المركز العربي للأبحاث ودراسة السياسات
Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies

Iran Reports

No. 2 – 2023

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Established in 2020, the Iranian Studies Unit of the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies focuses on Iran's domestic politics and foreign relations, in particular its relations with the Arab countries. The unit relies on a vast network of Iran specialists and policy experts. Iran Reports offers a compilation of papers published by the unit on various topics on Iran through contributions made by Iran specialists from around the world.

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Iran's "Women, Life, Freedom" Movement in Progress

Hamideh Dorzadeh and Julie Mariotti

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Autumn 2023 marks one year since protests erupted across Iran over the killing of Jina Mahsa Amini by the morality police. The protests brought to the fore women's resistance to mandatory hijab, and state ideology and control over their bodies. Historicizing the movement shows that this is part of Iranian women's ongoing efforts to defy state rules that undermine their rights and govern their everyday experiences.[1] Since its establishment, the Islamic Republic has continued its predecessor Pahlavi monarchy's practice of using women's bodies as political and ideological battlegrounds, imposing further restrictions on their rights. Women's involvement in the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement is indicative of their collective opposition to the policing of their bodies, in particular, and the systematic gender discrimination they face and lack of reforms, more broadly. The hijab was at the center of the movement, with women chopping off their hair and setting their hijabs ablaze in an act of defiance. The movement then grew to voice other social, political, and economic grievances by Iranian women and men.

While street protests have subsided, the Islamic Republic has continued its crackdown in the year since the movement by carrying out executions, targeting activists and harassing relatives, expelling university professors, closing businesses for not complying with compulsory hijab law, restricting internet access, and increasing surveillance. For example, the state has installed cameras to identify unveiled women and has harassed attorneys defending women brought up on charges of wearing poor or no hijab. Nevertheless, there has been a noticeable presence of women with no hijab in public spaces despite the return of the morality police and the enforcement of stricter penalties.

A more important development has been the passing of the "hijab and chastity bill" by the parliament for a three-year trial period.[2] Although the bill is yet to be approved by the Guardian Council, it has sparked debates and discussion on hijab in official circles. The content of the bill, with 71 articles, shows an attempt to increase coordination between different state institutions by assigning them additional responsibilities for the implementation of the mandatory hijab law. In addition to describing how women should comply with hijab laws and explaining what constitutes inappropriate clothing for women and men, the bill imposes financial penalties for hijab violations. This also includes punishing businesses that cater to women with poor hijab and forcing them to abide by the laws. More importantly, the bill encourages individuals and families to police each other off- and on-line, adding additional social pressure on women. Together these measures show the state's continued focus on hijab, which is one of the most visible symbols of its ideology, and its efforts to maintain its grip over society. While the protest movement has not led to legal reforms, it has been an important turning point for Iranian women as they collectively express their demands and challenge both the patriarchal state and social norms.

This issue of *Iran Reports* delves into a range of issues surrounding the Women, Life, Freedom movement, and how it has challenged the Iranian state's policies on veiling, gender inequality, and political control, leading to one of the longest-lasting protests in post-revolutionary Iran.

This collection of essays starts with Mehran Kamrava's overview of the movement and its significance, characteristics, and domestic consequences. Kamrava claims that the Islamic Republic state's social policies have primarily targeted women in order to impose its conservative interpretation of Islam. He

1 See the Iranian Studies Unit lecture by Shireen Saedi which provided a historical context of non-elite Iranian women's activism and struggle for equal rights: "Shirin Saeidi Lectures on "Historicizing Iranian Women's Activism in Post-1979 Iran" Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, October 10, 2022, https://bit.ly/3Q9m23u.

2 The document of the bill can be accessed here: https://bit.ly/48HFhsn.

argues that the protests which started in September 2022 are different from similar previous events as they broke out over forced hijab, posing an ideological challenge to the state. According to Kamrava, other significant elements of the protests include the central role of women and the movement's scale and duration. He contends that while the protests have exacerbated the loss of state legitimacy, the security forces have remained loyal to the state. Kamrava claims that the protests would have long-term social consequences and argues that the latest chain of unrest indicates a gap between the state and society, with women playing a dominant role.

In the second essay, Amir Hossein Mahdavi explains the institutional factors that led to the eruption of the movement, examining its political implications. Mahdavi highlights the fact that the Islamic Republic has failed to make governance more efficient, leading to declining public trust in the government. Supreme Leader Khamenei's powerful role and significant involvement in governance have rendered elected institutions irrelevant. Mahdavi also highlights the implementation of the "second phase" of the revolution, which aims to install officials loyal to Khamenei in all branches of the government in preparation for his eventual demise. According to Mahdavi, this has created a form of "internal colonialism," where the pro-Islamic Republic elites have monopolized the political scene in the country. Mahdavi also places the movement in the context of ongoing sanctions against Iran, as well as dim prospects for restoring the JCPOA, which have exacerbated people's dire economic conditions.

Taking a historical approach, Zahra Tizro highlights the contradictions faced by Iranian women as a result of the state's competing discourses on ways of being. She explains how Iranian women's roles and rights have changed over time. According to Tizro, these tensions have extended to all areas of life for women, making it difficult for them to navigate through it all and bargain for their rights. She argues that the structures of power and knowledge need to change to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women.

In his essay, Mohammad Hossein Badamchi also frames the protests as a struggle against the persistence of patriarchal oppression and women's subordination. He traces the significance of the hijab and how it became a tool to control women's bodies. Badamchi notes that until recently, the issue of hijab was never taken seriously in political debates. Some women activists have also been more concerned with legal rights than the issue of the dress code and compulsory hijab, which they see only as secondary. The Women, Life, Freedom movement has revived the debate on compulsory hijab and highlighted how it directs every facet of women's lives.

Together, the four articles provide analyses of a movement with significant political, economic, and social consequences. All of the essays conclude that the only way to address widespread discontent is through reforms. However, the aftermath of the movement has shown that the Islamic Republic state is unwilling to make compromises and, instead, has tightened its grip on women's freedom.

"Women, Life, Freedom": Protesting the Islamic Republic

Mehran Kamrava

Mehran Kamrava is Professor of Government at Georgetown University in Qatar. He also directs the Iranian Studies Unit at the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies. Kamrava is the author of a number of journal articles and books, including, most recently, *Righteous Politics: Power and Resilience in Iran* (Cambridge University Press, 2023); *A Dynastic History of Iran: From the Qajars to the Pahlavis* (Cambridge University Press, 2022); *Triumph and Despair: In Search of Iran's Islamic Republic* (Oxford University Press, 2022); *A Concise History of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2020); *Troubled Waters: Insecurity in the Persian Gulf* (Cornell University Press, 2018); and *Qatar: Small State, Big Politics* (Cornell University Press, 2015).

The killing in Iran of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman, at the hands of the so-called Morality Police (*Gasht-e Ershad*), has engulfed the country in nationwide protests since 16 September 2022. Amini, whose alleged crime was poor hijab, soon emerged as a symbol of women's second-class status in Iran and a rallying cry for men and women of all ages to express outrage against the Islamic Republic's arbitrary, and often draconian social policies. Since the 1978-79 revolution, women have been the main targets of the Islamic Republic's austere social policies and forced to accept Khomeini's, and later Khamenei's, highly conservative and traditionalist versions of Islam. With varying degrees of intensity in its forty-three-year history, the state has frequently sought to drag the population into heaven, even when kicking and screaming in resistance. The September-October 2022 protests are but the latest manifestation of an ideological state trying to enforce its ideology onto a restive and noncompliant population through its security forces.

The Islamic Republic is, of course, no stranger to protests, and the latest eruption is another chapter in a long repertoire of a society erupting intermittently against a state that is increasingly bereft of legitimacy. In recent years, the country has been racked by repeated episodes of violent, nationwide mass protests. Many of these past protests have been ignited by a sudden rise in the prices of basic goods, or lack of drinking water and other basic government services in the more deprived areas of the country and have generally lasted from one to two weeks. Each time, the protests have been brutally suppressed by the security forces, leading to mass arrests and hundreds of casualties.

The latest events stand out from earlier protests for several notable reasons. To begin with, the protests started not out of economic discontent, though deteriorating economic conditions certainly account for heightened dissatisfaction with the state, but over the issue of forced hijab. For the Islamic Republic, hijab is one of the most visible symbols of state ideology, with one half of the population signaling its compliance of the state's dictate by observing it in public. The fact that the protestors are shouting slogans objecting to compulsory hijab, with women openly defying the state by appearing in public with their heads uncovered, and some even burning their headscarves in the streets, represents a direct challenge to the state ideology. This blatant ideological confrontation with the state in such large numbers is unprecedented for Iranians. This exceptional ideological challenge accounts for the severity of the Security Forces response and their wanton repression of people protesting in the streets.

Another important feature specific to the latest protests is the leading role played by women. From the inception of the Islamic Republic, the state's clerical leaders have made women a target for second-class treatment. Today, despite the fact that women make up a disproportionately higher percentage of university students and graduates, Iran has one of the lowest rates of female participation in the formal workforce in the Middle East. State television programs glorify the virtues of motherhood and women's work at home, while the country is simultaneously experiencing increasing rates of divorce and co-habitation without formal marriage. As if the clerics are afraid of women, the state keeps finding excuses to block women's social mobility, economic empowerment, and even leisurely activities, including banning women from sports stadiums. The protestors' slogan of "Women, Life, Freedom" (*Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*) emerged in a context of the state making life for women increasingly more difficult by taking away one freedom after another.

Another unprecedented characteristic is the intensity and length of the protests. In the past, the protests often reached a crescendo on the second or third day, were then confronted by the security forces for about a week, and would die down by about the end of the second week. This time, however, into their third week as of this writing, the protests have slowed down, but continue to erupt on

occasion in Tehran and in other cities. Significantly, while on previous occasions the protests usually started in smaller towns and then spread to bigger cities, this time they started in Tehran and spread to the rest of the country.

It is unknown, of course, how long the protests will last and what their eventual consequences will be. Also unknown is the status of Khamenei, rumoured to be in ill health since the protests began. There are no clear answers to these questions at this point, and the trajectory of the protests remains undetermined. We know from the experience of the Arab Spring that the key to the political survival of incumbent dictators lies in the armed forces. In Iran, so long as the Security Forces remain loyal to the state and its ideology, there is no reason to suspect that the state is in serious trouble. Mir-Hossein Mousavi, former prime minister, and presidential candidate under house-arrest since the 2009 Green Movement, recently called on the Security Forces to join hands with the demonstrators. So far, however, there are no visible signs of elite defections or the abandonment of the clerical state by any branches of the country's multiple armed forces.

Some tentative conclusions are, nevertheless, inescapable. Iran's once-hybrid authoritarian system now no longer exhibits any hybridity; it is now a simple authoritarian state, reliant on the praetorian force of the Revolutionary Guards and other security services. President Ebrahim Raisi, who came into office promising to fix the economy, now finds himself even more reliant on the Revolutionary Guards to run the country. Whatever ideological legitimacy the state had, especially among the urban middle classes, is quickly evaporating.

Ultimately more important may be the longer-term social consequences of the latest uprisings. There have been scattered individual protests against mandatory hijab in the past. But now Iranian women have lashed out in droves against the social conservatism and myopia of the ruling clerical classes. The compulsory hijab, the most visible ideological symbol of the Islamic Republic, has now been challenged in a most obvious and celebrated manner. Even if the protests are effectively suppressed, and women go back to obediently donning their mandatory headscarves and chadors in public, Iranian women have demonstrated their empowerment and defiance in a manner that men have seldom dared to. The gap between the Iranian state and Iranian society is now wider than ever, with women leading the charge to separate a society yearning for freedom from a state that demands compliance and conformity.

The Intersection of Three Governance Impasses: What Were the Institutional Roots of the Women, Life, Freedom Movement?

Amir Mahdavi

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The initial outbreak of the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising (September 2022-January 2023) turned into the longest street protest in Iran since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Beginning as a reaction to the death of Mahsa Amini at the hands of the so-called morality police, the movement brought people across the country out onto the streets, eliciting broad support from the Iranian diaspora, as well as international public figures. Analysing the movement at present is a challenge given that the protests remain ongoing, if on a smaller scale. Furthermore, this movement is more complex than its predecessors and researchers have limited access to verified data. The Woman, Life, Freedom movement cannot be framed as a demonstration of rivalry among opposing political factions, as was the case for the 2009 Iranian Green Movement, nor as a revolt against economic crises, as in the 2019-2020 nationwide Iranian unrest. Available data indicates that participants of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement are diverse in terms of gender, age, and educational/career level.

This article focuses on the institutional factors that provoked the movement rather than the structure of the movement, seeking to understand what drove the Iranian people onto the streets to partake in social protest as the last viable option at their disposal. It examines the state's institutional function, the composition of its ruling elite, and its foreign policy to explain society's widespread desire for a change that led to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, concluding with an overview of the movement's political implications.

Institutional Chaos

Making governance efficient through a unified government is an unrealized dream in Iran. The experience of dual governance fraught with tension brought Hassan Rouhani's presidential term to political gridlock in 2021, when his cabinet member, Abdolnaser Hemmati, secured just eight percent of the total votes. Considering the political bankruptcy of Rouhani's government in foreign policy (inability to resume the nuclear deal), economy (negative economic growth and high inflation), and public policy (management of the COVID-19 crisis), many opponents and supporters of the regime agreed that the unification of the government would result in greater efficiency. However, the experience of the first year of the new administration has shown that institutionalization of the mechanisms that led to the failure of the previous president have perpetuated poor governance.

Inefficient governance is rooted in the dichotomy between democratic institutions and the supreme leader's power. Embedded in the constitution, this structure motivates the supreme leader to restrain the elected government by creating parallel institutions and granting broad powers to the organizations under his supervision. Examples in Iran include control of elections through the Guardian Council, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard's visible interference in politics, and giving some parliamentary and executive branch authority to councils supervised by the supreme leader. These mechanisms prevent the president and parliament from deviating from the supreme leader's desired policies. However, the experience of current president Ebrahim Raisi's government has shown that the institutionalization of these mechanisms, regardless of who is president, paralyses the administration in addressing daily governance issues that cause structural gridlock: Which bureau should issue vehicle registration documents – the judiciary or the police? Which organization may issue permits for streaming services –the Ministry of Culture or the state-owned TV? Which bureau should regulate the sale of public property to the private sector – the Parliament or the Supreme Council of Economic Coordination? Which body may ratify the internet censorship law – the Parliament or the Supreme Council of Cyberspace? Even the issue that ignited the recent Woman, Life, Freedom movement is not

free of the same contradictions: Which institution is responsible for determining how to enforce the mandatory hijab – the police or the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution?

Institutional chaos and the government's inability to identify the problems and propose and implement viable solutions have caused a sharp decline in trust in the government. The structural gridlocks have not only escalated the pressures on people but also undermined society's hope in the government's ability to improve the situation. The obsolete and dysfunctional structure of power shows no prospect of leading society toward a better future at the macro or individual level. In other words, this authoritarian structure cannot provide democratic mechanisms to reflect voters' demands in policies, social growth, and economic development. Surveys conducted during the months leading up to the Women, Life, Freedom movement showed that Iranian society imagines the future to be worse than it currently is.

Besides institutional chaos, the inherent duality of the constitution has led to the supreme leader's interference in executive affairs. In all countries with either a presidential or a parliamentary system, the most powerful person in the hierarchy is the one who oversees the cabinet. This does not apply in Iran, whose supreme leader is directly in charge of national security, defence, foreign policy, and even the appointment of the elected president. This deficiency motivates the supreme leader to circumvent the president and contact cabinet members directly in order to get information about each ministry and to block the policies that he considers incompatible with national security. Such interventions of the supreme leader and his subordinate institutions motivates the ministers to align their decisions with Khamenei's preferences regardless of whether or not the public approves of the job they are doing. This mechanism increases the risk of corruption and diminishes the government's efficiency. Furthermore, the dual accountability of cabinet members to the supreme leader and the president disrupts the performance of the executive branch. This institutional chaos has caused crises in governance, and the effort to solve those crises has led to the supreme leader's further interventions and the establishment of additional councils and organizations parallel to ministries. This vicious circle has led to a major decrease in the quality of governance over time. Among the mechanism's other effects is the impaired credibility and authority of senior government officials in the eyes of the public.

Even just a decade ago, Iranian society still interpreted the change of key administration figures as potential for government improvement and as hope for the future. At that time the dismissal and appointment of any minister, parliament speaker, or the vice president had important political connotations. The personality and political views of key appointees were criteria for stakeholders to predict forthcoming policies. However, the level of involvement of the supreme leader's office and his subordinate institutions in governance has made the elected institutions and the political orientation of public officials irrelevant. Currently, it is not only the changes of personnel at the level of governors, representatives, and ministers that have become meaningless but there is also no clear answer to the question of what meaningful changes will occur if the heads of the branches are randomly replaced by one another. Street protests to bring about radical change take place when there is least hope for institutional paths to break political gridlock. When citizens' collective conscience comes to believe that the governing structure is not capable of making positive changes, public anger will transform into a massive movement.

Internal Colonialism

The process of power unification favouring the unelected members of the regime entered a new phase since 2019 under the influence of two factors: the exacerbation of governmental crises; and the prospect of the succession of a new supreme leader in the near future. Authoritarian regimes have always faced a costly duality in selecting their administrative members. On the one hand, if such a regime employs independent experts, the possibility of implementing policies that deviate from its ideology will increase, and as a result, it will have to devote additional resources to monitoring. On the other hand, if it packs its administration with less specialized but loyal people, the regime will pay the price with reduced efficiency.[1] The sharp increase in Iran's budget deficit owing to nuclear sanctions as well as deepening crises such as the bankruptcy of pension funds and shortages of electricity and gas have reduced its ability to continue to pay the costs associated with tensions between elected government officials and the institutions subordinate to the supreme leader. Such a situation coincided with Ayatollah Khamenei reaching his 80s and growing need to set the stage for his successor. Thus, the big event celebrating the supreme leader's eightieth birthday was his decision to start a new phase of regime purification.

In 2019, Khamenei declared that the revolution has entered a "second phase." The essence of the declaration of the second phase of the revolution is about leadership succession.[2] According to the declaration, the revolutionary political elite expects the younger generation to take power. The aim is to extend the supreme leader's control over all parts of the government by filling key positions with his pure loyalists. The political elite initially realized this plan by imposing restrictions on opposition groups, thus forming a unified parliament in 2019 and a government in 2021. The implementation of the second phase of the revolution was not limited to making the elections non-competitive in favour of the "revolutionary" youth. It also affected other institutions and lower levels of the government. In the same vein, even the entry of less loyal people into civil society institutions such as bar associations, engineering organizations, and sports federations became severely restricted.

Other Middle Eastern countries, such as Iraq and Syria, have experienced this pattern of purification in the past, with the difference that the formation of minority political elites in those cases occurred around ethnic and religious divisions. For example, the minority Alawis (less than fifteen percent) in Syria hold almost all political power, and the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's method for domination in the 1970s was to change the composition of the administration by appointing people from his own city (Tikrit) to key positions. However, in the case of Iran, the loyal group of *revolutionaries* within the Shi'i majority from different regions of the country. They are distinguished from most of Iran's population not by their demographic characteristics but by their ideology, social behaviour, culture, and even lifestyle. This small segment of society is visibly distinguishable from average Iranians in terms of the shape of their beards and hijabs, vocabulary, rhetoric, religious ceremonies, and even entertainment choices. The state-owned media promotes them as the ideal type of citizen.

To keep the political elite motivated and attract new members, it is necessary to make them feel that they are not the minority and that their ideology is dominant. In this regard, the discourse of the second phase of the revolution was constantly re-enacted in artworks, pro-regime rallies, and

1 Barbara Geddes, Joseph George Wright, Joseph Wright, and Erica Frantz, *How dictatorships work: Power, personalization, and collapse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

2 "The Second Phase of the Revolution Statement to the Iranian people," *Khamenei.ir*, 11/02/11, 2019, https://bit.ly/3lsJJHJ.

the media to amplify the voices of the minority. Graduates of the best universities in Iran who have made progress in the private sector and start-ups are being monitored and should work according to policies designed by ministers, lawmakers, and high-level managers whose quality is below average compared to their peers but have been placed in such positions simply because of their loyalty to the regime. This trend triggers further alienation, anger, and frustration in society, which are potential ingredients of mass protests against the regime. The advancement of a small group of *revolutionaries* polarizes Iranian society. The public routinely refers to this ruling minority as *these people*, which is an expression of the prevailing sense of the otherness of the ruling elites in social psychology. Talented young people not considered loyal *revolutionaries* feel alienated from the administration and find their personal growth prospects stymied because they see a small group of *revolutionary* youth filling government positions. This monopoly of a homogenized ruling class with characteristics different from the majority of society has created a situation of *internal colonialism*.[3]

International Isolation

In 2022, Iran marked the twentieth anniversary of its conflict with the international community over its nuclear program. The country faced difficult economic circumstances in the early 2010s because of the impact of United Nations Security Council sanctions. The conflict resulted in the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between Iran, the five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), and Germany. The situation was relatively stable, and Iran enjoyed some sanctions relief until President Donald Trump withdrew the US from the JCPOA and adopted a policy of "maximum pressure" against Iran. As a result, Iran's oil revenue shrank by ninety percent from 2018 to 2020. Combined with the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, this was a devastating time for Iran's economy. Consequently, Iranians became hopeful when the Democrats won the presidential election and gained control of the Senate and House in the 2020 US elections. There was an eight-month window of opportunity when there was support for the JCPOA in both Tehran and Washington. The negotiations that began right after President Biden took office boosted Iranians' hopes, with negotiators even reaching a draft deal that Rouhani's opponents in Iran stalled. It seemed that the supreme leader and his allies were reluctant to take credit for the opening up of the Iranian economy resulting from the lifting of economic sanctions against his administration.[4] The general perception was that the ruling political elite wanted Ebrahim Raisi to come to power and then sell the agreement as the first fruit of the homogeneous government. However, the opposite occurred, and the prospect of the lifting of sanctions at the end of Raisi's first year in office became darker than ever – right when the Woman, Life, Freedom movement began. The trajectory of negotiations during the first year of the new Iranian administration had several features that raised expectations for their success.

First, the negotiating team had Ali Bagheri, a relative of the supreme leader, as its head. His presence marked the end to the duality in foreign policy that could assure the other parties that they were negotiating with the representative of Iran's ultimate authority. Furthermore, the public interpreted the fact that the negotiating team kept the contents of the negotiations secret as a sign that the

3 Asef Bayat "Is Iran on the verge of another revolution?" *Zeitoon*, February 28, 2023, https://bit.ly/3YWXT1y.

4 Rouhani even explicitly encouraged the government to let him sign the agreement so that the next government could reap the benefits. See: "Hassan Rouhani darbareyeh-e mozakerat-e ehyaye barjam: forsat-e dowlat davazdahum ra az dastash gereftand (Hassan Rouhani on the revival of the JCPOA: they robbed the 12th administration of its opportunity)," *BBC Persian*, July 14, 2021, http://bit.ly/40hzCEj.

negotiations were serious. Never before during the negotiations had the Iranian delegation refrained so much from sharing the details of the talks with the public. The continuation of this behaviour gave the impression that the negotiations were quietly progressing.

Second, in addition to the Biden administration, the other parties to the negotiations also had strong incentives for restoring the JCPOA. The withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA in 2018 deprived Iran of nearly all the benefits resulting from this deal. Whereas Iran largely adhered to its commitments, the European parties were almost unable to abide by theirs because of the secondary sanctions the US imposed. Therefore, they were eager to restore the JCPOA to compensate and keep Iran committed to restricting its nuclear program. Meanwhile, observing Iran's new policy of looking to the East, China knew that it would be the major beneficiary of the lifting of economic sanctions.

The third reason for optimism was the economic pressure of sanctions on the Raisi administration. He came to power in the first non-competitive elections of the last quarter century with the support of the supreme leader. Thus, Iranians expected that the whole regime would seriously try to remove the sanctions to give Raisi economic relief. However, in spite of these three reasons for optimism, Raisi's first year passed with no progress in restoring the JCPOA. It remains a mystery why Iran's government, in the midst of devastating economic pressure, did not do its best to get the sanctions lifted and help its economy, especially when the price of oil in 2021–2022 was greater than $100 a barrel. Here are three possible explanations.

First, the government was essentially reluctant to return to the JCPOA. Trump's violation of the deal had made the supreme leader pessimistic about any long-term agreement, and he considered survival without the JCPOA a lower price to pay than the shock of a second possible US withdrawal from it. In addition, the sanctions provided good justification for the Iranian regime's poor governance. Economic engagement with the world was likely to strengthen Iran's Western partners to challenge the regime in the long term. Furthermore, sanctions arguably weakened civil society and the pro-democracy middle class, which eventually made it easier for the government to control them.

Second, Russia played a role in preventing the reaching of an agreement. It is certain that military-security relations between Russia and Iran have greatly improved following their cooperation in the Syrian conflict. During the new round of JCPOA negotiations, Iran and the US communicated indirectly through a Russian representative who stated Iran's position on the negotiations. Russia's preventive role in restoring the JCPOA became clearer when Iran militarily supported the Russian invasion of Ukraine and called it a preemptive war.[5] Iran's engagement in the Ukraine war angered Europe, rendering the prospect of a nuclear agreement more remote even before the Woman, Life, Freedom movement began.

Third, sanctions perpetuated the domestic political and economic dynamics. The US withdrawal from the JCPOA and the reimposition of sanctions in 2018 taught the Iranian regime that it had to take measures to circumvent sanctions and unofficially export its oil. The current mechanism for bypassing sanctions created its own stakeholders and beneficiaries inside and outside of Iran. The buyers of Iran's oil have been intermediaries and small private refineries that received oil with unprecedented discounts. In addition, the domestic players in the unofficial export of oil are allowed to offer discounts and even bribes to sell oil in exchange for commodities or, after deducting the share of the

5 Tucker Reals and Khaled Wassef, "Iran Supreme Leader Lauds Putin for Starting Ukraine War and Says If He Hadn't, 'Dangerous' NATO Would Have," *CBS News*, July 20, 2022, http://bit.ly/3Zedyd3.

intermediary banks, for money. This network of beneficiaries has partners among the political elite who try to encourage the government to adopt an uncompromising negotiating position, which leads to the continuation of the sanctions. In any case, the result is a complete deadlock in the nuclear talks and the feeling of an impasse in society regarding the normalization of foreign relations. Failure in the nuclear negotiations means an intensification of the economic crisis and even the probability of war in the future, which could materialize in the form of an uprising of desperate people.

Conclusion

What government crises serve as the backdrop for the recent Woman, Life, Freedom movement? The intersection of the three impasses discussed above, along with other factors beyond the scope of this article, caused a sequence of collective actions. A modern society where seventy-five percent of the population resides in urban spaces, seven million women have university degrees, and ninety-one percent have access to the internet,[6] Iran has experienced an unprecedented economic downturn in the past decade. The overall standard of living fell by more than a third during this period.[7] With a severe decline in the size of the middle class, the low-income population, nearly eleven million ten years ago, has grown to thirty-two million.[8] Large numbers of formerly middle-class Iranians have moved to more disadvantaged neighbourhoods and suburbs. They have also changed their consumption patterns; they buy less protein and are unable to purchase new furniture. The political importance of this large population that descended from middle-income to low-income is that they are equipped with the skills and instruments necessary to express their dissatisfaction. They include teachers, engineers, and artists who find themselves in poverty and are more aware of the political context of their loss than those with low incomes from the outset. They are capable of relating their economic downfall to the governance impasses and thus frame political claims. They also have the ability to communicate with their peers. With access to global media and their interests, they know how to use social media properly to introduce themselves to the international community. Generation Z comprises gamers playing online with foreign opponents, and their middle-aged members are able to convey messages on the internet.

While suppression and lack of leadership may mean that the Woman, Life, Freedom movement does not have the features of a classic movement, protesters have managed to create opportunities to put pressure on the regime. The movement could more or less create what Tilly et al. called the necessary repertoire of collective action.[9] Collective actions like sharing videos of people cutting their hair, boycotting government-sponsored film festivals, or generating hashtags are among the innovations the movement created that can easily change from one issue to another or from one place to another.[10]

The rapid expansion of this movement has raised expectations of achieving desired political goals, and the lack of organization of the protesters inside the country has galvanized the opposition abroad to make regime change the primary goal of the movement. In addition, the meeting of some Western

6 "Middle East Internet Statistics, Population, Facebook and Telecommunications Reports," Internet World Stats: Usage and Population Statistics, http://bit.ly/3IsKwbF.

7 "Bayaneyeh-e 5 eghtesad-dan darbareyeh-e risheh-haye eghtesadi e'aterazha: sedaye e'aterazha ra beshnavid (Statement of five economists about the economic roots of the protests: Hear the voices of the protests)," *Ensaf News*, October 7, 2022, https://bit.ly/40gYZpH.

8 "38 darsad az jam'eyat-e Iran dar faqr be sar mibarand (38 percent of Iran's population is living in poverty)," *Shargh Daily*, April 26, 2022, https://bit.ly/3TpbtcT.

9 Charles Tilly, Ernesto Castañeda, and Lesley J. Wood, *Social Movements, 1768-2018* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

10 David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, "A movement society: Contentious politics for a new century," In *The social movement society: Contentious politics for a new century* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), 1-28.

leaders with exiled opposition figures who were not clear about whether they represented the protesters gave the impression that the world was beginning to cooperate with the next Iranian regime whereas, in reality, the authority of the current regime was still in place.[11] Although the protestors used revolutionary slogans and the regime used violence to suppress them, their number increased so that the opposition outside of Iran quickly named their movement a "revolution," which caused tension between revolutionary expectations and reality. The truth is that a revolutionary situation, in which the incumbent government and the opposition reached equality in power resources, did not occur during this months-long event.[12] Changing the power equilibrium requires the strengthening of the opposition on the one hand and the disengagement of the regime's elites on the other.

Although many of the Islamic Republic's old guards have recently refused to condemn the movement, there is still no clear evidence of the political elite's fall. As mentioned earlier, the regime had protected itself against such a possibility by implementing the Second Phase of the Revolution. This means that dismissing the old guard and replacing them with a new generation of loyalists had already happened. The core of the current government has become purified, cohesive, and under the command of the head of state, so it seems unlikely there will be any noticeable disunity, even under more severe pressure. However, a revolutionary situation can create the conditions for the departure of government and military personnel.

Taking everything into consideration, a set of reforms initiated by the highest level of power is the most viable option for the protesters and the government in the immediate future because, alongside the collective discontent, general outrage has grown after security forces killed five hundred protesters and injured even more. Therefore, the chances that people will contribute to any effort to make government work better are unlikely. The results of a poll on this issue show that less than twenty percent of Tehran's residents do not want to participate in civil protests.[13] In other words, despite being inclined to join protests, the majority do not want to engage in aggressive and costly actions in the meantime. Nevertheless, they are not going to be satisfied with anything less than radical reforms. The only least costly and viable option for the regime seems to be creating prospects by making a real paradigm shift to overcome the three governance impasses.

It is too soon to tell whether recent changes (e.g., peace with Saudi Arabia, the release of prisoners arrested in protests, and giving permission to the international nuclear agency for widespread monitoring) are attributable to the regime's intention to deliver meaningful change. One thing is for sure: the collapse of the economy and the people's immense discontent will not give the government much time to implement reforms. Unless reform takes place in the near future, it is no exaggeration to assume that most of the people who abstained from taking part in the street protests this time will be convinced to do so in the next phase of the movement.

11 Among those who met with opposition activists were the French president and the US secretary of state.

12 Tilly, Castañeda, and Wood, *Social Movements*.

13 "Sad saal va sad ruz: darbareyeh-e khizesh-e mahsa (hundred years and hundred days: Mahsa's uprising), *Zeitoons*, https://bit.ly/3Z0Qk9Q.

Finding Equilibrium: The Trilemma of Being a Woman in Iran

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Delving into contemporary Iranian history, this article aims to unravel how Iranian subjectivity deals with its ambivalence towards women's positionality in the nation's present-day cultural and socio-political life. Freudian psychoanalysis suggests that experiencing ambivalent thoughts and feelings about life and our existence is part of human subjectivity.[1] Nevertheless, living in a state of "disequilibrium" continually can lead to instability and unpredictability, making it hard to develop and implement sustainable and appropriate public policies to accommodate social change and this, in turn, can cause short-term and long-term psychological harm.[2] For instance, when it comes to work-life balance, many modern Iranian women struggle to balance the pressures of competing rationalities and have contradictory thoughts and emotions centring on bearing and rearing children and caring for the family and the production of labour, wealth and capital. The Iranian case of multiple (dis)equilibria is an example of a social order torn between multiple identities and their associated preference structures of Persianism, Islam, or modernity, and what might constitute a viable and stable combination of them. Each of these rationalities offer their own truth packages which are themselves "unities in multiplicities".[3] However, they interact and combine in innumerable permutations to generate different shades of the multiplicities of ways of being.

In contemporary Iranian history, three significant political events—the Constitutional Revolution, the Oil Nationalisation Movement, and the 1979 Islamic Revolution—are the manifestations of encounters with the wider world order that have had a significant impact on women's lives in different shapes and forms. The first Pahlavi king, Reza Shah (Khan), had a very ambitious project of social transformation to modernise Iran as swiftly as possible.[4] That also involved liberating women from the chains of traditions and patriarchal social order. After visiting Turkey in 1934, Reza Shah enforced the compulsory unveiling of women in 1936 in a top-down social engineering experiment that lacked adequate emergent legitimacy, with no attempt at consensus building.[5] He largely ignored the objections and resistance of the most conservative sections of the society who were traumatised witnessing the forceful and excessive measures used to remove the sacred hijab from women's bodies. This heretic and bold move was never forgotten nor forgiven and returned to haunt the Pahlavi dynasty later with catastrophic consequences. Meanwhile, the Shah's son, Mohammad Reza Shah, continued his father's revolutionary social and political reforms and women were granted more rights under his reign, such as the right to higher education and to work even at the highest levels of ministerial, parliamentary, and diplomatic rank, as well as the right to vote. More significantly, he introduced the Family Protection Act of 1967, along with the right to abortion in 1973, enhancing mother's custody rights of their children, limiting polygamy, and later abolishing extra judicial divorce in 1975.[6] Reforms also included changing the minimum marriage age for girls and boys, and providing welfare services for low-income women in urban areas and provincial towns overwhelmed with poverty.

However, many of these progressive laws were repealed after the 1979 revolution and replaced by the new social order introduced based on the traditional legal discourse of Sharia law (Revealed Law). Islamic jurisprudence in its Shia version, as the mainstream discourse with its affiliated institutions

1 Stephanie Swales and Carol Owens, *Psychoanalysing Ambivalence with Freud and Lacan: On and Off the Couch* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

2 Jessica Flack and Melanie Mitchell, "Uncertain times," *Aeon*, August 21, 2020, http://bit.ly/3Ms2AO8.

3 Thomas R. Flynn, *Sartre, Foucault, and Historical Reason, Volume Two: A Poststructuralist Mapping of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

4 Janet Afary, Khosrow Mostofi, and Peter William Avery, "Iran," Encyclopaedia Britannica, April 4, 2023, http://bit.ly/40HIjse.

5 Hamideh Sedghi, "Feminist Movements in the Pahlavi Period," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, IX/5, pp. 492-498, http://bit.ly/3Kc2AiH.

6 Doreen Hinchcliffe, "The Iranian Family Protection Act," *The International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (1968): pp. 516–521.

and structures, is a powerful force shaping the minds and lives of ordinary people in contemporary Iran with its two features of law and image-making.[7] As a result, a body of discourse and theory rooted in the theological and ontological foundations of orthodox jurisprudence defines male/female sexuality and gender roles and consequently have a major influence on women's lives.

In relation to women and their gendered role in the family and society, the image-making feature of the Islamic jurisprudence is the more imperative and is beyond law. It mainly serves as a philosophy shaping and informing gender relations and women's defective and inferior position in society at large. In the context of Islamic contractual marriage, which is considered as a "kind of ownership" (*milkiyyat*), women should obey their husbands both in general (*Tamkin-e aam*) and specific terms (*Tamkin-e khas*). The former refers to accepting the husband's authority as the head of the household and obeying his wishes, while also not leaving the family house without his permission. The latter refers to sexual submission and conjugal intercourse with its two features of promptness and exclusivity.[8] In return, the wife is entitled to maintenance (*nafaqeh*), bride-price (*mahrieh)*, and payment for housework (*ojratolmesl*). If she refuses to perform her duties, she would be recognised as a disobedient wife (*nashezeh*) and would be punished. Meanwhile, according to this orthodox-based formulation, men also have some spousal duties. They must provide for their wives by paying maintenance, and if they refuse to oblige and their wives complain, they would be imprisoned or punished by court financially.

There are some debates about whether Islamic marriage is a "complete ownership" or "partial ownership" of the wife and whether this sexual-economic transaction could lead to the use of physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence by husbands. According to some interpretations of the Qur'an (*Sura Nisa*), women who do not obey their husbands will be subjected to chastisement. However, some jurists argue that the type of recommended beating is different from battering and it is rather a symbolic gesture to show the husbands' dissatisfaction. According to some religious narrations (*hadith*), no harm should come to women and no bruises and injuries should be caused to their bodies, otherwise the husband would be punished and be liable to pay *diyeh* (blood money) to his wife.[9]

Nevertheless, some female academics, politicians, and activists in Iran resisted and challenged some of these unilateral rights and privileges being granted to men (such as polygamy, divorce, and child custody) and demanded new readings and interpretations of the holy text and religious sayings. As a result, some changes were introduced into the marriage contract (*aqd nameh*) and women were allowed to add some conditions (such as the right to work, travel abroad, education, divorce, custody rights, etc.) prior to signing their marriage contacts. However, most women are not fully aware of the legal complexities surrounding the marriage contract and how to use laws to make these conditions have legal bearing which could be problematic when problems arise. Even those who are conversant with these laws have found it challenging to pursue their rights and implement their conditions to their marriage contracts, while being surrounded by powerful family members of both sides who strongly resist and discourage the brides-to-be from putting any extra conditions in the marriage contract. Similarly, some registrars refuse to fulfil the women's requests, viewing these rights as un-Islamic and against the sacred Sharia rulings and God-given rights of men.

7 Janet Afary, Review of *Marriage on Trial: A Study of Islamic Family Law*, by Ziba Mir-Hosseini, *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 29, no. 3-4 (2022): pp. 363–367.

8 Zahra Tizro, *Domestic Violence in Iran: Women, Marriage and Islam* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012).

9 Ibid.

While the post-revolutionary social order was frowned upon by some women, especially those with predominantly modern and non-religious preferences, other women with religious and conservative backgrounds welcomed and embraced them. Those who favour the government's gender policies, in general, argue that the most important duty of a Muslim woman is to be a mother, raise a family, and obey their husband devotedly. These women wholeheartedly believe they will be rewarded in the hereafter as pledged in the Qur'an and in infallible Shi'i leaders' sayings. They view their assigned gender roles as sacred and simply just and fair. They also believe in the state's gender segregation policies, more particularly compulsory hijab, introduced in a reverse social engineering fashion by Ayatollah Khomeini after the 1979 revolution. According to them, these policies enhanced women's mobility, immunity and liberty, and maximised their access to the outside world.[10] More particularly, women and girls from rural areas with a conservative upbringing gained greater chances to travel independently to other cities for education and work and this, in turn, had a significant impact in increasing the number of women graduates and their participation in the workforce.

The above passages attempted to illustrate the historical materiality of the structures of power, knowledge, subjectivity, and violence, and the ways in which men's and women's subjectivities are formulated and reinforced based on powerful discourses. Given their position and status in the Islamic Republic's social order, which is by and large determined by their conceptualization of Sharia law, women find it challenging to negotiate their rights and safely navigate these endless tensions and contradictions. How can their desire to live a modern life be reconciled with the Islamic laws of chastity and Persianist ethics of public decency? How can their role in society be coordinated with the role of motherhood and 'wifehood' in the institution of the family? What is the roadmap through which society as a whole can reach a viable consensus on gaining legitimacy and a "licence to operate" in the realm of the public life in coordination with private life.[11] Ultimately, how can we reconcile the three distinct forces of Persianism, Islam, and modernity with their three contrasting structures of power/knowledge and affectivities, discursive formations, and institutional arrangements in different realms of life (family, gender relations, sexuality, death, education, and entertainment)? How can women safely navigate these endless tensions and contradictions?

The notion of a tragedy of confusion, and the incessant ebb and flow and perpetual conflicts between forces of globalisation and localisation make it almost impossible to construct stable and functional institutional arrangements and coalitions.[12] The persistent experience of institutional failure, turned Iran into a country of institutional dysfunctionalities and deformities, triggering the emergence of large- and small-scale social movements culminating in the experience of constant waves of political upheavals and socio-economic instability and crisis. Modernity is materialized through the establishment of nation states, which require a national identity that further fuels demands for resources embedded in Shia Islam and/or Persianism. This generates a demand to form a viable narrative out of resources of Islam and/or Persianism, made compatible with modernity.[13] It, in turn, leads to the emergence of three incompatible forms of nationalism (Islamic, Persianist, and modernist), and a variety of combinations of these forms with different priorities, prominences, and exceptions. The issue

10 Zahra Tizro, "The Political Psychology of Veiling / Unveiling in Iran," *Discover Society*: *New Series*, Vol. 3, No. 1, http://bit.ly/43fDyb0.

11 Philip Sadler, *Building Tomorrow's Company: A Guide to Sustainable Business Success* (Kogan Page Ltd, 2002).

12 Farhad Gohardani and Zahra Tizro, *The Political Economy of Iran: Development, Revolution and Political Violence (Political Economy of Islam)* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

13 Alam Saleh and James Worrall, "Between Darius and Khomeini: exploring Iran's national identity problematique," *National Identities*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2015): pp. 73-97.

is the confusion permeating and prevailing in other social issues related to life and we observe the disorienting array of inconsistencies, "incompletenesses", and "undecidabilities" at the heart of social life throughout modern Iranian history. As such, all areas of life (economy, culture and art, gender relations and family, education, health, foreign policy and security, social justice and freedom, ethical and legal arrangements) have become battlegrounds for alternative regime of truths. Institutional investments, as a result, encounter losses, reversals or irregularities and dysfunctionalities. Hence, these relentless and undecidable battles over the fundamentals of social life have produced constant shifts in the position of individuals and groups and formed unstable coalitions and alliances. Such battles continue to this day and will continue in future across time and space, it does not matter whether we are part of diaspora or reside inside the country, most of us experience the same confused preference structure and cultural trilemma.

We are facing different rival rationalities, each with a different set of historically formed and incommensurable conceptual schemes. Each has something different to offer to Iranian people. Nevertheless, in order to be free, as Spinoza believed, one must understand the ways in which one is determined.[14] To pave the way for a viable and stable equilibrium for a sense of national identity and an irreversible approach to gender equality, which eradicates all forms of discrimination against women in Iran, we need a smooth emergence of native and indigenous alternative structures of power and knowledge, with widespread acceptability and prevalence in everyday life. The essence of equality and justice should be formulated, lived, and practiced in the wider context of "the history of salvation".[15] To create a long-term mutually beneficial equilibrium and to establish consensus between, and within, rival groups and social entities, we need to adopt a compassionate non-combative approach. Only then will women's rights gain universal legitimacy.

14 Steven Frankel, "Determined to Be Free: The Meaning of Freedom in Spinoza's Theologico-Political Treatise," *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 73, No. 1 (2011): pp. 55–76.

15 Mohammed Arkoun, *The Unthought in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (London: Saqi, 2002).

Where Dance Fights with the Devil: A Report from Inside the First Female Revolution in Iran

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Michel Foucault in his famous writing on the 1979 Iranian revolution calls Iran the "spirit of a spiritless world." But as an anonymous critic, an Iranian woman under the pen name "Mme. Atoussa H" counters that this spirituality was masculine and soon summons the old traditional patriarchy in the new body of possessed modernized Pahlavi state.[1] One of the first revolutionary mandates of Ayatollah Khomeini was compulsory veiling (hijab). Mandatory veiling sparked large protests by women in the early years of the revolution, and gradually evolved into an oppressive system of female body control through a multilayered disciplinary, juridical, political, cultural, and intelligence institutions that supported the morality police against a trivial loosening of women's scarf.

On 13 September 2022, a 22-year-old Kurdish girl who was visiting Tehran for a few hours, was arrested by the so-called morality police and died in police custody. Since then, Mahsa Amini has become a symbol of women's fight against patriarchal oppression in Iran, with her death sparking demonstrations across multiple cities in Iran. A month after her death, anti-government protests persisted all over the country. Although internet and access to the global cyberspace has been restricted almost completely, and the police is suppressing any activities by the protestors, streets, universities, schools, local urban areas, cars, and rooftops have become the main stages for women protestors to perform their acts of defiance. While there have been many anti-government protests in the country regarding economic and environmental concerns, this one stands out because young women and girls are on the front lines, supported by young men. Women are taking off their scarves, spinning them in the air, cutting their hair, burning their veils, and dancing in the streets. The main slogan of this new movement is "Woman, Life, Freedom," which is being chanted everywhere. Similar to the deaths of Mohamed Bouazizi in Tunisia and George Floyd in the United States, Mahsa Amini's killing triggered widespread outrage. The source of the uprising was not the usual ideological, economic, racial or ethnic conflicts, but rather women's persistent oppression and subordination in the country. According to prominent feminist academics, this time we should "listen to the voices of a feminist revolution in Iran."[2] To better understand the political importance of the recent Iranian revolutionary phenomena, we need to examine the significance of the veil, and to properly understand what the Islamic Republic state sees the "woman problem."[3]

The Islamic Republic and Veiling

Until recently, in Iranian intellectual and political public spheres, the veil was seen as a minor concern of women. Although the protests against compulsory hijab were the first anti-government protests three weeks after the Islamic Revolution on March 8, 1979, elite men paid less attention to this feminine concern. The political debates always centered on masculine so called "serious" ideological, political, and economic problems. In Habermasian terms, the veil was categorized under secondary cultural issues in important public discussions, in which women with improper hijab are considered loose, even among opposition politicians and elites. Even some feminists, consider the veil as a trivial girlish concern about clothing, which should be disregarded in order to tackle the more "serious" problems about women's legal rights. Nevertheless, in all these years, the veil was a central part of an administrative "system" and family "life-world" marking the structure of real power, away from

1 B. Ghamari-Tabrizi, *Foucault in Iran: Islamic Revolution After the Enlightenment* (University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

2 J. Butler, J. Rancière, A. Y. Davis, S. Ahmed, and S. Benhabib, "A group of Iranian Feminists and others (2022), Listen to the Voices of a Feminist Revolution in Iran," http://bit.ly/3Ajwa1r.

3 Afsaneh Najmabadi, "Hazards of Modernity and Morality: Women, State and Ideology in Contemporary Iran," in *Women, Islam and the State*, ed. Deniz Kandiyoti (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1991).

discursive discussions. In fact, despite the existence of other regulations that limit their access to the economy, security, education, and healthcare, women in the Islamic Republic are subject to policing of their bodies through the imposition of the veil. The veil is a red line for the state, and it has not backed down from its mandatory veiling policy.

How can we understand the position of the veil in the Islamic Republic, this apparently trivial piece on women's head for which people are being killed in streets? According to critical social theory, this dilemma is related to the epistemological gap between politics and technology, culture and rationality, discourse and materiality, lifeworld and system, episteme and power in modern philosophical, political and social theory. Women are experiencing the veil existentially as a powerful entity that directs their life in practice in the latter parts of these dichotomies. The former parts of these dichotomies reduce the veil to an immaterial, power-free cultural concept in a symmetric network of equal values of clothing. To understand the nature of the veil, we need to change our focus from cultural representations of clothing to the embedded power codes. Andrew Feenberg calls this approach "technical politics," which reveals actual power relations hidden in technical codes.[4]

In our case, the veil is always considered as a theological regulation of women's dress. It is assumed that the technical code of the veil is directly deduced from epistemic theological arguments. But by shifting our focus from theology to technology, we can reverse the relationship between the veil and religious arguments. The veil is not an application of Islamic law; rather, Islamic law is an epistemological formulation of the veil. In this new genealogical understanding of the knowledge-power relation in Islam, the rational Western political question of who has the natural/philosophical/theological superiority and authority to rule others, has become a question of ways of ruling. Different from Michel Foucault's famous archetype of Panopticon as disciplinary machinery of the modern rationality-power relationship, Islamic disciplinary machinery is patriarchal and its political technology is veiling. Both the veil and Islamic law are products of a special historical patriarchal understanding of being and the Holy Quran, which are directly focused on the female body.[5]

Viewed from this perspective, it is clear why controlling the female body is the main platform and most strategic pillar of constructing an Islamic state. According to Fatema Mernissi,[6] if "the man of reason" in the Western tradition considers nature as raw material, a neutral object of making technical civilization including women,[7] then in the theory of the Islamic man of reason, Muslim women are more than raw material, a dangerous enemy against whom all patriarchal machinery is designed to exile and neutralize her. The veil is a political tool used to keep women out of the public eye and social contact while purging the masculine public sphere from femininity. Simultaneously this apparatus works with a theological regime of truth to reproduce ancient patriarchal mythology of women as a source of all sins.[8]

4 Andrew Feenberg, *Transforming Technology: A Critical Theory Revisited* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

5 L. Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021).

6 F. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamic in Muslim Society* (London: Saqi, 2011).

7 G. Lloyd, *The Man of Reason: "Male" and "Female" in Western Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2002).

8 N. S. Abu Zayd, *Circled of Scare, Women in Islamic Discourse*, trans. Edris Amini (Tehran: Negah Mo'aser Publication, 2018).

A Feminine Revolution

According to Karl Schmitt, every state has boundaries which provide "the political" needed for sovereignty by separating friends from enemies.[9] The state's boundaries become physical due to its nature. Usually, this boundary corresponds to national diplomatic borders; sometimes it emerges like the Berlin wall as a symbol of cold war ideological blocks; in racist regimes, ethnicity and race make the political curtain; and in the Islamic state, the headscarf segregates pure masculine society from feminine impurity. In this structure, it is clear that the hijab problem is more complicated than the external assumption that portrays it as a struggle over "the right to choose what to wear." The primary goal of the Islamic State is to save its identity and apparatus of power. Every patriarchal cultural, economic, political, educational, and juridical construction derives its model and metaphor from the traditional family pattern of father/husband superiority on women. In this structure, the male subject is the ruler, while the female and children are subordinates. The battle between women and the Islamic Republic over the veil is a crisis in the foundation of patriarchal governance, unlike previous ideological or economic protests. In other words, femininity is the ontological alternative of the masculine order.

This new feminine agency is the reason why we cannot talk about this female revolution in conventional terms of movements and revolutions. From the French to the Russian Revolution, and even the Iranian Revolution, we were only familiar with one type of revolution: The masculine type, which is political, equipped with an ideological manifesto, party, flag, charismatic leader, strategic plans designed by professional revolutionaries and an armed core of revolutionary men who are ready to fight the official army to overthrow the regime and establish a new one. It seems that this model would reproduce a more radical patriarchy in the new established state by following changes from above through top-down state engineering, as pursued by Robespierre, Lenin, and Khomeini in these three modern revolutions. Disagreements between the enlightenment, Marxism and Islamism, the man of reason and his platonic idealism, as well as militant violation tainted the idea and practice of revolution.

Nevertheless, here in the current movement in Iran, we lack aggressive violence, weapons, ideology, party, flag, charismatic leader, professional revolutionaries, hierarchical organizations, political headquarters to plan strategies, and propaganda to influence mass population. Instead, a new free world is revealed through the flourishing of the female body despite the existence of disciplinary forces, which have, through compulsory hijab, concentrated all their will to suppressing in a piece of fabric. Chucking the scarves in the fire and unveiled women dancing in the streets, which are still under strict surveillance and occupation of patriarchal forces, is the sacred rite of this feminist revolution. In Foucauldian terms, Iran is witnessing a new spirituality being born by brave young Iranian girls and women: the feminine embodied spirit that is tearing wide breaches in the curtains of a spiritless patriarchal world by simply throwing out the scarves and dancing in front of the devil.

9 C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political: Expanded Edition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008).