she experienced while living under the Shah's governance. She recognised the sense of personal liberty she experienced, as compared to post the Islamic Revolution, but also emphasised the authoritarian character of the monarchy, which did not permit opposing viewpoints and subjected dissenters to imprisonment and penalties. Bahar's parents sent her to Paris for her studies to keep her safe because they were aware of the potential danger she faced due to her differing opinions. She had significant issues with the monarchy, primarily due to the

absence of freedom of speech and the significant socio-economic inequalities within the nation. She repeatedly mentioned how the majority of the population was illiterate and living below the poverty line. On the other hand, only a quarter of the population had exclusive access to a comfortable lifestyle. She pointed out the striking difference between the immense riches produced by oil and the difficult circumstances experienced by most Iranians. Bahar recognised that she was a part of the privileged minority, but she stressed the significance of not ignoring the struggles of the majority. She admitted that the friends of her generation played an active role in the current situation in Iran by helping to remove the Shah from power. Reflecting on the present situation, Bahar expresses that things have worsened compared to the pre-revolution era. She confided that she often feels shame for her contributions in unknowingly putting the mullahs into a position of immense power.

In Bahar's lived experience, the unfolding events during the struggle against the Shah for a better future took an unexpected turn. The revolution's early stages saw a vibrant atmosphere with participants from various political organisations, sparking a flurry of activities, but the ensuing cultural revolution, which lasted from 1980 to 1983, signalled a big change. The mullahs started locking up anyone who disagreed with them, instilling a culture of fear and repression. The constant fear of being imprisoned or even killed was what ultimately led her to leave in 1984. Reflecting on the revolutionary transition, she sometimes questions if she should have stayed in Iran and fought back, but she acknowledges that such thoughts stem from her idealism. Rationally speaking, remaining in Iran would have meant putting her life at risk, and she recognizes that leaving was the only viable option to ensure her survival.

Zaara mused about the effects of Iran's post-revolutionary law requiring women to wear the hijab. Zaara admits that she did not fully comprehend the profound implications of this law and its potential consequences at the age of fourteen. She came from a religious but open-minded family, so she had never been forced to wear the hijab at home, but as she grew older, she became adamantly opposed to it. Zaara believes that despite the Shah's efforts to modernise Iran, he did not have enough time to effect significant change, for, as she emphasised, Iranian society at the time was deeply rooted in tradition and was not yet prepared to embrace such progressive notions of women's rights.

After the revolution, Mehezbeen vividly recalled the first time she heard about the obligatory hijab and called it the voice of tyranny. She bemoaned the profound changes that have taken place within the country's confines and attributed them to the authority given to men by the law. She contended that a cultural transformation is required to replace the current legal system and offer an executive guarantee for the restoration of both men's and women's rights. She drew attention in particular to the tremendous suffering experienced by women in the years following the revolution, noting that throughout these years, so many men in Iran either worked with the government or refrained from speaking out against injustices.

Kyra stated how "everything got worse after the revolution," and how, even though she personally wears a hijab for religious motives, she is against it being the law, seeing it as a symbol of tyranny. Although Mehezbeen acknowledged that creating a new culture in Iran will take time, she remained hopeful that the situation can be resolved. She expressed her wishes for abundant women's rights in Iran and in all the oppressed corners of the world.

5.5 On the Future of Iran

The future of Iran is presently in a state of uncertainty and is subject to various potential outcomes. When talking with interviewees, they shared their individual visions for their country, one that transcends its present realities and imagines a secular, democratic society with a wealth of women's rights and human rights as a whole. Their responses explored the realms of hope, providing a glimpse of a transformed Iran where people can thrive free from the constraints of restrictive patriarchal norms and restrictive religious dogma. They painted a country where gender equality is not just a lofty ideal but also the basis for all future social advancement. A new era of empowerment, inclusivity, and personal freedoms is heralded in this vision as the voices of Iranian women rise above the limitations placed upon them. Iran's transition to secularism would lay the groundwork for a society in which the separation of the state and religion permits people to exercise their rights free from the restrictions of religion. In this future, individuals are free to practise their religion, or not, as they see fit, with the protection of everyone's rights and autonomy by the government's neutrality in religious matters. The foundation of this future Iran,

repeated across interviews, is a democracy, which would ensure that the people hold the power. The voices of every Iranian, regardless of sex, would be heard and valued through transparent and participatory governance. A dynamic and inclusive political structure would value open discussion, enable different viewpoints to influence the course of the country, and foster a sense of shared responsibility and collective ownership. Resolute support for women's rights and gender equality is a key component of this vision. Systematic discrimination against Iranian women would no longer be tolerated; instead, they would be accepted as equals, their contributions would be honoured, and their aspirations supported. This future Iran would have legal frameworks that eliminate barriers and advance gender parity in all spheres of life, including politics and decision-making as well as employment and education. Women would be able to fully participate and lead in every aspect of society as the oppressive chains that have kept them in place for far too long break– and the 'Berlin wall' of gender apartheid is torn down once and for all. As expressed in interviews. women would become the drivers of development and change in this future Iran. Their accomplishments in academia, science, the arts, and entrepreneurship would shape the intellectual and cultural landscape of the country. In the corridors of power, their voices would echo, influencing decisions and promoting a fair and inclusive society and as comprehensive support networks and a culture that rejects all forms of prejudice and abuse take its place, gender-based violence would become a despised thing of the past. This vision contests the status quo by upending long-standing power structures and tearing down societal standards that support marginalisation and inequality. It embraces everyone's ability, regardless of sex, to contribute to the development and prosperity of the country.

In order to make this vision a reality, each interviewee offered their personal opinion on moving the country forward. Nova shared the following perspective:

> It's obvious that we have to get rid of Ayatollahs. Our experiences in the last forty-four years have taught us that when religion is in power good things will always be sacrificed. In this case, the regime knows that half of the population has the power to overtake them. Amini was just adding fire to the flame. Not only does the regime not have any future, but we also do not have any relations with any countries in the world. Our economy has collapsed.

Even the Ayatollahs know that if they want to stay in power, they must oppress women. All of this is happening as a consequence of all of the oppression of the last forty-four years.. I hope that we will have a regime change, a revolution or else, who lived there my entire life, I would have no future there. Even my mother tells me not to come back if the Ayatollahs are still there. It's not safe. My mother's biggest fear is to see me return to the Islamic Republic of Iran as it is. So, we have to revolutionise. That is the only answer.

For every person interviewed, the future of Iran relies on toppling the current administration and installing a secular one in its place. Women's rights are essentially nonexistent in the current system. "When the only men on the council for women's human rights, how can we expect a functioning system?" asked Sabnam. She, Nazanin, and Shadi continued by saying that Iranian women must continue to pursue employment, education, and financial independence, as their strength and agency are increased by these actions. She spoke about how she personally gained independence and autonomy thanks to her education. Every interviewee further spoke about how religion must be separated from politics and regulations must be changed to provide fair opportunities for people based on their competencies and qualifications– not their gender or religious ties. Mahroz and Mehrnaz added to this, stating that it is also crucial to drive Iran's income sources away from reliance on oil. Economic growth will result from placing a premium on technological development and productive industries, but even more importantly, it will advance public knowledge and awareness, particularly among women. As technology develops, it inevitably improves people's comprehension and upholds their rights. This development promotes a more diverse and prosperous society by encompassing both material and spiritual security.

Although it might require some time to fully realise Iranian women's human rights, as Mahroz said, it is clear that the country needs a secular government. Phebe likened Iran to a sickly body that is dependent upon a toxic ideology. Given how deeply Shari'a laws affect people's minds, particularly in traditional areas, detoxifying the body and eliminating the poison will be a gradual process. When it comes to understanding one's rights, education and awareness are essential. In contrast, she came to understand that she had

unalienable rights when she left Iran, rights that she never knew existed beforehand. Iran's reconstruction will be expensive, and sacrifices—possibly a generation's worth, she says—might be necessary, albeit complications that arise when Western interests are meddled in. She went on, exclaiming that the Ayatollahs will eventually fall, just like how dead trees without any roots cannot be replanted. She expressed how Iranians must draw lessons from the past and steer clear of hurried changes that, as was the case in 1979, have unfavourable effects. The next generation has the potential to be more conscious, and a better future will be shaped by education. She returned to the metaphorical poison, claiming that it has been injected into generations and will take time to be eradicated because it has infused itself into people's daily lives. She finished by exclaiming:

> "Although happiness and trust are abstract ideas for many of us, we can work to rebuild and regain these aspects of our lives by working together. I have dreams of going to a free Iran. What will I do? Where will I go? I can start something new."

Conclusion

The marginalisation and exclusion of women in public life in the Islamic Republic of Iran are not accidental or the result of conservative religious values; rather, they are part of a calculated policy to maintain religious purity and solidify the regime's authoritarian rule. This study brought to light the intricacies of the gender apartheid sustained by the Iranian regime by analysing the many strategies used by the state, such as patriarchal cultural norms, legislative constraints, and systemic discrimination. In order to maintain the status quo, the state has enacted a rigorous gender apartheid policy that severely limits women's access to school, work, and political engagement. By removing women from the public sphere, the authoritarian regime is able to maintain its grip on power, quell opposition, and solidify patriarchal norms, but it is essential to remember that Iranian women have done more than just sit on the sidelines as victims of the regime– they have proven resilient and resistant time and time again by fighting to protect their rights and promote gender parity. Promoting change and creating a culture where women's rights are preserved and respected requires an understanding of the interplay between religion, human rights, and the realities of Iranian women.

The prevalence of patriarchal systems is not limited to any particular religion or culture; however, in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic State and its customs have exacerbated these disparities. Following the 1979 Revolution, the Islamic regime set its sights on women's bodies, both physically and symbolically, resulting in a significant reduction and deterioration of their freedoms, creating a system in which the identity of the Islamic state is inextricably linked with the female form and the shaping of gender roles. This connection is a complex one, with various cultural, social, and political factors at play. The Islamic Republic of Iran has strategically highlighted gender as a crucial element of its worldwide perception, placing significant emphasis on the differentiation of gender roles and reinforcing the value of morality as a means to advance its political agenda. The hijab has emerged as a vital symbol for the Islamic state, as it represents the redefined gender structure:

"Because they know that compulsory hijab is the main pillar of Islamic Republic, It's like the Berlin wall. If we tear this wall down, the Islamic republic won't exist" (Alinejad 2022).

In the context of Iranian politics, the female form assumes a central role, with the state prioritising the regulation of women and their physical autonomy as a key political strategy. As a result, Iranian women have been marginalised, erased, and subjected to egregious violations of their most basic human rights.

The Islamic regime in Iran has gone above and beyond in suppressing the endeavours of feminists and women activists. Champions of women's rights have faced the harsh realities of persecution, including detainment, prolonged periods of incarceration, sexual assault, death sentences, and forced exile from their homeland while continuing to demonstrate unwavering commitment in challenging existing inequalities. Throughout the years, there has been a persistent effort to challenge the structural discrimination that is based on sex and gender, including the One Million Signatures campaign, My Stealthy Freedom movement, White Wednesdays, and Girls of Enghelab street campaigns. These initiatives have been instrumental in raising awareness and advocating for gender equality in society, but none have come as close to overthrowing the regime as the Woman Life Freedom movement that took the world by storm this past year. The systemic detention and suppression of female activists and feminists by the government carry significant implications, as they reveal the regime's total apprehension towards the influence generated by their opposition. The regime perceives these women as threats to their authority, underlining the weight their activism carries.

The interconnection between the struggles for religious liberty and gender equality is akin to the interwoven threads of a tapestry within the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Iranian example can provide insight on the intricacies of surmounting various types of subjugation by contextualising it within the framework of Kimberlé Crenshaw's intersectionality theory. As per the analysis of Crenshaw, individuals encounter a multitude of intersecting manifestations of subjugation. The conducted interviews have provided valuable insights into the dynamics that exist between religious affiliation, gender, and power distribution within the context of Iran. Women belonging to religious minority

groups are subjected to dual discrimination owing to their gender and their adherence to a non-hegemonic religious faith. The application of intersectionality as a theoretical framework enables a more nuanced comprehension of the intricate challenges that individuals encounter as they endeavour to attain both religious freedom and gender equality. The application of the theory further allows for a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which cultural norms, legal frameworks, and patriarchal power structures intersect to perpetuate the marginalisation of women within religious contexts. Crenshaw demonstrates the mechanisms through which institutionalised bias is perpetuated by the utilisation and interpretation of religious and gendered identities by individuals occupying positions of authority. The conducted interviews have illustrated the reinforcement of patriarchal norms and limitations on women's rights through a complex network of religious, governmental, and societal establishments and emphasised the agency and resistance of individuals as they navigate multiple forms of oppression.

Moreover, the application of Tronto's politics of care to the predicament of Iranian women provides a more profound understanding of the pernicious character of the political tactics employed by the Islamic Republic. The concept of politics of care highlights the ethical ramifications of utilising gender-based subjugation as a mechanism to sustain authority, thereby revealing the exploitative strategies implemented by the Iranian government. Tronto's emphasis on inclusivity and recognition of diverse lived experiences highlights the stark contrast between the politics of care and the oppressive policies imposed on women while emphasising the significance of deconstructing gender-based discriminatory structures and promoting the entitlements and autonomy of Iranian women. By incorporating Tronto's framework, we are able to discern the interconnectedness of power dynamics, gender, and political structures. This underscores the pressing necessity for worldwide recognition and intervention. Tronto's conceptual framework offers valuable insights and direction for both policymakers and activists who are committed to promoting justice and equality on a global level to cultivate a society that prioritises empathy and impartiality, while simultaneously rejecting the exploitation of women's physical autonomy for political gain.

The Shari'a legal system and traditional Iranian customs and values are observed in parallel throughout the thesis by contrasting the legal and historical structure of the country

to the lived experiences of its nationals. The conducted interviews have provided insight into how discriminatory practices, rooted in tradition and cultural norms, are in opposition to formal laws, particularly in relation to the rights of women. The official legal framework in Iran is at odds with the lived realities of the majority of Iranians. The idea of 'living law' proposed by Eugen Ehrlich illuminates how social norms and institutions shape legal structures rather than the other way around. How laws regarding religious freedom and women's rights are implemented and have an effect is influenced by religious interpretations and societal pressures, as demonstrated by the experiences of Iranians. The gap between the ideals of justice and equality and their actual enforcement is brought into sharp focus by the individuals' firsthand accounts. The interviews have amalgamated these theoretical perspectives, thereby exemplifying the intricate nature of the intersection between religion and human rights. The disparities in the ways in which individuals' tangible existences are regulated by legal systems, religious institutions, male-dominated power structures, and customary conventions were exposed. The interplay between theoretical frameworks and interview data highlights the intricacy of the relationship between religious liberty and women's rights in Iran. In order to advance towards a more inclusive and just society, it is imperative to possess a sophisticated comprehension of the pertinent matters and to undertake a collective endeavour.

Ehrlich's theories provide illumination on the diverse character of law, contesting the idea that legal principles are exclusively derived from governmental establishments. He advocates for the acknowledgement of the social actuality of law, which is entrenched in the regional populace and mirrors social conventions and cultural principles. In the Iranian context, the pervasive influence of Islamic law as the exclusive state-sanctioned religion is all-encompassing, weaving its way into every facet of the population's existence. The prevalence of Islamic jurisprudence as the exclusive acknowledged state religion in Iran exemplifies the impact of a distinct legal heritage; the coexistence of international law and Islamic law in Iran serves as a manifestation of legal pluralism in the Iranian milieu; the coexistence of multiple legal systems engenders tensions and conflicts due to their interaction and intersection. The development of a dynamic legal system, which is shaped by societal conventions and traditional beliefs, highlights the obstacles encountered by women and the barriers to attaining authentic gender parity. A fundamental shift must therefore originate from civil society itself, with the aim of contesting oppressive

frameworks and promoting the rights and agency of women. The dynamic relationship among pluralism, civil society, and the nation-state poses a range of prospects and challenges in the pursuit of certain objectives. Through the adoption of Ehrlich's theory and recognition of the importance of' 'living law,' it is possible to cultivate a society that is more equitable and all-encompassing, wherein societal conventions and cultural ideals are in harmony with the tenets of impartiality and human rights.

Weber's notion of legal pluralism poses a challenge to the conventional belief that theoretical legal concepts give rise to practical legal principles. The thesis acknowledges the intricate character of legal systems, which are influenced by a variety of historical, cultural, and social elements. Islamic law constitutes a fundamental cornerstone of the legal framework in Iran, permeating diverse dimensions of the populace's existence and interweaving with the societal fabric. The perpetuation of gender oppression and the hindrance of gender equality can be attributed to institutionalised religious influence. The incorporation of Weber's legal pluralism into the examination of the Iranian legal system provides a profound comprehension of the intricate power dynamics and complexities that are inherent in it, while he intricate interrelationship among diverse legal systems highlights the obstacles that women encounter in their quest for gender parity. The thesis underscores the imperative of subjecting legal frameworks to rigorous scrutiny and restructuring them in accordance with tenets of equity, fundamental freedoms, and parity between the sexes.

Given the Islamic Republic of Iran's manipulation of women's bodies as a political instrument to sustain authority, a comprehensive methodology that integrates intersectionality, legal plurality, and secular democracy is imperative. The challenges faced by Iranian women in society are compounded by the presence of patriarchal structures and religious oppression. The Ayatollahs employ repressive tactics that exploit the interconnectedness of women's identities to maintain their subjugation and exclusion from society, wieling total authority over women's bodies through stringent laws and policies, owing to the impact of Islamic jurisprudence. The exploration of an alternative legal system that prioritises women's rights and equality is a viable option, contingent upon the recognition of the necessity for legal pluralism. This recognition, in turn, poses a challenge to the hegemony of laws based on religious doctrine.

The Ayatollahs' power play in Iran would be derailed with the establishment of a secular democracy, founded on egalitarianism, autonomy, and tolerance. Women of all faiths and backgrounds could find greater access to justice and protection from discrimination under a secular democratic system that guarantees equality before the law for all citizens. Furthermore, women would be able to reclaim control over their bodies in a secular democracy, free from religious constraints on their reproductive choices, their educational pursuits, their professional trajectories, as well as their choices in clothing and dancing in public. When religion and politics are kept separate in a democratic framework, women's bodies would no longer used as pawns in power struggles. It would effectively dismantle the political exploitation of women and disrupt established power dynamics, paving the way for equality, justice, autonomy, and inclusive governance. Such a secular democratic system in Iran is urgently needed to advance women's rights and challenge the instrumentalisation of women's bodies by the ruling Ayatollahs, and the frameworks of intersectionality, care ethics, and legal plurality all emphasise this need.

Despite traditionalists' best efforts to stop the ongoing movement, Iranian women have already formed a new social identity. Both secular and religious Iranian women oppose institutionalised prejudice and argue instead for modernised and inclusive jurisprudence. Above all, they are fighting for a secular and democratic Iran, where women and human rights are respected and are ingrained in the pillars of the country. Only a reform of religious thought and an opening of religion to modernity can prevent a permanent rift at a time when political Islam is exposing its limitations and the gap between civil society and the State continues to widen. In spite of systemic oppression and ubiquitous patriarchal barriers in the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iranian women continue to be resilient champions in their unwavering pursuit of freedom.

زن، زندگی، آزادی.

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