

Challenging the Patriarchal System:
The Case of the Lower and Middle-Class Iranian Military
Wives During
the Iran-Iraq War - 1980-1988

by Nakisa Azizikotenaee

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Mohammad Faghfoory
Professorial Lecturer and Director of Graduate Program in Islamic Studies

Abstract

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Patriarchy as a dominant social norm was visible inside many traditionalist countries. Iran was no exception, where women struggled for a long time with this dominant norm. During the last century, women in Iran had the opportunity to experience many reform in their rights theoretically including written law. This thesis demonstrates how lower and middle-class women during Iran-Iraq War practically challenged this dominant patriarchal system. Through an analysis of interviews and statistical evidence regarding lower and middle-class military wives from 1980-1988, this thesis aims to indicate the elements that influenced women's path to promote their socio-political status in family, social, and political spheres. The thesis contributes information on the increasing status of Iranian women in the above-mentioned areas.

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Introduction

The Iranian concept of men as a higher gender or patriarchy has been a common concept long before the revolution (1979). Traditionally, men in Iran have been called “breadwinners,” “head of household,” and “decision makers” within the society. Although the state’s policies have changed over the time, the structure of patriarchal system has never been removed from the surface of Iranian society. However, the Iran-Iraq war created a crisis situation that challenged this system.

The Iran-Iraq war, commonly called ‘The Imposed War’ (*Jang-e-tahmīlī*) by the Islamic government of Iran, or the ‘Holy Defense’ (*Defā’-e-moqqaddas*), and the Persian Gulf War, lasted eight years (1980-1988), becoming the longest war in the 20th century.¹ Like the two World Wars, the Iran-Iraq war caused great damage in people’s personal lives, as well as in the political situation and economy of Iran. The war came at a great cost in lives and economic damage — half a million Iraqi and Iranian soldiers as well as civilians are believed to have been killed in the war, with many more injured — but it brought neither reparations nor a change in borders. In this war, Iranian women had a remarkable role in many areas. As a result of shortage of men for civilian work, the state revolutionary government encouraged women to enter the workplace, creating a challenge for women encountering the patriarchal system. Before the revolution, the previous state had encouraged women’s institutions to have more women workers in order to modernize the country. There was also a reform in the law considering woman rights. Nonetheless, upper-class women had the greater chance to benefit from reformed laws,² and women from the middle and lower classes were not equally effected by the reformed law. During the war, because of the needs for the labor force, the state had to realistically involve women in the public sphere, outside the households, resulting in a great transformation of the women’s role within society. Therefore, the latter state

¹ Karsh, Efraim. *The Iran-Iraq war*. New York: Rosen Pub., 2009, introduction

² Yazdani, Mina. "The Islamic Revolution's Internal Other: The Case of *Ayatollah* Khomeinī and the Baha'is of Iran1." *Journal of Religious History* 36, no. 4 (2012): 593-604. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9809.2012.01233.x.

had more success even if it did not have determined plan about women's public role as did the former pre-revolutionary state.

In this regard one can mention Iran's supreme leader as an influential element in the abovementioned transforming power from men to women. *Ayatollah* Khomeinī, the leader of the revolution and later supreme leader, highlighted women's important role in the revolutionary process. Even after the revolution, he mentioned that without women the revolution would have failed. In addition, the war stabilized the role of the women in the country, because after finishing the war, women would not be judged because of their gender as much as before especially in the Middle and Lower class. The process of overcoming of the inequality was not part of the plan of the government, nor of the patriarchal society. But the long war and shortage of men gave women the opportunity to enter in every space and reveal that they can do anything that the opposite sex can. Therefore, the gap between genders has somewhat diminished as a result of Iran-Iraq war.

The war offered the opportunity for women to transform the old-fashioned structure of patriarchy into almost gender equality. Nonetheless, the capability of Iranian women who worked behind the scene and their dedication for their nation received little attention by subsequent scholars, whether in Iran or outside. Women participated in different aspects of the social sphere more than before, but behind the scenes, because they were not permitted to participate directly in broad aspects of defense activities. While there are many documents from women who contributed in the war, there is not as much documentation of women who were challenged in different ways, both inside their households or outside of them. Although war always ruins and has negative side effects for societies, the battle between Iran and Iraq brought unique challenges for Iranian women, it also revealed their importance in the patriarchal structure of Iranian society, and presented new opportunities to challenge the male-dominated hierarchy.

In this thesis, I review life stories left by women from the time of the conflict until the present, in addition to interviews from military wives during the Iran-Iraq War, to demonstrate how typical women from lower-middle class improved the society's perception of women that had been

erroneous and simplistic about their gender. This information demonstrates how they were being judged before by their gender, and how that changed that perception as a result of the war. To investigate this issue, I also set an interview in the northern region of the Caspian Sea, especially in two cities from veteran's wives who were effected in the war and its pressure. Also they were the women whom the government trusted during and after the war for different jobs. Therefore, they were challenged directly by patriarchal system in and outside the household.

The reason that I focus on war veterans' wives in this thesis is in three folds; First, there is limited women's studies literature about ordinary women who were challenged the most during the war. The husbands who were absent from the home during the war have been studied, but the women, those who experienced the harshest financial problems within the patriarchal society, have been under studied. These women had a great role in transforming the social status of women from a passive to an active force. One may ask why I did not review the role of professional and upper-class women. The reason is, because there are many sources from their point of view about the war and their lives. Although, according to many scholars, professional women had a great impact on the revolution and the war, in my opinion, they were not the challenge to the patriarchal system that the thesis proposes to cover. They were from elite families who neither limited their daughters' education nor limited their work outside the home.

Second, the veterans' wives were women whom the government trusted the most after the revolution, and many of them were working outside their household despite a limited amount of formal education. For a long time, these women were also held up as models of modest women in Iran who were representing the ideal women in revolutionary ideology for being modest, supportive to the country's revolution and their nation. Therefore, the women's position was elevated, while before men were the heroes in many roles. For example, in famous movies before the revolution, male characters were the strongest and had the primary roles who would in the plot revive families

honor like Gheysar³.

Third, the state would have benefited politically from society being better aware of women's experiences. For example, as a child born at the end of the war, I remember a school tradition that would introduce these women as role models and invite them to have a brief conversation with female students. The war was an opportunity for these women, to challenge the system from within. Since the government plan gave the opportunity to their demands to be heard alongside their experience.

Literature Review

As in other societies at war, Iran's war story has been important to control, particularly as it pertains to the experience of soldiers who fight and die for the cause. There are a number of interviews and memoirs from these women, which show the process of the war through personal narrative accounts. In this regard, Iran has a broad scope of information about women who were the wives of veterans. In this thesis, I am mostly focusing on those sources which are not translated into English. I also organized interviews with 50 lower-middle class women in Iran, who were married before or during the war with soldiers, that helped me to rethink the war from a different perspective. In other words, analyzing the effects of the war not on the veterans, but looking at war as a challenge particular to women.

Interestingly, even these women's memoirs are mostly about the men they lost or came back injured. One notable memoir is the memoirs called *Baghe Angoor* (Vineyard), written by a woman whose field is gathering women's memoirs. She opens by stating that the book is mostly to credit the veteran, and would mostly talk about him rather than his wife. Nonetheless, these women's stories are interesting to read, because they were pushing and supporting their men risk their lives to protect the country. This approach, however, required reading between the lines to discover the women's role during the war. To help bridge the gap between text and subtext, I

³ Made in 1969 film by Iranian filmmaker Masoud Kimiai. The film was considered a "landmark in the Iranian cinema" and led to a new trend for brooding noir dramas in which outraged family honour is avenged

prepared interviews to explicitly examine these women's experiences with a more detailed lens. These interviews were helpful to see them in real life and to hear their stories directly from them, rather than reading quotes in the formal press considering governmental censorship.

Besides these sources, the thesis benefited from books such as *Women, Power and politics* edited by Elaheh Rostami-Povey, and *Reconstructed Lives* written by Hale Esfandiari. The latter discusses the lives of Iranian women which have been reconstructed after the revolution and how women with different jobs encountered the revolution. The former, however, makes passing references to the authoritarian and patriarchal nature of the 'religio-political state and society' in today's Iran.⁴ There were also related articles which describe the role of women in changing the revolutionary law to the benefit of women, which are mentioned in the bibliography.

While the revolution was a tremendous upheaval which overshadowed the Iran-Iraq war and women's struggles, there is a great part of these articles and books devoted to the role of women in this specific time-line. With these sources, I attempted to highlight the time of war and examine how much women contributed. In other words, what was the profound impact of women on the transformation of gender equality that helped the society to rethink this, especially during the war and afterwards. Simply by studying these sources, I attempted to respond the question that, what did make women during wartime more brave to declare that there is no difference between them and the men who went to war? It should also be mentioned that most articles that discuss the war as a main subject are either about the strategy of the war or the reasoning for initiating of the war from Iranian side. It is noteworthy to mention that there is a great study on Iraqi women such as: *The Roles of Iraqi Women during the Iraq-Iran War* by Noga Efrati.

This thesis begins by covering the historical context of the Iranian state policies toward

⁴ Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey (eds), *Women, Power and Politics in 21st Century Iran* (Ashgate, 2012), pp, 4

women's social position from the late 19th century to the end of 1980, including policy positions of the revolutionary government. In chapter one I examine three areas of the state policies, including women's education, labor, and dress code. By considering these elements, I describe how these policy areas limited or facilitated women's access to the public sphere. The second chapter discusses the differences among women from different socioeconomic levels in their involvement in the revolution. This discussion demonstrates the limits and opportunities that women experienced, based on their class level. The third and fourth chapters introduce the veterans' wives as a case study whose interviews represent their life stories. The third chapter introduces the challenges that women from middle and lower class encountered because of the war. The final chapter discusses how women integrated into traditionally male jobs as a result of the war. This opportunity helped them to break the dominant norm of patriarchy in Iranian society.

Methodology:

The type of research used in this thesis is an evaluation of historical and social analysis, which aims to develop an in-depth portrait of lower-middle class women's behavior during the war before and after the revolution. This portrait is intended to demonstrate that their behavior was not according to the dominant norm. The historical research examines the "how" and "why" of the state's decisions toward women's status in society. The social analysis examines the behavior of the lower-middle class women in response to those state decisions. The examination includes observations and analytical data along with questionnaire data that was administered to a specific group of women as an interview. A review of historical books and memoirs is also conducted.

Most of the data of this thesis is based on interviews that I conducted in two cities in northern Iran. I interviewed 50 veteran's wives from different occupational strata, including agricultural workers, teachers, a school administrator, and administrators from government organizations. My interviews were conducted in two phases, including the oral and written. Most of the women I interviewed ranged in age from forty-five to fifty-five years since this case were involved in the issue of both revolution and war afterward in a broad sense. Although I structured

the interview informally, I asked all the interviewees the same set of questions that are in Appendix A. The initial oral interviews with twenty-seven of these women and their responses to each other's which was casually hosted by one of the wife of *shahīd* in summer 2016, helped me to identify these women's concerns and obstacles during the war. The introductory interview session helped me to construct a set of questions to identify the common obstacles as a result of a patriarchal society and how these women responded to these challenges and experienced improvement in their lives. This set of questions formed a written interview administered which took place in the winter 2017, by assistance of one of the women from my family member and the interview form is shown in Appendix B. The questions of Appendix A and Appendix B were presented to the interviewees in Persian and Tabari, and the appendices in this thesis contain the English translation of those questions.

To preserve their anonymity, I assigned the interviewees alphabetic names (e.g., Woman A, Woman B, etc.). Not every woman that I interviewed appears in this thesis due to limited space and the common respond they had to some certain questions. I also spoke to other women who did not lose their husbands during the war, but they were the same age as these women and they experienced some other obstacles. These supplemental interviews helped me focus my questions for the women of my case study, narrowing the interviews to the specific issues experienced by the wives of *shahīd*, rather than broader issues experienced by many women in society of that time period.

The life stories presented here are based on weeks of organizing interviews and some group sessions and also two individual sessions with these women, which comprise one-third of this thesis. There have been many interviews with women of different social strata during the revolution. However, not as much information has been obtained from war widows to document their specific challenges during the most political-economic disruption of the society. Therefore, my intent is to use these interviews to fill this information gap.

Chapter one: State policies toward women in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods;

The concept of Patriarchy can be described the major obstacle to women's progress and development. According to this norm, the degree of subordination's can vary but men consistently hold the power. Therefore, for understanding the patriarchal system, it is necessary to understand the socio-political system.⁵ In many countries women were traditionally overshadowed by the presence of men. In many societies it has been, and still is, hard to acknowledge the idea of females as an equal gender to males. The emergence of feminism as a major field of study has done much to detail this unequal situation in order to solve the inequality.

There is no binary border to find out from when and why the patriarchal system initiated generally. Iran is not an exception in this context. Taghi Aramaki, believes that the society of Iran does not have a linear history. In other words, it is problematic to identify particular social norms with different dynasties. Since there is no definite borders for identify the time of creation of the patriarchal system, it is useful to examine briefly the traditional status and role of women in Iran previous to revolution appreciate the depth and magnitude of the changes in women's lives during the Iran-Iraq War. Because the state had the central role in determining the country's policies before the revolution, its decisions were effective regarding women's positions within the society. Therefore, in this section I shall examine state policies toward women in the Qajar and Pahlavi periods, considering education and labor, and their intersection with women's dress codes. I aim to understand how the government responded to the issue of women's position in Iran.

Qajar period:

From 1818 onward, following the example of the Ottoman Empire and Khedival Egypt, the Qajar dynasty in Iran started to send students overseas. They went mostly to Europe, as missionaries to learn Western technologies and return with this knowledge to develop their country. As a result of this movement, Iran was more involved with the West in various fields. In this

⁵ Sultana, Abeda. "Patriarchy and Women's Subordination: A Theoretical Analysis." Arts Faculty Journal 4, no. 0 (2012). doi:10.3329/afj.v4i0.12929.

regards, the elite class, including diplomats, had the opportunity to learn how the European countries were experiencing quick progress in science and industry. These visits made Iranian intellectual figures, who were all men, aware of the Iran's shortcomings in the abovementioned progress, which resulted in Iranian's great admiration of the West and its scientific achievements. According to this elite, one Iranian shortcoming was the way that the society treated women. For example, the well-respected student Mirza Saleh Shirazi stated in his memoirs that, "... the English women were engaging, attractive and morally sound. We see a clear appreciation for women's education in upper-middle class English society."⁶ To Shirazi, the educated women from upper class were consequently better mothers and, more importantly, be a suitable wife.⁷

However, this attitude toward women did not result in establishing any school for girls until the 20th century. Historically, Iranian women did not have many opportunities to work outside the house. Between 1905-1911, Iranian constitutional revolution served as one of the fundamental movements for women's equity. For the first time, women fought for rights such as higher education, participation in establishing the constitution, and voting enfranchisement. However, this revolution was not a great victory for women; they did not gain the major rights that they wanted to achieve. When the parliament was established, women encountered the denial of their political rights and prevention of their participation in parliamentary political processes. These denials were justified by Shiite clergy who had power alongside the king, on the grounds that such rights went against Islamic text. This denial of women's rights was not only limited to the political sphere, but also women's basic social rights were curtailed. Where the political leaders attempted to transform men from subjects of the Shah into citizens of Iran, women were still viewed as subjects of their husband and their fathers. Their political participation was limited to merely supporting of their male relatives and nothing more. Political and religious leaders claimed that they could interpret

⁶ Amin, Camron Michael. *The making of the modern Iranian woman: gender, state policy, and popular culture, 1865-1946*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005.PP; 55 and 145

⁷ Ibid, 145

Islamic scriptural sources to determine all the contemporary laws. This is the starting point for Islam being used as a justification in modern times for all the mandates that benefited of men over women.⁸ An example of this is *ayatollah* Hasan Modarres,(the highest religious authority), who believed that God had not given women the ability to engage in politics. He claimed that God said that women should be under the supervision of men and may not have the right to vote according the hadith. Because the social context was based on a patriarchal system, women could not enjoy a higher status in the social and political spheres.⁹

Therefore, the idea of extending education for women to higher class predated the constitutional revolution. In 1922, the government attempted to support establishment of private compulsory and universal elementary education for both girls and boys. In this regard, the government had actual supervision over the courses that were taught in girls' schools. Here, even the major leftist party, the Social Democrat Party, did not accept the complete equal curriculum guidelines for both genders. The party justified its position this way:

Surely intelligent people do not doubt that one big cause of the nation's misery and corruption of moral is the lack of education for women and ignorance of mothers. The meaning of women's education is instruction and education in housekeeping, health, marital etiquette, chastity, child raising, good morals and liberation from superstition. Surely there is no one who will take issue with this.¹⁰

Thus according to this view, even from a leftist perspective, girls' education should aim to teach women how to manage household and their marital life.

In addition, the lower-middle class did not appreciate sending their daughters to schools influenced by the ideas of missionaries who had visited the West. The flourishing of Western ideas, were not acceptable for this social level. Therefore, the attempt of the government alongside the

⁸ Hoodfar, Homa. *The Women's Movement in Iran: Women at the Crossroads of Secularization and Islamization*. Paris: Women Living under Muslim Laws, (1999), 4.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Amin.P; 146

elite to open limited opportunities for girls was not consistent with social power and value. In this regard, except for some limited activity in the Qajar period, there was not much change toward more equity for women and girls. Given this situation, the next dynasty could appeal to women's activists and women's issues in order to gain people's trust. The Pahlavi dynasty established this as one of its key policy issues.

First Pahlavi period

In 1921, a coup brought Reza Khan to power. In 1925, the Iranian parliament (*majlis*) proclaimed Reza Khan as a new king, marking the official beginning of the Pahlavi dynasty. 'Ulama was one of the supporter of Riza Shah, expecting Riza Shah to put more restriction on enforcing the law which was determined on 1907. According to one of the articles proposed, the Shi'ism would be officially recognized as the state religion. Mohammad Faghfoory explains this expectation in this way:

Out of these considerations, the ulama supported him in his drive toward the throne, hoping that he would seek a return to the orthodox principles of Shi'ism and make governmental policies congruent with Shi'i doctrine and, consequently, not usurp the power of the ulama.¹¹

However, Reza Shah stated that, to modernize Iran, the country needed reforms. These reforms included creation of a central government free of clerical, nomadic and foreign control.¹²

In this regard, Reza Shah considered religion as a sign of backwardness. In this regards he intended to magnify secularism which contradicts to the expectation of 'ulama. This attitude of Reza Shah made many clergies choose the path of *taqiyyah*,¹³ as Faghfoory explains:

They also hoped to revive their traditional task of giving advice to the monarch on the basis of the moral precepts and teachings of Shi'ism. Insofar as Reza Shah's nationalism affirmed the distinctive language of Iran as well as a unique faith (i.e., Shi'ism), it was acceptable to the clerical community as a whole. But when the monarch began to place a heavy emphasis on secular

¹¹ Faghfoory, Mohammad H. "The impact of modernization on the Ulama in Iran, 1925–1941." *Iranian Studies* 26, no. 3-4 (1993): 279. doi:10.1080/00210869308701803

¹² Nashat, P;25

¹³ Taqiya (Arabic: تقية taqiyyah/taqīyah, literally "prudence, fear, caution")[1][2] is an Arabic term referring to precautionary dissimulation or denial of religious belief and practice in the face of persecution

nationalism and to give priority to nationalism at the expense of Shi'ism, the ulama gave up any attempt at reconciliation between the two. Some resorted to *taqiyyah* but continued to deny the regime's legitimacy behind the scenes and adopted a wait-and-see attitude, while others reluctantly cooperated with the state.¹⁴

Besides the idea of modernization, his reign is also characterized by Westernization which intent to spread European-style institutions and lifestyle, including activities for women outside the home. After consolidating his political control, Reza Shah started to enforce law allowing girls to attend school, which had been originally passed in 1918. Women entered the University of Tehran for the first time by 1935, which included a small number of elite families' daughters. These girls consequently could get lower-level jobs in government service.¹⁵

Another reform initiated in applying restriction on religious court on the issue of marriage and divorce in January 1929. After two years, based on a new law, all marriage and divorce had to be registered in the national Ministry of Justice. This law addressed the punishment assumed to this law from one to six month of jail. In one of the article, in *Ittila'at*, the terms of marriage affirmed as follow:

... in this country men have always been the masters of women. Naturally, many men will not approve of this law. In the past they married several women because many marriage contracts were never registered. Now these men will face problems because registration of marriage contracts in official bureaus will create an obstacle in their way. Thus, this law will put an end to polygamy and violation of women's rights by men . . .¹⁶

Therefore, this article could legally benefit women in limiting polygamy with the right to refuse their husband's second marriage.

In regards to education, the process of admitting girls into schools improved during the Pahlavi period, but the curriculum for the girls' program was not socially equitable compared with the boys' curriculum. In other words, the aim was similar to that of the Qajar period. The policy

¹⁴ Ibid, P;311

¹⁵ Nashat, P; 25

¹⁶ Faghfoory, Mohammad H. P;283

for school in fact standardized curricula based on different genders. Therefore, the government policy simplified the girls' program by putting in courses such as drawing and sewing. This curriculum would remain the same even in higher levels of education for women. For example, in 1939, out of 170 hours of instruction, girls had to spend 13 hours in sewing class, four hours in child rearing, two hours in nursing, five hours in drawing, and nine hours in handicrafts. This resulted in devoting one third of girls' time to gender-specific activities. The policy aimed to make girl better mothers and wives, as well as housekeepers and hostesses¹⁷ The question is from where did the idea of two different curricula come: from government policy, society, or both?

In answering this question, one can examine the society's patriarchal ideology which was reflected by newspapers of that time. For example, one well-respected Iranian daily newspaper, *Etela'at*, printed forty-one letters related to the open question if women need to be more educated or have outside jobs. Responses to this question were mainly negative, apparently because this kind of society is not open to working with women who think that they are equal to men. One of the answers which clarifies this assumption was:

A woman who has studied politics, who has flown an airplane, who has swum for fifty-four straight hours—what is a man going to do with this *hour*i woman (angel)? Leave her to her sweet fancies! A women must be like an angel in the sky or the beloved of artists and poets before she is worthy of men's worship. If a woman has a broad chest, bulging muscles, or forelegs like Indian clubs in the *Zurkhaneh*, then what good is she to a man? It is as I said: A women should be educated enough to discern superstition [from fact], to manage household expenses and inventories, to know how to raise and educate a small child, and to make herself and her man, or rather I should say the family that he founded and created, happy and fortunate by means of her housekeeping and thrift. It is less likely that women who have a higher education will be that way.¹⁸

In the case of government, one can see the paradox between having modernized women alongside the concept of a traditional gender hierarchy. For example, the advertising of women

¹⁷ Amin.P; 146

¹⁸ Ibid, 161-65

working outside was encouraged by the government in the same newspaper. An example of this is an issue of *Ettela'at* newspaper in mid-August 1936, which encouraged and portrayed women working outside the home, but concluded with an example from the life of a female doctor who changed from a difficult major and more prestigious one to an easier one. This change was not because this woman doubted herself but because she could be an ideal mother and raise her children easier. This was propaganda that working outside was essential for the success of raising well-educated and behaved child.¹⁹

Considering all this attitude that was determined to benefit woman, the government was not separate from Iran's patriarchal system, because some of the reform plans to modernize women were against women's emancipation. One of these reforms was banning the hijab in December, 1928. The government introduced a new law which instituted a government-mandated, uniform dress code. Banning hijab in public was one of the article of the law. Upon this law people who violate the law "will be fined with cash penalties as well as prison terms from one to seven days"²⁰ Some elite women, such as the leading female poet Parvin Itesami, tried to legitimate this law, as Faghfoory described the situation; "...the majority of the people had strong religious and cultural reservations about removing the veil, and thus strongly opposed it."²¹ including the lower and middle classes. For these classes, the removal of veil meant committing a major sin and disgrace²² To avoid social disgrace, some Iranians developed creative temporary solutions to the situation. For example, according to a British consul report from one of the city of Iran, Kerman, the husbands declared they do not have wives. Another report showed that girl would wear their veils until reaching the gate of their school, and temporarily remove it in the school.²³ To oppose this law and its consequences, some parents stopped sending their daughters to school. Therefore, the processes of modernization not only did not stop the issue of patriarchy but made it stronger from before.

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Faghfoory, Mohammad H. P;290

²¹ Ibid. P;292

²² Nashat, PP;26-30

²³ Faghfoory, Mohammad H. P;293

Michael Amin believes these kinds of policies, whether implemented from society or government, indicate a collective picture of women of that time as a “dangerous women.” He elaborates: “Male guardianship could not trust women to exert upon themselves the moral control that male guardianship demanded of them. This mistrust manifested itself in a demonized image of women as a source of evil and discord. Nothing seemed to smack immoral rebellion more than the idea of political rights for women in any measure.”²⁴ Therefore, preventing women from having emancipation or participation in public comes from the threat that men felt at that time.²⁵

Therefore, the education program which overemphasized women’s skills as housewives, and the failure to ban the hijab, limited progress for women’s equity and restricted the integration of lower-middle class women into the general society. While it is true that Reza Shah could initially stabilize his power by emphasizing changes in women’s issues, however the unexpected results to his policies resulted in discontinuing his plans after his abdication in 1941.²⁶ The new king, who was Reza Shah’s son, tried another program to gain more appreciation from society and consequently stabilize his reign. Besides, as Faghfoory addresses; “the government, especially, failed to create a politically mature society because of its own absolutist nature. Many reforms did not even touch the traditional foundations of the smaller towns, and the villages remained completely outside the circle of modernization. The consequences were, as expected, disappointment, frustration, and finally opposition.”²⁷

Second Pahlavi period (M. Reza Shah).

After Reza Shah’s abdication, the clergy who were left out of power since the Qajar period wanted to regain their control and importance in society. The best opportunity for them was the women’s veil. However, the choice to wear hijab was according to majority of people’s demand at that time, the rest of ‘ulama’s policies were against women. As a result of this opposition, the small

²⁴ Amin, P:205

²⁵ Ibid, P:203

²⁶ Nashat, P:208

²⁷ Faghfoory, Mohammad H. "The Ulama-State Relations in Iran: 1921-1941." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 04 (1987): 428. doi:10.1017/s002074380005649x.

number of girls' schools in Tehran and other cities opened by Reza Shah during his reign were subsequently closed by the religious authorities. Despite the efforts of the 'ulama, their activities against women did not succeed for a long time. The idea of feminism and awareness of women's rights flourished in Western countries influenced many Muslim countries including Iran during the period of 1950 to 1970²⁸ .

Mohammad Reza Shah tried to provide the same plan alongside other Muslim countries, so as to not being left out. In the period 1960 to 1979, one can see the rapid development in women's issues during Mohammad Reza Shah's reign. The idea of feminism resulted in the creation of organizations and progress in a women's campaign, including Hizbe-Zanan (women's party) and the Women's League, which was advocating for women rights since the time of Reza Shah, but was stopped by his policies. The concept of "feminism" provided a valuable perspective for policies dealing with women's issues. The government would officially sponsor these policies by supporting women's organizations and institutions of feminism. Mohammad Reza Shah could not avoid supporting the new policies on women's issues. Otherwise these organizations would gradually oppose government.²⁹ In the case of labor, the treatment of female labor was reformed by three specific policies that recognized and encouraged women to be productive outside of their homes³⁰ It is true that political interests forced the government to be concerned about women issues, but at the same time women could themselves be the source of pressure for making heads of state consider feminist approaches to women's issues.

Another reform related to women came in changes to the family law code. In the time of Muhammad Reza Shah, many family laws changed in favor of women, including restrictions for marriage, divorce, child custody, and restricting polygamy. This paralleled women's increasing

²⁸ Amin, P;238

²⁹ Ibid

³⁰ Moghadam, Valentine M. *Modernizing women gender and social change in the Middle East*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Pub., 2013. P; 163

freedom inside the household and facilitated their greater participation in the labor-force³¹. These changes started to be implemented in the capital, Tehran, and other major cities, but in other towns Iranians were not prepared for laws favoring women in the broad areas of society. For example, there were no considerations for women working within the government. It was not acceptable for educated women from religious backgrounds to work beside male colleagues. Therefore, even if girls could attend school, their cultural and religious backgrounds prevented their participation in activities within the public sphere which included the presence of men. Thus, the paradox was that these progressive changes were intended to benefit Iranian women, but sometimes the changes conflicted with the gender hierarchy within the country.

Although the government managed the state plans and programs for the benefit of women, these plans were not completely implemented inside the country, and lower and middle class women did not experience these changes. Therefore, the participation of both young, politically active women and traditional women in the massive demonstrations against the shah's regime in the final months of 1978 and early months of 1979 is testimony to a new consciousness among women. They believed that their role was not confined to the home, but also that being out in the streets alongside men was also their duty as Muslims and as Iranians.³²

In sum, the visits of Iranian missionaries to Western countries raised the question of women's roles and participation outside their household during the Qajar period. This resulted in certain state policies and reforms, which did not equally reach all levels of society. Women from higher and elite classes benefitted from reforms, while there was no progress in the rest of the society. After the end of the Qajar dynasty, the first Pahlavi king - Reza Shah - started to question the situation of women. He initiated some modest reforms for women which were not all positive. The most important one was banning the *hijab* for women, which was not accepted by the public, causing women to lose their limited emancipation and restricting many of them from going out in

³¹ Povey p, 135

³² Nashat, p;208

public. After the abdication of Reza Shah, Mohammad Reza Shah used women's issues as a means to assert his control over Iranians. He started to assert his authority by co-opting women's organizations and introducing himself as a protector of women's rights. To accomplish this, he created a new model of the ideal modern women through state propaganda. Which did not match the popular ideal of women; therefore, his plan was unsuccessful. This became clear in the 1979 revolution, because it included many women from the lower-middle classes who felt left out of the shah's development projects aimed at upper class women.³³

³³ De la Camara, Andrea. "Women ' s rights in iran during the years of the shah, ayatollah khomeini, and khamenei." University of Central Florida Libraries. 2012. Accessed April 1, 2017. <http://stars.library.ucf.edu/honorstheses1990-2015>.

Chapter two: Women who are recognized by the revolution:

You ladies here have proved that you are at the forefront of this movement. You have a great share in our Islamic movement. The future of our country depends on your support.³⁴

Women played a vital role in the victory of the Islamic revolution. Although I was born after the revolution, and I did not see the actual contribution of women, the importance of women was always clear from the revolutionary slogans on the walls of various cities. These slogans stated that the majority of the Iranian people went out to enact the revolution, or that it was the first movement in which half of the supporters were women. A persistent question floated in my mind - what was enticed these women to participate in such a revolution? When I was in high school, a woman came to speak to the students. She was the wife of a *shahīd*,³⁵ and was one of the women who was in the front line of the revolution and witnessed its success. She then became the administrator of a well-respected school in the city. She responded to the question of what brought her out to the street in 1979:

It was the first time for a woman like me to be as important as other brothers. It was right after the revolution that ‘Imam’ Khomeinī spoke out: ‘there is no doubt that women played a very important role in the triumph of the Islamic Revolution and that they offered unparalleled support to its leader’. It was the first time for women from my class that their gender was not an obstacle.³⁶

She responded to my question by pointing out that the revolution empowered women from different classes, giving them enough confidence to challenge male domination.³⁷ From the bottom of society to the top, the women participated in the general political upheaval of the Islamic Revolution. In this historical transition, *Ayatollah* Khomeinī’s speeches, both before the revolution

³⁴ Khomeinī, Ruhollah. *The position of women from the viewpoint of Imam Khomeinī*. Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imām Khomeinī’s Works, Qom International Affairs Department, 2010.P; 147

³⁵ “Martyr,” in Arabic and Persian. Like the Greek *martyr/martyros*, it also means ‘witness.’ It is used as a honorific for Muslims who have died fulfilling a religious commandment. Since Iran after revolution was constituted under an Islamic government, whoever was killed during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) is referred to as a *shahīd*.

³⁶ Wife of *shahīd*, Public speech, December, 2004

³⁷ Ibid

and throughout the Iran-Iraq War, had an influential role in the women's participation.

As it has been discussed in the first chapter, before the 1979 most Iranians believed the women's participation outside their homes represented the Westernization of women, not their modernization. However, despite the second Pahlavi Shah's efforts for socio-economic progress, there was not a comprehensive development plan. In consequence, there developed class differences in women's participation in the labor force. Zahra Najmabadi in her article *Women and Employment in Iran*, describes the status of women before the revolution as follows:

Women's struggles were multifold. On the one hand, they struggled against the pro-western dictatorial regime of the shahs, while on the other, they struggled for the rights of women to vote and equal gender relations in the sphere of home and wider society.³⁸

Ayatollah Khomeinī noticed the shortcoming of Pahlavi's plan and introduced an alternative, which he claimed that would have a great impact on introducing another way that included all classes and diverse areas of the country. Khomeinī utilized two components to empower his alternative plan for women's development. First of all, he denounced the Shah's Western model, previously chosen as a modernization plan - as conflicting with Iranian culture. Second, in his alternative plan he announced that the Islamic government would achieve equality between genders. Therefore, a conservative family that did not see the public place as a trustworthy environment for its sisters and daughters, now saw revolution as a great transformation. Therefore, a society, which did not agree with the notion of its women playing a role outside the home, was encouraged during the revolution change and have its women participate like the other gender. In this case, we can follow Khomeinī's speeches to track down his eventual plan after the revolution.

Anti-Western attitudes;

As discussed in chapter one, Pahlavis tried to benefit from questioning the women's

³⁸ Povey, P; 73-75

situation and finding a solution for its improvement, establishing his control among the majority of people. Because women included half of the Iranian population, and because their rights were always limited, identifying with women's issues was the most obvious challenge for the Pahlavi dynasty to contrast itself with the previous government. Ayatollah Khomeini followed in a similar path. The previous government opened girls' schools, but also tried to introduce a new model of women in the workforce. However, Ayatollah Khomeini opposed the policy of modernization by reminding people that the Western model stood in contrast to the Islamic culture of Iran:

I can say that during the reigns of this father and son, our ladies suffered more than any other segment of society. Perhaps most of you cannot remember what they did to the ladies in the time of Reza Shah, what calamities they created on the plea of wanting to make Iran like Europe, of wanting to modernize Iran and bring half of its population into society. You have no idea what they did to the ladies.³⁹

He further emphasized what Islam gives to women as an alternative:

Islam shows a special regard for women in all aspects not found anywhere else. It has brought respect for their social and moral standing which prevents the kind of social mixing of the sexes that is incompatible with women's modesty and virtue, and this is not because Islam thinks, God forbid, that they are legally incompetent or they are prisoners.⁴⁰

By bringing up the issue of the hijab, Khomeinī could have opportunity to broadly oppose the Pahlavi policies toward women, regardless of the fact that some aspects of these policies were positive including women's right to vote and to participate in parliament, which according to some scholars had improved the status of Iranian women. Imam Khomeini ultimately believed that these ideas were government propaganda and would later on cause women to be seen as sexual objects in the workplace.

³⁹ Khomeinī, Ruhollah. The position of women from the viewpoint of Imam Khomeinī. Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imām Khomeinī's Works, International Affairs Department, 2010. P; 199

⁴⁰ Ibid, P;86

The tyrannical regime imagined that with this talk about equal rights it could open the way for advancing its evil goal, which is to deliver the final blow to Islam. But they didn't count on the reaction they would have to face⁴¹.

At the same time, Khomeinī questioned the policies that Mohammad Reza period started to implement. In this way he not only stopped people from following the reforms that the second Pahlavi Shah attempted to institute, but he also solidified his alternative plan, which needed a new Islamic government to implement. Supporters of Khomeini's plan did not question Khomeini's idea of gender equality, but they stated that the strategy of gender-equality does not follow Islamic tradition and cannot possibly happen. they stated:

Of course, they regard the civilization [sic] and advancement of the country as being dependent upon women going naked in the streets, or to quote their own idiotic words, turning half the population into workers by unveiling them (we know only too well what kind of work is involved here). They will not agree to the country being administered rationally and in accordance with God's law.⁴²

People who remembered the reign of Reza Shah and the hijab ban as a sign of modernization were pleased by Khomeinī's opposition. The alternative plan suited them and their families, allowing them to be comfortable out in public. Their daughters could easily go to school and be educated because the education curriculum did not teach them Western ideologies.⁴³

Khomeinī's positions on women's education and labor:

Although the ulama were marginalized in many metropolitan cities, such as Tehran, before the revolution, in villages and small cities they were instead empowered by their opposition to the state's Westernization policies.⁴⁴ This was especially the case in the first Pahlavi period. Before

⁴¹ Ibid

⁴² Muḥammad Bindārī, and Salīm Hilālī. *Kashf al-asrār. Al-Qāhirah: Mu'assasat Tabūk*, 2010. P;224

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Faghfoory, Mohammad H. "The Ulama–State Relations in Iran: 1921–1941." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 04 (1987): 428. doi:10.1017/s002074380005649x.

the Islamic revolution, the modernization of the state created a socio-economic division which differentiated the upper class from the lower and middle classes. In Khomeini's speech criticizing the Western model of women's development, the socio-economic borders determined by high education and wealth were questioned by the majority of people did not belong to the aristocratic class. As Hale Esfandiari mentions in her book *Reconstructed Lives*, the revolution was similar to an "earthquake" or "hurricane," especially for women⁴⁵. Prior to the revolution, there was a certain division between the higher class and the lower ones, determined by wealth, education and the province where people lived. Khomeini himself recalled the changes as a big transformation which was a result of revelation.⁴⁶

On July 3rd, 1979, Ayatollah Khomeini announced that the Islamic movement had created a transformation within itself. This transformation caused the voices of women to be heard in different parts of the country. Women who had to face other problems under the monarchical regime, during the revolution tried to confront the new regime with the problems they had. They aimed to bring the changes "shoulder-to-shoulder" with their brothers, sometimes participating in the vanguard of the revolution. He concluded that these changes and transformation was a miracle⁴⁷. The education for women was part of this transformation, or as Khomeini called it, a "miracle" for the majority of women.

To track this transformation and its influence requires an understanding of the new education policy that Khomeinī developed. As Khadijah Aryan mentioned in the book *Women, Power and Politics*, before the 1979 revolution there was no effort to prevent women from being educated, but the modernized style of education prevented many traditionalist families from sending their daughters to school. These families were more encouraged when Ayatollah Khomeinī

⁴⁵ Esfandiari, Haleh. *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997. P;105

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Khomeini, P; 199

stated that the system was not modernization but Westernization and did not suit the Iranian indigenous model. The revolution brought an alternative policy for these girls to pursue their goal of achieving higher education. Khomeinī himself encouraged women to overcome their illiteracy⁴⁸. One of his policies was opening Islamic schools for women who were married and had children.

To better understand how helpful Khomeinī's message was in increasing women's literacy, I asked one of my interviewees about the status of education for women like them during Khomeini's time. she answered the question by recalling her:

It was a very harsh time and I had four children after the revolution and during the war. My husband was one of the religious activists. At the time of the war, he joined the other brothers in the forefront. It was a hard time for taking care of the children. Because my husband and I were from a farming family, I had to work on the farm as well. One time when my husband came back from the war for a short amount a time, he told me he had heard that female teachers volunteered to teach the Quran in local mosques to improve Muslim women's literacy. He encouraged me to register since our Imam [Khomeini] requested it. So about 20 other women and I joined this mosque and after noon prayer [Namaz Zohr] we would spend 1 hour studying in the mosque.⁴⁹

This indicates how Khomeinī's charismatic leadership and education policies impacted individual families and women's lives. Indeed, his speeches, which were a result of political reasoning, affected the male mindset of even small remote cities. The men did not prevent their female relatives from pursuing their education, and they even encouraged the women to follow that path. We can find the opposite in a book of reconstructed lives about a girl who wanted to continue her education before the revolution. She had a conservative and religious brother who thought that the more she studied, the less she would want to marry by the certain age that was expected of her.

The other policy which supported this class of society was the issue of the hijab and gender segregation in public areas. The reason that many conservative families did not want to send their

⁴⁸ Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey, P; 40

⁴⁹ Woman A, personal interviewee, Mazandaran, July, 2016

female relatives to school was because of the policy of clothing in the previous regime. In this case Khomeinī praised the hijab and criticized the Pahlavi dynasty's regarding to encourage unveiling as he stated:

Could any Muslim agree with this scandalous uncovering of women? The women of Iran have themselves risen up against the Shah and given him a punch in the mouth with the cry: "We don't want to live this way! We want to be free!" To which this good-for-nothing replies: "But you are free! The only thing is that you cannot go to school wearing a chador or head-covering!" You call this freedom?⁵⁰

Following changes in the hijab policy, Khomeinī also encouraged the idea of gender segregation. His reason for this new policy was improving the quality of both work and education. In an address directed to Iranian women on 18 February 1978, Ayatollah Khomeinī said that the previous regime encouraged immorality among young women by choosing young men to tutor the people's innocent daughters. He urged and assured the public that if the government were under the influence of religious leaders, those leaders "will strike the government in the mouth; they will strike this parliament in the mouth and chase these deputies out of both its houses."⁵¹ In Khomeinī's ideology, mixing the two genders whether in the work place or school would result in corruption.

In addition to opening up some local opportunities for women, this position improved the literacy rate in Iran after the revolution.⁵² Indeed, Khomeinī assured women that this did not mean that the Islamic government would prevent women's participation, but in one speech Khomeinī reminded that women were part of all the movements, whether in the Qajar period, or in the constitutional revolution or the movement against the Pahlavi dynasties. He promised that the Islamic society would be an ideal society compared with other Muslim countries. He mentioned

⁵⁰ Khomeinī, Ruhollah. *The position of women from the viewpoint of Imam Khomeini*. Tehran: The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imām Khomeinī's Works, International Affairs Department, 2010. P 205

⁵¹ Ibid, P;228

⁵² Povey, P, 40

that the government not only would not exclude women, but with new policies women would find it more convenient to work outside the home. According to him, his policies intended to expand the number of women in education and in the workplace⁵³ In terms of education, Islamic republic encouraged both gender to carry on their higher education with the aim of being self-sufficient regarding to specialist in various fields. Although, the idea of encouraging of education initiated in second Pahlavi period but in case of women there was a great increase in the number of female who would enter to school. According to Iran statistical year book, in the 1976 the literacy rate for Iranian males was 58.9 and for women the same year was 35.5. However, in 1986, this rate increase for male to 71 and for female the same year 52.1. which apparently ⁵⁴shows the rise of more educated women⁵⁵. But the question remained of how much this education influenced the number of women working in the labor force.

Guity Nishat, a female Iranian scholar, criticized Khomeinī's educational policies. She believed that Khomeinī only used this strong language toward women who were adopting a Western lifestyle because he objected to the what he would refer to as Westernization transformation that happened through the sixties and seventies. This transformation caused many women to consider changing their apparel, including the chador (veil), but Khomeinī as a *faqih* (Islamic jurist) would not agree with these changes. So labelling these women prostitutes and immoral indicates that his expressed beliefs about women's progress were not necessarily accurate.⁵⁶

Along with Nishat, many well-educated women soon understood that, for them, the revolution was not a good idea. As Hale Esfandiari documented, many of these women had high expectations for the revolution before it happened. They thought that one shock to the Pahlavi dynasty would generate rapid progress regarding women's issues. They reached another conclusion

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid

⁵⁵ Ibid

⁵⁶ Neshat, P; 196

after the revolution. Their reaction toward the new government's policy regarding women's issues after the revolution is illustrated by three episodes.

One was Darya, a lawyer working in an organization affiliated with the Pahlavi dynasty, who gave up her job after revolution. She was hopeless, and decided to stay at home and watch to what extent women's rights would change. Another woman, Mari, who was English-educated, followed different path from Darya. As a professor who had not been dismissed from the university, she tried to resist new policies. Since she was a very well-educated and experienced, she attempted to stay in her position and defy the new government. Mari believed she achieved her aim because the good students would always follow a professor like Mari rather than one proposed by the new administration. She saw this as a transformation in the work sphere. Because of her experience Mari was not threatened by anyone's position. A third example was women like Faride, a former civil servant, who would not give up or resist, but rather started to adapt her lives to the new policies. Faride's life had changed, but she decided to accept the situation and continue her path.⁵⁷

The revolution had a negative effect on the well-educated class, and a majority of women who had advanced positions experienced similar situations. For example, Zahra Najmabadi also described a woman from a higher position who saw revolution as an opportunity, stating, "I come from a religious and traditional family. My father believed that I did not need higher education. But the 1979 revolution changed his view and I entered university and studied medicine."⁵⁸ However, the lives of women from the lower and middle classes were transformed to a higher level. According to most of my interviewees, the revolution and, in greater part, the subsequent war gave them more access to the public arena for work and interaction. In some cases, traditional society and conservative parents did not encourage them to actively participate in the social sphere, but the revolution still changed their lives.⁵⁹ These women had to witness the male-dominant norm in the

⁵⁷ Esfandiari, P:107-112

⁵⁸ Ibid.P; 78

⁵⁹ Interviewees, personal interviewee, Mazandaran, July 2016 & February 2017

work place, but the taste of victory in challenging the values of conservative families helped them to defeat societal norms as well.

On the one hand, according to Masoome Ebtekar the current minister, Khomeinī was the most important factor in this transformation. She stated that the revolution happened at a time when the status of women was the major concern of society. She stated that many scholars doubted if Khomeinī's promises about women's issues could be realized, but many years after the revolution, the status of women is a "far cry both from what critics feared and supporters hoped for"⁶⁰. On the other hand, Hale Afshar added another reason to the victory of the revolution by Khomeinī and women's participation, mostly from the lower and middle classes. She stated that during the last dynasty, politicians began to criticize the monarchical system due to the fact that there was only one established legal party. As the Shah lost his legitimacy, he started to blame the communist party inside the country as being an agent of foreign enemies. The religious leaders, who opposed the communist party, acquired more power to lead people because they received the majority of funds donated to mosques. The lack of leadership for the other parties on the one hand, and the charismatic personality of Khomeinī on the other hand, made the revolution a religious movement. The most important factor of the revolution was participation by women from different levels of society, especially from the lower and middle classes. The women from traditional families demonstrated their presence by wearing the hijab. This caused the women who typically did not wear the veil to temporarily adopt it. Therefore, the revolution realized a real and tangible social transformation among people.⁶¹

Hale Afshar stated that the power that the leader of Islamic revolution got from the masses gave him the ability to reform Westernized regulations and laws, including family laws. He declared that women belonged to the higher part of society and that they had more important tasks rather just working outside the home. The tasks included being a good wife and a raising a well-

⁶⁰ Ibid.PP; 158-159

⁶¹ Hoodfar, 1977, PP; 22,23

respected child. The women who were from the higher level of society, who did not feel inequality in their family or society because of their gender, and who had greater expectations about the revolution compared to Pahlavi reign, were hopeless about the result. Because of the war and the economic troubles associated with it, people were not willing to change the political situation again and the revolutionary government solidified its power during the war.⁶² The question then becomes how successful were the efforts of the revolutionary government in implementing the women's cause. Did women — who participated in the revolution in a major way, who extended their education, and who entered the workforce because of the new system — accept the patriarchal pressure of the new government? The next chapter considers patrilocal pressures that women from the case study encountered during the war, considering their loyalty to the new system.

⁶² Ibid.

Chapter three: The patriarchal pressure during the war and the reaction of lower and middle-class women.

No matter how long war takes, it will end someday. People of the countries who were involved in the war will be happy not always for being the winner but mostly because the war ended. The destroyed buildings, roads, streets, bridges would be constructed again. The political and foreign policies would reform again based on what the country lost during the conflict. As soon as the war end, people would start over with their lives. Do you know what would not ever be replaced or fixed? The pain that the war brought for millions of families who lost their dearest husband, brothers, or sons. The pain would not end like the war, as well as the burden you have to carry all the way on your shoulders to the end of your life. As a wife of a shahīd, my husband and my children are just a picture on the wall and memory in my mind. The pain for me did not end by the end of war and the burden is as heavy as it was from the first day I lost my husband to the war.⁶³

On September 22 1980, the Iraqi army invaded Iran. Saddam Hussein, the president of Iraq at the time, declared Iran and its revolutionary government as a threat to the Gulf states. This was because Khomeinī, in one of his speeches,⁶⁴ declared that Muslims, particularly the Shias in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, could follow Iran and make changes inside their countries. He also said that these populations could protest against their respective monarchies as well and join the Islamic Republic in a broader revolutionary movement. Many scholars, however, have a different view of Saddam's reason for initiating the war. Stephen Grummon wrote that Iran was an important target for Iraq at the beginning of the war because Iran was one of the most important developing countries in the region, but it did not have a stable government due to the recent change to the new Islamic Republic. Saddam chose to start the war one year after the revolution, when Iran's new government was not prepared for war. Moreover, the new Iranian government was going through the difficulty of reforming the military system to be consistent with the Islamic Republic of Iran. Iran was also undergoing harsh sanctions by the United Nations at the same time, because of the detention of

⁶³ Woman B, personal interviewee, Mazandaran, July, 2016

⁶⁴ Khomeinī, Rūḥallāh Mūsawī. *Ṣaḥīfa-i Imām: maḡmū'a-i ālār: bayānāt, payāmhā, muṣāḥabahā, aḥkāḡ, iḡāzāt-i šar'ī wa nāmahā*. 2014. PP:238-239

American diplomats as hostages. Therefore, Iran did not have enough weapons or sufficient military intelligence to prevent a war turning to a long war⁶⁵.

Psychological and Economic Pressure:

The Iran-Iraq War, called in Iran as the ‘imposed war,’ came at a great psychological and economic cost for both countries and their people. One observer of the war stated that the majority of people had not started to adopt the revolution yet, and the next thing they knew was the initiation of an unexpected war. She continued that, in her case, she had a brother who was a prisoner of war. Even though the family found out he was alive, they could not find out what was happening to him. She said that they tried to just survive during the war. Her brother finally came back from Iraq. He was alive but quite changed.⁶⁶

During and after the war, the government provided considerable funds for documenting the war. The war was primarily portrayed as a tragedy for the men, which was not false because many men joined the *Sepah* (the revolutionary army) and fought the Iraqi government, known as a “devil enemy.”⁶⁷ What has largely been ignored, however, was the pressure that women went through in the absence of their husbands and how they came out of it, which makes the history of the war a more complex social study. Long after the war, even up to now, except for some stories such as “Da” (mother): the memoirs of Seyyedeh Zahrā Ḥusaynī, the government would not publicize the stories of *shahīds*’ wives and the difficulties they went through. (IDNU) All the stories written by women as memoirs described the personal lives of the *shahīd* husbands, but not of their wives. However, the women described their struggles in some manner, which scholars discover by digging through those stories, identifying the obstacles that women encountered in many aspects of the war.

The economic cost of war had a profound impact on Iranian women, especially on those

⁶⁵ Grummon, Stephen R., and Robert G. Neuman. *The Iran-Iraq war*. New York: Praeger, 1982. P:6-9

⁶⁶ Esfandiari, 1997. P:206

⁶⁷ interviewees, personal interview, Mazandaran, July 2016 & February 2017

whose husbands were off fighting. The war interfered with Iran's economic development for two decades, costing Iran an estimated \$5 billion per year during the war. Besides this direct damage, Iran lost oil income totaling \$40 billion. As Mary Hegland, the writer of *Days of Revolution* described:

The Iran-Iraq war was a terrible one, reminiscent of World War I, with trenches, bayonets, barbed wire and human wave attacks. Those living in Iranian cities attacked by Iraqi missiles were especially traumatized. Saddam Hussein deployed chemical weapons against Iranians and Iraqi Kurdish settlements – most notably Halabja close to the Iranian border, on March 16, 1988.⁶⁸

People, regardless their social class, were terribly effected by the war. Beside the similarity to the First World War, as Hegland described, widespread food shortages and drought across the country was similar to that of the U.S. Great Depression in 1929. People had to stay in long lines for several hours from the early morning to provide food for their families. The women in my case study, who did not have their husbands at home, were responsible for the outside duties. One of the women who was pregnant during the time described the situation:

You would hear from somewhere the night before that your city would provide food and it would be ready the next morning. Every family had their limited coupons, and no one could go and buy items for the other family. I had two children and I was expecting another one. They would be hungry if I stayed at home. I remember if I went after 8 in the morning, everything was gone. I would go before the sunrise, stay in the line for some hours, and get my food. Except for the fact that my husband was alive, everything was so awful ugly in those days.⁶⁹

The consequence of the tight economic situation was not only the weak currency, but also its indescribable psychological effect on the people.

The wives of the veterans, even though they were activists in the time of revolution and encouraged their husbands to join the army, explained in their memoir or interviews how much the

⁶⁸ Hegland, Mary Elaine. *Days of revolution political unrest in an Iranian village*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014. P:230

⁶⁹ Woman C, personal interview, Mazandaran , February, 2017

experience of war and its pressure affected their psychological condition. Because of the catastrophic economic situation of the country, there was widespread famine within the country. Besides that, it was a stressful time for women whose husbands left them for the war with the death testimony (*vasiatname*). For example, in one memoir a woman described her situation thus:

It was one year after the initiation of the war, I found out that I was expecting a baby. I was so hopeful that the baby would come and detach me from the war. But after three months, I lost the baby because my body was so weak because of not having nutritious foods. I was so depressed for a while because of the child that I lost.⁷⁰

In another story one of the women remembered that because of wartime shortages, she was not able to feed her infant. She added that the “Bazaar Siah” (black market) would not allow her to buy baby formula for her child. Finally, a family member had a dream about the *shahīd* and brought some milk for the infant.⁷¹ While many women, especially women from lower and middle classes, were experiencing shortages affecting quality of life, the new government decided to distinguish itself from the previous regime in some areas. One of these areas involved the increasing demographics of Iran’s population.

Political Pressure:

In the book *Iran after Khomeini*, Shireen Hunter described the plan ‘increasing of the population’ as a demographic explosion rather than a demographic transformation. She mentioned that Iran, in the two last decades of Pahlavi dynasty, followed a plan to reduce the population because of concerns about environmental issues, including shortages of water and nutritious food. Reducing the population became part of government’s fourth and fifth development plans from 1966. In 1967, after the Tehran Declaration, which indicated family planning as part of basic human rights, the policy initiated in Iran reduced the birthrate from 3.2 children per family (1956-1966) to 2.6 (1966-1976). Following the revolution and the initiation of war, the short and long term

⁷⁰ Alī Akbar Khavar ī Nezhād, *Chahar fasl (four season)*, Tihra: Rivāyat-i Faṭḥ 2006, P;27

⁷¹ Dāvudī, Mahdīyah. *Chirāghchī: bih rivāyat-i hamsar-i shahīd*. Tihrān: Rivāyat-i Faṭḥ, 1383.

developmental policies on population followed a completely opposite path. By the end of the war, the estimate was a population increase of 3.9 percent annually compared with before the revolution.⁷²

Mohammad Fazeli in his recent book, *From Bazargan to Ruhani*, declared that the reason behind this population growth was a consequence of the war. According to him, because of the war, the leader of the revolution emphasized the importance of increasing the population. In this regard, Mohammad Fooladi, Iran socialist believes referring to the population as a source of power is different based on various time and location. He continues that while some scholars, such as the economists Harrod and Domar believe that a large population is one of the bases of modern society. Other scholars such as Thomas Malthus believe that having a more populous society does not necessarily promote development, but can have a negative effect, such as shortages of food, water, and other environmental resources. Mohammad Fooladi believes that in the case of Iran after the revolution, the government started the policy of removing the Pahlavi demographic plan, which had reduced population growth, because of the war. In one of his speeches, Khomeinī said that Islam needed a larger population and that other Islamic government did not consider this a necessity. He continued that Iran itself could provide quality of life for two million new people.⁷³

Based on Khomeinī's speech and the agreement of other *'ulama* (Islamic scholars) such as Ayatollah Makarem Shirazi about increasing the population, the revolutionary government set policies to prevent reducing population growth in the beginning of the period 1980 to 1986. These policies included closing institutions which provided information about family planning, limiting products that prevent pregnancy, and encouraging youth to marry earlier and produce more children.⁷⁴ Women's wartime memoirs of marriage during the war illustrate these changes on an individual and family level. Almost all of the women describe their weddings as simple affairs,

⁷² Hunter, Shireen. *Iran after Khomeini*. New York: Praeger, 1992. PP; 70-75

⁷³ Khomeinī, Rūḥallāh Mūsawī. *Ṣaḥīfa-i Imām: maǧmū'a-i āṭār: bayānāt, payāmhā, muṣāḥabahā, aḥkāḥ, iǧāzāt-i šar'ī wa nāmāhā*. 2014. P;393

⁷⁴ "The control of population growth in Iran." Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution. January 26, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2017. <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/article/view/93633>.

unless a family would push them to have an elegant wedding. One of them described it this way:

It was so important for me to marry to someone who preys on time and follows Islamic morality. For me, a wedding was not as important. I married someone who was already a veteran. Our marriage day was so simple. Both our families asked me to buy items for my *Aghd* (Islamic marriage contract), but I refused to buy objects. We started our life very simply.⁷⁵

Most of the marriages in the case study were very simple, and the couples started their lives with only the most basic household goods. They believed that because of the war, they had bigger aims and goals than having a very elegant wedding. Throughout the interviews, I asked the women how many children, they planned to have. Most of them said about 8 to 10 if they could. One of the women said, "It was not like it is now in which a family does not want more than one child. I remember after our marriage my husband told me, "I want to have a generation like myself, that have the guts to fight with enemy of Islam." She continued, "I was from traditional family. Even if we did not have as much money in our family budget, more children would bring more money into the family, because youth would work either on their land or on other farmers' lands"⁷⁶ In addition to that, the government encouraged early marriages and producing more children.⁷⁷

In 1986, the Iranian government recognized the country's demographic explosion because of governmental policies to control family planning. The data showed that in 20 years, the population of Iran would transform from primarily an aging population to a predominately youthful population. The concern that this population required more jobs, health care, and housing in the future caused the policy to change after six years. Indeed, the government position supporting a larger population help spread the revolution to was no longer practical. The reformed plan would ease governmental pressures with regard to the abovementioned youth demand. Consequently, the government changed its public message to encourage the more prosperous and socially just Islamic communities to increase their population, rather than to have "sheer number Muslim with their

⁷⁵ personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016 & February 2017

⁷⁶ Woman D, personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016

⁷⁷ Khezri, Mohammad. "The impact of the government's economic policy after the revolution the family." Institute for Humanities. 2002. Accessed April 1, 2017. <http://www.ensani.ir/fa/content/89187/default.aspx>.

hands outstretched to foreigners are not going to serve the interests of the Islamic world.”

⁷⁸Makarem Shirazi, a Shi'i *faqih* (Islamic jurist), believed that the need to limit population growth by decreasing family size occurred to the *'ulama* from the very beginning. But because the majority of people who contributed to the revolution believed that the Shah's family policies were based on Western ideas, the *'ulama* preferred to be silent about this important issue. Indeed, some other *'ulama* believed that using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy was not Islamic. Therefore, in its first decade the Islamic government followed a policy of increasing population growth, which actively changed after the end of the war.⁷⁹

But the families who brought forth children based on government proclamations then had the pressure of raising the children after the war. This issue came at great cost to the mothers who lost husbands to the war. Woman E described the situation after the war in this way:

It was a good time while Imam Khomaini was around. After him the government changed its plans for covering all the cost of the children of the *shahid*. There was support in the time of Khomeini but then they did not care how the single mother could raise three or four children when she also had to work outside the home. As a result of that, some of our children did not choose a good path, some of them became addicted. Raising more than two children was overwhelming for a mother like me who has only two hands.⁸⁰

For these people, changing the plan was not at all affordable. From their point of view, their family was overextended because of the governmental inconsistent policies which on the one hand encouraged the enlargement of families, and on the other hand wanted to limit the number of children. The policy transformation, therefore, was not practical for families. Indeed, although the government started an educational campaign on birth control and provided free contraceptive devices in 1982, the revised plan was not as effective as was assumed, due to a weak foreign currency.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Hunter, Shireen. *Iran after Khomaini*. New York: Praeger, 1992. P 75-80

⁷⁹ "The control of population growth in Iran." Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution. January 26, 2014. Accessed April 1, 2017. <http://www.hawzah.net/fa/article/view/93633>.

⁸⁰ Woman E, personal interviews, Mazandaran, February 2017

⁸¹ Hunter, Shireen. *Iran after Khomeini*. New York: Praeger, 1992. P 75-80

I was young when the war started. Still young when they told me you are widow and lost my husband, my children's father, to the war, yet young when I started school again (*maktab khane*). I was young when I experienced being a mother and working outside to make a better life for my children. I am 51, many people say you are young but I think that in eight years I lived 1000 years. My soul is pretty old and tired.⁸²

The Islamic government also tried to reform family law, which many considered as an issue of women's rights. The new parliament started to repeal and replace the family plan laws (FPL, laws which were the policy of the previous government). This FPL policy, which began in 1967 during the Pahlavi period, was abrogated by a new patriarchal revolutionary plan that included limiting women's right of divorce and reinstating the right of polygamy for men in the Civil Code).⁸³ Ziba Mirhoseini, a female Iranian scholar, believed such a law disappointed even women who supported the Islamic Revolution. She quoted one woman who wanted to divorce in 1980, questioning the government, "Can he really divorce me if I don't agree? Is this what *shari'a* says?"⁸⁴ The unjust custody policy was not limited to the issue of divorce. Many women of the case study in this thesis were challenged by this law after losing their husband in the war. One of the women stated:

According to their law, in the absence of my husband, his father and brother would get the custody of my children. Since they could prove I cannot protect my children financially. I had three children and I even decided to run away from my in-laws. The other fact was that I could get the *shahīd*'s payment while I was faithful to him and protected his children. Therefore, my father-in-law took my children and my payment for a while. If my husband was around he would be so mad. He even came in my dreams several times. After that, my mother-in-law told me that I could take my children.

It should be noted that many of the other interviewees were not as disappointed as this women, regarding the laws, because they believed that the FPL laws would not consider their

⁸² Woman F, personal interviews, Mazandaran, February, 2017

⁸³ Moghadam, Valentine M. Modernizing women gender and social 2013. P; 176

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

problems and challenges either. They said that they stayed patient with the new government, believing that the situation would eventually get better. Needless to say, the women's unhappiness with this law and its lack of congruence with their domestic lives, caused a dilemma for them about the new government. Subsequently, their complaints and women's resistance reformed these governmental laws, which they claimed was based on *Sharia* (Islamic law).⁸⁵

In the case of education, the universities were closed for two years. The new government demanded a new curriculum in the schools which included an Islamic framework for classes. All the schools were segregated by gender. The *Konkur*, the entrance exam for universities, was held in 1982 for the first time after the 1979 revolution. Although the government increased the number of females enrolled in classes, the new schools had policies about the hijab and religious ideology. Therefore, students who passed the entrance exam were re-examined for their political ideology. This policy prevented many students from actually entering school. Indeed, the majors for women became limited and some majors—including sciences, geology, mining, and some engineering programs - did not include women because the authorities believed that these majors were masculine and were inconsistent with women's gender ability (i.e., motherhood)⁸⁶. Although the new educational policy was a limitation for many women, it opened new opportunities for the traditional family, whose women could actually enter the work-force after obtaining their education. Even though the legal system went through some specific reforms, the broader society needed more time to accept the idea of more opportunities for women.

Social pressure:

As Reza Banakar states in his book *Driving Culture in Iran*, Iranian law can be classified as two different types: the written law in parliament and the unwritten law which is called '*urf*(custom). '*Urf* is in effect the norms of society, which does not necessarily result in any state

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Amin .P; 177

punishment or reward, but sometimes is even more influential than the written law.⁸⁷ These norms can be observed in everyday activities and guide certain acts in various relationships. Banakar states that according to these cultural norms, one can understand why people do certain activities or why they resist doing things.⁸⁸ In the case study of women, the society based on the unwritten law of *'urf* could affect societal judgement of women's private lives.

An example to illustrate was the situation of one woman who had a sick mother. She stated, "After the death of my husband, which was around 1986, I could not stay outside my own home more than an evening. One time my mother was so sick and I had to stay in the hospital until midnight," having asked her sister-in-law to take care of her baby until she returned. She continued:

After midnight the hospital asked us to go home. I got a taxi to go home but then you could not distinguish taxis from personal cars. The taxi took me home that night. The day after I had to go to work in the early morning. I saw a lot of judgmental looks. I remember one of my neighbors did not respond to my good morning. I found out, but could I explain to everyone about my mother's situation? Would they even believe in me? So I had to take those looks until God proved to them how wrong they were. I can tell the situation is far better now from the begging days after the end of the war.⁸⁹

The restrictions on these women were not just because their husbands were killed in the war, but more so it was due to the image that the government promoted about them. The image was of a national hero who should be recognized by the entire society. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, these women would be invited to girls' schools in special days, mostly to celebrate of the memories of deceased veterans or the birthday of the Prophet's daughter, Fatimah. The women would tell the girls stories of their lives, which were modest in scale. Idealization of these women placed more of a social burden on the shoulders of the majority of women and girls in society. If a woman chose a path different from the society's norm, she would be questioned by society, not just as a woman but also as a role model. That is why most of these women preferred the time when

⁸⁷ Banakar, Reza. *Driving Culture in Iran*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2016. introduction

⁸⁸ Ibid

⁸⁹ Woman L, personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016,

their husbands were around, even if it was war-time and also time of less equality for women. Many of these women had to accept marrying according to their laws, because being in the shadow of men was better than being a single mother in the society.

These pressures also extended to the workplace, outside of the women's households. The opportunities that widows of *shahīd* had to get government jobs were better than those for other women because these widows were actually the women most trusted by the government. Most of them had active roles in the revolution and had also encouraged their beloved husbands to battle the enemy of their country, which was under revolutionary governance. But getting a job was not the only obstacle that these women encountered. Primarily, society would assume that these women obtained their job because of their situation, not because of their ability. One of the interviewees of this paper stated that when she became an administrator of one minor organization, her co-workers always misjudged her. She was afraid to make even one honest mistake, because then the coworkers would think she did not deserve the job and she was only in the higher position because of her deceased husband.

Another woman experienced a similar situation. She was one of the revolutionary activists who also happened to live in Ahvaz, one of the regions that witnessed combat with Iraqi troops. During the war, she had to evacuate to the north because her family home was ruined. She transferred from the organization in Ahvaz to work in the north. She stated,

I had to work in male areas and activities, because in Ahvaz most women were welcomed in industrial jobs due to the city's economy being dependent on those jobs. During the war, because of brutal attack of Iraq, I had to leave my hometown. My house was ruined and I lost most of my family members to the war. My daughters and I moved to north. Here people mostly spoke in Tabari, the local language. It was so different working in the north. I remember once my co-worker made a joke about my job, that I am a slow worker because I am a woman. They said it in their dialect that I do not understand. I found out the joke and I said nothing. Instead I asked one of my friends to teach me the Tabari dialect. After six months, while they were continuously talking in Tabari dialect, I went to the office and said in their local dialect that I might be slow, but not in learning language. Their joke was

finished then.⁹⁰

Even though the pressure was overwhelming for these women, they tried to find a way around it. They had to fight both the enemies from outside the country and the patriarchal system inside their country. How they turned these difficulties into opportunities is discussed in the next chapter.

⁹⁰ Woman G, personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016,

Chapter four: Reaction of Case Study Demographic and Challenges to Patriarchal System During the War

War, no matter where it happens, never has a friendly face. Needless to say, the Iran-Iraq war brought widespread disruption within the country, including growing poverty, rapid population growth, and many other pressures that notably influenced women's lives. However, as previously mentioned, it enabled women from the lower and middle classes to challenge the dominance of socio-political patriarchy. As discussed previously, patriarchal political and social systems generated the primary obstacles to women in Iran long before the Islamic Revolution. These systems limited women's advancement due to male domination both inside and outside the household. This chapter analyzes the war as an unexpected event which challenged this traditional system within the country, and consequently impacted the role of women during the war in enhancing their power within the society to some extent. This chapter will consider three aspects of this change in women's roles. First, it will consider the shift of women's status toward greater gender equality within the family and private sphere. Second, it will consider the emancipation of women in society by their participation in traditionally male jobs. Third, it will consider changes in state policy toward widows of *shahīd* based on necessity due to war.

Family role: Challenging the Norms within the Family

Different social thinkers have different ways to define a patriarchal system. Sylvia Walby, a feminist sociologist, defined the word patriarchy as a “system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.”⁹¹ She believes that women experience this not because of biological determinism but because they live in a hierarchal system in which their status is less than that of men. She explains that in this way “every man is in dominant position and every woman in a subordinate one.”⁹² Lerner, on other hand, describes patriarchy as a manifestation

⁹¹ Walby, Sylvia. *Theorizing patriarchy*. Oxford u.a.: Blackwell, 1990, P;20

⁹² Ibid.

that male members have the dominant role over the family.⁹³ Based on this definition, the hierarchal system does not change unless something unexpected takes place. As previously mentioned, the lack of men on the home front during the war was completely unexpected, which created an exception to the unwritten societal custom (*'urf*) of male dominance.

It should be noted that this deviation from the unwritten customs mostly effects women in the lower-middle class, since these woman had more restriction in their life in public and in the home. Neither the revolution nor the Iran-Iraq War afforded women from the higher class more opportunities for equality within the family, even though they recognized the differences between the two genders in the greater society. For example, as Haleh Esfandiari wrote in her book *Reconstructed Lives*, there were many women who did not feel subordinated due to their family background: “Before the revolution, I was a high school student. In our household there was a total equality among my brothers and me..., at home we never discussed the problems women had in society. There was extraordinary harmony between my parents.”⁹⁴ However, as discussed in previous chapter, lower-middle class women were subordinate to men in their households.

During the Iran-Iraq war this structure changed because of men’s absence from their home. Most of the male relatives of the heads of household were gone to war. The women who were stayed behind acquired responsibility for everything in the family, which was new and challenging for traditional families who were accustomed in living in hierarchal system with men at the top. In the story of *Da Zahra Husaynī*, describes a father who left his family for the war. Before he left, he saw how his daughter started to be strong for the family and take care of everyone in his absence. Hence, he trusts his 17-year-old daughter to look after his family in his absence. This responsibility later brought on a conflict for the daughter when she tried to take care of everything related to the family. “I asked Da⁹⁵ to leave the house because it was not safe to stay because the troops were

⁹³ Lerner, Gerda. *The creation of patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.P:239

⁹⁴ Esfandiari, Haleh. 1997. P; 61

⁹⁵ In Kurdish language means mother

coming down every day. Da said, ‘How I can go while without my husband’s permission. He did not tell me to go that I can go outside of my house. He is still alive and I should obey him.’”⁹⁶

As the story continues, the girl who was asked by her father to look after the family tries to convince her mother to go somewhere safe. At first the mother was upset that the daughter is ordering her about what to do while the father of the house is still alive. However, the daughter, who sees herself responsible for her siblings, insists and convinces the mother to leave the house. This illustrates a clash between the traditional mindset of the mother and the attitude of her younger daughter. The success of the daughter, in sending her family to a safe area, made her more confident, and that is the start of breaking the hard crust of the patriarchal system.

In another story from my interviews, a woman said that during the war, other borders of Iran were not safe because most of the forces were centered on the war front. Therefore, some of the military forces had to go to other borders to manage internal crises, such as protecting against *ashrar* (criminals people who were and are involved in smuggling opium and gunrunning) were using the opportunity to attack army stations to steal guns and other weapons. Woman C had to go with her husband, but because of his extensive job, her husband did not get a chance to visit his family very often. She described that her husband taught her how to shoot with the G3 rifle. “He told me in my absence, this [gun] is the husband that you can call for.” She described her remote one-bedroom house near the southern border, 20 miles further than the first house of the village. She described her personality as coward at first, but because of daily events, she had to overcome her fears. In response to my question about how she describes her personality after the war, she stated:

I was afraid of everything before the war. I remember toilets were placed at the far end of the yard. In Mazandaran, yard means jungle because people were planting everything in their yard. I was so scared to use toilet after dark. But living in the south for a while made me brave. Except for God, I do not have any fear. Sometimes my relatives asked me, “Are you afraid of this or

⁹⁶ Ḥusaynī, Zahrā, and A’zam Ḥusaynī. Dā: khāṭirāt-i Sayyidah Zahrā Ḥusaynī. Tih-rān: Intishārāt-i Sūrah-i Mihr (vābastah bih Ḥawzah-i Hunarī), 1394. P;86

that?" I would respond, "I am alone, but I am one *gurdan* (battalion)." To respond to your question, I should say yes, my personality changed because of the war. I am fearless.⁹⁷

Not having fear in the larger society freed women from seeing the necessity of having men around. Hence, being fearless made these women more independent. Because of the challenging situations they went through, these women ultimately learned how to be the head of the household and how to be responsible for the home. They learned how to make decisions for their families. Also being fearless helped many women to even enjoy the army during the war and to defend their country. According to Shirin Saeedi, 6,000 women were killed during the war between Iran and Iraq⁹⁸.

Social role: Women's presence in Traditionally Male Jobs

Although Walby views patriarchy in the form of a hierarchal system, the anthropologist Kate Millett believes that patriarchy derives from biological differences between men and women, rather than deriving from a social hierarchy. This theory leads a society to believe that men are always dominant over women. In another words, "Men are usually able to secure the apparent consent of the very women they oppress."⁹⁹ In this regard Lerner also states that male power is not limited to the household but it extends its power throughout society. "Men hold power in all the important institutions of society" in a way that make women weak enough to not achieve such power.¹⁰⁰ Therefore, in this structure, the societal norm is that women are subordinate to men, not only in the family part but also in a broader social context.

The Iran-Iraq War began unexpectedly with little warning, and it took Iran some time to determine the best way to respond. At the start of the war, the greatest cost came to the cities on the border with Iraq, including Khorramshahr, Abadan, and Ahvaz. The Iraqi army attacked the cities without warning. All inhabitants of the cities were targeted and affected by the invasion—

⁹⁷ Woman C personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016

⁹⁸ Hosseini Khah, Maryam. "Women Untold Stories During Iran-Iraq war." BBC. N.p., 27 Sept. 2010. Web. 1 Jan. 2017.

⁹⁹ Millett, Kate. *Sexual politics*. London: Virago, 1977. P;35

¹⁰⁰ Lerner, P;239

women, men, old or young people. The Iranian army was disorganized due to the recent revolution.

One woman described the situation this way:

The soldiers who were ready to join army were in long lines for registration. While there were abundant forces behind the front lines, people in the “Red” line were dying because they did not have sufficient troops. The hospitals were full of injured people; the cemeteries were full of dead bodies. Even if many people volunteered to help in the first place, there was no one to organize this population.¹⁰¹

The men willingly joined to fight the war, leaving a testimony as a written message to their family members because they did not know if they would ever return. Taking the place of the male head of the household meant not just covering his role in the home, but substituting for him wherever there was a need in outside of the house. As an example if the man was working in the industrial factory, the wife should have substituted for him until he returned.

The social situation was anarchy. Women tried to replace the men who were leaving for a war. This phenomenon of women substituting as an alternative to men occurred not only in the households. Later on, when the war demanded a larger force, a great number of men from all around Iran responded to Ayatollah Khomeinī’s call of *jihad*.¹⁰² Their wives were the only persons who could fill the gap in the workplace due to the absence of their husbands. One of the interviewees states in this case that:

After my husband left us for the war, his job in industry was vacant. At that time the government would give us some money, but not monthly, and I did not want my husband lose his job after he came back from the war. I went to fill his job until the war came to an end. It was a very masculine place. At first I did not feel comfortable, but after some months there were more women hired in the same workplace. People who worked there respected me because of my situation, because my husband was risking his life against the Ba’athi (Iraqi government), which was the not only the enemy of country but of Islam¹⁰³.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Husaynī, P,172

¹⁰² Enzabi, Mohammad. "امام خمینی و دفاع مقدس (Imam Khomeini and the Sacred War)." Nasrnews.ir. September 21, 2014. Accessed May 10, 2017. <http://www.nasrnews.ir/News/tab>

¹⁰³ Woman H, personal interviews, Mazandaran , February 2017

¹⁰⁴ The Ba’athi army was called an “enemy of Islam” because it wanted to bring up the conflict between Shiat. Since Iraq had the second majority of Shiat at the time and Iran had the first majority.

In another story, Woman I states, she had to fill two roles (IDNU) left by her husband, by working in the farm and inside the home. She describes that there were jobs developed to support a group of women. Someone would take care of the babies; some women would take care of making food for all workers. Because her husband was absent, she had to make food for workers before going to farm and working like a man. Although it was a hard job, she said, “Sometimes my old father-in-law would admit that if my husband was there, he would not be as helpful as me.”¹⁰⁵

This story reminds one of Engels’ theory that in the beginning of agriculture, men were not the only owner of the property but the property was shared in common. The society was mostly matriarchal, rather than patriarchy. In this kind of society, Engels believed that women were honored because they were the ones who gave birth to children, and the family identity consequently would follow the mother. Based on Engels’ theory, this system changes over time since men and women started to extend their fields and grow more crops. Women had to stay home due to their role as mothers, and men would put more effort as farmers and shepherds. Therefore, after some time, men “emerged as owners of the only valuable property...Men then used their power as property owners to institute paternity and patriarchy”¹⁰⁶. However, despite some scholars such as Simon De Beauvoir criticize this theory due to incorrect description of the transformation from matriarchal to patriarchal society, most socialists still believe that this transformation took place after extending the role of men in the agricultural fields.¹⁰⁷

As previously discussed, the value of men was substantial in traditional Iranian society, and having a son was a source of pride for some families. Yet the case of the father-in-law, admitting the daughter-in-law’s equal accomplishments compared with his son’s, illustrates a smooth change for the patriarchal attitude emanating from the base of the society. (IDNU)

¹⁰⁵ Woman I, personal interviews, Mazandaran , February 2017

¹⁰⁶ Fisher, Helen E. *Anatomy of love: a natural history of mating, marriage, and why we stray*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2017. P; 283

¹⁰⁷ "Simone de Beauvoir’s analysis of patriarchy’s genesis." University of California, School of Law. March 9, 2015. Accessed March 29, 2017. <http://femlegaltheory.blogspot.com/2015/03/a-critique-of-simon-de-beauvoirs.html>.

Some women also were placed in jobs directly supporting the military, which were usually done by men. In the period 1960 through 1970, Mohammad Reza Shah accepted women as soldiers, police and pilots, but the general society was not pleased by the presence of women in male occupations like the military. In my interview, Woman J stated, “One time I was tired of being in the bloody war neighborhood. I asked my husband to leave Khoramshahr. He told me that while our *Navamis*¹⁰⁸ are resisting under the guns of the enemy, how I can leave the town?”¹⁰⁹ As Shirin Saeedi, who wrote about the role of women in forefront of the war, states that, later in the war women were fully involved in the war effort.¹¹⁰

As a result of this changing attitude from the bottom of society upwards, more than the society changed. Women’s personalities changed over time. Many of the women who participated in my interviews described their confidence and independence as a new aspect of their personality. One of them described that her personality completely changed after her husband’s death. She added, “I felt more secure and independent about myself. Although it was difficult to always live as a single mother and woman, over time I felt stronger than before.”¹¹¹ In this regard they recognized the Prophet’s daughter and granddaughter as their role models. These two individuals were mentioned by most of them as a role model who is confident to take a stand against injustice (*zolm*) and fight the enemy of true Islam, a job that these women saw themselves doing during the war.

The State Reaction to the Status of Women During the War:

Simone de Beauvoir saw subordination of women as a result of men’s views about women. She believed that because men recognize women as a second gender from them, women are assigned a secondary sex status, with men assume their gender as having the primary status.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ (usually means women who are close relatives, but in this case refers to all Iranian women)

¹⁰⁹ Woman J, personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016

¹¹⁰ Hosseini Khah, Maryam. "Women Untold Stories During Iran-Iraq war." BBC. N.p., 27 Sept. 2010. Web. 1 Jan. 2017.

¹¹¹ Woman K, personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016

¹¹² Beauvoir, P:221

Many societies are structured in this way, and because women do not have the chance to acquire the resources of power, they remain in a subordinate status. In the Kate Millett's theory, the lack of access to resources makes women dependent on the power of men in various aspects of life¹¹³ In this case, the state is one force that contributes to this inequity in society by its position on women's access to resources of power in the system.

After the revolution, Iran encountered a phase that can be called clericalism (akhundism)¹¹⁴ in which many socio-political patterns of the society were changing based on the fatwa (religious-orders) of Shi'ite clerics. Ayatollah Khomeinī was one of the most important clerics in determining whether the societal norms were to be challenged. As previously discussed, during the revolution Khomeinī tried to focus on half of the Iranian population, which was women, because women's participation gave the Islamic revolution the opportunity to be stronger in the street. After the revolution Ayatollah Khomeinī's ideas evidently changed, as many other Islamic groups of currents strongly believed in the natural inadequacy of women. As claimed by Ayatollah Motahhari and others, based on Islamic ideology, women's natural metabolism is constructed of decision based on emotion, making their intelligence shallower than that of men. However, some *'ulama*, such as Ayatollah Yahya Nuri, stated that women were different but not inadequate, and based on that he recognized women's equality in society. When the revolution succeeded, *Ayatollah* Khomeinī stated that the recognition of women's inadequacy did not mean to exclude women from social life, but rather "elevates them to a platform where they belong, a higher platform."¹¹⁵ Needless to say by higher platform, he meant the role of women as mothers and wives as we discussed in chapter three Therefore, one can raise the question of how women could improve their second class status in so many areas of society when the gender norm was broadly based on family, societal, and state attitudes.

¹¹³ Millett, P;35

¹¹⁴ Abrahamian, Ervand. A History of Modern Iran. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014.P; 168

¹¹⁵ Hunter, Shireen. Iran after Khomeini. New York: Praeger, 1992. P;73

The Iran-Iraq War was one of the most important events that challenged this dynamic. The state and Khomeinī as a leader emphasized the role of women during the war. Based on his declarations during and after the war, women's power was identified in a broad extent. People from middle and lower classes strongly identified with the Islamic government because they were one of the most vital forces of the revolution. Because of that, the strategy used during the revolution continued during the war, in the sense that *Ayatollah* Khomeinī would make a *fatwa* and people would follow the order. In the case of war, the state policy was based on using all human resources, whether women or men. Therefore, the women of the case study had a chance to stand before policy makers of smaller governmental units and inform them that the women had access to power. In the story of *Da*, a woman stood in front of a cleric responsible for the organization of the forces and asked to join the army like her brothers (brother in a religious sense). The cleric raised her gender as an obstacle. He stated although he appreciated women's efforts behind the scene so far, they now needed to leave the city. The women then asked him to tell her the color of his blood. The cleric responded, "Red." The women replied, "My blood is also red and I don't understand the difference between me and you, so I stay as long as you stay."¹¹⁶ (90, *Da*) Adding women to the army meant more fighters and ultimately more power, so there was more support in response to this call.

Adding to this individual experience, many of women who I interviewed believed that the system during the war was far better than the current system. They said that was because the leader of the nation noticed women's efforts during the war, but after his death other leaders were not as influential in women's issues as Khomeinī had been. In contrast, during his leadership many women from the higher class were not pleased with Khomeinī's policies on issues such as secularization, the hijab, and the rights of revolutionary women.

According to my interviewees, all three issues gave the women of the case study more

¹¹⁶ Husaynī, P;90

emancipation in their society. For women from the traditional part of society, Khomeinī's policies offered access to the resources of power. One of the interviewees compared her situation before and after Khomeinī's death in this way:

In the time of Khomeinī, the situation of *shahīd* wives was outstanding. Imam Khomeinī would consider us in many cases, such as having a job or a *shahīd* payment with benefit which would add to the salary of the wives. He noticed us as an important force in the success of the war regardless of our gender. But after Khomeinī's death, we encountered some issues in getting our own rights.¹¹⁷

In the days after Khomeinī's death, many women tried to get on their feet and stand up for their vital rights which they might not have thought about doing before the war. War awakened their sense of fighting against *zolm* (injustice).

One example of this everyday fight is women's' rights after the revolution. Many feminists believed that the laws enacted after the revolution discarded women's' rights. For example, polygamy was one of the laws enacted in 1981 after the revolution. Illustrating this fight was a conversation that one woman had with the chief member of the *shahīd* foundation in her city. She stated:

One day I went to the office to do paperwork. The person very impolitely told me that he was not pleased with the behavior of my sisters (the wives of *shahīd*). I said, "Why?" And he said, "Since after the war, we had many co-workers who tried to marry them but they refused." I asked, "Why are your co-workers still single." He stated, "They are married but the Sharia lets them to have second wife." I responded, "How do you expect the women who went through eight years of war, and fought for her moral values, to enter into the life of a poor women?" I told him we did not fight to reach this destination.¹¹⁸

The right of polygamy was reinstated two weeks after the revolution by the revolutionary government. As Homa Hoodfar stated, the issue of temporary marriage and polygamy was not considered illegal anymore, and was also openly encouraged.¹¹⁹ However, regardless of the legal

¹¹⁷ Woman K, personal interviews, Mazandaran February 2017

¹¹⁸ Woman L, personal interviews, Mazandaran , July, 2016

¹¹⁹ Hoodfar, PP; 17-20

law, the *'urf* (custom) does not accept having a second wife, even temporarily. It should be noted that the woman recounting the story was a child of a second wife. In response to the question regarding what had changed about *Urf*? Or in other word why the *Urf* permit her father to get married now it considers out of morality, she said that the time of her father was different. It is true that under the FPL (Family Protection Law) one could not easily have a second wife, but the *'urf* would allow the men to do it. She continued that on the farm, having more wives and children would increase men's wealth, but eventually if men want to have a second wife, they would need to hide her in a *pastoo*.¹²⁰

Based on this, one can reach a conclusion that the war challenged the norms of life in the society, and these changes in norms persisted after the war. This issue is reinforced by the experience of the Iraqi government in the same time frame. Amal Rassam's analysis of the Ba'th government's attitude toward women and their rights during the crucial wartime proposed that before the war, the government faced two contradictory demands toward women and their role in the society. These demands included the concept of "modernity" which was applauded by the West, and the concept of "cultural authenticity" which stressed the role of women inside the family. The government policy during the war was to divide the women's role into two aspects of private/familiar and public/economic¹²¹. Due to the war, the Iraqi government emphasized the latter based on necessity. In Iran, the state's focus on the latter changed societal norms after the war, including the patriarchal system.

¹²⁰ A *pastoo* denotes a hidden room, closet.

¹²¹ Efrat, Noga. "Productive or reproductive? The roles of Iraqi Women during the Iraq-Iran War." *Middle Eastern Studies* 35, no. 2 (1999): 27-44.

Conclusion

To examine the issue of a dominant patriarchal system in Iran and the challenges experienced by women of the lower and middle classes, this thesis reviewed women's status since modernization efforts in the 19th century when the issue of women's rights became a distinct political issue. This was a time that some women had realized the lack of vital women's rights under the Qajar dynasty which was in contrast with the dominant norm in the society, patriarchal system. Before modernization flourished in Iran, Iranians followed ancient traditions in various aspects of their lives. The long-established norms of personal and social conduct were based on women's subordination and male dominance. Based on tradition and norms, women were relegated to the household and men to the public arena. There was no recognition that women could complain about their rights or criticize the situation.

In the late Qajar period, the state appreciated the importance of science, and he allowed some students to travel abroad to obtain an education and gather knowledge. These students returned with new ideas, including the importance of women's education. This generated a clash between modernization and traditionalism. According to the perspective of modernization, , the lack of education for women was one of the reasons for the backwardness of the entire society. Additionally, modernization was often conflated with Westernization by its opponents. Modernization efforts brought a transformation of women's clothing to more Western style, which did not please traditionalist families. They tried to protect their family honor by not sending their daughter to schools and by encouraging early marriage. In this regard, most of the women's rights were considered to be against cultural norms. The assumption is that the system of patriarchy benefitted men, and men were reluctant to give up their social status.

Despite the small gains for women during the Qajar period, in 1950 the parliament passed laws resulting in more restrictions on women in private and public areas including the restriction on the right of voting for women. During the reign of Riza Shah, the king started to issue some

reforms in order to modernize the country. One of these reforms was the abandonment of the *hijab* for women. The traditionalist families, which constituted the majority of society, did not appreciate this change. There was a great clash in the first Pahlavi period, creating a broad division between the modernist and traditionalist factions of society. During the 1960s through the 1970s, the second Pahlavi Shah emphasized reforms to benefit of women. The Family Protection Law as one of the reforms that the parliament declared in this period. Because the law was not implemented in all regions, there was not uniform progress in discarding the patriarchal system. In addition, despite the second Pahlavi king's plans to improve education and the workforce, the lower-middle classes still believed that schools would Westernize their daughters and they did not want to send their daughters to school or to college. The second Pahlavi shah expressed support for the women's movement, but preferred that this movement should operate within the structure of the existing political system, rather than criticizing the system from the outside.

Ironically, female activists and more traditional Iranian women were drawn together due to the Iranian revolution. Many studies agree that the revolution succeeded because Khomeinī was one of the *fughaha* with access to public funds, but as discussed, for many families with religious and traditional backgrounds, the Islamic revolution with Khomeinī's leadership was the only success that they wanted. While there were traditionalist families in the upper class, as was discussed in chapter two the revolution primarily drew support from the middle and lower classes.

The Islamic Republic's agenda for women was inconsistent and unpredictable. Khomeinī, as the leader of Islamic revolution, invited women to be part of the revolution and promised emancipation of women from Western ideas. Therefore, women shoulder to shoulder with their brothers participated in the revolution. After the success of the revolution, new laws pertaining to women were enacted, including a modified FLP and shifting women to a higher status as a housewife. When the war occurred, women from traditional families, who had made significant contributions to the revolution, also played a major role in the war effort. Despite all the financial, social, and political pressures women encountered, they finally could challenge the patriarchal

system that placed obstacles on their lives. Women, whether the ones whose memoirs were published by the government or the ones who were interviewed for this thesis, removed the obstacles their families, social neighborhoods, and within the country.

Because of the absence of men during the war and the resulting financial difficulties of that time, families were supported by the women around them, including daughters-in-law, daughters, mothers and sisters. Therefore, women entered a new phase of providing financial support for their families. Across the social spectrum, women were respected because of their devotion to the society. Although people around them were respectful, some of the women believed that this respect existed just during the length of the war. Some thought that after the death of Khomeinī people forgot that women gave up their husbands for the security of the nation. Despite this, there remained a respect for women. In addition, due to Khomeinī's speech calling them one of the main reasons for the success of the revolution, women gained confidence and increasingly believed in their abilities within society. Within the state, they were more effective than some other secular movements that occurred after the revolution, because they were on the side of government. They participated in the revolution, therefore their demands for women's rights of access to the workforce, obtaining wages similar to men's, and other changes, were more acceptable to the Islamic leaders.

These women who played a strong role in the revolution, who made the revolution, were mostly from the middle-lower classes before the war. These women were from families who, before the revolution, did not believe in reform of the patriarchal system. These classes called for the revision of Westernization. After the war and with great effort, the reform of the patriarchal system was not in opposition to the culture, because by then women's awareness of their rights became more universal. Although there were still many obstacles as a result of Iran's longstanding patriarchal system, the women's struggle within the system empowered them to transform many norms, not just by changing the laws, but by changing the unwritten norms of society (*'urf*).

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Appendices

A

Oral Interview Questions

- 1.What is your first name?
- 2.How old are you?
- 3.What is your relationship to a *shahid*?
- 4.If he was your husband, when did you marry him-- before, during, or after the war?
- 5.What was your parents' idea about getting married to your husband?
- 6.Did you re-marry after losing your husband? (The women felt uncomfortable with this question, so I did not want to offend them and I had to drop this question in the written interview.)
- 7.How many children do you have?
- 8.Tell me about your life before marriage?
- 9.What is your job right now?
- 10.Did you have a job during the war?
- 11.How did you provide financial support for your family?
- 12.Were you supportive of your husband during the war? How did you express this support?
- 13.How do you describe your life during the war? They dealt with them. (Here they talked about their challenges and how?)

B

Written Interview

1.What is your first name, if it is preferable?

2.What is your age range?

35-40 40-45 45-50 50-55

3.What is your job if you are working?

4.Did you have a job before the revolution and how do you describe it if you had one?

5.How was the situation for you and your family before the revolution?

Personally, did you notice any big difference in your status inside the society before and after the revolution?

(Then I shifted to the war-time and their situation; here I found out about the family class inside the society.)

6.What is your relation to the shahid?

If he was your husband how did get to know him? (Except for one, all were family arranged marriages.

7.Did you support him going to the war?

8. What was your husband/brother's job before the war?

9. When he attended the war, who supported the family?

10.With a percentage, let me know how much you appreciated your marriage?

10-20 20-50 50-70 70-100

(All replies were 100 %.)

11.Did you have a job during the war? If yes, and you had a child or children, how did you balance that out?

12.After the death of your husband, how did you feel in the society? (I received many stories here about the pressure that they first went through and how they overcame that.)

13.What was the reaction of the Islamic government to your situation

In the beginning of the war:

During the war:

After the war:

14. Did you feel any changes personally? If you did, how do you describe it?

15. What do you think it would be like if your husband were alive now? What would be different in your status?

16. What did you expect from family, society, and state that you feel you did not get from them?

17. How much do you talk with the next generation about women like you?

18. Do you have anything to add?
