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**An Era of Becoming a Witness: Ecofeminism Revisited
The Redefining of Nature in Environmental Art through the
Creative Resistance of Iranian Women Artists**

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Abstract

The integration of gender into politics in present-day Iran has sparked a multifaceted and evolving process of progress within gender politics. This ongoing journey encompasses advancements and setbacks in women's legal and social status while also witnessing shifts in the perception of the "female subject" within Iranian society. Concurrently, in the context of Iran, it is evident that nature itself is politicized. How nature is perceived, managed, and utilized is deeply intertwined with the country's political ideologies, policies, and power dynamics. The politicization of nature in Iran also intersects with gender politics. The history of art in Iran is also a history of its intellectual, philosophical, and religious engagement with nature. Environmental art has a close relationship with its surroundings, and according to its formal and semantic position, it establishes an interaction between the audience, the artwork, and the landscape. Environmental art is strongly influenced by regional and local culture, and the rituals and traditions can be easily recognized in it. By making viewers aware of their familiar surroundings, environmental artists have always tried to increase their concern about the environment and establish different meanings concerning the landscape. Along with social, political, and philosophical concerns, environmental issues are the most critical factors that have expanded the concept of landscape and developed environmental art.

The medium and approach through which art bears witness to the socio-political and environmental challenges in Iran form the context of the study and the experiment conducted within the framework of ecofeminism-especially in the absence of environmental activists as original witnesses-is the focus. The main goal of the intellectual currents of ecofeminism and its introduction into Iranian society is to direct the environmental art of women artists against the hegemony of masculinity in Iranian society. This project expands the issues raised by reviewing literature on critical issues such as culture, society, gender, borders, and the environment.

By integrating the analysis of gender politics and environmental art, this study examines the intricate developments and influences within contemporary gender politics in Iran. With this in mind, this study aims to explore how environmental art can be used as a testimonial medium for promoting ecofeminism and how this, in turn, can contribute to changing the existing political and social discourse in Iran in general and supporting the social struggle of Iranian women in general and women artists in particular. The theoretical approach of the study is based on the description of the concepts and definitions of ecofeminism. According to this, the position of women in a feminist analysis system is fundamentally different from that of men. This difference can be established in two ways: an institutional status of socialization and a socio-psychological status. What artists see when they observe the environment goes beyond documentary testimony of environmental damage; they create art that, through its unique forms of testimony, becomes a positive ecological intervention, giving aesthetic and political weight to ecological restoration. Nature, landscape, and environment thus become visible - and criticizability - as aesthetic media of political power relations.

Keywords: Gender policy, Nature, Environmental Art, Ecofeminism, Hegemony Structure, Nature politicization

Ökofeministische Neudefinition der Natur durch kreativen Widerstand in der Umweltkunst iranischer Frauen

Zusammenfassung

Die Integration von Geschlechterfragen in die Politik im heutigen Iran hat einen vielschichtigen und sich entwickelnden Prozess des Fortschritts innerhalb der Geschlechterpolitik ausgelöst. Diese fortlaufende Reise umfasst Fortschritte und Rückschläge im rechtlichen und sozialen Status von Frauen und bezeugt gleichzeitig Veränderungen in der Wahrnehmung des "weiblichen Subjekts" innerhalb der iranischen Gesellschaft. Gleichzeitig wird im Kontext des Iran deutlich, dass die Natur selbst politisiert ist. Wie die Natur wahrgenommen, verwaltet und genutzt wird, ist eng mit den politischen Ideologien, Richtlinien und Machtverhältnissen des Landes verflochten. Die Politisierung der Natur im Iran überschneidet sich auch mit der Geschlechterpolitik. Die Geschichte der Kunst im Iran ist auch eine Geschichte ihres intellektuellen, philosophischen und religiösen Engagements mit der Natur. Umweltkunst steht in enger Beziehung zu ihrer Umgebung und etabliert gemäß ihrer formalen und semantischen Position eine Interaktion zwischen Publikum, Kunstwerk und Landschaft. Umweltkunst wird stark von regionaler und lokaler Kultur beeinflusst, und Rituale und Traditionen sind leicht darin erkennbar. Indem sie die Betrachter auf ihre vertraute Umgebung aufmerksam machen, haben Umweltkünstler immer versucht, das Umweltbewusstsein zu stärken und unterschiedliche Bedeutungen in Bezug auf die Landschaft zu etablieren. Neben sozialen, politischen und philosophischen Fragen sind Umweltfragen die entscheidenden Faktoren, die das Konzept der Landschaft erweitert haben und zur Entwicklung der Umweltkunst beigetragen haben.

Die Medien und der Ansatz, durch die Kunst auf die sozialen, politischen und Umweltprobleme im Iran hinzuweisen, bilden den Kontext der Studie und des Experiments im Rahmen des Ökofeminismus, insbesondere in Abwesenheit von Umweltaktivisten als ursprüngliche Zeugen. Das Hauptziel der intellektuellen Strömungen des Ökofeminismus und seiner Einführung in die iranische Gesellschaft besteht darin, die Umweltkunst von Künstlerinnen gegen die Hegemonie der Männlichkeit in der iranischen Gesellschaft zu lenken. Dieses Projekt erweitert die durch die Literatur aufgeworfenen Fragen zu kritischen Themen wie Kultur, Gesellschaft, Geschlecht, Grenzen und Umwelt. Durch die Integration der Analyse von Geschlechterpolitik und Umweltkunst untersucht diese Studie die komplexen Entwicklungen und Einflüsse in der zeitgenössischen Geschlechterpolitik im Iran. Mit diesem Ziel untersucht die Studie, wie Umweltkunst als Testimonial Medienform zur Förderung des Ökofeminismus genutzt werden kann und wie dies wiederum dazu beitragen kann, den bestehenden politischen und sozialen Diskurs im Iran insgesamt zu verändern und den sozialen Kampf iranischer Frauen im Allgemeinen und von Künstlerinnen im Besonderen zu unterstützen. Der theoretische Ansatz der Studie basiert auf der Beschreibung der Konzepte und Definitionen des Ökofeminismus. Gemäß diesem Ansatz unterscheidet sich die Position von Frauen in einem feministischen Analyse-System grundlegend von der Position der Männer. Diese Unterschiede können auf zwei Arten etabliert werden: ein institutioneller Status der Sozialisation und ein sozialpsychologischer Status. Was Künstler sehen, wenn sie die Umwelt beobachten, geht über die dokumentarische Zeugenaussage von Umweltschäden hinaus. Sie schaffen Kunst, die durch ihre einzigartigen Formen der Zeugenaussage zu einer positiven ökologischen Intervention wird und ästhetisches und politisches Gewicht für ökologische Restauration verleiht. Natur, Landschaft und Umwelt werden somit als ästhetische Medien politischer Machtverhältnisse sichtbar- und kritisierbar.

Schlüsselwörter: Geschlechterpolitik, Natur, Umweltkunst, Ökofeminismus, Hegemoniestruktur, Politisierung der Natur

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the culmination of my independent and original research efforts and is not submitted for any other degree in any other institution. The content of this thesis is exclusively derived from the explicitly mentioned sources, supported by extensive bibliographical references.

Signed: Azalia Shahnazari Shahrezaei

Acknowledgements

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1. Background and Context

1.1 Historical Trajectory

In order to explore whether the struggles of Iranian women to gain rights in a patriarchal society qualify as a social movement, the very definition(s) of the concept of “movement” (and by extension, “social movement”) demands close examination. How then, have “social movements” been defined? Anthony Giddens defines and describes “social movements” as follows:

collective attempts [such as various forms of social and political movements] outside the sphere of established institutions. A wide variety of social movements besides those leading to revolution have existed in modern societies, some enduring and some transient. [W]hile some social movements carry on their activities within the laws of the society, others operate as illegal or underground groups. It is characteristic of protest movements [o]f what is legally permissible [according to the governing authorities] at any particular time or place (Giddens & Sutton, 2009, pp.1010-1011).

Blumer, meanwhile, considers social movements "collective enterprises" that seek to establish a "new order of life " and which, in

their inception [...] derive their motive power [from two key factors] on one hand from dissatisfaction with the current form of life, and on the other hand, from wishes and hopes for a new system of living (Blumer,1951, p.99).

This suggests that social movements are about altering or reforming existing systems and fundamentally transforming society in significant and new ways.

Needless to say, many analysts of social movements are opposed to the contention that there exists a direct connection between discontent and the emergence of social movements. Moreover, they are suspicious of the claim that such a relation automatically includes social movements, political parties, and activities and unites them all under one definition or category.

Naturally, this makes the very attempt to pin down a proper and precise definition of the term “social movement” a difficult and contentious matter (Morris & Herring, 1987, pp.137-139).

Diani, who has identified four sub-components of the concept that are identified and discussed by various researchers (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Tilly, 1978; Cohen, 1985; Klandermans & Tarrow, 1988; Melucci, 1985), further notes the four instances of the concept of “social movements” as follows:

- a) A social movement involves a network of informal interactions and reciprocal actions,
- b) Individuals engaged in a social movement have shared sets of beliefs and solidarity,
- c) Individuals engaged in social movements have collective activities on contentious Issues,
- d) The actions are clearly outside the organizational and institutional realm and the routine procedures of social life (Diani, 1992, p.7).

While Diani’s outlining of the salient features of social movements can be helpful, he appears to claim that non-institutional and non-organized aspects of social movements are somehow constitutive of them. Diani thus goes so far as to restrict such phenomena to a network of informal interactions, implying that such movements are somehow inherently de-centralized and lack a distinct hierarchy and formal organizational structure; instead, they are driven by connections between individuals and groups who hold a common purpose (cultural or political) or collective identity (Ibid, p.13).

In attempting to define social movements, several scholars have attempted to classify such phenomena by employing a set of categories. This approach allows the inclusion of a broad range of movements under a specific definition. Take Anthony Giddens (2009), for instance; his typological approach classifies social movements into four distinct categories, two of which are particularly relevant for our purposes. One kind of social movement is what he calls a “transformative movement.” The objective of this type of movement is a comprehensive transformation of the society or societies of which it is a part. Mass upheavals of a rapid nature tend to be comprehensive, pervasive, and often forceful. Giddens cites revolutionary and radical religious movements as instances of transformative social movements. Another type of social movement identified by Giddens is the “reformist movement.” In his view, such movements tend to be limited in scope and seek to initiate a transformative process that targets specific aspects of

the prevailing social order. Reformist movements focus on particular forms of inequality or injustice in society.

Alain Touraine (1981), meanwhile, employs the concept of historicity to address the phenomenon of struggle in social movements. According to Touraine, the objective of social struggles is not the overcoming of oppression with the express goal of conquering the state and then holding on to socio-economic and political power. Rather, the historicity of a social system involves the struggle for competitive systems of values, and this itself constitutes the formation of the very structure of society.¹ In Touraine's definition, social movements refer to the “organized collective behavior of a class actor; struggling for the social control of historicity against the class opponent” (Touraine, 1981, p. 77).

Aside from approaching social movement from paradigms that focus on typology or on the historicity of struggle, a number of theorists have turned their attention to emergent features of “new” social movements (NSMs). Habermas (1981) argued that the NSMs of the post-1960 period, including the women's, youth, and ecological movements, provide the raw material from which a new sense of the public sphere emerges.² Through struggles for lifestyle and identity, the NSMs call into question the legitimacy of government and existing modes of social responsibility, offering critical and constructive responses.

Considered in this light, the distinctions between new and old social movements offer yet another way of classifying social movements (Melucci, 1995). NSMs are often said to include the students' movement, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the environmental movement, and the peace movement, whereas the workers' movement is often placed under the heading of old social movements. In what ways do old social movements differ from new ones? In order to respond to that question, Scott (1990) delineates four contextual factors. The first is the societal “location” of the two types of movements. He asserts that emerging NSMs arise and unfold *within* the community, whereas the origins of the old movements tend to lie in the political sphere. The second distinction is reflected in the movements' objectives. While the old movements

¹ Touraine's use of the term “class” is entirely different from the way it is employed in Marxist thought. According to Touraine, what makes Marxist analysis problematic with respect to class is the reduction of the actions of social movements to nothing more than whether they encourage or discourage the claimed inevitable historical march towards communism.

² Habermas' theory of new social movements (NSMs) can be found in an article published in Telos (1981), itself derived from “*The Theory of Communicative Action: System and Lifeworld*.” (Boston, MA: Bacon Press, 1987).

primarily pursued political aims or economic rights, NSMs focus mainly on changing values and lifestyles or supporting civil society. Meanwhile, the third point of difference lies in the formal organization of the two types of movements, which involves the issue of hierarchy. Unlike NSMs, old social movements emerged from local networks and even formed at the grassroots level of the populace, often developing with no particular prior organization. The fourth dissimilarity between these movements relates to the means of action. Whereas older social movements fixate on political mobilization as the primary means of social action, NSMs prioritize cultural innovation and the individual's activities as means of social action (Scott,1990, pp.18-19).³ NSMs are considered innovative because they result from the emergence of a new social structure; in other words, they are considered “new” by virtue of the novel way in which they exemplify and represent social and political relations.

By examining the aforementioned approaches and attempts at defining a social movement, it can be stated that a social movement involves a self-conscious collective movement that seeks to create a new order in society, brings forward a new objective and desire for that new societal order, and undertakes an endeavor to achieve those aims. As mentioned previously, the women's movement has been acknowledged as a new social movement. However, given the cultural disparities among Muslim nations (including Iran) and the Western world, as well as the difference in levels of achievement between women active in the Iranian women's movement and Western feminists, the question arises as to whether or not the efforts of Iranian women towards social actions can legitimately be considered a social movement. Another question that demands close examination is the following: through what means have women struggled to overcome the pervasive political, historical, cultural, economic, and social paradoxes that constitute the patterns of patriarchal power? Moreover, assuming revolutions have been conscious and mass-oriented socio-political-and-economic strategies that seek to establish an alternative to patriarchy, inequality, subjugation, and exploitation, how have women approached the implementation of such agendas? ⁴

³ The NSMs tend to be predominantly the movements of the educated middle class, particularly “the new middle class,” and/or the most highly educated/privileged part of the generally lower-privileged groups (Scott,1990, p.137).

⁴ In this context, the term “revolutions,” referring to the social, political, and economic strategies pursued by conscious individuals within social movements to challenge and transform existing systems of patriarchy, inequality, foundation, and exploitation, does not refer to particular historical events or political uprisings. Instead, it engages conceptually in women’s reform efforts in terms of social activism and progressive change.

The Middle East has been host to several of the critical democratic revolutions of the early 20th century, including the revolution establishing the constitution of the Ottoman Empire in 1908 and the Iranian Constitutional Revolution (*Engheleb-e Mashruteh*) between 1905 and 1911. In addition, there has been a rich history of social movements in the Middle East, which involve peasants, women, students, workers, and, most recently, the environmental and LGBTQ+ movements.⁵ During various historical moments, each of these movements has been influenced and constituted by a wide array of often opposing political and ideological forces, spanning the anti-colonialist to nationalist, liberal to conservative, socialist and Communist. This has been accompanied by the constant presence of Islam, whose political and ideological formulations have exercised significant influence in such movements.

The commencement of women's entrance into the social sphere in Iran – that is, their engagement in activities outside the domestic environment –coincided with the Developments of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This was precisely the historical juncture when Middle Eastern nations sought to implement societal reforms following the Developments witnessed in the Western world. These Developments, in turn, set the stage for changes in the social, cultural, and economic status of women. In Iran, dramatic societal change became apparent with the advent

⁵ With the transformation of fundamental developments in Iranian society at the end of the 19th century, the prevailing Iranian sexuality led to a sort of domination of heterosexual discourse per such developments (Kiani,2022, p.94). In her book “Bibi Khanum Astarabadi's Vices of Men” (1992), Najmabadi investigates the concept of sexual desire and sexual preference in Iran until the end of the 19th century. She argues that during this time, the prevailing belief was based on heterosexual marriage, which served the purpose of procreation. In addition, in “Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity” (2005), Najmabadi discusses the concept of enforced heterosexuality concerning homosexual discourse in Iran. The 1979 revolution in Iran and the establishment of the Islamic Shiite government had profound and multifaceted consequences for the LGBTQ+ community in Iran. Ganji (2015) mentioned that translating “queer” into Farsi is a subject of discussion and reflection about the movement. However, the term's original Farsi translation, “degarbash,” appears to be an “invented word” combining “degar” with the meaning “different, hetero” and “bash” referring to “existence, being” in terms of “heterogeneity of desire or sexuality” (Ganji,2015, p.106). For Iranian Queer activists, the Global Queer Movement has offered a platform to engage with LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations worldwide, sharing experiences and struggles and gaining knowledge from each other's policies and strategies. The link between the queer movement and the feminist movement shares a common origin; the discrimination by the patriarchal system and the relations resulting from it in all dimensions: Social and State. While the Iranian queer community exhibits sexual and gender differences, in its confrontation with the patriarchal system and its totality, its commonalities with the Iranian women's community have sometimes given it a position of sameness vis-à-vis the government of the Islamic Republic. However, the discriminations faced by women and the queer community are not homogenous (Azimzadeh,2022). Even so, it is worth noting that due to their similarities, the Iranian queer movement has the capacity to collaborate with the Iranian women's movement in changing the system aiming to abolish discriminatory laws and opening the space for collaborative education. Moreover, as Ganji (2015) mentioned that “*A collective phantom, a term borrowed from an astronaut of the South London AAA (Karloff), is a name for [...] region of forces. Therefore, whoever affirms this collective power is in solidarity with this name, and “queer” is a name for a certain collective power, traversing different identities in the green movement, the women’s movement, the workers’ movement, and other minoritarian movements, forming a haunting phantom in the struggle against the constituted power in Iran*” (Ganji, 2015, p.113).

of the Constitutional Revolution (Bayat,1991). The revolution itself centered around a transition from an absolutist regime to a parliamentary monarchy but necessarily had consequences related to women's civil, political, and social rights and citizenship.⁶ During the Constitutional Revolution, for the first time, Iranians defined themselves as members of the state and sought to establish an independent and constitutional nation-state. In addition, constitutionalist women started secret women's associations and, subsequently, women's clubs in order to struggle for social and political rights. In particular, they strove to define their social and political identity in the constitutional movement by establishing the demand for women's citizenship (Keddie,1966; Abrahamian,1982; Bayat,1991). Demonstrating their ability to struggle against the prevalent absolutist form of government, such women did not correspond to the dominant societal perceptions of the time with regard to the role of women in society – i.e., passivity, docility in behavior, and dependency on men. Their abandonment of certain dominant expressions of femininity resulted in expressions of fragility of male identity, even among revolutionaries, and was associated with a crisis of masculinity, forms of domination, and the attempt to exercise control over women's activities, bodies, and sexuality. Therefore, revolutionary women were quickly disarmed by their male comrades, encouraged to support the movement but within conditions and limits such as abstaining from all physical intervention (Bayat,1978; Afary,1996). Sanasarian (1982) considers women's participation in the struggles of the constitutional era as a “sub-movement” that formed within the framework of the Constitutional Revolution with the primary objective of Iran's independence and the implementation of the constitution (Sanasarian,1982, p.41).

⁶With these words, women's participation in the Tobacco Revolt cannot be considered the beginning of the women's movement since this uprising never mentioned their demands and never intended to obtain more social rights by way of participation in these struggles. Instead, the incident can be considered as the inception of the women's movement in Iran during the Constitutional Revolution, as women consciously advocated their rights and engaged in actions such as the publication of periodicals and the establishment of women's centers. The Tobacco Protest (1891-1892) against the Tobacco Concession provided the first opportunity for the collective participation of women in a national movement against foreign interference in Iran. The participation of women ranged from Tehran to Shiraz, Tabriz, and several other cities (Lambton,1987; Bayat ,1991; Browne,1966; Keddie,1966 provide a good accounting for the Tobacco Revolt). Armed women in Tabriz also shuttered the city's local market [*Bazaar*]. In the book “Three Essays on the Constitutional Revolution of Iran,” it is noted, following the words of “Habl al-Matin” (a liberal, reformist, and patriotic magazine), that in one of the clashes between the revolutionaries and the government forces, there were twenty constitutionalist women dressed in men's clothing amongst the dead revolutionaries (Pavlovich & Iranski,1961, p.55). During this movement, even the harem women stopped smoking hookah and preparing it for the Shah. (The term “Shah” refers to a sovereign or king and has been widely used throughout history in the Iranian context and beyond). See Kasakovsky's “Memoirs of Colonel Kasakovsky.” Abasgholi Jali, Trans. (Simorgh, Tehran,1976): 32.

The majority of representatives in Parliament refused to approve the demand for political rights for women, considering such demands to be anti-Islamic. They eventually convinced the constitutional activists that women's equality could only be achieved through the struggle of women, and that education was to be the prerequisite for this (Sanasarian,1982, p.92; Shuster,2006, pp.234-340). Establishing women's organizations and centers represented the first step in organizing and mobilizing forces. This Development then led to the social movement's first and most crucial step, namely “collective action” (Afary,1996, pp.236-237). However, neither modernity nor the Constitutional Revolution could fulfill the demands of activists who sought social and political presence in this national family. Despite the disagreements, women's rights activists espoused a kind of nationalism based on the privileges of urban women from the wealthy classes, mostly Fars in ethnicity and Shi'ite. Naturally, this social affiliation influenced the organization, demands, and effectiveness of the women's movements in Iran. Moreover, although not negating identities based on biological differences, they fundamentally altered the political order based on such dual social identities.

In contemporary history, Iran has witnessed the construction of various normative models of masculinity based on female/male duality and derived from the mental framework of heterosexuality. The term “masculine identity” is defined as conquering the subject by itself. Only masculinity represents a form of action, the male identity obtained through arduous struggles against natural animosities, resistance, and masculinity in women, despite contradictory interests and rivalries between men (True, 2012, pp.38-39). As a social construct, masculinity has generated a particular concept of identity (and individual and collective rights) among males, which is primarily associated with power and independence. In contrast, women's social identity has been associated with fertility, submissiveness, and vulnerability, leading to their reliance on male support and government assistance.

The establishment of the Islamic Republic represented a reactionary response to the Iranian Revolution, which led to the disempowerment of the previously ruling monarchy (Green,1982). The ideological apparatus of the republic, whose missionaries (*clergy*) were marginalized during the constitutional movement and the modernization of society, emerged as the agreed-upon force for the Western capitalist world to reconstruct capital relations and intensify the class struggle (Bashiriye,1984; Arjomand,1988). The newly established regime, infused with traditional beliefs and a resentful disdain for those outside their circle, acted out their pent-up anger by seeking

revenge on various segments of society, including workers, women, the modern bourgeoisie, ethnic and religious groups, the modern middle class, advocates of freedom and socialism, and other strata and spectra (Farhi, 1988; Foran, 1994). While political and economic oppression in society affects both men and women, as far as lifestyle is concerned, women are subjected to an even more severe form of oppression by way of the governmental structure and dominant patriarchal culture. Women are discriminated against and subjected to degrading insults that are difficult for even empathizing men to comprehend.

Research on social movements in Iran has been classified into two groups; The first group focuses on the 1979 Islamic Revolution and examines resentments, political opportunities, and Shi'ite ideology. The second group analyzes post-revolutionary social movements, notably The Green Movement that emerged in 2009, and examines the role of both political opportunities and communication technologies in the emergence of these movements (Tofangsazi, 2020). This highlights the discrepancy between the prevalence and significance of social movements, on the one hand, and the extent to which scholarly research has examined these phenomena, on the other. To cite an obvious case in point, consider the lack of systematic academic research on individual or issue-based movements, such as the environmental-social movement in Iran.

The intertwined economic, political, environmental, and geopolitical crises in Iran, coupled with the government's corruption and inefficiency, have resulted in widespread poverty, inequality, and a sense of despair about the future. These problems are reflected in the Dey⁷ and Aban⁸ uprisings, which have exposed the numerous contradictions and inequalities within Iranian society and contributed to a shift in the political landscape.

During this time, protesters witnessed various forms of violence and repression, including “unjustified arrests, relentless victimization of activists and ethnic minorities, pervasive

⁷ The “Dey Protests” in Iran refer to a series of demonstrations in December 2017 and January 2018. Various economic grievances, including high unemployment, inflation, and corruption, sparked the protests. In addition, the demonstrators called for more significant economic opportunities and political freedoms and expressed frustration with Iran's foreign policy and involvement in regional conflicts. The protests were initially peaceful, but they turned violent in some areas, and the government responded with a heavy-handed crackdown that resulted in numerous arrests and casualties.

⁸ The “Bloody Aban” protests in Iran took place in November 2019. The protests were sparked by the government's decision to raise fuel prices by up to 200%, which led to widespread anger and frustration among Iranians already struggling with high inflation and economic hardship. The protests quickly turned violent, with reports of clashes between protesters and security forces and instances of property damage and arson. The government responded by imposing a widespread internet blackout and cracking down on the protesters, resulting in numerous arrests and casualties.

censorship, violent armed attacks, and devastating suicide bombings.”⁹ As a result of the protests, many filmmakers and photographers were arrested on charges of “assembly and collusion against national security” and “propaganda against the state.” Visual images of brutality are the basis for discourse and may have material consequences (Sontag, 2003).

With thousands of people sharing information about the socio-political struggles of the environmental crisis as *visual activism* (Demos, 2016) on social media in Iran, the demand for accountability is continually increasing and happening by way of shifts in testimonial processes. Papadopoulos, who concentrates on activists and image practices, notes that in recent years, people all around the world have increasingly recorded incidents of police violence and other human rights abuses with their smartphone cameras. Such photos and videos have then been reported and shared on digital social media platforms. These videos are of a different genre than the so-called citizen camera testimony (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2014). The current dominance of visual form has considerably changed the trend among witnesses, who have now started to refer to a new theoretical viewpoint (Hand, 2012). The audio-visual statements of witnesses, which functionally reshape the witnessing and testimonial processes with images and testimonies, are beginning to circulate under new circumstances.

Despite the ongoing societal challenges, many Iranians remain resilient and committed to working toward positive change. In this regard, the oppression of women may prove to be a uniting force for all oppressed and disowned segments of society, bringing them together as part of a broad political movement, as women's oppression encapsulates and serves as the focal center of all the oppressions inflicted on the downtrodden in Iran.

1.2 Definition of the Problem

Today, the world faces numerous challenges in nearly all domains of life, ranging from the social to the economic, the cultural to the political and the environmental. However, the

⁹ Consult Amnesty International's report on Iran's presidential election during civil unrest and ongoing human rights abuses (Amnesty International, 2009, June 5). The document can be found at <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2009/06/irane28099s-presidential-election-amid-unrest-and-ongoing-human-rights-violations-200/>

environmental crisis in the present era has reached such an unprecedented level that the threat it proposes to human survival can no longer be neglected. The emergence of environmental crisis in the contemporary age can be traced to social problems as well as the disproportionate and excessive impact of human society on nature. The imbalanced Development of cities and nation-states, the single-minded pursuit of material wealth by way of successive stages of industrialization under the banner of “progress”, increasing overpopulation, the view of property rights vis-à-vis nature, and the improper use of technology to conquer and dominate nature have collectively resulted in mass consumerism and social self-alienation of contemporary societies which may be described as disturbingly bipolar in their worldview and modus operandi. Such societies are predicated on the binary opposition between culture and nature and between mind and body while also suffering from dysfunctional constructs of hierarchical and patriarchal modes of domination (Ortner, 1974).

Sociologists have long ignored the environmental crisis or pretended that it could somehow be overcome with patience and minimal initiative. Even Marxist sociologists regarded environmental issues as mere distractions from the necessity of demanding class struggle, a stance similar to their interpretation of the role of religion. When the state of the environment was diagnosed as turbulent and acute, left-wing critics blamed power-class relations for the crisis rather than factors closely related to the environment itself. This approach has gradually changed since the 1970s (Hannigan, 2006, p.32). Soon thereafter, new environmental challenges emerged, which societies had to deal with, including answering the question, “Who caused the hole in the ozone layer?” This question was part of the larger political controversy between developed and economically developing countries in the 1980s, which can be formulated as follows: “Do populous countries like India, with high levels of waste, urban pollution, and incomplete industry, contribute more significantly to ozone depletion and global pollution and are they to be held accountable?” Although at first sight the answer might appear to be obvious, upon close examination, the issues turn out to be much more complex and a collective affair involving more than just developing countries. This can be observed in the fact that “the average American consumes about 30 times more resources than the average Indian and 100 times more than the average person in the world’s poorest countries” (Miller & Spoolman, 2016, p.16). The ozone layer and other environmental issues point to the ongoing political controversies and differences between countries, each one claiming to know more about the other's guilt than about its own. The

moralistic opportunism of nation-states may be seen in the post-WW II era, particularly after Britain and the United States discovered new petroleum deposits in their seas in the 1970s. Suddenly, both nations tightened their austerity measures with the enactment of new standard environmental laws! Environmental laws were seen to control petroleum in underdeveloped and newly independent countries, and threats to the ozone layer exacerbated these strict regulations.

It may be asserted that although the environmental laws of the world are to be for everyone, not everyone in the world benefits from them. For instance, consider how underdeveloped countries such as Iran, after a historical effort and with the aid of austerity and technical measures, are producing new products to gain a foothold in global consumer markets. Given the frenetic pace of technological progress and the establishment of new global standards for products that may compete in worldwide consumer markets, the technology of underdeveloped countries is often deemed woefully inadequate, falling short of global market standards and therefore under pressure to either follow the environmentally destructive path of more advanced industrial societies or suffer even more extreme economic hardship.¹⁰

In our era, one of the most imminent environmental threats is the emerging global conflict over water resources and how regulation and ownership of bodies of water will affect countries' borders and their access to water.¹¹ Conflict over water even dominates domestic affairs, as can be seen in the case of Iran. The drying up of Lake Urmia, for instance, is due to the limited local stance and negotiations of regional actors on the excessive utilization of water resources, as in the promise of deputies to construct a highway over the lake or to increase the number of dams on the

¹⁰ Global standard indices such as ISOs are changed every few years, and products from underdeveloped countries are banned from the world market. The production of sustainable goods or the slogan of sustainable Development do not equally serve the interests of all people in the world. Environmental laws have their beneficiaries, just as environmental degradation has its stakeholders.

¹¹ One example is the conflict between Iran, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan over constructing the Selma Dam in Afghanistan. Iran and Turkmenistan commissioned the Dosti Dam in 2005, whose water resources come from the Harirod River in Afghanistan. With the onset of Afghanistan's Development and modernization in the mid-1980s, the Selma Dam project began upstream near Herat. The Selma Dam is being built in Afghanistan with India's help and financial support as Afghanistan's most significant Development project. However, the construction of this dam means a substantial reduction in the amount of water on the border between Iran and Turkmenistan, plus a threat to water resources in Mashhad. India's support for the Selma Dam, while helping Afghanistan, poses a threat to Iran and its longtime rival Pakistan. The more Afghanistan goes down the Development path, the more extensively it will control its water resources. For instance, the construction of the Kajaki Dam at Helmand Dam in 1999 restricted the water resources of the Hamoon River; the result was that it dried up for 20 years. In this sense, Afghanistan's Development limits Iran's water resources in the east, and there is a concealed and open war between Iran and Afghanistan.

lake's water resources.¹² Despite the existence of international and national laws to relieve tensions and distribute natural resources equitably, the fragility of this legislation, coupled with the presence of powerful vested interests, hinders the effectiveness of such policies.¹³ Environmental issues on a national scale can be an obstacle to Development at the regional and local levels. However, the question arises as to which political actors – e.g., Members of Parliament or regional economic actors, including local investors – consider the preservation of the environment as more significant than short-term self-gain. All this demonstrates that care and protection of the environment and the path toward a sustainable way of life for human beings in society all involve a political dimension.

The single-minded obsession with maximizing utility, optimizing modes of industrial production to make them more and more efficient, and maximizing profit to gratify the desire for endless financial growth has taken a grave toll on the environment. The direction human societies have taken in the modern period in terms of industrial modes of production and, conflictual competition and opportunistic compromise so as to increase the “productivity” of the land and water for purposes of financial progress has involved and exerted large-scale suffering on the international, national, regional and local levels for human actors themselves while also exacerbating environmental degradation.¹⁴

Iran's current environmental crisis is a historical problem with various roots caused by the government's and the nation's weak performance in fulfilling their responsibility in protecting and preserving the environment. This crisis is unfolding in the wake of the experience of industrial Development and modernization In Iran over the last century. Still, there is a palpable emergence

¹² Moreover, a conflict continues between Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari (Province) as the source of *Zayandeh Rood River* (one of the major rivers of the central plateau of Iran) and Isfahan as a province, which is the primary beneficiary of *Zayandeh Rood* and *Yazd*, to which *Zayandeh Rood* flows. The consequence of such conflicts over intake and increased productivity of the *Zayandeh Rood* water has been the drying up of the *Gavkhoni wetland* (the rarest wetland in terms of geographical environment in addition to hydrological, biological, and ecological parameters) on the border between *Yazd* and *Isfahan*.

¹³ For instance, with the outbreak of the war in Iraq (1980-1988) and the failure of the central government to control the competition between the northern and southern parts of the country, there has been an increase in uncontrolled exploitation of the water resources of the northern parts of the country and the construction of major dams on rivers and digging of numerous wells. This resulted in a drought affecting the southern half of Iraq and, eventually, an increase in dust pollution (*aerosol*) levels affecting Iran.

¹⁴ Given the widespread perception in Iran that if Iran failed to exploit oil resources, then Qatar would be surpassed in exploiting the resources, or Iran's water resources would be consumed in Iraq, and Isfahan's Koohrang water resources (The river rising in the Zagros Mountains in western Iran) would be depleted in Yazd, which has resulted in the exploitation of the resources. Ultimately, the loser of this competition will be the environment.

of a renewed sense of environmental consciousness, which in part may be attributed to the broadening of communication with the West and globalization at large.

The environmental crisis in Iran can be considered from a historical perspective as having started at a particular point in the past, then going through decline and worsening continually until the current state of degradation and threat is reached. Since historical research deals with the roots, starting points, and the ways in which crises arise, it may be of significant use in helping to identify the underlying concerns, questions, and issues facing contemporary society. Improved comprehension of where the crises come from and how they have developed over time may offer important clues as to what steps can be taken to address current situations. Another benefit of the historical approach is the highlighting of the hazards of paths that have led to contemporary crises. Learning from the past can help prevent future generations from committing the same mistakes. Since relatively little attention has been paid to the history of the environment in Iran, finding relevant sources that deal with the historical issues involved in this field is rather challenging. In most of the literature on the environment and natural resources, apart from the repetitive content mentioned at the beginning of the discussions, nothing of deep significance can be found. Similarly, most studies on natural resources and the environment in Iran are related to environmental law or technical issues in this field, including protected areas, forests, pollution prevention and associated problems.¹⁵ This, in itself, is a telling and troubling sign, as it indicates that the environment is not being experienced and interpreted as a fundamental reality but merely as an instrumental component for human use. In part due to this mode of approach, the crisis has come to affect millions of Iranians' lives and livelihoods. It has become a political problem par excellence. The inter-connections between social and environmental problems are undeniable, and this means that changes in the way that one domain is approached will affect the other.

The exploitation of Iran's forests has been handled variously under successive rulers, influenced in part by religious beliefs and traditions. Before the advent of Islam, the Zoroastrian

¹⁵ In the field of Iranian environmental and natural resources history, there is a notable scarcity of literature. One significant work in this area is "History of Iran's Natural Resources Sciences" by Karim Javanshir (Academy of Sciences of Iran, Department of Agricultural Sciences, 1999). However, it is essential to note that Javanshir's focus is primarily technical rather than historical. Within the context of air pollution, Ali Mashhadi's "Rights of Air Pollution" (Tehran: Khorsandi, 2013) merits attention. It offers a comparative study of air pollution regulations in Iran and France. While primarily focused on contemporary issues, it briefly touches on the historical background of air pollution in Iran up to 1995 when the Prevention of Air Pollution law was enacted.

religion was predominant in Iran, and two factors were respected in this religion: the natural elements of water and fire. Therefore, it was expected that the private fireplaces and fire temples would be lit in most houses, and their fuel was supposed to be exclusively wood. This may seem to point to the pressing necessity for wood and thereby the need for protection of forests. Based on historical evidence, it can be concluded that there was no shortage of timber and forest during that time (Arastoo, 1995, p.198). According to Hakimian's view (1999), during the reign of the Sassanids, there were many forests on the Iranian plateau, and at that time, these forests were burned to grow fodder for livestock. Unfortunately, the depletion of forests in northern Iran due to felling livestock is still ongoing (Hakimian, 1999, p.93). Meanwhile, the Mongols, being shepherds and tent dwellers, also used large expanses of the forest to create pastureland. During the Safavid period, wood was used extensively to construct buildings. The subsequent Qajar period (1789-1925) is of particular importance in terms of studying the question of Iranian approaches to the environment, as it represents a significant period of time. During the Qajar era, the utilization of forest trees was offered by way of contractual concessions, initially to the British and then to the Russians in 1863 (Adamiyat & Natiq, 1977, p.288). The initial acquaintance of Iranians with modern military technology and the significant import of rifles and pistols occurring during the Russo-Iranian wars (1826-1828) can subsequently be interpreted as an embodiment of modernization and accession to modernity. This Development and the continuation of the traditional and deeply-rooted culture of hunting as an aristocratic pastime had obvious consequences for the ecosystem and wildlife of Iran. This is a historical period in which environmental issues were not yet a primary concern. Therefore, the powerholders' inconsiderate approach to the natural environment, the increased Development of hunting tools, weapons, and equipment compared to the previous periods, and the lack of specific legal measures of environmental protection all prepared the way for considerable environmental destruction in Iran during the Qajar period.¹⁶ Due to a lack of efficient management, pastures were utilized

¹⁶ Given the Qajar aristocracy and the environment that has driven it, primarily through hunting, only animal species were not threatened. One of the causes of the construction of mansions on the hunting grounds was the extension of hunting and making camps by the kings and entourages. Aside from the construction of manufactured structures, which generally are detrimental to nature, this would create a place for more patient hunting. Although part of the destruction of Iranian nature (e.g., the loss of several animal species) occurred during the Qajar period when Iran had no advanced industry or large population. It should be noted that the environmental crisis is rooted in numerous and diverse circumstances. Here are a few of the research works specifically addressing hunting during the Qajar period: Mohammad Hassan Khan [Etemad Al-Saltaneh]. "Al-ma-aser va Al-Asar" Vol.1, Coordinated by Iraj Afshar (Tehran: Asatir Publications, 1995); Abd Allah Mostofi. "My Biography or Social and Administrative History in Qajar Era"

indiscriminately during the Qajar rule. It should also be stated that there was no written law concerning the exploitation of fields in Iran before the Constitutional Revolution.¹⁷

Another significant factor contributing to the environment's degradation in Iran lies in the relationship between the absolute and quasi-modern essence of the Pahlavi regime (1925-1979) and the authoritarian modernization process in Iran before the Revolution of 1979. The construction of the Pahlavi government as an absolute and quasi-modern government was based on the formation and expansion of bureaucratic institutions, the consolidation of power in the hands of the Shah, the authority of the court, and the modern army (Poggi, 1978, pp.110-130). Therefore, if in the West the concept of the environment and its protection was raised by social movements and imposed on political systems, in Iran, the absolute structure of the Pahlavi state and the accumulation of power by the Shah stood as an obstacle to the emergence of social movements such as the environmental movement.

So, how does Iran fare in the contemporary context with regard to environmental care and protection? The amount of Waste disposed of in the forests of Iran exceeds three thousand tons a day, making Iran the “6th most environmentally destructive country in the world” (Gholizadeh, 2002). It is significant to note that according to Yale University's Environmental Performance Index (EPI), Iran lacks a fundamentally sound approach to addressing its environmental issues. The 2022 report measured forty indicators among 180 countries and ranked Iran 133rd with a score of 34.50.¹⁸ As for the destruction of the hub by the economic growth of recent years, developing countries, including Iran, consider that Development and advancement to represent an inalienable prerogative of all nations, asserting that environmental issues ought not to be appropriated and misused as policy tactics against countries that must necessarily exploit and utilize their natural resources to survive and remain economically competitive.¹⁹

(Tehran: Zavar Publications, 1992); “*Vaghaye Etefaghieh and Dowlat-e Ellie-ye Iran*” [News Paper]. No 1-4. (The Ismailic Republic of Iran National Library, 1857); Lady Mary (Leonora Woulfe) Sheil. “*Glimpses of life and manners in Persia: With Notes on Russia, Koords, Toorkomans, Nestorians, Khiva, and Persia.*” (London: John Murray, 1856).

¹⁷ The Qajar dynasty witnessed movements seeking to end the authoritarian system, leading to the Constitutional Revolution, which introduced a Parliament (*Majlis*) and a constitutional monarchy in Iran. The Constitutional Revolution represents significant societal, economic, and political achievements that helped foreign investors, the establishment of the press, and the expansion of relations between Iran and Western countries.

¹⁸ Refer to: <https://epi.yale.edu/epi-results/2022/component/epi>

¹⁹ In architecture, the notions of sustainability and sustainable Development have created a subject entitled “sustainable architecture,” which has received less attention in Iran regarding the human environment and environmental productivity. The major headings are “Ecotech Architecture,” “Architecture and Energy,” and “Green Architecture.” Sustainable architecture and design are among the major contemporary trends representing a logical response to the issues of the industrial age.

As mentioned above, the description of Iran's approach to environmental concerns and the factual assessment of its current performance all point to the formation of emerging discourses in the environmental movement and environmental studies. This involves, but is not limited to, the participation of individuals and collectives in various domains and affairs of society, including public participation with regard to environmental consciousness and protection. In societies like Iran that have experienced rule by a quasi-modern authoritarian government, turning an issue into meaningful public discourse is often far more difficult and costly than in democratic societies. Therefore, in pre-revolutionary Iran, novel and modern concepts such as "environmental protection" were promoted as modernist ideas in the society at large. Since the society essentially had not created practical room for public involvement, engagement with such ideas was limited to the upper echelons of the system and, as a rule, was proposed and implemented by the Shah.

Besides the factors mentioned earlier, it is essential to acknowledge that wars and military conflicts have also significantly contributed to environmental destruction. For instance, during World War I, which occurred from 1914 to 1918, Iran declared its neutrality, but the country was occupied by Russian, Ottoman, and British forces from 1916 (Majd, 2016). The occupation during World War I resulted in the destruction of nature, the plundering of resources, and the degradation of the environment. Additionally, the "Great Famine" of 1917-1919 exacerbated the situation, leading to further environmental challenges. Similarly, the occupation of Iran during World War II, which took place in September 1941, also had severe social and human consequences. Majd (2016), writing about the crisis of World War II in *Iran Under Allied Occupation in World War II: The Bridge to Victory & A Land of Famine*, notes that:

"After the occupation of the country, Great Britain and Russia commandeered nearly all of Iran's [vehicles and] railways, seized all the food [...], and brought in tens of thousands of Polish refugees from Russia. [This situation led to a significant crisis in terms of] food, [transportation, and] public health" (Majd, 2016, pp.1- 2).

As can be seen, despite the dominant coverage of Iran as a nation confronted with major socio-economic and political problems, it also faces an ecological crisis. Rather than highlighting only one set of challenges at the expense of another or separating them as if they have no bearing or influence on one another, it must be recognized that Iran's ecological crisis itself has been a

major contributing factor to economic poverty, ill health, social disruption, and political demonstrations. In addition, the country suffers from the direct environmental consequences of its homemade destruction of nature, which includes (but is not limited to) water scarcity, declining water levels in lakes and rivers, air pollution, sandstorms, desertification, lack of biodiversity, and diminishing forestland involving illegal deforestation of trees.

Among the catastrophic environmental incidents that have affected Iran in the course of its recent history are the experiences of the Iran-Iraq War (1980 to 1988), the spilling of millions of barrels of oil in the Persian Gulf, and the deployment of chemical weapons. In addition, various human activities have affected the environment in the Middle East region. Among the activities that have threatened the marine environment the most are the following: 1.) physical alterations of the environment due to mineral and engineering activities on the shores, 2.) contamination through industrial effluents, oil extraction, human and agricultural sewage, waste disposal, and 3.) overfishing by commercial fishing vessels and improper fishing methods (Ranjbar Heydari & Jamshidi, 2016).

Since the early 1990s, the aforementioned process has accelerated, and the policies adopted (despite all imposed sanctions) have led to significant environmental challenges. Considering the statistics of the World Bank and various sectors of Iranian industry, increasing trade liberalization in the industrial sector has resulted in the deterioration of the quality of Iran's environment. This means that most of the economic activities of various industrial sectors are damaging the environment through the extraction of raw materials, the utilization of renewable resources, or the production of Waste and pollution. Moreover, it indicates Iran's relative advantage in producing so-called “dirty industries” (Asghari, 2013). In addition to the pollution of the soil caused by various factors, such as hard and non-degradable or degradable Waste, municipal and sewage waste, industrial Waste, and household waste, there are growing concerns about the role and priorities of the Iranian government. The government primarily focuses on material consumption rather than promoting environmental consciousness and protection. This approach has led to the depletion of significant non-renewable resources, jeopardizing the country's sustainability, particularly considering its rapidly growing population. Based on this, Iran has used up a significant part of its non-renewable resources, destroying the elixir of life to sustain the country's exploding population. Leaving the fate of the natural environment in Iran to the hands of the Department of Environment and subordinating it to the executive branch of government implies

that the latter can readily violate environmental guidelines in their affairs (Gholizadeh, 2002).²⁰ Given the dire state of the environment in Iran and the fact that it deserves immediate attention and prudent action, there is even more reason for the executive branch of government ought to be monitored; for failure to provide proper care and protection of the environment will lead to further degradation of the natural environment, and this will exacerbate a host of other ongoing socio-political and economic difficulties.

This raises the question of why concern and care for the natural environment has suffered so much neglect in contemporary Iranian history. Investigating the question of power – both in terms of the role of power structures and power struggles – in societal modes of formation and action will be of particular help in this regard. When modern Iranian society is considered from a historical perspective as constituted of historical processes involving complex mechanisms – themselves composed of Iranian forms of technocracy, ideological modes of governance, the various events and contingencies of the last few decades, and ongoing socio-political and economic forms of corruption etc. – it may become clearer as to how structural formations of power and their interplay have resulted in care for the environment being relegated to a minor and seemingly inconsequential issue in various domains of Iranian life and thought.

Let us examine power relations more closely to gain a clearer sense of how they shape the contemporary societal experience of Iranians and their relationship with the environment. Lukes offers a theory about power, categorizing it into three modes of relation between A and B. In the first mode, A forces B into doing something that B would not do if not compelled by A. The second mode involves A excluding an issue from the agenda using various mechanisms, rendering it unconsidered by B or other members of society. This absence of apparent coercion leads to the issue's disappearance from consideration. As identified through Foucault's perspective, the third mode of power reveals that power is pervasive and comes from everywhere, configuring B as A's subject (Dahl, 1957, pp.205-207; Foucault, 1978, p. 93).

In the context of Iran's environment, a group of politicians and media have effectively employed the second form of power, eliminating the issue of the environment from the agenda and marginalizing it in society. Moreover, they have managed to present the destruction of the environment in a manner that a significant portion of Iranians, from ordinary people to experts and

²⁰ The part of the government has the exclusive authorization and accountability for the daily administrative management of the state.

politicians, perceive such actions to align with their interests and the nation's interests at large, reflecting the influence of the third form of power. This pervasive structural dynamic of power challenges specific questioning of power relations without acknowledging them as part of a wider web of power dynamics. The question arises as to whether these individuals and institutions have indeed applied the second and third forms of power, and if so, with what mechanisms and under which conditions? One of the mechanisms that individuals and groups in Iran have tended to employ is the creating of various “dipoles” or dichotomies. These dipoles have effectively eliminated the issue of the environment from the political agenda of Iran. One such dipole, to which most politicians and Iranian society at large is beholden, is that of “Development” and “environment” (Tofangsaz,2020). In contemporary political and social parlance in Iran, it is stated that Development is the first priority, with the environment following closely. By manipulating people's minds and excluding other potential options, a conflict between Development and the environment has been created, and an ideology has been developed with no factual grounding.

Leaving governments aside, the need to engage in environmental discourse and activism plays a significant part in improving environmental awareness and protecting the environment. Under Article 50 of the Iranian Constitution, the conservation of the environment is established and mandated.²¹ With Iran's post-revolutionary society transforming, environmental activism has had a rising influence on the environment itself as well as the political, cultural, and educational spheres. In general, however, this Development represents an advanced political movement in contemporary Iranian society as it is intended to play an essential role in extending safety and welfare beyond maintaining the political order to include environmental security (Afrasiabi, 2003).

In the age of globalization, awareness of the shared biological realm matters more than ever. And yet, awareness of global co-existence poses countless challenges and involves multiple political rivalries between regional, national, and local actors. For instance, the emergence and spread of the COVID-19 virus have highlighted the complexities, including the opportunities and threats, of living in a more interconnected, interdependent world. It is a world in which pathogens are not limited to a country's regional or national borders, as previously known. Ecological issues do not operate according to geo-political borders and thereby have the potential to level the playing

²¹ The text of the Constitution is available online at <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ir/ir001en>

field and bring people together regardless of their beliefs, cultures, ethnicity, and/or socioeconomic status.

Returning to the issue of environmental care and activism in contemporary Iran, it may be observed that while the question of the environment was in many respects “immune” to authoritarian regulation and intervention by political authorities, this appears to be shifting. The combination of a rise in general public environmental consciousness and the mounting frustration with the government with respect to its failure to address severe environmental problems has led to increased environmental activism in Iran. This phenomenon has persuaded some that environmental activism poses a danger to national security (Madani, 2019), and this perceived danger has in turn threatened environmental activists and their activism. For instance, following the Dey Demonstrations in 2017/2018 and due to the efforts of Iranian environmental activists, there was a surge of arrests across the country (Fathollah-Nejad, 2020). Such Developments highlight the fact that the Islamic Republic of Iran is, on the one hand, faced with an extreme “existential triple crisis” on the socio-economic, political, and ecological fronts (Ibid, 2020, pp.1-5); on the other hand, activists who are bringing to the fore the need to address these crises, including and especially the environmental crisis, are themselves being seen as existential threats by certain parts of the government and Iranian society. Thus, The Dey Protest movement has come to be boycotted by some who have labelled the movement as nothing but “undemanded gatherings.”²² However, a closer examination of the underlying causes and concerns of the environmental movement reveals that the recent protests are primarily due to the lack of consideration given to the environmental demands of the local citizenry over the past few years.

The perceived threat that movements related to sustainability and environmental conservation pose has often led to reduced coverage compared to more highly politicized and violent movements. This lack of attention, in turn, has contributed to a lack of awareness about their presence and Development in society at large. The declaration of Kaveh Madani (2019) highlights the challenges that environmental activists face and is an illustration of environmental

²² In February 2018, the plane crash, and the death of a group of environmental activists who had traveled to Tehran to talk to Parliament members and follow up on the situation of detained activists undoubtedly contributed to the dissatisfaction of large sections of the Iranian people. They poured into the streets by combining fragmented, self-organized activities, Individuals, and groups to demonstrate. In this regard, Media activism shows overlapping parallels with street protests. Cell phone pictures and video recordings that emerged from these protests turned out to be the most comprehensive coverage of the protests as a “space of recognition” (Butler, 2004) and the social movement resulting from environmental activities. In this recent movement, both separately and collaboratively, people produced photos and videos, and the images were centered on a synthesis type of production (Jenkins & Form,2005).

activism being considered a threat to national security. In addition, the detention of nine environmental experts from the Persian Wildlife Heritage Foundation (PWHF) at the beginning of 2018 on charges of suspicion of espionage indicates a shift in the perception of environmental activism—from being viewed as a politically innocuous activity to being considered a potential threat to national security.²³

Such Developments are deeply troubling since the very people who could be part of the solution to the severe economic and environmental challenges Iran faces are the ones that authorities are throwing into prison. One key activist died in jail shortly after his arrest in an alleged suicide.²⁴ According to the families of those detained and human rights groups, the remaining activists are currently on trial, several facing charges that could carry the death penalty. However, as of now, the government has not announced any further investigation of activist allegations.

As the environmental crisis rages on, the violent politicization of the issue also seems to be spreading like wildfire. And all of this despite the fact that the ecological crisis clearly defies reduction merely to political or ideological adherences. Indeed, the environment encompasses a global ecosystem in all localities, regions, and nation-states. However, following a closed-door trial launched at the beginning of 2019, a contentious disagreement has emerged between the Iranian civilian Intelligence Ministry and the IRGC concerning the arrested environmental activists. While the intelligence ministry claims that the activists are foreign operatives, its counterpart, the IRGC, accuses them of being part of an espionage network conspiring against Iran.

²³ This case revolves around the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) accusing environmental protection specialists in Iran of using their activities to gather sensitive data for spying on foreign operations. Such allegations could lead to severe consequences for environmental activists and conservationists in the country, potentially resulting in state persecution and criminalization of their efforts. Kaveh Madani, an Iranian environmentalist and former government Deputy Minister, testified about the criminalization of environmental defenders in Iran and the situation of detained environmental activists who were charged with espionage. The lack of clarity regarding the accusations creates confusion among activists, NGOs, and the public, hindering their ability to take effective action for the environment (Madani, 2019). Several environmental activists, including Niloufar Bayani, Sepideh Kashani, Homan Jokar, Amirhossein Khaleghi, Taher Qadirian, and Sam Rajabi, were temporarily released after five years of imprisonment on the eve of Nowruz. However, after the brief release, their return to Evin Prison highlights the challenges faced by environmental activists in Iran, where environmental issues have been politicized, criminalized, or securitized. The case underscores the complex interplay between state authorities, environmental protection specialists, and environmental activists, with severe implications for preserving Iran's natural resources and protecting environmental defenders' rights.

²⁴ Kavous Seyed-Emami, an Iranian Canadian academic and conservationist, the founder of the PWHF, was reported dead on February 8, 2018, inside his cell just two weeks after his imprisonment. The authorities claimed that the death was a suicide, while the family denied the allegation.

The emerging environmental movement in Iran, however, cannot be understood in its fullness without careful exploration of the role of the media and how it shapes and mediates individual and public perception and action. Mass media in Iran does not operate according to open critical discourse or as a means of preserving checks and balances in governance. Instead, it implements a state-determined agenda that is achieved through the manipulation of news through the selective suppression and exposure of information, which naturally involves extreme forms of information censorship (Lotfalian, 2013). The majority of the witness accounts by activists provides an in-depth, textured testament to the lasting effects of censorship on environmental activities and the boundaries to which these activists are pushed, forcing them to leave their lives in Iran.

In this regard, trust in mass media has severely declined in Iran in recent decades. Social media has been establishing itself as a powerful public medium and forum for information exchange and discourse (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009), a public venue where witness accounts and perspectives about social developments as well as suppressed information such as the detainment and imprisonment of environmental activists are shared, documented and discussed, albeit on condition of anonymity because of fear of government reprisals.²⁵ At the same time, human rights organizations have expressed concern about the situation of imprisoned environmental activists in Iran. The Iranian Human Rights Campaign's "petition for conservationist accused of spying sentenced in Iran" called on world figures and artists to support them.²⁶ The street images produced as protest art in Iran in 2018 could also provide a tool for visually representing images of the oppressed, approximate with the performative gathering of bodies for witnessing in the public space (Fathollah-Nejad, 2020). The images on the walls appear to be displayed in public spaces, while the individual bodies depicted in photos are murdered or imprisoned in jails. Concerning this issue, it is worth turning to *Notes Toward a Performing Theory of Assembly*, by Judith Butler (2015), who contends that public protests only pursue justice through participation because

“One implication seems clear: [The assembled] bodies [convey the message that] we are not disposable.” [In essence, their message] is “we are still here,

²⁵ Refer to Azam Bahrami. (2017). “Environmental Activists Under the Wheel of the Development Machine.” Radio Zamaneh. Retrieved from <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/384089/> (Last accessed on June 19, 2022).

²⁶ The Petition is available on www.petitionsite.com.

persisting, demanding greater justice, a release from precarity, a possibility of a [sustainable] life” (Butler, 2015, p. 25).

The images on the walls of Tehran and other Iranian cities bear witness to the unequal circumstances being protested every day by different groups around the country. The aim of prisoner portraits or political messages is to compel all to memorize them as a cultural memory. Thus, Bal (2002;2017) suggests that memory can have a performative nature. The performativity of these images, argues Bal, lies in their ability to establish a connection with culturally rooted concepts, either confirming or challenging the relation with subsequent images (Bal, 2002, p.177). Memory takes on an essential role, serving as a “stage operator” and a driving force. In this fusion of performance and performativity, memory emerges as a pivotal element, the origin of all practices, and the factor enabling the activity to foster social interaction (Butler, 2011, pp. 84-85). In this regard, images play an essential part in the performativity of memory and bearing witness as a social event. Some images, serving as symbols against forgetting the oppressed and the dead, have become iconic, while many others convey explicit political messages; Yet, all of them were creatively arranged by the creators to prompt objection to political action. In this context, the work of McAfee (2005) also proves significant since it can offer insight into the role of art when brutal governments continuously ignore the voices and rights of citizens. She considers narrative as an action and not merely a form of production. Still, the distinction between these two activities may remain somewhat obscure here, mainly because the form of narrative that concerns her is the one that memorializes and persists, so it must be recorded: an artifact formed into a story (McAfee ,2005, pp.112-113). Therefore, narratives and testimony in public spaces are crucial for dealing with the atrocities a government has committed in a community.

Witnessing is the intervening dimension between experience and action, and regardless of its individual, communal, spiritual, or legal dimensions, it may be considered a communicative activity. Its occurrence concerns oneself and others, entangled in the performance of both profound personal and community needs (Felman & Laub,1992). In the realm of contemporary feminist identities, the act of witnessing or engaging with narratives that highlight specific issues assumes a crucial role for two fundamental reasons. Initially, witnessing allows recognition and commendation of the valor demonstrated by others, serving as an impetus to foster personal courage in analogous or diverse circumstances (Dunn & Manning, 2018). Secondly, aware

environmentalist feminism, or ecofeminism, is a political project aiming at revising the relationship between men and nature and their relationship with women.

At present, most political and philosophical studies mention the two streams of “feminism” and “environmentalism,” and the discussion of the relationship between ecology and feminism in sociology is possible within the framework of ecofeminism. The term *ecofeminism*, a combination of “eco-” and “feminism,” provides a sufficient understanding of its basis. This project expands on the issues raised by ecofeminism through a review of the literature on critical subjects such as culture, society, gender, borders, and environment by writers such as Carolyn Merchant (1980, 1990, 1992), Val Plumwood (1986, 1992, 1993), Donna Haraway (1989, 2016), Rosemary Radford Ruether (1975, 1983, 1992, 2005), Greta Gaard (1993, 2011), Karen J. Warren (1987, 1988, 1990, 1994, 1997), Susan Griffin (1978, 1989), Jane Wildy (2011) and Ariel Salleh (1984, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2016). Ecofeminism involves a merger of the women's liberation and environmental protection movements. The two movements are firmly committed to opposing the world's anthropocentric vision and behavior. However, the pacifistic and nature-oriented behavior of the women's movements in the 1970s with respect to the environmental crises and the emergence of the green movement contributed significantly to the Development and spread of ecofeminism, and in the 1980s, ecofeminist groups actively entered the societal arena to advocate the enhancement of women's living conditions and address environmental threats and hazards. Ecofeminism has several aspects and is widespread in a number of geographical locations, however, it is most academically influential and socially active in the United States, Canada, Northwest Europe, Australia, and India (Lorentzen & Eaton, 2002). The political position of ecofeminists has varied widely depending on the particular time and place of its existence (Sturgeon, 1997).

Françoise d'Eaubonne first proposed the concept of ecofeminism in her 1974 book *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. This concept was later extended by other feminist scholars, including Ruether (1957), Griffin (1978), and Merchant (1980). These were aimed at linking the male domination of nature to the necessity of ecofeminism as a way of addressing it. Ecofeminism adopts an interdisciplinary approach drawn primarily from various environmental, feminist, and sociological strands, both theoretical and activist.

In the wake of increasing environmental degradation, ecofeminists have emphasized the intimate connection between women and nature. Ecofeminists argue that patriarchal oppression

under the guise of profit and progress destroys nature (Warren, 1987). Environmentalist feminism or ecofeminism is a political project aimed at revising the relationship between men and nature and their relationship with women. Its point of departure also emphasizes the inverse relationship between men's domination and oppression of nature and women's proximity to nature (Barry, 1999). However, so long as the relationship between men and women in society remains unequal, and women, as the emblem of nature and its protectors, stay in a vulnerable condition, humankind will be inherently domineering and destructive, and ultimately the efforts of humans to protect the environment will not succeed.

The patriarchal gender relations in society are connected with the destructive confrontation of male-centered approaches to the environment; the same thought and behavior patterns that devalue, suppress, and utilize females are applied in the confrontation with the natural world. Ecofeminists extend this analysis to the status of other groups experiencing oppression in society and consider the oppression of people of color, for instance, or those who are members of the lower strata of society or minorities, to be similar. Hence, freedom in society and refraining from abusing nature are interconnected.

From a feminist analytical perspective, women's positions fundamentally differ from men's. This difference can be noted in three ways: sociobiological conditions, the institutional status of socialization, and the socio-psychological status. From a methodological perspective, ecofeminism posits that no single type of oppression or form of inferiority takes priority over others, a principle it holds to be true in all societies. This theoretical approach, by addressing subordinate and superordinate variables such as race, gender, class, and nature, distinguishes itself from other feminist approaches by rejecting the precedence of any specific variable (None of the four variables is prioritized). Indeed, ecofeminism critiques the prevailing mainstream body of feminist thought that considers the oppression and subjugation of women to be the most fundamental and strategic form of oppression and the earliest and most historically significant instance of subordination in all social spheres (Plumwood, 1993). In this regard, ecofeminism is concerned with domains as varied as politics, philosophy, theology, social issues, and ecology.

Most ecofeminist theorists emphasize three main issues: the connection between nature and women, the correlation between women's domination and nature, and the role of women in addressing ecological questions (Henshall, 2007). This mindset does not intend to challenge individuals but to question the structures that, over centuries, have assumed the form of gender in

society. In the context of Iran, the question arises as to whether ecofeminism has been effective in bringing about structural changes in recent decades and through what modes of social activity and engagement. A society where social spaces are designed solely by men-centric paradigms and the social and behavioral events are based on masculine patterns does not provide a suitable platform for the social interactions of individuals in society, especially women (Barry, 1999). Ecofeminism has given a more general nature to feminist theory to eliminate patriarchal discrimination. It has shifted the women's movements for gender-related causes, expanded to other areas, especially ecology, and gathered people (whether women or men) under a single approach (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

The ecofeminists' argument contends that patriarchal oppression under the rubric of profit and progress devastates the natural world. In response, ecofeminism emphasizes altering humans' behavior and dealings with nature, making the movement a subset of ecologism. The underlying background of ecofeminism relies on the traditional mindset according to which intimate natural ties exist between women and nature that are proximate to the innate characteristics of women, i.e., reproduction, feeding, and nurturing. From a feminist perspective, the relationship between women and nature goes all the way back to the era of matriarchal societies, a link that is valuable for women appearing in the guise of environmentalists even in the age of technology, in which most destruction and debilitation of environmental rights are formed.

Nevertheless, is ecofeminism uniform, or are there different ecofeminisms? Relying on the opinions of one of the ecofeminism theorists, Plumwood (1992) asserts that there are two main branches of ecofeminism: cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism. In his view, these two branches differ in their attitude towards the relationship between the concept of woman and nature. Cultural ecofeminism considers nature to be a feminist-related concept. Social ecofeminism, meanwhile, gives the relationship between women and nature a historical aspect; it considers the subordinate roots of women and nature before men to lie in ancient Greek philosophy, where people were classified according to color, race, and gender. This classifies an ideological nature that is then institutionalized in the structure of social networks and interpersonal relationships (Gaard, 1993). According to this attitude, most of the findings and research based on an analysis of concepts such as human and ecosystem relationships, the role of women in nature, the role of men in nature, and the role of patriarchal approaches are considered to represent cases in the simultaneous oppression of women and nature.

The emergence of ecofeminism in Iran aims to implement environmental protection and challenge the inefficiencies of political institutions. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the new social movement theory, which predominantly relies on the European context, constrains the comprehension of social movements in non-European societies, like Iran, which possess distinctive social and historical contexts. For instance, the environmental movement in Iran has always been civic, while feminism has focused on equality. Unfortunately, civic movements are still disconnected from feminism, hindering the connection between the two. Nevertheless, a feminist movement is essential in this context (Shiva, 1988, pp.viii-x). Those who seek to overthrow domination will naturally connect with ecofeminism if they are feminists. Similarly, environmentalists must join the feminist movement to make their efforts more radical (Merchant, 1980; Gaard 1993). The key to achieving success in both movements is through connecting and collaborating.

Environmental protection movements have emerged as a global social phenomenon, albeit with indirect connections to each other. However, in Iran, where environmental movements are active, they have been less effective in protecting the environment due to a deficient political structure resulting from a lack of opportunity to participate in governance and policy formation. This sets Iranian environmental movements apart from similar yet more successful ones in developed countries. Nevertheless, in recent years, environmental issues and the factors affecting them have received widespread attention. Policymakers and researchers have been placed in positions of relative power and influence. As a result, many studies have emerged in this field. Each of these studies has examined the role of several factors, including economic growth, energy consumption, and population. Nevertheless, what needs to be more researched is the essential and sensitive role of environmentalists and social movements in the form of NGOs.

Environmental movements in Iran have included active individuals, volunteers, and environmental NGOs that have adopted organizational forms and mechanisms and various social strata and yet have remained separate from each other like islands or an *inconsistent multiplicity*. This term represents one of the main constitutive elements of Badiou's ontology and is a name for pure existence here: there are no units before the count (Badiou, 2005, pp.28-29). In this case, this is a pure plurality that does not reach any singular entity, neither from below nor from above. The adjective *inconsistent* implies precisely this multiplicity.

During the 1900s and 2000s, environmental activities and movements in Iran experienced major ups and downs. As a result, many NGOs were unable to sustain activities. They collapsed due to internal and external structural challenges. Now, a significant number of these movements remain active based on the prevailing circumstances. As environmental organizations have become more specialized in their activities and focus, they have experienced fewer external structural issues. However, they continue to face several major challenges, including a lack of democratic discourse both within and outside the organizations. Additionally, vertical structures of authority and domination can often result in problems such as lobbying, management conflicts, and a lack of rotation of elites, among others. These issues can impact the effectiveness and sustainability of these organizations in protecting the environment (Shateri et al., 2021). Besides the internal challenges environmental organizations face, external factors such as an overbearing government and its pervasive influence in all aspects of life, as well as the government's focus on security concerns, have also hindered the efforts of environmental activists. These factors can limit the ability of environmental organizations to operate effectively and discourage individuals from engaging in activism due to concerns about government surveillance and repression.

1.2.1 Tracing the Relevance of Ecofeminism to Environmental Art

Research on politics and art is meant to be instructional in constructing social circles. People are responsible for developing their narratives and handling their own social and political environments (Heble, 2000). Works of art help us focus on historical, scientific, technical, religious, and eventually political testimony (Blocker, 2009). Iranian feminism's influence, by virtue of its long history, culture, and religious and theological authority, could play a significant role in defining Iranian artists as agents of change.

Art, storytelling, and other cultural activities can trigger engagement with environmental controversies. Women artists in Iran, committed to influencing social structure, have utilized their artistic expression as a medium to invite change. However, the patriarchal systems also affect visual artists by constraining and shaping artistic practices. Mahmoud Maktabi (2016), an environmental artist, asserts that Iranian artists are joining global efforts to address environmental issues, including the draining of lakes, the extinction of local wildlife, urban pollution, and the lack of sustainable Development. Such issues are due to the government's neglect, over-

exploitation of natural resources, and disruption of ecosystems. For artists, such concerns are significant issues that often intersect with cultural, social, and political perspectives.

Aside from the rise of the feminist artists, the feminist movement in art contributed to the emergence of innumerable artists who used art to examine the concept of gender and genderism, providing art as a tool to uncover gendered aspects in society that have been concealed and occasionally flipped upside down throughout history. One such example is nature, which symbolically and ecologically features a feminine gender and has not been spared from the racial and gender discrimination that is prevalent in a global society. In contemporary art, nature has become an environmental subject for artists. However, nature has been considered in different ways throughout history. In the history of thought, nature is seen to begin with encountering human beings, giving them things, and teaching them. The human being also completes the deficiencies of nature, makes tools and equipment. In the Middle Ages, nature symbolized God and the soul. During the Enlightenment, humans sought ways to overcome the limitations and resistances of nature, aiming to extend their knowledge and mastery over it in all its breadth. The inner nature of human beings, the regulation of subjective nature, and the mastery of objective nature are all concerns of the Enlightenment (Cassirer, 1951). For the Romantic philosophers, meanwhile, nature was the embodiment of the soul (Schütze, 1918, p.281). In Romanticism, moreover, wild nature stands for the beasts in human beings or the uncontrollable forces of nature (González Almodóvar, 2014).

In the epochs that followed, and with scientific progress, nature was forced to reveal all its secrets to humanity through scientific methods. Therefore, the instrumental values of nature were at times taken into consideration. Nature became an instrument of exploitation in the hands of rationality. Unfortunately, however, such utilization has led and continues to lead to unexpected destruction.

It is worth turning our attention to the history of art since artists have dealt with nature in various ways. At times, they have imitated it, adopting data from nature in order to improve technical aspects of the art process, creating subjects from nature, and collaborating with nature. At other times, they have distanced themselves from it, while at yet other points in history, they have fixed nature into a particular configuration.

The framing of nature as landscape was the source of numerous works of art, ranging from ancient Greece (Alcock, 1996; Hawes, 2017; Unkel, 2018) to the Renaissance, from murals to

numerous paintings of varying purposes (Panofsky, 1939; Clark, 1949; Mitchell, 1994). During the Enlightenment era, nature was regarded as a reality, and the rational mind was also deemed competent to perceive nature as a part of knowledge. Applying the scientific method to human nature led to discovering the principles essential to nature's existence. In a broad sense, nature encompasses the individual's objective reality and spiritual life (Adorno, 1997). The artists of the period competed with nature without attempting to emulate it. They considered nature's ultimate perfection to lie beyond nature, not within nature itself.

In response to the global issues raised by complications of modernity and the excessive Development of technology, environmental art can focus on contemporary concerns such as environment, culture, and human society and propose solutions to them from its landscape (Smith, 1996). Environmental art has a complete continuity with its environs, and according to its formal and semantic place, it interacts with the audience, artwork, and atmosphere (Potteiger and Purinton, 1995). In the early 1970s, environmental art emerged as a new trend that sought to create a new connection between the artist, the audience, and the environment. The inspiration for these artists was the early societies and the close cultural harmony of these societies with the natural environment surrounding them. One of the goals of this art is to protect values, prevent the destruction of nature, highlight it as a highly significant factor in human life, and redefine the human-nature relation. However, nowadays, such art has gained a broader perspective so that these artists depict nature, human actions, and human interactions with nature. Apart from biological and ecological interactions, these interactions can also refer to cultural, economic, and even political ones.

Environmental art is rarely presented in the abstract for two reasons, namely due to its connectivity with individuals and its intimate connection with the environment. With regard to connectivity with individuals, it can be asserted that “identity” in the environment is manifested when there is a natural and logical connection between the individual and the environment. There will be no connection and sense of belonging between the person and the environment unless the person can know and recognize the environment accurately, is aware of its distinctions from other environments, and knows when and how to respond appropriately to the actions of that environment (Alexander, 1979). Environmental art has a direct and intimate relationship with the environment and individuals, to such an extent that some works even require the participation of

an observer in the creation of artwork. Therefore, human understanding of environmental artworks is an integral part of this art.

With regard to the intimate connection of environmental art with the environment itself, it must be noted that such stands above all for a return to nature; *not* to the rural and idealized nature of the last century, but for an expanded vision of the environment and an awareness of the role that economic, psychological, cultural, and biological forces play in individuals' lives. In this regard, it can be said that environmental art has an undeniable connection with the natural aspect and the meanings and preliminary concepts proposed by humans on nature.

As a form of intimate connection with the environment and human beings, environmental art has four primary goals that adequately enable those relations to unfold. They are as follows:

1.) The relationship of humans to nature

The goals of environmental artists and their understanding of the natural environment are to re-imagine the relationship between humans and nature. Environmental art also offers a new perspective on our relationship with nature and provides novel solutions to coexistence with the environment. This art seeks to approach nature as a space for the cultivation of sensory perceptions, an area in which man finds his relationship with the environment and responds to its natural needs.

The emphasis of the environmental artists is not on separation from nature or imitation of it but on creating a unity between nature and human beings through their artwork. Environmental art fills the gap between man and nature by making changes in the creation of the artwork and its presentation, which includes the importance of creating the artwork and its place. The audience, whether directly or indirectly related to it, should be considered a goal in creating environmental art. Therefore, such artistic exchange allows for a comprehensive consideration of social relations.

2.) Environmental information

Environmental art is a form of art that interprets and informs about nature and its processes, seeking to promote environmental awareness and stewardship. It can take various forms, from installations and sculptures to performances and interactive experiences.

3.) Imitation of nature

Environmental art deals with natural materials and forces, so the artworks created in this field are sometimes influenced by natural forces such as wind, rain, lightning, and earthquakes. Environmental art reflects a different approach to art and nature. Whereas nature used to be considered only a beautiful piece of work in painting or photography, nature itself is now the very basis for creating a work of art. In this regard, Malcolm Andrews exclaims, "Landscape in painting and photography, when it comes to creating art and recreating nature, we are dealing with two things, firstly the earth (as the source of inspiration and principle) and secondly the artwork." As an artistic representation, environmental art facilitates differentiation between two key components: firstly, a distinct and enigmatic quality inherent in the original (i.e., the Earth), and secondly, a disparate significance attributed to the artifact (the work of art). This differentiation ultimately gives rise to a dynamic interplay or 'dialectic' between these elements (Andrews, 2006, p.265).

4.) Environmental conservation

Environmental art is at times reflected in the restoration and regeneration of damaged environments. Reconstruction and restoration of deteriorated ecosystems can take place through artistic and aesthetic methods, and the reason for the growth of this trend, the expansion of friendship with the earth and the preservation of the environment, is constitutive of certain modes of environmental art. Since humans, society, and nature are inseparable components of environmental art, environmental artists naturally pursue their goals on the basis of those indicators when creating works of art.

Placing the audience against the change in their familiar landscape, environmental artists have always tried to increase their concern about the surroundings and establish different meanings in their relationship with the landscape (Kagan, 2011). Visual witness clarifies the artist's work from an aesthetic, historical, and political viewpoint. Along with social, political, and philosophical concerns, environmental issues are the main factors that expanded the concept of landscape and developed environmental art. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, the need to turn public attention to this category has significantly increased (Kastner & Wallis, 1998). The artist's effort is to portray the ways of preserving the environment by drawing people's attention to the work of art (Wildy, 2011). The consequential upheavals and trends in

environmental aesthetics have overlapped and included other sciences associated with a more profound perception of the environment through artists and audiences.

In addition, aesthetics have transformed in response to increasing public and political concerns over environmental degradation. This change began in the late 1960s when environmental aesthetics emerged as a distinct branch. Despite the damage that human beings have done to the environment by way of instrumental rationality, they have also demonstrated that environmental science, aesthetics, and art can interact and propose appropriate ways to prevent further harm.

Considered an art that affects the environment, environmental art encompasses various issues. However, the critical and the protest approaches feature most prominently in many artworks compared to other dimensions. The artists of the 60s and 70s, in particular, devoted the essential aspect of art to more significant consideration, displaying the exterior art spaces to protest against Minimal Art and the authorities of galleries and exhibitions. Instead, such artists' artwork consisted of creating and exhibiting artwork in a broad environmental context. Following political and social obstruction of the freedom of expression for artists over the years, such art has shifted towards the natural environment and, more particularly, the preservation and protection of the environment. The works of environmental artists have frequently consisted of collective projects involving collaborative approaches. The artworks dealing with the environmental state and condition of subjects, including the natural environment, have become the center of social discourse. Artwork performed on natural sites opposes the notion of immortality and permanence exuded in museums by gradually being absorbed into the environment and decaying like the elements of nature itself.

The distance of art from galleries and museums in the 1960s became an act of criticism among artists. In the framework of the galleries, works of art were reduced to objects obtained via the mechanism of the art market. In this regard, objects that were dominated by the heavy silence of the galleries and museums had become a mute commodity. By leaving the galleries and the controlled spaces of the museums, the artists attempted to reconnect art and the environment. Modern art, which had distanced its focus from social issues by emphasizing abstractionism, now renewed the challenge to artists to adopt a social stance in the form of contemporary art. Contemporary art is primarily concerned with the relationship between art and the environment surrounding it, leading artists to become activists who address social questions and life experiences through performing arts and works of art.

At this point, it should be noted that each society creates its artistic structures following the experience of life or its living world, which have passed through spiritual and objective paths and have been transformed into creative activity. Thus, the comprehension of art presupposes the awareness of culture. In fact, art represents one of the means of conveying the image of a culture in time and space (Morphy & Perkins, 2006, pp.293-299).

Returning to environmental art, Rosi Lister (2003) describes three related strands of such art in her *Visual Culture and Nature*:

1. Art that witnesses and interacts with the natural environment,
2. Art that regains or develops physical environments in the real sense,
3. Art that combines with the pedagogical or activist aim in the social context.

Given the aforementioned observations about art in general and environmental art in particular, in this study, works of art by Iranian artists will be examined with regard to the effects of placement and witnessing on the production of art. More specifically, contemporary Iranian artists' environmental art will be explored in depth. The present work also seeks to make a significant contribution to the fundamental research question at hand in that it presents and examines the contribution made to the knowledge of artistic practices by women who have devoted their work to environmental issues, social concerns, and feminist-related challenges.

It can be asserted that contemporary artists in the domain of environmental art shape their works of art in various ways based on diverse trends. This is based on the range of meanings attributed to nature, including land, site, landscape, belonging to the cognition, human nature, nature as formative of the cultural construction of artifacts, and the environment. Thus, in the 80s (*šamsi*) [equivalent to the year 2000], as new art forms spread in Iran that were generally distinct from “postmodernist” and conceptual art in the West, an informal form of art emerged in Iran, commonly referred to as “environmental art.” Moreover, the approach deals with the inner layers (including cultural, social, and even political interactions) in terms of the environment and its surroundings. As such, the approach can be called the Discourse of Protest in Environmental Art of the last decade in Iran.

Environmental art emerged in Iran with a distinctly ecological attitude. However, with time, particularly from the 80s (*šamsi*), the artists, due to various political, cultural, and social factors, sought art to express the issues and concerns they were dealing with when society inclined more

toward environmental art. Behind the ambient feature of this art, artists have created works to express social, cultural, and political issues and concerns, giving more expression to its critical and protest aspects. In seeking to express themselves freely, one of their objectives has been to choose environmental art as an art form that can incorporate all aspects of the environment, enabling the expression of their goals to society and individuals in a more unrestricted way. While environmental art has been known in the West and Europe for nearly half a century, it has only received serious consideration in Iran in the last decade. It must be noted, however, that myriad forms of this art are spread throughout Iran. So far, more than forty environmental art festivals have taken place in different parts of Iran, with a significant number of artists participating in them.

Iranian environmental art is well-known in the art circles beyond Iran itself. More than thirty international artists have participated in Iranian environmental art festivals, and Iranian artists have recognized how they and their work can have worldwide influence. There are also numerous artists who have been working in painting or sculpture for many years. They have either participated in the festivals or are pursuing environmental art independently. Identifying the reasons for the specific attention artists pay to various environmental causes in Iran will be essential for this research.

While considering the general trend in the study of environmental art in Iran in recent years, which mainly includes aesthetic, historical, and cognitive analyses, this study attempts to provide a novel view of these works of art. The current perspective focuses on and offers an analysis of the protest discourse of Iranian women in this artistic movement. The necessity of this research can be described in the following manner: considering the social activity of the Iranian environmental artistic movement and its concomitant protest discourse, the reasons for Iranian artists' attention to environmental art demands careful investigation, especially over the last decade. This, in turn, requires a thorough examination of artwork in terms of conditions and goals. This study also offers a close analysis of Iranian environmental art, allowing the audience of these works to consider such artwork from a novel perspective that sheds light on the core purposes that give rise to environmental artists' works of art.

1.2.2 Artivism: The Intersection of Art and Activism for Social Change

Witnessing, as a form of *documentary* or *documentation*, is a term with a history that many individuals have employed in various ways. The artists' works do bear witness in the images and words of those works, thereby creating acts of witnessing. These studies focused on numerous kinds of witnessing: becoming a witness to oneself, a witness to others' testimony, and a witness to the act of witnessing itself (Chute, 2016). Visual and visuality, image, and imaging technology have influenced testimony theories (Schankweiler et al., 2019, p.3). Blocker (2009) addresses the part or role of the witness and the concepts of witnessing by reminding us that witnessing is not merely reducible to the viewpoint of what witnesses see and how they are influenced by what they see but about the *how* of seeing, the tools we use to look with, and the types of power that constitute the gaze and which are, in turn, enabled by that way of looking. Frosh (2006) redefines "bearing witness," stating that it occurs through textual representation rather than direct observation. He highlights the significance of the witnessing text, especially in today's visual-centric context, suggesting that images play a crucial role in expressing and capturing experiences (Frosh, 2006, p.274).

When activism tends to be mentioned, one primarily considers a political context since historically, the terms "activist" and "activism" have frequently been applied to a political context, referring to labor demonstrations and protests. However, the wave of NSMs in the 1960s in America established a new conception of activism as a democratic alternative to civil or reformist protest. The categories of movements typically examined by NSMs researchers include civil rights, environmental concerns, women's liberation, and cultural shifts often driven by activism (Pichardo 1997).²⁷

Visual activism effectively relies on a visual means to promote social change, heighten awareness of political/societal issues, or question the underlying concerns. What is referred to as artistic activism constitutes a response of the art realm towards the ideal of independence in modern art, which provides an isolated image of the autonomous artist and isolates art from political, social, religious, and moral aspirations. However, art becomes considered a cultural, political, and social experience again, creating a new artistic narrative. According to Lippard

²⁷ See also Ron Eyerman. "Social Movements and Social Theory." (Sociology, 18(1),1984): 71–82, and Christopher Rootes. "Theory of Social Movements: Theory for Social Movements?" (Philosophy and Social Action, 16(4),1990): 5–17.

(1984), a distinction is supposed to be maintained between “passive and active politics” and between “lip service and activism.” Here, she equates activism with the desire to transform, a valid assertion that needs further elaboration (Lippard, 1984, pp. 236-237). The relation between art and struggle alters based on the historical conjuncture, locality, and subject matter. Still, the model of what artists are struggling to create remains ambiguous (Ibid, p. 323). In the words of Barbara Kruger,

“All art contains a politic, as [politics are inherent in every conversation, and power is exchanged constantly – this phenomenon occurs every minute], we are responsible for the meaning which we create” (Kruger quoted in Kamimura, 1978, p. 40).

Various expressions have emerged to name the intersection between activism and art, the newest term being *artivism* rather than *activist art*. According to Asante (2008), the *artist* [artist + activist] “fight and struggle against injustice and oppression by any medium necessary [including] pen, the lens, the brush, the voice, the body, and the imagination” (Asante, 2008, p. 206). In considering *artivism*, Zoë Charlton and Tim Doud (2021) emphasize that effective artivism requires a link to social awareness. Artists wield boundless creative potential, often with political undertones. Outside influences like media, education, and capitalism vie to control creative realms. Amid this tumult, artists find empowerment. Citizen artists take this further, engaging with others to transform discussions and reshape societal realms. Conversely, activism without creativity may lack depth and relevance. The emerging movement of “cultural democracy” aims to raise collective awareness (Harding, 2015); however, its long-term consequences remain uncertain as it develops and organizes activities.

What is currently occurring in Iran can be described as the turning of new art toward *social art*. The concept of social art includes several synonyms, of which almost all stress the conjunction and reconnection of art and the environment. Suzi Gablik (1992), for instance, has suggested the term *connective aesthetics* for the type of aesthetics based on participation and connected actions – for instance, a kind of purposeful art that is not passive towards environmental responsibility (Gablik, 1992, p. 84). Bourriaud (2002), meanwhile, has proposed the term *relational aesthetics*. He regards artists not as creators but as mediators. Thereby, an artist affords access to power and

acts to transform the world. In Bourriaud's view, art provides a means of cultural production with a critical approach to society in order to improve it.

Kester (2004) applies the term “*dialogical art*” and considers it a paradigm shift from static and individualized experiences based on object effects to dynamic, group- and process-related experiences based on collective project art (Kester, 2004, p.12). Kester's view is based on Habermas' concept of *dialogical aesthetics* and considers the formation of an artist's identity as being constituted by being open, listening, and depending on intersubjective relations with observers or contributors.

Following Habermas's approach (1989) to discursive interaction, two critical distinctions emerge between the dialogic and the conventional approach to the aesthetic experience. Firstly, the universality of dialogic aesthetics enhances the production of a local, tentative consensus rooted precisely in the sphere of collective interaction rather than yielding or demanding a universal judgmental standard. Secondly, the distinction drawn between a dialogic and a conventional model regarding aesthetics effectively means that the relationship between identity and the discursive experience becomes crucial (Kester, 2004, pp. 110-113). Habermas considers authors, intellectuals, and artists as the origin and the source of the evolution of the public sphere. Hence, artists can highlight and emphasize environmental issues through their artwork, and, more significantly, art can increase public awareness about global environmental concerns. This itself is an implication that follows from Habermas' (1989) contention that the public sphere is the space between civil society and government, so that whatever occurs inside this space involves critical dialogue.

1.3 Research Method, Questions and Objective

The recognition of the role of temporality in social change is widespread in the new social sciences, particularly in studies and research on contemporary Iran. In mainstream reviews and analyses, however, time is often viewed as an abstract concept for understanding the influence of social structures and actors, with scant regard for its effects on social transformation. The recognition of temporality as a significant factor in social transformation rests on two assumptions: 1.) social transformations are influenced by a complex interplay of structural contexts, human

actions, and random events, and 2.) occurrences similar to social structures and actions provide both opportunities and constraints for social transformations, influence the dynamics and effectiveness of actions, and shape the course of transformation.²⁸ In the context of this project, the temporality of social transformations refers to the arrangements and rhythms of various social events and transformations within an interrelated process.

Accordingly, this project sketches the evolution of the research methodology, beginning with an overview of the various research methodologies and the case study selection. It then proceeds to formulate a hypothesis and draw viable conclusions in order to achieve the research's objectives. Therefore, the research methodology chapter outlines the multi-method approach for obtaining insight into artists' works of art by considering the patriarchal governance prevalent in Iran. The research methodology employed is an interdisciplinary one. When it comes to the epistemological dimension of quantitative, qualitative, and integrated or mixed methodology, the quantitative approach emphasizes positivism and focuses on the external aspects of reality. In the qualitative approach, emphasis is placed on structuralism, subjectivism, and interpretivism. However, in integrated or mixed methodology, the dimensions of external opposition, demonstrability, and the qualitative and subjective aspects of reality are emphasized. By utilizing an integrated or mixed methodology that combines both qualitative and quantitative methods, this project aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its subject matter. In addition, the research will discuss the methodological approaches used in this type of study in order to demonstrate its position within the discipline. Data analysis is the process of combining data, which is information obtained from various sources, to provide a continuous description of the researcher's observations and findings. The conclusion of the study is presented as a descriptive text derived from the analysis of the data using an interpretive method. The primary data collection method for this research combines library research with numerous field studies, thereby providing an in-depth analysis of environmental art by Iranian artists.

The theoretical aspect of this research involves a literature review that examines relevant historical, theoretical, and political events that have significantly impacted Iranian environmental art. This review includes sources in both English and Farsi. Additionally, the research offers an

²⁸ For further details on this issue, refer to Piotr Sztompka. *"Society in Action: The Theory of Social Becomings."* (Cambridge: Polity Press and Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1991) and Charles Tilly, *"Sociology, Meet History"* (University of Michigan, 1979).

extensive exploration of concepts related to identity and multiculturalism, focusing on Iranian women's identities and their unique positioning in the artistic sphere. In contrast to Western professional artists who mainly publish their art in catalogs or books, artists in Iran often present their artwork in virtual spaces. Due to the relative scarcity of published material on Iranian environmental art, the researcher had to visit Iran to collect first-hand data by conducting interviews with artists in the field of environmental art and by using viewing tools as well as textual and visual data and documents. Additionally, it was necessary to collect visual data, such as exhibition catalogs, photographs, and other sources, all of which allowed for the analysis conducted in the research.

The conceptual framework of this project is based on two variables: the dependent variable, which is environmental art, and the independent variable, which is protest discourse. The societal circumstances and the discourse that governs a society influence the creation of artworks within the framework of the prevailing discourse. The artist's objectives may differ in their expression, but ultimately, they are influenced by the dominant discourse. Discourse encompasses terms and concepts that are part of the language structure. The principles underlying discourse analysis go beyond the analysis of text, script, or language alone. Instead, discourse involves a set of statements that embody a broader concept. In discourse analysis, the researcher examines the entirety of social conditions, the context of the text or script, language, non-verbal communication, and the relationship between words and structure in the totality of the predicate. However, discourse is not static and unchanging, and its associations and meanings may vary and be expressed differently in different times and places. Therefore, the structure of language is always subject to change. From this perspective, discourse can be viewed as an explanation of language that goes beyond individual phrases, words, and expressions and can be observed through signs, verbal actions, and all interpersonal interactions. In terms of the structure of this project, considering the above discussion, the methodological framework is divided to bear witness through ecofeminism. This study unpacks the witness to atrocity and develops a theoretical framework for analyzing testimony through culture in experiencing events defined as unrepresentable and unclear. Furthermore, this study highlights the importance of focusing on the visual. Therefore, discussing the relationship between ecology and feminism in sociology is possible within ecofeminism. In this regard, the method of witnessing and witnessing events, the significance of hearing and seeing in this process, and the integrity of testimony are thoroughly

analysed. In this way, representations of witness events in art by environmental activists are discussed.

Moreover, this project addresses the environmental art of women against the hegemony of masculinity by way of a theoretical approach based on the description of the concepts and definitions of ecofeminism in the Iranian community. It answers a number of central questions by establishing a logical link between three key areas: gender, the impact of culture on the formation of this witnessing, and its representation in environmental art, all of which are considered in line with the efforts geared toward environmental protection.

The following represent the key research questions that this study seeks to explore:

- A) How do Iranian women treat testimony as created by culture/society?
- B) How has the idea of witnessing informed the understanding of the crisis in environmental art, and how has the protest discourse found an objective and aesthetic expression in Iranian environmental art over the past decade?
- C) How do Iranian women artists address the intersection between environmental, and political issues, and social concerns in their works of art? More specifically, how do they express their views on Iran's male-hegemonic power structure and environmental conditions?
- D) How can documenting environmental art and environmental activism contribute to bearing witness to the environmental crisis? In what ways can art that engages with environmental issues shed light on the role and representation of femininity in contemporary Iranian society?
- E) Can landscape come to be gendered, and if so, how? And how can the artist gender their creations of the landscape?

In order to address these questions, the research will draw upon findings and analyses related to concepts such as the human-environment relationship, women's role in nature, men's role in nature, and the impact of patriarchal approaches. Such works indicate that a simultaneous oppression of women and nature has been occurring. Additionally, the research will examine the impact of placement and witnessing on the production of art, particularly focusing on the environmental art created by contemporary Iranian artists. The artworks themselves will serve as answers to the research questions, contributing to the understanding of women's artistic practices that address

environmental issues, social concerns, and feminist challenges in their work. The objectives of the study can be stated as follows:

- A) To contribute to the existing literature on women's movements in Iran. Although the literature on the history of Iranian women's movements, dating back to the 20th century, is extensive, it lacks a comprehensive analysis of the various periods within its extensive journey. This research will provide valuable insights into the changes and continuity of women's roles and perspectives in Iran's history by analysing and comparing different periods.
- B) To determine and examine the witnessing of Iranian women artists working in Iran and explore the relationship between their practice and environmental activism.
- C) To demonstrate and identify how environmental art can be used as a means of witnessing in order to promote ecofeminism by influencing the existing political and social discourse, specifically the social struggle faced by Iranian women against the use of approaches offered by ecofeminism studies.
- D) To examine the process of modernity by focusing on redefining the role of women in Iranian society and reviewing the role of the West in modern Iranian art with a focus on intercultural communication as the research groundwork.
- E) To outline and define the significant cultural and political influences that shape works of art, particularly the representation of Iranian society, and to classify works of art in terms of environmental, ritual, personal, and socio-critical issues.
- F) To explore environmental art's attention to marginal and resistant societal discourses that confront dominant discourses, including environment, gender, race, ethnicity, etc.

In order to limit the scope of this study, this work considers how the aforementioned objectives are negotiated in environmental art by Iranian artists on the basis of *three distinct criteria*. These three criteria indeed serve as the basis for the selection of the works that are examined in this thesis. They are as follows:

1.) Artists are addressing environmental issues.

In contrast to arts whose works abstain from engagement in activism, this category includes artists who are actively involved in social, cultural, and political movements that often result in

the creation of works of art that bring the environmental crisis to the audience's attention. They create inconspicuous artworks that cause scant or no damage to the environment, using their work to engage in dialogue with and inform the public, seeking to restore or enhance degraded environments. However, many of these works have a potent environmental narrative with an absence of aesthetic value. For this category of artwork, the boundary between the social movement and art becomes blurred. This group can be described as a witness or informer.

2.) Artists are addressing aesthetic concepts.

This second category pertains to artists whose aesthetics plays the primary role in their artwork. Using natural elements, such artists create a work of art that is often ephemeral, missing a clear and ecologically-based subject. In this category of artwork, the artist uses visual knowledge to create a work with visual value and ontological concepts, which are considered to be hidden layers. The message may be put in the secondary layers, or there may be no such concerns at all so that the performance of the work of art is purely behavioural.

3.) Artists who are making arts nowadays

The third group of artists can be characterized as individuals who not only pursue socio-cultural objectives but also utilize visual art knowledge adeptly and adhere to aesthetic criteria in their artworks. Several such artists are able to achieve an impressive level of inventiveness, artistic creativity, evocation, and compelling messaging, comparable to the explicit approach often witnessed in advertising. However, their works maintain a balance between creativity and artistic expression to remain relevant and contemporary.

The present study is intended to achieve its objectives in five chapters. The structure of the study adheres to the traditional format, including an introduction to the research background, a discussion of the methodological approaches used to conduct the research, and a literature review and discussion. Following an outline of the context of the women's movement in Iran, the study will focus on a specific aspect of artistic representation: the environmental art of Iranian women. The objective is to investigate how Iranian women artists address the power structure in Iran through their art, particularly in relation to environmental issues. These means will be shown to be influenced by the socio-political circumstances in Iran.

Chapter one of the dissertation incorporates issue-framing and explores the challenges confronting Iran's human and natural environment. Identifying the key issues and contextualizing them within the research field lays the foundation for the study. The chapter also provides a literature review that traces the relevance of ecofeminism to environmental art and highlights the intersection of art and activism for social change. It furthermore outlines the research methodology adopted in the study, with a detailed outline of the approach and framing of the questions and objectives of the research. Last but not least, the chapter provides an overview of the research structure and outlines the organization and sequence of subsequent chapters.

In order to study feminism in Iran through a historical-sociological approach, the second chapter highlights the Development of the women's movement and the formation of feminism in Iran as a response to various factors. It starts by analyzing the feminist movement through the lens of social movement theory and by exploring the passive subjectivity of women in the Middle East. The distinct stages of the movement have been characterized by alterations in demands, policies, tactics, potency, and achievements. Significant moments include the organizing of the earliest semi-clandestine women's associations in Iran by women activists, a step which had a decisive impact on opposition to various practices such as polygamy, domestic violence, and denial of the right to education to women.

The second part of chapter two focuses on the first Pahlavi era (from the 1920s to the 1940s), a period of significant transformation in Iran. During this period, the country transformed from a traditional monarchy to a modern nation-state, initiating various social, political, and economic reforms. One of the notable Developments during this period included the increase in literacy rates and women's educational opportunities, which allowed more women to access academia. However, the controversies of this period, particularly the state's policy decision to mandate the unveiling of women and enforce Western dress codes for both men and women encountered resistance and sparked debates over the role of tradition and modernity in Iranian society.

The third section of chapter two examines the second era of the Pahlavi dynasty, itself comprised of two periods. The first section focuses on the era known as the era of nationalization (the 1940s -1950s), which featured increasing participation of women in both public and political activities within nationalist and socialist organizations. During this period, several reform projects and discussions about the role and status of women emerged and became part of the broader body

of the public debate. The second phase of this period, known as the era of modernization, took place in the 1960s and 1970s. This period was characterized by the rapid urbanization of society, which enhanced the visibility of women.

Next, the fourth phase of this period is discussed, covering the years from 1979 to 1997. This turbulent and revolutionary phase of Iranian history features the considerable mobilization of both men and women in the course of the Islamist revolution and the era of Islamization. However, it was also dominated by the enforcement of discriminatory laws and policies, in addition to the imposition of the hijab and gender segregation. Moreover, this period featured violence, political oppression, and deteriorating socioeconomic circumstances.

This next section of chapter two discusses the period after Islamic reform, which extends from 1997 to the present. During this time, Iran experiences greater openness to socio-politics, the emergence of civil society organizations, a vigorous and comparatively independent press, including a more feminist press, and sporadic improvements in economic conditions. Despite such notable breakthroughs, it must be noted that they have often been short-lived.

The final section of chapter two addresses the mobilization structures and resources in the post-revolutionary era. The era of reformism, the Ahmadinejad cabinet, the Rouhani administration, and the Raisi government are discussed in detail, with a specific focus on their particular views and policies with regard to gender. The chapter also emphasizes two effective movements, the One Million Signatures Campaign, and the Green Movement, which significantly changed the women's movement. Furthermore, the chapter includes an examination of the recent uprising in Iran, highlighting the aspiration for life as an uprising against a destructive civilization and the significance of "*Jin, Jiyan, Azadi*." The chapter concludes by discussing the nature of resistance to domination and marginalization from the social sphere and highlights the significance of gender equality and empowerment in Iranian society.

The third chapter of the dissertation focuses on ecofeminism and its various dimensions, highlighting patriarchal culture as a critical perspective. In addition, this chapter discusses how ecofeminism challenges the dualistic thinking that separates humans from nature, emphasizing that humans need to be considered as part of nature instead of being superior to nature. In addition, throughout this chapter, critiques of essentialism within ecofeminism are discussed, which questions the notion that women have innate characteristics connecting to nature more closely than men. Specifically, the chapter will argue that this thinking can constrain and reinforce gender

stereotypes. In addition, this chapter addresses the question of anthropocentrism in Islamic environmental thought; Challenging anthropocentrism in Islamic environmental thought is an essential aspect of the Iranian environmental movement, and this is where Islamic ecofeminism comes in. It has offered a framework for understanding how environmental degradation affects women and marginalized groups and has called for a more inclusive and equitable approach to environmental policy. In exploring the relationship between humans and their environment, this section examines the significance of nature according to Islamic scholars and Western philosophers. It also examines how aesthetics, including art and literature, influence perceptions of nature. Finally, the relationship between humans and nature throughout the course of history is discussed, stressing the necessity of moving beyond an anthropocentric view and adopting a more holistic perspective.

Chapter four analyzes the literature on environmental art to provide a background for its recent manifestations and the purposes of its practitioners as it relates to the power structure in Iran. The chapter begins by providing an overview of environmental art's various definitions and subcategories, followed by an analysis of changes in the movement over time based on books, catalogs, academic articles, and social network sites (SNS) belonging to environmental arts organizations. Additionally, the chronology of the emergence of modern art in Iran will be explored, including the emergence of environmental art in Iran. This will explain the historical context in which environmental art has emerged and developed in Iran. The aim is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the literature on environmental art, which is relevant to the analysis of the artwork created by Iranian women in the context of the power structure in Iran.

Following the research structure, the fifth chapter of the dissertation offers the conclusion of the entire work. The chapter represents the culmination of the study and provides a comprehensive synthesis and reflection on the research findings, analyses, and interpretations. In addition, it provides a summary of the major arguments and pieces of evidence presented throughout the dissertation. It ultimately leads to a set of closing statements and findings.

2. Women's Movement in Iran: A historical Background

2.1 Power in Numbers: The Feminist Movement Through the Lens of Social Movement Theory

The majority of creativity in anthropology arises from the tension between two requirements: the explanation of general human affairs and the description of specific cultural issues. Hence, the question of “woman” becomes one of the most challenging issues to address. The subordinate status of women in society constitutes one of the actual issues of public concern and a common underlying fact across all cultures. Nevertheless, in this general reality, the particular cultural perceptions and *iconizations*²⁹ of women are conflicting and even contradictory (Moore, 1988).³⁰ It is a fact that the attitudes, representations, and institutional frameworks concerning women vary significantly across cultures, and the observable manifestations of women's agency, authority, and impact among the populace may embody culturally conflicting ideologies. Nevertheless, on a broader analytical level, the root cause of women's subordination in a given society's cultural assessment can be discerned in the cultural beliefs, symbolic systems, and social structures constraining women's participation or access to specific domains.³¹

As Ahmed (1982) states, the feminist movements in the Middle East have emerged as a response to colonialism and Western influence but have also been shaped by local cultural and political contexts. Her work points to the complexities of defining feminism in the Middle East,

²⁹ In this context, “iconization” refers to the way in which women are represented as symbols, ideals, or cultural icons in a particular cultural context. It implies that women may be portrayed in ways that emphasize specific cultural values, norms, or stereotypes associated with femininity, which can vary and conflict across different societies or cultural settings.

³⁰ As Moore notes, feminist anthropology must be committed to social change and to recognizing the interdependence of theory and practice. Stressing how crucial it is to understand the specificity of gender relations in particular cultures and historical periods and that feminist anthropology needs to address questions of power and inequality, as well as pay attention to the connections between gender, race, class, and sexuality. For more see Henrietta L. Moore. “Feminism and Anthropology.” (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988).

³¹ See Mansoureh Zarrabi-Kashani. “Women's struggles, feminist anthropology, and the Islamic Republic of Iran.” (Critique of Anthropology 24, No. 4, 2004): 475–495. Kashani argues that women in Iran face complex and multi-layered challenges as they negotiate their identities and roles in a patriarchal society heavily influenced by Islamic ideology. She emphasizes the importance of understanding the historical and cultural context in which these struggles take place and the importance of feminist anthropology to draw on the experiences and perspectives of women themselves.

given the region's diverse histories, cultures, and political systems, while highlighting how the region's broader political and social movements have impacted feminist movements.

What does this imply with regard to Iran? The status and rights of women in present-day Iran, along with the Development of the feminist movement and the movement of Iranian women, are intricate and contradictory, resulting from various factors such as patriarchal and patrimonial patterns, state policies and ideology, and intellectual trends encompassing nationalism, socialism, Islamism, and liberalism (Bayat, 2007, pp. 167-168). In recent years, additional factors have contributed to this paradoxical condition in Iran. These factors include the process of globalization, transnational feminist activism, human rights discourses, and the use of communications and mass media. The growth of globalization has resulted in a two-way interaction between local-national factors and global-international factors, which has been described as *glocal* by some scholars (Tohidi, 2016, p.12). This has further complicated the status of women in Iran and the feminist movement, as they have been exposed to global feminist discourses and movements that challenge traditional patriarchal values and practices in Iran. At the same time, the Iranian government has tried to counter these global influences by emphasizing the country's unique cultural and religious values and promoting a nationalist discourse that rejects Western feminist ideologies (Afshari, 1999; Moghadam, 2003; Zandian, 2018). This tension between global and local forces has made the status of women and the feminist movement in Iran even more complex and challenging to navigate.

The global-national and transnational dynamics of the past four decades have caused a significant wave of Iranian emigrants to settle mainly in Western European countries and North America. This migration has resulted in millions of self-imposed or forced exiles who have left Iran for various reasons, including political persecution, economic hardship, and social and cultural restrictions. This wave of emigration has included many Iranian women who have contributed to the evolution of Iranian diaspora communities and the transnational feminist movements. They have actively promoted Iranian women's rights and challenged the patriarchal norms and practices in their homeland. Their migration experiences and adaptation to new cultural and social contexts have also shaped their identity and political consciousness, creating a new generation of Iranian feminists with a transnational perspective (Chahroudi, 2011; Tohidi, 2012). The feminist activities of Iranian immigrants represent one of the principal aspects of “transnational connections,”

reciprocal communication, and the “global-local process of socio-cultural” transformations in contemporary Iran (Tohidi, 2016).

The Iranian diaspora has played a significant role in promoting gender equality and women's rights in Iran through transnational feminist networks and collaborations with local feminist organizations (Chahroudi, 2011, pp. 4-9). Iranian immigrant women have shared their experiences of suffering discrimination and oppression in Iran and have worked to challenge the patriarchal values and practices that limit women's participation in social, political, and economic life. They have also used their transnational connections and communication to raise awareness of human rights abuses and to advocate for political change in Iran.³² Feminist activities of Iranian emigrants play a significant role in facilitating transnational connections and reciprocal communication between Iran and other countries. These activities also contribute to the ongoing socio-cultural transformations in Iran, which are shaped by global and local influences (Tohidi, 2005, pp. 111-119).

Before delving into the study of this process, it is essential to ask whether it is possible to provide a comprehensive definition of the multifaceted concept of *social movement*. It should be noted at the outset, however, that the diversity of definitions in the literature makes it challenging to provide a clear and definitive response to this question. The social movement is one of the most contradictory concepts in the social sciences (Tarrow, 1998). Applying this concept to third-world countries, such as Iran, brings about numerous contradictions, especially given the limited right to protest and the lack of an established framework for it. As a result, widespread protests in these countries tend to occur abruptly and explosively, taking the form of insurrections, rebellions, sudden uprisings, or even revolutions. Despite their various forms, it may be asserted that social movements are typically characterized as collective actions driven by a group of people seeking social, political, or cultural change.

Unlike bureaucratic behavior, which is typically characterized by rigid rules and procedures, social movements tend to be less structured and more spontaneous, with individuals

³² See Reza Afshari, “*Human rights in Iran: The abuse of cultural relativism*.” (University of Pennsylvania, 2009). He comprehensively analyzes human rights abuses in contemporary Iran, including issues related to women's rights and gender equality. Afshari argues that the Iranian government's use of cultural relativism to justify human rights violations, particularly those affecting women and minorities, is a significant obstacle to promoting greater rights and freedoms in Iran by discussing the role of transnational feminist movements in raising awareness of human rights abuses in Iran and in advocating for political change. Additionally, he explores the impact of global human rights discourses on Iranian women's struggles for greater equality and rights.

coming together to pursue a common goal or objective. Most research on the study of social movements (e.g., Blumer, 1951; Lang & Lang, 1961; Turner & Killian, 1987) describes them as “non-institutionalized approaches to social transformation” (Jenkins, 1983, p.528), a contention that is based on the fact that these movements are defined as coordinated and organized action groups that share common values and whose objective consists in bringing about transformation or opposition to alterations in social institutions or the social order (Turner & Killian, 1987). Jenkins and Form (2005) argue that social movements are typically defined as organized efforts to achieve social change. This definition emphasizes that social movements involve collective action by a group of individuals who share a common goal or purpose. McCarthy and Zald (1977), meanwhile, define social movements as a group of individuals with shared beliefs and opinions seeking to change society. Their organizational-entrepreneurial paradigm disregards the organizational determinants and power struggles within social movements. This definition emphasizes the role of collective beliefs and preferences in motivating social movements and driving social change.

In recent decades, social movement theory (SMT) has evolved as a growing field of research and has developed into a sophisticated body of theory. In the 1950s and 1960s, the field of “collective behavior” emerged as an irrational response to the breakdown of society, social dislocation, and marginalization (Tilly, 1978; McAdam, McCarthy & Zald, 1996). However, a particular narrative, specifically the incorporation of the concept of change into social movements, emerged in the 1970s and 1980s, along with leftist protests and their quest for change (Povey, 2015, p.22). From the writings of Marx to the theories of mass psychology developed in the mid-twentieth century, its origins can be said to be diverse. While Marxists considered society to be torn apart by class oppression and class struggle, Durkheim's and Weber's theories held that society is bound together through a set of shared beliefs and that disengagement from these beliefs, or anomie³³, leads to social protest (Ibid).

³³ This idea is rooted in the work of Emile Durkheim, “Suicide: A Study in Sociology.” (London: Routledge, 1897), who argued that when individuals are experiencing a sense of normlessness or disengagement from society's shared values, their behavior tends to be more divergent or unconventional, including social protest. This idea was further developed and expanded by later theorists in the field of social movement theory. See Donatella della Porta & Mario Diani. “*Social Movements: An Introduction*.” (Wiley-Blackwell, 2006). This article outlines the various theoretical approaches that have been used to study social movements. In the section on anomie and social movements, Snow and Soule discuss how the concept of anomie has been used to explain social protest in different historical and cultural contexts and its limitations as a theoretical framework.

A further significant underlying concept in the theories of social movements involves the political process, which emphasizes the dynamic and complicated interaction between three factors: economic resources, cultural factors, and political context (Moghadam & Gheytanchi, 2010, pp. 258-267). The political process theory, by Doug McAdam (1982), Charles Tilly (1978; 1984; 2004), and Sidney Tarrow (1998) emphasizes the importance of understanding the interplay between these three factors in explaining social movements' emergence, development, and outcomes. Economic resources refer to the financial and material resources available to social movement organizations, while cultural factors include the shared beliefs, values, and symbols that underpin collective action. The political context encompasses the institutional and legal structures and the broader cultural and ideological context in which social movements operate. By addressing the three categories of factors and how these interact, the theory of the political process provides a more comprehensive understanding of the circumstances under which social movements emerge, mobilize, and accomplish objectives.

The feminist literature has also contributed to the study of social movements by focusing on how women's movements construct the identities related to the state, the transnational aspects between identity and the state, as well as the connection between gender and social movements themselves. Focusing on the relationship between women's movements and the state, Misra & King (2007) emphasize the complex and often fraught nature of this relationship. Their examination also shows how such movements have been impacted by and have impacted national and international levels of the globalization process. Using feminist movements as a vehicle, they argue that such movements have been instrumental in shaping political agendas and challenging dominant power structures, particularly in the context of neoliberal globalization. Moreover, transnational feminist movements advocate for the protection and promotion of women's rights in various spheres, including (but not limited to) the fields of occupation, population policies, and social welfare (Moghadam, 2003; Chowdhury, 2006; Stroup & Wong, 2014).

In general, the term *gender* refers to the societal and culturally based interpretations or explanations and expectations related to sex, which extend beyond biological features. Such meanings and expectations are shaped by various factors, including historical, cultural, and political contexts, and are subject to variation across societies and periods. In various ways, gender can be used as a basis for social movements and activism. For instance, feminist movements have historically used gender as a lens to analyze and challenge social power structures and inequalities.

In addition, gender-based violence and discrimination, such as unequal wages and restricted access to education, have been among the issues social movements have sought to address through mobilization around gendered identities (Kaplan, 2012, pp. 640-648). However, some argue that gender should not be used as an *oppositional mechanism* since it can reinforce binaries and essentialist notions of gender. Instead, they advocate an intersectional approach to social justice that recognizes both how gender intersects with other social identities and the fact that social movements must simultaneously address multiple forms of oppression.

The adoption of gender in a social movement can be decisive in determining the effectiveness of a movement, as it either establishes the existence of gender norms or challenges them (Einwohner & Olson, 2000). In Einwohner and Olson's study of the cultural construction of social protest, gender is described as acting on multiple levels, including that of an individual characteristic, a social characteristic, and a set of group-level expectations and behaviors. On the individual scale, gender can be considered a personal characteristic that informs a person's self-image, identity, and experiences. At the social scale, gender is a feature of social organization that shapes patterns of interaction and social relationships. Finally, at the group level, gender is manifested by expectations and behaviors related to particular gender identities, such as masculine and feminine characteristics (Ibid, 2000, pp. 87-95).

In addition to being a more comprehensive system of hierarchy, Lorber (2000) characterizes gender as not merely a set of individual characteristics or personal traits but rather a social institution that sets patterns of expectations for individuals, organizes social procedures of individual daily life, and incorporates them into the influential social organizations of society, including economics, ideology, family, and politics, and also represents an entity in itself (Lorber, 2000, pp. 82-86).³⁴ However, when it comes to the Middle East, applying these various approaches to the region inevitably becomes complicated. One reason is the widespread prevalence of authoritarian regimes that typify this region as opposed to democratically inspired structures and policies, which appear to be rather scarce. Gender relations in the Middle East are frequently affected by cultural and religious traditions that may differ from other parts of the world (Moghadam, 2013). Such traditions can contribute to gender-based discrimination and inequality,

³⁴ Moreover, Lorber notes that gender operates as a system of social stratification, with males generally holding more power and privilege than females. This power imbalance is reinforced by cultural norms and expectations promoting male characteristics and behaviors over females. See Judy Lorber. "Paradoxes of Gender." (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

including restricting women's access to educational and employment opportunities and limiting their political participation.

2.2 Silenced and Submissive: Exploring the Passive Subjectivity of Women in the Middle East

As in numerous regions of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the women's movement in Iran is intimately tied to ideals of resistance to imperialism, colonialism, and the promotion of national identity. Moreover, Tohidi (2010) explains that even though Iran was never a colonial nation, the influence of the British and Russian empires on Iran in the 19th and early 20th centuries resulted in an anti-imperialist perspective among pro-modernist and pro-democracy Iranian factions (Tohidi, 2010, p. 377). Under this framework, Iranian feminists and feminist activists, similar to their counterparts in Egypt and other parts of North Africa, frequently confronted the necessity of distancing themselves from external imperialist forces to maintain a measure of authenticity and credibility. Consequently, this became crucial to challenging existing patriarchal structures and advocating women's rights in the society in which they lived. (Tohidi, 2016; Gheytaichi & Moghadam, 2020). This tension is evident in the history of the women's movement in Iran, where women have struggled to assert their rights while navigating the complex politics of Iranian nationalism, Islamism, and anti-imperialism.

Post-colonialism has been associated with minority disciplines since its development in the 1950s (Said, 1994; Gandhi, 1998). Such cognitive domains are excluded and marginalized, focusing on cognitive systems' superiority and authority (Ashcroft, 1990, p.41). Post-colonial studies have been affected by two streams of intellectual thought. Firstly, the writings of Frantz Fanon (1963;1967;1994), the Algerian leftist thinker of the 1950s, directly influenced this stance. He examined the constraining power of mental imagery in colonial societies and considered colonialism, along with its Marxist and existentialist tendencies, as a system of racial oppression that affects both the mind and the body. Secondly, from the middle of the 20th century, through the process of decolonization in the colonies in the West, influential currents of thought emerged that challenged the previously held notions of *subjugated* peoples (Spivak, 1988, pp. 273-280). These

currents included a wide range of notions and creations that no longer sought to summarize history, the culture in the West, scientific discourse, and modern thought as had been the case in the past.

The concept *post-colonial* poses a fundamental issue for historians of the Middle East in the 20th century. Defining the term *post-colonialism* is an unwieldy task due to the broad spectrum of fields that it involves and seeks to address, key among them being theory and literary criticism, economic and political studies, colonial governance, the issue of identity, and cultural studies (MacLean, 2001, p. 47). The focus of postcolonial studies is on the intersection between imperialism and culture, particularly in terms of how this shapes identity, lifestyle, and other aspects of individuals' lives. The term *cultural imperialism* refers to the process by which dominant cultures impose the values, beliefs, and practices they hold onto subordinate cultures, often through media and other means of cultural dissemination (Bashiriye, 2000, p.132).

Following the disintegration of European power after World War II, several post-colonial countries arose in the Middle East.³⁵ Postcolonial states frequently justified an existence through ideologies influenced by their political positions. This underlines the influence of colonialism and imperialism in shaping the self-understanding of the Western world and its relations with other parts of the world (Bhabha, 1994; Fanon, 1963; Said, 1979; Loomba, 1998). In the current state of affairs, the West has, in a sense, turned into a globally constituted value system that has significantly impacted the identity formation and lifestyles of countless individuals around the world. Therefore, it would not be unreasonable to claim that the entire world finds itself in the post-colonial era.³⁶

The designation *postcolonial* has come to be applied through association with at least three separate, albeit interrelated, aspects: a historical perspective, a cultural perspective, and a critical

³⁵ These approaches seek to deconstruct the colonial discourse by challenging and uncovering its underlying assumptions, dynamics of power, and biases, aiming to disrupt and question the dominant narratives and discourses used to sustain colonialism and imperialism. By re-questioning the concept of the West, such approaches seek to interrogate the notion of Western superiority and dominance central to colonial discourse and to empower and amplify the voices and perspectives of the colonized and other marginalized groups. For instance, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Macmillan Education Ltd, 1988): 271–313.

³⁶ The post-colonial theory posits that this impact stems from historical and ongoing power relations between Western and non-Western countries, and the legacy of colonialism continues to shape contemporary global politics and culture. However, some scholars believe that the world is in a state of ongoing decolonization as non-Western countries attempt to assert their own cultural and political identities in the face of Western hegemony. However, others believe that the concept of "post-colonialism" itself is problematic, as it implies a complete rupture with colonialism that may not be accurate or helpful in understanding contemporary global power relations. For more, see Maha El Said, Lena Meari & Nicola Pratt (Eds). "*Rethinking Gender in Revolutions and Resistance*" (Zed Books, 2015).

perspective. With regard to *postcolonialism* as a historical designation, it can be asserted that the Middle East underwent significant changes during the 20th century, a time when colonial powers progressively lost control and post-colonial states emerged. During this period, power in the region was frequently held by European countries; however, that all changed with the disintegration of colonial rule.

In what sense is postcolonialism not merely a reference to a historical period but a cultural perspective? States emerging from colonial empires in the Middle East frequently adopted colonial establishments. Among the new heads of state, many were military officers serving in militaries led by the British, the French, or even the Ottomans. The colonial powers created these institutions to monitor and control the state's population from the top down instead of providing for the needs of individuals. However, based on one count, such states were also prone to coups, which occurred approximately two dozen times in the post-colonial period in the Middle East. Thus, for instance, in the thirty years following World War II, four coups d'état occurred in Syria and three in Iraq. Colonial powers desired that no one should treat them as if they had just violated another state. However, they often struggled to persuade the formerly colonized states and societies to carry out what their agendas (Kuran, 1998, pp. 115-121).

However, several Middle Eastern states, including Iran, have never been officially colonized, yet they have evolved similar institutional arrangements to post-colonial states (Helfont, 2015; Tohidi, 2016). During the early decades of the 19th century, two major foreign powers, Great Britain and Russia, partitioned Iran into zones for political influence (Abrahamian, 1971; Katouzian, 1981, 2018; Amanat, 2017; Helfont, 2015). Amidst European colonialism, the Portuguese also emerged in the Persian Gulf and invaded Hormuz Island, a significant part of mainland Iran, while Britain sought trading relations. Iran had been downgraded to the status of a *semi-colony* and was under intense pressure from foreign agents to grant concessions. As a result, it could not protect its markets against foreign competition. In common with other parts of Asia and the Arab world, Iran embraced the constitutionalist movement during the colonial period, accompanied by a rise in nationalist consciousness (Jayawardena, 1986, p.10) and attitudes among the subalterns. Thus, while Iran does not conform to the initial, chronological definition of a postcolonial state, some consider it being *postcolonial* in terms of its state and political structure.

Aside from the historical and cultural associations, the term *post-colonial* has also come to be applied as a mode of postmodern critique. Postcolonial theorists contend that modernity,

including liberalism and secularism, are not universal, objectively constructed concepts based on logic and science, but social constructs rooted in Western experiences and frequently influenced by Christianity. Hence, modernity tends to be Western, and the imperial powers, in effect, forced the Middle East to conform to Western patterns of thought and life.³⁷

The Middle East experienced all sorts of issues in the pre-Enlightenment West. The Age of Enlightenment and what is called modernity emerged due to prolonged conflicts with traditional patriarchal systems – the same patriarchal systems present in the Middle East nowadays. Post-colonialism tends to interpret the historical world of non-indigenous societies according to the present demands. This way, post-colonialism proceeds from the current horizon, passes into the past, and re-enters the present. This is a hermeneutical issue, and post-colonialism draws on two hermeneutical approaches. One is the hermeneutic of resistance, which implies struggling to oppose the domination of colonialism. The other hermeneutic it draws upon is that of reliance, which signifies recognition of the living experience in the East.

Post-colonial studies have been influenced by various new European intellectual currents such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, neo-Marxist criticism, and contemporary feminist criticism (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p.156). Minority knowledge, such as feminism, embodies a form of thought and culture (Ashcroft, 1990, p.41). Postcolonial feminism, in its broadest form, encompasses all kinds of struggles of Third World women against prevailing patriarchal ideologies, including resistance to local power structures, Eurocentric or racist beliefs, and first-world feminism (Spivak, 1990, 1999; Mohanty, 1995).

In the article “Can the subaltern speak?” (1988), Spivak argues that the subaltern, or the marginalized Other, is systematically silenced and excluded from mainstream political and cultural discourse.³⁸ This is due to various factors, including language barriers, cultural differences, and the power of dominant groups to control the terms of the conversation. Spivak contends that the subaltern cannot simply speak within existing discursive frameworks but must instead create their

³⁷ Samuel Helfont. “Understanding the Modern Middle East: History, Identity, and Politics,” presentation at the FPRI Butcher History Institute's conference. (Philadelphia, October 17-18, 2015), accessed via https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/195659/helfont_-_hi_-_post-colonialism.pdf.

³⁸ In particular, Spivak has used the concept of the “*subaltern*” to refer to those who are excluded from dominant discourses and political structures, including women, workers, and colonized peoples. Spivak has also critiqued Western feminism for its failure to adequately address the concerns and experiences of subaltern women, arguing that feminist theory needs to engage with issues of colonialism, race, and class to be genuinely inclusive and transformative.

modes of expression and resistance. Consequently, Spivak asserts that the experiences and voices of subordinate women are marginalized and rendered invisible amidst the dominant discourse of phallogentric tradition, imperialism, and objectification (Spivak, 1988, pp. 287-305).

The women of the colonies have been doubly silenced and subjected to dual oppression, once by the patriarchal system of their own society and then again by European-influenced colonialism. Spivak has often emphasized the multiple forms of oppression faced by women in colonial contexts. She argues that these women are subjected not only to patriarchal systems within their societies but also to the violence and exploitation of European colonialism, which further exacerbates their marginalization and erases their experiences and perspectives from dominant discourses. Spivak critiques individualism as a defining feature of Western feminism, arguing that this approach is often grounded in Eurocentric assumptions and fails to account for how women in different cultural contexts experience oppression and resistance in diverse ways. She also highlights the role of imperialism in shaping feminist discourse and the broader political landscape, emphasizing how imperialist ideologies have influenced and constrained feminist movements in both colonial and postcolonial contexts (Spivak, 1996, pp. 208-213). Like Edward Said, Spivak emphasizes how Western representations of the East have shaped and constructed the identity and experiences of individuals from these regions and also seeks to create a new narrative of how the Third World is a subject of representation, or a set of representations, for both the West and the culture of the East.

While such criticism of the prevalent approaches to the study of the subaltern emerges from the attempt to revive the historical consciousness of the subjugated, it unfortunately leads to inverted ethnocentrism. This, in turn, means that feminism will experience another complex confrontation when the duality of male/female, as it now exists, becomes inverted so that, in the end, the nature of women is still determined by the relationship between male and female (Mohanty, 1984, pp. 61-62). According to Spivak (1985), all these arguments, whether from the colonizer or the colonized, remain based on colonizer-created terminology (Spivak, 1985, p.133). The issue lies not with the fact that Third World women are unable to express themselves, but rather the lack of a positing of expression: the absence of a space in which the sexually inferior subject is able to have and express a voice. The woman holds no position; everyone speaks up for her. She is constantly rewritten as an object of patriarchy or imperialism. In Spivak's view, the

subaltern is talking, yet there is nobody listening; even when the subaltern strains to speak to the point of death, she is unable to be heard (Ibid, p.292).

Ashcroft, in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (1998), states that there is a convergence between feminist and post-colonial theories in their efforts to empower marginalized voices and challenge dominant power structures. Both perspectives share a concern with the experiences of those excluded or oppressed by dominant social and political systems, and both aim to bring these experiences to the forefront of academic discourse. The concept of otherness is central to both feminist and post-colonial theories, and the expression of this otherness can highlight the experiences of women and other marginalized groups who have historically been silenced or excluded from mainstream discourse.

During the first years of the 20th, womanhood was controversial and ambiguous. Traditional views rooted in femininity portrayed women as passive and inferior to men. This perception was thought to have originated from the conventional belief that women existed to consolidate the dominance of men and played an integral role in their political existence (Sahgal,2006). Under postcolonialism, the word *woman* in this theoretical field has also been highly ambiguous, and the female sex encodes such ambiguity. Moreover, this equivocation itself has been surrounded by a dual political ambiguity, making this obscurity and the multiple ambiguities problematic for selecting a purpose for an Eastern woman's position in a theoretical discussion. Women were not situated in a political space associated with nationalist politics. The ambiguity of the meaning of woman recalls the nature of a contradictory concept.

The emergence of modernity significantly impacted the discourse of political and religious thought on a global scale, providing women with legitimacy and paving the way for their increased participation in the public sphere and the assertion of their voice in subsequent decades (Chhachhi, 1989). Post-colonial feminism highlights various cases of subordination, exploring active and passive dependence on dominant formulations and the expression of the subjugated to assert their psychological, individual, and social rights (Goel,2010, pp.126-127). The language of colonialism, with its gendered notions of the colonial subject, reflects the misogyny embedded in public life (Mohanty, 1984). Notably, the tradition in colonial contexts fostered monopolistic masculinity, which became even more pronounced with women's presence. Women, considered part of colonial property alongside wealth, transformed, and the construction of Eastern womanhood often carried

masculine connotations. The politics of representation and ethnicity played a crucial role in reshaping women's identities in these contexts.

Millet's (1970) theory emphasizes the role of gender politics and colonization in maintaining patriarchy. She argues that women are colonized by male values that they internalize, resulting in sexual politics of misogyny and the oppression of women at both the institutional and individual levels. Subordinate women are reduced to distorted and passive objects within a male-dominated complex.

The intersection of feminism and postcolonialism provides a framework to amplify the voices and experiences of marginalized subjects. However, the contrast between the West's discourse on the East highlights a pattern reminiscent of the duality of men and women, defined by their association with imperialism. Imperialism attempts to exert influence over another country, imposing its will onto the other and colonizing it. Inspired by this statement, Fanon (1963) portrays the colonized as the *Other* who cannot assume a role. This position of the *Other* generates a sense of alienation and inferiority in the colonized or an inability to assume a role or identity that the colonizer does not define. Males and females also have familiar elements from their inherited language in both discourses (Bhabha, 1994, p.34).

Undoubtedly, it can be said that the colonial system treated women differently from men, subjecting them to double oppression and discrimination. Women were often subjected to both public and private forms of discrimination and were treated as colonial subjects in their own right. Therefore, it is essential to consider this issue in any analysis of colonial oppression. Even the anti-colonial nationalist movements that emerged after independence were not devoid of these gender biases. Male bias strongly influences both traditional and pre-colonial structures, resulting in the misrepresentation of indigenous women as isolated and submissive beings (Ashcroft et al., 1998, pp.92-94). In this respect, it can be asserted that anti-colonial discourse marginalizes women as an *Other*.

In the book *The Second Sex* (1973), Simone de Beauvoir contends that one is not born a woman but rather *becomes* a woman. De Beauvoir applies the concept of the *Other* to articulate the inequality of power between men, and women by arguing that women are relegated to the position of Others in society, defined primarily with regard to men and so that women are denied any agency or power in their own lives. Similarly, Said (1979) argues that the concept of the *Orient* was not a fixed, objective reality but a construction of Western European thought and discourse.

According to Said, the *Orient* was created as a way for Western Europeans to define themselves in opposition to a supposed *other* seen as exotic, primitive, and backward (Said, 1979, p. 15).

Spivak (1985) discusses how individuals have used terms like *Third World* and *Third World woman* in the First World to establish a binary opposition that defines themselves as the normative *Self* and the Third World as the problematic *Other*. This leads to a restrictive and homogenizing view of individuals and cultures not part of the dominant Western discourse. Spivak argues that such an approach neglects the complexity and diversity of people's lives and experiences, reducing them to simplistic and stereotypical labels. "Othering is a dialectical process" (Ashcroft et al., 1998, p. 168), so that *colonialism*, or *the big other*, is created simultaneously with *the little other* (Lacan, 1977) – that is, *the Third World woman* as a subject.³⁹ The colonizer, like other individuals, has no independent and autonomous identity, instead forming an identity through interaction with the colonized.

Then again, in this transformation, the colonized question themselves: Who am I? How far is the *Other* from me, and where am I? How far does the nature of the struggle extend to take *Me* to *Other*? Contrary to the *Other*, an *Insider* must be forged, which could be achieved through culturally differentiated practices. The truth remains that the construct of this fake self provides it the capacity to confront colonialism. Feminist discourse reveals moving from the object position awaiting the detection of the *Other* view toward the subject position. The presence of the *Other* lies in the lack of otherness, which yields meaning and becomes internal in a way that does not need to be external; each otherness becomes part of this multiplicity of individuality at the core of these struggles to be one with the *Other* at the cost of survival – a survival that turns the silent screams of the egalitarian movement into a deafening sound. Such struggles for equality and recognition involve a multiplicity of individualities united in the desire to connect with the *Other*.

³⁹ Some critical theorists have also delved into the ethical and moral aspects of the connection to the "*Other*," as Bakhtin proposes in an essay entitled "*Art and Answerability*" (1990), by engaging with the diverse viewpoints and voices of the "*Other*," the artist can create a work that is deeply rooted in human experience, transcends mere individual subjectivity, and offers insights into the broader social and moral dimensions of human existence. In this context, the "*Other*" is not merely an object of artistic representation but rather an active participant in the creation of the artwork. Throughout Derrida's *Politics of Friendship* (1997) and *Of Hospitality* (2000), the "*Other*" signifies both a radical alterity and an ethical responsibility. Whereas conflict and differences can emerge in the encounter with the "*Other*," friendship provides a way to bridge the gap between the self and the other, creating a sense of community. Levinas, in *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1969), argues that the face of the "*Other*" represents an ineluctable demand that calls for our attention and response. This responsibility arises from our encounter with the "*Other*" and is rooted in our recognition of their vulnerability, suffering, and humanity.

However, this desire for connection may come at a cost, particularly in the context of survival and the need to resist oppression.

2.3 Gendered Social Order: Women's Compliance and Acceptance of Dominant Principles

The Iranian Constitutional Movement during 1905-1911 was one of the earliest political and social Development movements in the East at the beginning of the 20th century, which aimed to restrict the traditional form of government, eliminate political tyranny, and strengthen the rule of law. This movement became the precursor of constitutional government, in which the people, as God's successors and their representatives, ruled the earth, approving or rejecting laws, budgets, foreign treaties, and government ministers (Abrahamian, 1982). Women's participation in the anti-colonial movements of the world, their struggle for freedom, and their protest against dual sexual oppression significantly influence Iranian women.

Since the Iranian constitution was initially established and signed, the women's movement has organized numerous street actions and methods of civil protest against discrimination in overt and covert circles. And yet, although women may be in the majority due to their sheer number, once the ruling power structures and signifying systems of a society or culture marginalize their concerns and issues in such a way that they are placed in a socially inferior status, they are made to assume a minority position. Therefore, despite their numbers and their historical contribution to social movements in Iran, Iranian women have remained marginalized and subordinate, being the ones who are most overshadowed in with regard to their situation.

Based on available evidence, the term *women's movement* continues to be rejected and questioned in Iran as conservative Islamist leaders dispute the existence and legitimacy of such a movement (Tohidi, 2016, p.79). Tohidi (2017) distinguishes between *women in the movement* and *women's movement*. Whereas *women in the movement* refers to women's participation and active role in national anti-colonial and labor and class movements, the *women's movement* refers to social movements and causes in which women are the principal and leading actors. Eliminating discrimination, women's empowerment, and gender equality in terms of legal rights and

sociocultural opportunities constitutes the latter term's fundamental objectives.⁴⁰ Tohidi (2016) highlights the relationship between women's movements and feminism, noting that women's movements often exhibit a feminist orientation, even if their participants do not explicitly identify as feminists. On the other hand, she points out that many Moderate Islamic reformers and secular progressives, both Muslim and non-Muslim, support women's demands and criticize the government's suppression of women activists (Tohidi, 2016, p.79). The debate rages on in Iran with regard to the nature of women's movements, with some claiming that the lack of a formalized, women-led organizational structure implies such movements do not really exist. In contrast, others argue ardently in support of its existence, emphasizing the struggles of women activists in the country (Alamdari, 2008; Mashayekhi, 2009).

A key question to consider at this juncture is the following: have Iranian women played a significant role in shaping a women's movement in Iran? Many observations of contemporary Iranian society seem to suggest the lack of a strong women's movement and the basic structures necessary for a meaningful change in strategy. This lack may be partly due to the influence of a Western-influenced model of social activism that emphasizes only two polarized options: either there is a women's movement, or there is not. However, this narrow framework may not reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of women's struggles for equal rights in Iran, a phenomenon which can encompass a variety of strategies and approaches.

In light of the unique challenge that the Iranian context presents, it is worth noting that Bayat (2007) has argued that the absence of recognizable leaders who identify as feminists has made it difficult to mobilize the masses of ordinary women in what appears to be a *non-movement* (Bayat, 2007, p.169). Through his analysis of civil society and political movements in the Middle East, Bayat introduces a term particularly relevant to the analysis of civic movements in this region. Rather than using the term *civic movements*, he highlights dispersed activities that emerge in response to collective needs and issues, naming such phenomena *non-movements* (Ibid). Through this concept, he focuses on the informal and often spontaneous nature of social and political activism in the Middle East, which does not necessarily fit into the conventional models

⁴⁰ Several complex factors, including religious, cultural, and political considerations, have influenced women's activism in Iran. The participation of women in social and political movements has frequently been constrained by patriarchal attitudes and behaviors embedded in these movements. Additionally, the state has often suppressed women's rights activism and feminist organizing, making the establishment of a sustainable and cohesive women's movement challenging.

of organized social movements. The concept of *non-movements* recognizes the diverse and fluid ways in which individuals engage in political action and highlights the need for more nuanced approaches to studying social and political change in the Middle East.

Bayat also refers to *collective actions* by *non-collective activists*. The use of these terms highlights the fact that political activism in the Middle East frequently occurs through collective action by individuals who may not necessarily belong to formal political organizations or movements. Indeed, according to Bayat, such a formulation accurately describes the political movements of the region over the three decades leading up to the Green Movement in Iran and the Arab Spring (Bayat, 2010, p.15). In these instances, individuals with diverse social and political affiliations gathered to engage collectively in shared issues, frequently in the absence of a distinct organizational structure or leader. Bayat contends that this type of non-movement activism reflects a broader trend toward decentralized and informal forms of political participation that challenge conventional social and political models of organization.

The emerging concept of *non-movements* offers a fresh perspective on various protest movements in Iran, including the women's movement, labor, student, and youth movements. In contrast to the classical and sometimes dismissive term “protests,” which implies a lack of formal organization and support from institutions and political entities, *non-movements* provide a contemporary alternative to describe these social movements. However, using the term *non-movements* raises an essential question concerning how we refer to these phenomena. For instance, should we label women's activism in Iran as “the women's movement” or “the women's non-movement”? It is essential to understand that in Bayat's theory, *non-movement* does not imply any inferiority to what is conventionally known as a *movement*. Instead, it represents a distinct and different form of social mobilization that may not conform to traditional movement structures and longevity.

Since Bayat's concept of *non-movement* draws upon Foucault's notion of power, and since this will prove pivotal to our examination of the relation between the women's movement and the environmental movement in Iran, let us explore the matter in greater depth. Foucault's re-conceptualization of power emphasizes that it is not solely exercised by civil macro-institutions and state organizations but also operates at a micro-level, such as in relationships between individuals. According to Foucault (1978), power emerges from every *force relation* present in

society and every encounter: therefore, power is “everywhere; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (Foucault, 1978, p. 93).

In this sense, one may assert that power flows through the social body in the form of a network. In fact, the origin of power is coeval and coextensive with all the multiple aspects of life, so that the very attempt of identifying a circumscribed source of power prevents one from considering the intricate nature of power distribution. It follows from this that power is neither merely an *institution*, nor a *structure*, nor a *capacity* for transmitting the means of information, nor even a specific force with which particular individuals are equipped (Ibid). Such an approach to power – i.e., one that is aware of its pervasive force and its potential modes of reproduction and distribution – may be especially helpful in addressing the complexities of power relations in a society, especially in cases where uneven or imbalanced distribution of power has taken institutional form.

Foucault refers to centralized power distribution as *government*, and the concentrated power in this form as *governance*. He seeks to base the second horizontal structure on a reading of power in terms of *government* and institutions of power. This emphasis on the spread of power fails to take seriously a more antagonistic understanding and the realities of class conflict (Rouse, 2005, pp. 98-121). Furthermore, a micro-individualist struggle against the system is replacing former antagonistic policies. According to this view of power, the task of individuals consists not in appropriating the institutions of power at the macro-level but instead in transforming the power structure that makes *sovereignty* and *domination* at the micro-level fundamentally feasible. Having briefly outlined the significance and potential advantages of Foucault’s approach to power as well as its limitations, let us now return to Bayat’s more native and emergent re-conceptualizations of power.

One of the key concepts Bayat uses is that of *quiet encroachment* referring to how individuals in the Middle East can resist and subvert existing power structures by engaging in small, everyday acts of non-conformity and non-cooperation. According to Bayat (2013), what is occurring in the Middle East, particularly in Iran and Egypt, reflects this approach to political power. Whereas the antagonism and overt conflict with the official institutions of power are practically impossible, individuals *can* and *do* sporadically defy the ruling power even when failing to form an overt front (Bayat, 2013, pp.312-313). Indeed, he contends that women’s activism in Iran represents what James Scott (1985), in the context of peasant resistance, describes

as “everyday forms of resistance.”⁴¹ While such resistance is often monotonous and tedious, it represents a form of incessant struggle and involves anything ranging from foot-dragging to false compliance to dissimulation and secrecy to blatant negligence to sabotage to demonstrating disobedience to the superior classes (Scott, 1985, pp.85-94). Even the least of these modes of resistance involves coordination and planning, frequently representing a form of individual self-help, and generally eschews any direct symbolic confrontation with the government or the prevailing norms. According to Scott, in nearly any circumstance, overt insubordination provokes a swifter and sharper response than disobedience by way of more everyday forms of resistance, which is and may yet be a far more pervasive form of power. In this regard, it may be said that those who engage in overt modes of subordination and insubordination have never ventured to struggle against the formal definitions of power hierarchies (Ibid).

Undoubtedly, the *power of presence* and the *ordinariness* of women's resistance are an essential part of women's agency in many societies, the kind of agency that plays an even more significant role in Iran's repressive system than in democratic countries (Tohidi, 2016, p.80). Women who participate in private circles and parties striving against both the official laws and unwritten laws of the government, as well as girls who are pursuing occupations and academic positions against the patriarchal system of the society, all represent instances of *individual* movements that at various junctures of time change something in the social scene of the societies of the Middle East. Such movements do not effect change by the *action* that takes place, rather merely due to their very *being*. In this respect, the resistance and role of women in the gradual and progressive transformation of the Iranian cultural scene through their everyday modes of *being* may be regarded as part of the broader women's movement. Rizvan Moghadam (2013) confirms this when she states that “The Iranian women's movement is everywhere by now, in private and public spaces, even in the clerical household, where women and girls oppose male domination. Yet, they [the opponents of the movement] cannot disrupt this movement by resorting to Sharia law or by the threat of imprisonment and firearms.”⁴²

⁴¹ As James Scott described in “Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance.” (Yale University Press, 1985), resistance studies have increasingly focused on the concept of “everyday resistance” or “infra politics.” This type of resistance involves informal and non-organized acts of defiance by subaltern groups that challenge dominant power structures subtly and often indirectly.

⁴² This is an excerpt from the interview of Rizvan Moghadam (researcher, human rights activist, and women's rights activist) with Radio Zamaneh. “Rizvan Moghadam: The women's movement has expanded the scope of its demands daily,” radiozamaneh.com, December 3, 2013, <https://www.radiozamaneh.com/189490/>

According to Bayat, the Iranian women's movement is expressed in its *art of presence* (Bayat, 2010, p.169). Based on his analysis, the very *mode* of people's presence in Iran, Egypt, Syria, and Sudan has political significance. Due to often erratic and turbulent changes in how institutional power is concentrated and wielded in these countries, the various *modes of presence* enable ordinary citizens to face the dominant power structures (Ibid). According to the simultaneousness of these forms of presence, it is appropriate to refer to them as an unorganized collective movement. However, Bayat concedes that it could be argued that Iranian women have also often been "subverted or resisted in their everyday practices" (Bayat, 2010, p.169). While Bayat's attention to the mode of presence as an essential element of resistance offers an insightful way of approaching the discourse and actions of the female protagonists in contemporary Iranian history, it is neither comprehensive nor always an accurate description of Iranian women's movements, which have not merely been concealed or silent or purely individualistic by virtue of being labeled as illegitimate by the dominant agents of conventional structures of power.

Tohidi (2016) thus amends Bayat's analysis (2010) by adding that the activity of Iranian women has indeed grown *beyond* the boundaries of the *normal* and of *ordinariness* in recent decades. She claims that certain features of social movements proposed by proponents of NSMs have been present in the recent Development of women's collective activities in Iran. These include (but are not limited to) such activities as staffing, networking, organizing Campaigns, producing discourses and icons, which, as a consequence, generate a sense of collective identity and enable group demonstrations, albeit on a small scale (Tohidi, 2016, p.7).

It is true that emerging social movements in Europe, America, and other parts of the world during the 1970s and 1980s, particularly those that focused on issues such as women, feminism, sexual orientation diversity, the environment, civil rights, and opposition to war differed from earlier movements.⁴³ Indeed, NSMs such as the women's movement in Iran do not have a centralized and formal organizational structure, instead being 1.) *segmentary* (i.e., composed of small, diverse, and occasionally competitive organizations and groups), 2.) *polycentric* (i.e.,

⁴³ The social movements of the 1970s and 1980s in Europe, America, and other parts of the world represented a shift toward a more individualistic and identity-oriented approach to activism, with a greater emphasis on cultural transformation and individual freedom. It also reflected the changing political and social context of the time. For further discussion of this concept, see Alberto Melucci. "Challenging codes: Collective action in the information age." (Cambridge University Press, 1996). & Sidney Tarrow, "Power in movement: Social movements and contentious politics." (Cambridge University Press, 1998).

involving multiple leaders), and 3.) *reticulated* (i.e., interconnected by loose links). If the government ties its legitimacy to a pretended notion of society that it presents as real, then the echoic representation of what is enacted means nothing other than opposing this prevailing political will. This is the contradiction that arises in the context of the policy of truth. In a sense, Iranian civil movements have assumed the responsibility of countering this appearance of truth by relying on the policy of truth.

Any individual can implement the echoic truth even without belonging to collective action. A person's challenge with this action neutralizes the government's effort to represent and impose its will on a social level. Therefore, regardless of whether a person is a political activist, their actions can have political significance. It should be noted that in the realm of the actions of individuals, such actions have political meaning only with regard to their performance, and it seems that this cannot imply the existence of a specific political *intention*. What transforms the scattered performances into an *intentional action*, however, lies in the existence of a space that draws the previously motionless actions into a public scene of conflict, for instance, the street.

Another theorist whose theories bear on the present study is Pierre Bourdieu. According to Bourdieu (1993), *fields* are structured spaces of positions that can be analyzed independently of the occupants of such positions (and determine their characteristics to a certain extent) (Bourdieu, 1993, p.133). This analysis can reveal how different forms of capital are valued and exchanged within the field and can help explain the patterns of success or failure of individuals or groups within that field. *Fields* may be associated with social, cultural, or symbolic capital [depending on status and social position] (Ibid, p.69). In a particular state of power relations, whoever more or less monopolizes one specific capital, which is the foundation of power or the distinctive authority of a *field*, tends to employ preservation strategies. An additional feature of the *field* is that all individuals who reside in a *field* tend to share a certain number of essential resources, i.e., all those objects associated with the existence of the field itself. In this case, a sort of objective collusion is hidden under all contradictions.

The condition for entering the *field* is the identification of the issues raised and even breaking through the red lines that will lead to exclusion from the game (Bourdieu, 1993, pp.136-137; 236-237). The *field* operates as a censor. The subject who enters the *field* instantly becomes classified and is placed within a particular structure, namely the structure of capital distribution. Thus, the group either gives or deprives this person of recognition and the right to expression. In

this way, the *field* effectively censors what the person decides to utter over the idiotic words that might come to be spoken through his/her own voice. The censorship rules prevail and compel him/her to assert solely the “appropriate” content (Ibid, p.165). From Bourdieu's standpoint, then, the *field* is a social arena, a site of contestation where advantages and resources become disposable. In this regard, every *field* carries a *dominator* and a *dominated*.

Every *field* is the site of a struggle, which has to be sought for its particular manifestations on each occasion; the combat between the newcomers, who seek to establish the right to penetrate the field, and the dominators, who attempt to maintain the monopoly by demolishing the field of competitiveness. The struggles that ensue in the *field* involve the monopoly of legal violence (particular authority) that characterizes the field in question – i.e., ultimately, the preservation or destruction of the structure of distribution of a specific capital. The constant struggle *in the field* is the impetus *of the field* (Bourdieu, 1993, pp. 237-238). Meanwhile, those struggling for supremacy ensure that the *field* transforms and constantly rebuilds.

In the context of the struggles mentioned above and transformations within various social fields, the concept of mental structure comes into focus; alternatively, embodied social structures and mind replacement. As newcomers and the dominated engage in a constant struggle in the various fields, thus individuals engage in a parallel internal struggle by taking part in the structures of the social sphere. Those with a unified social world position possess a similar mental structure. The mental structure established at a particular point in time is constructed and supplemented in the flow of collective history. Mental structure is both permanent and transmissible. Consequently, it serves simultaneously as the determinant of the construction of the social world and as the product of the social world's influence (Ritzer, 2006, pp.678-680). Virtually, all agents have a perception of the world [and based on this perception] construct their image of the objective world. However, each structure has particular structural limits. The cause of the social world occurring as a perceptual truth lies in the positions and *habitus* held by each social agent (Bourdieu, 1987, pp.146-147). These positions and *habitus* are mental structures through which social agents (operators) comprehend the social world. Conversely, such positions and *habitus* constitute the product of the internalization of the structures of the social world (Bourdieu, 1996, p.19). *Habitus*, referred to as the “structure of perception, conception, and action” (Bourdieu, 2000, pp.27-32), represents a system of enduring, implementable, and cognitive tendencies and inclinations which are internalized in a person through the socialization process, yet manifested as though innately

inherent in the person's nature from the beginning (Bourdieu, 1994, p.64; Bourdieu, 2000, pp.22-23). By examining the experience of the social order based on gender, it becomes evident that women are often held accountable for conforming to the dominant view, accepting the normative nature of the social order, and adhering to predetermined roles within it. In this social field, the private sphere is attributed to women, while the public sphere is reserved for men.

In light of the struggles and transformations within various social fields, including the concepts of mental structure and embodied social structures, the emergence of the feminist movement in the Middle East, including in Iran, in the early twentieth century holds significant relevance. This movement responded to increasing awareness among women within the context of colonial and postcolonial state formation. Primarily comprised of individuals from privileged backgrounds and belonging to the generation involved in the constitutional revolution, they sought to counter tyranny in their land and resist foreign encroachments. However, women's societal roles at the national level were still confined by culturally-rooted feminine boundaries imposed by their male counterparts. Moreover, the authority of Islam was seen as emblematic of cultural and societal identity, standing in opposition to the imported Western model of the modern world. What made this structure of feminism new for Iran included the gathering of active women, covert or overt, for discussion and struggle against internal and external factors, as well as the oppression and pressure imposed on them, along with this movement to embolden male backers to stand in defense of women's rights.

2.4 Voices from the Frontlines of the Iranian Women's Movements

In this first stage of our study, a reference to the constitutional era is made in order to identify where associations and publications were established that stressed the benefit of educating mothers with regard to bearing children. The feminists' essential claims involved rights to education, electoral rights, marital and divorce reforms, and citizenship, which all demanded political and social reforms. Under the perceptions of non-political demands of Iranian feminists, including education, marital and divorce law, health, and hygiene, such demands cannot be classified as non-political since they can be considered fundamentally political in nature and relate to the power relations between males and females, civil society, and international politics

(Sanasarian, 1982, pp. 46-47). In addition, this section emphasizes the importance of understanding the impact of socioeconomic developments, political trends, state policies, and cultural contexts on the women's movement in modern Iran. The questions in this section include the following: for what purposes have these associations and publications been established? Was the women's movement a spontaneous movement? And did Iranian women have feminist demands?

In analyzing the women's activist movements during the constitutional period, which occurred several decades after the emergence of the first wave of feminism, some points demand consideration. The first is a close study of social Developments in the years preceding the constitutional period, i.e., from the beginning of the Qajar era.⁴⁴ The second objective is to demonstrate to which extent the Development of women's status, particularly from the establishment of the Constitution onwards, has been influenced by the movements of modernity and feminism.

2.4.1 Gender in the Pre-constitutional Period: Politics and Thought

Until 1869, the government in Iran consisted of a hybrid of tyranny and patrimonialism. All political power and domination resided with despotic males, who often gained power by defeating other contenders (both within and outside the dynasty). By having consolidated power, they sought to display paternal authority over subordinates. In such a system, no member of the general public, regardless of being male or female, had the right to political leadership and thus, by extension, a presence or role in the governance of the state or policymaking.

Nevertheless, in this political and social system, women faced the dual domination of government (an indirect one) and males (a direct one). Men had assumed social and political

⁴⁴ The Qajar rule was established in 1796, nearly simultaneously with the formation of the French Revolution. During the years 1788 to 1798, constitutional amendments occurred in the French Revolution, including the central status of human rights, the establishment of a Parliament, and the transformation of the monarchy into a republic. These developments coincided with the beginning of the Qajar dynasty, leading to the gradual spread of modern political idea to European countries and other countries, including Iran.

positions and workplaces from high to low, and women had to earn their personal and social position by depending on men (through marriage and by way of the roles of wife and mother).

The sociology of gender assumes that if the division of labor in society is gendered and occupations are defined and distributed based on gender, males will obtain more resources than females over time (Turner, 1999, p. 238). This is then coupled with women having a legal identity generally associated with a male guardian's (i.e., the father's or husband's) consent (Moghadam, 2003). Consequently, it can be said that women lacked an autonomous identity when compared to men, becoming merely the honor of the father and the husband; from birth until death, they were always under the guardianship of either the father or the husband and considered only a part of a man's property.

Moreover, during this period, besides the gender segregation of labor in the domestic and communal environment, there was also a separation of the sexes, particularly among the inferior strata of society. The houses consisted of an interior [*andarounis*] and an exterior [*birouni*] area, and women used to enter the interior whenever a stranger was present (Pirnia, 1992). The separated spheres are the antagonistic and hierarchical system centered on the dominant sphere of production (male) and the subordinate sphere of reproduction (female). This practice reflects the manifestation of patriarchal power, which has two distinct significations. In the strict and traditional sense, it denotes a historical system rooted in Greek and Roman law of ancient times where the male household heads possessed absolute legal, political, and economic authority over their dependent female and male family members (Smuts, 1995; Dialetti, 2013). However, in the broader sense frequently adopted by feminists, "patriarchy" refers to the hierarchical and antagonistic system centered on the dominant sphere of production (the male) and the subordinate sphere of reproduction (the female) (Lerner, 1995). This broader meaning underscores the pervasive and systemic nature of male dominance, which affects various aspects of social life, including the separation and segregation of the sexes in various domestic and social spheres.⁴⁵ Private patriarchy refers to a system where women are largely excluded from participating in social life outside the

⁴⁵ Within Sylvia Walby's theory of "patriarchy," she identifies a network of interconnected substructures that serve a critical role in maintaining male dominance and perpetuating gender inequality in society. These substructures span a wide range of dimensions, including the patriarchal mode of production, gender dynamics in the labor force, the impact of male dominance in the state, the prevalence of male violence, power dynamics related to sexuality, and the impact of patriarchy on cultural institutions including religion, mass media, and public education. Collectively, these elements form a complex and interwoven web that reinforces women's subordination, shapes various aspects of social life, and contributes to the persistence of male domination over women. Refer to Sylvia Walby, "Theorising Patriarchy." (Sociology, 23(2). 1989): 213-234.

confines of the household. Within this private sphere, a patriarch assumes control and authority over women, individually and directly, utilizing their services within the domestic setting. On the other hand, public patriarchy does not wholly exclude women from certain areas of society but instead subordinates them in all aspects. In this form of patriarchy, the appropriation and control of women occur more collectively, affecting women's roles and status in various societal domains (Walby, 1989, pp. 227-228; Rendell, 2000, p. 103). As the structure of the family affects the structure of the house, making it infeasible to envision the family without visualizing its space, the power relations are also represented in the housing configuration. According to the general belief, what is customary is considered the norm, and “since the system of male domination and female subjugation has become habitual, it makes any alteration of it abnormal” (Mill, 2007, p. 26). Therefore, the architectural structure also crystallizes this dichotomy between the private and public spheres. Iranian architecture has always been based on the interior, and women, including the most prominent categories of wealth, have always occupied a place in the interior.

Based on sociology, including the sociology of gender, the behavior of men and women is not predicated on their biological differences (Goffman, 1977, pp. 315-316). Instead, by accepting society, individuals have to embrace particular attitudes and behaviors. In this context, *gender roles* are defined as expected behaviors and preferences that society attributes to each sex (Schaefer, 1992). Therefore, the appropriate role for men and women stems from the tenets received during socialization (South, 1994, p. 212). Sociologists have also considered the family structure operative in determining gender identity, pointing to factors such as power, patriarchy or matriarchy, extended family, or nuclear family (Barret, 1980). Based on Homans' theory of social exchange (1958), three elements – social norms, resources, and benefits of power distribution – determine family relationships. From Millet's standpoint, the family plays an essential role in the transmission and interiorization of patriarchal ideology by teaching and evaluating the positions of each sex (Donovan, 2001, pp. 158-160).

Bourdieu highlights how gender classification, by using *symbolic violence* and the *language of gender*, which are entirely social phenomena, all shape identity (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 127; 1991, pp. 72 & 126-127). Based on the sociology of gender, the theoretical framework highlights that in any society, gender is shaped by three main factors: cultural factors [which encompass ritual beliefs, the influence of Western culture, and the state of education]; social factors, [including power structures, social norms, and social class]; and economic factors, [such

as livelihood and geographical area]. These interconnected factors are crucial in shaping gender roles, identities, and expectations within a given society (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This framework underscores that gender is a socially constructed concept⁴⁶ – i.e., it is created and reinforced through social interactions, cultural norms, and institutional practices so that, for instance, space and gender affect one another. In social theories, *space* is not pre-existing data. As Lefebvre asserts, it is produced by society and, therefore has to be considered in a dialectical relationship with social actors (Lefebvre, 1991, p.322). Along similar lines, in *Gendered Spaces*, Spain attempts to explain the relationship between gender and space and power relations and how power relations become entrenched in space (Spain, 1992, pp.112-113). Here, *space* is not merely a physical or material entity, but a social and cultural construct produced and reproduced through social practices and power relations. She argues that gender is a fundamental aspect of space, meaning the spatial arrangements and practices reflect and reinforce gendered assumptions, norms, and expectations.⁴⁷ Social spaces are a complex interplay of subjective and intersubjective practices, influenced by objective constraints from the natural environment and normative arrangements in the cultural world. Lefebvre (1991) raises existential questions about the nature and origin of these spaces, highlighting their dual character. The answer lies in acknowledging that social spaces are products of physical constitution and cultural construction, existing between

⁴⁶ Stoltenberg's argument (2000) suggests that sexual interactions reinforce societal expectations of gender roles. Men are often seen as active and assertive, while women are expected to be passive and receptive. This reinforcement of gender roles occurs through the act of sex, which affirms and perpetuates the socially constructed notions of masculinity and femininity. Judith Butler's question raises a critical point about the relationship between sex, gender identity, and desire. Butler challenges the idea that one's biological sex determines gender identity and proposes that it is a complex interplay of social, cultural, and individual factors. Butler questions whether gender identity is shaped by regulatory practices, particularly those related to heterosexuality, which often upholds traditional gender norms (Butler, 1990, 19-24). Butler's broader perspective on gender is that it is not a fixed or innate characteristic but a performative and socially constructed concept. Gender is not an inherent attribute but a product of ongoing societal interactions and practices. This understanding implies that gender roles and identities are not predetermined but are continuously shaped and modified by various social influences (Ibid). Therefore, acknowledging that gender is a social construct, it signifies a product of society's norms, values, and beliefs rather than an inherent or biologically determined quality. Recognizing gender as a social construct allows individuals to challenge and break free from limiting stereotypes and expectations.

⁴⁷ Concerning the separation of women's and men's spaces, Shirley Ardener, in "Women and Space: Ground Rules and Social Maps." (London: Routledge, 2021), seeks to provide an insight into the cultural roots of the division of women's and men's spaces and to account for the role of space in symbolizing, structuring, and reinforcing gender relations. Further references may be found in the following works: Doreen Massey. "Space, Place and Gender." (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); Gillian Rose. "Making Space for the Female Subject of Feminism," in *Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift (eds), Mapping the Subject*. (London: Routledge, 1996): 332–354.

nature and culture (Lefebvre, 1991, pp.82-84). The practices of individuals who inhabit these spaces play a crucial role in their emergence and existence.⁴⁸

In considering the relationship between gender and space in traditional society, the influence of gender on subsistence culture is of particular interest. The reason is that subsistence methods defined "gender roles" and shaped attitudes toward gender. During periods when women were responsible for part of their livelihood, their presence in the public sphere was more pronounced than during those periods when men were responsible for subsistence (Chardin, 1966; Wilson, 1973; Sheil, 1983; Adam Olearius, 1984; Pollock, 1990). Two variables of community type – i.e., the urban vs. rural/tribal and the social strata – are influential in this domain. The responsibilities of a woman in an urban family were restricted to the domestic sphere. In contrast, rural and nomadic women devoted more time to the public sphere with regard to their duties. In a nomadic society, women held the most privileged status and freedom since men's survival depended on women. Therefore, a positive relationship existed between the economic role in the family and the definition of gender, which affected how the arenas were occupied. In other words, for an urban woman participation in the public arena – aside from the mentioned legitimated cases – was considered to be a sign of her belonging to the lower social classes and undignified. Therefore, to increase the presence of men in public space (the city), activities with a male gender character – positive or negative actions – were increased in this sexualized space, and what was initially public space was transformed into a gendered space. As gender roles yield to gender equality in the villages, especially in tribal life, the representation of gendered space becomes more attenuated. In addition, in tribal life, gender spaces were divided by invisible boundaries that defined the limits of functions.

During the pre-constitutional era, the legal system that governed relations between men and women consisted of social usage and Sharia rules (Ahmed,1992; Mir-Hosseini, 2013).⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Social space constitutes a dynamic entity shaped and continuously reconstructed by human action and labor to fulfill individuals' demands. Social actors actively construct and reconstruct their spaces, moving beyond mere economic production to imbue meaning and transform them into meaningful places (Susen,2014, p.339). Such places emerge as socially produced and culturally significant forms influenced by labor and cultural interpretation, underscoring the dynamic nature of social construction. For more, see Simon *Susen*. "The Place of Space in Social and Cultural Theory," in *A. Elliott (Ed.)*. (Routledge Handbook of Social and Cultural Theory. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

⁴⁹ Indeed, the value of women as human beings achieved perfection once one was able to marry and bear a child, particularly a boy. However, in cases where women were unable to become mothers and lacked the ability to breed, men were allowed to divorce their wives, or the women were expected to consent to the remarriage of their spouses. Forced marriage of girls for various purposes (considerations of kinship, the will of family elders, establishing ties

Women were deprived of the most fundamental rights, namely education and training; moreover, women's education occurred mainly within the family. It was limited to basic religious knowledge, such as reciting the Quran. There was no opportunity for women to pursue education outside the family in the educational system, as the general belief prevailed that the acquisition of knowledge by women in schools and even in traditional schools contradicted religious teachings and was inconsistent with women's chastity. Even the few women who benefitted from education and knowledge in educated families tended to conceal the fact. Mothers in families generally started by teaching their daughters household skills and manual labor until they reached puberty to prepare for marriage, marital life, and maternity (Shahri, 1968, p.447; Hejazi, 2009, pp. 70-72).

Nevertheless, parallel to the developments that had occurred in other regions of the world regarding the status of women, concern for women's issues gradually settled into the lap of the modernist demands of the state's cultural and political elites. Progressively, some urban women became familiar with and committed to women's issues and, along with the reformist men, demanded changes in the status and social rights of women. While the dominant definition of women as emphasized by men, particularly those in conservative circles, described women as subjects subordinate to the institution of the family., there now emerged an alternative notion that, in addition to being involved in the domestic sphere, a woman could also be educated and participate in the public sphere to promote the progress of the state. Therefore, such modernists' primary demand during this period was the right to education. Although this aim was successfully achieved by a considerable part of urban families in Iran, particularly the middle and upper classes, the right to education in this period did not translate into women as citizens (in the democratic meaning) enjoying civil rights such as the right to education. Instead, the matter was viewed as a means of combatting the state's backwardness by raising women's literacy level (Keddie, 2007).

In the late nineteenth century, due to Iranians' communication and familiarity with the developments and achievements of the West, groups of men came to be influenced by such modern principles and demanded reforms in governmental affairs, most often in clandestine ways and through activities in secret organizations. Among the reformists, one of the first demands was to highlight the need for women's right to education and training as well as the necessity for equal human rights. Mirza Malkum Khan Nazim al-Dawlah (1831-1908), the former ambassador of Iran

with influential families, suppressing clan differences, maintaining governing posts and positions, preventing honor adulteries) was widespread (Hejazi, 2009, pp. 67-70).

to Austria, established his aspired social order on the two principles of “social equality of all citizens” and “Development and the general welfare” (Etehadieh, 1982). He believed that in addition to involvement in domestic activities, women could and should be educated since raising the level of women's education becomes the initial step towards Development and social equality, which in turn is key for the Development and progress of the state (Etehadieh, 1982, pp. 55-60). To promote and implement his ideas, he initiated the establishment of the House of Oblivion (*Faramushkhana*) in 1859, one of the most influential clandestine societies during the constitutional period in Iran (Adamiyat, 1972, pp. 56-64). Through the efforts of Malkam Khan's peers, The League of Humanity [*Majma-i Adamiyat*] was also formed, which was a continuation of Malkam Khan's *Faramushkhana* and defended the concept of human equality and in its mission to achieve national Development, individual freedom, to promote the Development of human reason and thought, equality in rights for everyone regardless of origin, religion, and gender (Abrahamian, 2008, p. 99).

Mirza Fatali Akhundov, also known as Mirza Fatali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878), another intellectual, criticized the status of Iranian women. He considered the illiteracy and ignorance of women to be the cause of the nation's backwardness and society's superstition. Accordingly, he believed that the critical solution to many of the issues faced in the country lay in freeing women from social constraints and enabling women to assert social rights, particularly the right to education. As he wrote in his *Kamal al-Dawlah's epistles*,

“Pity you, Iran! Your land is ruined, and your folk is ignorant of the cultures and civilizations of the world, deprived of the blessing of freedom, and your king is a despot. So despotic is the system that it has restricted the freedom and intellectual maturity of its people, particularly women, and has provided the basis for such idiocy and imbecility among them so that they have resorted to sorcery and superstition to get rid of this issue” (Akhundzadeh, 2023, p.60)
[Translated from Persian by the author].

According to him, traditional societies frequently followed feudalistic forms of rule. The family prepared individuals for social life, the assuming of responsibility in society, and the

furtherance of its objectives. At the head of the family structure, the father or spouse headed the family, and the other family members were under their patronage until getting married or reaching independence in status. For traditional families, the man served as the conduit for communicating between other members of the family and the outer world. In such societies, women had no independent social presence (Adamiyat, 1978, p. 125). Akhundzadeh points to the social and family structure and in particular the educational setting of women, as a factor of backwardness since he considers Iran to be governed by a patriarchal system that, by maintaining and perpetuating women's traditional roles in the household as wife and mother, prevents women from assuming other roles and obtaining rights (Akhundzadeh, 2023, p.60).

Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani (1854/55-1896/97), one of the other intellectual reformers, in his book *Three Letters (Seh Maktoob)*, expressed opinions similar to those of Malkam Khan and Akhundzadeh on women's rights. He also considered the education and training of women as an initial step towards the realization of freedom and social equality (Kermani, 2001, pp. 3-4). However, in contrast to the intellectuals mentioned earlier, he viewed such reforms as opposed to the existing government and therefore as an essential prerequisite to transforming the regime (Ibid, p.122). In addition to the aforementioned intellectual reformers, women also gradually participated personally in reflecting on issues surrounding gender.

Fatimih Baraghani (1817-1852), a poet and theologian of the Babi faith, in her works *Consolation of the Eyes (Qurat-ul-Ayn)* and *Golden Crown (Zarin Taj)*, became the first woman to denounce the discriminatory status of women and held the belief that women were not meant to be secluded and confined in harems but that their presence in society should be on equal footing to that of men (Hejazi, 2009, pp. 102-108).

In addition, Bibi Khanoom Astarabadi (1858/9-1921), an educated woman among the few, in *The Vices of Men (Maayeb Al-Rejal)*, criticized common beliefs and behaviors towards women using strong and fearless language and slashed the thoughts of the innate superiority of men over women. The book was a reaction to another book by an anonymous male author and, titled *Disciplining Women (Tadib Al-Neswan)*, which dealt with the issue of women's behavior towards their husbands. Here is a sample of Astarabadi's message:

“Sisters, disregard the advice of the authors of *The Education of Women* and similar writings. Such teachers need to rectify their own moral vices first. These twaddlers seek to demolish civilization and exterminate humanity. In the form

of their petrified minds, taking the whole world as their property, giving instructions about the condition of the world that correspond with their situations and imaginations; We were in the inner harem and the cookhouse; therefore, they have caused all this corruption because of their actions. That is why there is no justice or order in this land. Thus, the virtues and vices of individuals have absolutely nothing in common with the natural distinctions of their sex. And as there are all types of characteristics and common forms, male and female, good and bad, both exist to be seen by anyone. If the character needs to be trained, it should be everyone's character. The training also is subject to all the laws of civilization, religion, nation and government, sharia and custom, country and army" (Astarabadi, 1994, p. 64) [Translated from Persian by the author].

The very expression of such thoughts and the proposal of such actions by reform-minded men and women revealed that they sought reformation in government affairs. According to them, the cause of Iran's "backwardness," compared to European countries, lay in an authoritarian hierarchy and the lack of law, safety, equality, and freedom. In order to establish law, security, and freedom, the dominant system of governance asserted the role and status of women by promoting a particular set of patterns in women's personal and social lives. The reformers sought to change the existing roles, status, and patterns of societal behavior of women in Iran. In this context, the issue of women's education was considered one of the levers for establishing the rule of law and developing the country as a whole.⁵⁰

Hence, the delineation of the demands of the modernists and some reformist women during this period reveals the core of the conservative definition of woman emphasized by conservative

⁵⁰ During those years, despite the protests and resistance of some clerics, the attention to women's education was promoted on a broader scale with more seriousness by foreign publications, which included *The Star (Akhtar)* in 1875 in Istanbul by Mohammad Taher Tabrizi, *Law (Qanun)* in 1889 in London by Mirza Malkam Khan, and *The Strong Cord (Habl al-Matin)* in 1893 in Calcutta. These sources frequently showed reformist tendencies by writing on the adverse situation of women and the necessity of reforming it, with an emphasis on education (Babran, 2002). In addition to these foreign publications, with the beginning of the constitutional movement in 1905/1906, Iranian publications emerged which emphasized not only social and political reforms but also the necessity of reforming the status of women in the country by highlighting the need to educate and train women. Publications of this nature included newspapers such as *Naday-e Vatan* from 1907, published by Majd ol-Eslam Kermani in Nahran, *Sur-e Esrafil* from 1907 by Mirza Jahangir Khan Shirazi and Ali Akbar Dehkoda in Tehran, *Tamdan* from 1910 by Reza Modaber al-Mamalek Harandi Esfahani in Tehran, and *Shafaq* from 1912 by Mirza Sadegh Rezazadeh Tabrizi in Tabriz (Babran, 2002, pp.31-32).

religious movements – i.e., woman as a subject subordinate to man. However, another idea emerged during this period that defined women's identity in the context of the government, specifically in relation to the progress and development of the country, rather than their position vis-à-vis the father or the husband. The modernists' demand for the right to education and increased women's literacy was considered a strategy to eliminate the perceived backwardness of the state. According to this definition, women were no longer a subject of the institution of the family but rather an issue of the government, meaning that the government was to provide the virtual platform and facilities to ensure women's rights, which included education so that women could contribute to the progress of society. It should be noted that despite all the arguments and efforts of the modernists and some reformist women in defense of women's literacy during the years before the constitutional movement, the women's movement failed to gain wide recognition and approval and remained merely as an idea of a number of modernists.

2.4.2 Gender in the Constitutional Era (1905-1925): Politics and Thought

Following the Constitutional Revolution's success in establishing formal institutions – i.e., a Parliament and political parties – attention to women's issues entered a new stage, both intellectually and theoretically, politically and practically. With the formation of the Iranian Social Democratic Party (*Ferqa-ye Ejtema'iyun-e 'Ammiyun*) in 1905, a radical movement with socialist tendencies and an egalitarian approach began to emerge, leading to various perspectives on the issue of gender (Kasravi, 1984).

The manifesto of the Social Democratic Party stressed the right to free education for all (especially for women), the establishment of new schools, and the closure of old schools called *Maktab Khaneh* (an old-fashioned institution of the Muslim world), the right to form political and civil associations and the right to vote for all (including women), the legal equality of citizens regardless of religion, race, and gender (Afary, 1996, p.86; Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 135-190; Etehadieh, 1982, pp. 226-227).⁵¹ The representatives of this Party addressed the issue of suffrage

⁵¹ The Democratic Party in Iran has gained the support of many reform-minded women. For instance, during a significant event in Iran, when the Democrat Party declined to comply with the Russian ultimatum to expel Morgan Schuster's delegation and bring the Second Parliament to a halt, a group of women armed and organized by the Party displayed their backing for the Party's cause. For further information on the topic, please refer to Janet Afary's "*The*

for women in the second Parliament, in addition to the question of education for women, and believed that “*Despite the law denying women the right to vote, elections cannot be free, and as long as an illiterate man has the right to vote while an educated woman is denied the right to vote, no hope for progress exists*” (Annotated proceedings of the Second Parliament of the National Council, 1924, pp.756-757) [Translated from Persian by the author].

It is widely known that religious conservatives, such as Seyyed Hassan Modarres, strongly opposed women's suffrage. Along with disapproving of women's education, this faction was against women's right to vote during the second Parliament. As evident in the following words, Seyyed Hasan Modarres held the view that women ought to be denied the right to vote:

“[T]he proof is that regardless of what we consider today, God has not given women the ability to earn the right to choose, since their minds lack the talent. Besides, it is an obvious fact that in the Islamic religion, women are under the guardianship of the man and will never have the right to decide in any religious or secular matter. Also, Article 10 of the Constitution states that the following persons, namely women, the insane, beggars, and murderers, shall not be allowed to vote or to be elected” (Modarres, cited in the Annotated proceedings of the Second Parliament of the National Council, 1950, p.760) [Translated from the Persian by the author].

As can be seen, the conservative religious tendency was to oppose any alteration in the status of women, particularly during the first Parliament. One of the principal axes of the arguments it used against the constitution and other laws passed by Parliament was to frame legal equality and women's right to education as issues that contravened Sharia law. Obviously, after Tehran's conquest and the minor tyranny's overthrow,⁵² such forces became marginalized. However, they were not entirely removed from the political and social scene (Afary, 1996, p.16).

Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, & the Origins of Feminism.” (Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁵² The Minor Tyranny was a period during Mohammad Ali Shah Qajar's reign from 1907 to 1909, characterized by his opposition to the Iranian Parliament and the political activities of the Iranian Constitutional Movement. Despite attempts to dissolve the Parliament, the constitutional press criticized many of the Shah's actions as illegal. Tensions escalated with the assassination of unknown assailants accused of belonging to the constitutionalists. On June 23, 1908, the Shah ordered the bombing of the Parliament and the arrest of his opponents (Abrahamian, 1982; Adamiyat, 1992; Ajoudani, 1997; Sedghi, 2007).

In this way, the advent of the constitutional movement provided relatively convenient intellectual and political platforms for various social groups, including women, to disseminate their educational demands and ideas to the public. This included the call to raise women's literacy level.⁵³ To this end, following the approval of the Constitutional Decree and the establishment of Parliament, a group of reform-minded women pioneered the establishment of girls' schools under the new conditions.⁵⁴

Moreover, this period of history is noteworthy for its constant engagement in establishing periodicals dedicated to women. The majority of publications at that time emphasized the advancement of women's literacy under the heading “Educating Mothers for the Upbringing of the Future Generation.” However, gradually, some publications, such as the *Women's Voice* (*Zaban-e Zanan*) headed by Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, were published in Isfahan in 1920 (Khosropanah, 2002, p. 238). It became the first magazine published under a woman's leadership and the first to mention *women* in its title. Initially, she only emphasized women's lack of literacy. However, from 1922 onward, she became one of the advocates of Western and anti-religious culture and gradually turned radical, entering fields such as politics that were prohibited to women. Dowlatabadi not only persistently pursued the political occurrences and developments of the state but also attempted to voice the political positions of reform-minded and liberal-minded women by criticizing the governments of the time and preparing the way for women's participation in the political arena. Such efforts eventually enabled women's demands to reach political levels (Babran, 2002, pp. 56-58).

⁵³ To state their opposition to the establishment of girls' schools, the clergy refrained from appearing in the pulpit for a week, considering the establishment of girls' schools a “propagation of prostitution” and “an infringement of Sharia laws,” as well as “a factor in the destruction of the family and society.” As a result, they encouraged the mob to harass girls and teachers (Hejazi, 2009, pp. 72-73). In the middle of this broad range of thought, there were moderate forces such as the *moderate Party* (*Etedali*, one of the two critical political factions of the constitutional period advocating gradual reform and opposing radical), whose members included figures such as Ayatollah TabaTaba'i and Seyyed Abdullah Behbahani, who, although they agreed with social reforms, were very cautious regarding changes in the status of women's rights. These forces considered the desirability of girls' education contingent on preserving honor and adhering to Islamic rituals and laws. For this reason, they were often opposed to the radical proposals of the socialists, practically defensive and conservative (Etehadieh, 1982, pp. 226-227).

⁵⁴ For additional information on the founding of the first schools by women during the Constitutional era, please refer to Sedigheh Dowlatabadi. “Woman's Attitude and Writing: Letters, Writings and Memories,” in *A. Najmabadi and M. Sanati* (Eds). (New York: Nigarish va Nigarish-y Zan, 1998); Mansoureh Etehadieh (Nezam Mafi). “Here is Tehran: A Collection of Articles about Tehran (1853 to 1926).” (Tehran: The History of Iran Publications, 1998); Soheila Torabi Farsani. “The Documents from Girls' Schools from the Constitution to the Pahlavi.” (Tehran: Iran's National Documents Organization, 2018).

A number of other noteworthy publications emerged during this period, which were both run by women and helped to educate Iran's female population. These included the following: *The Women's Letter (Naameh Banovan)* in 1920, under the editorship of Shahnaz Azad; *The World of Women (Alam-e Nesvan)* in 1920, under the editorship of Nawwab-e Khanum Safawi; *The World of Women (Jahaan-e Zanaan)* in 1921, under the editorship of Fakhr-Afagh Parsa; and *The Iranian Patriot Female Population (Jamiat-e Nesvaan-e Vatankhaah-e Iran)* under the editorship of Molouk Eskandari in 1923 (Golestani, 2015, p. 47). These publications were significant in promoting the education, empowerment, and social status of women in Iran. They provided a platform for women to express their views, share their experiences, and voice their concerns. Moreover, they contributed to raising women's awareness of their rights and civic responsibilities. These magazines also encouraged women to participate in social and political activities, such as charity work, education, and political Campaigns.

2.4.2.1 The Initial Phase of Organizing Associations: Clandestine Unions

Aside from the aforementioned publications, associations (*anjumans*) were founded during the first years after the establishment of constitutionalism. They were established by a small number of educated women, and their aim was to educate women so as to be able to gain social legitimacy and preserve their lives. Besides improving women's literacy, raising women's awareness of social, economic, and political issues, caring for homeless women, and establishing hospitals, they also emphasized supporting domestic industry (Sanasarian, 1982; Fasihi, 2010; Golestani, 2015).⁵⁵

According to Bamdad (1977), the main objective of The Association of the Ladies of the Homeland (*Anjuman-e Mukhaddarat-e Vatan*) was to organize a series of activities leading to Iran's independence from foreign and imperialist powers (Bamdad, 1977, p.36). Moreover, they

⁵⁵ Among such associations the following are worth mentioning: The Secret Union of Women (*Ittihadiyah-yi Ghaibi-yi Niswan*, 1907); The Association of the Ladies of the Homeland (*Anjuman-e Mukhaddarat-e Vatan*, 1910); *The Association for the Welfare of Women of Iran (Shirkat-i Khairiyah-yi Khavatin-i Iran*, 1910); The Association of Ladies of Iran (*Anjuman-e Khvatin-e Iran*, 1910); The Union of Women (*Ittihadiyah-yi Niswan*, 1911); The Association of Women's Efforts (*Anjuman-e Himmat-e Khavatin*, 1911); The Council of Women of the Center (*Hay'at-e Khavatin Markazi*, 1911), The Patriotic Women's League (*Jamiyat-e Niswan-e Watankhah*, 1922), and The Messenger of Women's Prosperity (*Peyk-e sa adat-e niswan*, 1927) (Afary, 1996, pp. 183-184; Golestani, 2015, pp. 80-81).

clearly demanded the attendance of women in the National Assembly and their participation in the administration of the society, as can be seen in this selection from an article titled “Mokhadarat,” published in *Neda-y Vatan*:

Fourteen months have passed since the constitutional situation was established. We spend our days and nights reading the papers to determine what the National Assembly has been saying and doing. [A]s it turns out, our lawmakers established the Assembly to their advantage. Its purpose tends to be the enforcement of law. So, where is your rule? So, what has happened? Where has your Senate gone? If we do not exist, there is no existence for you; if there is no existence for you, there is no existence for us. Therefore, if we figure out what the work's shortcomings are, we will rectify the law, we will rectify the order, appoint rulers, and eradicate the roots of oppression (Mutazed, & Kasra, 2000, p.261) [Translated from the Persian by the author].

In ways similar to those cited above, such associations, beyond the right to education for women, aimed to provide the opportunity for women to have a presence in society and participate in national reforms. Thus, the schools, publications, and associations founded by women on their own, following the constitutional movement's ascendancy, demonstrate a full-fledged women's movement, albeit with limited objectives and demands (such as the right to education and the right to participate in social and civic activities) and a base limited to educated middle- and upper-class women. Nevertheless, during this period, women demanded public education for men and women from the National Council members. As a result, the general education scheme was proposed in the Parliament, leading to the law on compulsory education for women enacted in the first and second constitutional periods (The Annotated proceedings of the Second Parliament of the National Council, 1899, p. 255).⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Educational institutions in Iran thus assumed a stable and centralized structure from 1876 onward, and the government's supervision of educational institutions acquired a legal dimension. In 1879, a separate department called *The Department of Female Education (Edareh Taalimat-e Neswan)* was established with the purpose of developing public schools for girls. However, it was only in 1881 that the education of girls was made compulsory and became an official part of the government's responsibilities (Golestani, 2015, p. 30).

During this period, women's demands and actions revealed that a new identity was emerging for women, that the identity of women was being raised not as subjects of men but as subordinates of the government. The government's policy of approving the Education Act in the First and Second Parliaments of the National Council and the actions of reformist women and their achievements, combined with the transformations which had previously occurred in the mindset of part of the men, particularly the political and social elites, provided the basis for a set of measures adopted by the government in the years 1900 to 1920 regarding the transformation of the status and social and legal position of women.

2.4.3 Political and Ideological Stances on Gender in the First Pahlavi Government (1921-1941)

From 1872, following the escalation of political tensions between opposing factions within the country, all the way up to the eruption of the First World War, and despite remaining a neutral country during this war, Iran was effectively embroiled in foreign occupation and internal strife (Abrahamian, 1982). In such a context, it was not feasible to raise issues of women's politics. However, with the end of the war and particularly after the establishment of relative political stability in the first years after the coup d'état of 1921, proper space for addressing women's issues was re-established.

Reza Khan, described as a “traditional masculine character” (Sedghi, 2007, p. 61) and known for his antagonism toward the clergy (Banani, 1961, p. 44), overthrew the Qajar dynasty by way of the Parliament in December 1925, leading the Majlis to nominate him for the imperial throne. This is, in fact, how the Pahlavi regime came into being. Reza Shah's reign lasted from 1925 to 1941. Approximately two years after his nomination as king, Reza Khan forced the closure of the entire independent press in Iran while demolishing all political parties.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Against the backdrop of political change, the Revival Party, initially supporters of Reza Shah, was banned. Subsequently, the New Iranian Party (*Hezb-e Iran-e Now*) and the Progressive Party (*Hezb-e Taraghi*) emerged, influenced by Mussolini's fascist Party and Mustafa Kemal's Republican Party. In this era, there was a multifaceted ground in which efforts to redefine the status of women gained prominence, supported by an authoritarian government and leftist elements (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 120). A whole spectrum of forces, including communist and socialist-nationalist groups, sought to empower women through education and social engagement and this account may seem complicated, yet it reflects the complicated dynamics of the period.

During World War I, a group of Iranian intellectuals gathered in the German capital. They were analyzing Iran's issues in a political atmosphere filled with loathing for the Allies, especially England and Russia, who were accused of having caused many disturbances in Iran. Meanwhile, it seemed inevitable that popular nationalist ideas in Germany would influence them (Banani, 1961, p. 48).⁵⁸ Indeed, these were the roots of the modernist nationalist forces whose members would form *The Revival Party (Hizb -i Tajadod)*. It was founded by Ali Akbar Davar and Abdolhossein Teymourtash. Later, Hassan Taghizadeh, Mohammad-Taqi Bahar, and Hassan Mostowfi al-Mamalek joined this Party, which published the newspaper *The Free Man (Mard-e Azad)* and advocated the improvement of the status of women (Makki, 1945). In addition, the three following newspapers also supported the goals of the Revival Party and their reformers: *Iranshahr*, managed by Hossein Kazemzadeh, the leading theorist of Iran's national unity discourse (Banani, 1961, p. 50), in Berlin in 1924; *Farangestan*, organized by Mushfiq Kazemi in 1926; and *The Future [Ayandeh]*, managed by Mahmoud Afshar in Tehran in 1925.

In the publication *The Future*, Mahmoud Afshar provided a commentary on women's education in which he stated that:

“the idea of male superiority is often rooted in physical attributes like muscular strength and bone structure, while women's strengths lie in emotional depth and sensitivity. However, these differences in upbringing have led to the misconception that women are inferior in talent to men. In other words, from childhood onward, boys are respected and loved, and their independence of thought and a sense of superiority over girls is reinforced. Boys are always encouraged to be independent and brave, while girls are encouraged to be

⁵⁸ The economic and social conditions of Iran as a consequence of the intervention of foreign powers, the rebelliousness of various tribes, the emergence of centrifugal tendencies, and the collapse of the establishment of constitutionalism caused the nationalism of this generation to develop a centralizing, unifying, and anti-diverse character. Moreover, the notion of national unity became the principal concept of nationalism in this period (Banani, 1961, p. 52). The Berlin Circle was established under Seyyed Hasan Taqizadeh after the outbreak of World War I in Germany. The members of the Berlin Circle were the inheritors of the experience of Iranian constitutionalism, which, in their eyes had failed to achieve the same status as advanced European societies. They, therefore, identified the models of centralism and racialism, prevalent in Germany at the time, as appropriate for the state of affairs of Iranian society. According to Behnam, the Berlin Circle was innovative in several areas and influenced the Development of Iranian society. They disseminated criticism of the social condition and helped spark debates on issues such as democracy, nationality, religion, identity, and modernity in a novel manner. For more, see Behnam, Jamshid. “Berliners: Iranian Intellectuals in Berlin 1915–1930.” (Tehran: Farzan-e Ruz, 2000):198.

courteous and modest, and they come to think these distinctions are innate to each of them” (Afshar, 1925, pp. 316-318) [Translated from the Persian by the author].

The various modern movements that emerged in Iran between 1921 and 1941 provided a conducive platform for women's activism by way of publishing articles that advocated for improved women's literacy, which in turn led to significant shifts in women's status. In addition, women took advantage of this period to publish more women-related materials, a significant increase compared to previous eras (Babran, 2002, pp. 74-88). The modernists' demands redefined women's identity as a catalyst for the country's progress. To achieve this, women needed to be recognized as citizens by the government, albeit not in the democratic sense. Moreover, the government needed the necessary infrastructure and facilities for women to participate in the public sphere and contribute to the state's Development. These demands redefined women as subjects of the government, which created an identity for them through implemented policies. As a result, during this period, such demands went beyond mere ideas and actually materialized in the form of policymaking under the authoritarian government of Reza Shah. Following the establishment and consolidation of Reza Shah's monarchy, the government implemented more rigorous and extensive measures to change the status of women. As Reza Shah's administration aimed to formally establish individuals' identities under a modern system of government, the initial step towards achieving this goal was to revise and modify various civil law articles. This included the enactment of the Civil Registration Laws in 1925, which granted women an independent registered identity alongside men (Sanasarian, 1982; Najmabadi, 1991; Kian, 1997).⁵⁹

The registration authority's political function hinged on the government's ability to depend on institutional accessibility.⁶⁰ The anonymity of individuals allowed the government to broaden

⁵⁹ The proliferation of modern institutions during the early Pahlavi era was not a coincidence. In fact, according to Foucault, it resulted from a specific form of political rationality aimed at altering the *bio-politics* of Iranians (Foucault, 2008). Through the Development of ordinary objects such as the civil registration system, itself based on the governance techniques derived from a particular policy of rationality called modernism, the Iranian government aimed to initiate power relations that could transform the *bio-politics* of Iranians. Foucault's definition of the concept of *bio-politics* refers to a complex set of individuals and objects as well as the relationships between individuals and their way of living. *Bio-politics*, then, describes how the individuals of a society turn into subjects of needs and desires, on the one hand, and objects of *biopolitics*, on the other (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1983).

⁶⁰ It is noteworthy that the implementation of this law faced difficulties and encountered opposition in some instances. For instance, in specific cities, some individuals objected to mentioning the names of their female family members on birth certificates, citing privacy concerns and deeming it an encroachment upon their moral values.

its presence in the private sphere of life. By providing a new officially registered state identity for individuals, Reza Shah, in effect sought to ensure two desired outcomes. Firstly, this step made the individuals reliant on the government so that the scope of the government's power was thereby increased. Secondly, the state needed to utilize the power of the entire population in order to advance its agenda of developing the country. It therefore needed women, who constituted half of the country's population, to achieve this agenda, and official registration of identity became a means to this end. But beyond the merely bureaucratic aspect of formal registration of identity, the official definition of women's identity now required the creation of a foundation by which women's participation in the public domain could be ensured. The key initiative taken during the initial years of Reza Shah's reign, thereby, was to reform the educational system (Sadiq, 1937, pp. 382-383).

In the context of education, then, the widely prevalent political and social restrictions and opposition to women's education that had hitherto existed seem to have almost vanished (The Annotated proceedings of the Second Parliament of the National Council, 1921, p. 230). This did not mean, however, that, practically speaking, women's education was now on equal footing to that of men. In addition to practical limitations in providing educational services, particularly in small towns and villages, the financial and existential pressures of the impoverished who relied on girls to work in the household and the fields often prevented them from actually participating in and benefitting from formal education whose right was being promised to them. Aside from structural limitations and existential pressures, some groups declined to allow their daughters to enroll in schools or educational institutions for cultural reasons, believing that women's education was inconsistent with the traditional role of women as housewives.⁶¹

Beginning in the 1930s, the question of women's employment became relevant to economic Development and modernization policies, in addition to having modernist and egalitarian implications. To this end, Article 1117 of the Civil Code was enacted in 1935, which states that "the husband may prohibit his wife from engaging in an occupation which is contrary to the interests of the family or his dignity or even to his wife's dignity" (The Annotated proceedings of the National Council, 1931, p.1121). At its core, this article states that women are allowed to be employed, provided that the woman's occupation does not offend the chastity and dignity of the

⁶¹ In this regard, reference can be made to Sheikh Yusuf Najafi Jilani, a prominent member of the clergy who, in 1927, penned a book called *The Chastity Scroll (Toumar-e 'Iffat)*.

family. This legislation's emergence reflected the patriarchal spirit's dominance at the time. In any case, it should be noted that at the time, not all women had access to employment opportunities since, on the one hand, many areas of work in Iranian society remained segregated on the basis of gender, meaning that women were simply excluded from performing those jobs in the practical sense. On the other hand, the majority of Iranian society still did not support women's participation in the public sphere.

The issue of women's employment was linked to another key concern: the wearing of the veil by women. Reza Shah was steeped in the dominant ideologies of the modern West, which had come to assert a stark division between religious authority and secular political power. This division translated into the curtailment of clerical power (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 136).

The *Occidentalization* of Iran involved emulating European models of progress and modernization to make Iran more similar to Europe. This included the establishment of secular educational institutions, the unveiling of women, the adoption of European dress for both men and women, and an economy, civil bureaucracy and judicial system all based on and attempting to emulate modern Western models (Sedghi, 2007, p. 64). The government regarded the change in women's dress patterns to be one of the ways of achieving the nation's progress and Development, which is why the issue was placed on the government's agenda. It should be noted that the history of the notion of freedom for women in relation to veiling and unveiling predates this era by several decades. Independent of the narrative of Zarin Taj (also known as Tahereh Qurrat al-Ayn), who discovered the hijab in the mid-19th century during the Babi Uprising (Hejazi, 2009, pp. 102-107), the notion was also advocated by modernist intellectuals of the Nasseris and Mozaffari periods, including figures like Akhundzadeh and Mirza Agha Khan Kermani.⁶² Their argument stated that:

⁶² The Babi movement (later Baha'i), which was founded in 1844 in Shiraz, Iran, by Seyyed Ali Mohamad Shirazi (1819-1850), who was known as *The Bab (The Gate)*, is regarded as a messianic movement in contemporary Western historiography aiming to reshape a society that was dominated by Twelver Shi'ism and governed by the Qajar dynasty's Despotism, which was regarded as corruption. The Babi movement is best known for its egalitarianism and, more specifically, for its influence on the status of women in 19th century in Iran (Paidar, 1995, pp. 35-36). The obvious role of Tahereh Qurrat-al-Ayn (1817-1852), a female leader of the Babi movement, in revealing herself during a gathering in 1848 known as the Badasht Conference (Milani, 1992, p. 3), is to be noted. Due to the association with this proscribed movement of unveiling herself in public, she was arrested and executed in 1852 (Milani, 1992, pp. 36-37). For further discussion of this concept, see Manoochehr Bakhtiari, "*Babism and Women: Background and Relationship of the Babi Religion and its Proponents with the Contemporary Women's Movement in Iran.*" (Germany: Forough Verlag, 2019).

“The requirement of wearing hijab in Islamic Law [*Sharia*] was initially founded on a particular necessity and expediency that arose from Arab culture and society. However, its applicability and relevance in present times are debatable. Unfortunately, the veil [*hijab*] has been misused to the extent that it has turned women into lifeless beings, a far cry from its intended purpose” (Kermani, 2001, pp.3-4) [Translated from Persian by the author].

Naturally, compared to women's education, the issue of women's clothing rights failed to attract significant attention among the reformist political currents and the women's community in the pre-constitutional period and even during the constitutional period. In other words, during the constitutional movement, the women's movement prioritized education for various reasons and was not concerned with addressing the issue of veiling. Tohidi (2016) considers that the controversial government decree of forcefully imposing unveiling on women under the rule of Reza Shah was progressive though authoritarian and led to the politicization of the hijab issue.⁶³ However, it did not prevent, and perhaps even precipitated, the reverse – that is, the imposition of the mandatory hijab in 1979 under the rule of Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic (Tohidi, 2016, p.8).

In 1930, the government introduced a decree permitting the importation of European women's hats into Iran.⁶⁴ This policy catalyzed a significant shift in the attire of the civic body, a transformation that its advocates heralded as a progressive stride for societal Development. (Moallem, 2005, p. 28).⁶⁵ Following the government's political standpoint, several intellectual non-

⁶³ The modernity concept of Reza Shah was inspired by the Turkish president Ataturk, although his vision seemed to be expressed differently. This preoccupation with modernization was accompanied by pressure on women and prepared the ground for unveiling in Iran (Neshat, 1983, p.39; Hoodfar, 1999, pp.13-15; Abrahamian, 2008, p.148).

⁶⁴ Any head-covering garment in public, except for European-style hats. Moreover, if any woman was found wearing a chador or any other non-European head-covering in public, it would be forcibly removed and confiscated by the police.

⁶⁵ The term “Development” implies moving beyond a state of “envelopment.” It encompasses both economic and social progress observed in the tangible realm. Any attempt to define Development must be grounded in the distinct attributes of the particular event under consideration. Hence, when delving into the discourse surrounding Development, the foremost challenge arises from the intricate nature of its “definition,” stemming from the complex interplay of linguistic, historical, and cultural elements associated with it. As a result, the divergence of Development theories predominantly results from the varying definitions attributed to the concept (Hirschman, 2013, pp.64-70). Modernization and Development in Iran evolved due to external influences during the 19th century. These triggered mental and objective changes, prompting adjustments. The journey can be categorized into four periods: modernization under figures like Abbas Mirza, Qaim Maqams [deputies], Amir Kabir, and Sipahsalar [army commanders]; modernization during the constitutional revolution; modernization under the Pahlavi regime (Bill, 1970, pp.22-31); and modernization and reforms in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution. The discourse of Pahlavism (the third period of modernization and reforms in the direction of Development) and its emergence was the product of the

governmental parties also began to support the concept and act of unveiling. In various publications of the era, including the newspaper *Women's World (Alem-e Niswan)*, a trend emerged that asserted the root cause of Iranian women's backwardness lay in the hijab. According to this viewpoint, unveiling was seen as the only way to overcome this backwardness, considering that the hijab was a significant factor contributing to the unfortunate state of family life. It was believed that many drawbacks and deprivations were fostered under the cover of the hijab (Dowlatabadi, 1998).

Following Reza Shah's return from Turkey in 1934 and his being impressed with Mustafa Kemal's reforms in the social and juridical spheres, he decided to establish a formal women's organization called *The Ladies' Center (Kanoun-e Banovan)*, which was launched in 1935 under the leadership of his daughter Ashraf Pahlavi. It was the first women's society to be established with the official support of the government and in line with its objectives (Paidar, 1995, pp. 103-105). In addition, between 1936 and 1941, Reza Shah implemented his Women's Awakening Campaign Project as a state *feminist project*, providing new opportunities for employment and education to some Iranian women as a way of considering the prospect of requiring all Iranian women to unveil in public (Amin, 2002, pp. 1-2; Paidar, 1995, p. 104). While Reza Shah certainly did not believe that women's rights mattered in themselves, he attended to those issues in women's life that most overtly appeared to the public eye and which were pivotal in portraying Iran as a country on the path to becoming a modernized nation-state. Thus, the organizational objectives and activities of the newly established Women's Center were not about offering women equal rights. Instead, the majority of the activities were aimed toward charity projects.

The policy of unveiling continued on a limited scale and in the form of encouragement for women and girls of officials to avoid veiling at ceremonies, festivals, and at the organization of the Congress of the Eastern Women's Union in 1932 (Bamdad, 1939, p. 87). In 1935, the agenda of unveiling women entered a more serious phase. According to the government's order that year, the presence and participation of women in schools, offices, and public meetings were allowed *on the condition of not wearing a hijab*; otherwise, violent action by coercive authorities was anticipated (Hoodfar, 1999, pp. 13-17). According to Hoodfar (1999), the impact of un-veiling for women during that time was uneven. Some well-educated women expressed their support of the

failure of the constitutional discourse (the second period of modernization and reforms in the order of Development) to organize the Iranian society in achieving the goals that the constitutionalists had promised.

unveiling law and embraced the educational and employment advantages that came with being unveiled. However, many other women who felt uncomfortable appearing without the hijab in public were forced to remain indoors and were thereby forced to abandon social activities. Consequently, they suffered the social consequences of the imposed policy of unveiling in that they often lost their social ties with family members, friends and, acquaintances (Hoodfar, 1999, p. 15).

The enactment of the forced unveiling of women as official state law witnessed protests from the conservative religious movement, led by figures such as Ayatollah Muhammad Taqi Bafqi Yazdi, Sheikh Yusuf Najafi Jilani, Ayatollah Haeri Mazandarani, and many others. Regarding the duty and right of women to continue wearing the hijab, Najafi Jilani, in his work, *The Scroll of Chastity (Tumar-e Iffat)* states the following: “Unveiled women will never be able to get married, and when un-veiling becomes mainstream, the children of the future generation will become enfeebled and diseased since their fathers were losing the sexual power as a result of debauchery. That is why the hijab and the veiling of the woman are considered obligatory in Islam” (Jilani, 1971, p.193). Similarly, Haeri Mazandarani, in reaction to the policy of forced removal of the hijab, published a book titled *Hijab*, in which he set to refute the contention that the reason for the backwardness of women is based on their wearing the veil. He asserted that it is men who are promoting the agenda of forced unveiling while women themselves are uninterested in it (Haeri Mazandarani, as quoted by Nouri, 2004, p. 140).

What is starkly evident in the contentious debates, political maneuvering, and policy enactments of this era is that women again became subjects of an authoritarian government, unable to act independently and in opposition to the government's ideology, agendas, and policies. Moreover, resistance to the imposed policy of unveiling now came with consequences, effectively translating into exclusion from educational, occupational, and medical opportunities. Two pressures faced women in this period. On the one hand, the government pressured them to unveil and embrace new forms of head covering. On the other hand, the community and the family pressured them to keep the hijab. As a result, women were placed in a situation in which either option carried a heavy price.

Eventually, the issue of veiling gave way to other demands. Thus, starting in 1935, modernist women, in addition to calling for the right to education and employment, progressively voiced more political demands, such as political rights centered on representation and engagement

in political affairs. Women's political participation in the time of Reza Shah was restricted to mere ideas and remained confined to the modernist elites. It never reached the level of political formation and implementation and therefore did not generate staunch opposition (Dowlatabadi, 1927, pp. 2-3).

What emerges from the above examination of the reality of women's lives during the first Pahlavi's reign is that the perception and role of women in Iran effectively changed from that of them being subjects of *men* to them being subjects of the *state*. Whereas in the pre-constitutional and constitutional eras, the woman's identity was defined within the framework of the family institution (being defined with respect to the father and the husband), during the reign of Reza Shah, the woman's identity became defined by the government and its agendas and policies. It is apparent that throughout this period, the government exhibited authoritarian tendencies while simultaneously endorsing reforms to achieve its objectives, i.e., the modernization and Development of the nation by seeking to utilize as many male and female members as it could to enter the workforce. Initially, the government's strategy consisted of assigning women a new title, that of *citizen*, to redefine their status as interdependent members of society to expand the sphere of power. These moves enabled women to access rights, opportunities and roles beyond motherhood, allowing them to play an active role in advancing and developing the country. The official policy of forced unveiling in the public sphere was intertwined with political maneuvering and agendas but also led to significant progress for women. However, as it deviated from prevailing social norms and cultural mindsets, it faced intense resistance from conservative groups and opposition from the majority of society. Ultimately, the policy failed and paved the way for the resurgence of conservative politics after the overthrow of Reza Shah.

2.4.4 Gender Politics and Ideology in the Second Pahlavi Government (1941-1979)

At the outset of Mohammad Reza Shah's reign (1941-1953), the lack of solid leadership and the prevailing political atmosphere, combined with the resurgence of conservative forces in the political sphere, hindered the government's ability to implement effective policies to enhance the status of women. As a result, the government's attempt to revive conservative reform policies failed to bring about significant transformation for women.

Historical analysts have portrayed 1940s Iran as an era of parliamentary politics (Afary, 1996, pp. 35-36). Society's open political and social climate allowed various political factions to propose reformist concepts, including women who voiced their demands, albeit not through a unified social movement. The different political groups in power championed these demands. In contrast, between 1953 and 1960, there were no government policies dealing with women's issues or significant actions taken by women. This was primarily due to the closed political context of the state and the government's efforts to achieve political stability. Meanwhile, the period 1960-1979 was characterized by state leaders' efforts to strengthen the foundations of their power, with a particular focus on promoting the development and progress of the state. As a result, the government's progressive policies also had an impact on the status of women.

2.4.4.1 Gender Politics and Ideology From 1941 to 1953

After the occupation of Iran by the Allies in 1941 and the resignation and exile of Reza Shah, the field of Iranian politics underwent rapid transformation. This was brought about in part because of the interruption of the process of governmental establishment as well as the attenuation of military power. The most obvious manifestation of this political shift involved the opening up of the political sphere and the activation of political and social forces. Numerous organizations, groups, and figures that had been suppressed or marginalized during Reza Shah's era re-established their communication networks, formed associations, and re-entered the political arena. Simultaneously, a variety of new political forces and organizations, including religious, liberal and nationalist, and Marxist and communist parties, emerged and challenged the existing governmental forces (Jafariyan, 2003, pp. 19-22). These socio-political currents, in turn, also translated into different competing forces that sought to reform and transform the status of women in Iran.

Since Reza Shah's policies had resulted in a new social stratum relying on various features of secular modernism, forms of political, economic, and cultural life had emerged that were based on non-traditional attitudes. After the overthrow of Reza Shah, religious currents, as well as religious associations and communities, began to re-appear and assert their influence in the political sphere. The religious currents of this era can be divided into two types: a staunchly conservative one and a more moderate one.

With regard to women, the ultra-conservative camp aimed to return women to the domestic sphere, envisioning only the role of the housekeeper, mother, and wife for them. Ultra-conservatives also demanded the repeal of the official policy of women's unveiling. Although their resistance and protest did not result in a complete repeal of unveiling or the prevention of women's education and their active participation in society, it did restrict women's visibility to a certain extent.

On the other hand, invoking the second principle of the constitutional amendment, such scholars demanded that the clergy be granted power of approval over parliamentary law as well as discriminatory jurisdiction over matters pertaining to the government and the educational system, including the determination of the content of schoolbooks, publications, and the press. Due to those demands, a policy was implemented regarding education, particularly the education of women, which included the education of children on the basis of traditions from the Shari'a and good morals, the establishment of Islamic schools for girls, and the establishment of separate spaces for boys' education and girls' education. Moreover, an organization called *The Devotees of Islam (Fadaiean-e Islam)* was founded during this period (Jafariyan, 2003, p.109). The organization represented a further expression of the demands of the conservative religious current, and its purpose was to oppose currents of irreligion and implement Islamic legal rulings.

Part of the manifesto of *Fadaiean-e Islam*, which deals with the rights and status of women in society, asserts the following:

“A woman carries more emotional and physical vulnerability than a man. Therefore, domestic management belongs to women, and women should confine themselves to the home environment, for the presence of women in public places leads to awakening men's instincts. [T]he corruption caused by the presence of unveiled women in society leads to bribery, prostitution, and the wandering of women and men, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, the disruption of generations, disruption of procreation, and death in adolescents (Declaration by devotees of Islam cited by Mehdinia, 1999, pp. 207-208).

Alongside the radical currents, some moderate religious movements also emerged in the form of organizations. These groups aimed at adapting religion to the changing intellectual

landscape and encouraged women's education within the bounds of religious law, which included the retention of the hijab.⁶⁶

Following the religious movement's frequent pleas to repeal the unveiling law, the ban on women wearing hijabs attending schools and public offices was eventually abolished in 1943 (Proceedings of the Sessions of the Supreme Cultural Council, 1949, p.502). The increase in the demands of the conservative current to reinstate women in the domestic and familial setting indicates the desire of this current to preserve the traditional male-female relations pattern, in which women define identity in relation to submission to the man (father-husband) and avoid perceived infringement of their chastity and dignity by way of restrictions on their overt involvement in the public sphere.

Once Reza Shah was freed from confinement, social forces in Iran strove to revive a free press, free organizations, and political parties. The arrival of the social movements that emerged in Iran after World War II was a positive response to this freedom (Foran, 1993, pp. 393-394). These developments also changed the status of women in Iranian society. The women who founded the women's movement in Iran at the end of the Qajar period achieved some of their demands during the first Pahlavi period. However, the fact remains that during this period, women also got the bitter taste of the harsh tyranny of the first Pahlavi regime, as did other members of Iranian society. Many women's rights activists were imprisoned, the activities of their organizations were suspended, and their publications were seized. Upon the downfall of Reza Shah's authoritarian regime and the subsequent emergence of a more permissive political climate, the women's movement in Iran regained momentum and intensified its Campaign for establishing social, political, and economic rights for women.

The 1940s brought with them another socio-political Development that would prove influential in modern Iranian history and play an essential role in the context of women's rights. The Party of the Masses, or The *Tudeh* Party, was founded in Tehran in 1941 by a number of leftist and nationalist Iranian intellectuals).⁶⁷ Aside from opposing the return of women to the domestic

⁶⁶ Among the moderate religious organizations that emerged during this time, the following are worth noting: The Association for Promoting Islamic Propaganda (*Anjoman-e Tablighat-e Islami*), established in 1942, and The Community for Combating Atheism (*Jamiat-e Mobarezeh ba Bi dini*), founded in 1944 (Jafariyan, 2003, pp. 44-48).

⁶⁷ As an internal reformist movement with Marxist tendencies, it is practically the communist Party of Iran. The Party propaganda has consistently echoed the communist strain, whereas the Party organization has repeatedly operated on the field in the sense of Soviet interests. The *Tudeh* Party constitutes the culmination of a revolutionary movement

environment, the Party also aimed to extend women's literacy and participation in various domains, including the social, economic, and even political, something that can be gleaned from the Party's platform from this time. The ultimate objective of the Party, however, remained the establishment of socialism in Iran. The initial move towards the realization of this objective included the formation of a democratic government, which was seen to provide the basis for the establishment of freedom, autonomy, and social and economic justice in society (Abrahamian, 1982, p.335).

Regarding specific steps taken on women's issues, The *Tudeh* Party's activities commenced in 1940 with the establishment of *The Women's Association (Tashkilat-e Zanan)* (WA) of Party members and *The Organization of the Women of Iran (Anjoman-e Zanan-e Iran)* (OWI) for Party supporters (Tudeh Party, 1978), The latter being replaced by *The Iranian Women's Associations [Tashakolat-e Zanan-e Iran]*.⁶⁸ Most of the Party's principal figures were relatives of Party leaders or members of the early women's movement, particularly *The Women Patriots (Zanan-e Vatan Parast)*. The Party insisted that the question of women's education should not merely be reduced to rote literacy but on acquiring knowledge, figuring out a path, and participating in the economy so as to contribute to the country's progress. In order to achieve such ends, it is essential to provide equal wages for equal work performed by women and men in the economic sphere. It was believed that in this way, inequality between the sexes and the exploitation of women would disappear (Sanasarian, 1982, p. 113).

In addition to demanding the right to education and employment for women, The *Tudeh* Party also pushed for the right of women to vote. Thus, in its manifesto at the first Congress on August 10, 1944, point 6 of the Party program calls for the recognition of the right of women to vote in the Legislative Assembly. At the time, these demands faced opposition from the majority of Parliament since opponents felt that offering women the right to vote violated Islam and the Holy Qur'an and constituted behavior outside the boundaries established by Islam (Annotated

dating to the first decade of the 20th century, as Russian radicals were beginning to exploit the liberal Iranian press to challenge the czarist regime by preparing Iran for a radical government. See "The Tudeh Party: Vehicle of Communism in Iran; CIA Historical Review Program." ORE 23-49. (Published July 18, 1949):8.

⁶⁸ The WA was established in 1944 under the *Tudeh* Party with the assistance of several communist women and leading figures of the women's movement. It aimed to achieve women's fundamental political, social, and economic freedom (Abrahamian, 1982, p. 334; Sanasarian, 1982, p.72). Moreover, the WA gained membership in the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDE) in 1948 and attended WIDE international congresses and conferences. Sanasarian considered the WA a radical group, closely linked to the pro-Soviet *Tudeh* Party. She argued that all women's groups during this period were inalienably subordinate to male-dominated political parties and lacked independence, unlike earlier feminist groups. Sanasarian attributed this to many of these organizations being associated with political parties or societies (Sanasarian, 1982, pp.54-78).

Proceedings of the National Assembly, 1949, p. 834). However, The *Tudeh* Party and its supporters were not deterred by the widespread opposition from continuing their involvement in the political arena. Thus, they pressed for women's suffrage during Mossadegh's premiership:

“All citizens, regardless of gender, ought to be allowed to have a voice and vote in the political sphere. If women are capable of choosing a broker and lawyer for their financial affairs, they are [also] capable of electing their representative in the political arena. Hence, the right to vote and the right to be elected is mandatory and essential for women, as the progress of a society depends on ensuring the rights of its women” (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 350-351).

For this reason, in 1951, the Party published a declaration on women's political rights in which it asserted that:

“[y]ou have forgotten that women constitute half of the population of our country. Those women are now involved in all social affairs, working in factories and farms and playing a significant part in agricultural production. The participation of women in the Tobacco Movement (or Tobacco Boycott)⁶⁹ in 1891-1892, the presence of women in the 13 April 1952 strike in Abadan [opposing the conspiracy of the former Iranian Petroleum Company and England to interfere militarily in Iran's affairs], the involvement of women in the 21 July demonstrations in 1952, and the 30 July uprising provides the most apparent evidence of the awakening of Iranian women.⁷⁰ Iranian women have demonstrated their growth and political consciousness in all these instances. They consider the struggle for national independence contingent on the battle

⁶⁹ The Tobacco protest represented Iranian traders, intellectuals, and the clergies as the primary collective effort of political opposition against the Qajar dynasty and foreign dominance in the Iranian national economy during the Constitutional Revolution. For more, see Nikki Keddie, “*Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*.” (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁷⁰ In 1952, the prime minister's government, Dr. Mohammad Mosaddegh, granted women the right to vote in municipal councils. In 1953, with the passage of a new social insurance law by Parliament, including the right to maternity leaves and the provision of disability benefits, women obtained equal rights as men. Conversely, women strongly backed Dr. Mosaddegh, as in demonstrations on July 21, 1952 (30th Tar 1331 in the Iranian calendar). However, in 1953, the CIA-MI6 coup, which overthrew Dr. Mosaddegh's administration, brought another provisional end to women's achievements.

for their rights (National Assembly Documents, 1956, No. 8953) [Translated from Persian by the author].

According to published reports, one hundred thousand signatures were collected supporting the declaration, including from the Iranian Medical Association and the Tehran University Law Students, and additional statements were issued. However, a large number of clerics opposed the order and stated that the right of women to vote contradicted Islam and the Quran and was beyond the boundaries established by Islam. Consequently, the right of women to vote was not incorporated into the draft of the electoral law and remained only an idea among the Party members (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 311-313 & 248). Women remained the subject of the government, meaning the government was expected to provide the necessary platforms and facilities to ensure women's rights, including the right to vote, to accelerate women's political progress and Development as a pillar of the country's progress.

As the following demonstrates, similar to the *Tudeh* Party, the National Front movement intended to empower and ensure the rights of women as part of their main objectives:⁷¹ 1.) The establishment of national sovereignty arising from the general will of the Iranian people in a republican system based on the principles of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, 2.) Guaranteeing and safeguarding the fundamental rights and freedoms of the Iranian people, both men and women, particularly the independence of political parties, elections and the press, 3.) Ensuring equal rights for men and women in all spheres (economic-political, cultural, and social) and combating any violation of human rights, 4.) Safeguarding equal civil rights, 5.) Establishing social justice, and 6.) Increasing employment and distributing income equitably (Nouzari, 2001, p. 60; Azimi, 2012, pp. 552-553).

Concerning the battle for women's suffrage, Jalali Mousavi expressed the following statement in the National Council of 1952:⁷²

⁷¹ In 1949, the national-religious oriented group, *The National Front (Jebhe-ye Melli-ye Iran)*, led by Dr. Mossadegh, emerged with a number of parties such as *The Pan-Iranist (Hezb-e Iran)*, *The Toilers Party (Hezb-e Zahmatkeshan)*, and *The People's Party (Hezb-e Mardom)* as supporters (Katouzian, 1999, p. 41).

⁷² As previously stated, the proposal encountered resistance from different factions, such as the conservative trend (clerics) and some parliamentarians. Consequently, it failed to be included in the election law. Among the opposition, representatives included Seyyed Bagher Jalali Mousavi, the representative of Damavand, who called the participation of women in the elections a violation of the rule of law, the constitution, and Islam.

“Women cannot have the right to vote and be elected, for the representative of the nation is supposed to be someone who, with the effective moves they make, does not squander two years of the country's life in vain. [When] the women of our country are in shoes and hats imitating foreign countries, how can they lead a nation independently (when their thoughts are addicted to a foreign country)? So, brothers, when you seek to grant rights to your mothers and sisters, the great religion of Islam is the most significant law to defend their rights, leaving the women to be occupied with raising the generation of the country, which is the greatest sacrifice” (Jalali Mousavi quoted by the National Assembly Documents, 1952, No. 9215, p. 117) [Translated from Persian by the author].

Besides the representatives, some scholars, such as Ayatollah Abol-Qasem Kashani, a politician and Shia Marja (leading cleric), also opposed women's suffrage, noting that:

“The constitutional decree that forms the foundation of our constitution and the constitutional law states clearly that elected officials are required to be men. Therefore, the entry of women into Parliament is subject to numerous prohibitions and violates Sharia law. Islam respects women more than all others in all aspects, and the respect for their social and moral dignity has led it to oppose this kind of demand, but not on grounds that it places them in the same category as captives and convict. Thus, women's suffrage not only fails to relieve our society, instead it will aggravate the issue” (Kashani quoted by the National Assembly Documents, 1952, No. 9215, p.118) [Translated from Persian by the author].

Given the clergy's lack of approval of women's suffrage and the conservative government's concomitant lack of support, women were unable to form a social and political movement to assert their demands. For the time being, the only way to express their demands was to participate in parties such as the *Tudeh* Party and establish associations.

As mentioned earlier, a branch for women was established within the *Tudeh* Party called the OWI. Additionally, in 1944, an agreement was signed between the *Iranian Women's Party (Hezb-e Zanan-e Iran)* and the *Iranian Women's Organizations of the Tudeh Party (Tashkilat-e Zanan-e Iran -e Hezb-e Toudeh)*, highlighting their commitment to struggle against the unjust

treatment of women who were suffering due to the lack of education. They acknowledged that illiteracy among women was the primary cause of their oppression. *The Union of Working Women (Etehadieh-i Zanan-i Iran)* merged with the Iranian Women's Organization in 1947. In the same year, the Iranian Women's Organization joined the International Democratic Women's Federation in Budapest (1947) and a year later, in Beijing, and was subsequently renamed *the Iranian Democratic Women's Organization (Tashkilat-e democratic Zanan-e Iran)*. Its objective was to safeguard women's social, economic, and political rights (Zahed & Khajehnouri, 2003, pp. 113-115). Further, in 1951, several organizations were established by a number of influential women of the era. These included *The New Path Society (Jamieat-e Rah-e Now)*, headed by Mehrangiz Dolatshahi, *The Society of Advocates of Human Rights (Jamieat-e Tarafdaran-e Hoghough-e Bashari)*, led by Safiyeh Pirouz, and *The Society of Iranian Women (Jamieat-e Zanan Iran)*, led by Badr al-Maluk Bamdad (Afkhami, 1997, p.390; Azimi, 2012, pp. 554-556).⁷³

According to Moghissi (1994), the Communist women's organizations of the time were not meant to unite women with their particular interests, demands, and issues. Instead, they were regarded as Party organs devoted to furthering the Party's political goals, which male members of the Central Committee at times headed. She argues that the prevailing antifeminism and lack of gender consciousness among Communist women meant that these organizations failed to prioritize the expansion of women's committees over other revolutionary activities (Moghissi, 1994, pp. 90-92). Shahidian reinforces this assertion when he notes that there was a failure to incorporate a more "gender-conscious" theory and practice given that the primary aim of leftist women's organizations was to rally support for their affiliated organizations, a form of participation did not necessarily promote a feminist consciousness among women (Shahidian, 1994, pp. 235-242). Firoz (Farmanfarmaeyan), a Party member, stated that Suleiman Mirza Eskandari, a primary founder of the *Tudeh* Party, declined to allow women to join the party, leading to women launching their movement on the outskirts of the Party (Farmanfarmaeyan, 1995, p.44). Over time, women gained access to the organization itself (Abrahamian, 1982, p.272; Eskandari, 1994, pp.160-162).

⁷³ Eventually, the latter organization was renamed The Women's Organization for the Proclamation of Human Rights [*Sazeman-e Zanan-e Tarafdari-e Hoghough-e Bashari*]. In addition to establishing associations, the women issued several publications, including pro-government, leftist, and national magazines. These publications focused on women's issues, such as equal access to education, equal employment opportunities with men, and political involvement. Some of these publications included "Resurgence" (*Rastakhiz*) in 1943, "Woman of the Day" (*Zan-e Emrooz*) in 1944, "Lady" (*Banoo*) in 1944, "Women" (*Zanan*) in 1944, "Our Awakening" (*Bidari-e Ma*) in 1945, "Women's Uprising" (*Qiam-e Zan*) in 1948, and "Women's rights" (*Hoghough-e Zan*) in 1951 (Babran, 2002, pp. 91-120).

However, Firouz emphasizes that despite not being allowed to become official members by Eskandari, women were indeed involved in the Party's demonstrations and strikes. The passage highlights women's determination and their unwavering commitment to the cause of progress and freedom (Farmanfarmaeyan, 1995, pp.40-41).

The overthrow of Prime Minister Mossadegh in the coup d'état of 1953 is a defining moment not only in Iranian history but also points to the global consequences of the Cold War. The Cold War rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union can be said to have impeded Iran's political progress, and many have speculated that the 1979 Revolution might not have happened had Mossadegh not been overthrown (Gasiorowski, 1987, pp.262-265). The primary cause lies in the fact that in the wake of the coup, the government suppressed all political parties and activities until the revolution of 1979, a period of roughly twenty-five years. Consequently, what was assumed to be Iran's progress toward democracy, initiated in the early 20th century to achieve broader independence from imperialist powers and a system of governance based on more democratic principles, was seen by some to have been the coup d'état of 1953. Due to the coup, many adherents of the National Front and the *Tudeh* were arrested, and women's activities turned underground and clandestine as well. Overall, the role of communist groups in the women's movement turned out to be quite tenuous during this period.

The political repression resulting from the coup had a detrimental impact on the Development of the women's movement in Iran (Gasiorowski and Byrne, 2004). During this period, there was neither a strong women's social and political movement nor a government policy to strengthen women's rights, and these demands (increasing women's literacy and increasing women's participation in society, particularly in the political sphere) remained merely notions between the modernists and some reform-minded women. Nevertheless, these demands pointed to a new identity for women as citizens in a broad sense, albeit not in the fully democratic sense of the term. In this era, the nature of the female subject was defined by the contentious conflict between the conservative and modernist currents of society, the former contending that women are subordinate to men and the latter contending that women are subordinate to the government.

2.4.4.2 Gender Politics and Ideology from 1953 to 1960

In the wake of the coup d'état of August 19, 1953, a political stalemate ensued, which effectively eliminated all governmental efforts dealing with women's issues. Although stability reigned in society, the government concluded that relying solely on the military or suppressing the opposition was not sufficient to restore the government's authority; instead, the social base and the legitimacy of the government also had to be restored. Therefore, during the first years after the coup, the government took serious steps to establish ties with the clergy (Lambton, 1969). To avoid antagonizing the clergy, the government ceased to concern itself with women's issues and shifted its emphasis entirely to political and security matters. In addition, the authoritarian nature of the government during this period effectively precluded the activities of independent women's publications and associations. Only government women's associations and publications that promoted the government's objectives remained active.⁷⁴

2.4.4.3 Gender Politics and Ideology from 1960 to 1979

In the two decades preceding the Iranian Revolution of 1979, women's identity was redefined by the government by the term *citizen*, although this did not grant women the full democratic rights that the term entails. Women's citizenship effectively meant that women were able to assume roles aside from housewifery, fertility, and childbearing so as to contribute to the Development and progress of the state.

The initial step in achieving this policy involved broadening education and raising the literacy level of both men and women in order to enable educated individuals to participate in the economy. The year 1962 marked the beginning of significant Developments in the field of education and the expansion of educational institutions in Iran. The *Literacy Corps* (*Sepah-e Danesh*) and the *National Committee* (*Komiteh-ye Melli*) were established to eradicate illiteracy and expand education in the villages of the country (Ranjbar Omrani, 2006). This is what came to

⁷⁴ For instance, New Path of Society (*Jamiat-e Rah-e Now*) headed by Mehrangiz Dowlatshahi in 1955, Women's Advocacy Group for the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (*Sazeman-e Zanan-e Tarafdare Ilamiey-e Hoghough-e Bashari*) led by Badr- al-Molouk Bamdad in 1956, Iranian Women's Societies Council for Collaborative Action (*Shoura-y Hamkari-y Jammiyat-haye Banoun-e Iran*) directed by Farrokhroo Parsa and Safiyeh Firouz in 1956 (Golestani, 2015, pp. 94-96), and "Iranian Lady" (*Banooy-e Iran*) under the direction of Nayereh Saeedi in 1955 (Babran, 2002, pp. 121-125).

be known as the *White Revolution (Engelab-e Sefid)*, occurring in Iran between 1963 and 1979 in the reign of the late Muhammad Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979), and referred to in the 1970s as the Revolution of the Shah and the People (*Engelab-e Shah va Mardom*) (Pahlavi,1967).⁷⁵ Parallel to the activities of these associations, the *High Council of Women's Societies of Iran* (HCWOI) (*Shura-ye Aali-ye Jamiyatha-ye Zanan-e Iran*) was established in Tehran in 1961 (Paidar, 2005, p. 137). The principal objective of the Council consisted of arranging literacy courses for women, recruiting and training volunteers for these courses as well as, establishing other educational programs for women.

In the mid-1960s, the WOI replaced the HCWOI.⁷⁶ The charter of the organization made specific reference to promoting women's political, economic, social, and cultural knowledge. From 1968 to 1976, most of the official roles of the WOI belonged to a small number of individuals, who were either appointed or elected. This clearly indicated the permanent monopoly of court members who were close to the government and of high status in the council, which was considered one of the main elements of decision-making in the WOI (Sanasarian, 1982, pp. 126-133). The women's organization implemented significant measures, including the establishment of family welfare centers, educational facilities centers, health care, legal counseling facilities, and childcare services for low-income women, the provision of social services for women university students, and the provision of equipment and basic needs for homeless families, among other things (Ranjbar Omrani, 2006, pp. 111-115). Several other communities dealing with women were also working toward the objectives of the WOI – i.e., increasing women's literacy, ensuring women's health, and encouraging women to participate in public life, particularly in politics – and most of these communities were headed by several commissions (Bakhshizadeh,2018).

During this period, the government also began to address other matters, including political reform concerning the role and involvement of women – i.e., the presence and participation in the political sphere, as well as the right to be elected and the right to vote. Such considerations and efforts were primarily driven by the government's need for women's participation in politics and the support of the modernists, particularly the women's community, who sought to legitimize such

⁷⁵ See more Nikki, Keddie, “*Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution.*” (Yale University,2003), and Ervand Abrahamian. “Social Bases of Iranian Politics: The Tudeh Party, 1941-1953.” (Columbia University,1969).

⁷⁶ However, the WOI was also instrumental in developing the Family Protection Law (FPL) in 1967, revised in 1975, which enacted several reforms in the field of family law, including age barriers to marriage, divorce, child custody, and policy on polygamy (Bakhshizadeh, 2018, p.65).

efforts. The government's efforts in this regard do have a conceptual basis. The concept of *women's suffrage* in the Iranian context dates back to the period of the second Majlis (1909-1911) and was proposed by Mohammad Taqi Wakil al-Raaya, the Majlis' deputy in Hamedan, who advocated women's rights (Afary, 1989, pp. 74-76). Women's suffrage was also addressed by the Tudeh Party (Paidar, 2005, p123) and its adherents in 1944 and by several prime ministers. Prime Minister Ahmad Qavam presented a bill for women's suffrage in 1946, although it was not adopted due to clerical opposition (Abrahamian, 1982; Hoodfar, 1999; Sedghi, 2007), which resulted in the issue being omitted from electoral law. Prime Minister Mossadegh provided women with limited voting rights in district and local council elections. Mossadegh also drafted an election reform law granting women the right to vote. Nevertheless, due to opposition from the clergy, he was eventually forced to revoke the bill before it being considered in Parliament (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 272-273).⁷⁷

As Sedghi notes, *women's suffragist movements* stemming from the West came relatively late to the Third World, emerging from various ideological currents and struggles such as anti-colonialism and nationalism and merging with women's aspirations for emancipation (Sedghi, 2007, p.154). For many sections of the Western world, the suffragettes consisted mainly of white females or females of the ruling elite. The movements emerged when their societies were in the throes of capitalist change. Women's suffrage in Iran, while related in many respects to the history of women's suffrage in general, has its own distinct background and development, given its specific socio-political, economic, and religious context.

Iranian women's reaction to the patriarchal culture and the clergy's efforts to oppose women's suffrage led to the strike of January 23, 1963, which demanded that women contest the constitutional mandate of 1906, which had classified them alongside foreigners and criminals with regard to voting rights (Farmanfarmaeyan, 1995, p.104). Three days later, a referendum was held as part of the White Revolution which led to women being recognized as full citizens of Iran (Sedghi, 2007, p. 156).⁷⁸ While impoverished and labor-class women could barely self-represent,

⁷⁷ In 1963, several activist women (Hajar Tarbiat, Safia Firoz, Badr ol-Moluk Bamdad) held meetings with the Parliament demanding the right to vote for women. In addition, various pro-government publications and associations, under the leadership of the Iranian Women's Council (*Shora-ye Zanan-e Iran*), advocated for women's suffrage and conducted widespread propaganda on the issue (Women's Council as cited by Ranjbar Omrani, 2006, p. 83).

⁷⁸ Suffrage was established symbolically, yet it had distinct significance for women, the state, and the clergy. According to Sedghi (2007), this achievement benefited the state in following three related but distinct forms: 1.) The government's defeat of the nonconformist clergy (due to the diminishing influence of the clergy's control over women's

many middle-class and élite women formed a renewed coalition with the state, becoming its agents, ideologues, and political planners, specifically on gender issues. Sedghi mentions one feminist that ardently lauded the events of the time, contending that the major barrier that had previously prevented women's participation in legislation had now been breached due to “*the unshakable will*” of Shah, with the result that democracy appears to have taken a meaningful hold (Ibid, p. 158).

As is evident from the following excerpts from an interview with Oriana Fallaci, the Shah’s vision of women and women's rights is far from flattering and can even be described as demeaning as it does not seem to recognize the inherent dignity of women and their abilities:

“I don't underrate [women]; they've profited more than anyone else from my White Revolution. [...] put them in the army, where they get military training for six months and are then sent to the villages to fight the battle against illiteracy. [...] I'm the son of the man who took away women's veils in Iran. [...] Women are important in a man's life only if they're beautiful and charming and keep their femininity [...] What do these feminists want? What do you want? You say equality. [...] You're equal in the eyes of the law but not [...] in ability. You've never produced a Michelangelo or a Bach. You've never even produced a great chef. And if you talk to me about opportunity, all I can say is, are you joking? Have you ever lacked the opportunity to give history a great chef? You've produced nothing great, nothing! [...] All I can say is that women, when they govern, are much harsher than men. Much cruder. Much more bloodthirsty. [...] You're schemers, you're evil. All of you” (Fallaci, 1976, pp. 271-272).

sexuality and labor) increased women's participation in society, establishing a challenge to the authority of masculinity previously endorsed by the religious body and thereby closing the gap between the government and the clergy by highlighting the gender at this point to form a beneficial government. 2.) Given that during the first Pahlavi Era, by manipulating gender, it sought to “emasculate” religious power and diminish the role it assumed in politics and society, the accompanying women's Suffrage formed a government based on secularism, economic growth, and gradual integration into the global capitalist market, democracy, and equality at the international level, especially in the United States. 3.) Suffrage thus represented the reconciliation of a gender-state and the reluctance of the government to deal with women’s votes, voting for men and women in separate ballot boxes so that women's votes are not counted in the total number of national votes. Overall, the White Revolution resulted in granting legal civil rights and the entrance of women into the national and international circuit (Sedghi, 2007, pp.154-157).

In the Shah's view, women would never achieve the equality they sought, although he granted them provisional “equality” under the law. This illustrates the contradictory yet strategic nature of the Shah's actions of using women to secure greater political power domestically by reducing the influence of clerics (*ulama*) while at the same time gaining the support of Western powers. Nevertheless, the Shah gave a speech two years later at the Majlis, which coincided with the commencement of the International Women's Year. In that speech, the Shah stated that he had issued the decree for the equality of the political rights between men and women due to the fact that “the Iranian women had attained the “maturity” and the “capability” of now obtaining that right. Although the Shah's relation to women and their rights did play a notable historical role in the context of women's rights in Iran, it was marred due to his desire for domestic political power and clout among Western powers, which ultimately betrayed his belief that women were somehow inherently inferior to men. In the wake of Westernization and the White Revolution, the Shah's reforms on behalf of women, like most of the other reforms, remained nearly exclusively superficial and made no significant or permanent impact on the situation of women. In this respect, one may draw a comparison to the approach employed by his father, Reza Shah, during his reign, which culminated in the Unveiling Decree of 1936. Here as well, it is to be noted that the government's reform policies were not intended to establish and ensure a more egalitarian society but rather a homogenized, cosmetically westernized, and hierarchical Iran, obliterating any power that might question and challenge the total supremacy of the Pahlavi dynasty and the state.

However, with the advent of the new economic environment and progressive release of the traditional bonds, several middle- and upper-class women achieved a measure of freedom and gained control over aspects such as their own lives and sexuality. The income from employment provided women with an increased power to negotiate relationships regarding patriarchy, which necessarily constrained its influence, particularly in the household. Since most working-class and lower-middle-class women could not obtain secure and lucrative occupations, they took on menial labor and earned low wages. In the 1960s and 1970s, the economic evolution and state policies enabled women to participate in the labor market and achieve a certain degree of self-sufficiency and financial autonomy (Sedigh, 2007, p. 100). Nevertheless, women's work included traditional and emerging forms of submission: as workers of employers, as women of powerful men, and (in positions of stark power differences) as women of more powerful women. As Sedigh contends, the increased participation of women in the Iranian economy at the time not only resulted in

shifting labor divisions but also filled part of the demands for the expanded labor force of a fast-developing nation in the 1960s and 1970s (Ibid).⁷⁹ Women joined the productive sphere while being confronted by a doubled sense of inequality, the existing everyday form, as well as the emergent form in the labor market.

From 1963, as the government pursued current policies, including grants of suffrage to women, a convenient platform for the anti-royal and revolutionary struggle was established; moreover, the return to Islamic foundations and values was stressed more strongly than in the past. With the enactment of the Women's Suffrage Act, an intellectual spectrum emerged in 1963 in which various notions of reform and change in the status of women (suffrage) collided (Sedghi, 2007, p.133). State and provincial associations started a political and religious struggle for women's suffrage. Within this religious organization (oppositional clergy), there were three groups: non-political scholars, moderate scholars, and militant clerics. It was the third group that vehemently rejected women's suffrage (Abrahamian, 1982, pp. 435-437). The issue of women's rights was so polarizing and divisive that it became one of the main elements in the struggle to overthrow the Pahlavi monarchy, which eventually led to a return to conservative tendencies and forces in the years following the Shah's removal.⁸⁰ At the instigation of Ayatollah Khomeini, the militant clerics formed the Islamic Consultative Assembly, a body opposed to public policies and governmental action in favor of women. He believed that suffrage for women meant nothing but demagoguery. Ayatollah Khomeini further contended that the Pahlavi regime violated the Constitution by granting women the right to vote since Constitutional Law contained no existing legislation concerning women and their right to vote (Khomeini, 1988, pp. 34-40 & 305). And yet, in the Iranian Revolution of 1978, the vast majority of urban women, echoing the common sentiment of discontent, participated in the protests without making specific demands. Considering the role of women as social and political actors, Ayatollah Khomeini, during his exile in France,

⁷⁹ The increasing involvement of Iran in the world market typified postcolonial political and economic ties among industrialized and developing states situated on the periphery, wealthy in natural resources. The Iranian relationship with the West also emerged in the framework of the Cold War's policy of containment. While seeking to preserve Iran's stability, the West was concerned with preventing the communist states from accessing Iran's petroleum and the political establishment processes. For more, refer to Bahman Nirumand, *"Iran: Imperialism in Action"* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1969).

⁸⁰ Another influential current that opposed the Pahlavi government was the intellectual current of Islamic socialism represented by Ali Shariati and the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran (PMOI) or Mojahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK).

moved away from his earlier position of denying women the right to elect and be elected and instead now sought to legitimize the political rights of women (Nashat,1983).

Laws supporting women's rights were favored by a small number of neo-religionists, pro-government elites, and a few educated women, while the rest of the community, particularly conservatives, declared dissatisfaction with the passage of such laws. Due to widespread opposition, this article of law was not only included in the nation's electoral law. Still, the Pahlavi administration did take a step in heeding women's legal concerns, enacting the Family Protection Law in 1967 for the welfare of women, which offered women a means of becoming more aligned with the Pahlavi government (Pahlavi, 1980, p. 155). In 1974, more provisions were added to support women's rights, reflecting the demands for equal rights with men that some women had advocated for years prior.⁸¹ Implementing this law brought about a notable transformation in women's status within the family institution. It empowered women, granting them greater freedom and a renewed sense of identity that was no longer subordinate to men nor solely focused on perpetuating the male lineage through childbirth and arranged marriages (Sanasarian, 1982, pp. 74-75).

Following the emergence of Islamism and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran's religious government in 1979, numerous laws and policies within both private and public domains fell under the direct control of the clergy. They extended the limits and domains of gender discrimination in favor of men. During the 1980s, the ruling clergy rolled back several significant progressive reforms introduced during the second Pahlavi era under the umbrella of the Family Protection Law. Consequently, the Family Protection Law was nullified, and family and criminal law were reinstated (Mir-Hosseini, 2002, pp. 167-168 & 186-188). Although women protested and there were no alternative provisions, the Family Protection Law continued to be implemented as a benchmark for addressing matters that Sharia law does not explicitly cover.

⁸¹ Actually, the legal committee of the non-governmental organization New Path Society (Jamait-e Rah-e Now), chaired by Mehrangiz Dolatshahi, started to draft a bill in 1957, which was adopted by the Parliament ten years later with the support of the Women's Association of Iran, with a few amendments, the National Assembly approved it under the name of Family Protection Law.

2.4.5 Gender Politics and Ideologies in the Islamic Republic (1979-present)

Scholars have identified four distinct phases of women's participation in politics during the post-revolutionary period (Kian, 1997; Mir-Hosseini, 1999& 2002; Tohidi, 2017):

- The revolutionary period of 1979 to 1981, during which the secular opposition played a visible role but was ultimately suppressed.
- The war period between 1981 and 1988, during which the process of Islamization was implemented under Khomeini's guidance.
- The exclusion of the radical wing occurred during the post-war reconstruction period, following Khomeini's demise and the escalating conflicts between factions within the regime.
- The emergence of a new Gender-Aware Movement in Iran peaked during Khatami's presidency and the following post-1997 era.

Just a month before the revolution's victory, Ayatollah Khomeini gave an interview in which he discussed the position of women in Islamic rule. He stated that women's education and economic activities were not in opposition to one another, and that women's freedom was to be respected as much as men's. Khomeini emphasized that men and women were equal according to Islamic teachings. While he acknowledged the requirement for women to wear the headscarf (*hijab*), he also stated that the type of covering was not prescribed and could be chosen by women as long as it met the requirement of being a *hijab* (Azari, 1983). The secular revolutionaries found the statement reassuring, and several agreed to wear the hijab during the demonstration to signify their union with the revolution. In addition, the reinstatement of the *chador* through the secular group of women represented a symbolic act of resistance against the Westernized dictatorship of the Shah (Afkhani, 1997). The 1979 revolution in Iran represented a nationwide popular movement involving various groups and social classes, modern and traditional, the religious and the secular, the middle class, and the impoverished; both men and women were involved at a massive level (Bayat, 2007). Women who followed Islamic ideology participated in the revolution to establish an Islamic state grounded in Sharia law. Women who held secular beliefs participated in the revolution as a form of opposition to the Shah's dictatorial regime. Women affiliated with

Marxist organizations strived to abolish the Shah's regime, which they considered a puppet of the Western imperialist powers. It may be said that the foremost objective for them all was the establishment of a new form of social status (Mahdi, 1995, p. 68). Women formed an integral element of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, taking part in various efforts and becoming a critical visual icon of rebellion against the Westernization imposed by the Shah and the Pahlavi regime. The *hijab*, often seen as a means of segregating women from their gender identity or a primary symbol of their subjugation, was transformed into an emblem of resistance and struggle. However, the political and social transformations that gripped Iran left women and citizens questioning whether life under Ayatollah Khomeini was better than that during Shah's reign. It was not long before the ruling powers demanded that women be barred from participating in elections. As a result of this viewpoint, women were once again relegated to a position subordinate to men.⁸² These underlying concerns intensified at the outset of the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and were compounded by the Iranian government's contentions of what the nation was willing to "sacrifice." The position of women in Iranian society involved much more than the veil's resurgence. It concerned underlying issues regarding the status of women in relation to Islam and the milieu of the twentieth century.

After implementing Sharia-based laws in the Islamic Republic, women in Iran experienced a substantial reduction in their rights across various aspects of their lives. The most obvious and intriguing contradictions of this political, legal, and ideological structure appear in the question of women and gender and sexuality. Women's rights became the initial victim of the revolution, which turned into a regressive and reactionary path. In March 1979, on the occasion of International Women's Day (March 8), thousands of urban women, primarily middle class, spontaneously poured into the streets to protest Ayatollah Khomeini's compulsory wearing of the *hijab*, the reversal of family laws, the dismissal of female judges from the bench, and other similarly discriminatory and misogynistic programs (Keddie, 2007, pp.20-23). Moreover, they chanted, "*Freedom and equality is neither Eastern nor Western! It is universal!*" as well as "*We did not have a revolution in order to go back!*" (Figure 1).

⁸² For instance, Iran has implemented traditional tribal codes, including "hudud" and "qisas," which impose severe penalties like stoning. However, applying these laws has been discriminatory against women, who are considered inferior and even "sub-human." (Tohidi, 2016, pp.262-264).

With widespread backing from political forces demanding progress, equality, and justice, this demonstration lasted for a week despite physical attacks and violence organized by groups of misogynist men. In fact, it only ended after the government's (tactical) retreat. In order to create a morally upright society, the recognition of the importance of the dress code led to the introduction of an Islamic law that involved punishment by lashing for violations of “Islamic concepts of decency,” as stated in Article 102 of the 1983 Constitution.⁸³ This law explicitly targets women who appear in public without the required *hijab* and sentences them to 74 lashes. In addition, the previous notion that the *hijab* symbolized seclusion, submissiveness, and backwardness was also denounced through public speeches and written works. In contrast, conservative religious preachers promoted a new conception of the *hijab* as a symbol of freedom, purity, and honor. The Shah's attempt to gain women's patronage for the regime by promoting modernism proved fruitless and instead culminated with the rise of religious groups headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, who campaigned actively and gained popularity among Iranian middle- and lower-class women (Kian, 1998, pp. 145-147).



Figure 1. Kaveh Kazemi. “Enforcement of Islamic Veil” (1980)⁸⁴

⁸³ According to the Iranian Human Rights Documentation Center (2012), the 638th article of the law stipulates that women who appear in public places and on roads without wearing the Islamic hijab can face a penalty of imprisonment ranging from ten days to two months or a fine ranging from fifty thousand to five hundred Rials.

⁸⁴ In March 1979, a gathering of women demonstrated against the mandatory use of the Islamic veil by waving their veils in the air outside the prime minister's office in Tehran, Iran. The photos (Figures 1-4) capturing the events by Kaveh Kazemi can be found in the book *Revolutionaries: The First Decade* (2017) from Nazar Research and Cultural Institute.

The emerging Islamic state intended to involve women in a national vision that granted them equality of rights and a significant part in contributing to the Revolution's cause while recognizing their fundamental role in the household (Vaez, 2004; Jahanshahrad, 2012). The Islamic gender policy promoted the protection of traditional family values and the maintenance of gender roles following Islamic teachings (Najmabadi, 1998; Hoodfar, 1999; Moghadam, 2002).

Religious activists mobilized women who had previously been confined inside their homes to participate in demonstrations against the unjust rule of the Shah. Moreover, religious issues and symbols, particularly those associated with Fatima Zahra (as symbols of resistance against unjust rule), inspired women to take political action (Mahdi, 2004, pp. 434-435). This collective political engagement of both religious and secular women played an instrumental role throughout the movement against the Shah. When Ayatollah Khomeini realized the significance of women's participation, he changed his stance on women's political rights. By reinterpreting the medieval legal principles of Shi'a jurisprudence in a contemporary context, he emphasized women's empowerment in accordance with Islamic principles. The segregation of the sexes was considered both a means of preventing any behavior that could lead to the collapse of the family structure and as instrumental to the preservation of the modesty and purity of women in Islamic society (Farhi et al. 2012, pp. 63-67).

As a result of the religious-led Revolution, Iran was transformed into the Islamic Republic of Iran, with the support of the voting population in April 1979 (Hendessi, 1990). Rejecting entirely the values of democracy and secularism, which are critical features of the agenda of globalization, Iran instead established a theocratic regime that purported to base governance on Islamic doctrines. Under this system, divine commandments were to hold absolute and unquestioned authority. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 brought the division between secular and religious forces in Iran to the fore. In this respect, women also became the site of conflicting aspirations and achievements of religious and secular forces in revolutionary Iran (Reeves, 1989). For the most part, the Revolution's primary victims consisted of secular women who belonged predominantly to the middle and upper social strata (Abrahamian, 2008, pp. 176-178). Religious policies aimed at promoting Islamic values and beliefs in the public sphere had a significant effect on secular women's lives. In some cases, the impact included being barred from involvement in domains of public life and being forced to adhere to Islamic dress codes. Women from conservative backgrounds who had previously been prevented by their families or religious leaders from

showing themselves in public spaces now experienced reduced social inhibition and greater religious acceptance due to the prevailing Islamic environment.

During the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), women voluntarily requested to be assigned to the war fronts. In response to this appeal, Ayatollah Khomeini (1980;1983) stated that while women fought in the time of the Prophet of Islam, their duty involved tending to the wounded (Khomeini, 1980, p.253;1983, p.281). The authorities encouraged individuals to demonstrate commitment to the Islamic Republic by conforming to traditional gender roles (Paidar, 1995, p. 355).

Throughout the different stages of the war, the expected type of support from women underwent changes. The revolutionary period in Iran lasted until the end of the Iran-Iraq War, witnessed a politicized and ideological definition of Islam dominating the political environment and the state gaining power and autonomy over civil society- a patriarchal, military suffocation atmosphere prevailed from which only radical Islamists and nationalists benefited (Tohidi, 2017, p. 63). Women were expected to engage in self-*jihad*, which involved striving for spiritual excellence through acts of piety, self-restraint, and opposing immorality. This form of *jihad* was not only about personal Development but also directed toward combatting poverty and illiteracy. In addition, the government aimed to mobilize devoted women to work towards establishing an Islamic society. As part of this effort, the government encouraged single or widowed women to marry wounded or veteran soldiers to pursue the self-*jihad* principle (Figure 2).⁸⁵ The approach to women's participation in the war effort changed as the Iran-Iraq war progressed and the realization that a conflict settlement was unlikely to occur soon. As a result, more practical and systematic approaches were adopted, and women were recruited as revolutionary guards and mobilized in various organizations (Paidar,1995; Farzaneh,2021).

⁸⁵ A groom, a veteran of the revolutionary forces with severe burns on his face, sits beside his bride. They are underneath a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini in a wedding ceremony arranged by the marriage bureau of the Martyrs Foundation, located in Tehran. The images that can be described as faceless stories depict war-wounded individuals who often remain anonymous or hidden from view. Many of these individuals have suffered devastating injuries that have left them without a visible face or blindness, while others experience shame that leads them to conceal their identity. This is not limited to men, as women also appear faceless and covered in these images, further highlighting the vulnerability of those whom the fate of their circumstances has impacted.



Figure 2. Kaveh Kazemi. “Veteran’s Marriage” (1988)

During this period, the government introduced measures to provide women with employment opportunities, welfare, and subsistence. However, these measures were not intended to expand social and political rights for women but rather to mobilize their participation and support in attending support headquarters, preparing items, providing clothing for soldiers, and caring for the wounded during the war (Hooglund, 1989). Thus, the relief measures for women were aimed at encouraging their involvement in the war effort rather than promoting their social and political rights. In such a situation, women's demands did not revolve around attaining political, economic, and cultural rights. Instead, they focused on the propagation of Islamic values and culture, the advancement of indigenous customs, the restoration of positive practices, and the prohibition of negative ones. However, while the women who joined the Revolutionary Guards were taught to handle weapons, their roles were primarily non-combatant. In fact, female members were not expected to be involved in military activities in the same way as their male counterparts, instead assisting from behind the front lines. Nevertheless, women received training in the use of weapons as a precaution. This policy was consistent with Ayatollah Khomeini's endorsement of the conventional Shi'a belief that women are prohibited from participating in *jihad* or holy combat (Figure 3&4).



Figure 3. Kaveh Kazemi. "Untitled" (1980)



Figure 4. Kaveh Kazemi. "Untitled" (1988) ⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Basiji women participate in mass mobilization efforts during Iran-Iraq War, wearing black chadors, familiarize themselves with the AK-47 assault rifle in a school classroom in West Tehran.

As the Iran-Iraq War extended to urban areas and civilian neighborhoods became frequent targets of air raids, the Iranian military was disadvantaged due to its limited resources and training. As a result, it suffered a series of defeats at the hands of the better-equipped Iraqi forces. Meanwhile, the conflict grew increasingly unpopular among the population, significantly after rural areas were also affected. As a result, the number of volunteers dwindled, war refugees protested, and those who had lost their homes to the bombings openly expressed their dissatisfaction. To counter these challenges and ensure its own survival, the Islamic state, with Ayatollah Khomeini's endorsement, decided to mobilize women for military purposes. This marked a significant shift in policy (Hendessi, 1990). During a speech to a gathering of women revolutionary guards in April 1985, he urged them to be ready to defend Islam with arms, emphasizing that:

“What is not accepted in the Shari’a is women's participation in primary *jahad*. But when it comes to the question of defense, there is consensus in Islam that women are obliged to take part in every possible way including military defense. Women should receive military training. [...] With their presence at the war front, women not only bring extra human power, but they also create a special sensitivity in men to fight even harder. Men are sensitive towards women and react more strongly against seeing one woman hurt than a hundred men killed (Paidar, 1995, pp. 306-307).

Ayatollah Khomeini's declaration that women should participate in the military during the Iran-Iraq War required widespread acceptance. As a result, a women's demonstration was held in Tehran, which resulted in a resolution declaring their eagerness for armed conflict against Saddam Hussein and calling for women's military training. However, women did not have to resort to using arms to defend Islam. With its constant bombardment of civilian areas, the Iraqi army had advanced too far to be halted by the mobilization of military forces consisting of both men and women. Eventually, Ayatollah Khomeini acknowledged that the only viable solution left for the Islamic Republic was to end the war, which he did one year later.

2.4.5.1 Women and the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Ascent of the Feminist Response

During the first decade of the Islamic Republic, a growing body of women increasingly questioned the discriminatory circumstances surrounding them, re-interpreting legal texts that had previously been relied on to validate gender discrimination. This eventually resulted in the Islamic feminism movement, which had significant ramifications on the national and international scale. In Paidar's opinion, the bewilderment in Iran stems from the lack of an equivalent concept of *feminism* in Farsi and is widely adopted as an imported term (Paidar, 2001, p.3). The fundamental notions related to feminism have existed in Iran for the past centuries, and a large part of the literature expounding Islamic feminism has been invented more recently, and what has been even more novel is the application of the term *Islamic feminism*. Since its inception in the 1990s, various definitions of this term have been put forward, and it has failed to provide a generally agreed meaning of the concept. Hence, a specific and unified definition of *Islamic feminism* ought not to be adopted as a criterion overall (Mojab, 2001, p. 125; Badran, 2009, pp. 19-22).

The evidence increased in the middle of the 1990s that *Islamic feminism* was a concept generated and propagated among Muslims in the most remote parts of the world (Mir-Hosseini, 2000). Moghadam (2013) defines *Islamic feminism* as a “theological and intellectual movement” that promotes gender equality and women's progress within the framework of Islamic discourse (Moghadam, 2013, p. 179).

Portraying Islamic women's organizations through a Western lens has been a consistent failure that ultimately omits the influence of Islam and the state's influence on women's issues in Muslim societies (Kandiyoti, 1991). Abu-Lughod (2013) criticizes the narrative of Western feminism, in which Muslim women are consistently oppressed and need Western interference, arguing that various factors, including religion, policy, economy, and culture, shape the experiences of Muslim women in various societies. The experiences and struggles of women in these countries are often disregarded in many Western feminist approaches to women, and consideration of specific women and their specific issues merits further discussion. Indeed, this is a significant topic of consideration in the study of Muslim women's movements in the Middle East as Muslims, regardless of the level of their religiosity. The matter deserves sustained attention because, according to the Western feminist perspective, referring to the *Muslim woman*, whether religious or non-religious, is a pointed reference to Muslim society as a whole, often without the

necessary level of discernment. Thus, a distinction between a woman who has integrated Islam as a significant element of her identity and is termed a *religious woman* as opposed to a woman who has adopted a secular way and is referred to as a *secular Muslim woman* needs to be made.

In this context, *Islamic feminists* and *Muslim feminists* are two prominent terms that have distinct meanings. While both terms refer to feminists who are Muslims, there is a methodological difference between the two (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Badran, 2009; Moghissi, 2009; Mir-Hosseini, 2011). *Islamic feminism* refers to a specific movement that seeks to reconcile Islamic teachings with feminist values and principles. Islamic feminists believe Islam can be interpreted to promote gender equality and women's rights. They rely on Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and Hadith and the principles of justice and equality in Islamic law (*Shari'a*) to support their arguments. On the other hand, *Muslim feminism* is a broader term that refers to any feminist who identifies as a Muslim. *Muslim feminists* refer to Muslim women who advocate for gender equality and justice, but they do not necessarily rely on feminist interpretations of Islamic texts to support their cause. Instead, they accept feminist demands and human rights rulings that align with their values and beliefs. *Muslim feminists* may also use secular arguments and activism to pursue gender equality and justice. Thus, the methodological difference between the two lies in the extent to which Islamic sources and teachings promote feminist ideals (Wadud, 2020). Badran (2007) defines *Islamic feminism* as a subject of discourse and practice framed in Islamic discourse and influenced by the Qur'an. Following Badran, *Islamic feminism* originated from criticism of patriarchal Islam(ism) and secular feminism (Ibid, pp. 42-45).⁸⁷

Mir-Hosseini (1999) points to the diversity of groups within what she calls the *Feminist Project in Islam* and notes that there is no unified approach to feminism within the Muslim world. Instead, there are a variety of interpretations of feminism, as well as different ways of understanding Islam and its relationship to feminist ideals. In the context of the *Feminist Project*

⁸⁷ *Islamic feminism* is a diverse movement that encompasses a variety of perspectives and goals. For instance, some Islamic feminists advocate gender justice and equality in Islamic societies, while others seek to challenge patriarchal interpretations of Islam in the theoretical realm. Still, others seek to reconcile Islam with contemporary human rights principles and to promote a more inclusive and compassionate understanding of the religion. Some Islamic feminists argue that gender inequality is not inherent in Islam but results from patriarchal interpretations of religious texts and traditions. They seek to reinterpret Islamic teachings in ways that affirm women's rights and empower them to participate fully in all facets of social, economic, and political life (Badran, 2009; Moghadam, 2010). For more see Yamani, Mai & Andrew Allen (ed.) "Feminism & Islam: Legal and Literary Perspectives." (Ithaca Press, London, 1996). The book is an edited collection of essays that examines the intersection of feminism and Islam from diverse disciplinary and cultural perspectives.

in Islam, feminist activists face opposition from a range of actors, including conservative religious leaders, government officials, and even some feminist groups themselves. This opposition can take various forms, from legal restrictions on women's rights to social and cultural pressures reinforcing gender inequality. She argues that the existence of opposition can indicate that a movement is gaining momentum and posing a challenge to existing power structures. There is often resistance to feminist ideas within religious circles, particularly among more conservative theologians who see them as threatening traditional gender roles and family structures. She notes that this has led to a kind of “disputation” between feminists and theologians as they argue over the proper interpretation of Islamic texts and the role of women in society (Mir-Hosseini, 1996, pp. 284-287; 1998, pp. 240-247).

In addressing the *Islamic feminist* belief of gender inequality as societal rather than religious, Najmabadi's work (1998) is noted for offering potential opportunities for social transformation in the future. She argues that this perspective creates new possibilities for transforming society, opening up opportunities for examining and changing social structures and norms that contribute to gender inequality. Furthermore, by questioning the traditional religious and cultural assumptions that have historically underpinned gender inequality in Islamic societies, *Islamic feminism* provides a new framework for rethinking gender relations and promoting women's rights.

However, Mir-Hosseini (1996) explains that with the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Muslim women activists began to view the patriarchal laws based on state Shari'a principles as constituting Islamic injustices. Consequently, women in Iran started to challenge the state's monopoly over the definition and implementation of Shari'a law in both public and private legal spheres. In this respect, it may be said that Islamic feminists in Iran do not support the state but instead use the same Qur'an as the state to fight for their rights. They aim to challenge the patriarchal laws based on the state's formulations of Shari'a principles, which they view as Islamic injustices. The limitations imposed on women by such an approach to the Shari'a can be reconsidered by engaging with the same Qur'anic texts that the state claims to be following. This engagement will inevitably create tension as Shari'a upholders face opposing objectives of preserving the family and restoring women to a “true and high” status under Islam (Mir-Hosseini, 1996, pp. 284-285). However, this tension, intrinsic to Shari'a practice, provides opportunities for

new interpretations of Shari'a rules to emerge in an unprecedented manner as far as Islamic legal history is concerned.

In Iran, two distinct strands of *Islamic feminism* can be identified: one branch that studies the scope of women's potential interests under the Islamic Republic of Iran and Islam. The first strand of Islamic feminism in Iran is often referred to as *reformist feminism* and is associated with women who are working within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran to expand women's rights and opportunities within the constraints of Islamic law. This strand of Islamic feminism prioritizes legal reforms and the reinterpretation of Islamic texts and teachings to support gender equality. The second strand of Islamic feminism in Iran is often referred to as *transnational feminism* and is associated with women who are engaged in a more global discourse on the intersection of Islam and feminism. This strand of Islamic feminism tends to be more critical of traditional interpretations of Islamic texts and teachings and seeks to challenge patriarchal interpretations and practices within Muslim communities worldwide (Mir-Hosseini, 2011, pp. 334-346; Afshar, 2012, pp. 382-396; Moghadam, 2013, pp. 894-920).

However, the other branch concerns opponents of the use of Islamic feminism as a descriptive concept in the Islamic framework. According to some Iranian *Islamic feminists*, men and women are equal, albeit with unequal rights (Moghadam, 2002). They consider the fact that women are discriminated against and systematically humiliated under the laws in force in Iran and other comparable countries, live in complete lawlessness, and are practically considered second-class citizens does not necessarily imply injustice but is partly related to the "roles and different responsibilities of men and women" regulated by religious laws (Afshar, 1998, pp. 23-34). According to this view, individuals' right to sexual identification, opposition to gender-based discrimination, and adherence to children's rights and human rights principles should be subject to religious demands.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ Many activists in Iran have developed their feminist identities in the context of the Islamic Revolution. Moghadam (2002) examines the emergence of Islamic feminism in Iran and the debates surrounding its compatibility with feminist principles and Islamic teachings. She notes that many Iranian women have developed their feminist identities in the context of the Islamic Revolution and have been influenced by the revolutionary Islam advocated by Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Khomeini. Moghadam also notes that the initial years of the Islamic Revolution witnessed some efforts to promote gender equality. However, these were later abandoned in favor of a more traditional interpretation of Islamic gender roles that emphasized the segregation of the sexes. Ziba Mir-Hosseini and other scholars critically analyze classical Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) by challenging its gendered assumptions about roles, interactions, and rights. According to Mir-Hosseini (2003), classical *fiqh* was heavily influenced by patriarchal societies and relied on men's experiences and concerns, resulting in male-centric interpretations. In order to address these biases, she argues that women must engage with religion and participate in the production of religious knowledge. This entails asking new

Wadud, in her book *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam* (2006), argues that a desire for political independence, participation in governance, suffrage, education, and human rights for all citizens drove women's participation in national movements in Islamic countries. However, despite these efforts, the demands of women were often sidelined and ignored by national governments after independence. In particular, some feminists had assumed that the disregard and humiliation of women were somehow “inherent” in the nature of religion itself, proceeding from this assumption to argue that feminist discourse should, therefore be fundamentally dissociated from religious discourse. According to Wadud, such an approach creates a false dichotomy between religion and human rights and fails to recognize the potential for religious traditions to promote gender equality and justice (Wadud, 2006, pp. 211-219). She contends that Muslim women face the challenge of balancing their commitment to Islamic traditions and values with their desire for human rights and gender justice. Wadud advocates for a *gender jihad*⁸⁹ or struggle for gender justice within the Islamic tradition, arguing that Islam does indeed provide a framework for promoting gender equality and justice. Approaches such as Wadud's have led Islamic feminists to conclude that Muslim women who strive for liberation do not need to approach and frame their Islamic beliefs and their pursuit of human rights as a conflictual binary opposition.

Islamic feminism seeks to challenge the historical clichés that link the suppression of women among Muslims to Islam itself and to define Muslim women in their own terms rather than as the Other of Western secular feminism. One way in which Islamic feminism achieves this goal is by grounding the struggle for women's rights in a religious ideology, which allows its adherents to reject the notion of feminism founded on secularism while still accepting the tenets of gender

and challenging questions, which can help to reshape Islamic discourse and contribute to more equitable interpretations of Islamic law (Mir-Hosseini, 2003, pp. 17-22).

⁸⁹ She argues that the concept of *jihad*, often associated with mere military struggle, can be reinterpreted in a gendered sense to refer to the struggle for gender justice. In 2005, she led a mixed-gender Friday prayer in New York, attended by around 100 male and female worshippers. This was a controversial event, as many conservative Muslim scholars and leaders consider it a violation of traditional gender roles and religious norms. Wadud and other scholars who support mixed-gender prayer argue that there is no prohibition in the primary Islamic texts, such as the Quran and Hadith, against separating men and women during prayer. They argue that gender segregation during prayer is a cultural practice rather than a religious requirement and that it perpetuates patriarchal norms and limits women's participation in religious life. See Katherine Bullock, “*Amina Wadud: Leading Mixed-Gender Friday Prayers.*” (Islamic Horizons, vol. 34, no. 2, 2005): 20-23; Mona Eltahawy, “*Female-led mixed-gender Friday prayers.*” (The Guardian, 22 March 2005). (For more information visit:

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2005/mar/22/muslimwomen.religion>

(Last accessed on October 10, 2022).

equality enshrined by universal human rights. As Badran (2007) states, *Islamic feminism* is a form of feminism that rejects the monopoly of the secular West on feminist discourse and asserts its presence, history, and contributions to the Development of a gender-egalitarian Islamic tradition (Badran, 2007, pp. 42-45). By rejecting the idea that Western secular feminism is the only valid model for women's rights struggles, Islamic feminists claim their legitimate position in the feminist movement's history. They seek to challenge the tendency of women's rights struggles to be monopolized by secular models of reasoning that purport to be universal (Ahmed, 1992; Moghissi, 1999; Barlas, 2011).

The disruptive cultural shift in Iran in the 20th century, in general, and the process of identity formation after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in particular, placed women in the spotlight as representatives of culture, raising unprecedented awareness of gender issues among women and in Iranian society. This enabled women to become active participants in negotiating the interaction between tradition and modernity, especially in areas such as education. The issue of gender within Islamic policy discourse has also been transformed due to increased focus on the role of women in Iranian society. Rather than being discredited as a merely marginal topic to be neglected both in public discourse and in the domain of policy formation, it has come to be seen as a central imperative in both.

Tohidi (2002), who documented the activities of Iranian women's non-governmental groups at the United Nations from 1979 to 2000, demonstrates the significance of their involvement by dividing them into three distinct camps: 1.) women's groups in power alongside Islamic conservatives who promoted the Muslim women's model and the ruling ideology in Iran as led by international organizations, 2.) groups of pragmatic Muslim women, generally with higher education, who served to strengthen the position of women in the emerging Islamic state, and 3.) independent activists, including feminists, who were active both inside and outside of Iran.⁹⁰

After coming to power, the Islamic government resorted to eliminating and suppressing any and all forms of opposition, both in the political and social arenas, in order to consolidate its

⁹⁰ Aside from the aforementioned groups, Islamic reformists also responded to Ayatollah Khomeini's attempts to Islamize women by establishing the Islamic Women's Movement. This movement gained momentum and developed into a distinctly Islamic feminist one during and after the transition period. In addition, the Women's Society of Islamic Revolution (WSIR) (*Jamee'y-e Zanan-e Enghelab-e Islami*) was formed shortly after the Revolution to maintain and expand the revolutionary demand for a culturally authentic gender identity (Paidar, 1995, p. 240; Hoodfar, 1999, p. 27).

claim to authority. The Iran-Iraq War provided further incentive for the government to achieve its agenda. It thereby proceeded to target opposition groups such as the leftists, secularists, and even Islamic groups not aligned with their distinct ideology, leading to the suppression, elimination, or exile of any such group members (Mir-Hosseini, 2002; Paidar, 1995). Additionally, the government either shut down or converted the press, political parties, and trade unions into propaganda machines, significantly reducing room for public discourse in Iranian society. During the transfer of power to the Islamic regime, various women's organizations emerged with leftist, liberal-democratic, and nationalist backgrounds, each advocating its own demands. Amid a climate of religious fervor and hostility towards secularism, liberalism, and Marxism, activists committed such groups began to hold underground meetings and classes in order to promote their ideologies (Khiabany, 2010, p. 196). However, these nascent associations and other social movements were suppressed and dissolved during a period of repression, which contributed to a renewed decline of the women's movement. At the time, secular Iranian women believed that the Islamic Republic used the socio-political involvement of the Islamist women to suppress their movement, whose aim was to oppose the formation of a new patriarchal system (Farhadpour, 2012, p. 101).

Meanwhile, the Islamic feminist press played a critical role in the protests against the repeal of the 1967 Family Protection Law, which occurred immediately after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (Paidar, 1995). The repeal reintroduced practices such as polygamy, temporary marriages, the right of men to simply divorce, and the automatic custody of children for fathers. Women representatives in Parliament also raised similar objections, opposing, for instance, the government's endorsement of polygamy. They put forward arguments based on Islamic principles to restrict polygamy and suggested that judicial approval should be required (Hoodfar, 1999; Keddie, 2000; Osanloo, 2008). In this regard, both the press of Islamic activists and the efforts of women parliamentarians led to a significant outcry from both Islamists and secular revolutionaries, who pointed to the absence of any replacement legislation for the repealed Family Law. As a result, the state did not provide funding for the WSIR, and later, meetings of the group were attacked by supporters of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP). The IRP aimed to replace reformist women in the WSIR with their supporters to mobilize women for state-led demonstrations and gatherings (Yeganeh & Keddie, 1986).

Islamic reformist women sought to create a perception of the ideal Islamic society and to establish the role of women in it. The idealization of the Islamic society of the future accompanied

a critique of both the present and the past. The Islamic feminist theory of the oppression and liberation of women assumed the appearance. This was constructed as an opposition to “traditional Islam.” According to Islamic feminists, “true Islam” transcended “traditional, deviant, and colonized Islam” insofar as women are concerned (Paidar, 1995, p.240). The deficiencies of “traditional Islam” were believed to originate from the culture of male dominance and the misinterpreted application of Islamic laws. Paidar expresses this sentiment as follows:

In the current Islamic system, women in our society are second-class citizens. From the moment of birth, sorrow is expressed: “What a pity she is not a boy!” In adolescence, she is constantly reminded of the differences between her situation and that of young boys. When she gets married, she is told “go to your husband's home in a white wedding gown and come out in white shroud,” that is, in all quarrels and disputes it is she who must keep silent. Finally, as she becomes middle-aged and reaches old age, instead of one master, every son becomes a new master, especially if her husband dies [...] Are these all the rights that Islam gives to women? [...] How can these Islamic laws and practices be said to support women? (Paidar, 1995, p. 240).

In the post-revolutionary period, both religious and secular Iranian women became concerned about patriarchal dominance in family matters, that had led to the implementation of strict societal boundaries between men and women. These boundaries were justified on religious grounds, including the separation of genders in co-ed classes, banning female students from certain fields of study, professions, and sports, and the dismissal of all women judges. The restrictions were meant to prevent moral decay and sexual promiscuity among Iranian youth. Nevertheless, Islamic reformers and feminists confronted a similar political dilemma as other revolutionary movements: Should they jeopardize unity against imperialism by insisting on their interpretation of Islam? Although they proposed alternative positions, they refrained from openly opposing the Islamization measures of the hardline clergy. The criticism voiced by Islamic feminists and nationalists was often restrained, reaffirming their loyalty to Ayatollah Khomeini and rejecting secular opposition. Islamic feminists made a clear distinction between their defense of women's rights and that of secular feminists. While they sympathized with the protests of secular women against the compulsory *hijab* and the erosion of women's rights in the family, they did not join the

secular women's movement – i.e., the issue of women's rights did not serve as a unifying force among women of different ideologies.

2.4.5.2 Structures and Resources for Mobilization in the Post-Revolutionary Era

Iran, after 1979, is often characterized as a revolutionary and Islamized society. However, for many outsiders, Iran is perceived as a predominantly traditional society with restricted rights for women due to the strict enforcement of Shari'a law, which limits women's participation in various public spheres. Iranian society exhibits a mix of traditional and modern inclinations despite this perception. From one perspective, the empowerment of Islamic identity prompted a deliberate revival of traditional values, beliefs, and practices in women. This policy has particularly benefited religious women, for whom the revitalization and establishment of religious values tend to be of paramount significance. Conversely, recognizing the value of industrialization, global marketing, human evolution, and technological advancement has motivated many women to modernize Iran, a move that represents a desire to establish a nation free of religious restrictions. Since its inception under the tutelage of religious authority, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been actively disengaging Iranian consciousness from globalizing values such as secularization and Westernization, which were promoted by the Pahlavi regime. As a result, it has effectively reversed much of what the Shah had achieved in terms of integrating Iran into global societal forces. During the post-revolutionary period, the religious authority has wielded complete control over the sociopolitical climate in Iran, justifying its monopoly of political power by appealing to its particular interpretation of Shari'a law.

Following the Iran-Iraq War and the passing away of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989, Hashemi Rafsanjani became the president of Iran. One of the early steps taken to promote women's rights during this period was the creation of the Women's Cultural and Social Council. The council was founded in 1988 under the authority of the Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution (Afshar, 1998, p.57), and its objective was to facilitate the growth of women's character in different domains, including that of politics, culture, society, economy, and the family (Shadloo, 2000, p.438). In 1993, for instance, with the assistance of Islamic feminists, the Women's Social and

Cultural Council led the way in helping lift the restriction on women studying particular academic subjects (Moghadam, 2013, pp. 177-178).

The Reconstruction Government, led by Hashemi Rafsanjani (1989-1997), ushered in a period of renewal of thought, which was partly a reaction to what had emerged during the Iran-Iraq War (Koolae, 2012, p. 139). Rafsanjani considered promoting women's inclusion in society crucial for Iran's liberalization and economic Development. As such, the government launched operations to promote its said targets. However, given that the nation was emerging from an eight-year-long war, the government was now burdened with facing the consequences, including a major decline in production, severe destruction in various parts of the country, devastation of human resources, and limited foreign exchange resources. These pressures led many women who had previously not worked outside the bounds of the home to enter the public workforce (Khiabany, 2010, pp. 193-195).

Even Iran's elites were compelled to request that secular, professional women who had been dismissed from their jobs during the revolution return to their positions after President Rafsanjani stated that the country required a female labor force (Kian, 1997). The re-entry of such a large wave of women into the workforce aided the reconstruction effort and also meant that the government exercised significant control over women, shaping their identity as citizens in this period. The Hashemi government needed both men and women to implement its progressive policies. Thus, it was crucial to establish a distinct identity for women beyond the traditional roles of mother and wife. The new public roles and functions were established for women to be able to contribute to the nation's progress and Development, particularly in the public and economic spheres, and these roles and functions, in turn implied that women were now citizens dependent on the government's definition of their identity. Thus, in the mid-1990s, the increased visibility of women in the public sphere, particularly those of the middle class, allowed them to gain self-confidence and develop new social skills. As a result, many women were motivated to volunteer for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and engage in other social efforts (Bayat, 2007; Fazaeli, 2007; Vakil, 2011).⁹¹

⁹¹ Exposure and involvement in social causes enabled them to contribute to society and further enhance their skills, promoting their empowerment and advancement in various fields. Subsequently, the Bureau of Women's Affairs was established in 1991 within the Presidential Office, and Shahla Habibi was appointed the President's first advisor on women's issues (Bahramitash, 2007, p. 94). Despite its establishment, the Bureau of Women's Affairs faced widespread criticism for lacking a concrete reform action agenda. However, during the Fourth International Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995, Iranian participants embarked on developing an action plan. Following the election of

The ongoing challenges faced by Iranian women, their fight against patriarchy, and the emergence of Islamic Feminism were the subject of various studies that began to track the emergence and progress of women's movements in Iran, including those published in the women's press. Among the notable new publications that appeared in the women's press were "*Women*" (*Zanan*)⁹² and "*Wise*" (*Farzaneh*),⁹³ with *Zanan* being the most prominent and influential in recent years (Farhadpour, 2012, p. 96). The publication was aimed at a female audience and gained popularity during the 1997 presidential elections when it supported Khatami and his stance on gender equality. *Zanan* also started a new section in 1999 called "New Religious Thinking and the Question of Women," in which leading male reformists discussed questions of gender equality (Ghouchani, 2000; Farhadpour, 2000; Mir-Hosseini, 2002). The aim of the journal was to provide modern interpretations of the Qur'an and Shari'a in order to address contemporary issues related to gender equality, family law, political sharing, individual rights, employment, and the civil justice system, and the journal is known for providing a platform for secular authors to contribute as well (Khiabany, 2010).⁹⁴

Each journal that emerged during the reconstruction era approached the subject of women from a distinct angle and framed it in various discourses.⁹⁵ For instance, the journal "Women's

a reform-oriented government, the Centre for Women's Participation in Development Programs (a spotlight on the adherents of the Islamic government) was established in 1997 to focus on enhancing the rights and opportunities of Iranian women. Despite discussions of improvements in statistical data on the participation of women in a range of activities, including employment, literacy, education, healthcare, and population control, feminist critics argued that the percentage of Iranian women in these areas still lagged significantly behind industrialized nations (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2010, pp. 54-57).

⁹² *Zanan* magazine was launched in 1992 by Shahla Sherkat and became a significant publication addressing women's rights and gender-related issues. With its bold coverage of reformist politics, domestic abuse, and sexual relations, *Zanan* ventured into new political territory (Farhadpour, 2012, p. 96)

⁹³ *Farzaneh* is a reputable periodical that debuted in the autumn of 1993 as a semi-annual journal. The Women Studies Centre in Tehran, which Monir Gorji oversaw, entrusted the editorial and licensing responsibilities of *Farzaneh* to two of its members, Massoumeh Ebtakar and Mahbobeh Abbas-Gholizadeh. *Farzaneh* did not operate as an advocacy-oriented publication but rather as a forum for scholarly and theological discussion, as a conduit between policymakers and academics/intellectuals, and between conventional and modern schools of thought. The journal aimed to attract specialists within and beyond Iran's borders, as evidenced by its publication in both Farsi and English (Khiabany, 2010, p. 204).

⁹⁴ Moreover, in August 1998, Faezeh Hashemi launched a periodical called "*Woman*" (*Zan*). It was the country's first daily paper dedicated to women's issues. Despite its brief existence, *Zan* sparked considerable controversy by highlighting crucial issues during the conflict between various factions within the ruling establishment (Keddie, 2000). "*Woman's Message*" (*Payam-e Zan*), which debuted in March 1992, and represents the views of the clerics of Qom, who seek to address women's issues on the basis of their interpretations of Islam (Farhadpour, 2012, p. 96; Mir-Hosseini, 2002, p. 111).

⁹⁵ Ahmadi-Khorasani (2001) distinguishes three distinct categories of writers based primarily on their entanglement with the government apparatus. The first category consists of independent writers, in the case of Shirin Ebadi, who have no ties to factions of the ruling élite. While the second includes those who have strong ties with the state and are

Rights” (*Hoqooq-e Zanan*) by Ashraf Geramizadegan, promotes justice and gender equality for women within the framework of Shari’a law as well as Iranian cultural norms. This indicates that the publication aims to reconcile women's rights with Islamic principles and cultural traditions. At one point, when Mir-Hosseini asked Geramizadegan about why she refrains from using the label *feminist* to describe herself and even avoids mentioning the term in her editorials, the latter responded by explaining that the term *feminist* is problematic since it is commonly “associated with radical and extreme expressions of feminism” (Mir-Hosseini, 2002, p. 116), rather than being recognized merely as a term that points to women demanding equal rights and justice. She went on to describe herself and her colleagues as advocates for women's rights, indicating that if that is considered “feminism,” then they would accept that label (Ibid). In effect, Geramizadegan’s response is indicative of the fact that in Iran, feminism has often been perceived negatively while its positive contributions are overlooked. Still, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, who published “The Second Sex” (*Jens-e Dovvom*), opted to focus on the term *feminism*, situating the challenges faced by Iranian women in the context of the broader global feminist movement (Mir-Hosseini, 2002, p. 117).

Mir-Hosseini (2011) initially applied the term *Islamic feminist* to a group of Islamist Iranian women who had been instrumental in suppressing the voices of other women. She notes that by the early 1990s, these women grew disillusioned with the Islamic Republic's official discourse concerning women and left their official positions to join the New Religious Thinkers, a group that later became the core of the reform movement.⁹⁶ During her conversations with these women in the mid-1990s, they did not mind being called *Islamic feminists* even though they did *not* accept the feminist idea of gender equality at the time. Interestingly, a number of these very same Islamist women joined the nascent reform movement and even began to identify themselves as *secular feminists* by the mid-2000s.

part of the political elite, recognize that the suppression of social demands is impossible, and do not seek to escape international pressure. Finally, the third group, represented by *Zanan*, does not have complete autonomy and no longer has the same access to the power center as the second group (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2001, pp.157-164).

⁹⁶ She includes the following women as key representatives of Islamic feminism in Iran: Shahla Sherkat, the editor of the official women's magazine “*Woman of the Day*” (*Zan-e Ruz*); Azam Taleqani, who had taken over The Women's Organization prior to the Iranian Revolution and destroyed all their books; and Zahra Rahnavard, who had authored a seminal book on the *hijab* and repudiated feminism.

2.4.6 Transformation and Renewal: The Era of Reformism (1997-2005)

With Islamist extremism and authoritarian politics increasingly discouraged, more moderate and secular groups gained a wider foothold in the political landscape of Iran (Tohidi, 2010). In the 1990s, a broader reform movement emerged among former Islamists, including certain influential clerics, intellectuals, and students. The reform movement not only involved women but feminists who sought to reform the very notion of civil society.

The formation of a movement primarily aimed at securing women's rights in the Islamic Republic could have potentially far-reaching implications for the reinterpretation of Islamic texts within Iran and outside its borders. While reformist interpretations of Islam have been occurring for quite some time, until now, they have not been associated with particularly progressive theological arguments; neither have they been supported by the many traditionally educated clerics and women from diverse social backgrounds, particularly those in the Middle East (Keddie, 2000, p. 423).

From 1989-2005, the Iranian government prioritized the improvement of foreign relations as well as economic Development. This shift led to a number of efforts to grant women more opportunities to participate in public life, although such opportunities were limited to women who were aligned with the regime's ideology. This shift toward moderation and democracy eventually culminated in the unexpected election of a moderate reformist cleric, Mohammad Khatami, in the 1996 presidential election.

The emergence of an open political sphere has been considered a precondition for the formation and effective operation of civil society organizations. Similarly, it is recognized that the rise of discourse on reformation and democratic political and social ties, with a political shift toward moderation and pluralism, fostered the founding of NGOs and the establishment of political parties. This context further resulted in the expansion of women's activism, the feminist movement's growth, and the advent of reform-oriented publishing, all indicating the Development of civil society organizations (CSOs) (Shojaee, 2001). Also, the increasing involvement of women in cultural and artistic fields has played a significant role in fueling a fresh wave of feminist activism.

During President Khatami's presidency from 1997 to 2005, the so-called Reform Era, women in Iran made significant progress. Khatami elevated the concept of “*civil society*” (*Jame-i*

Madani) to a prominent position in Iran's political discourse in 1997 (Rostami-Povey, 2012, p. 28). This significantly changed the focus of the country's state goals and cultural landscape. According to one commentator, the emphasis on the discourse of civil society had supplanted the discourse of alienation from the West (*Gharbzadeghi*) (Khiabany, 2010, p. 125). The wave of liberalization initiated by Hashemi Rafsanjani and reinforced by Khatami's reforms paved the way for women to participate in higher education by lifting previous prohibitions on women in academic fields. As a result, women's participation in higher education increased significantly (Aryan, 2012, p.42). Moreover, Khatami's political stance resonated with the broader Iranian population due to his advocacy of pluralistic Islam as opposed to the rigid religious rhetoric espoused by his peers. Based on the principle of *ijtihad*, this reform movement provided an apparent tactical and strategic ally for religiously oriented feminists (Moghadam, 2002).

However, Khatami did not fully endorse women's rights from the outset. Moreover, before his election, he disapproved of Western society's approach to women's liberation and believed it was detrimental to families (Hughes, 1998, p. 24). It should also be noted that Khatami's government enacted a law restricting discussions of women's issues to what was permissible under Islamic law as interpreted by the ruling clergy. Meanwhile, these reformist demands of women and the government's cultural policies, particularly the flexibility and permissiveness towards the hijab of women, encountered violent opposition from hardline religious ideologues and proponents, who demanded that the government tackle the “bad *hijab*” (i.e., an inappropriate form of dress not in line with their interpretations of propriety). As such, the government implemented the Chastity Plan (*Tarh-e-Ifaf*), which served a two-fold agenda. On the one hand, Khatami's government gained the approval and support of the conservative current to provide legitimacy for the government. Simultaneously, the move aimed to promote character, elevate the culture and dignity of women, address inadequate hijab in public places, and establish a sense of moral security in Iranian society. To this end, the government issued an order in 2005 to establish sixteen regulations on *hijab* and chastity, which the Supreme Revolutionary Council approved. The “Morality Police” project was proposed and was implemented to fulfill the aforementioned goals in Tehran and other major Iranian cities. The implementation of this policy clearly contradicted the Khatami government's discourse on freedom, citizens' rights respect. It was clearly more aligned with the conservative opposition and its supporters.

Following the election of President Khatami in 1997, the first gathering of women was organized by a group of women publishers led by Shahla Lahiji, who launched a secular magazine called “*Intellectuals and Women's Studies*” (*Roshangaran- va- Motaalea't-e Zanan*). Furthermore, the first public celebration of International Women's Day by secular women took place in Tehran in 1999, despite strict government restrictions on public demonstrations. This event marked the first-time secular women had publicly celebrated International Women's Day since 1979 (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2010, pp. 80-84). The Women's Cultural Centre was founded by Ahmadi-Khorasani in 2000 with the aim of furthering women's rights through demonstrations, awareness initiatives, and non-violent activism (Ibid, pp. 102-105).

On December 19, 2001, as part of its current reform agenda, the Khatami Cabinet proposed an act to the Parliament to incorporate the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (Keddie, 2000, p. 419). During this period, there were numerous attempts by Islamists and secular women to form coalitions. Nevertheless, under the Iranian Constitution, all legislation approved by Parliament is also subject to approval by the Guardian Council, which comprises unelected Islamic clerics. According to the Council, the proposed law was in violation of Islamic Sharia law and the Iranian Constitution. The Guardian Council thus withheld its approval (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2012).

During Khatami's administration, a range of reformist policies was implemented along with numerous extensive actions that were demanded by three distinct groups of women: those who were marginalized from positions of power, such as Parliament and other key decision-making centers; women who were involved in mass communication through various publications and associations; and women who were active at the academic level. Based on the demands and policies of the government during this period, women were defined as independent and free subjects who were striving to contribute to and realize societal policies concerning women's welfare. However, such demands faced stiff resistance and opposition from the hardline conservatives, so that for countless Iranian women, such efforts translated into mere ideas. It may be asserted that this contributed to the hindering of reflection on concepts key to the role and function of women in Iranian society, what one may call a “deceleration” of the women's movement, which provided the requisite background for the reversion to hardline conservative policies under Ahmadinejad's government.

The Iranian women's movement during the Reform Era may perhaps best be described by the term *pragmatism*. The term points to an approach that involves assessing whether an idea or proposition is appropriate or accurate based on its applied effectiveness rather than merely its theoretical merit (Livingston, 2001). In the context of the Iranian women's movement, a pragmatic approach implied prioritizing practical solutions and actions that have a tangible impact on improving women's rights and status rather than solely advocating for abstract principles. In other words, practicality was so highly valued in the women's movement during the Reform Era that ideas that were not actionable were typically rejected.

Once pragmatism gained currency in the socio-economic and political context, it also became an integral dimension of Iranian feminist thought. The pragmatic approach to feminism emphasized the mutually beneficial relationship between feminism and pragmatism. According to this perspective, different interpretations of feminism – whether secular or Islamic – are not seen as being in competition with one another or in binary opposition. Pragmatic feminism during the Reform Era opposed dualistic thinking, as it often leads to marginalizing one viewpoint over the other. Instead, it encouraged collaboration across different interpretations of feminism, allowing them to coexist and learn from each other without disputing their validity or relevance. Despite the divergent opinions among the various factions of the Iranian women's movement, both sides prioritized pragmatism over theoretical differences in their fight for gender equality. Their willingness to occasionally set aside their differences and to work together was based, in part, on this pragmatic understanding. Overall, the pragmatic approach taken by the women's movement in the reform era enabled them to achieve tangible results in their struggle for women's rights.

The women's movement faced several key challenges during the Reform Era, including the absence of feminist representatives in parliamentary elections (Childress, 2011; Hoodfar, 2009). The lack of support from the government may be considered as one of the factors leading women to prioritize practical, collaborative efforts in order to achieve progress in the fight for gender equality. The pragmatic approach allowed different interpretations of feminism to coexist and work together, resulting in tangible progress despite the challenges faced by the movement. And yet, notwithstanding the efforts of Islamic feminists to work within and with the system, it may also be asserted that no substantial advances were achieved for women during this period. The frustration of women from every stratum with the reform movement's general incompetence regarding women's issues underscores the urgent need for a more effective and inclusive women's

movement in Islamic societies. This need may be met by members of society working together and adopting a broader framework that includes the principles of human rights, allowing women to continue to push for substantial gains with regard to their rights and freedoms.

2.4.7 Gender Politics and Ideology During Ahmadinejad's Presidency (2005-2013)

When Mahmoud Ahmadinejad assumed the role of president in 2005, the promising atmosphere that had characterized the Reform Era of Khatami's presidency faded away. Several factors contributed to Ahmadinejad's presidential election, including the Reform governments' failed efforts to institute the required systemic and economic reforms, something that alienated countless Iranians. In addition, the conservative state institutions, including the Guardian Council, also contributed to the failure of reform-minded candidates to contest the elections. Conversely, Ahmadinejad addressed the disenfranchised sectors of Iranian society by pledging to ameliorate the deteriorating economic situation and promising come to their aid in their hour of dire need (Ehteshami & Zweiri, 2009, pp. 85-60).

However, as a result, Ahmadinejad brought even more conservative beliefs on women than had predominated during the republic's early years (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010). Among these views was the notion that women's proper place is in the home, which was frequently highlighted over his eight-year tenure. Under his presidency, the Special Council for the Development and Promotion of the Humanities was also established, which sought to Islamize academic disciplines (Sadeghi, 2012, pp. 126-127). The main elements of his policy emphasized ideologically charged and populist notions of justice, benevolence, religiosity, the struggle against hedonism, and concern for the underprivileged classes by mobilizing the anxiety, frustration, and anger of vast segments of the Iranian population and framing this as a righteous battle against the forces of liberalism and Westernism (Koolae, 2012). The impact of these socio-economic and political changes in the government's fundamental approach to Iranian society impacted women's affairs in significant ways.

By removing *public participation* and replacing it with *the family*, the government effectively sought to monopolize the course of women's efforts and societal discourse concerning women. The official discourse now pitted perceived Western ideals against perceived Islamic ideals, and hardline ideologues and populist forces now strove to shift the balance of power toward

their ideological interpretation of Islam. In line with this attitude, the Ahmadinejad government intended to demonstrate *family* as a central policy priority.⁹⁷

Asef Bayat (2007) argues that the so-called “anti-imperialism” of populist Islamists, including that of Ahmadinejad, is not focused on authentic liberation of marginalized groups but rather a strategy of ideological self-preservation. As a result, the hardliners’ policies in Iran have not only failed to improve the plight of ordinary citizens’ lives, particularly that of women, the poor, and the marginalized, but have actually led to the severe violation of human rights and deprived citizens of their socio-economic security. Furthermore, the extremist rhetoric and exclusionary practices of Iranian hardline populists have offered ample “evidence” for Western neoliberal opportunists waiting to justify their ideology while also fueling Islamophobia. Needless to say, all this has, ironically and tragically, allowed the most intolerant warmongers within and without Iran to victimize poor and marginalized Muslims (Bayat, 2007, pp. 113-114).

The domain of education was also to become a pivotal arena of contention during the Ahmadinejad years. The rising number of female undergraduates at universities was considered a threat to the country's adherence to Islamic principles and conservative values. As a result, the government attempted to address this issue by implementing a quota system that restricted the number of departments and majors available to female students, thereby limiting career opportunities for women.⁹⁸ This led to a higher percentage of men in the labor market, further marginalizing women and limiting their access to public participation in Iranian society (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010, p. 896). The policy reinforced traditional gender roles, pushing women back into the private sphere and hindering their ability to participate in the public sphere.

⁹⁷ As a result, the organization prioritized family planning, and some of their actions included the implementation of family regulations, which granted legal privileges to families with four or more children. Another action was to provide housing and support for the marriage and employment of young people. They also approved the Law on Facilitation of Youth Marriage, established the National Family Headquarters project, and evaluated women's domestic work, which led to the Development of the Housewives' Insurance initiative. See more Aryan, Khadijeh, “The Boom in Women's Education,” in *Women, Power, and Politics in 21st Century Iran*. Ed. Tara Povey and Elaheh Rostami-Povey. Farnham, Surrey (England: Ashgate, 2012).

⁹⁸ The fifth Development plan introduced by the government includes policies to enhance women's employment opportunities. These policies include approving part-time work, reducing the weekly working hours of women from 44 to 36, restricting working hours for women, and extending maternity leave for working mothers from 6 to 9 months. These measures emphasize the importance of domestic labor and aim to boost income for families while creating a healthier work environment. Additionally, these policies aim to reduce coed workspaces for men and women (Arayan, 2012; Koolaei, 2012).

The Iranian government at the time effectively sought to intervene and institutionalize efforts with regard to women's affairs. The protests of the hardline conservative forces and parliamentarians against the cultural policies of the previous government meant that women's issues, left unresolved during the Khatami years, were now an easy target of socio-political mobilization. Even during the Reform Era, a proper foundation and background for women's demands was not established or provided. As such, Iranian women were not seen or treated as an independent and free subject but rather assumed to be subjects of the government. Now, Ahmadinejad's populist government conferred significance and projected a sense of identity onto women, albeit one strictly based on its own hardline political agendas. This matter, then, involves the question of women's subjectivity, identity, and visibility and proceeds even to the level of how women's bodies are perceived and treated in Iranian society. In this regard, it may be asserted that women's bodies are not considered to be a matter of personal autonomy but have effectively become an arena of ideological contention and political conflict. The control over women's bodies can even be said to reflect, in part, the ideological battle over power and supremacy in Iran. The conservative hardline factions have used women's sexuality as a convenient stratagem to introduce and fortify their ideological interpretation of what (women's) identity means or ought to mean in Islam. This situation highlights how politics and religion intersect with women's rights and freedoms in Iran.

The Ahmadinejad government intervened in women's affairs in a number of ways, Implementing the chastity plan for women. This led to the shutdown and dissolution of the majority of specialized women's associations and publications established during Khatami's administration. (Razavi,2006, p. 1223). As a result, only a limited number of women's associations and political parties – predictably, those aligned with the government's positions – remained active during this time.⁹⁹ This highlights the negative impact of Ahmadinejad's rule on civil society and political dissent in Iran. His so-called “anti-imperialist” stance was essentially used as a cover for a myriad of domestic forms of oppression in Iran, including but not limited to the suppression of the rights and freedoms of ordinary citizens, including activists, students, and workers. The closure

⁹⁹ These included: the “Population of Muslim Women” (*Jamiyat-e Zanan-e Nowandish*) led by Fatemeh Rakei, while the “Women's Party of the Islamic Republic” (*Hizb-e Zanan-e Jomhouri-e Islami*), associated with Fatemeh Alia, and the “Fatemiyoun Society” (*Jame'eye Fatemiyoun*), directed by Tahereh Rahimi in 2006 (Golestani, 2015, p. 111). Other pro-government publications which promoted the government's cultural policies included: “Woman of the Day” (*Zan-e Ruz*), “The Message of Hajar” (*Payam-e Hajar*), “Women” (*Zanan*); “The Message” (*Payam*), “Bride” (*Aroos*), and “Eastern Woman” (*Zan-e Sharghi*) (Geramian & Ghouchi, 2015, pp. 156-158).

of NGOs, the incarceration of dissidents, and the suppression of protests can be pointed to as examples of the undemocratic and oppressive tactics employed by the regime under Ahmadinejad. All this provides ample evidence indicating that the regime's claims of anti-imperialist resistance were not merely hollow but also duplicitous and destructive, its true agenda being the acquisition and preservation of power at all costs, even if it meant sacrificing the rights and well-being of the Iranian people (Bayat, 2007, p. 114).

The Ahmadinejad government offered various cultural initiatives promising to empower women, and it did so by rejecting and opposing several policies of previous administrations, including those that focused on Iran's participation in international agreements like the CEDAW. Moreover, the government took steps to undermine relations with the West and international organizations responsible for women's welfare. Despite institutional barriers that emerged during the Ahmadinejad era, women's organizations and activists consistently found innovative ways to overcome such systemic obstacles. Both Islamist and reformist women's groups collaborated to promote women's rights. While these coalitions were dynamic and may have involved a diverse range of women given the issue, they proved effective in promoting collective action and advancing social change toward equality (Hoodfar and Sadr, 2010, p. 896).

When Ahmadinejad rose to power in 2005, secular women's activist circles organized a large-scale demonstration to demand constitutional reform and the elimination of discrimination against women (Ibid, pp. 897-898). They initiated their movement by organizing a protest with as many as 150 NGOs outside Tehran University on June 12, 2005, underscoring the broad support for the women's movement in Iran. The event indicates that despite new challenges, women's groups in Iran remained committed to gender equality and were willing to adapt their strategies to changing circumstances. While the protest was held peacefully, no substantial results emerged in terms of advances to women's rights in Iran.

2.4.7.1 Empowering Women Through Collective Action: The One Million Signatures Campaign

The One Million Signatures (OMS) Campaign, launched in 2006, marked a turning point in Iran's women's rights movement (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2010; Tohidi, 2017). The Campaign was founded to raise public awareness through face-to-face meetings and to collect signatures for a

petition addressed to the Iranian Parliament. The petition calls for laws that discriminate against women to be reformed and aligned with international human rights standards (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2010). The effort was met with increasingly severe government-backed attacks on the movement's network, highlighting the gravity of the challenges facing Iranian activists working for women's rights. Despite differing opinions, the Campaign united many women under a unified objective. In fact, the Campaign witnessed the dawn of a coherent movement with the primary objective of abolishing discriminatory laws against women in Iran and ultimately amending discriminatory cultural and social norms in society. As viewed by Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani, one of the leaders of the movement, the Campaign was not formed on the basis of ideological agreements but was instead “based on a concrete and definitive agreement, i.e., specifically a legal demand” (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2010, p. 57).

The women's social movement in Iran at this time recognized that significant change can only be achieved through the participation and cooperation of women from all parts of the country. This movement believed that the participation of Islamic and secular women is necessary to respond to the different demands of women and bring about legal and social transformation. In this regard, the Campaign to collect one million signatures was an effort to raise awareness and achieve gender equality by utilizing both traditional and modern methods. The movement also recognized the importance of cooperation with other democratic movements to accelerate its growth and success. For instance, the reform of Islamic family law in Morocco in 1992 was a significant motivating factor behind the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran.¹⁰⁰ This legal reform strengthened the hope of Iranian activists that a similar Campaign could be successful in their own country. As a result, members of the Women's Cultural Centre and other affiliated groups set out to collect one million signatures to protest against discriminatory laws that targeted women.

This Campaign's approach allowed its activists to reach a broad audience and mobilize support from various sectors of society (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2010). Alamdari's perspective (2008) on this Campaign shows that the emerging women's movement in Iran during this period was

¹⁰⁰ *Maudawana* refers to the collection of family laws in Morocco that were established in 1958, based on customs and traditions of the past centuries. These laws granted men the right to unilaterally divorce their wives, while women were not allowed to marry without the legal consent of a guardian or caretaker. Additionally, these laws compelled married women to obey their husbands. A women's rights advocacy group, known as the Women's Movement Union, took up the cause of reforming these discriminatory laws and granting women equal rights under family law. Their efforts played a pivotal role in accelerating the reform movement of *Maudawana*, aimed at promoting gender equality and women's rights in Morocco. See, Loubna H. Skalli. “Moroccan Women, Activists, and Gender Politics: An Institutional Analysis.” (Syracuse University Press, 2014).

characterized by a shift towards pragmatism and practicality rather than idealism and theory. This shift is seen as a response to the failure of previous social movements, including various women's movements, to achieve their intended goals through idealistic and ideological demands. Instead, the focus of the new movement was on finding practical solutions to the problems faced by women rather than on theoretical or subjective debates. This statement demonstrates that the women's movement in Iran prioritized practical engagement and unity over theoretical debates, which does not imply that theory was completely disregarded. The secularists, however, faced a quandary regarding which feminist theory to adopt as the basis for their thoughts and actions. The choices included liberal, radical, and leftist traditional feminisms prevalent in the West. However, it was unclear whether the existing forms of feminism could sufficiently address the myriad challenges prevalent in the Iranian context (Alamdari, 2008, pp. 155-158).

It is worth returning to the One Million Signatures Campaign in order to consider its contributions. Since its founding, the Campaign has attempted to fulfill its demands by establishing educational committees, holding gatherings, and communicating with regional, national, and international institutions while also cooperating with other movements in civil society (Hoodfar, 2009, pp. 200-221). The Campaign was met with harsh opposition by the Iranian government under Ahmadinejad, however, which accused it of violating the Constitution and spreading propaganda. As a result, the Campaign's office was closed, its website was banned, and its members were arrested and fined. During the Ahmadinejad era, the government's repression of women's groups escalated, and countless secular activists were targeted and deemed to be threatening dissidents (Honarbin-Holliday, 2008, pp.127-128). What is certain is the fact that the women's movement, which initially defined itself primarily in terms of reforms and the student movement, achieved an independent, feminist identity after the One Million Signature Campaign. The efforts of informed women associated with the Campaign reflect the tenacity and resistance of women in Iran amid gender apartheid. Despite significant obstacles such as strict dress codes and harassment by the morality police, women's involvement in the women's movement has continued to develop and intensify. The collective struggle has brought together reformist, secular, and Islamist women and marked a shift in how women of different political and religious affiliations had previously collaborated. However, the Iranian government's persistent attempts to stifle its efforts and to obstruct the social changes it seeks to bring about continue to exert tremendous pressure on the women's movement.

2.4.7.2 Uniting Voices for a Sustainable Future: The Power of the Green Movement Connection in Ahmadinejad's Second Term (2009-2013)

The outcome of the controversial election on June 12, 2009, was a shocking surprise for those anticipating a victory for Mir Hossein Mousavi of the Green Party. Following the announcement of the official election results, large crowds of Mousavi's supporters and reformists took to the streets spontaneously, raising questions about the validity of the election results with a simple yet powerful slogan: "Where is my vote?" This was a direct response to the seemingly rigged election that had led to the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Moreover, it marked the start of a significant political movement in Iran, which came to be known as the Green Movement, or, as Hamid Dabashi contended, the Iranian Civil Rights Movement (2010, p. 310). Meanwhile, Amanat, in an essay in the New York Times (2009), opined that the crisis in Iran reflected the advent of a rising new middle class with demands contrary to the radicalism of President Ahmadinejad and the conservative values of the clerical elite.¹⁰¹

Women's groups that have fought injustice and suffered discrimination over the past decade have collectively and intentionally shared their experiences of collaboration, cooperation, advocacy Campaigns, and the forging coalitions with the Green Movement. However, amidst social unrest and turmoil unfolding during the period of the Green Movement, the women's movement was not formally connected to it.¹⁰² Nonetheless, the women's movement had a notable impact on the Green Movement by introducing peaceful tactics and playing a pivotal role in helping to strengthen the movement's approach and methods (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010). According to Jahanbegloo (2009), a prisoner in Evin Prison in 2006, most women and men who participated in the mass demonstrations sought to resist authorities in a nonviolent and peaceful way. He characterized the uprising in Iran at the time as a significant "Gandhi-style" nonviolent movement (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010, p. 83). The nonviolent ethos of the Green Movement in Iran was due in large part to the struggle of women. In contrast to the labor and student movements,

¹⁰¹ Refer to "Where Will the Power Lie in Iran?" (New York Times, June 16, 2009, Last accessed on October 10, 2022). Retrieved from: <https://archive.nytimes.com/roomfordebate.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/06/16/where-will-the-power-lie-in-iran/>.

¹⁰² According to the Iran Human Rights Documentation Center's report titled "Silencing the Women's Rights Movement in Iran" (2010), there have been efforts to suppress the women's rights movement in Iran. The report states that women's rights activists have faced harassment, intimidation, and imprisonment, which has significantly reduced the number of women participating in the movement. See <https://iranhrdc.org/silencing-the-womens-rights-movement-in-iran/>.

which have historically pursued more militant and counter-oppressive methods of resistance, the women's movements in Iran have consistently advocated nonviolent means such as peaceful Campaigns, sit-ins, boycotts, and acts of civil disobedience in their quest for gender equality and the establishment of societal, political, and cultural change (Ibid, pp. 83-84). Such efforts contributed to the strides made by the Green Movement in achieving its objectives despite the systemic oppression and acts of violence its supporters faced.

At this stage, it is worth reiterating that gender politics in Iran has consistently exhibited a stark division between secular and religious women, a division depending on their ideological and socio-political leanings. In the period leading up to the Green Movement, Iranian women remained divided along those very same lines. Thus, despite supporting the reforms of President Khatami, the division remained until the Coalition of Women's Convergence was formed in 2009, which called for legal equality and emerged as a central issue in the presidential election Campaign which preceded the onset of the Green Movement (Vakil,2011).¹⁰³ Their demands were encapsulated in one key question, “What do we women want?”, regarding which they asserted the following:

“Equal rights and the elimination of all forms of gender, ethnic, religious, and class discrimination are the essence of women’s collective demands. Iranian women of all social backgrounds share this common belief that social strata constructs and affects gender relations. Hence, in order to achieve democracy, civil liberties, and citizens’ rights, women have long fought shoulder to shoulder with men [...]. We are well aware that gender equality is a pre-condition to democracy, sustainable Development and the creation of a society which is void of violence, poverty, and injustice” (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2010, p. 172).

The Women's Coalition in Iran, advocating gender equality for several decades, decided against endorsing any particular political Party in the 2009 presidential election. They made this decision after observing that previous efforts, such as the One Million Signatures Campaign, had not yielded the desired results. Their decision at the time clearly indicates that women in Iran have

¹⁰³ According to the discussion, Filmmaker Rakhshan Bani-Etemad produced a documentary “*We Are Half of Iran’s Population*,” (2009) capturing the voices and demands of the Women's Convergence and the candidates' responses, which were available on the internet. Retrieved from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l_BinbdFndI

often had to adopt a fairly cautious approach to political engagement so as to be able to advance their cause.¹⁰⁴

The current situation in Iran resulted from women's presence and active participation in the public sphere. It has shown the girls that being a woman is not limited to traditional roles and that they must fight for their rights. Risking their lives to save what remains of their republic, these women have opted for nonviolent resistance. Despite their efforts to protect the riot police and the public, they have been brutally beaten and even killed. With the threat of imprisonment of the thinking class, including strategists, activists, and writers, as well as the near-total closure of the pro-reform media and the suspension of accessible communication, the state's use of violence and intimidation, which led to the deaths of at least seventy people and the arrest of four thousand, as well as the adoption of propaganda Campaigns, Stalinist-style mass trials of opposition figures, and psychological warfare progressively debilitated the street struggles (Bayat, 2010, p.117).¹⁰⁵ Although the government may have emerged victorious in the immediate aftermath, fundamental changes have taken place that will have lasting effects. Following the government's practice of detaining activists without charge and denying them access to legal counsel or communication with family members constitutes a violation of human rights, denying activists their legal rights and limiting their ability to receive support from family members. The Human Rights Agency has identified several categories of individuals who have been detained. These include prominent leaders of the women's rights movement, women's rights activists with significant track experience and their advocates, individuals associated with the "One Million Signatures" Campaign, including

¹⁰⁴ Besides this, before the June 12, 2009, Iranian election, a group of prominent women formed a political coalition and created a charter that expressed their demands. The coalition comprised women's rights activists from various fields, including NGOs, political parties, media, and trade unions. The coalition aimed to advocate for women's demands during the presidential election without endorsing any particular candidate or interfering with citizens' right to participate or not participate in the election. See Golbarg Bashi. "Feminist waves in the Iranian green tsunami?" In N. Hashemi & D. Postel (Eds.), *The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the Struggle for Iran's Future*. (Melville House, 2009): 37–41.

¹⁰⁵ Following the 2009 Iranian elections, the death of *Neda Agha-Soltan*, captured on video, has become a symbol for the Green Movement. Moreover, Majid Tavakoli was arrested and humiliated after being accused of trying to flee disguised as a woman. However, Tavakoli's ordeal led to a display of unity and solidarity in the Men with *hijab* Campaign, as Iranian men posted photos of themselves wearing the hijab on social media to support Tavakoli, creating a symbol of resistance to the oppressive regime (An investigation of documentary news in Iran from June 22 to the end of 2009. Refer to <http://www.bashariyat.de/KetabHa/Ketab%20Zanan/05%20Zanan.pdf>):188.

its leaders, affiliates, and petition gatherers, and members of the “Mourning Mothers,” or “Mothers of Laleh Park.”¹⁰⁶

It is worth noting that violence at the time was not restricted to women but also affected the core members of the Green Movement as well as countless other demonstrators. It is to be emphasized, however, that the violence committed against women appeared to be even more intense, in part due to the pre-existing state-sanctioned forms of violence against women, which included the following: domestic violence, which included child marriage, honor killings, and the legal violence that included unequal inheritance, laws of retribution, stoning against women, a husband's right to prevent his wife from working outside the home, child custody laws, male-biased rights to divorce, polygamy, temporary marriages (*sigheh*), which are legally permitted even for men who have been married for extended periods of time, and compulsory wearing of *hijab* (Ebadi, 1994; Kar, 1997& 2008; Ahmadi-Khorasani,2009). It may thus be asserted that violence in Iran serves to enforce gender norms and is maintained through two principal drivers: the patriarchal roots of value that perpetuate male dominance, on the one hand, and a state-supported institutional structure founded on a strict construction of Islamic tenet, on the other. The situation implies that these factors reinforce each other and obstruct women from questioning the status quo.

2.4.8 Gender Politics and Ideology During Rouhani's Presidency (2013-2021)

A glimmer of hope for change emerged in Iran in 2013 when Hasan Rouhani, a moderate politician, was elected. Rouhani's government configuration and statements indicated a definite intention to shift from Ahmadinejad's policies and ease societal restrictions (Menashri, 2013; Vakil, 2011). During the 2013 elections, a coalition of feminist activists was formed comprising individual women and various groups aimed at representing the demands of women in both directions (Tohidi, 2016). The coalition consisted of three distinct groups of activists promoting change. The first group included women affiliated with the ruling parties who advocated for

¹⁰⁶ The Mourning Mothers, or the mothers of Laleh Park, consist of mothers who lost their children in the post-election demonstrations by gathering in parks on Sundays to call for accountability for the kidnappings, arrests, and murders during demonstrations.

women's rights. The second group included women who were members of civil society and actively participated in NGOs and quasi-organizational networks. Meanwhile, the third group was comprised of individual women who opposed gender discrimination and advocated for egalitarian change, including through their daily lives (Tohidi, 2016, pp. 82-83). The demands raised at the meetings can be categorized into two main categories:

1. Legal and Political Demands: These demands primarily focused on eliminating discrimination against women in existing laws, the employment of women in mid-level and upper-level administration, and enabling their participation in the various pillars of political power.
2. Educational and Civil Rights Demands: This set of demands was raised by liberal feminists and some independent activists. These demands focused on removing restrictions in the academic and educational fields, abolishing security barriers and obstacles, and eliminating pressure and security threats against women and human rights activists.

Ahmadi-Khorasani (2019) notes that at the time, women were involved in advocating for women's rights within government structures and factions, in women's movement groups, and as part of civil society activism. The newly emerging political sphere, which stood in stark opposition to the previous eight years of Ahmadinejad's rule, enabled women's rights activists to conduct open gatherings (Tohidi, 2016). During Rouhani's presidency, a period marked by moderation, Iran's foreign policy experienced a remarkable change. This shift led to progress in resolving the nuclear crisis by way of diplomatic negotiations with world powers. Nevertheless, although Rouhani was considered a moderate president, hardliners maintained significant influence and hindered any effort to extend the purview of human rights and advance the status of women (Ibid).

Fluctuations in government policies and attitudes towards civil society marked the evolution of the NGO community in Iran. While the presidency of Khatami from 1997 to 2005 saw a period of growth and Development for NGOs, the subsequent administration of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad resulted in the closure of many organizations. Presently, under President Hassan Rouhani, there has been a reduction in government interference, leading to a conservative resurgence of women's NGOs in Iran. Rostami Povey has recently documented the resilience and determination of Iranian women's NGOs, who have continued to pursue their objectives even in a highly challenging environment (Rostami Povey, 2016, pp.27-28). Despite facing significant obstacles, such as government restrictions and social conservatism, these organizations have

remained committed to promoting democratic values and advocating for the compatibility of Islamic traditions with modernity and women's rights. Their efforts have been crucial in advancing the cause of gender equality and human rights in Iran.

While conservative hardliners were busy spreading anxiety about how social media was threatening the country's security, Rouhani opted for a slightly different strategy following the election (Naeli, 2018, p. 116). Around the time of the Green Movement, several non-mainstream groups emerged, including women's groups with Marxist beliefs. Since their founding, these groups have been fighting against class systems, patriarchy, and any form of domination. Among these groups is “*Other Women*” (*Zanan-e Digar*), established before the Green Movement and utilizing its blog to convey its perspectives and statements. Another group worth mentioning is “*Rebellion*” (*Osyaaan*), whose regular online publication has presented the group's fresh perspectives on women's issues and solutions for women's emancipation. The period since the Green Movement has seen women's rights activist groups establish a significant digital presence using well-known websites such as *The Feminist School*, *Iranian Women's Association* and *Bidarzani*.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, many of these websites have been linked to their corresponding social media sites as the number of social media users has continued to increase.

While the origins of the 2018 uprising are still debated and controversial, it quickly gained widespread popularity. This marked the first large-scale and relatively comprehensive movement in the subordinates in around forty-three years, aiming to address issues such as injustice, discrimination, poverty, corruption, and starvation. The protests targeted all factions and the government as a whole. Despite the absence of a formal organization and the government's brutal crackdown, the uprising had a profound effect on opposition movements. Liberal and reformist factions found themselves in disarray, while more radical opposition groups emerged with renewed vigor. These factions espoused highly radicalized views, advocating for sweeping changes at a societal level and putting forth class-based, macro-level demands. Although the role of women as an independent, gendered movement was limited in this uprising, it nevertheless had a profound impact on the women's movement, similar to other social movements of the period.

¹⁰⁷ For more information, refer to:
<http://z-degar.blogspot.com>
<https://nashriyeosyan.wordpress.com>
<https://www.feministschool.com>
<https://ir-women.com>
<http://bidarzani.com>

In December 2017, a few days before the protests began, in a taboo-breaking, radical, audacious move, an initially unnamed girl held her headscarf up on a stick on the utility box in Tehran's Enghelab Street in protest of the government's mandatory *hijab* policy, triggering a wave of protests in which many women and men in all major Iranian cities followed suit. It was a symbolic movement and that in effect said "no" to the mandatory *hijab*, and in turn, aiming at the artery of the regime. According to Ahmadi-Khorasani (2018), the activities of her generation were predominantly characterized by collective, mediated, written, long-term, continuous, coherent, coalition-based, and delayed efforts. In contrast, the current generation of women activists has at their disposal new communication technologies that allow them to engage in more personal, direct, and visual forms of activism that are typically shorter-term, more intermittent and fluid. These new methods are often more personalized and multi-faceted. They tend to yield results more quickly.¹⁰⁸ The Girls of Revolution Street movement and other recent social movements exemplify these new forms of activism and their characteristic features. However, instead of helping to sustain, deepen, and broaden such bold movements, various currents in the women's movement have either sought a share of the credit or made such movements appear worthless and perverse (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2019).¹⁰⁹

During and after the Fundamentalist Era of Ahmadinejad and the period of the Green Movement, the condition of women in various segments of Iranian society has deteriorated due to widespread repression. As a result, the women's movement and its leaders in the public sector have been unable to engage in public activity. In effect, there is uncertainty about the country's future political perspective and orientation. The confusion among these movements is compounded by the coalition of reformists and moderates, with parts of the women's movement reducing their demands and aligning more closely with the government. Consequently, during Rouhani's administration, the intra-system faction of the women's movement split into two main currents. One was comprised of reformist women, government reformers, and moderates who presented a proposal to the new coalition government after holding meetings. The other current, consisting of more radical reformist women, was critical of this cooperation and unity and sought solutions in

¹⁰⁸ In her article "*The Girls of Revolution Street and the Emergence of a New Generation of Social Activists*," she reviews the appearance of girls on Enghelab Street and their role in shaping a new generation in social activism. The article is available in the archive of articles and writings by Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani (2018) on her website at <https://shorturl.at/ctGY6>

¹⁰⁹ See Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, "*Why the Girls of Enghelab Street Movement has not spread*," (2019). Retrieved from <https://ir-women.com/16564> (Last accessed on October 23, 2023).

informal meetings. Meanwhile, informal activities were carried out outside the women's movement to expose the new government, present demands, and spread opinions through virtual and real spaces (Tohidi, 2009).

In an analysis of Tohidi's comments in an interview about Women's Day,¹¹⁰ Yarshater presented a comprehensive perspective on the definition of individual and social identity and the women's movement. Yarshater, in conversation with Zandian, noted that:

unless the matter of women in our culture and society is addressed and women themselves drive a substantial part of the solution, there cannot be a proper social movement. To address this issue, it is necessary to redefine the male mindset, and women are taking it upon themselves to lead this effort for themselves and for the men. To achieve women's emancipation, men who are closest to women must take action to effect change in society and government. Without the support of men, this goal cannot be accomplished. [...] Men have historically authored a particular code of ethics for themselves, while women aim to redefine the standards for both genders by placing their needs and values at the forefront rather than conforming to the morals dictated by men. By default, this creates a division between individual moral values and governmental regulations. It implies that progress must be made through collective efforts. Forming a shared understanding among women and between women and men plays a crucial role in solidifying this social consciousness across all societal institutions (Yarshater, cited by Zandian, 2019, p.367) [Translated from Persian by the author].

Women in Iran are actively involved in various areas of civil society. This includes participating in environmental protection activities, advocating for sustainable Development, establishing local libraries and cultural centers, providing awareness about drug addiction, combating violence through education programs, supporting victims of violence, advocating for the rights of children, especially children living on the streets, improving the standard of living of working-class and impoverished women through vocational training, and providing legal support to abused women (Tohidi, 2010).

¹¹⁰ Nayereh Tohidi. "The role of the women's movement in the democratization process in Iran" (Iran Emrooz website, March 2016). Accessed on November 5, 2021, at <http://www.iran-emrooz.net/index.php/social/more/60465/>

Being a female activist in contemporary Iran demands the ability to challenge, oppose, negotiate, or even evade gender inequality not only through extraordinary and inclusive movements characterized by targeted collective protests and guided by theories and tactics of mobilization, in addition to participating in everyday activities including working, being involved in sports, jogging, singing, or running for public office (Bayat, 1997, p. 167). Aptheker (1989), in *Tapestries of Life: Women's Work, Women's Consciousness, and the Meaning of Daily Life* explores the importance of women's everyday experiences and how these experiences shape their unique activism and their feminist consciousness. She argues that women's activism is not limited to large-scale protests or political movements but is also evident in women's everyday actions and practices as they unfold in their homes, workplaces, and communities. By examining women's experiences in their daily lives, Aptheker highlights how these experiences can be a catalyst for political action and social change. To achieve this, one must harness the power of presence and the ability to impose collective will despite encountering significant obstacles. As Sedghi (2007) has pointed out, “*power of presence and ordinariness*” are crucial components of women's agency in Iran, perhaps even more so than in democratic nations. In the recent trajectory of collective women's activism in Iran, specific characteristics of social movements identified by Bayat, particularly those associated with *new social movements*, can be observed (Sedghi, 2007, p. 80). These include structuring, networking, conducting Campaigns, creating discourses or icons to establish a collective identity, lobbying, mobilization, and organizing collective protests, albeit on a smaller scale.

The examination of the status of women during the four eras covered above reveals that although the policies of the various governments – in their interactions with world banks, international monetary funds, and the capitalist world – exhibit a significant impact on the economic, political, educational, and cultural conditions of different strata and classes of Iranian society, during periods of social movement, including the women's movement, the various regimes were compelled to strike a temporary balance by implementing policies that were less unpopular and discriminatory (as seen, for instance, during the Reform Era). However, the evidence also suggests that when movements lose momentum, governments typically revert to their previous discriminatory and unpopular policies (as seen during the Ahmadinejad period and, to a lesser extent, during the Rouhani period). It would seem, therefore, that the continuous existence and presence of independent and conscious movements with specified demands are essential for the

stability and deepening of claims of the various classes and strata, including women. Unfortunately, the constituent segments of the women's movement, despite their more or less continuous presence, have neither been able to exhibit the above characteristics nor overcome the following hindrances:

1. Support of internal groups for current policies of governments,
2. Influence of election slogans on internal groups and their stance on women's demands,
3. Compromise on women's demands for legitimacy from the government and individuals,
4. Internal groups becoming appendages of power,
5. Unrealistic expectations of achieving women's demands within existing policies.

Conversely, anti-systemic groups lack any organic connection with women due to the informal nature, operate in small and limited groups, and cannot expand their reach. Moreover, their informal struggles hinder their ability to communicate with other parts of the movement or their peers. These groups often hesitate to declare their opinions and focus primarily on their anti-class stance, neglecting to address women's daily demands and interests. As a result, they tend to adopt conservative demands or leave them to the government, which leads to various issues and problems.

2.4.9 Gender Politics and Ideology During Raisi's Presidency (2021 to present)

The ascent of Ebrahim Raisi to the presidency occurred under extreme repression, whereby the electoral process was structured in a manner that excluded certain groups – including women, individuals belonging to religious minorities, and those who held opposing viewpoints – from participating as candidates. The closed and repressive state of the regime in Iran, led by a president notorious for suppressing any efforts to uphold human rights, has dealt a severe blow to feminist efforts. Nationwide anti-government protests that emerged in smaller cities and rural areas in 2019 and 2020, starting as demonstrations against gasoline prices, eventually turned into two distinct types of protest: one driven by gender apartheid and the other rooted in economic grievances. Despite their similar origins, these protests remained separate from one another, and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, they subsided. The government used the opportunity to orchestrate

the election of President Ebrahim Raisi, an extremist figure who played a direct role in the execution of thousands of Iranian political prisoners in 1988 and previously served as the country's chief justice. Following Raisi's election, the regime initiated a crackdown.

Since Raisi's rise to power, the government has implemented strict policies on abortion and birth control and instated mandatory monitoring of pregnant women so as to push women back into a life of marriage and multiple children.¹¹¹ In addition, despite polls showing that most Iranians believe wearing the *hijab* should be voluntary, President Raisi opted for a policy of harshly enforcing the *hijab* laws in July 2022. Over a period of several months, the morality police increased their attacks on young women for not wearing the *hijab* properly. This phase of severe repression eventually led to the death of Mahsa Amini. Mahsa represented the intersection between many layers of oppression, those that were hidden under heavy veils. Mahsa was a woman, a symbol of all women marginalized in the shadow of a patriarchal system, bearing the burden of suppression.

2.4.9.1 Anatomy of an Uprising

ژینا گیان تو نامری نوت ده بیته ره مز¹¹²

“Dear Jina! You won’t die. Your name will turn into a code name.”

Despite traditional gender roles in Iran, women aspire to change. Their evolving position is now a topic for social scientists analyzing their participation in significant social, political, and economic activities in contemporary Islamized Iran. Throughout history, Iranian women have witnessed various revolutions, from the Tobacco Movement (1891-1892) to major political upheavals such as the Constitutional Movement (1905-1911), the Islamic Revolution (1979), the emerging Green Movement (2009), and the Mahsa Uprising (2022). Despite differing religious

¹¹¹ The proposal to increase population growth through bans has sparked reactions from political activists and environmentalists. Ismail Kahram, an ecologist and environmental activist, argues that while population growth for Iran matters, it cannot be enforced through regulations and policies. He adds, “The resources and energy reserves of the country have not been used in the right direction to increase the population. The population wants prosperity first. The state's leaders ought to be aware that the ‘reproduction’ of Iranian people is not order-and-directives-based” (*The reaction of a social and environmental activist to the implementation directives of the population youth plan in an interview with Didehban Iran*, March 1, 2022). Retrieved from <https://www.didbaniran.ir/> (Last accessed on November 6, 2022).

¹¹² Epitaph on the grave of Mahsa amini (Jina)

beliefs, these revolutions have significantly impacted how Iranian women view themselves and their societal place.

In December 2017, Vida Movahed took off her headscarf on Enghelab Street, raised it with a stick, and stood on a utility box (Figure 5), making a powerful statement of defiance and freedom. The actor with a genderless dress opted for the utility box, a stage with an area of only a few square meters – a narrow space that expressed limitation, imprisonment, and even solitary confinement. Her genderless dress echoed Judith Butler’s point in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory* that:

“Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*. Further, gender is instituted through a stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self” (Butler, 1988, p. 519).



Figure 5. Vida Movahed. “The Girls of Revolution Street” (2017) ¹¹³

¹¹³ Photo from the article “First Revolution Street Girl Who Removed Hijab In Protest Sentenced To Jail,” published on April 14, 2019, available at <https://en.radiofarda.com/a/first-revolution-street-girl-who-removed-hijab-in-protest-sentenced-to-jail/29879936.html> (Last accessed on November 28, 2022).

To dress in a manner that does not reflect a female's defined sex and serves two simultaneous objectives. First, it aids in reminding that a person is allowed in society to wear something that does not conform to gender norms. Furthermore, second, it provides a more meaningful connection to other silent protesters—from sexual minorities and queers to men who have not experienced the hardships of mandatory *hijab* but are experiencing oppression with every passing moment. Movahed started the protest movement Girls of Enghelab Street, and her image entered the history of Iranian freedom activists.

In September 2022, Mahsa (Jina) Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, was killed after being arrested by the morality police. The protests of women against overt police violence grew, culminating in a protest in which women removed their headscarves and set them on fire. This is a much more radical and appalling movement than the Vida Movahed action and, simultaneously, a continuation of it. The slogan “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” was chanted in Kurdistan, and shortly afterward, the slogan echoed in Tehran: “Woman, Life, Freedom.” The movement has been identified as a linear narrative linked to Jina's death. The imposition of *obligatory hijab* or *obligatory non-hijab* is a significant element in the construction of the *Iranian woman* in the government's hands, serving as a tool of sovereignty.

Nowadays, the protest movement against the mandatory *hijab* has taken a significant leap forward, similar to the Iranian women's movements. The Woman, Life, Freedom movement represents a movement with tremendous potency. For the first time, a feminist movement has emerged from the depths of Iranian society, sustainably questioning masculine political and social hegemony, challenging imposed subjugation, denying the power of the people, and addressing the marginalization of a significant part of the population (Towfigh and Yousefi, 2022). It has called for regaining the ability to operate with dignity and, ultimately, to lead one's own life (Khademlou, 2022; Sadeghi, 2022). The movement provides a profound socio-political impetus with progressive implications. An immediate achievement of the movement lies in its repudiation of the desperation and obstruction that have characterized Iran's politics in recent years.

The compulsory *hijab* has been the primary power system to dominate women's minds and bodies. However, it cannot be reduced to just a covering of the head or face; instead, like any power system, it has an ideological aspect linked to propaganda as well as a coercive arm

(Darvishpour, 2007).¹¹⁴ This implies a sexualization of the female body. The woman's body is a political issue produced by the property-oriented and patriarchal system, but the singularities exist in various geographies, making it highly meaningful. The woman in the Middle East also has her coordinates of oppression. Since the end of the Qajar period and the beginning of the modern era, the term *Iranian woman* has been closely linked to the issue of *hijab*, which has been the cause of oppression and inferiority. However, what is the *obligatory unveiling of hijab* during the era of Reza Khan, and what is the *obligatory hijab* at present?¹¹⁵ It may be asserted that during the modern period, the Iranian government has consistently suppressed women's bodies for political and economic purposes. But, in addition to the history of oppression, it is possible to review the history of women's resistance and struggle, as alluded to before: from March 1958 to 1996 and continuing to the present day. The headscarf, in this context, acts as a flag of domination over woman, demanding property, childbearing, confinement to the home, and objectification for sexual desire.

The 2022 uprising in Iran involves issues beyond women's rights, including authoritarianism, economic stagnation, unemployment, religious-fundamentalist impositions, and climate disaster. The protests were also fueled by the public's response to the regime's corruption, confrontational foreign policy, regional expansionism, and the increasing isolation of Iran. An ethnic dimension also distinguishes the protest from other protests in recent years while also building upon them. Jina, as a Kurd, showed a sign of national oppression in Iran. However, the death of the Kurdish woman has allowed two sub-movements, that of women and that of the Kurds, to become even more active, to mobilize protests, and to overcome collective outbursts of rage and discontent. The Kurds, among the ethnic groups in the Middle East region, have a long tradition of struggle against ethnic oppression and are considered leaders in movements ranging from the pursuit of class to those of gender and ethnic equality. Furthermore, due to the elements that have figured prominently in their efforts – i.e., distinct concepts, slogans, rituals of joy and mourning,

¹¹⁴ Mehrdad Darvishpour's speech titled "[Secular Feminism: The Vanguard of Modernity in Iran!](#)" was presented at the 17th International Conference of the Iranian Women's Studies Foundation in Montreal in 2007. (Last accessed on February 14, 2023).

¹¹⁵ HRANA, the Human Rights Activists News Agency, citing ILNA, reported that Marzieh Taherian, a 21-year-old worker, in November 2021 was killed at the Nasaji Kavir Semnan spinning factory in the industrial zone in the eastern city of Semnan. According to her co-workers, the female veil workers are obliged to wear. However, inappropriate for working conditions and safety, she got caught in a ring-spinning machine and dragged her head into the machine. <https://www.en-hrana.org/female-worker-dead-after-veil-caught-in-machinery-at-textile-factory/> (Last accessed on October 17, 2022).

symbols, and the art of protest – the Kurdish tradition of struggle is considered noble. The imposed terms of Iranian-Islamic identity have always entailed the homogenization and suffocation of other voices, languages, and bodies. Language is not just a tool for transmitting thoughts; language is thought itself and the history of the body itself. So, not recognizing other languages means suppressing all dissent and alienation. The intersection of gender suppression (being a woman), national oppression (being a Kurdish woman), and religious oppression and fundamentalism triggered a new transitional moment.

However, the female body is not the only part of the principle of pleasure that is suppressed here; the alienated labor in the form of the socially beneficial labor system constitutes a further aspect of the suppression of the principle of pleasure, which is generally applied to all parts. It manifests itself in the form of a capitalist system both in the central regions of the country, the exploitation of the working class, and the lower class of society. Moreover, the inequitable evolution of capitalism has confronted the periphery of the country with a larger mass of unemployed and oppressed. In addition to unbalanced capitalist Development, upper-class nationalism in the form of national and religious supremacy oppresses the marginalized beyond capitalist exploitation, and the impoverished and economically backward areas and cities are expressions of this dual oppression.

A significant aspect of the Women, Life, Freedom uprising was mobilizing the Islamic Republic's public under an assumed code to express discontent related to inflation, the economic situation, and the curtailment of civil liberties. Consequently, protests occurred in various areas, including the bazaar and craft associations, expressing disaffection and demand for change. Since the onset of the Movement and its gaining momentum and continuity, it has increasingly been able to activate and inspire other forces to align with its cause. This potential for collective action and solidarity may continue to increase and motivate more individuals and groups to participate.

2.4.9.2 The Desire to live as a Revolt against a Destructive Civilization

In *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), Freud holds that civilizational progress is based on the suppression of desire. In his view, the unconscious realm, the *Id* (essence), is suppressed by the *ego* (self) as the child grows and passes through the hidden stage. The *ego*, which constructs the human personality in the real world and is the social feedback loop, is governed by the reality

principle, following the rules of the external world. While the *Id* is the reservoir of the *libido* and the function of the desire principle, social expediency, and the work system drive reason to follow the conquest of the *ego* over the reality principle, and a particular type of human being suppresses the *desire principle* and the *libido* for the progress that civilization brings it. Freud states that “the price we pay for our advance in civilization is a loss of happiness through the heightening of the sense of guilt” (Freud, 1930, VII, p.97). In addition to the life instinct, Freud considers *eros* to be the blossomed libido and the symbol of the pleasure principle. He believes that in the struggle between the death drive (*Thanatos*) and life drive (*Eros*). The *Eros* accepts the rules of repressive civilization to resist the death drive (Freud, 2003, pp. 3740-3761). This does not mean that the life instinct is conquering but rather that the repressed life instinct prevails. Repressive civilization reveals its features in alienated work and marginalizes the libido, and the system based on patriarchy and monogamous marriage, through the suppression of the libido, transforms desire into love for another, the purpose of which is not the satisfaction of desire but the suppression of desire. In contrast to Freud, Marcuse (1966) argues in *The Eros and Civilization* that the repressive form of civilization comprises only one facet of civilization. Freud proposed the dialectic between *Eros* and *Thanatos* on the biological level. However, Marcuse builds his hypothesis by proposing this dialectic on an entirely philosophical level, transforming the issue of the conflict between drives and society into the conflict between two basic drives and contending that the attenuation of erotic drives under the dominance of the performance principle will lead to the strengthening of destructive drives.

The principle of reality as tradition and law in Iranian society represents a form of repressive civilization that establishes the welfare of society in the observance of its codes and the overcoming of pleasure and desire. This principle suppresses the reality of the female body and regards it as pleasurable, considering the path to salvation to lie in covering the female body in order to prevent women and men from becoming contaminated by sin. The repressive civilization is not sufficient to recommend the salvation of humans, to caution against sin and offend; the guidance patrol represents an executive manifestation of this repressive civilization, significantly suppresses any opportunity for the representation of the body. The performance principle also displays its manifestations through the alienated self's social work and labor system, and by suppressing the alienated and exploited bodies, it demolishes all liberation and pleasure.

Therefore, the political structure that governs Iran represents, above all, a demonstration of the superiority of the reality of principle over the pleasure principle, which emanates from the suppression of the libido, the female body, and extends into the sphere of economic life. Within such a principle of reality, the ruling order aims to prevent the pleasure principle from flourishing through nationalist and/or religious propaganda with the pledge of peacefulness and safety. As the ego suppresses the pleasure principle with the expediency of a steadier life, here, the ruler in the position of the ego justifies the existing adversities and issues with the expediency of safety, the pledge of development in another time and the acquisition of pleasure in another world, relegating the principle of pleasure to lust and inferior desires that deserve to be suppressed. However, in the duality of the pleasure principle and the reality principle, the *id* cannot remain eternally silent; thus, it reappears in the form of a spirit of life, pleasure, and freedom in the arising of Jina.

The dream of a non-repressive civilization based on the pleasure principle manifested itself in the self-same female body and resisted the oppression of the body. The *id* arises and seeks to reclaim the pleasure principle and opposes the reality principle. Thus, removing the *hijab* is a protest figure, and throwing it into the fire represents a vigorous protest against the reality principle, seeking revenge against the severe oppression imposed by the reality principle. In the revolt against the reality principle, women are the representatives of the struggle against the same structure that represents the reality principle, namely the patriarchal and populist order, which is one of the principal factors for the suppression of the pleasure principle.

With the assistance of artistic patterns and Kant's power of judgment, Marcuse considers art as a manifestation of the reconquest of the pleasure principle and places labor as a form of art in front of socially beneficial and alienated labor. The affirmative character of art lies in its commitment to Eros, the profound affirmation of the instincts of life in its struggle against instinctual and social oppression (Marcuse, 2003). In the emergence of Jina, artistic crystallizations for this reconquest of desire in the form of performances and artistic effects of street protests, as well as performance, dance, and song amid protests, play a prominent role in demonstrating the rebellion of life (Figure 6). The artist's anonymity highlights the ever-present atmosphere of anxiety and the necessity to protect oneself when voicing one's opinion in repressive governments. In addition to denouncing atrocities, the artwork also serves as a memorial to the ongoing struggle for freedom and justice in the face of oppression.



Figure 6. Anonymous Artist. “Tehran Drenched in Blood” Tehran (2022)¹¹⁶

2.4.9.3 On the Origin and Significance of “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi”

During the Syrian civil war, the Kurdish Freedom Movement assumed control of the Rojava region, known as the Democratic Federation of Northern and Eastern Syria (DFNES) (Leezenberg, 2016). Meanwhile, in conjunction with other activists, the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, PYD), played an instrumental part in establishing the DFNES by implementing the political concept of *democratic confederalism*, which Abdullah Öcalan launched (Knapp et al., 2016). Democratic confederalism advocates political self-government where all groups and cultural identities have a voice in local assemblies, general assemblies, and councils (Al-Ali and Käser, 2020). This form of democracy provides political space for all levels of society and allows various political groups to express themselves, leading to the political unity of society. Consequently, “politics becomes a part of everyday life” (Öcalan, 2011, p.26). Democratic confederalism represents a form of democracy open to “other political groups, multicultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented” (Ibid, p.21). In addition, it prioritizes “ecology and

¹¹⁶ Photo from the Instagram account@1500tasvir, posted on October 7, 2022

feminism” as central pillars (Öcalan, 2011, p.21). “The Kurdistan Workers' Party” (*Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*, PKK) was founded in 1978 in northern Kurdistan (Leezenberg, 2016, p.673) as a Marxist-Leninist liberation movement by Kurdish and Turkish revolutionaries, including Abdullah Öcalan and Sakine Cansız (Knapp et al., 2016, p.36).

Due to global upheavals in geopolitics, the PKK underwent a significant shift in its ideology starting in 1995, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Öcalan, 1999). During this new phase, women's issue became the organization's focus, and the PKK women's movement progressed to higher levels, gaining independence in action and opinion.¹¹⁷ Numerous scholars, such as Zizek (2015), Graeber (2014), as well as Jongerden & Akkaya (2011), have observed the increasing impact of Bookchin's ideas on Öcalan's theoretical, ideological, and political framework, particularly concerning the implementation of communalism within the Kurdish Freedom Movement.¹¹⁸ The nexus is aptly encapsulated by Öcalan's pronouncement that “The freedom of the Kurdish people can be viewed as inseparably bound to women's freedom” (Öcalan, 2010).¹¹⁹ This implies that social reality is determined to a considerable extent by women's reality. Hence, any movement seeking a free society must prioritize women's liberation as an essential part of its practice (Öcalan, 2009, p. 266).

In analyzing the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy through history, Öcalan highlights that women's subordination was more prominent than men's subjugation. Moreover, Öcalan identifies three significant shifts in gender roles from the Neolithic period onward. The first rupture is considered to be the plundering of the household economy and the emergence of the organized power of the proto-priest (*shaman*) over society, which formed the basis for the transition to the patriarchal system and the emergence of the state (Öcalan, 2013, pp.18-19). Öcalan maintains that patriarchy is not innate to human society and that there are indications that the position of women

¹¹⁷ See Leezenberg, Michiel. “The ambiguities of democratic autonomy: The Kurdish movement in Turkey and Rojava.” (*Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 16(4), 671-690).

¹¹⁸ In the 1960s, Bookchin developed the theory of Social Ecology, which posits that ecological crisis stem from social pathologies, such as patriarchy, capitalism, and the nation-state. In response to the perceived inadequacies of Marxism and anarchism, he proposed “communalism” as a political goal based on decentralized social organization, direct democracy, and ecological principles (Morris, 2009). Bookchin (1982/2005) cautions that ecological emergencies have gotten so dire that the Marxian slogan of “socialism or barbarism,” which was a call for the revitalization of society, has ceased to be the response to the problems facing humanity in the present era. Now we have to be concerned with destroying the human species, which is possible only through establishing an “ecotopia” founded on ecological principles.

¹¹⁹ Öcalan, Abdullah. “The Revolution is Female.” (2010, March 9) *Il Manifesto*, translated by David MacDonald. <http://www.freedom-for-ocalan.com/english/hintergrund/schriften/ilmanifesto.htm>

in earlier matri-centric societies was otherwise. Moreover, he infers that this shift resulted from a gradual assault on the earlier natural or matri-centric societies in which women performed a pivotal, non-hierarchical role in community organization (Ibid, pp.13-15). Öcalan argues that power relations constitute an inherent feature of capitalist societies, and women's subjugation through *housewifization* (Öcalan, 2013, p. 26) demonstrates how social norms and power structures are intertwined. This highlights the connection between power structures, societal norms, and women's subjugation and illustrates how power structures become embedded in societies. Based on Maria Mies's concept of *housewifization*, she argues that the “housewifing” of women aimed not only to provide labor and capital for the state but also served as a critical strategy for consumerism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Mies, 2022, p. 106). As a result, the housewife discovered the household as an important market for a wide range of new products and rapidly evolved into an ideology that pushed for the domestication of women (Ibid).

According to Öcalan, gender discrimination has two detrimental effects on society. On one hand, it leads to “the enslavement of women” (*housewifization*), and on the other, “all other forms of enslavement” will be implemented on the basis of *housewifization* (Öcalan, 2013, p. 27). He argues that homemaking is a “social process that impacts the society as a whole” (Ibid). Öcalan considers the enslavement of women and the concealment of their subjugation to be intimately linked to the ascent of hierarchical and state-like power, by which he means “power as the state of execution of the state institution” in society (Güneser, 2021, p. 50). Such enslavement of women lays the foundation for the establishment of other hierarchies in society, leading to the enslavement of other groups, including men (Öcalan, 2013; Öcalan, 2017).¹²⁰

According to Öcalan, the second most significant shift in gender roles was the reinforcement of patriarchy through the influence of monotheistic religions, particularly the Abrahamic ones. The shift away from mythological beliefs and practices was driven by cultural Development and changes in social values. In contrast, the transition emerging from monotheistic beliefs resulted from religious laws and decrees considered divine commands. This resulted in women, once considered inferior, now being connected to the sacred command of God. Öcalan

¹²⁰ It is important to note that Öcalan's writings in the treatise were written while he was in prison and, therefore, may not have the same access to sources and evidence as other scholarly works. Nevertheless, it is also worth mentioning that some of his ideas in the book's first chapters can be traced back to earlier works by scholars such as Friedrich Engels and Thorstein Veblen. See Friedrich Engels, “The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State.” (Verso, Brooklyn, NY, 1884/2021) & Thorstein Veblen. “The beginnings of ownership.” (American Journal of Sociology 4(3), 1898).

cites examples such as Abraham's treatment of Sarah and Hagar, the acceptance of polygamy as an ethical practice, and Moses' conflict with his sister as evidence of this trend (Öcalan, 2013, pp. 30-31).

Öcalan considers the third major shift in gender roles to be the institutionalization of gender equality, which requires the elimination of male dominance. He contends that “the male has become a state and turned this into the dominant culture. Class and sexual oppression develop together; masculinity has given rise to the ruling gender, ruling class, and ruling state. When man is analyzed in this context, it is clear that masculinity must be killed” (Ibid, p.51). Hence, the emergence of “democratic civilization represents not only the rebirth of peoples but, perhaps more distinctively, it represents the rise of woman” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 57).

In his work *Sociology of Freedom* (2020), Öcalan introduced the concept of *Jineoloji* (the science or study of women), which has become a guiding principle in the Democratic Federation of Rojava and draws on Bookchin's idea of hierarchy as the main problem behind gender issues and that which needs to be targeted to dismantle patriarchal structures and establish gender equality (Öcalan, 2020, p.109). The conceptual agenda of *Jineoloji* is multidisciplinary and is reflected by the term itself, which originates from the Kurdish language, with “jin” signifying woman and “jiyan” signifying life. The suffix “ologî” is derived from the Greek word “logos,” which implies knowledge (Knapp et al., 2016, p.71; Al-Ali and Käser, 2000, p. 2) and consists of improving access to “science and knowledge” for women and society and strengthening the relationship between “science, knowledge, and society” (Öcalan, 2020, p.249). In order for a concept of a fulfilling life to be developed, it has to be implemented through councils that interact with each other constantly (Knapp et al., 2016, p. 71). *Jineoloji* originates from the ideology of women's liberation within the movement, which itself was influenced by the history of the conflict involving the Turkish state and the PKK from 1978 onwards (Al-Ali & Käser, 2000; Çağlayan, 2012).

Jineoloji was introduced in 2009 by Abdullah Öcalan to describe the study of women's experiences and knowledge. Since its inception, however, *jineoloji* has evolved and expanded (Güneser, 2021. pp. 42-47). In 2012, official discussions commenced by the Guerrilla's Academy of Şehîd Zeynep Kınacı in the mountain camps of Qandil concerning how to participate in knowledge production and practice (Piccardi & Barca, 2022). Dorşîn Akîf, director of a women's academy in Rimelan, expounded that the *Jineoloji* represents the culmination of Kurdish women's experiences of struggle and seeks to regain the knowledge that was taken away from them for

“epistemological justice,” as Dirik claims (Al-Ali and Käser, 2000). The female of the Jineoloji strives to comprehend the production and reproduction of concepts within social relations and establish an accurate interpretation of history by making “women visible” (Biehl, 2015). In writing about the Jineoloji, Öcalan considers that the oppression of women is not just a gender issue but a fundamental element of a “hierarchical and patriarchal society that subjugated women, youth, and members of other ethnicities” (Öcalan, 2013, p. 25).

Hence, Jineoloji relies strongly on feminism and acknowledges its significant contribution to the “struggle for social liberation” (Güneser, 2021, p. 57). It focuses on studying and critiquing “patriarchal class civilization” and “capitalist modernity,” which pose a menace to women. While feminist politics has advocated for establishing spaces reserved for women, it has often neglected to create strategies and platforms for gender struggle aimed at transforming men.

The movement for women's freedom considers this a solution to the question, “What is Jineoloji?”

“To analyze the freedom hidden in moments of creation, liberation, and life, [...] to contribute to building democratic modernity[...] the ability to create scientific, philosophical, and activist vehicles to express women’s potential, in alliance with the other forces of democratic modernity [...] to develop and organize an alternative demographic understanding based on women’s self-determination” (Güneser, 2021, pp. 61- 67).

The experience of the revolution in Rojava was a significant achievement and an essential step in the liberation and equality movement, but it is also considered a historic moment for the women's movement, particularly for women in the Middle East (Öcalan, 2017). The continuous revival of the Kurdish slogan “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” through Democratic Confederalism has been promoting this perspective since 2005, and it is currently at the Center of women's activism in northern and eastern Syria (Piccardi & Barca, 2022).

In Kurdish, “the word for life is Jin, which also means woman. The term Jîn means alive, and Jiyan means life. Hence, the women's freedom movement employs the slogan Jin Jiyan Azadi, where Azadi means freedom. The Sumerian word for freedom is ‘amargi’, signifying ‘return to the mother’. The three words are interconnected and emphasize the significance of women's freedom, which is essential for the restoration of the magic and enchantment of life” (Güneser,

2021, p. 83). Hence, the slogan “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” provides a unifying narrative as an alternative to the oppressive male-oriented structure of the government, which has denied freedom to various groups, including women, queers, workers, ethnic and environmental activists, and other marginalized groups. The slogan emphasizes the significance of women's liberation and is in direct contrast to the narrow-minded, male-oriented, and chauvinistic slogans often espoused by right-wing nationalist groups, many of which are closely aligned with the royalists. Such groups may seek to replace Öcalan's slogan with their own, which could perpetuate multiple forms of oppression at their core.¹²¹

From Öcalan's perspective, women's freedom cannot be realized within the framework of the nation-state but stands as a global phenomenon that requires the establishment of self-governing and ecological confederalism worldwide. Thus, the slogan “Woman, Life, Freedom” represents not only a Campaign slogan but also a blueprint for the foundation of a new world. The field of the Jineoloji, then, deals with educational practices referred to as *perwerde* in Kurdish (Piccardi & Barca, 2022, p. 1279). Women's education and research centers have been established in Rojava in both Kurdish and Arab cities, involving a high percentage of the Kurdish population. The centers serve as a platform for women to deal with family issues and societal challenges affecting them. They also serve as a site for collaboration with other women to identify solutions. The objective has been to empower women to make decisions regarding questions that directly concern women, leading to a “new consciousness” and form of “self-awareness” (Knapp et al.,

¹²¹ For instance, placing the slogan “Man, Homeland, Prosperity” [*Mard, Mihan, Abadi*] alongside the primary slogan of the uprising can be considered inappropriate. The current revolutionary upsurge is predominantly characterized by women standing up in a society where men and traditional definitions of masculinity dominate. It can recognize their humanity by chanting slogans centered around women and acknowledging their identity as equal to men. However, adding the word “man” to such a slogan does not serve as a form of protest. Instead, it carries symbolic associations with concepts such as “Motherland” and “homeland,” which undermine the very purpose of a woman's fight for life and freedom. The word “homeland,” which means patriotism, has a deep gender meaning as it reinforces the notion that the identity of the homeland is tied to women's bodies and is exclusively the responsibility of men. This suggests that patriotism is a man's job, and women are relegated to a secondary role in protecting and preserving the homeland. The concept of patriotism, as represented by the word “homeland,” reinforces the notion that women and the homeland are tied together, with women's bodies embodying the homeland's identity. This discourse portrays femininity as a body that needs to be protected against external threats and sexual violence. Consequently, the responsibility of protecting and supporting the homeland and women falls under the purview of men. According to Najmabadi (1997), this discourse contributes to the construction of gender roles, where men are viewed as protectors and women as those needing protection. The concept of “prosperity,” which refers to a human and trans-gender ideal, reinforces the idea that supporting women and their bodies and improving the homeland are acts of masculinity and honor exclusive to men. This implies that women are exempt from participating in the betterment of the homeland, and their role is confined to the private sphere of home and family. Thus, this discourse perpetuates gender roles, where men are seen as the protectors and providers of the homeland, while women are relegated to the domestic sphere.

2016, p. 71). By researching communal and matri-centric societies to gain insight into their economic systems, Jineoloji seeks evidence of communal economic systems across time (history) and space (various parts of the world) (Al-Ali & Käser, 2020).

Piccardi and Barca contend that this Jineolojical approach depicts a self-determined feminine practice of “socio-eco-logical” liberation, which prioritizes the concepts of democratic, social, and community-based economies (Piccardi and Barca, 2022). According to the Kurdish movement, ecology forms an integral part of the social economy, which relies on fulfilling fundamental necessities and utility values rather than exchanging values defined by capitalism. This approach situates women as pioneers aiming to establish an ecological economy based on subsistence (Aslan, 2021, p.213). *Perwerde* provides opportunities for women to engage in activities such as gardening and natural medicine, enabling women to leverage reproductive labor practices as sources of social change, ecological sustainability, and economic autonomy (Piccardi & Barca, 2022).

Öcalan, meanwhile, identifies women as the natural protectors of the environment, from whom Industrialism appears as a threat. He maintains that women’s marginalization from the economy and the emergence of nation-states led to the idealization of Industrialism, resulting in an ecological crisis (Öcalan, 2012). Öcalan believes that Industrialism has caused significant destruction to agriculture and small communities, which are essential to society. To promote democratic autonomy, he underlines the significance of establishing *eco-communities* such as communes (Aslan, 2021, p. 214). The longing for a society that provides freedom and equality for all individuals surrounded by a natural environment has been maintained throughout history. The wish for such a society has never been entirely extinguished, nor will it ever be. Öcalan holds that the establishment of state and hierarchical systems has impeded the establishment of such ideal societies (Öcalan, 2004, p.19). According to this characterization, humans live in a natural society (i.e., ecological society) as part of nature, and community is part of natural ecology. He maintains that the Kurdish people have consistently emphasized cooperation and organic society and construes Kurdish society in the past as being based on clan and tribal associations rather than a centralized government, which he believes provides the Kurdish people with the potential to attain freedom (Biehl, 2015). He believes that the achievement of freedom by the Kurdish nation will be part of a broader struggle toward the liberation of all oppressed peoples.

2.5 Nature

A) Question: Am I named a woman?

A name of the woman that includes all the oppressions inflicted on women for many years, whose lives have been turned obscure by the government, the economic system, and male-centered society. The market system and the regime desire to keep women as sexual objects, child-bearing factories, and low-cost laborers.

B) What does the woman's term in "Woman, Life, Freedom" mean? Does that name mention me?

Becoming a woman is the power of the minority for freedom from enslavement. Therefore, the term "woman" in this slogan is the name of all minorities who are tired of defining the boundaries and limitations of their lives, sexuality, leisure, and the conquest of their bodies and their lives – the names of all minorities: queers, trans, Baluchis,¹²² Kurds, and all such subjects.

The feminine nature of the revolutionary movement lies in how it is articulated and named in the public sphere. This involves finding ways to represent and express the movement's core values and goals that are inclusive and empowering for women and other marginalized groups. In addition, naming and portraying the practice on the street is essential in creating a powerful and

¹²² *Desgohari* signifies a friendship-based social tradition among the Baluch women that represents compassion, comradeship, assistance, and sisterhood. "Desgoharan" stated at the outset of the Jina insurrection based on the fact that Baloch women, who had been independently and quietly engaged in a variety of civil activities for years, were among the first to be suppressed by the repressive apparatus even before protests began in Sistan and Balochistan, and with the first sparks of nationwide uprisings, they were forced to remain silent with the help of the repressive apparatus allied with the government, i.e., the clerics and doyens. Women in the north of the province, i.e., in Sistan (Baluch and non-Baluch, Shiite and Sunni), a more ethnically, linguistically, and religiously pluralistic society, face distinct challenges than women in the southern areas of the province. The government of the Islamic Republic has consistently benefited from the ethnicism and religious diversities in the Sistan region, leaving their original demands unaddressed due to such disparities. Environmental crises have affected their lives differentially due to the varying climates in the north and south of the province. Black Baloch women, undoubtedly among the most oppressed women in this region, are another category of women that no one has mentioned until now. However, how does the Center deal with this diverse geography of Sistan and Balochistan it has drawn? One word: uniformity! The action begins with suffering and assumes various forms according to the circumstances of time and place. At times it opposes the normalization and depoliticization of the existing situation, gradually finding opportunities and continuously moving. On other occasions, it is an objective rupture with all that is obsolete. We recognize these sufferings and actions from the north to the south of Sistan and Balochistan province; we will spread the voice and struggle against homogenizing images. We are assured that our liberation depends on the liberty of others. (From @thevoiceofbaluchwomen (published online on IG, October 11, 2022).

effective movement to bring about real change. This may involve developing slogans and symbols that reflect the movement's values, highlighting the experiences and perspectives of women and marginalized groups, and creating safe and inclusive spaces where these groups can unite and organize. Ultimately, the movement's success will depend on its ability to articulate a clear and powerful message that resonates with people and inspires them to bring action.

In this movement, and unlike other protest movements, the street does not assume the role of a mediator. Instead, "the 'street' becomes the ultimate arena to communicate discontent" (Bayat, 2010, p. 11). The street acts as a vein that injects blood into the body of society, and the street protests represent such blood. This type of street politics outlines a series of disputes and their outcomes involving "an individual or collective population and the authorities" that are carried out in the physical and social space of the streets, from the back alleys to the visible streets (Ibid). Each active or participatory use antagonizes officials, who consider themselves to have sole authority to impose and control public order.

As Bayat notes, street politics is gaining momentum, especially in neoliberal cities like Tehran, Cairo, Dakar, and Jakarta, dominated by market logic. This is because the neoliberal city takes the form of the "city inside out," in which circumstances of poverty and dispossession force many inhabitants to work, co-exist, socialize, and have a life in the public sphere (Bayat, 2010, p. 12). Thus, urban space acts as a site of sociopolitical contestation. It provides a provocation for particular kinds of politics on both the "micro and macro levels" (Ibid). Having a presence on the street disrupts the hegemony of subduing power and its dominance over the public space. The government's excessive violence in dealing with protesters stems partly from the fear of losing the street.

This is where a comparison may be drawn with the Green Movement, which may be said to have suffered from two strategic flaws: taking to the streets as a mediator for a political demand and as a mediator for policy as a demand. In other words, the presence on the street in the Green Movement turned into a maneuver to demonstrate power as a mediator to demand rights. The element of violence in any street protest leads to downfall and collapse. The decrease in street protests after its peak was not only due to the violence and suppression of street protests. A more significant cause came from the fear of the street, which became the prevailing mindset of a considerable part of the protesters. The other failure of the Green Movement involved reducing the policy to demands. The object of the street presence consisted of expressing a demand.

Revolutions, in terms of insurrections, are not just the consequence of particular historical sequences; they are also characterized by specific geographical areas and promoted by distinct spatial influences. Therefore, rather than simply asking questions about why and when a particular revolution happened, it is worth considering *where* it was sparked and *why* it occurred wherever it did. Yet politics involves more than making demands; no kind of demand can be accomplished solely through negotiation from above.

The Woman, Life, Freedom movement does not suffer from street phobia. The street protests are not held for protesters to play the role of mediators, nor is the purpose of the protests simply to demonstrate power. The “imagination of non-transcendence” forms a further significant feature that underlines the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. Its hopes and dreams are not dictated from above and outside the world of human possibilities. This phrase is often heard: The Iranian Revolution is stolen. The Iranian Revolution has been stolen by a transcendental and metaphysical imagination rather than by a group of clerics, an imagination based on establishing a utopia by following superhuman orders. This political imagination was supposed to seek salvation in the appeal to something superhuman. As a result, there was no salvation but a human hell (Sadeghi, 2022, p. 5).

In a recent message, Michael Hart declared his solidarity with the insurrection of the Iranian people and emphasized the significance of the strategic slogan Women, Life, Freedom.¹²³ Hart stated that struggle is mobilized and dynamic, extending to various circumstances, constantly shifting and translating. In his words, slogans are a means to mobilize, translate, and spread the struggle. Hart indicated that he was intrigued by the Woman, Life, Freedom movement’s slogan, which could translate or complement the slogan of the French Revolution, “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,” just as the slave rebellion in Haiti translated or complemented the French Revolution.¹²⁴

¹²³ The Contemporary American philosopher and theorist Michael Hart is most widely known for the collaborative works he has coauthored with Antonio Negri, including *Multitude* (2004), *Assembly* (2017), *Empire* (2000), and *Commonwealth* (2011).

¹²⁴ The French Revolution (1789-1790) led to the overthrow of the monarchy in that country, but the freedom and equality that the French sought were eventually encountered in Haiti after the Slave Rebellion (1791-1804) in the French colony became a real substantive. See James, C.L.R. “*The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*.” (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc. 1989).

In written correspondence with Slavoj Žižek, Navid Gorgin sought Žižek's insights on the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, aiming to comprehend Žižek's interpretation of these events within Iran. A portion of Žižek's reply on this matter is revealing.

“What goes on now in Iran has a world-historical significance: it combines different struggles (against women’s oppression, against religious fundamentalism, for political freedom against state terror) into an organic unity. Iran is not part of the developed West, so Zan, Zendegi, Azadi is very different from MeToo in Western countries: it mobilizes millions of ordinary women, and it is directly linked to the struggle of all, men included – there is no anti-masculine tendency in it, as is often the case with the Western feminism.

Men who participate in Zan, Zendegi, Azadi [Woman, Life, Freedom] know well that the struggle for women’s rights is also the struggle for their own freedom: the oppression of women is not a special case, it is the moment in which the oppression that permeates the entire society is most visible.

What goes on now in Iran is thus not a thing of the past, it is something that awaits us in the developed Western world where political violence, religious fundamentalism and oppression of women are growing daily. We in the West have no right to treat Iran as a country which just has to catch-up with the West. We in the West have to learn from Iran, we will soon need a similar movement in the US, in Poland, in Russia, and in many other countries.

Whatever the immediate result of the protests, the crucial thing is to keep the movement alive, to organize social networks which, even if state oppression will temporarily win, will continue its underground work and lay the foundation for a new explosion. All the babble about cultural specificities (often used by reactionary forces to justify religious and ethnic oppression) is now meaningless: we can immediately see that the Iranian struggle is the struggle of us all.”¹²⁵

It is remarkable that Žižek considers the Woman, Life, Freedom movement to be *more* progressive than Western feminist movements since it is not only not male-dominated but also tends to process the male/female question. The movement itself also presents new paradoxes, including that of the nature and behavior of the “Morality Police” – i.e., how the very entity that purports to represent morality actually hinders moral progress and undermines its own legitimacy. The global nature of the movement is also noteworthy, as is the speed with which it penetrated the

¹²⁵ Refer to: Gorgin, Navid. (2022, September 30). “Slavoj Žižek Sends a Message of Solidarity to the Iranians Protesting Mahsa Amini's Murder.” Radio Zamaneh. <https://en.radiozamaneh.com/32762/> (Accessed on October 15, 2022).

Kurdistan Region and spread all around Iran. Nevertheless, by virtue of its spread both geographically in Iranian society and globally via news and digital social media channels, the movement has demonstrated its capacity of becoming a global-level definition for an ideal future. As a movement, its voice is not merely local or regional but global, even appealing to the inhabitants of other nations. Its record-breaking coverage in the media indicates that this time around, the reaction of Western civil society is not merely one of pity for the impoverished, the weak, and the oppressed of far-away totalitarian regimes. In this case, the inhabitants of wealthy nations realize that Woman, Life, Freedom may very well be the key that leads to their own liberation.

Nowadays, this kind of discriminatory, reactionary political prevailing, which the members of the Islamic Council are now implementing, has been identified and opposed by the "people." However, one must ask, who constitutes the "people"? "People" are the ones who create themselves in public and form their own identity by calling themselves "people" in an explicit declaration. "People" determine their actions; the "people" in a pluralist political form are independent of a ruling regime, autonomous of governing symbols, and representing plurality in terms of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, and nationality. "The people," through its presence in the streets, are the bearers of popular sovereignty and the political actors. Regimes whose legitimacy hinges on this executive action (Butler, 2016, pp. 49-61). In each action, the actor's body becomes the statement's core. To comprehend the significance of the activist body, consult the ideas presented in Barbara Sutton's book *Bodies in Crisis*.

Undoubtedly, each action with a specific objective demands a distinct performance method, yet the dialogue-oriented feature of the performance methods establishes the link among them. Charles Taylor (1994), in his book *Multiculturalism*, advances the following thought: "We define our identity always in dialogue with, sometimes in struggle against, the things our significant others want to see in us" (Taylor, 1994, pp. 25-26). In other words, our identity depends heavily on our dialogue-oriented communication with others. Dialogue in this context includes not only language but also the body and its forms of expression, the way it is covered, and the way it is exposed. Hence, the action will be more effective if it provides a more dialogue-oriented capacity.

An essential aspect of the mechanism of intense monitoring and supervision and the expropriation of the body has been to construct a particular form of sex/gender identity, namely

the heterosexual male and female. Butler's argument (1988) regarding the distinction between sex and gender holds that no gender exists, which is not inherently gendered. In other words, all bodies are assigned gender from the outset of their existence in society. There is no such thing as a "natural body" that exists independently of cultural and social influences. Thus, the concept of a "natural body" that precedes its cultural and social construction is invalid. Hence, it appears to lead toward the inference that gender becomes not a thing one is, but rather a thing one does, or more specifically, a sequence of acts, more a verb than a noun, a "*doing*" rather than a "*being*." Even beyond the manifestations of gender, there is no set gender identity. It produces this identity performatively with the same manifestations considered to be its effects. According to Butler, there is no necessity to have a subject behind the verb. The subject is produced as a variable while the verb is being used and while the act is being performed.

Butler explains the effect of gender, arguing that,

“[gender] is instituted through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. This formulation moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of a constituted social *temporality*” (Butler, 1988, pp. 519-520).

Kandiyoti (2016) points out that the emergence of *masculine restoration* is “when patriarchy is no longer fully secure and requires higher levels of coercion and the deployment of more varied ideological state apparatuses to ensure its reproduction” (Kandiyoti, 2016, pp. 109-110). On this basis, the mandatory *hijab*, with its precise coding of the boundaries and how the body is to be concealed, and the performance of acts that correspond to this covering, not only serves as the government's desirable gender/sex identity creator but also eliminates and negates other identities. This ideology is defined by eliminating other human identities through *hijab* and honor while defining desirable femininity and masculinity as a human value and independence, considering “man as a thrall of lust and woman as a captive of man's affection.”¹²⁶ The term *body*

¹²⁶ Morteza Motahari's writings on women and women's rights, one of the principal ideologues of the government, considers the *hijab* as a fundamental principle in defining the identity of women, and he formulates specific measures to construct the desired identity of this ideology through the *hijab*. See more Morteza Motahari. "Hijab Issue." (Sadra Publications, 1996).

politics typically refers to activism and efforts related to the entire body, including issues of health, sexuality, gender, and identity. However, it also encompasses the practice and policies employed by those in power within society and government to regulate and discipline the human body. Bodies are integral to many aspects of society, including economics, social and political institutions, and the formation of civil society and citizenship.¹²⁷ As such, the regulation and control of bodies has profound implications for power dynamics and social hierarchies within a given society. As El-Saeed (2015) states,

“Women have rebelled not only against dictatorship but, in so doing, have rebelled against the socially informed body, have shunned the ‘docile’ female body and used their bodies as weapons of resistance. Employing strategies of resistance that appropriate the oppressive powers of domination, women have been able to ‘reconstitute the body in terms that lie outside the hegemonic forms of bodily comportment’” (El-Saeed, 2015, p.50).

However, the exertion of power, the expropriation of property, and the elimination of other identities is not the only function the compulsory *hijab* performs. It should also include eliminating women from the public sphere. The intertwining of the *hijab* issue with women's identity and the responsibilities and duties imposed on them is intimately tied to the gendered division of labor. Through the sanctification of being wife and mother, women have been assigned responsibilities that unambiguously identify them as the main forces of reproductive labor in the household, whose bodies are the means of reproducing and extending labor power. According to Federici (2006), housework is the work that not only reproduces “life” but “labor power.” Labor power has been materially devalued and is no longer even considered labor but is entirely at the disposal of accumulation.¹²⁸ Acts on child marriage, laws on family rights, employment and reduction of women's working hours, and plans for the population's youth are executive assurances and are part of the mechanism to remove women from public life and economic activity.

¹²⁷ See Arthur Frank, “*For a Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review*”, (ed.) by Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Brian Turner. (London: Sage.1991): 36-101.

¹²⁸ Federici also highlights that housework, while unpaid, significantly fuels capital accumulation. This revelation underscores a fundamental understanding of capitalism as a system reliant on extensive unpaid labor, surpassing contractual relationships. It also reveals how the labor-wage dynamic conceals the predominantly enslaved nature of the labor that forms the foundation for capital growth.

Consequently, in the Women, Life, Freedom movement, the world of human possibilities makes creating something very different feasible. This has been a tough achievement, and it should not be treated lightly. The distinction between the Women's Movement and other movements lies in its linking of equality and freedom. In this movement, equality hinges on freedom and freedom on equality. Consequently, neither equality takes precedence over freedom nor freedom over equality. Instead, the two are dependent on one another, and the one is impossible in the absence of the other. In other words, gender by itself does not contain equality. Woman-oriented thought means other than woman-oriented, whereas male dominance is other than masculinity. Many of the males participating in this movement are conscious of this fact. Therefore, their participation has not been due to gender but rather to the realization that women's humiliation and oppression are not restricted to them but concern everyone.

Women-centered thought policies can provide an alternative to the reactionary command-obedience paradigm by rejecting patriarchal domination and the corrupt relationships that flow from it. In this approach, the government is fundamentally accountable due to the domination-based and unequal relationship between the patriarchal ruler and the condemned. Therefore, the equation politics = government is replaced by the equation politics = equality and freedom.

3. The Human and the Surrounding Environment

Then,
the sun grew cold
and the earth became barren.
The grass withered in the meadows
and the fish withered in the sea
and the earth no longer
welcomed the dead [...] (Forough Farrokhzad; Earthly Verses)¹²⁹

3.1 The Human Being and Nature

Human life is inevitably connected with the environment and nature, and the quality and manner of humans' interactions with the natural world are the most critical issues of their lives. Accordingly, epistemological systems attempt to provide a model which involves a scheme for knowing and comprehending humans as well as their interrelation with the universe and its constituent parts. Apart from the general importance of epistemology, the occurrence of significant ecological changes and the endangerment and threat of extinction to many species since the mid-twentieth century (Botkin and Keller, 1998, p.6) has led to the consideration of a question of deep significance, namely "What is the proper nature of relation between human individuals and the world around them?" or "How ought human beings to be in relation with their natural environment?"

The structure of the ecological network consists of humans and the living beings that surround it, all of which have a direct and indirect impact on human life and the entire biological complex. However, the effect of humans is distinct and more effective. Humans, with the power of creation and innovation, are able to change the environment permanently, even in adverse geographical environments, to create appropriate conditions for living. However, nowadays, humans pay less attention to the extent of the effects of such changes in various biological areas,

¹²⁹ In the poem "Earthly Verses," Farrokhzad symbolically expresses the destruction and deterioration of nature in modern Tehran as an industrial society. See also Sholeh Wolpe, "*Selected Poems of Forough Farrokhzad*," at <http://farrokhzadpoems.com>.

intrinsic value, and essential nature, and it has become the primary cause of severe degradation of ecosystem areas and subsystems. Nowadays, nature has become a secondary value for human beings. Humans regard all of nature as merely a provider for their boundless demands. A more fundamental perspective of man and nature and the relationship between the two underlies a consequence that the human being has appropriated the dualism “I-Other” as “I or subject-object,” with the ability acquired in the new era to place oneself and his/her thinking in a central position. Humans, who did not separate themselves from nature by separating themselves from nature and other beings, consider them only as means to achieve their ends. In the new philosophy with Bacon (1620), Descartes (1641), and Kant (1798), this formulation was maintained, consolidated, and extended in various ways. Even the most widespread moral systems today, such as the bourgeoisie, implicitly endorse this perspective. Such a mindset underlies the environmental disasters of the present era.

The principal issue involves altering this way of thinking and theoretically abolishing the duality of subject and object and the resulting pattern of contemporary interaction with the environment, given that productivity dominates the current human-nature relationship and the life of modern human beings on Earth. Above all, it is a matter of developing a new understanding of the human-creature relationship and even a moral vision according to which nature becomes secure once again, destruction and annihilation yield for its protection, and the relationship of mastering and overcoming the creature is transformed into amity with it. Notably, there are essential elements in Heidegger's thought that trace back to the original relation to the creature and to nature (Heidegger,1954; 1977;1997; Zimmerman,1993). Thus, the notion of nature as the "other" to be overcome and subjugated is transformed into a safe dwelling for the Human Being. Since human beings spend life in a system of components and elements that constantly interact and communicate with them, the question of their status and relationship to the system of evolution arises: “Can human beings interact with the system of existence according to their will or not?” Modern ontology, in its dominance, leads to the destruction of nature (Plumwood,2002). The answer to this question is significant since, nowadays, the effects of all human movements and dwellings on the world system have been proven. Consequently, human interaction can be helpful and constructive or beneficial and destructive.

3.1.1 Equivalents of the Word "Nature" in Contemporary Persian Dictionaries

The word “nature” is a term that has different meanings and concepts in European, Arabic, and Persian languages. The descriptions offered in encyclopedias and Western philosophical cultures suggest that the term *nature* can include two types of meanings and concepts, namely lexical concepts and philosophical ones. To elucidate the meaning of the word nature and its conceptual development in the contemporary era, the equivalents of this word in the most significant Persian dictionaries of the recent century need to be comparatively examined first. For this purpose, *Farhang-e Nezam*, *Farhang-e Nafisi*, the *Loghat-nama-ye Dehkhoda*, the *Masaheb Persian Encyclopedia*, the *Farhang-e Farsi* of Moḥammad Moin, *Farhang-e Amid* by Hasan Amid, and *Farhang-e Bozorg-Sokhan* by Hasan Anvari have been studied in chronological order.

Farhang-e Nezam, written by Mohammad-Ali Dai-al-Eslam (1295-1878), a Persian scholar, preacher, and lexicographer, was first published in India in 1926 and can be considered the oldest Persian lexicon of the 20th century. In this lexicon, the word “nature” is defined as “inwardness and essential attribute,” while “natural” is defined as “anything attributed to nature, such as the natural wisdom discussed by objects” (Farhang-e Nezam, 1926, p. 636).

Natures, the plural form of the noun, is defined as “inwardnesses and essential attributes – the four temperaments – were designated in early times as hot, cold, dry, and wet” (Ibid, p. 634). In *Farhang-e Nafisi* of Ali Akbar Nafisi, published in 1939, the following definition is offered for the term *nature*: “Temper, temperament, disposition, character, and institution. Modality. Essence and habitude. Temperament and comportment. Animal consciousness. Also associated with “nature” is the tendency to be impatient and intolerant or fiery, as one who is quick-tempered and hot-blooded. ‘Nature’ also means innate, pristine, and substantive” (Farhang-e Nafisi, 1964, vol.3, pp. 2230-2231).

The *Dehkhoda Dictionary*, first published in 1931, is considered the most extensive and comprehensive Persian dictionary and a valuable reference source. When defining the term *nature*, the dictionary, like others before, only refers to the word’s old meaning. The definition of *nature* in *Dehkhoda* encompasses both lexical and medical meanings, including the mettle on which humans are created, and also the following lexical meanings: temperament, character, creation, essence, (inner) conscience, instinct, wisdom, talent, and element, as it is said, and the four natures (earth, water, air, and fire) while also noting that *nature* “means something immutable about the

element of the heavens and the temperament of the body, that is, what the organism (of the body) is born with” (Dehkhoda, 1998, vol. 10, pp. 15381-15382).

The initial publication of *Farhang-e Amid* took place in 1956, and a more extended version was published in 1963. Following the author's demise, a two-volume edition of Amir Kabir's publication was printed in 1981. The updated two-volume dictionary version contains an altered definition of the term *nature*. According to the latest edition, the word signifies various meanings such as temperament, habitude, kidney, mettle on which humans are created, temper, disposition, and plural natures (Amid, 2005, vol. 2, p. 1395).

Meanwhile, the *Farhang Moin* dictionary (first published in 1963) outlines nine distinct meanings for the term *nature*. These include 1.) the inherent constitution and power with which humans are created; 2.) habit and disposition; 3.) each of the four elements or āxšij; 4.) the specific temperament and strain of an individual; 5.) the controlling power that governs all natural phenomena from below the moon to the earth; 6.) the restraining power that shapes creation and form; 7.) a divine truth that is operational in all forms; 8.) four meanings that deserve special attention, including a) special temperament, b) composite gestalt, c) administrative power, and d) the demeanor of ego; and 9.) anything objective and realistic that exists outside the mind. The definition also notes that the classical schools of painting and sculpture, realism, impressionism, and particularly naturalism, each embody nature in their distinct ways, serving as models for the works of these artists (Moin, 1974, vol. 2, p. 2213).

The *Persian Encyclopedia*, authored by Gholam Hossein Mosaheb and first published in 1966, also includes an entry on the term *nature*, which shares similarities with the previous dictionary definitions. Mosaheb's definition of nature encompasses three primary meanings. Firstly, as a concept in ancient wisdom, it refers to the intrinsic and internal origin of movement, stillness, and actions in objects, in contrast to forced movement. Secondly, *nature* refers to a familiar appearance, the origin of all properties and characteristics of a particular species, such as human, animal, or plant nature. Lastly, *nature*, as opposed to *industry*, refers to something beyond human control, so that as a concept, it appears to be the very opposite of industry (Mosaheb, 2004, vol. 2, pp. 1161-1162).

Farhang Bozorg Sokhan, published under the direction of Hassan Anvari in 2002, presents eight distinct meanings of *nature*. These meanings are as follows: 1.) the part of the world that is untouched by human intervention, such as mountains, plains, and the sea, from which artists often

take inspiration; 2.) the material force responsible for creation and growth; 3.) the universe as a whole; 4.) the force that shapes events and determines the destiny of humans; 5.) the four temperaments in ancient medical science; 6.) in ancient philosophy, the inherent nature of everything or everyone, including their essence and temperament; 7.) each of the four elements: earth, water, wind, and fire; and 8.) the instinctive qualities (or instincts) of humans or animals. (Anvari, 2002, vol. pp. 4863-4865).

On the basis of the aforementioned information, it can be concluded that contemporary Persian dictionaries have only really started to render the term *nature* in its holistic sense over the past two decades, so that we find references to the world around humans that are not humanly created, such as mountains, rivers, and plains. Earlier lexical sources, including *Farhang-e Nezam*, *Farhang-e Nafisi*, *Loghat-nama-ye Dehkhoda*, and *Farhang-e Masaheb*, which were written between 1926 and 1966, do not mention this dimension of nature at all. It is worth noting that the last meaning of nature given by Masaheb, where he posits the opposition of nature versus industry, refers to nature as something *beyond* human control and influence. Although this definition may relate to the subject of creation and be associated with art, this aspect is not explicitly mentioned, as the definition may encompass other subjects such as humans, animals, galaxies, and specific events. In any case, it may be asserted that the dictionaries of the second half of the last century introduced a somewhat new meaning of the term *nature*, a move which reflects a cultural shift. *Farhang-e Bozorg-Sokhan* is the first Persian dictionary to explicitly define nature in its contemporary sense. Surprisingly, this meaning of nature, referring to the natural world such as mountains, plains, and seas, has only been found in Persian dictionaries for about twenty years, since 2002. However, the author of the parable explicitly uses the image of nature to convey the first meaning of the word, which confirms the influence of Western culture on the new definition of nature.

3.1.2 The Meaning of Nature According to Islamic Scholars

One could argue that the Persian word for nature has its roots in the Arabic language and the way in which Greek philosophy was integrated by Islamic tradition. Arabic translators used the word “طبع” (*tab*) to translate the Greek word *physis*, which was then further translated into “طبیعت” (*tæbi: 'ʔæt*) in Persian. It is important to note that neither the terms *nature* nor *Natura* are

mentioned in the Qur'an, but “طبع” (*tab*) appears in eleven verses, where it is used to mean “seal” or “lock,” which is distinct from the philosophical meaning of nature. It is worth noting that although the Arabic word for nature (طبيعة) has its origins in Greek philosophy, it has taken on a distinct meaning in the Arabic language, just like in Persian. In Arabic dictionaries, the word nature is defined in a way similar to the Persian definition. For instance, in *Taj al-Arous Man Jawahar al-Qamoos*, Zubaidi defines *nature* as “the innate disposition or temperament based on which a person is born” (Zubaidi, 2019, vol. 11, p. 317). This shows that the concept of nature had been assimilated into the Arabic language and culture but with its unique interpretation and application. The author highlights the notion of nature's variability, which is echoed in other dictionaries such as *Muntah al-Arb* and *Bahr al-Jawahro*. Although these definitions may not be interchangeable, they all refer to the inherent qualities of a person or thing and are not related to *nature* in the sense of the external world.

As Seyyed Hossein Nasr points out, Islamic scholars also made a distinction between the two words “طبايع” and “طبيعه,” with the former being regarded as an immanent attribute of the object and the latter as the principle of movement and repose (Nasr, 1971, p. 12). These two definitions of nature are pervasive in the course of Iranian Islamic philosophy. Jorjani, for instance, contends that “nature refers to an inherent power in things, through which the body achieves its natural perfection” (Jorjani, 1998, p. 104). Khawaja Nasir al-Din al-Tusi's definition of “طبايع” in the *Sharh al-Isharat*, meanwhile, is as follows: “طبايع” refers to the origin of the primary and intrinsic attribute, which is the nature of movement and stillness, essentially and involuntarily (Tusi, 1978, vol. 2, p. 56). In the section titled *Fan-e samae Tabii* of his work *The Book of Healing (Kitāb al-Shifā')*, Ibn Sina alludes the various meanings of the term *nature* as they occur in the different philosophical schools. He offers three definitions of the term: the first being the nature of form and essence, the second the nature of the composition of quiddity, and the third being the substance of a thing (Ibn Sina, 1898, p. 48).¹³⁰

In Islamic theological writings, the term *nature* is typically understood in relation to three fundamental ideas. Firstly, it can refer to the entirety of the material world, as distinguished from

¹³⁰ The view of nature as a captive or an obstacle to spiritual enlightenment is a common theme in some schools of Islamic mysticism, particularly in the tradition of the Illuminations. According to this view, nature is seen as a veil obscuring the true nature of reality and the divine presence, and thus, as an obstacle that must be overcome for the mystic to achieve union with God. See Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Amin Razavi. (eds.). “*From the School of Illumination to Philosophical Mysticism*.” (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

the higher realms like the *Eighth Clime*. Secondly, it can indicate inner energy and power that governs creatures according to divine providence and without excess. Finally, it can signify the simple, pure, and intrinsic essence of human beings (Bolkhari Ghohi, 2009, p. 208). This implies that nature may refer to a process and/or an inner quality that constitutes the essential essence of a human being and the world. From the philosophers' point of view, this conceptual duality of nature, which blurs the boundary between man and nature so that they are bound to one substance, expresses in a certain way the principle of correspondence, which implies that nature is reflected in humanity and vice versa. Having offered an overview of the semantic scope and development of the term *nature* in the context of the Persian language and Iranian philosophical-theological intellectual tradition, let us now move on to the exploration of the term *nature* in the thought of modern Western philosophers.

3.1.3 Nature in the Terminology of Western Philosophers and the School of Naturalism

During the centuries that typically delineate Western modernity, Western philosophers have usually employed the word *nature* to refer to the material aspect of the universe – i.e., *nature* is considered to mean *the material world*. It is regarded as a collection of things belonging to that world, the material world itself, and even the entire universe at times. In ancient Greek culture, the term *nature* stood for substance that possesses existence. In Aristotle's philosophy, more specifically, *nature (phusis)* is the source of *motion (kinêsis)* in objects and causes them to move from force (*bia*) to action (*poiein*). The “inner principle” of movement (change) or rest in an object differs from an object of art, which represents an external source of instability. Natural beings are those that possess internal source of change (*kinêsis*) (Falcon, 2000).

The followers of Pythagoras believed that nature is indeed in a state of constant change. However, this behavior is itself a manifestation of eternal stability. The attempt to explain nature in simple terms preoccupied the pre-Socratic philosophers. Democritus, for instance, was the first to propose the idea of the *atom*, a notion that is considered to be a precursor to 20th century physics (Ede, 2005, p. 27). Nature, art, and reality play a significant role in Plato's *Republic*, where in Book III, *mimesis* or imitation is examined in its relation to reality. According to Plato, whereas

mimesis is the imitation of *nature*, *nature* itself is an imitation of *the world of ideas*. In this sense, *art* is limited to creating *simulacra* – creating objects similar to other objects.

George Ritzer delineates three historical phases that humanity passes through, which eventually lead to the modern notion of *nature*. The first phase represents the *theological phase*, which is characterized by the belief in supernatural powers and religious figures modeled after human beings. This stage occurs in primitive societies, the ancient civilizations of the East, as well as in ancient Greece. The second phase is defined as the *metaphysical period*, which spans half a millennium, from 1300 to 1800. During this period, abstract powers such as “nature” were believed to be able to explain practically anything. The final phase, which emerged around 1800, Ritzer refers to as the *Age of Positivism*, marked by a rigid belief in modern science. In this phase, humans consider themselves the Center of the world and try to discern the laws of nature by relying on reason. (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, pp. 14-15).

The Renaissance witnessed a shift away from the organic view of human beings and the universe to a merely mechanical one, a change that was accompanied by a redefinition of the term *nature* according to the dominant philosophical and scientific beliefs of the times. These radical shifts led to the division of the universe into a natural and a supernatural world, with the material aspect of the universe being referred to as “nature” by philosophers such as Spencer (Torrance, 1992). While some materialist philosophers considered only the material world to possess reality, another group believed in the existence of both material and non-material elements, including supernatural phenomena. This division of philosophical beliefs gave rise to two schools of thought: *naturalism* and *supernaturalism*. Naturalism seeks to argue against supernatural causation and attempts to prove an immaterial and supernatural cause for the natural world (Jenkins, 1942). The term *naturalism* is defined as follows in the *Dictionary of Philosophy*:

Naturalism [...] has as its fundamental tenet the proposition that the natural world is the whole of reality. “Nature” and “Natural world” are certainly ambiguous terms, [however], naturalism means to assert [...] one system or level of reality [with] the totality of objects and events in space and time [...]. Nature [...] as self-contained and self-dependent [...] define(s) to a great extent the influence of naturalism. [Denying] nature is derived from or dependent upon any transcendent, supernatural entities [and] this in turn entails the denial of freedom, purpose, and transcendent destiny. Within the context of these views,

there is evidently allowance for divergent doctrines [...]. The metaphysics of naturalism is always monistic [and] man is viewed as coordinate with other parts of nature (Jenkins, 1942, p. 205).

On the basis of such assumptions, naturalists 1.) deny the idea that the world's creation is a supernatural occurrence, asserting that it is an autonomous phenomenon, 2.) contend that the order and sequence of events in the world are not attributed to the will of nature, and 3.) end up denying human freedom, arguing that human actions do not have a predetermined intention and thereby rejecting the concepts of fate and destiny. Followers of naturalism assume that human perceptions and beliefs are shaped by nature, so they do not admit to any evaluation of them beyond the limits of nature they uphold. The approach to axiology on the basis of naturalistic belief considers the human (in individual and collective form) to be the standard for valuation. On the basis of this assumption, naturalists then reduce value (in the form of individual and societal benefits) to nothing more than varieties of natural desire.

3.2 The Relationship of Humans with Nature in the Course of History

Examining the assumptions and proposed theories of the relationship between human beings and nature is critical as it reflects the shift in human attitudes toward the natural world during the course of human history. Radical transmutations of that relationship in the 1800s and the 1900s eventually led Comte and Rapoport, among others, to postulate historicist classifications of the relationship between humans and nature, which assumed evolutionary progress. According to Rapoport (1969), there are three primary classifications for man's relationship with nature: 1.) a religious and cosmological relation, 2.) a relation of coexistence, and 3.) one in which the human being assumes the role of executor, creator, and destroyer. In the first case, nature dominates the human being, and man is less significant than nature. In the second case, man and nature coexist in equilibrium, and the human being considers himself responsible before God for the well-being of nature and the earth. In the third case, meanwhile, the human being begins as the executor and determiner of nature, then becomes its creator and ultimately its destroyer. In the first two relationships, the human-nature connection is individual and interactive, while in the third *nature* is viewed as something to be processed and utilized. In the modern period, the notion of *nature*

can be seen to involve all three relationships, thereby demonstrating the integrity of nature (Rapoport, 1969, pp.73-75) (Table 1).

Rapoport's classification is strikingly similar to that of Auguste Comte's three stages, marking that latter's formulation of an ideology of historical progress and positivism that gave rise to the discipline called sociology. Indeed, Comte's introductory course in positivist philosophy set the tone for the discipline. Comte posited that the "essential laws of human organization" are divided into three stages, namely the theological-military, the metaphysical-judicial, and the scientific-industrial (or *positivistic*) (Comte, 1975, pp. 9-69). The theological-military stage was assumed by Comte to be governed by notions that refer to the supernatural while being structured by slavery and militarism. It was followed by the metaphysical-judicial stage, which, according to Comte, was characterized by concepts referring to the essential nature of phenomena and sophisticated forms of policy and law. The positivist philosophy of science and the industrial schemes for social organization and production eventually emerge in the final stage.

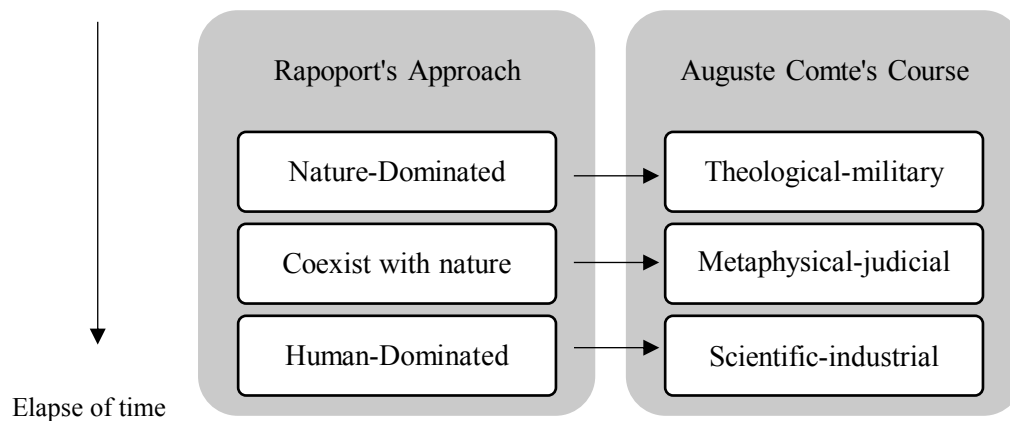


Table 1: The division of human interaction with nature over time.

The theological, metaphysical, and scientific stages of Auguste Comte's positivist ideology demonstrate a certain degree of resemblance to Iran's pre-Islamic, post-Islamic, and contemporary eras. These topics are discussed in detail in the following sections. Throughout history, humans have striven to gain control over nature and achieve what is often termed *progress*. And yet, when

it comes to understanding the spiritual dimensions of nature, humans have not only failed to make significant advancements but may be said to have suffered massive *regression*. Based on these two dimensions, the relationship between human beings and nature can be divided into four historical periods:

1. Nature and Organic Patterns (The Paleolithic Age)

During this age, human beings were dominated by nature, and nature dominated all aspects of their existence. Human beings sought to meet the needs emerging from the hunter and gatherer period, which we may have assumed to be safety and survival. This is sometimes referred to as an age in which human beings, through beholden to the forces of nature, were powerless in the face of it. This was the era in which human beings were faced with the struggle to overcome nature, being faced with a constant threat on the battlefield of survival. To avert the existential threat posed by nature, humans used their power of imagination, attempting to develop solutions through magic. In this phase, a different relationship between humans and nature lies in the fact that the primitive individual considered the origins and causes of natural phenomena to be inherent in nature itself – i.e., without paying any consideration to the supernatural. Moreover, it was not acquainted with the spiritual world. Their spiritual evolution had not yet reached that stage, and there was no distinction between nature and the supernatural.

2. Nature and Hyper-organic Patterns

Since humans are unable to tolerate adversity and seek to align themselves with nature or align nature with themselves for mutual benefit, human expectations range from seeking assurance to finding solace. During the second period of human history, which lasted until the onset of the first Industrial Revolution, humans engaged in a constructive confrontation with nature. Traditional societies, which were often guided by religious beliefs, had a deep respect for nature and its resources and utilized them according to specific principles and demands without causing significant harm to the environment. During this time, humans attributed natural events to supernatural forces and held a worldview that reflected duality and dichotomy. Humans believed that supernatural forces caused natural events and held a worldview emphasizing duality and contradiction. They divided the world into two opposing parts, the material (the natural) and the

immaterial (the supernatural), attributing the causes of natural events to the supernatural realm. Furthermore, they viewed the natural world as subservient to the spiritual world, believing that supernatural forces determined their destiny. This changed humans' relationship with nature as they began to revere spiritual beings in the supernatural realm. By offering sacrifices and praying to these beings, humans sought to gain control over nature and make it subservient to their needs. However, this approach caused humans to lose their connection with nature, leading them away from rational thought and towards imagination and mythology.

3. Nature and Patterns of its Mastery (The Industrial Revolutions)

During the periods associated with the Industrial Revolutions, human expectations exceeded the basic needs of safety and convenience, giving way to the pursuit of hedonistic prosperity. As a result, humans set out to outdo one another in unbridled exploitation, thereby setting the stage for nature's degradation and destruction. Contrary to the previous stages of the relationship, nature was no longer involved in a reciprocal and mutual relation with human beings; instead, nature was now treated as passive, mute, and devoid of spirit and intelligence, the resource to be unilaterally exploited and used to fuel modern industrial society. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the modern transformations of religion, human identity, and worldview, human beings considered themselves the undisputed masters of the cosmos. The unbridled will to power by optimizing modes of material production and maximizing profit resulted in the unprecedented abuse and destruction of nature during the ages associated with the various Industrial Revolutions.

4. Nature and Quasi-industrial-organic Patterns (Techni-organic)

In this period, the unbridled desire for prosperity still prevails. However, the perception and awareness of environmental degradation has increased. As a result, the global community has tried to reconsider the relationship between industry (economics) and nature (the environment). Humans have realized that the destruction of nature and the depletion of its resources will result in planetary devastation and lead to human extinction. This had led to policy reforms and programs seeking sustainable management of nature. Naturally, each region and area of nature now

constitutes a specific part of human society. To some degree, contemporary humans have become aware of their shortcomings and have sought to reform and compensate for them. Thus, the sustainable use of natural resources, a more benevolent treatment of nature, urban Development, the features of the human habitat, a renewed sense of relationship with nature, and the concern for the artificial environment have arisen from the worldview and mindset that dominates this stage of modern human society regarding nature.

In the context of human interaction with nature, the earliest tribes interpreted existence and natural phenomena through myths, imbuing them with human-like qualities. By personifying natural phenomena, humans developed a closer connection with the environment and world based on familiarity and perception. This process of symbolic imagery is reflected in Iranian folk tales and narratives, which have a long history rooted in ancient Iranian mythology. Since the survival of the ancient Iranian people relied heavily on agriculture and the powers of nature, Iranian myths often focused on the strengths found in nature or reflected by nature (Bahar, 1983). In fact, it may be asserted that the ancient Iranian mode of interaction with nature is rooted in myth. But before turning to representative accounts of ancient Iranian myth, let us turn to ancient Mesopotamian mythology for insight into the relationship between human beings and nature.

In *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, the most significant creation of the Akkadian religion, Utnapishtim informs Gilgamesh about the plant of immortality, which bears the gift of eternal youth. Gilgamesh embarked on a quest into the depths of the sea to obtain it (Hooke, 1963, p. 72; Eliade, 1978, p. 160). Another notable myth is about Dumuzi and Inanna, the Sumerian gods whose more familiar names are Tamuz and Inanna. Inanna is the wife of Dumuzi and corresponds to the Akkadian Ishtar, the Semitic Queen of Heaven. Dumuzi stands as the prime exemplar of all the plant gods. Both die and rise in the spring season, corresponding to the rebirth of the plants (Eliade, 1978, p. 154). The myth of Etana also mentions the life-giving property of a plant called the Plant of Birth. As a king, Etana was intent on securing the continuation of the monarchy by way of a male successor, and yet, Etana had no son himself. Thus, every day he sacrificed to Shamash and prayed to this god to grant him a successor (Ibid, pp. 77-79). The mythological relation to nature by way of plants also expresses itself in the myths of Babylon and ancient Iran, where the forest is the abode of fairies who set nature in motion and enliven it (Grimal, 1983, pp. 118-119). Ancient Indo-European myths often contain accounts of the assimilation of the human being with a plant

and offer origin stories that trace the human being to a plant. Such accounts are evident in Greek and Germanic mythology (Mallory, 1989).

Meanwhile, the mythological significance and sacredness of the plant among Iranians are rooted in the myth of the creation of the first man and woman, who grew together as a plant. The story of the creation of Mashya and Mashyana (Mahla and Mahlina) is of particular significance. Middle Persian texts all refer to the creation of this first pair in the form of a plant named Rivas (rhubarb). The complete narrative account of this tale can be found in the Middle Persian text titled *Bundahishn*.¹³¹ The first Aryan male, Mashya, and the first Aryan female, Mashyana, come forth from the sperm of Kayomarth (Gayomart) (Bahar, 2016, pp.81-83). This pair, which initially appears as a plant, transforms into a human pair by way of several stages. Some have suggested that creation myths based on plants are narrative expressions of early human knowledge of agriculture. In the Iranian myth of Mashya and Mashyana, for instance, the two emerge from the depositing of the sperm of Kayomarth into the earth, a description that is the symbolic equivalent of the agricultural act of planting a seed [tōhm] in the ground (MacKenzie, 2002). It is significant to note that while the creation of the first human pair originates from a plant, it alludes to two sexes (male and female) rather than one. Thus, the Iranian myth of human origins does not assert that man is a plant but that *the first human pair* emerged from a primordial plant.

The myth, with its entanglement of man and plant, points to the precedence of plants (agriculture) in ancient Iranian culture while also offering an early explanation for the creation of man (Lévi-Strauss, 2016). Plants were among the foremost elements of nature and featured in the best-known and most sacred myths of ancient Iranians. The particular structure and scheme that forms such a hypothesis are based on several elements, including social, economic, geographical, and cultural aspects of Iranian civilization, with variance depending on the period in which such myths emerge.

The prominence of nature in the form of plant life is also supported by the centrality of the Tree of Life (Eliade, 1978, p. 149). According to ancient Iranian belief, as expressed in *Bahman Yast* (Fargard II; paragraph 14), this tree has seven branches. This is due to its referring to the seven sacred stars or the seven nations that the Iranians used to rule (Pourkhalghi Chatroudi, 2019, p.98). Furthermore, in the history of religions, one deity may be attributed with considerable

¹³¹ *Bundahishn* which means “Primal Creation,” signifies the contents of Zoroastrian scriptures, reflecting both ancient Zoroastrian and pre-Zoroastrian beliefs.

powers and attributes that may seem contradictory in order to elevate their status to that of a greater god. Attributing a “totality” of characteristics to a deity often involves synthesizing various local and regional beliefs and practices into a unified religious system (Eliade, 1978, p. 688). In Iranian mythology, the sanctification of natural elements, such as plants and water, highlights the close resemblance between these natural elements and human beings, leading to the discovery of new concepts through shared experiences. For instance, the temples of Dar-e Mehr and Anahita are considered sacred due to their association with natural elements. Anahita, known as the goddess of water in myths, is also believed to serve as Mother Goddess, responsible for the soil’s fertility and a significant force in the world's creation.

3.2.1 The Role of Aesthetics in the Perception of Nature

Having examined the mythical-historical stages of the relationship between nature and human beings, let us now turn to the role of aesthetics in the perception of nature. Given the abundance of images of nature in environmental aesthetics, the conservation and protection of the environment have often been seen as a minor concern. Instead, the general objective has been to demonstrate how to evaluate nature aesthetically. Although recent research has shown how environmental ethics and aesthetics are interrelated, in environmental philosophy, it is the former rather than the latter that has garnered primary attention.

In the context of the interrelation of aesthetics and ethics in environmental philosophy, the question arises as to whether aesthetic behaviors and values can be said to sustain ethical environmental attitudes. One affirmative response to this inquiry has been aesthetic conservation, an approach that endangers human respect toward nature on the basis of the Development of aesthetic sensibilities. According to this philosophical approach, the emphasis is not on adapting or improving natural environments, such as the desert, but on preserving them to prevent alteration and decay (Barry,1999). Aesthetic conservation seeks to preserve natural resources by avoiding ecosystem conversion and is widely supported among environmentalists. It is based on the idea that nature has intrinsic value and should be protected from human interference so as to maintain its natural state. This perspective also recognizes the significance of preserving natural beauty and its role in contributing to human emotional and psychological well-being (Carlson, 2000; 2012).

In the history of art, this concept of beauty has found its aesthetic justification in the beauty of *nature*, and the beauty of *art* has often been conceived as a manifestation or image of nature (i.e., of natural beauty). Philosophical approaches to defining the essence of the aesthetic experience of nature, according to its rational justification, have pointed to its manifestation in seemingly non-aesthetic subjects (Crowther, 2010). The aesthetic value of nature, then, is not solely based on scientific knowledge but on how humans aesthetically experience nature. Furthermore, the aesthetic experience of nature is closely tied to the environmental context in which it is experienced. Therefore, assessing nature's aesthetic value requires considering nature's physical attributes, environmental context, and the viewer's subjective experience. Finally, the aesthetic experience of nature is visceral and sensory, involving the sense of touch and immersion in the natural environment (Foster, 2004, p. 132).

In essence, fully appreciating the beauty of nature requires actively engaging with it and allowing oneself to become immersed in its sensory experience. The tendency to appreciate and value nature for its beauty can lead to cultural and environmental ties forming over time. Human evaluations of nature's beauty occur on multiple scales, and metaphysical imagination is crucial in achieving a profound and spiritual sense of nature. This means that artists do not necessarily rely on descriptions and analyses from natural philosophers but rather on their own perceptual experiences and understanding of the sensory qualities of nature to lead the aesthetic experience (Brady, 2003, p. 160).

In his seminal work on the role of landscapes as the site of aesthetics in modern society, Joachim Ritter provides a systematic and historical analysis of the conditions for the emergence and function of *landscape* in relation to nature (Ritter, 1963). According to Ritter, the emergence of an *aesthetic image of nature* emerged through the dissolution of the long-standing metaphysical idea of the universe as compensating for the decay in the pervasive patterns of interpretation and the lack of direct reference to nature in man's biological world (Ritter, 1963, pp. 12-13). This attempt at (re)connection was achieved by establishing forms of industrial possession and property in nature through labor, as Hegel and Marx subsequently defined it. For this reason, the perception of nature as *landscape* became an aesthetic possibility in the late 18th century and is reflected in Immanuel Kant's analysis of *Das Naturschöne* and *Das Naturerhabene* (Ibid, pp. 17-18).

Ritter distinguishes between the ancient conception of nature itself. According to the novel aesthetic understanding, in the theory of antiquity, nature could not be perceived and known, as it

was considered to be divine or religious (i.e., *pan*).¹³² This attitude prevailed throughout antiquity, in various forms of mythology, during the pre-Socratic era, in the Classical and late Hellenistic periods. It is evident in Platonic thought and even among the early Church Fathers,¹³³ and the philosophy of early Christianity more broadly considered, despite particular differences that existed in the philosophical currents of that time. For St. Augustine, for instance, contemplating and delighting in nature and its beauty is permissible only when it is regarded as God's creation *beyond* mere sense-perception so that one sees the *pan* revealed in or through it. Otherwise, the perception of nature and devotion to its beauties pursue a different objective, becoming causes of man's turning away from God and abandoning the path of salvation. Such an attitude toward nature, then, is deemed an offensive and sinful one (Ritter, 1963, pp.9-11).

The Copernican Revolution marked a significant turning point in humanity's understanding of nature, as it emphasized the importance of sensory and cognitive experiences and recognized the significance of particularity. This shift was characterized by an ego-centric approach that led to a deeper appreciation of the natural world. In order to extract aesthetics from nature, it was necessary to create a sense of distance between human beings and the natural world so that nature could be viewed aesthetically without being seen as a mere source of survival or a threat to human existence. This allowed for the development of a more nuanced and complex relationship between humans and nature, one that recognized the intrinsic value of the natural world and allowed for the formation of an aesthetic perspective toward it. For *wild* or *untamed nature* to be viewed positively, it was necessary to establish a sense of distance between human beings and nature. Urban individuals, who viewed the city as a symbol of human freedom from nature's domination, had to undergo a sense of duality and alienation from nature in order to appreciate its aesthetic value, now as a form of compensation for separation from it.

¹³² Historically and thematically, such an approach to nature arose naturally in the context of the Greek intellectual and philosophical tradition. The man considered himself an observer of the ordered and adorned world, which was interpreted as the *cosmos*. In the Pythagorean and Platonic currents of ancient Greek philosophy, *philosophy*, in the sense of *Theoria*, involved observing the systematic world or *cosmos*, which was held to be extrasensory-intuitive. Another influential approach to nature emerged from the Aristotelian school of philosophy, which conceived of nature as *physis*. The Greek root "φύ" is deducted from the verb *phyesthai*, which means "to develop" and "to grow" and originates from the plant world. From this perspective, nature is the origin of objects and the principle determining their coming into being (generation) and decay (Ritter, 1963, p.10). Both views have a common denominator: nature is considered to be *pan*, i.e., "divine, and a religious matter."

¹³³ It refers to the Christians who formulated the principles of Christianity before the eighth century CE, known as the Patristic Era.

According to Ritter (1963), the aesthetic relationship between humans and nature is a historical phenomenon that emerged in Western culture over the last two centuries due to specific cultural and societal Developments such as industrialization and urbanization. The modern era has thereby brought about a radical shift in the connection between humans and nature, one that is based on aesthetic appreciation born of separation and mastery of nature, but one which is sometimes framed as respect for nature's intrinsic value. Historically, of course, there is ample evidence that an *aesthetic attitude toward nature* existed long before the likes of Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant and their analyses of *the beautiful* and *the sublime*. To be sure, nature in its primal form and function did not recede all at once or disappear from human consciousness. Instead, a transmutation occurred during the modern period with the emergence of a modern human subject whose approach to nature was increasingly configured by a subject-object bifurcation. This sense of subjectivity posited itself over-and-against a more and more objectified, tamed, and *landscaped form of nature* through which it could exercise its modern aesthetic sensibility.

3.3 Unveiling the Nexus: Gender, Environment, and Social Capital

Let us now turn our attention once again to social movements. Social capital, which manifests through social networks, egalitarian groups, and non-governmental organizations participating in diverse cultural, social, and political domains, can steer and direct social movements. In reality, its objective is to stimulate greater involvement of individuals, foster and elevate civic responsibility, and raise awareness that social capital is a potent mechanism in the political arena. The interdisciplinary and interconnected nature of social networks and groups is a key concern raised by social activities as capital. According to Bourdieu (1986) and Putnam (1993), social capital denotes gathering tangible and intangible resources related to close-knit networks that establish an identity for these networks. Citizens' social activities can be institutionalized as civic virtues promoting coordination and common objectives. Moreover, such social activities can link individuals with shared interests and resources to accomplish their purposes. In this regard, is there a philosophical framework and a set of interpretations that can articulate the relationship between women and nature from a feminist perspective and be

considered comprehensively? Can a significant correlation be established between gender and being an environmental citizen and taking responsibility for the environment?

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) was established in 1948 to encourage collaboration and engagement among diverse public and governmental entities to safeguard the environment.¹³⁴ However, the concept of sustainable Development was first introduced by Barbara Ward, the founder of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), a woman who used the term in the 1972 Stockholm Declaration (Satterthwaite, 2006, p.12). Ward emphasized the crucial role of women in the connection between development and environmental conservation and the obligation of governments and organizations to attract and support women's participation (Ibid). Then, in 1992, The Rio Declaration emerged as one of the most significant results of the Earth Summit. The declaration forced governments to adopt a strategic framework that linked environmental and development objectives. The declaration emphasized the significance of social justice, poverty eradication, gender equality, and the protection of vulnerable communities from exploitation. It also addressed issues related to nuclear power plants, sustainable peace, indigenous peoples' health, workers' rights, and investment in education and information. These aims were widely supported by various gender equality and peace movements worldwide, including feminists.¹³⁵

Assuming that major structural issues, beliefs, values, and counter-values, which co-exist within groups, unify them in a common sphere of activity, an appreciation of the institutions of the women's movement and environmental activism can form a valuable connection. Such an underlying comprehension clarifies the significance of what is now termed *ecofeminism*. Considering the issue of the environment from the point of view of citizenship and human rights, the categories of culture and education, beyond mere technological expertise, are addressed. More specifically, in the context of ecofeminism, the following dimensions of human rights are examined: 1.) rights in the field of residential and working health, 2.) the right to a healthy life, 3.) the equal and balanced weighing of capital, and 4.) consideration of the health of the next generation. The neglect of the relationship between human life and nature has resulted in a void that the environmental movement has sought to fill, particularly through the involvement of

¹³⁴ IUCN. (n.d.). Our History. International Union for Conservation of Nature. Retrieved on October 23, 2022, from <https://www.iucn.org/about/who-we-are/our-history>

¹³⁵ United Nations, "United Nations Conference on Environment and Development: Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 3-14 June 1992," <https://www.un.org/en/conferences/environment/rio1992> (accessed on October 23, 2022).

women, a Development that has contributed to the global concept of sustainable Development since the middle of the 20th century.

In contemporary Iran, cooperation between a group of environmental activists and the women's movement has contributed to the Development of an environmental movement. Two questions can be posed to assess the advances of their joint efforts. First, what are the basic principles and values of the women's movement in Iran that coincide with the environmental movement's goals? Second, to what extent do these two movements' management, organization, and goals overlap and intersect? In other words, what are the foundations, trajectories, and implications of emerging *Iranian ecofeminism*?

It should be noted that ecofeminism positions itself against what it posits as the ideology of global patriarchy, which it describes as ecological domination and control that promotes a dichotomous relationship between humans and nature, with one subservient to the other. From the ecofeminist perspective, global patriarchy represents an exploitative agenda that is not limited merely to gender but extends to class and race, leading to discriminatory and utilitarian attitudes toward certain groups (Mitchell, 1971; Beechey, 1977; Walby, 1990). *Ecofeminism* is a term that simultaneously refers to a field of study, a social movement, and a way of addressing environmental and cultural challenges. It offers an interdisciplinary approach to redefining and valuing ecology and politics, creating a shared space for agreement and understanding. By challenging the dualistic system and promoting harmony between humans and nature, ecofeminism advocates for a more equitable and sustainable world.

The common contentions of ecofeminism may be summarized in four points. The first contention is that all parts of a system hold equal value. In this sense, ecology assigns equal significance to all components of nature and considers all constituents to be effective in the hierarchy of values. Ecologists and feminists seek to ensure that all human and natural systems possess equal value.

Secondly, the earth is seen to represent the home from the point of view of the role and influence of all family members among themselves, as well as in the system of power distribution. In the environment, the earth is considered a typical habitat and a home whose health depends on its inhabitants' collective responsibility and health. Peaceful coexistence also requires that a platform for dialogue on an equal level be created in that home. Exploitation and discrimination are not accepted in a healthy family, regardless of the point of view.

The third contention of ecofeminism is that connection is key to peace and serenity. Ecofeminists focus on the feminine dimensions of existence and the qualities associated with femininity that the world needs to maintain perpetual peace. This points to the essence of the meaning of growth, nurture, and the sense of preservation, which has often been culturally and historically appropriated and considered a weakness of women, thereby limiting and restricting them despite their significance to the life of the earth.

Last but not least, ecofeminism holds that there is a close connection between women and their participation in nature-related work. A significant proportion of those employed in agriculture and factories are women (Chambers, 1983). In Iran alone, over 40% of work in rural areas is done by women (Mohammadi, 2003). While women are the most vulnerable group to the harmful effects of pollutants in industrial environments, they play indispensable roles in agriculture, including the cultivation of sugarcane, tobacco, tea, and rice, as well as engaging in labor in mines and factories. The direct connection with nature puts women at the forefront of harvesting and preserving the environment. Therefore, they should not be seen as less knowledgeable or less effective than men with respect to environmental issues and their impact. Women often have a deeper awareness of the adverse effects of environmental degradation. For instance, they are the first to notice when water sources become contaminated. They also immediately recognize when their children become ill due to environmental factors. In addition, in many contexts, women typically have to travel long distances to fetch water and secure food from forests or farms.¹³⁶ Unfortunately, in patriarchal systems, these skills are often devalued, and a woman's role is limited to that of a housewife, which diminishes her status and identity. Ecofeminists, however, view these skills as valuable and integral to the environmental movement. Rather than being limited to the conventional role of mother and head of household, women can take on the role of environmental saviors and apply their knowledge and skills to protect and preserve the ecosystem.

¹³⁶ A case in point occurred when the Chabahar city representative posted a message about a woman's efforts in Sistan and Balochistan to provide drinking water for her children, which caused a wave of regret and grief among the public. Moreover, in a video released of Moinullah Saeedi's speech to the energy minister, he angrily announces that a woman is forced to sleep with a stranger to get drinking water before committing suicide (The information is sourced from aftabnews.ir on October 21, 2020. [Link](#)). Traditionally, men are responsible for obtaining provisions, fuel, and general monetary necessities in these areas. In addition to household chores, caring for children, and tending to livestock (if any), women are responsible for carrying water into the home. Each day, they must walk for hours on the way home to a spring, river, pond, or well and bring containers of water home. Sometimes, this work is left to the girls.

3.3.1 Ecofeminism and Multi-Dimensional Perspective

Humans have continually altered what nature has provided them, and, in turn, nature has also undergone changes. The question arises as to how the approach to nature has been conceived and elaborated in the different scientific disciplines. Additionally, it's worth exploring whether disciplinary boundaries allow for interdisciplinary relations or not. One of the significant issues in the classical sociological tradition, for instance, has been to maintain sociology's boundaries vis-à-vis other sciences, so sociologists have generally avoided interfering with what has been called the natural sciences. However, this trend was challenged mainly through the endeavors of prominent Chicago School sociologists Robert Ezra Parks and Ernest Burgess, who placed human ecology under the sociological umbrella (Quinn, 1950, p. 4). They proceeded to reduce the great divide between societal questions and environmental issues. In the modern Western context, George Perkins Marsh's *Man and Nature*, published in 1864, was the first work to express the idea of caring for and protecting the environment in an ecological manner in his book (Lowenthal, 2000, p. 4). In the wake of WWII, the sheer magnitude of technological advancements meant that the environment now became subject to a host of threats. This, in turn, gave way to a number of publications that served to inform the general public of the various dimensions of the looming environmental crisis. It was during this time as well that Rachel Carson's anthology of stories emerged. Then, in 1962, Carson authored *Silent Spring*, which was crucial in making the ecological crisis a topic of public discourse and scrutiny. Her work drew attention to the issues of pesticides and experimental nuclear contamination, among other things (Carson, 1962, p. 31). The following year, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, exposing the problem of women's hidden return to domestic affairs in the post-World War II era.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the scientific community began to consider environmental issues more seriously, but experts realized that it would not be sufficient to address just technical ecological problems (Freeman, 1973). It appears that once scientists began to consider the range of issues that affect the environment, including those domains conventionally considered to lie beyond the purview of the natural sciences, the interdisciplinary nature of the study of the environment and the ecological crisis presented itself. Among other things, this meant dealing with the question of gender. Over the last few decades, the "interaction between gender and the

environment” has received particular consideration (Rico,1998). It is worth remembering that the matter is not a simple one, particularly within contemporary urbanized societies.

The physical remoteness between sources of food, energy, water, and other substances essential for survival and contemporary urban society makes the relationship between gender and the environment challenging to comprehend. Buckingham-Hatfield (2000) believes that a woman’s physiology and lifestyle make her more susceptible to comprehending the relationship between the environment and society. For example, even in the urban community, there are still women responsible for purchasing and providing healthy, pure produce to family members. This is particularly the case with women from the bottom social strata and classes who mainly belong to local communities (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000, pp.11-12). The social roles are related to the socializing aspect of gender – i.e., what society considers feminine and masculine and what is expected of a woman or a man. According to Hatfield, one who seeks to comprehend the environment and its issues in a society ought to note that if a society is stratified by class, race, and gender, these stratifications shape how that society reflects on environmental matters (Ibid).

Given the interplay between culture and history, each society has prepared specific responses to the way the environment and gender interact. The determination of the particular role women do and should assume vis-à-vis the environment has been debated for a reasonably long time. And yet, it must be noted that men and women do not necessarily have entirely distinct specifications with regard to the environment. Thus, the sharp distinction between men and women in all spheres of society may complicate the comprehension of their conditions. In other words, in observing large numbers of phenomena, it is preferable to consider them collectively. The significant point is that the forces whose motions are changing the world in the contemporary world are themselves undergoing radical change at a pace that is not comparable to the past. Thus, class differences and class struggle are no longer the main issues for the emergence of movements to transform the world. Rather, it is the emergence of novel approaches that change social life. Among these forces, two of the most significant kinds have been those efforts that address the status of women’s and those that deal with the environment. The interaction between these two types of social movements has had a significant effect on their respective formations, so it is impossible to consider them separately.

Not surprisingly, the role of gender in environmental movements has been explored in many investigations of the environment and environmentalism. Efforts and movements in the

domain of environmental studies and activism may be said to be bound up with the question of the status of women in modern society. In the contemporary context, most countries around the world are searching for modifications that, in their opinion, can somehow improve living conditions and the overall quality of life. In most such programs that are dedicated to such efforts, women have been accorded a certain level of importance. These efforts are generally organized as national and international Development programs, which, particularly during the last decade, have two main dimensions and aspects: the protection of natural resources and the environment, on the one hand, and quality between genders and improving the conditions for both sexes, on the other.

Such development efforts point to one of the first issues that became apparent: the shared fate of women and nature. It is as though the two suffer from a common condition of pain and can, therefore require the same treatment. This does not suggest that developmental efforts have only now emerged. For instance, in Iran, environmental awareness has been an issue for over a hundred years. However, the nexus of environmental awareness and the improvement of the status of women has only recently been recognized and examined.

Whenever the relationship between environment and gender is discussed, one of the primary theories which spring into mind is *ecofeminism*. Ecofeminism evolved to analyse the connections between societal culture and nature, diagnose the problems that exist in those interconnections, and offer a prescription for transforming those relations. In this regard, an ecofeminist point of view has, from the start, been structurally pluralist, inclusionary, and contextualist. By examining specific cases and contexts, the ecofeminist approach has had a critical role in improving our understanding of both sexist and naturist practices.

There has been a vast body of literature that has emerged under the heading *ecofeminism*. However, both as a discipline and as a term, *ecofeminism* can be quite complicated to define accurately since the term is adopted and used in different ways by feminists, academics, and ecologists, among others. The majority of those who use the term or adhere to it as a discipline or movement refer to it as a hybrid between *feminism* and *environmentalism*. Ecofeminism, therefore, incorporates several theoretical and practical strands of thinking that emerge from each of those two domains, the feminist and the environmentalist. Its examination of the domination of nature and society arises mainly from feminist thought. There are arguments in ecofeminism, for instance, which refer to the prevalence of patriarchal suppression and call for alternative approaches to environmental care that include a more feminist approach (Warren, 1987). In addition,

ecofeminism is attuned to the chief concerns associated with environmentalism, including the depletion of natural sources, the formation of environmental norms, and the sociological assumptions that undergird them (Brammer, 1998).

Bina Agarwal (1992) has outlined four main concepts that define the framework of ecofeminism. The first point is the acknowledgment and mention of both feminism and environmentalism. The second aspect is related to the roles of men and women and their relationship to culture and the environment. According to Agarwal, ecofeminism examines this nexus, pointing out that men have conventionally been associated with *culture*, whereas women have been linked to the *environment*, with culture being considered “superior” to untamed nature. The conclusion drawn is that women and the environment have been assigned a common inferior status, with the contribution of *women and the environment* deemed less significant than that of *men and culture*. The third contention of ecofeminism is the simultaneous oppression and disempowerment of women and nature. As such, it calls for women to take responsibility for counteracting male supremacy in both domains. Last but not least, ecofeminism is motivated by the combination of feminism and ecological thinking, as it asserts that these categories are oriented toward non-hierarchical and egalitarian structures.

A prominent characteristic of ecofeminist approaches is the assumption that women possess a specific spiritual relation with nature, providing the female subject with special access to detailed environmental knowledge. This relationship is evident in the following quote from *Women and Nature*, in which Griffin asserts:

[that] we know ourselves to be made from this earth [and] this earth is made from our bodies. [...] We are nature [...] with a concept of nature. Nature weeping [and] speaking of nature to nature (Griffin, 1978, p. 226).

Griffin’s contention represents an approach to ecological identity that aims to increase awareness of the nature-women relationship by stressing its affirmative values. Ruether (2005) considers the stark conceptual opposition between the terms *nature* and *culture* as one of the factors responsible for man’s disdain towards nature. From this standpoint, culture considers nature a separate and subordinate reality that is there merely for the exploitative benefit of human beings. In this regard, it is important to note that adherents of biological determinism argue that men have “something” in their genetic structure that makes them naturally dominant, “something” which women lack.

Meanwhile, women are said to be naturally dependent on men based on their genetic make-up. Biological determinism has been used to argue that such dependence on men maximizes women's chances to become mothers by enjoying the experience. Such perspectives are sometimes employed to justify and propagate the assertion that nature and culture exist in binary opposition to one another. Along these lines, that which is related to advancement and Development, along with those factors that enable and promote thriving, reason, and logic, are considered to constitute *culture*. That which is the breeding ground and also the site from which resources can be derived in order to advance developmental objectives for *culture*, meanwhile is collectively referred to as *nature*. Biological determinism has sometimes been coupled with such conventional perspectives to suggest that nature is naturally subordinate to culture and that culture has the responsibility of mastering and supervising nature as a means of promoting cultural evolution. In contrast, Leacock (1978) and Sacks (1976) reject biological determinism and instead favor explanations stressing diverse forms of social construction and social production. Leibowitz (1978) as well considers the sex-based division of labor not to be a biologically conditioned phenomenon but rather a socially constructed one derived from historical transformations of the techniques and relations of production.

From the perspective of self-consciousness, each culture considers itself not only as distinct from nature but also superior to it due to its ability to transform – i.e., to “socialize” or culturally appropriate – nature. What is common to all existing cultures which devalue women is that the woman is seen to represent the essence of something abhorrent in each culture. From the stance of ecofeminism, such definitions, and even the bifurcation and opposition between culture and nature, are highlighted as being derived entirely from the domain of culture – that is, as culturally constructed and determined – and not based on any inherent and underlying natural reality.

From the ecofeminist perspective, it is necessary to examine how women have come to occupy the “second position” in all cultures. In this respect, the way in which men are considered to be identical to culture and women to nature is explored by ecofeminism, which seeks to question the supposed superiority of culture to nature and men to women while also exploring how women's inherent connection to nature can be positively affirmed in the societal context.

One central concern that ecofeminism explores is that of the physiology of women and whether this physiology is somehow closer to nature. Most of the female body's capacity is devoted to reproduction, something which can jeopardize the health of the female body. Beauvoir

holds, however, that the “female is in prey to the species” (Leibowitz, 1978, p. 58), and her animality is more manifest (Ibid, p. 237). De Beauvoir addresses the negative consequences of “enslaving women to the species” regarding projects involving humans and processes through which culture is produced and defined. The key to the mystery lies “on the biological level,” where the species is sustained only by recreating itself. Such creation leads merely to the repetition of the same life in further individuals. In contrast, man provides “the repetition of life while transcending life through existence” (Ortner, 1974, p. 75). Man, devoid of “natural creative functions,” is obliged [or has the possibility] to use “technology and symbols” to claim creativity “artificially” and externally (Ibid). During this process, the male creates relatively permanent, transcendent objects, as opposed to the female, who creates perishable human beings. In this regard, Ortner is referring to the “physiological differences between males and females” with the underlying cause that the “woman’s body” is more involved in the “natural functions” of natural reproduction (and thus nature) than the male body. And yet, for women, participating in the human social dialogue in culture is a form of action that is situated between culture and nature, a mode of engagement subordinate to that of men.

Ecofeminism also explores a second key concern, namely the social roles of women in the cultural context. Women’s social roles have conventionally been held to be lower than that of men. Since the woman is responsible for giving birth and feeding the child, she is clearly more connected to the child than the male gender. Moreover, by necessity, she devotes a considerable amount of her lifetime at home, which forms smaller unit of society, and herein relates to the child with restricted capabilities. Despite the absence of official public declarations to the effect, the private domain of the home is subordinate to the public sphere of society, being administered under the general laws of society, which is mostly the domain of men’s activity.

The third key area of consideration for ecofeminists involves the psyche of women being closer to nature than that of men. In the cultural context, women’s relative concreteness is often compared to men’s relative abstractness. Another area that is conventionally alluded to for difference and comparison is relative alluded subjectivism versus relative objectivism. In this regard, Chodorow (1978), Tannen (1990), and Gilligan (1982) assert that men and women also diverge in terms of their relations to other members of society. In their interactions with others, women seek to be more sociable, whereas men esteem their independence. The male realm of

value is more abstract and related to the mind, while the female realm of value is more concrete and related to the body.

Ortner (1974) explains the behavioral differences between the genders, in which women tend to behave in more “direct and unmediated” ways, i.e., similar to nature. Conversely, men interact more obliquely and explicitly, frequently relying on “mediating categories and forms” instead of engaging directly with “subjects or objects” (Ortner, 1974, p. 82). Ortner contends that the distinctions are not intrinsic and genetic but arise from the familial structure. Given that the “female personality” becomes formed in the family structure and is nearly a universal reality, it can be argued that its features have contributed to the notion of a woman being inferior to a male on a culture-wide level. This means that women are willing to enter into such relations with the world as the culture may consider more “natural” or “nature-like” – i.e., internally and positioned within objects as prescribed as opposed to being “culture-like” or transcending objects and transmuting them through the combination of abstract categories and transpersonal values.

Ever since Aristotle, philosophical discourse has held that cognitive abilities are superior to natural predisposition and that men are superior to women. The characteristics, capacities, and actions of women have been seen as subordinate to those of men. Wisdom and mind, justice, as well as governmental and public responsibility, have all been considered to constitute the masculine domain, while emotion and the body, passivity, and bonding with the household and life – i.e., domesticity – have been associated with the feminine domain. And along these lines, conceptual frameworks for determining effectiveness in task performance have also tended to favor assigning higher value to features conventionally associated with masculinity as opposed to those associated with femininity (Korsmeyer, 2004, p. 14).

Various aspects of women’s situation (physiological, psychological, social) lead to the perception of women as more connected to nature, while this concept of women’s connection to nature is, in turn, “embodied in institutional forms” and leads to the reproduction and reinforcement of this perception (Ortner, 1974, p. 87). An alternate cultural perspective is shaped by a different social reality and vice versa; a different social reality forges a distinct cultural vision. Altering this view demands reciprocal changes, both in the direction of transforming social institutions and cultural assumptions (Ibid). For this reason, as Ortner notes, “both men and women can and must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will

women be seen as aligned with culture, in culture's ongoing dialectic with nature" (Ortner, 1974, p. 87).

Ecofeminist thought holds a broad spectrum of positions, all grounded in the premise that, historically, men have exploited and exerted masculine domination over women and the natural world to construct patriarchal societies. Ecofeminism conflates nature's inequality to culture with the oppression of women by men. It highlights and defines what it has meant to be a man in society, outlines the role hegemonic masculinity has played, and describes the reciprocal relationship in which various oppressive structures reinforce each other (Gaard, 1993; Plumwood, 1993). The links between the subjugation of women and the oppression of nature are emphasized as a means of justifying why environmental concerns constitute a more feminist agenda while also justifying why a feminist agenda can be addressed through an environmental framework (Gaard, 1993, p. 4). Therefore, nascent environmental concerns reinforce the notion of the environment as a social (and feminist) question.

Ecofeminism aspired toward liberating spaces for women and nature on a theoretical, political basis (Warren, 1987; Gaard, 1993; Lorentzen & Eaton, 2002), and it can be described as feminist activism that operates in a similar way to peace movements, women's health claims, anti-nuclear efforts, and animal rights protests. In theory, it encapsulates both social and environmental aims, outlining the process of recreating a world worth inhabiting by all living species. Ecofeminism as a system of values, social actions, and practice also reflects political analyses exploring the correlation between androcentrism and the destruction of the environment (Birkeland, 1993, p. 18). There is a broad range of underlying tenets in ecofeminism. Gaard, for instance, portrays ecofeminism as a lake where one can see the intricacy of the origins and branches of ecological, feminist theorizing (Chen, 2014, p. 67). One may assert that ecofeminism constitutes an ecological and social movement that promotes the abundant variety of women and creates, in this regard, a "oneness" between women and nature.

Ecofeminists have come to realize that patriarchal societies have consistently employed oppressive conceptual frameworks to position women between men and nature. Despite the excruciating circumstances they have faced, throughout history, women have been active in environmental struggles worldwide and have also often come to be leading experts in various subjects dealing with the environment. As such, women's historical and contextual links to nature are relevant and crucial for a gendered approach in social theory and environmental studies (Shiva,

1994, p.xvii). Furthermore, the history that gives rise to the emergence of ecofeminism is linked to the agenda that configures its future. In this regard, it can be asserted that the main objective of ecofeminism is to eliminate the detrimental effects caused by all anthropocentric activities perpetrated by men, thereby establishing social justice and restoring natural tranquility on Earth.

Banerjee and Bell have noted that ecofeminism has tended toward an ideological construct rather than a scholarly prospect. Given the recent rise in cross-disciplinary research, particularly in critical geography, political ecology, and post-structuralism (Banerjee & Bell, 2007, pp. 4-17) that can be employed to analyze the human-nature interactions, ecofeminist theorists have therefore turned to a host of theoretical approaches, including gender theory. Ecofeminists argue that the category of *gender* has conventionally been defined according to the hegemonic “mainstream” culture (Birkeland, 1993, p.14), and thus, among all the various strands of patriarchal supremacy, it is perhaps *the* major component associated with all other strands of domination (Plumwood, 1993, p.8). By employing gender, ecofeminists broaden the circumstances faced by other groups suffering from societal oppression, including black people, those belonging to the lower classes of society, and other minorities as being of the exact same nature as the oppression from which they suffer.

Therefore, ecofeminism involves not only philosophical, theological, sociological, and ecological concerns but also political ones. Various strands of ecofeminism, such as liberal, cultural, social, and socialist ecofeminism, shared a common thread: criticizing the power structures of oppressors who have oppressed women and nature under any and all cultural, environmental, historical, and political conditions. Broadly speaking, in ecofeminists literature, eight forms of oppression (of women and nature) can be identified, namely historical, conceptual, experimental and practical, symbolic and iconic, epistemological, political and functional, ethical and theoretical oppression.

Discussions surrounding the concept of ecofeminism in 1983 marked a significant moment for all those seeking to find solutions to environmental destruction, leading to the coining of the term *ecofeminism* in its original sense in 1987. Discussions among authors or members from various disciplines, including ecology, feminism, Marxism, socialism, post-colonialism, and so forth, then continued. According to ecofeminists, realizing the interconnectedness of all life processes and cultivating a reverence for nature and all living beings is essential. As per their perspective, man ought not to attempt to dominate and control nature but, instead, cooperate with

it, striving to detach himself from power relations. This would involve incorporating the dualisms of the duality of males and females into one's vision of reality. In addition, ecofeminists argue that it is essential to be process-oriented rather than merely results-oriented (Gaard, 1993, pp. 17-20). The personal is political, and therefore, the feminine private realm is equally important and applicable to the masculine public sphere. And if this is the case, one has to modify the patriarchal essence of the system by taking power away from the patriarchy.

3.3.2 Ecofeminism; Moving Beyond Theory

Ecofeminism's origins exemplify its multifaceted and arguably unavoidable genesis. It originated in the 1970s with a call to the rise of the archaically rooted connection between women and nature in conjunction with the second and third waves of feminism (Shiva and Mies, 1993). As a concept, this was first publicized in 1974 by the feminist and activist Françoise d'Eaubonne, who through her book *La Feminisme ou la Mort (Feminism or Death)*, called for women to assume a leading role in environmental movements (Merchant, 1990, p. 100).¹³⁷ Most of d'Eaubonne's work was focused on feminism and environmental concerns, offering a reflection on the ability of women to make an ecological impact and foster a more balanced and sustainable environment. In a sense, d'Eaubonne echoed the position expressed by Simone de Beauvoir in the 1950s, namely that 1.) women possess a particular affinity with the natural world as a result of the systematic domination imposed by men and that 2.) there is an inherent superiority in nature and all subjugated social classes (i.e., women, colored persons, children, underprivileged) (Gaard & Murphy, 1998, pp. 15-20). The affinity that both authors point to underscores the extent to which the social norms of gender empower women to have compassion or empathy toward nature. Ecofeminism, then, offers a framework that can both assess and address the various forms of human domination of nature and the various modes of social domination of the oppressed (on the basis of gender, race, class, and the other forms of social absence) (Cudworth, 2003; Davion, 1994).

However, it should be noted that although ecofeminism makes a significant number of references to feminism, there are a number of dimensions in which the theories do not overlap, and which present themselves as inconsistencies. This is because radical and liberal feminists

¹³⁷ However, to Heller's point, Murray Bookchin launched the term *ecofeminism* in 1976 by prefixing "eco-" to all social-ecological curriculum subjects (Heller, 1993).

sometimes dismiss the connection to the natural world or, indeed, any feminine relationship with nature. These considerations represent elements that they have primarily disdained in the course of their particular forms of feminism. As such, they dissociate from feminist thinking as having any natural connotations and refute that there is such a connection, even if the link between women and nature is being discussed in circles other than their own.

In her comprehensive study, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir stated that women, as non-human beings, tend to be more concerned with regeneration and the repetition of life (Eckersley, 1992). The excess population and environmental degradation arise from two influential innovations that men have routinely used to obtain power: 1.) the ability to cultivate the earth, and 2.) the use of women for reproduction (d'Eaubonne, 1980). The shared aim of feminists and ecofeminists has been to shift structures of authority by stripping masculine phallocratic hegemonies and sexist systems of their power and instead empowering emerging social and environmental movements.

In an article titled "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?" (1974), Sherry Ortner emerged as a significant voice of the emerging ecofeminist movement. Ortner drove forward the debate by rewriting de Beauvoir's rejection and providing a more culture-based account of the reasons for women's general subordination in society. Suggesting a systematic investigation of the causes of violence to discover the underlying issues, she advocated a reconsideration of body differences. Initially analyzing the differences in physiology among men and women, Ortner established the basis of the nature/culture duality,¹³⁸ according to which women's bodies and roles are more directly related to the reproduction of the species than men's (Humm, 1992, pp. 252-254). Women's bodies possess capabilities that men's bodies are missing, including the ability to be pregnant, among other qualities. The bodily capabilities and their concomitant functions, however, all come to subordinate women to men and inevitably make them submissive to patriarchy (Cahill, 2002).

Ruether, meanwhile, goes so far as to claim that *all* models of domination, including those based on a separation between self and other, God and creation, superiority, and inferiority in hierarchical societies, are grounded in a *sexual dualism*. Additionally, the mastery over nature is

¹³⁸ This dichotomy was carried forward by Aristotle and was used to justify slavery. This concept was developed during the Enlightenment, establishing a distinct division between reason and nature. In Baconian conceptions of science, this concept emphasized the necessity of "taming nature," with nature repeatedly described in feminine terms (Plumwood, 1993).

included in this assertion. Ruether asserts that the notion of a *super-natural*, non-tangible god-father emerged at the same time as power shifted from tribes to urban societies whose cultural form assigned an inferior status to women justified male domination. Such urban societies made women increasingly dependent on the patrimonial monopoly of political power as facilitated by way of industrialization (Ruether, 1975, pp. 4-9). Ecofeminists join Ruether in assuming that an oppressive agenda is at work throughout all civilizational history and that this oppression manifests itself in hierarchical, dualistic concepts of superiority/inferiority, divinity/matter, masculine/feminine. These patterns, which reinforce each other, have been consistent features in ecofeminist studies. Ecofeminism has been described as a means of analyzing and revealing diverse strata of oppression. This has led Plumwood (1992) to exclaim that ecofeminism is a *General Theory of Oppression*.

A number of ecofeminists have claimed that the devaluation of natural systems by mainstream culture is attributable to a male consciousness. Moreover, among the early ecofeminists, there was a significant emphasis on overcoming the social and environmental issues that were seen to have been created and imposed onto women and nature by men (Griffin, 1978). During this phase, ecofeminists sought to show that men were incapable of serious involvement in further movements for environmental and social egalitarianism.

Susan Griffin (1978) represents an ecofeminist position in pointing out that the rape of women and the exploitation of nature are both carried out through Western science so as to achieve domination and control over both. Since nature is seen as female, male domination brutalizes and utilizes it. Preferring violence to compassion, males are prone to destroying both women and nature. Her book *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (1978) arose from the connection between the effeminized standing for women and the natural world, who were considered subordinate in order to legitimize that subordination to an elitist and military-dominated social order (Gaard, 2011, p. 28). Griffin adjusts the story of Red Riding Hood,¹³⁹ whom she holds to represent all women as ideally imagined to be in harmony with the animals and nature (Humm, 1992, pp. 75-76). As Daly (1978) points out, such a perspective creates severe difficulties for men in overcoming contemporary ecological and cultural issues. She exposes a core aspect of the

¹³⁹ *Red Riding Hood* represents a young woman wandering in nature with freedom and happiness. However, she is taken captive by the “Big Bad Wolf,” the patriarch’s representative, who attempts to kill her. Griffin explains how men seek to control women and nature out of fear, stemming from their desires and perceived insufficiencies.

discourse that essentially frames masculinity as the enemy. She observed that patriarchal and phallogentric global religions generate the typical suppression against women and nature, a masculine gaze in society, and discrimination against all people on the planet. These views laid the foundation for the growing movement of implicit misandry. Taking the lead from these pioneering theorists, early ecofeminists initiated a feminized ecological phase that focused on the contradictions inherent in the nexus of gender and nature, framing their concerns as being bound to interconnectedness and holism in both theory and practice. For instance, this can be seen in Ynestra King's work (Warren, 1997, p. 240).

Significantly, theorists considered the initial point of view as the framework for publicizing ecofeminism. However, ecofeminist efforts also began to emerge unexpectedly at the grassroots level throughout the world. (Salleh, 2016). These developments represent a broader critique of the ecological and feminist dilemma in the contemporary differential duality. As Warren characterizes *ecofeminism*, the term refers to distinct feminist perspectives regarding nature within the links between women's [and other oppressed humans'] superiority and the mastery of the natural world. Understood in this manner, the term *ecofeminism* affirms the connection between the domination of nature and the domination of women, including the subordination of all "other" actors. (Warren, 1994, p. xiv).

Plumwood (1994) posits that there is an inherent latent masculine bias and justificatory social prerogative since men have historically dominated societies. Hence, explanation does not constitute a gender-neutral characteristic of human thought. Instead, throughout history, males have been using various means of oppressing the female voice, devaluing non-human animals' value, and destroying the ecosystem at large. The unjustified inferior categories – e.g., non-white people, children, the impoverished, the lower classes, and outcasts – were all defined as non-human equivalents morally inferior to those cultural or rational categories that possessed superior value (Warren, 1987).

Critical links begin to appear with the emergence of the women-initiated ecofeminist movements at the grassroots level. These movements addressed ecological questions and the impact of humans on nature. Like ecofeminists more generally, grassroots activists have enthusiastically advocated raising consciousness by providing more informing populations about the long history of the destructive domination of nature for the sake of economic advantage. According to Warren, the domination of nature and the domination of women are bounded by the

following ten links: 1.) the historical bond, 2.) the conceptual relation, 3.) the linguistic connection, 4.) symbolic links, 5.) the religious and the spiritual constraint, 6.) epistemological relations, 7.) the political association, 8.) ethical considerations, 9.) the empirical reference, and 10.) the socio-economic relation (Warren, 1987, pp. 21-38). Let us briefly elaborate on the implications of each of Warren's links of mutual domination.

1.) The Historical Interconnection: In observing the deplorable degradation of nature, ecofeminists state that it is patriarchy, the dominant system of societies, that is the primary culprit. It is patriarchy that has caused the miserable condition in which nature finds itself in the present hour. Since patriarchy has created the structures of society, it is the force that has framed the female stereotype as it appears throughout the course of history.

2.) The Conceptual Relation: The conceptual framework of the hierarchy in the world produces the dualities of mind/body, men/women, nature/culture, and rationality/emotion, consciously framing certain conceptions as being superior and others as inferior (and thereby "other"). Women, like nature, become demoted by patriarchy for having similar procreative abilities.

3.) The Linguistic Nexus: Several ecofeminists have discussed the role of language in the Development of naturism and sexism. For instance, a gendered and sexist linguistic approach redefines females as subordinate and insignificant while portraying males as essential elements of human existence. Such language ascribes elevated qualities and titles to men while assigning inadequate and inconsequential values to women and the natural world. The discriminatory language supplies a pretext to ecofeminist claims by referring to women as chicks, foxes, snakes, bird spirits, etc., demoting to the position of animals. In a similar and inverse fashion, animals, forests, land, and other parts of nature are feminized. With terms such as Mother Earth or Virgin Wood, which feminize nature, this language may devalue both women and nature, promoting a sexist sense of the natural world. (Warren, 1987, p. 22). In effect, ecofeminists claim that by way of such use of language, women are being construed as animals and animals are being feminized, and all this through the male patterns of self-ascribed superiority that equate women and nature in a demeaning way so as to establish their inferiority. Language becomes one of the prime means by which humans and nature are abused, becoming a mere environment overrun with corruption due to transgressions of power.

4.) Symbolic (and Literary) Links: This nexus highlights the imagery of women and non-human nature. The symbolic paradigms among women and nature and realistic male patriarchal

disengagement from the ecology characterize this kind of suppression. Literature and many storylines emphasize men, whereas women and nature trail behind them.

5.) The Religious and the Spiritual Constraint: Nature's devastation by man and the concomitant subjugation of woman and her muteness stems from the dictates of religion and spiritual faith. There are three major religions, along with a host of minor religions, that demand the utilization of women and nature in the pursuit of serving "humanity" by abstracting women out of the process of active production. These religions rely on the fact that humans have been created as superior to all else. Patriarchal power considers this as the justification for its domination over the natural world, with women being merely the progenitors of that dominant humanity (Ruether, 2000). For instance, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran establishes most of its authoritarian and ideological order through the control of the female body. The government doubly fears women activists since their constant participation in various modes of civil and political struggle is a confrontation with the Islamic Republic's authoritarian regime. Therefore, it attempts to expand the circle of women activists in various civic movements through multiple ploys. The ideological order of the Islamic Republic will disappear and collapse its corrupt system once the gender pattern changes in Iran. The neglected issue of women's struggles and movements and other civil and political movements is finally coming to realize the significance of the interaction between class and gender discrimination. The issue of owning one's own body is essentially one of the critical questions of emancipation. However, the concept involves ensuring that women can comfortably walk on the streets and without the fear of being sexually abused, instead of its more usual concerns with the political, economic, and social subjectivity that women gain through liberation. For instance, the official law or the Rejuvenate the Population Plan in Iran and specific issues contained therein, such as the prohibition of abortion and the indispensable usage of the female body as a reproductive tool, are entirely related to the policy of domesticating women. Moreover, women's perception of women as mothers who bear children implies keeping them apart from social interactions. In a society like Iran, with all the reactionary legislation concerning women and the intense economic pressure, the question arises: What are the consequences of legislation such as the Plan to Rejuvenate the Population, which increasingly restricts the availability of contraceptives?

6.) The Epistemological Connection: The issue concerns knowledge. Since knowledge has come from male power, it is distorted from the very core by banishing its center's actual expertise and

its beneficiaries. Females have been excluded from the production of knowledge by being entirely excluded from the intellectual sphere.

7.) The Political Association: Ecofeminism commences as an oppositional political discourse that directs attention to biocentric relations between men, women, and nature as a three-way interconnection. In doing so, it overtly objects to misogynist and capitalist agendas. Part of the connection between women and nature is political. The male system presumes women to have a closer relationship with nature, forcing them to integrate with nature.

8.) The Ethical Consideration: Environmental ethic, even when viewed through an eco-friendly lens, and the land ethic, which aims to maintain the purity of the land, both emerge as counterparts to Aristotelian and Baconian notions of progress. Such an ethic instrumentalizes nature, insisting on the essentiality of nature merely for the existence of mankind.

9.) The Empirical Reference: Considering environmental destruction and women's oppression, how women and nature are interconnected has been proven and is beyond doubt. Moreover, their position in the political domain and their profound spiritual awareness demonstrates the profound connection between women and nature.

10.) The Socio-Economic Relation: The male-centric hegemony in socio-economic relation has generated countless sociological crises, undermining women's felicity, and environmental equilibrium. Over the long term, such androcentric forms of monopoly have led to repeated socio-economic collapse since such patriarchal policies devastate fertile land, sources of water, and other ecological components. Moreover, it is precisely because of patriarchy that the world finds itself in a state of crisis, suffering from shortages of fossil fuel and water and prone to evermore ecological catastrophes.

Ruether proposes to define the connection between sexism and environmental degradation. At the cultural-symbolic and socio-economic levels, notions of justification are rooted in male supremacy at the culturally symbolic one (Ruether, 1975). This shows that the dominant culture has construed the natural world as strange and separate from human beings. What feminists characterize is a dualistic separation between humans and nature, in which a distinction is made between two elements and applied to the analysis. Ecofeminists assert that two main concepts, nature and human beings, are bifurcated, with the supposed supremacy of humans imposed on nature.

As can be seen so far, ecofeminism encompasses a wide range of diverse perspectives put forth by theorists from various fields. In attempting to comprehend the diversity of ecofeminism, the categories provided offer a helpful tentative framework. For analytical purposes, Carlassare (1994) divides ecofeminism into two principal directions. On the one hand, she names ecofeminism that utilizes materialist methods *social/ist ecofeminism*. This current of ecofeminism can also be referred to as *materialist ecofeminism*.¹⁴⁰ On the other hand, Carlassare identifies a mode of ecofeminism that operates in the realm of culture and spirituality, which she describes as *cultural ecofeminism*. This strand can also be referred to as *spiritual/cultural ecofeminism*.¹⁴¹ However, such separation and categorization obscure what is actually transpiring in academic ecofeminist discourse. In reality, the majority of ecofeminist theorists cannot be classified under one category, and many ecofeminists draw on the tenets of both types.

Spretnak proceeds on to identify further pathways to ecofeminism. For her, the first route to ecofeminism emerges from a.) radical feminists exposed to Marxist cultural experimentation in the 1960s and b.) feminists who emerged from engagements with critical theory and social-ecological studies in the 1970s. This strain of ecofeminism relies on the domination theory path (Spretnak, 1990, p. 5). On the basis of Marxist ideology, these feminists repudiated dominance dictated by affluence and class, instead seeking to assert that women constitute the dominant class.

The secondary route to ecofeminism that Spretnak identifies relies on ancient Goddess-based nature religions. The prehistoric era, based on the worship of goddesses, was eventually subordinated to an emerging patriarchal model of the male god's asserted superiority to the female deities. This eventually led to the modern Western conception of nature. Merchant (1992), for instance, points to the significant shift in how humans conceived of nature in the 17th century. Substituting the metaphor of a nurturing world with that of *the machine* resulted in a reductionist approach to nature, allowing for the domination of nature through the use of technology, industry, and science.

¹⁴⁰ Broadly, materialist ecofeminists seek women's liberation from patterns that associate females with nature, particularly in relation to the use of biology to justify the exploitation of women and other marginalized groups. Materialist ecofeminists assume a constructivist stance, asserting that the connection between women and nature is culturally contrived. For many materialists, constructing the very social categorization of women as rooted in nature necessitates abandoning it. Man, however, has always been a human-animal culture in nature. Irrespective of how identities are presented, humans are interwoven into the more-than-human, embodying the nature of the experience, which is genuinely significant (Carlassare, 1994).

¹⁴¹ Further, many spiritual-cultural ecofeminists' approaches to oppression at political scales are spiritual and productive.

Finally, the third route toward ecofeminism arises from environmental consciousness. It explores the ways and reasons that women's career advancement in the domains of public policy, technology, and science, as well as in public environmental organizations and universities, has been blocked. This approach involves examining the challenges faced by women and seeking justifications for women's association with ecofeminism, which posits that the fundamental dynamic underlying male domination over women is primarily rooted in fear and resentment. It works to offer an understanding of each manifestation of patriarchal culture in terms of its hierarchical, mechanical, militaristic, and industrial aspects (Sprenak, 1990, p. 5). The improvement of the link of nature and humans, meanwhile, has been associated with liberal, cultural, social, and socialist feminism. In various forms, they have all contributed significantly to ecofeminist positions.

Merchant has also proceeded to categorize ecofeminism into liberal, radical, cultural, social, socialist, ecological, deep ecology, transformative, aboriginal, and developing world ecofeminism, all of which play into the various spheres of daily life (Merchant, 1996, p. 207). Liberal ecofeminism is aligned with the values of environmental reforms that aim to transform human-nature relations by adopting novel regulations inside the established governmental system. As part of its critique of patriarchy, it seeks to propose solutions to environmental issues that strengthen women and nature. Cultural ecofeminism, meanwhile, seeks to consider the women-nature relation in a more comprehensive way. And Social and socialist ecofeminism seek to offer trenchant critiques of domination as they work for social equity and liberation.

The primary intentions of policy activities involving these diverse objectives ought to overlap. For instance, the common goal of women is to rebuild the natural world and improve the quality of life for humans and all living and nonliving inhabitants of the Earth, which may be a more significant unifying point than diversity (Merchant, 1990). In proposing such a concept of ecofeminism, Merchant details the three distinct positions and recognizes that each is related to its growth. These standpoints delineate ecofeminism's roots and demonstrate how ecofeminism is non-monolithic.

Karen Warren argues that the various stances toward ecofeminism constitute a "patchwork quilt," where each of the patches operates discretely, though collectively, form a beautiful ecofeminist "rug" that represents a broad spectrum of perspectives across the discourse (Warren, 2000, pp. 65-67). Buckingham-Hatfield (2000) holds that ecofeminism has evolved to provide a

perspective on society-nature relations by way of cultural ecofeminism and social ecofeminism. Buckingham-Hatfield indicates that these two trends must be considered against the West's social, historical, and cultural context (Buckingham-Hatfield, 2000, p. 35). In other words, according to this view, the women's nearness to nature is itself a construct, a direct consequence of the roles that society has assigned to women. As such, this closeness can be considered a sort of social foundation.

Sutton (2007), meanwhile, adds the three areas of liberal, socialist, and Third World ecofeminism to the existing theoretical framework. According to the social ecofeminists, women are less able to distance themselves from nature due to their social roles. They can also comprehend the sense of domination and subordination based on mastery and discrimination due to the caring roles assigned to them by society. Social ecofeminists, therefore, believe that the primary step in eliminating discrimination against nature is linked to eliminating other forms of discrimination in society.

Each component of the ecofeminist movement displays distinctive features. Taken together, they represent different aspects of the struggle to liberate both women and the natural world from the clutches of male supremacy.

3.3.3 The Positioning of Ecofeminism's Branches

A) The Social Standpoints

1. Radical Ecofeminism

Radical ecofeminism takes as its point of departure female inequality in biology and gender systems. Historically, radical feminists assume that "women are closer to nature than men." To what extent radical feminism confounds women's experiences by locating them closer to nature than men has been contested by several ecofeminists, providing a historical-critical and essentialist representation of women's experiences (Zimmerman, 1987; Warren, 1987; Roach, 1991). Radical feminism was born of the claim that patriarchy is the origin of all types of oppression, and it attempts to reframe women's oppression, seeking to serve, oppose, and substitute the modes of the capitalist state as based on patriarchal religious practices (Plumwood, 1993, p.44). Given that

radical ecofeminism considers male dominance (patriarchy) to be the primary root of all societal evil, its gaze is cast primarily to the politics of biology. The highly politicized, rationalistic, and theorized mode of radical ecofeminism holds that under patriarchy, women's biology (childbirth, menses, etc.) limits women's access to power in the public sphere. Radical ecofeminists who subscribe to such a view oppose considering females as being closer to nature than men.

In opposition to liberal ecofeminism, radical ecofeminism denounces the dominant culture's maleness, refuses to embrace an identity of masculinity, and demands a feminine identity in its place. However, the progression of such feminisms involves an "uncritical reversal" (Ibid) may lead to an imagined segregated "utopian" society since males come to be regarded as *irredeemable* and females as *incorruptible*. Such a radical approach distinguishes itself both from liberal feminism and conventional Marxist feminism. However, it reflects man's spiritual relationship with nature. It contends that gender inequality is biologically conditioned by nature, and women's construction of "the feminine" somehow contributes to nature by responding to women's biologically conditioned oppression.

2. Socialist Ecofeminism

Socialist ecofeminism considers social issues as rooted in material circumstances (historical materialism), underscores the economic value of women's labor, is anthropocentric (human-centered) in its conception of nature as a resource for human necessities, endorses policy resolutions, and dismisses spiritual/personal struggle as ineffectual for revolutionary social transformation. Socialist ecofeminism is the version of ecofeminism represented by Carolyn Merchant and Mary Mellor. The basic contribution of socialist ecofeminism lies precisely in bringing environmental and social justice issues to the forefront (Mies & Shiva, 1993). While socialist ecofeminism upholds Marxist feminist traditions by demanding that capitalism be eliminated, it is distinct in that it centers on the categories of nature (reproduction). In this way, eco-socialists make the case that *reproduction* is subordinate to *production* under industrial capitalism. Hence, socialist ecofeminism conceives of a *socialist ecological society* as bringing human production and reproduction into equilibrium (Merchant, 1992). The ecofeminist Ariel Salleh has also contributed to the evolution of socialist ecofeminism.

According to many ecofeminists (Merchant, 1992; Salleh, 1997; Mellor, 1992), socialist feminism is considered the only viable foundation approach for ecofeminism. In contrast to radical or Marxist feminism, it analyses the oppression occurring along multiple axes to resolve the subjugation existing along numerous dimensions, not just the dimensions of gender or class. Representing materialism as embodied, however, Salleh (2001) maintains a materialist approach to ecofeminism in that it takes up and incorporates the practical tools of Marxist sociology. It seeks to reframe the discussion by emphasizing naturally interconnected wholes – i.e., males, females, and nature. Salleh posits that this type of ecofeminism is an embodied materialism that is materialistic by taking up the main tools of Marxist sociology. It is *embodied* in the sense that it seeks to re-evaluate the debate by placing appropriate organic value on the interconnected entities. Embodiment embraces and recognizes the concept that human beings are bodies with specific needs, roles, and stances (King, 1989, p. 23). Among these needs and roles are nurture and care, for instance. Such needs ought to be fulfilled by oneself or by others (either human or nonhuman). Furthermore, the point is not to restrict women to what is associated with “the feminine” but to integrate both sexes' specific characteristics and work in equal measure.

For socialist ecofeminism, class, and capitalism are not the only significant analytical criteria. Rather, this mode of feminism draws on neo-Marxist approaches to women and the natural world. Socialist ecofeminism is derived from materialistic feminism (Marxist and socialist feminism). It is based on the constructivist position that considers both knowledge and nature as historically and socially constructed. This socio-historical process of construction is assumed to result in the circumstances and relations of the very existence of knowledge and nature (Merchant, 1992, p. 269). This stance departs from and goes beyond orthodox Marxism, allowing a host of other forms of oppression to be identified rather than only class oppression due to capitalist hegemony. Patriarchy and imperialism, for instance, represent patterns of domination that are as pertinent for socialist ecofeminist approaches as class oppression under capitalism (Mellor, 1992, pp. 123-124). Socialist ecofeminists do, of course, focus on the power structures under capitalism and, in common with socialist feminists, consider capitalism (with respect to patriarchy) as interacting with, reciprocally reinforcing, and being systemically inseparable from feminist analysis. Given the complexity of the interrelated roles of patriarchy and capitalism in terms of the subjugation of women, socialist ecofeminists often treat both patriarchy and capitalism as a unified system.

Arguing for a critical materialism of embodiment, which responds to the assumed subordination of women under patriarchal capitalism while also addressing women's unpaid labor, Ariel Salleh (1997) notes how ecofeminist analyses are based on a "critical materialism" of capitalism. She also argues that women's relationship to nature and labor is structured differently from that of men. Salleh shows, for instance, capitalism's very operation and survival are dependent on women's labor by pointing to the fact that *unpaid work* by women accounts for most of the world's labor. Salleh's contention is that capitalism is a system of patriarchal relations that at once degrades the environment and oppresses women. She further asserts that the continuing capital accumulation and the increasing transnational hegemony of operations deepen the subjugation of nature and women (Salleh, 1997, p. 22).

The conclusion to be drawn is not that capitalism is the only source of such systemic oppression. Nor do all socialist ecofeminists wish to claim that capital does not prey on men as well. Instead, the category of *nature* is used by socialist ecofeminists to demonstrate the construction of *woman* as a category. For them, women and men are *constituted* through *social relations*, not by *nature*. By historicizing human biology and gender, socialist ecofeminists refer to representative and material variation. For them, the human body is inscribed in social terms, just like human practice, psychology, and knowledge.

Carolyn Merchant (1980), another prominent socialist feminist, argues that social and biological factors sustain the relations of production and affect the sphere of social and economic affairs in ways that are at least as significant as production. Accordingly, Merchant employs the production relations and social and biological reproduction functions as analytical criteria in her critique of patriarchal capitalism and her investigations of human-environment interactions. In Merchant's view, environmental crises have been manufactured by society, a consequence of the contradictions that exist, on the one hand, between production and ecology and, on the other, between reproduction and production. There is, therefore, a genuine need to explore alternatives beyond the Marxist framework since its promotion of class awareness, revolution, and liberation do not bring transformation to the state of women or the condition of nature.

3. Social Ecofeminism

Social ecofeminism, like ecology, posits equality among all beings, promoting balance and tranquility on earth. Social ecofeminists have sought to establish the relation between socio-political studies and ecology. Proponents of social ecofeminism can be distinguished from other forms of ecofeminism by virtue of their contention that while all individuals are incorporated into nature, men are anchored in *reality* and thus less capable of *embodiment* (Mellor, 1997, p. 60). Emphasizing embodiment, accountability, awareness, and “spirited” behaviors, gathered under the term *Living Planet Ethics*, this branch of ecofeminism aims to address the fundamental necessities of all beings (Merchant, 1992, pp. 186-201). This standpoint exemplifies the implicit dualism of gender roles and seeks to underscore the theoretical implications of post-gender stances for the individual, society, and the environment by arguing for liberation from all patriarchal systems (Warren, 1987, p. 18).

The central tenet of social ecology holds that deep-seated societal issues emerge from environmental concerns. In turn, ecological problems might not be identified, still less overcome, if social problems are not addressed. Socio-ecological approaches contend that environmental disasters are likely to be the outcome of the patriarchal organization of power and the oppressive mentality embedded in the fundamentals of patriarchal societies. As such, social ecology connects *primary biotic nature* to *secondary human nature*.

Bookchin, a representative of social ecofeminism, challenges positions based solely on anthropocentrism and biocentrism. The former, for instance, is based on the conviction that the universe is created for humankind, placing humans at the Center of a hierarchy of species (Bookchin, 1999). Social ecofeminism refrains from idealizing dominant “feminine” or “masculine” identities. Rather, it takes on a perspective that examines how dualisms historically and sociologically reinforce one another (Twine, 2001, p. 3). By analyzing discursive uses of *reason* and *nature*, for instance, social ecofeminism becomes more able to consider alternate modes of subjugation. It opposes theorizing oppression solely in terms of class and gender, opting instead for a theory that constructs an intersectional, reticular framework for analyzing oppression.¹⁴² Such a theoretical approach seeks to illustrate the interconnections between class, race, gender,

¹⁴² Although Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) is credited with introducing the intersectionality approach, the qualitative nature of ecofeminist theories, as expressed in the works of Vandana Shiva (1987) and Maria Mies (1986), predates the concept.

and mastery over nature (Plumwood, 1992, p. 10), pointing towards contextual patterns that classify people as *oppressor* and *oppressed*.

B) The Reformatory Standpoint

1. Liberal Ecofeminism

Liberal ecofeminism is regarded as mainstream, reform-oriented, predominantly white middle class, and believes that women in the patriarchal system can humanize the system by struggling for the equal rights of women mainly inside the system. Originating in the 18th century, liberal feminism reached its peak in the mid-1960s, with the aim of achieving gender equality. The earliest exponent of liberal feminism, Mary Wollstonecraft, notes in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* that “woman is generally inferior to man in strength (Wollstonecraft, 1796, p.3), but a woman's inferiority is due to external causes occurring in special education, resulting in gender differences produced in her lack of adequate education and limited opportunities to participate in society (Ibid, pp.3-8). Liberal ecofeminism emphasizes legislative and regulatory reforms to rectify human-nature relations and address environmental issues caused by societal Developments (Merchant, 1990, p. 93). However, some critics argue that this approach may not address the underlying drivers of environmental degradation, which are linked to the broader developmental processes. This approach is consistent with the reformist environmental consciousness, which seeks changes within existing systems.

2. Deep Ecology Ecofeminism

The deep ecology movement is rooted in both spiritual and sociological science, and its founder, Arne Naess, was influenced by Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring*. Naess's deep thinking and philosophical concepts provided the foundation for the movement, which stresses the intrinsic value of nature and the interconnectedness of all living things (Whitaker, 2006). Arne Naess introduced the terms *deep ecology* and *shallow ecology* in 1972 to distinguish two approaches to the ecological crisis. Deep ecology aims to explore the roots of unsustainability and

create significant and lasting changes to address the ecological crisis.¹⁴³ This approach to ecofeminism advocates the preservation of the environment by opposing the displacement of values and the dualistic approach to humanity and nature. Its main objective is to create a sustainable and harmonious relationship between humans and the environment (Matthew, 2005).

3. Ecological Ecofeminism

Ecological ecofeminists seek to recognize the inherent meaning in all things, accounting for the intrinsic and the rational values of all life. In other words, their purpose is to work out the consequences of interconnectedness among all living things (Matthews, 2005, pp. 68-69). This approach insists that ecology as a science and ecofeminism share a meaningful connection. According to Warren (1997), ecological feminism posits the idea of significant links between how “women, people of color, and the lower class” are supposed to interact in their treatment of the “non-human natural environment” (Warren, 1997, p. xi). Warren’s work on ecofeminism probes the underlying causes of women-led movements across the globe, providing interdisciplinary perspectives on the movement as well as a philosophical framework. Her work highlights the intertwining of social and environmental issues and emphasizes the need to acknowledge the intersectionality of such issues.

4. Developing World Ecofeminism

For developing countries, increased globalization is one cause of the degradation of natural resources. Participating in the world markets attracts developing countries by opening them to economic growth opportunities and improving the quality of their citizen’s lives. However, since globalization demands a higher rate of consumption, developing countries often stand to lose rather than gain. Women in such countries are forced to accept extreme working conditions just to keep up with expected standards of productivity, a fact that affects their health and overall quality of

¹⁴³ Arne Naess believed that simplistic strategies were insufficient to solve complex social and ecological challenges. He introduced the concept of deep ecology as a philosophy in a plea published in 1965 entitled “*Nature Ebbing Out*” to protect *Innerdalen*, a Norwegian mountain valley. In this paper, he stressed the need for an overview to prevent environmentally destructive behavior.

life. According to Mies and Shiva (1993), capitalistic patriarchy (or a modern civilization) establishes a context in which one is always considered to be superior, constantly prospering and progressing to the detriment of others. This worldview and *modus operandi* inevitably have to establish a relationship with a subordinate *Other* in order to achieve one's aim (Mies & Shiva, 1993, p. 5). Developing world ecofeminism thereby seeks to offer a critical analysis of how patriarchal societies in positions of power seek to advance societal advancement and economic prosperity at the expense of nature.

5. Transformative Ecofeminism

Transformative ecofeminism involves making one think anew with regard to defining and understanding *human nature*. The concept of *human nature* is characterized by a non-patriarchal conception of the connections between human and non-human nature, all of whom may be seen as members of an ecological community. Transformative ecofeminism instructs individuals to recognize all types of oppression as interrelated. In this regard, the position of females becomes determined by more than just sex or women's connection with nature. Many elements that are based on an ecological foundation affect their status. This points to a key tenet of transformative ecofeminism, namely that everything is interconnected to everything that exists (Warren, 1997; Cuomo, 1998).

Transformative ecofeminism has sought to transform nature-women relationships. It claims that women's ties with nature have been socially contrived and intensified by ideology. As such, women have a role in shifting the significance associated with their relationship to nature. From the transformative ecofeminist perspective, the oppression of women occurred not as a result of oppression per se or because of women being equated with nature. Rather, both women and nature have been *othered*. In similar fashion, "people of color, Jewish, the poor, gay, or lesbians" have been stigmatized as inferior in the same way that women have been, and society's domination over women and the natural world has been unjustly vindicated (Gaard, 1993).

6. Third World Ecofeminism

Although environmental issues disproportionately impact women, they are particularly accentuated in the Third World. Women are the primary victims of the destruction to the ecosystem wrought by patriarchal capitalism, and in more than one way. Women are most vulnerable and affected when natural disasters strike, for instance, since they bear the burden of feeding, clothing, and raising their children. When the natural environment undergoes disruption, women who seek the resources offered by that natural environment are profoundly affected (Shiva, 1993). Vandana Shiva's broad critique of globalization and its wide-ranging implications for the literature on gender, the environment, and sustainable Development requires a closer appraisal. Shiva holds developers responsible for the death of the female principle, which is a way of sustaining life, variety, the process of nurturing, conservation, and third-world holism (Shiva, 1993, p. 96). This describes how the state and capital have been partnered in development imposed from above on populations, bringing about more harm than gain. This process has involved creating and assessing external policies and macro-economic projects for nation-building that have demanded sacrifices from the invisible, impoverished masses.

C) The Essentialist Standpoint

1. Cultural Ecofeminism

Cultural ecofeminism is rooted in radical feminism and revolts against devaluation of the qualities related to the gender construction of women by patriarchy. Plumwood (1993), addressing both radical and cultural origins of feminism, states that the radical feminist cultural critique suffers from various issues. The assumption is that women's oppression is the foundational type of oppression from which all others are derived. The denial of femininity is considered the starting point of the distortion of culture (Plumwood, 1993, p. 30). As a response to such devaluation, cultural ecofeminists revalue qualities such as intuition, caring, feeling, and the body – i.e., qualities that have been culturally and historically assigned to women. Here, the term *cultural* refers to the appeal for all women to construct an alternative feminine culture to replace the

misogynistic, dominant, hierarchical, violence-prone, and death-denying culture of the Patriarch (Zimmerman, 1994, p. 236).

Cultural ecofeminism relies heavily on symbols, turning all the signifiers of female inequality into symbols for female empowerment (Plumwood, 1992). Thus, the creation of the notions of Gaia,¹⁴⁴ Goddess, and Shakti¹⁴⁵ can be considered as embodiments of feminine power (Aggarwal, 1998). Due to its potent essentialist influences, cultural ecofeminism became a prominent object of critique for liberal, Marxist, and materialist feminists as well as ecofeminists. However, Merchant notes that although the overarching aims of liberal, radical, and socialist feminism may differ, be it capitalism, women's culture, or socialism, the purpose of political action ultimately should overlap. In this way, the common goal of women is to restore the natural world and improve the quality of life of humans and all living and non-living inhabitants of the Earth so that they might form a broader unified entity than existing as mere diverse parts (Merchant, 1990). Cultural ecofeminism involves no effort to review or critique the current inequalities and hierarchies built into the established framework. Instead, it seeks to include additional females into the present leadership class, traditionally a predominantly white, masculine elite (Mellor, 1997). It also seeks to expand on the foundations of cultural feminism, which recognizes the undervalued contributions of women and strives to value the historical role of women in society. This approach is consistent with the principles of environmental reformation, which aims to alter the relationships between humans and nature by establishing new regulations within existing frameworks of governance.

By criticizing patriarchy, cultural ecofeminism addresses environmental issues and provides solutions to empower both women and nature. However, whereas cultural ecofeminism centers on the nature-women relationship, some contend that social and socialist ecofeminism provides a broader critique of domination and social justice, ultimately striving toward liberation for all (Merchant, 1980). Social ecofeminism provides a historical nature to the relation of women with nature by identifying the root of the inferiority of women and nature to men in the ancient

¹⁴⁴ Any life on the Earth may be considered a unity, this unity being like a major super-organism called Gaia. Viewing Earth as a living being through which all living beings form a unity makes it possible to approach the Earth with an integrated perspective, thereby respecting the various component parts of nature. The belief in natural religion and deities such as Gaia and Mother Earth has highly influenced ecofeminist theory. It holds that everything has an intrinsic value in nature, implying that a *biocentric perspective* ought to replace androcentric or anthropocentric philosophies (Plant, 1989, pp. 26-47).

¹⁴⁵ In Hindu mythology, *Shakti* is part of the feminine concept of the transforming spirit and power in the cosmos. This definition has also been broadly applied in ecofeminist discourse, frequently mentioned by Vandana Shiva.

Greek philosophy, in which individuals became classified based on race and gender, with such classifications assuming an ideological character and eventually becoming institutionalized in social network structures governing interpersonal relations.¹⁴⁶ In other words, cultural ecofeminism aims to correlate women and nature based on the assumption that women possess an enhanced and specific appreciation of nature, one that is superior to men, due to their behavioral and intrinsic characteristics (Mies & Shiva, 1993).

Cultural ecofeminism is also intimately connected to the necessities of human life, and women, compared to men, possess more experience in comprehending the theoretical standpoint (Bhattacharyya, 1971). In contrast, working women in southern countries lead an all-embracing struggle to pursue and maintain a level of subsistence. These women, therefore, can be far more experienced at grasping this view compared to the urban middle-class women and men of northern countries. Conversely, this view embraces a broader scope compared with other feminist approaches, considering there are bodies of both men and women victimized by industry-generated pollution.

2. Spiritual Ecofeminism

A spiritual branch within the humanistic psychological framework, the Human Potential Movement, heavily inspired by Abraham Maslow, emerged in the 1960s. It involved psychologizing the spiritual processes by incorporating the insights of Gestalt and transpersonal psychology (Morris, 2006). The new psycho-spiritual context was synthetic and syncretistic, merging with various cultural disciplines, a transcultural and spiritual mix updated with ecofeminist values.

¹⁴⁶ The Greeks conceived of birth power as nature's ability to give life. As Plato states, the woman in her conception and procreation is only "the imitation of the earth" rather than "the earth of the woman" (Partenie, 2009, p.16), emphasizing the symbolic connection between women and the earth. Mircea Eliade (1957), in "The Sacred & the Profane: The Nature of Religion," posits that "generation and childbirth are microcosmic versions of a paradigmatic act performed by the earth" (Eliade, 1957, p. 142). He suggests that every human mother imitates and repeats the primordial act of life's appearance in the womb of the earth. According to Eliade, a woman is mystically regarded as one with the earth, and childbearing is seen as a human-scale variant of telluric fertility. All religious experiences associated with fertility and birth have a cosmic structure. The earth endows living forms by creating and bringing them into existence from its essence. Its fertility gives life, and anything originating from the earth exists, while anything returning to the earth regains life (Eliade, 1957, pp. 142-144).

Ecofeminist spiritualities include a range of non-denominational tenets and an acknowledgment and commitment to nature. In terms of gender, females may be said to have taken a keen interest in such holistic environments because the kind of proscribed subjective spirituality offered in such venues is often legitimized in the academic world as an articulation of the self and an expression of autonomy. Proponents of spiritual ecofeminism contend that an open, relational, and practical spirituality fosters and empowers women's agency (Woodhead, 2007). Spiritual ecofeminism, by connecting interdependence, eco-dependency, and their psychological implications to values, attitudes, and forms of relationship toward others or nature, may be said to stand in stark opposition to patriarchal principles (Warren, 1995). It is also worth noting that this branch of ecofeminism is grounded in insights of Jungian psychology. Two of Jung's followers, Esther Harding, and Erich Neumann, elaborated on the archetype of the Great Mother. Their work formulated and advanced a more female vision of Jung's psychological analysis. Ecofeminist spiritualities bring together the commitment to women's individual self-development and welfare. Proponents contend that this stands in contrast to other spiritual and religious approaches that generally emphasize matters of transcendence and the fulfillment of the hierarchy's established canons.

3. Aboriginal Ecofeminism

At first sight, the term *indigenous* might be thought of as referring to the original inhabitants of a specific place. However, in addition to this common usage, a more complex dimension has emerged to refer to issues arising from colonial governance and policy history. Theories dealing with aboriginal issues draw either on the traditionalism of women or the feminism of postcolonial eras. They reflect the inherent tension, especially that which develops between essentialism and contemporary problems. When it comes to practical daily life, Aboriginal women generally aim to avoid the essentialization of their actions and identities. Putting it at the forefront of political struggles or theoretical discussions, therefore, influences how diversity discourse is approached.

Indigenous feminism proposes decolonizing itself by drawing on pre-colonial practices, including aboriginal principles and traditional ecological wisdom. Its proponents contend that establishing principles of this kind is essential to reasserting pre-colonial ecological imperatives

related to Aboriginal environmental respect, which, in turn, is essential for reclaiming sovereignty over Aboriginal territories on behalf of Aboriginal peoples and communities to end ecological devastation (Smith, 1999). Simultaneously, acts of indigenous *mothering* have been appealed to as ways of promoting a nation, encouraging cultural viability and severe political participation that significantly enables the creation and fostering of distinct cultural distinctions and identities (Sunseri, 2008). *Aboriginal motherhood* illustrates the critical elements of *aboriginal feminism* as a decolonizing theoretical and methodological movement that promotes the empowerment and liberation of women.

It is worth noting again that ecofeminism has borrowed from a range of feminist and political sources. However, ecofeminism's main appeal to feminism can perhaps best be described by what Ruether has called *integrative feminism* (Ruether, 1983, p. 233). She contends that an integrative feminist vision needs to draw on liberal, socialist, and radical intuitions toward developing an *ecological society*. In a similar vein, Warren has called for a *transformative feminism* that places an ecofeminist vision at the Center of feminist theorizing and practice (Warren, 1987, p. 3). Aboriginal ecofeminism might present an integrative and transformative approach to feminism that complements what Ruether and Warren initially proposed.

3.4 The Central Perspective: Patriarchal Culture

Ecofeminism questions the dominant reductionist paradigms operative in society from various perspectives and at multiple levels. Theoretically, it illuminates what Plumwood (1992) refers to as *a web of subjugation* and offers a multi-dimensional understanding based on political, ecological, cultural, and personal inter-connections that expose a nexus of domination which victims are women, nature, and other subjugated groups (Plumwood, 1992, p. 66). Androcentrism involves a patriarchal system based on domination, where the male-female relations operate on the logic of power domination (Warren, 1990, p. 124). What is called *patriarchy* provides a pattern for other domains in which such an approach to power is exercised, including racism, militarism, classism, and naturism. The assertion of patriarchy as being at the root of the domination of women and nature implies that *all modes of oppression are traceable to patriarchy* – i.e., the domination of women by men. Ecofeminist theory questions the presumed imperative of power relations by

arguing for a change in morality founded on structures of dominative power over persons (Birkeland, 1993, p. 19).

Various discourses have sought to explore the simultaneous domination of and submission to men by women under a patriarchal culture. In many cases, the subjugation of women and nature are explained through philosophical dualism. However, that matter has rarely been studied in depth.

The constant feminist emphasis on patriarchy implies that *patriarchy*, and not anthropocentrism, needs to be the primary concern in the process of moving toward and implementing an ecologically appropriate approach to practice. Cultural ecofeminist thought has provoked intense critiques from both ecological and feminist sides. From an environmental lens, the assertion that the roots of the domination over women and the natural world lie in patriarchy has been criticized as reductionist. As Eckersley (1992) observes, it is essential to point out that patriarchy *antedated* dualism and anthropocentrism, bringing them to fruition. There is, therefore, a necessary correlation between the phenomena. Further difficulties arise, however, chief among them being the difficulty that feminists and ecofeminists face in explaining the harmonious co-existence between pre-modern patriarchal societies and nature. In addition, anti-patriarchal feminist and ecofeminist critiques often run the risk of making women's liberation inevitably dependent on (or at least somehow bound up with) the liberation of nature. In this regard, Eckersley (1992) has suggested that women's emancipation may not necessarily follow the liberation of nature, and vice versa. Thus, while feminist and ecofeminist approaches have relied heavily on the critique of a patriarchy that is equated with the co-domination of women and nature, this approach itself is now being called into question as problematic, suffering from difficulties and inconsistencies that require deep examination (Eckersley, 1992, p. 69).

3.4.1 Dualism

Dualism indicates a mindset characterized by dividing reality into hierarchical dualistic pairs. In a dualistic pair, male and female categories become associated and are perceived to be fixed and non-historical, such that dualism implies essentialism. The sharp distinction that marks the dualistic pair strengthens the presumed supremacy of one over the other (Foucault, 1989,

p.261). The post-structuralist deconstruction of dualistic thought has demonstrated how the self is directly contingent on the Other for its integrity, thereby calling into question the notion of a radical separation between self and Other (Derrida, 1981, p.27). The claim of post-structuralists is not that distinctions between self and Other are suspended. Rather, in the culture of equality that dualism dictates, it is asserted that there are only ever *differences*.

Dualism, in ecological terms, has been accused of sanctioning the destruction and degradation of natural environments. Anthropocentrism, meanwhile, has been described as stemming from dualism, where humans become acutely separated from the natural environment (Warren, 1987; Plumwood, 1986). By relating dualism to the philosophical origins of patriarchal oppression, Griscom demonstrates how the conceptual framework of dualism, including sexism, racism, classicism, and naturalism, maintains and reinforces oppressive systems. Such an understanding bolsters the argument that hyper-segregation and the magnification of differences within dualist frameworks contribute to the marginalization and subordination of certain groups. (Griscom, 1981, pp. 5-6).

Gray (1982) maintains that society has been configured in a hierarchical pattern of mythic structure that serves men's vested interests to the detriment of women and nature. This hierarchical structure sanctions the abuse, violation, and slaughter of the members of the lower order – whether women, children, animals, or plants – under the needs of the members in the higher-order. One must comprehend that this dichotomy between the superiority and inferiority of humankind and culture and nature has been generated through an ideology based on *dualism*. Therefore, hierarchical dualism legitimizes a dependency in which women and nature are seen as passive entities to be used and exploited for male purposes. Ecofeminists lay great emphasis on the contention that such hierarchical dualism disregards both women's and nature's positive, dynamic, and life-supporting dimensions, confining the concept of humanity to a masculine one. This, in turn, leads to a reductionistic approach to life that primarily focuses on elements that can be exploited to generate profit.

Such an ideology claims that power, rationality and control are associated with maleness, deemed superior to the femaleness, while nature is associated with caring and passivity, both deemed inferior. This dualism leads to a debasement of those elements identified with females, nature, and the physical body while simultaneously raising the value of factors associated with males, rationality, and culture (Gaard, 1993, p. 5). For Gray (1982), the oppression experienced

by women and nature is ultimately attributable to the dualisms of male/female, mind/body, spirit/flesh (Gray, 1982, pp. 6-8). Such dualist approaches have typically associated and identified the male with the higher sphere of the spirit and soul (representing God's authority on earth). Historically, this has translated into men assuming positions of privilege within a range of dualistic pairs, with females and nature being associated with the lower sphere of the physical and material. In contrast to post-structuralists, who primarily focus on *difference*, environmentalists believe that establishing a significant connection between humans and nature is necessary to address the environmental crisis and other forms of mastery (Cuomo, 1998; Plumwood, 1989). Ecofeminists contend that the dualistic approach to the male-female relation in society causes severe problems by creating a hierarchy of values that places males above females. They hold this to be rooted in a patriarchal framework based on a "logic of supremacy." Warren, for instance, argues that dualism has led to a society divided along oppositional and exclusionary lines, with one side assigned a higher status and the other (Warren, 1987, pp. 6-8).

Ecofeminism refuses distinctions and dualities such as culture/nature, which assume masculinity. On the basis of the elimination of distinctions, it marginalizes, feminizes, or animalizes anything repressed from the Center. A renowned theory of masculine flow originated in the Enlightenment era, which significantly influenced the green mainstream current approach. Since the Age of Rationality asserts the notion of societal history as developing on a forward trajectory of "progress" and human evolution that is to be achieved solely by disavowing social and natural pressures, the process of dualism is set in motion. Enlightenment dualism underlies several ideologies and strategies that demand the mastery and utilization of nature by any means possible.

The modern Western mechanistic approach to natural science became one of the means of bifurcation so that instead of relation, masculine/feminine, objectivity/subjectivity, and spirit/emotions dualisms emerged with masculine domination over women and nature being promoted in each case. In this context, the significance of production came to be equated solely with the material value of production. Anything interpreted as "unproductive" was therefore deemed insignificant. Women, as well as nature, were rendered epistemologically indiscernible and methodically overlooked. This anthropocentric perspective eventually became the predominant *modus operandi* for society. On the basis of the patriarchal assumption that configures society, several basic tenets can be observed, namely 1.) the dualism between masculine/feminine

archetypal understandings, 2.) that men ought to assert mastery over the female/nature nexus such that both become engaged in the patriarch's services, and 3.) that men are portrayed as independent, authorized beings who possess the capacity for rationality, transparency, and individualism (Gaard, 1993, p. 24).

Griffin (1978) argues that the notion that women possess an inherent nearness to nature has been influenced by societal expectations and gender roles that place women primarily responsible for domestic and caregiving tasks. Plumwood (1993), meanwhile, seeks to critique the conceptualization of dualism and its implications for women's discourse and identity. She suggests that *dualism, as hyper-separation*, maximizes the amount and significance of inconsistencies between dualistic ties in a way that renders common features seemingly insignificant, thus making them susceptible to neglect (Plumwood, 1993, pp. 448-452). According to Plumwood, hyper-separation is the establishment of extreme divisions or subdivisions between categories or concepts. In dualistic thinking, hyper-separation serves two primary objectives.

In the first instance, hyper-separation involves constructing a false dichotomy or setting up dualistic categories. This implies that options are depicted as *mutually exclusive* or in terms of *either/or*. The notion is assumed to apply to gender since gender itself is assumed to be merely a social construct or generated outcome of hyper-separative dualism. Based on this series of assumptions, Plumwood and others contend that hyper-separation in the domain of gender reinforces the notion that one must be *either* a man *or* a woman, a phenomenon that, they believe, disregards the existence of non-binary or fluid gender identities. Hyper-segregation is identified as the culprit that needs to be taken to task for generating and reinforcing the emergent assumptions and expectations prevalent in society.

In the second instance, hyper-separation establishes connections that are rooted in domination and subordination. Here, the concepts or categories participating in hyper-separation are portrayed as distinct and separate entities – that is, discontinuous instead of subsisting along a spectrum of continuity. Thus, the notion that one category is somehow superior or dominant over the other reinforces power dynamics and inequalities. In addition, hyper-separation of the categories further reinforces the notion that the terms and categories in question are in fact, fundamentally dissimilar and simply cannot exist on a gradient or spectrum of variation that would suggest continuity.

Plumwood also highlights the phenomenon of *backgrounding*, which refers to the construction of a hierarchy that is based on particular mechanisms of focus and attentiveness. A dualistic approach highlights one element rather than another, or it relegates one element to the background, placing the other in the foreground. This has the effect of identifying the contributions of one element as being crucial to the image and those of the other as insignificant. What was initially a seemingly innocent distinction between concepts is shown to be a strategy of placement and positioning in terms of center and periphery.

Plumwood's concept of relational meaning encompasses two components counterpointed by their counterexamples, namely *instrumentalization* and *homogenization*. Plumwood argues that focusing exclusively on the perceived closeness of women and nature can have adverse effects (Plumwood, 1993, pp. 450-452). Instrumentalization can lead to the expectation that women will assume the burden of being environmental caretakers due to feelings of obligation and a perceived sense of maternal duty. On the other hand, homogenization involves the tendency to over-simplify and flatten the diverse experiences and identities of women and nature.

Plumwood goes on to critique the *reversal strategy of social change* in ecofeminism and advocates challenging the dominant culture rather than adapting to it. She emphasizes dismantling dualities that perpetuate hierarchies based on gender, race, and species (Cudworth, 2003, p. 57). By rejecting and dismantling the dualities of man/woman, human/animal, white/non-white, and Western/other, ecofeminists strive for what they hold to be a more inclusive society grounded in equality and positive values, notions that are to replace the previously held perspectives, which are deemed exclusivist and demeaning. Ecofeminist philosophy critiques hierarchies that devalue women and marginalize societies and the natural world, instead emphasizing the interconnectedness and intrinsic value inherent in all life.

Ruether (1975) is another prominent voice who appeals to dualism and patriarchy in setting out her ecofeminist perspective. Her critique of patriarchal religion, for instance, asserts that it is rooted in *transcendental dualism* that maintains a hierarchical social structure that oppresses women and marginalized groups. Ruether argues that portraying women as mothers is crucial to transcendental binarism because women's ability to bear children enables them to comprehend the cyclical dynamics of life and death in ecosystems. In contrast, men lacking this ability and experience have constructed a masculine deity, highlighting the finitude of physical existence

(Gaard, 1993, p. 274). Ruether's assertions are intended to challenge traditional gender norms and underscore the interconnectedness of life, which she attributes to women.

Garry and Pearsall (1989) echo the sentiments voiced above, noting that *hierarchical models of thought and dualism* inevitably ascribe superiority to particular elements over and against others. Structures that emerge from such hierarchical dualism, in turn, perpetuate further polarized and dualistic ways of thinking within hierarchical frameworks. Plumwood (1993) argues that dualistic thinking acts as a dominant logic in shaping how individuals perceive the other, establishing divisions and unequal power dynamics. Ecofeminists wish to reject such a logic since, for them, it denotes dependency on a perceived superior other that maintains the alienation and marginalization of the inferior.

Hierarchical dualism, then, comes to be identified as the basis for countless evils, building and perpetuating distinctions that devalue and exclude certain groups. Warren (1988), for instance, notes how feminist critique has helped highlight the role of conceptual hierarchy in generating and maintaining inequality (Warren, 1988, p. 32). Her reference to the feminist critique of hierarchy is another way of pointing to the feminist identification and diagnosis of the fundamental root of oppression that is held to pervade all historical and social constructs: patriarchy. Since socio-historical constructs shape the framework of fundamental beliefs and operative values that, in turn shape the self-perceptions of individuals and collectives and how they conceive of the world, the presumed transmission of patriarchy is the most problematic of developments, requiring identification and demanding dismantling.

Ruether (1975) proposes a transformative social vision emphasizing the interconnectedness and mutual interactions between humans and nonhuman nature. The experienced-based account of ecofeminism underscores the interconnectedness of living beings and the material world. Furthermore, it illuminates the underlying causal relations between various forms of domination and the destruction of the environment (Cuomo, 2002). Environmental degradation, including water disputes, destructive forestry practices, and industrial pollution, disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including women, people experiencing poverty, and other oppressed groups. Although the level of victimization may vary from the ecofeminist perspective, it is clear that environmental misconduct is rooted in perspectives and practices that are fundamentally influenced by male dominance, the colonial legacy, and capitalist ideologies. Such systems ensure that ecological well-being continues to be disregarded and that profitability

is prioritized over sustainability. Adopting an ecofeminist perspective that challenges oppressive structures and promotes connectedness, equality, and caring can create a more holistic approach to environmental problems and a more equitable and sustainable world.

3.4.2 The Critique of Essentialism

The fundamental criticism leveled against ecofeminism is its perceived essentialism. Social and socialist ecofeminists utilize materialistic methodologies to analyze classes and capitalistic economies. In contrast, cultural ecofeminists frequently adopt more spiritual or associational methodologies as a means of investigating subjugation on an individual and broader societal scale. For many critics of ecofeminism, the constructivist stance is aligned with social or socialist ecofeminism and rejects cultural ecofeminism as *essentialist*. *Essentialism* generally involves supposing a subject, e.g., a woman, is imbued with certain pre-social, congenital, and immutable properties. *Constructivism*, meanwhile, entertains the assumption that a subject is constructed by way of social, historical, and cultural factors, which are intricate and varied. Arguments by essentialists suppose that females and males are equipped with essential character traits that are considered eternal and unchangeable in nature, *not* historically or culturally contingent (Warren, 1994, p. 221).

The essentialist view is criticized as implying that women's identity is not solely historical, which is then held to imply that it is not subject to change. Essentialists are then also charged with espousing biological determinism, leading to them supporting static naturalistic arguments that relate women to nature. Such a perspective is said to generate the subordination and marginalization of women, notions that must be overcome and discarded. Based on these assumptions, dominant forms of feminism have sought to react against such essentialism (as identified with biological determinism) by moving more and more towards a constructivist stance that assumes that women *lack* an essential identity and that their identity is completely determined by socio-economic and cultural factors. Most notable among the constructivists is Simone de Beauvoir (1973), whose claim that "women are not born, they are made" is often cited as pointing to the assertion that women's identities have nothing inherent about them but are entirely the product of socially constructed permutations.

Feminists claim that by rejecting the notion of essentialism equated with biological determinism, the notion of an “essential woman” has effectively been removed. This move is taken to be the condition for the possibility of a fight for greater gender equity that insists that biological differences are of no account with regard to men’s and women’s abilities or social orientations. Feminists have mobilized their rejection of biological determinism to split the relation between *sex* and *gender*, a move that has been essential for feminist and queer scholars and activists and their respective agendas.

The *essentialism* attributed to ecofeminism consists of a commitment to an extreme dichotomy between men and women. It should be noted, however, that social constructivists themselves can be deemed essentialist by assuming that patterns of social construction are equally generalizable to all women. Several ecofeminist ideologies focus sharply on essentialist concepts. By essentializing peripheral performers and appropriating the attributes traditionally considered inferior, many contend that they enhance and reclaim the esteem of peripheral individuals. That is why several feminist scholars, including Janet Biehl (1991), Meera Nanda (1991), and Bina Agarwal (1992), indicate that ecofeminism leans toward ethnocentrism, essentialism, ignoring class and neglecting the substantive sphere (Jackson, 1993, pp. 397-398).

In ecofeminist discourse, the systemic inequality and domination of women and nature are portrayed as forms of victimization attributable to evolution. By considering females as intimately correlated with nature in a way that eludes men, the corollary is also assumed, namely that any threat against nature automatically and equally affects women. Essentialist views also run the risk of seeing women as “cleaners and men as mess-makers,” “freezing women as merely caring and nurturing beings, rather than the full range of women’s human potential and capabilities” (Biehl, 1991, p. 15). Such biases may indeed “relegate women to the status of traditional stay-at-home housewives, where they clean up messes after men” and engage women in the role of caretakers, nurses, and domestics. New (1996) characterizes ecofeminism that reduces women to their biological make-up as *dualistic affinity ecofeminism* and that which is based on the social and cultural functions of women as caretakers as *social ecofeminism*. According to New, social and dualistic affinity are rooted in the problematic notion of an *essentialist* – i.e., a biological and a social – model of womanhood, one which she rejects.

The assumption that ecofeminists are more likely to “connect women to nature as part of an umbrella theorization of gender distinction that seeks to portray men as more dominant and

destructive and women as more sympathetic and benevolent” is one that Roach (1991) considers profoundly inaccurate (Hultman & Pulé, 2018, p. 52). Roach asserts that the problem “lies in a false hierarchical opposition between the categories of nature and culture themselves” (Ibid). Roach’s critique of an essentialist ecofeminist conception in the world is based on pragmatism. Closer examination of the critique also reveals it to rely on generalizations and stereotypes that simply do not extend to all women or men.

Biehl finds the ecofeminist claim that women are “nurturing” beings who are like the Earth and the notion that the Earth is somehow feminine as more regressive than liberating for women (Biehl, 1991, p. 18).

The second correlation that emerges in ecofeminist literature, namely that women’s domination and nature’s destruction go hand in hand so that both are victims of systemic patriarchy Development, is assumed to be self-evident. After all, if women are inherently correlated to nature, any harm to nature would inherently harm women. However, ecofeminist literature offers no specific proof or convincing argument to prove that such a connection between women and nature actually exists. Instead, it takes this highly *anecdotal position* for granted and assumes it to be true. Such essentialism runs the risk of depicting females as a homogeneous category across regional and national divides as well as those of class, race, and ethnicity. (Agarwal, 1992, p. 122). While materialist and cultural-spiritual forms of ecofeminism have often operated on the assumption that there is an *intrinsic essence* to women, sociologists have suggested that differences exist across cultures and that these differences are socially constructed.

Adopting a novel materialist approach along the lines suggested by sociologists may imply adopting a stance in which essentialist ecofeminists move toward a socially constructed, culturally determined, and materially situated sense of women’s identity. This is appealing to those ecofeminists who wish to emphasize the domination of women and nature through an ideology driven by economic gain, political power, and gender-based division of labor and concomitant allocation of opportunities. Adopting a constructivist approach is also believed to address the historical transformation that a society undergoes, something essentialist approaches are thought to neglect.

Susan Prentice (1998) has argued that essentialist ecofeminism’s emphasis on women’s privileged connection to nature and the polity problematically assumes that men can only relate to the Earth in ways far worse and far more destructive than women. Such assumptions and

projections ignore evidence that suggests that men may also develop an ethics of empathetic concern for the natural world. Another weakness of the essentialist approach is that it fails to offer a rigorous account and critique of capitalism concerning its impact on nature. Given the polarization of the essentialized realms ascribed to men and women and the lack of a critique of socio-economic implications of capitalism, some believe that essentialist ecofeminism is incapable of devising an effective strategy of transformation (Merchant, 1992, pp. 196-197).

Plumwood's categorization of ecofeminism into cultural and social branches provides a basis for understanding how these approaches differ in their perspectives on women's relation to the natural environment. Cultural ecofeminists are inclined to consider the connection as somehow intrinsic, asserting that women possess an extraordinary nature and privileged knowledge of the natural world, rooted in a "subsistence principle" that eludes men (Twine, 2001, p. 2). Conversely, social ecofeminists perceive the association between women and nature as being constructed by societal norms and dynamics of power (Mies & Shiva, 1993, pp. 20-21). The argument is made that cultural ecofeminism also deals more with spirituality and individual growth, emphases that are taken to engender naïve efforts such as seeking "gender complementarity." Critics of essentialist currents of ecofeminism claim that it resembles romantic approaches to "Mother Earth" that replicate the feminization of nature in an uncritical way (Twine, 2001, p. 2-3), ignoring the exploitation and devaluation of both women and nature.

In Moore's view, the critique of essentialism in feminism implies that anti-essentialism in feminist theory has assumed nearly *obligatory* status. More specifically, it can be said that feminists often express strong frustration toward various ecofeminist viewpoints, discounting them simply on the basis that they are, in fact, essentialists. It has only been recently that a few feminist theorists who had led the charge of anti-essentialism subsequently began to reflect on the negative consequences of compulsory *anti-essentialism*. Chief among these examinations has been the effect of using the term *essentialism* as a pejorative term to compel the refinement of one's feminism (Moore, 2008, pp. 282-283).

The critique of essentialism in ecofeminism has spread to considerations of feminism itself. Moreover, it has been adopted by many non-feminists and non-philosophers who use the term *essentialism* merely to draw quick conclusions based on oversimplifications of complex issues and questions. Salleh states that *essentialism* is routinely invoked as a strawman by both men and women when drawing conclusions about anything with which they may disagree (Salleh, 1996, p.

141). As Spivak has observed, non-philosophers routinely use the term to refer to all kinds of things when they are in doubt. Without having done one's theoretical homework, the term essentialist is bandied about by those who adopt "anti-essentialist" stance against their presumed opponent (Ibid).

Stacey Alaimo (2000) dismisses fundamentalist viewpoints and questions common conceptions of the relationships between gender, nature, and morality. She advocates against both idealizing *and* devaluing women's connection to the natural realm. Rather, Alaimo makes an argument that recognizes the complex and often fraught relationship that exists between gender and the natural world. Birkeland (1993), meanwhile, suggests that essentialist beliefs stem from patriarchal ideology, which claims nature to be separate from culture and grants males a position of authority. Such a belief system, Birkeland contends, frequently results in the assumption that women are somehow closer to nature and have a privileged relation to nature that is somehow unavailable to men. Prentice (1988) also calls into question the notion of women being inherently linked to nature, claiming that it reflects a political prejudice toward masculine forms of engaging the world. She argues that males can also develop ethical and empathetic relations with the natural world and that gender differences should not be essentialized.

3.5 Challenging Anthropocentrism in Islamic Environmental Thought

Both culture and history constitute a significant part of human relations with nature. In several Western contexts, ecofeminism's relations to the sacred have been primarily conducted from Christian theology. Other religions have also been extended to participate in encounters and seek to collaborate differently. The philosophical debate between deep ecologists and ecofeminists in the West has also centered on masculinist, patriarchal, Western anthropocentrism, and ethnocentrism. Both ideologies celebrate nature, are concerned with ecology, and seek to move toward a form of responsibility that properly comprehends human relations with the elements of the nonhuman world in ways that may be compatible, albeit dissimilar (Sessions, 1991, pp. 92-105). Addressing the issues of environmental and gender discrimination is certainly not easy. Each challenge is linked to various societal dimensions, namely the political, economic, historical, cultural, religious, and social dimensions, among others. To this must be added the specific context

within which collaborative movements take place. The existence of a women's movement in Iran, for instance, is especially challenging given that the debate over the environment and gender is surrounded by fear and institutionalized legal barriers affecting women and femininity in the country.

In the Western context, the connection between ecofeminism and the sacred has primarily been examined from a Christian theological perspective. Other religions have been encouraged to engage and participate in various forms of collaboration that seek to explore the relationship between the sacred and the environment. In some cases, this has led to the examination of nature and the sacred being conceived in terms of women and involving gender.¹⁴⁷

Islamic scholars have studied ecology in recent decades, drawing on primary sources of the tradition such as the Qur'an, hadiths, and commentaries (Nasr, 1968, 1994, 1992, 2000; Khalid, 1998; Ahmad, 1997; Ali, 1993; Haddad, 2006; Abu-Hola, 2009). The interest in examining the relation between ecology and religion coincides, to some extent, with Lynn White Jr.'s publication of "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in 1967.¹⁴⁸ Since then, the field of Islamic environmental awareness has expanded and become a growing area of study (Foltz, 2005, pp. 24-25). The environmental aspects of Islamic theology have gained increasing prominence, leading to numerous articles, websites, blogs, organizations, Campaigns, and initiatives that investigate various dimensions of the relationship between Islam and ecology.¹⁴⁹

One of the most recent treatments of this subject matter is *Muslim Environmentalism* (2019) by Anna M. Gade, who sets out to investigate the intersection between Islam, Muslims, and environmental ethics by employing case studies focused on nature conservation, faith-based ritual, and legal. She provides a new perspective on environmentalism that reorients approaches to environmental issues and highlights the potential of Muslim environmentalism to address pressing

¹⁴⁷ A conference series focused on world religions and ecology was held at the Harvard Divinity School for the Study of World Religions (CSWR) from 1996 to 1998, organized by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim; it featured programs dedicated to Religions and Ecology, including Christianity and Ecology, Buddhism and Ecology, and Islam and Ecology.

¹⁴⁸ The essay by Lynn White Jr. entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," published in 1967, focused on Christianity, particularly the Western Christian worldview, as partly to blame for the ecological crisis that became increasingly apparent. White suggested that the Biblical concept of man's dominance of nature and the belief that nature was created solely for man's benefit and enjoyment had led to negligence and exploitation of the environment. See Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson (eds.), *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The 'Lynn White Thesis' at Fifty* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

¹⁴⁹ Such websites as <https://www.theecomuslim.co.uk> and <http://www.khaleafa.com>

contemporary issues. Gade's characterization of Muslim environmental consciousness implies that "the patterns of interaction between local and global formations constitute those things to be emulated, rather than any regional features that might be normatively categorized as 'Islamic'" (Gade, 2019, pp. 29-31). She argues that the Qur'an possesses authority in a variety of systems and is widespread among practitioners and thinkers of religion, something that ought not to be taken as a prognosis of Muslim mindsets. This perspective provides a more nuanced approach to understanding the relationship between Islam and environmentalism and emphasizes the need to consider cultural and contextual factors when examining the intersection of religion and environmental ethics.

Gade aims to recognize cross-cultural and cross-temporal global patterns with regard to Islam and environmentalism, among other factors. She assumes that the Qur'an, Muslim traditions, and historical experiences such as colonialism have been shared and interpreted worldwide (Gade, 2019, pp. 30-31). Gade's study identifies two ways in which environmental ethics is intertwined with Islam for Muslims: the first being Islam as a means to promote environmentalism and the second being Muslims who use environmentalism to accomplish religious objectives. The first involves incorporating environmental concerns into ritual and theology, adopting prescriptive messages, and essentializing Islam to assert its authority. This approach is motivated by a desire to address environmental issues and crises and may provide existing environmental schemes with an Islamic justification. It focuses on religious teachings such as environmental responsibility rituals, authoritative pronouncements, including interfaith declarations and *fatwas* (Ibid, p. 43). The second approach is constituted by Muslims who engage in environmental protection for religious reasons, apart from the usual paradigms offered by environmental science (Gade, 2019, pp. 27-28). Recognizing Muslim resources to be autonomous systems of knowledge, they commit to an assertive environmental consciousness that illuminates a typical environmental humanities project.

Gade's work may be said to align with that of Ruether (2005), who stresses the inherent pro-environmental potential in each world religion and emphasizes the necessity of addressing critical issues related to gender, race, and class across such traditions. She argues that "ecological theology and ethics" provide a valuable opportunity to construct a holistic appreciation of the divine existence that underlies and maintains the various processes of the natural order (Ruether, 2005, p.ix). By integrating insights from science and acknowledging the ecological challenges

facing humanity, Ruether puts forward a vision that recognizes the interconnectedness of all beings and seeks to address the crisis of human history in a sustainable and responsible way.

Religious activists within the Muslim community have frequently emphasized the interconnectedness of nature and women. However, it is relevant to observe that discussions of gender and feminism among Muslim scholars and activists have remained relatively limited. Instead, the emphasis tends to be on the concept of gender complementarity and alternative approaches to addressing gender issues within religious teachings and traditions.¹⁵⁰ Islamic feminists are inclined to emphasize the distinction between points stated in the Qur'an and issues conditioned by specific historical situations. Hence, the Qur'anic injunction of "commanding the good [*ma'ruf*] and forbidding the evil [*munkar*] as considered through the lens of ecofeminism raises serious challenges to the modus operandi of most ruling governments. Specific areas of application may be challenging governmental decisions to allow for manufacturing practices that emit toxins into water and soil, especially in areas immediately next to downtrodden communities whose most vulnerable individuals include the women, generally mothers, who bear the primary responsibility for their children's well-being and are most affected by illnesses caused by toxic contamination (especially of sources of drinking water).

Ruether (2005) notes that several Islamic environmentalists have engaged in interpreting the Qur'an with a view to explore the relationships between human beings, the natural order, and God (Ruether, 2005, pp.73-76). She stresses, however, that Muslim and non-Muslim feminists have paid insufficient heed to the intersection of feminism and environmentalism in the Islamic context. For their part, Muslim feminists have primarily emphasized the equality of genders before God despite the biological and functional differences. However, apart from a few instances, Islamic environmentalists generally have not focused on the subordination of women and the degradation of nature, as have modern Western feminists. Ruether notes that Islamic environmentalists offer critiques of the adverse consequences of Western consumerism and technology on the environment. However, the concern voiced by conservative Muslim communities over the moral decadence associated with Western influences often results in tensions and a reluctance in accepting influences emerging from Western modernity that would threaten

¹⁵⁰ As an instance, Amina Wadud's book titled "Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective." (Oxford University Press, 1999) provides a feminist reinterpretation of the Qur'an that explores the text from a woman's perspective and questions the traditional patriarchal interpretations.

the preservation of local traditional values. This tension is something that is also evident in the environmental debate (Ibid).

There are varying interpretations of Islam with regard to how sexuality and environmental concerns are related. The differences are not only along scholarly lines but also involve individuals and groups who adopt various definitions of feminism and ecofeminism depending on personal or communal opinion or dominant conventional practices and trends in different domains of society. Ali (2014) has stressed the need to establish a sustained exploration of the relationship between the sacred, the natural order, environmental concerns, and gender. According to him, the lack of such a discourse among Muslim environmentalists and feminists has impeded the broad comprehension of how gender differences may relate to ecological challenges, such as environmental degradation (Ali, 2014, pp. 112-114).

Ammar's work stands out in this regard, offering an interpretation of environmental justice in Islam (2005) that highlights the importance of considering the social and cultural factors contributing to environmental problems. Considering the marginality of women in many Muslim nations, a more nuanced approach can be taken to understand factors that contribute to population growth and other environmental problems. According to Ammar (2003), one predominant belief among Muslims is the doctrine of predestination. She notes that most Muslims in developing countries face significant challenges of poverty, including water scarcity, poor water quality, urban desolation, and public health issues (Ammar, 2003, pp. 380-382).

Another challenge is that of population control, a thorny issue for most Muslim societies, which generally have high birth percentages. Ammar claims that Muslims often do not recognize environmental degradation as resulting from human greed and injustice, focusing instead on being victimized through the process of colonialism, racism, and discrimination (Ibid, p. 382).

Afrasiabi has suggested that a comprehensive approach is needed to examine the nexus between Islam, ecology, and gender and how contemporary challenges may be properly addressed (Afrasiabi, 2003, p. 287). This approach acknowledges the complexity of these issues and integrates multiple perspectives while offering an innovative and imaginative perspective that challenges conventional norms. Haq (2003) prefaces his study of Islam and ecology by emphasizing the need to begin by considering the issue as a historical endeavor. He argues that understanding the environmental crisis from an Islamic perspective requires recognizing the magnitude of the challenges it involves, which include the need to reconstruct Islamic texts and

traditions while acknowledging that this process is ongoing and not definitive, even if there is an overpowering community consensus. His objective is to address the issue of Islam and ecology and encourage an imaginative reconstruction of Islamic thought that addresses contemporary challenges in a balanced and attentive manner (Haq, 2003, pp. 121-124).

Muslim activists and environmentalists in Iran have rarely presented perspectives on the conservation of nature in the context of women and gender. A few of them *have* offered approaches, however, that seek to address issues related to deforestation, global warming, natural disasters, pollution, diseases, and animal extinction. Those who have become aware of the impact of war on women, children, and the environment have been active in advocating for reconciliation and conflict resolution (Foltz et al. 2003). For the most part, however, literature on Islamic environmental ethics, women, and Islamic feminism has not followed modern Western ecofeminism in asserting that there is a conceptual link between the fate of the natural environment and the oppression of women.

The Iranian environmental movement integrates Islamic principles, feminism, and environmental protection, emphasizing women's participation. This integration is driven by three factors: the influence of Qur'anic and Islamic legal traditions in advocating for environmental protection, the harmonization of traditional practices with contemporary Islamic historical values, and the recognition of the significance of a feminist perspective in framing Islamist environmental priorities and rights (Afrasiabi, 2003). Afrasiabi (2003) examines the proposition that Islam has the means to advocate for environmental conservation, noting that Muslim scholars should go beyond conventional interpretations and re-evaluate crucial beliefs in order to tackle current ecological issues effectively and efficiently. He challenges the environmental sustainability of conventional forms of Islam and highlights the inconsistencies in the arguments of some contemporary environmental Islamic scholars, particularly on the issue of Islamic anthropocentrism (Afrasiabi, 2003, pp. 291-294). According to Afrasiabi, in order to adequately address contemporary society's environmental challenges, a significantly altered Islamic theology must be developed, one that substantially diminishes the emphasis on human-centeredness.

Afrasiabi notes that environmentalists have routinely criticized monotheistic religions, including Islam, for being anthropocentric. He also points out that establishing an Islamic form of humanism is problematic, and these challenges cannot simply be overlooked by pointing to the ecologically friendly aspects of the religion. Afrasiabi suggests that a more nuanced approach is

needed that considers the tension between humanism and environmentalism within Islamic theology and tradition (Afrasiabi, 2003, p. 290). In other words, he believes that the discussion of Islam and ecology should not be limited to highlighting the environmentally friendly aspects of the religion but should also address the challenges posed by the human-centric worldview inherent in Islamic theology, assuming that this translates into potentially negative consequences for the environment.

Two responses are generally offered by Muslims to such criticism. The first is to argue that critics like Afrasiabi misinterpret Islam and fail to comprehend its teachings. This response provides a variant interpretation of Islamic teachings that emphasizes the significance of protecting the environment. The second response entails attempting to provide a contemporary formulation of the inherent compatibility of Islamic teachings and the well-being of nature. In other words, this second approach seeks ways of reconciling Islamic beliefs the necessity of caring for and protecting the environment. The literature suggests that this latter response is less prevalent than the first.

The term *religious humanism* generally refers to the idea that religious teachings can be used to promote ethical values and principles that benefit human beings. Afrasiabi argues that such religious humanism is not common in Islamic history. He assumes that ecological parameters have been absent in previous Islamic traditions and that they are lacking in contemporary discourse as well, which for him makes reconciling religious teachings with environmental concerns problematic for Muslims (Afrasiabi, 2003, pp. 289-290). Afrasiabi holds the opinion that a viable approach to nature must be developed so that Islamic teachings can respond to the contemporary need for environmental protection.

The main challenge facing Islamic ecofeminism is bound up with the ongoing tensions between conventional and modern interpretations of Islam. On the one hand, conservative interpretations see women as subordinate to men and view environmental concerns as secondary to economic Development. On the other hand, there are progressive interpretations that emphasize social justice, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

3.5.1 The Unseen Concept of Iranian Ecofeminism

Civil society can flourish in stable and mature democracies where individuals' freedoms and rights are protected. In such democracies, citizens can freely form associations, express opinions, and participate in public affairs without the fear of repression or persecution. Such an environment creates the conditions for civil society to operate effectively and contribute to social Development and reform. In authoritarian/totalitarian states such as Iran, however, civil society actors must circumvent the state's restrictions on their activities. Moreover, they are forced to operate within the confines of the state's legal framework, which may restrict activities such as forming associations, expressing dissenting opinions, and participating in public affairs. The very nature of such a political system creates challenges for civil society actors who seek to promote salient environmentally friendly policies. The autocratic elements of the system can hinder proactive environmental strategies if they deem such obstruction to be politically expedient, and this, even if civil society actors successfully raise awareness and advocate for change.

Environmental protection [*Hifz-e Mohit-e Zist*] as a concept that has been popularized in Iran evokes dynamic associations among communities that advocate the participation of citizens seeking to protect the environment regardless of the numerous environmental issues impacting the health and well-being of the natural environment, wildlife, and communities in Iran. Since Iran was not suffering from severe resource depletion caused by overconsumption, industrialization's devastation has only attracted significant attention in recent years. In contrast to industrialized Western countries, in Iran, post-materialist values emerged later. Even though environmentalism's emergence and early formation can be traced back to the early 1990s, its expansion is not merely due to the occurrence of environmental catastrophes throughout the country (Fadaee, 2011, p. 80).

In 1971, the Ramsar Treaty, also known as the Convention on Wetlands, was signed in Ramsar, a coastal city in Iran, making it the world's inaugural environmental treaty. This agreement holds immense significance as it pertains to preserving and protecting wetlands worldwide (Shokri et al., 2008, p.209). The spread of the West's green ideologies in the 1980s meant that educated parts of Iranian society gravitated toward environmental questions. Until the beginning of the 1990s, engagement in civil activism remained practically absent. Thus, collective organizational activities related to environmental and ecological concerns failed to materialize.

The emergence of environmentalism at the beginning of the 1990s coincides with the appearance of the Reform Movement. The transformation of Iranian society after the Revolution meant that environmental activism exercised increasing influence in the country's environmental, cultural, political, and academic domains. However, this influence came at a time when the political marginalization of actors was on the rise, a factor that shifted participation in social movements to individuals (Offe, 1987). As a result of the eight years of war following the Iranian Revolution of 1978/1979, a severely constrained political atmosphere had emerged in Iran that marginalized the majority of the Iranians from public involvement in decision-making. It was only after the Khatami's presidential election in 1997 that individuals and groups were openly encouraged to engage in public efforts, including those related to the rights afforded to individuals and citizens by the government. As a result, various forms of public activities were facilitated, providing a sphere for emerging new fields of public life and civilian activities.

Considering the evidence that the environmentalists in Iran consist of official, quasi-official, and unaffiliated activists, it should be noted that environmental activism is being fought mainly along two fronts, namely at the grassroots and state levels. The grassroots movement is made up of women, youth, and middle-class and higher-income groups. It is important to note that the Iranian environmental movement has been involved in a struggle along a number of crucial intersections, including individual subjects versus multi-axial agendas, provincial versus capital groups, and Islamist versus secularist ideological preferences. Moreover, the environmental *protection from below approach* holds the potential to expand beyond borders, while the Development of *political environmentalism* is regarded with wariness among some government officials as being a cover for both political and secular nationalism (Afrasiabi, 2003, p. 433).

The Islamic Republic's policy of environmental protection appears in Article 50 of the Iranian Constitution, which states that protecting the environment (in which the current and coming generations are supposed to lead a prosperous social life) is a public obligation. Hence, economic activities and any other matter associated with environmental pollution and irreparable destruction are prohibited (Constitutional Law of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1979). The emergence of environmentalism in the early 1990s, however, also owes its existence to the restructuring of the Environmental Organization of Iran in 1997 and the implementation of the National Environmental Protection Action Program (Fadaee, 2011, p. 82). Environmental groups or associations, like other societal actors, showed a general tendency toward the expansion of

Iranian civil society, which rose in part due to what has commonly been referred to as *the environmental crisis* in Iran. The National Environmental Protection Plan called for collaboration among relevant formal organizations and civil society, relying mainly on implementing various schemes aiming to associate several groups of individuals, organizations, and manufacturers on the basis of environmental considerations.

Environmental activism provides women with a channel for participation and engagement in societal affairs. In many societies, women have limited opportunities to participate in public and political life. Environmental activism offers women a viable way to become involved in their communities and to have a voice in decision-making related to environmental issues that affect them. Furthermore, by raising awareness and advocating for change, women can work towards creating a more just and sustainable society. Such efforts, combined with the fact that several official Iranian women have been leading voices of the Iranian environmental movement, has meant that it is entirely legitimate at this stage to discuss an *ecofeminist vision* in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Women's high level of affinity toward environmental issues is a conduit for their involvement in environmental efforts. However, this is subject to the caveat that Iran's socio-political situation is rather erratic, which implies possible setbacks at any point. Still, the prospects of Islamic ecofeminism, situated as it is between the traditional and post-modern constructions of Islam, appear to be relatively robust, although it must necessarily face practical, theoretical, and theological pressures.

Iran's socio-political plight from 1979 to 1997 was of an authoritarian nature, with a centralized system exerting tight control over all aspects of Iranian societal life. As a result, it was challenging for NGOs to be established during this period. The first environmental NGO in Iran was founded in 1980 by Farrokh Mostofi, the director of BoomIran. This organization opposed the draining of the Anzali Lagoon near Rasht on the Caspian coast. BoomIran's publications included a monthly magazine entitled *Wildlife and Nature (Shekar va Tabiaat)* and the *Encyclopedia of Iran's Fauna* (Foltz, 2005, p. 8). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that the committed involvement of women toward environmental preservation in Iran can be traced back to the years before 1994. In early 1971, for instance, a group of rural women from Ashkezar, the southern province of Yazd, established the first Iranian environmental effort to stabilize dunes and combat desertification (Foltz, 2010, p. 161; Shokri et al., 2008, p.209). However, in 1997, the election

opened up the sphere of civil society, allowing for greater political participation and freedom of expression. This led to a reform movement in Iran that aimed to address the limitations of Iranian society and promote democracy and social justice. The reform movement resulted in significant changes and structural transformations that impacted various aspects of Iranian society, including the economy, education, and women's rights.

The *Green Front of Iran* (GFI) (*Jebhey-e Sabz-e Iran*) was founded in 1989 by Siamak Moattari. With over two thousand members nationwide, the organization focuses on educating the public about environmental issues and publishes the quarterly magazine "Green Peace" (Foltz, 2005, p. 9). The organization also promotes public participation in environmental clean-up projects.

In 1990, shortly after establishing the GFI, a few students in Talesh established the *Green Group of Masal* (GGM). Initially, the group's aim was to serve the Talesh people and learn about their identity and culture. However, upon discovering the Shafarood company's destructive activities in the Masal forests, the group shifted its focus to protecting the environment in the area. The GGM's protests against deforestation resulted in the arrest of some members. However, with the backing of the local community and authorities, the group ultimately prevented the Shafarood company from engaging in further deforestation in the area.¹⁵¹

In Iran, relations between the state and society have changed significantly since the mid-1990s, leading to new social movements, including the environmental movement. During the course of this period, several civil institutions have emerged whose focus is specifically on the sustainable Development of local communities and indigenous peoples. The Centre for Sustainable Development and Environment (CENESTA) is one prime example. Khadijah (Catherine) Razavi and Mohammad Taghi Farvar Razavi initially established the Institute in 1979. However, they left Iran for several years due to a lack of freedom to engage in civil activities in the first decade after the Iranian Revolution. After their return in 1991, they resumed and re-registered the Institute. CENESTA's approach to Development is alternative and sustainable, addressing environmental, economic, social, institutional, and political dimensions, in addition to taking into account

¹⁵¹ A brief history of the group (2011). Retrieved from <http://masalgreengroup.blogfa.com/post/8> (Last accessed on February 12, 2023).

endogeneity, equality, and rights-based considerations that include gender, sociocultural, communal, and economic factors.¹⁵²

The early 1990s witnessed a pivotal moment for Iranian civil society, as three global conferences were held, with participation from government officials and NGOs from various countries. This contributed to the emergence of NGOs in Iran. Subsequent to the 1992 World Conference on the Environment held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the Islamic Republic of Iran's accession to the conference document, popular organizations, including the Women's Society Against Environmental Pollution (WSAEP) (*Jamiat-e Zanan-e Mobarezeh Ba Aloudegi-e Mohit-e Zist*) were gradually authorized to engage in environmental effort. Mah Lagha Mallah, often referred to "The Mother of Nature," played a crucial role in initiating the activities of the WSAEP with the overriding objective to "improve the environmental culture of diverse individuals through continuous exploration and education, promoting environmental ethics" (Moghaddam, 2020, pp. 67-68).

Due to her perseverance and dedication, WSAEP officially launched its activities in 1993, and later, in 1995, it became officially registered with the Ministry of Interior (Ibid). Mallah reports that a chance encounter with a book titled *Environmental Pollution* while working at a library inspired the establishment of WSAEP. The book's alarming depiction of the bitter reality of pollution and environmental destruction in the United States of America was eye-opening for her. This was her first introduction to concepts such as the depletion of the ozone layer, the melting of the ice cap at the North Pole, and extinction of biological species. By virtue of having read the book, her awareness of the state of the environment and planet Earth had been transformed. At this point, Mallah began to express her interest in protecting the environment.

One of Mallah's contentions has revolved around the crucial role that the family unit can and must play in preventing pollution and environmental destruction. Despite the challenge posed by population growth, she has consistently emphasized that efforts to combat environmental degradation must begin at the family level in order to raise awareness and effectively address environmental preservation in a sustainable way. It was when she realized that decreasing pollution is a matter of cultural transformation and collective effort that she was led to found WSAEP (from

¹⁵²Further details about Cenesta's alternative approach can be found on their website: <http://www.cenesta.org/en/category/projects-en/>

R. Banietamad's documentary film, titled "All My Trees," 2015). Her comprehensive approach to environmental issues calls for involvement of both the public and private sectors. In addition, Mallah stresses the value of educating families, local communities, schools, and companies so that all members of society may participate in care for the environment.

According to Moghaddam's view (2020), the WSAEP had two bylaws, neither of which was being followed (despite one of them being registered with the Ministry of Interior). Instead, the members of NGOs were utilizing their own drafted bylaws. As a result, there was a contradiction in the way the WSAEP functioned at the beginning, with statutes being imposed by the Ministry of Interior and the board of trustees displaying duplicity of performance. Ultimately, this hindered the organization's growth.

Despite challenges at the organizational and administrative levels, Mallah has stressed that individuals, too, can be meaningful contributors to environmental preservation and protection if only they are determined enough (From R. Banietamad's documentary film titled "All My Trees", 2015). In order to foster an atmosphere of hope, Mallah's own house has served as a meeting place for environmental activists since the very founding of the WSAEP. Environmental activists routinely meet there to discuss various environmental challenges, determine shared trajectories of action, and consider the implications of ideas that have been put into practice. Examples of actions by the WSAEP include protests against pollution in Tehran and other cities, writing letters to the Ministries of Education and Science to address the authorities' lack of concern and action, and contacting university professors to encourage them to promote environmental education (Moghaddam, 2020, p. 70).

The WSAEP has been instrumental in promoting environmental education and protection in Tehran since its inception. Through its education programs, the Society has educated thousands of families on various topics such as waste separation and healthy drinking water while working to introduce Natural Environment as a compulsory subject in schools and as an elective for university students. In addition, the Society has collaborated with schoolteachers, health mediators, and householders to promote environmental protection measures. It has also cooperated with state cooperative managers in rural areas to procure composite materials and clean up villages. Moreover, the Society has participated in numerous conferences and workshops at home and abroad and has published a seasonal news and application magazine called "Cry of the Earth"

(Ibid, p. 76). The Society even served as one of the meeting places for secular and dissident women who had no other place to gather in the 1980s (except for their academic research circles).¹⁵³

Iran's involvement in the World Population Conference of 1993 resulted in the formation of health-oriented associations. One of the influential organizations established following the conference was the Family Planning Association, founded in 1996, and led by Hossein Malek Afzali, the Deputy Minister of Health at the time. The international conferences held during this period bolstered such development even further, creating opportunities for previously marginalized groups to operate independently and facilitated the entry into civil society of individuals who maintained ties with the government.

However, it was not only domestic Developments in Iran itself that led to key breakthroughs in terms of the environmental movement. The 1994 UN Conference on Women in Beijing raised public awareness of environmental issues in Iran, according to Shojaie, a self-proclaimed ecofeminist.¹⁵⁴ In addition, Iranian delegates who attended the conference also contributed to raising awareness of both women's rights and environmental issues. This suggests that international conferences can positively influence public awareness of important issues such as gender equality and the environment.¹⁵⁵

Following the participation of Iranian delegations in the three world summits in the first half of the 1990s, the recognition of non-governmental organizations by the government was facilitated. As a result, numerous organizations received licenses, some of which had launched

¹⁵³ According to women's rights activist Mahbobeh Abbasgholizadeh, the state of civil society in Iran in the 1980s was characterized by a lack of public and nongovernmental collective movements. Indeed, the only gatherings were women's meetings and studies conducted in homes and charitable associations, which essentially played a supportive role. Although associations of religious minorities dating from before the revolution remained; however, none were very active (Farhangkhah, 2007, p. 13). This is an image of a period when any political or civil group that opposed or criticized the government was brutally suppressed, and any civil movement was scrutinized and obstructed from a political perspective. Fatemeh Farhangkhah considers a specific group of NGOs established in the early postwar years to be "modern and with objectives similar to the demands and conditions of the period," established by individuals with ties to the government. These organizations were "often established with the awareness that the government was providing public funds and played a significant part in transitioning from traditional association activities to organized, modern, and Development-oriented ones" (Ibid).

¹⁵⁴ Mansoureh Shojaie brought up two contentious articles, one in "Women" and the other in "The Second Sex" journals, when discussing the Iranian women's movement. By writing about *ecofeminism* in an article, she became the first to address this progressive feminist topic in Iranian intellectual society.

¹⁵⁵ See Mansoureh Shojaie, "The plural concept of feminism from Beijing to New York," The Feminist School, (accessed on February 18, 2023). Refer to: <https://shorturl.at/vAFU1>. The significance of the Beijing Conference consisted of its specific address to women in Third World Nations and the broad and diverse presence of women in such countries, particularly in Muslim nations. From this point on, the discourse of Eastern feminism and the issues of feminists in Muslim countries entered the discussions and even influenced the feminist theories.

activities only years earlier, including the GFI and the WSAEP. Others were founded by technocratic forces close to the government, forming quasi-governmental organizations. Still, activists established others focusing on fields like children,¹⁵⁶ environment, social detriment, development, and poverty alleviation.

Among WSAEP's efforts was opposition to the construction of the Tehran/North freeway, a project by *The Mostazafan Foundation of Islamic Revolution* in collaboration with a Chinese company in 1996. In 1977, the Center had published an article titled "Freeway Tehran-North, why not?" edited by Nasrin Khatibi, outlining the reasons for opposition, including the plan's destructive effects on ancient forests and vital water bodies. Despite significant protests in Sohanak, the twenty-two-year effort to oppose the project ultimately failed, largely due to officials' ineffectiveness and various power struggles.

In 1999, the first women's cooperative for environmental protection was established in Tehran with the assistance of seventeen women, who called it the Green View Supporters' Cooperative (*Taavoni-e Hamian-e Negah-e Sabz*). According to Moghaddam's interview with the Iran Feminist Tribune, the cooperative is not classified as an NGO but operates as a civilian organization that aims to promote sustainable human Development. It consists entirely of women, although men also assist them in implementing their agenda (Moghaddam, 2020, p.76). The cooperative was initially founded by a group of environmentalists who had experience in the field, as well as educated women who were interested in civil activism, albeit with no prior background in environmental activism. The principal objectives of the cooperative were the promotion of environmental culture and the development of employment opportunities by way of women's empowerment, and its programs have been deemed acceptable from a cultural, social, environmental, and economic standpoint.

The Cooperative of Green View's supporters also initiated the Women's Employment Homes, a project aimed at empowering women through life skills as well as education in the areas of technology, occupation, and entrepreneurship. These homes were constructed on a trial basis with the assistance of the municipality in several areas of southern Tehran, including Kian Shahr, Nasser Khosro, Khani Abad, and Islam Shahr. Ultimately, the goal was to establish an independent women's cooperative in the district to ensure the program's sustainability (Ibid, pp. 77-78).

¹⁵⁶ For instance, the Society for Protecting the Rights of Children (SPRC) was founded in 1994 as one of the most remarkable non-governmental organizations of the time, initiated by secular social activists.

Moghaddam, a vital cooperative member, explained that this plan was put into action in a Kian Shahr bazaar following two years of monitoring. The decision to target women who head households as well as those without husbands was based on two factors. Firstly, household headship is often associated with financial hardship, thus necessitating more significant support. Secondly, the presence of a husband may increase the risk of legal action being taken to prevent women from working (Moghaddam, 2020, p.79). She acknowledges that the establishment of employment opportunities and the increased participation of women yielded positive results during this period. Reports of these activities were regularly shared with the municipality and “Women's Magazine” and “Soroush Banovan,” as well as with foreign journalists. Eventually, competition arose among mayors in the southern districts so as to establish an employment center for women heads of households. However, the absence of a written agreement during meetings between women's activists and the mayor and cultural commissioner resulted in a shift towards merely instrumentalizing women's efforts. In this way, the government handed over the abandoned area to the cooperative for supervision. Nevertheless, by formalizing the centers, the government privatized them at an exorbitant price. Although, this seems to be a typical pattern in the government's approach to individuals or groups who seek to promote the public interest. In other words, governmental offices initially offer their support but eventually hinder progress. This is often due to their fear of the movement gaining momentum, particularly among the underprivileged in disadvantaged areas with little to lose (Moghaddam, 2020, pp. 78-85).

In this regard, the activities of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Iran, due to the complex political climate and existing institutional arrangements, challenge activists and environmental groups, which are affected by the country's socio-political conditions. Furthermore, the inability to meet environmental groups' demands efficiently indicates that there may be limitations to the government's ability to respond appropriately to specific issues. To put it another way, the NGOs in Iran face the challenge of navigating the political environment and cooperating with government officials. Although some NGOs prefer to operate autonomously, cooperation with officials occasionally becomes essential to achieve objectives. However, this can also lead to

accusations of false compromise by other NGOs that value independence from government involvement.¹⁵⁷

Before Khatami's presidency, Shahla Habibi was the head of the Bureau of Women's Affairs. The primary force behind the organization, however, was Massoumeh Ebtekar. Khatami appointed Ebtekar as Iran's first female vice president and head of the Organization for the Protection of the Environment. In addition to establishing the Vice Presidency for Environmental Affairs, the media, academic journals, and the press featured more prominently in the discourse on sustainability-related issues. A notable instance occurred with the establishment of a vice presidency for the environment, which encouraged the growth and recognition of approximately 300 local environmental NGOs. This suggests that the significance of civil society groups in addressing environmental issues in Iran was increasingly recognized (Foltz, 2005). Azam Bahrami, an environmental expert, makes the following observation, however:

“During Ebtekar's period in office, no significant project was initiated, although I can mention the abolition of locally produced fuel, which caused significant pollution, or the fact that the space for non-governmental organizations and environmental NGOs was slightly opened. Some things were also done in the field of education, which can be deemed to be among Ebtekar's positive achievement. However, in general, when we examine large-scale projects such as the problem of aerosol or water and the field of sustainable Development and general education, and chief among all, the interaction with and appearance before large ministries such as oil, energy, and agriculture, which have created severe problems for the environment, Ebtekar's performance cannot be said to be positive.”¹⁵⁸

Following Bahrami, we can go further and say that during Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's tenure, a significant *regress* in environmental awareness and activism occurred with regard to

¹⁵⁷ For instance, the environmental movement in Iran has developed within a semi-authoritarian (semi-democratic) context, a fact that has both enabled and limited environmentalists' activities. Thus, while the semi-democratic context may offer some space and certain opportunities for civil society activities, there are also limits that hinder these groups' activities.

¹⁵⁸ Refer to: Azam Bahrami (n.d). “Ebtekar's Management in the Department of Environment.” (Retrieved February 5, 2023, from <https://macholand.net/ebtekar01/>)

environmentalism in Iran, primarily due to the ideological instrumentalization of environmental efforts, most of which were depicted as being mere ploys of colonialism and imperialism.¹⁵⁹

Throughout history, women have played a significant role in conserving natural resources due to their innate connection with nature. In Iran, women have traditionally been assigned the role of primary protectors of natural resources, in large part due to their cultural responsibilities. Women have also been essential in educating and shaping the values of future generations. Therefore, recognizing the crucial role of women in conserving natural resources can lead to positive societal social changes. Such recognition also has the potential of uniting Iranian and non-Iranian women.

In order to understand the reason for the lack of mass support for the environmental movement in major urban areas in Iran, two major issues need to be taken into account. The first one involves the participants' motivation, which includes personal and professional concerns in the natural sciences. The other factor relates to the political and instrumental structure within which participation occurs. In many cases, the absence of free political parties and a free platform for political participation has resulted in individuals with political concerns turning to environmental activism.

Environmental groups in Iran are characterized by their diversity, as reflected in their different ideologies, activities, objectives, and scale. For instance, while some groups focus exclusively on environmental protection, others seek to question the social, political, and economic structures of Iranian society. Thus, espousing a combination of ideologies is quite common among such groups. Despite the differences in ideologies and activities, however, Iranian environmental groups concentrate on *cultural change* as their principal purpose. The environmental NGO sector in Iran consists primarily of organizations that focus on *urban* environmental issues. The organizations involved include Climate Change and Environmental Pollution, Academic Scientific Research, Woman-Environment, Young-Environment, Protection of Wildlife, Individual Issue Campaigns, Common Environmental Issues, and Nature Conservation (Fadaee, 2011, p. 90). However, some groups also prioritize rural areas and villages, focusing more on community Development. For instance, protecting a region's vital ecosystem

¹⁵⁹ For additional details on this topic, see Hossein Godazgar. "Islam in the globalized world: consumerism and environmental ethics in Iran" in *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability*. (Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2011): 115-136.

requires diversifying livelihood practices compatible with the environment and replacing traditional industries based on the region's capacities and opportunities. In this way, incompatible forms of earning livelihood can be eliminated, contributing to the preservation of the ecosystem.

The Zagros Mountain Ecosystem hosts about 10% of the country's population and provides a livelihood opportunity for many. It also provides 40% of the country's water supply, being the origin of several major rivers, including the Karoon. Unfortunately, the Zagros forests have faced significant challenges and threats recently. The diversification of livelihood and indigenous industries with a view to achieving greater alignment and compatibility with the region's natural conditions can lead to two interrelated benefits: 1.) the elimination of labor that is incompatible and harmful to the environment and 2.) the protection of this vital ecosystem of the country. In order to achieve the goal of promoting socio-economic Development while also protecting and restoring biodiversity, a project called "Involving the Local Community of Golsefid Village in the Revival of Traditional Handicrafts as a Sustainable Alternative for Livelihood" was introduced under the Central Zagros Biodiversity Conservation Plan. This initiative aims to replace the exploitation of the Zagros oak forests by promoting and supporting sustainable efforts, such as the revival of indigenous handicrafts in the region. The women of the local organization Shuliz believe that with the assistance of cultural and environmental activists, it will be possible to reduce oak forest deforestation. This will have to be achieved by agreeing on sustainable exploitation of natural resources based on the income generated from the sale of handicrafts. In this regard, the women of Golsafid village, in collaboration with the Chaharmahal Natural Resources Department and Bakhtiari Province, have taken a symbolic step to revive and restore part of the forest land on the outskirts of their village. Shuliz, a region in Iran, boasts a product known as the Leily doll, which is regarded as a symbol of beauty in several areas of the country, including Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad, Chaharmahal, Bakhtiari, and Fars. The Leily doll is a performing doll of Il Bakhtiari, and efforts are underway to secure national registration and UNESCO recognition for this unique regional product (Bozorgnia & Raies Dana, 2016, pp.88-91).

The presence of Iranian environmental groups concerned both with urban and rural challenges allows the movement to have a wide reach and gain the support of various sectors despite governmental pressures and limitations. Gadgil & Guha (1994) challenge the conventional wisdom in Western social science, which suggests that environmentalism is primarily an interest of the upper middle class. Instead, they suggest that environmental movements in the Third World

indicate that environmental concerns can be critical to individuals regardless of their economic status. This implies that environmentalism may be driven by factors other than material wealth and can be a social phenomenon that transcends class boundaries (Gadgil & Guha, 1994, p. 131).

It must be admitted, however, that in Iran, environmental activism *is* mainly driven by the middle class, a situation similar to that of Europe. Although, despite the differences in social base, Iranian middle-class environmentalists have focused on increasing awareness of environmental issues among the lower classes. This indicates that environmental issues are perceived as involving and affecting all members of society, not just the middle class. It is also significant to note that the environmental movement has a significant number of student activists, particularly among the “Environment-Youth.” This contingent overlaps with both the women’s and student movements. The focus on drawing attention to the younger generation is a priority for many environmentalists since they recognize the importance of engaging and empowering young people to create a sustainable future.

Between 1997 and 2003, the Youth National Organization supported young groups interested in socio-political participation. Comprised of individuals aged 16-35, the groups organized events and workshops, conducted research, and participated in joint projects with municipalities. However, despite having up to 1,000 members, many of these groups experienced a decline in activity after the 2005 presidential election of Ahmadinejad, primarily due to reduced support from the Youth National Organization. The fact that the leaders of these environmental groups primarily belong to the educational sector suggests that environmental activism in Iran is considered to be more or less an intellectual endeavor.

It is worth considering further specific cases of Iranian environmentalism to gain a sense of the distinct nature and implications of the subject. The city of Rasht in Iran's Guilan Province attaches considerable significance to nature conservation, as the forests and the Caspian Sea are vital to the population’s livelihood. However, over the past several years, the growth of tourism and misguided policies have caused significant environmental damage so that earning one’s livelihood in Rasht has become a concern. NGOs have addressed the issue by focusing on forest and sea protection through seminars, workshops, Campaigns, protests, and lobbying with government agencies.

In the Iranian context, both men and women are involved in the founding of NGOs dealing with environmental issues, and both are also represented in the organizations’ leadership.

Nevertheless, the widespread fact that a strong link exists between feminism and the environmental movement may explain the presence and prominence of women in such movements. This connection may be due to a shared concern for social justice and equality and a recognition that environmental issues disproportionately affect women and marginalized communities. The large number of women involved in environmental movements and the prevalence of feminist principles in environmental organizations indicate considerable overlap between women's movements and environmental movements. Despite the patriarchal culture and restrictions enforced on women following the Iranian Revolution, the women's movement in Iran has steadily grown and gained strength in recent years, partly due to increased access to education in rural and tribal sectors (Afkhami & Friedl, 1994; Kar, 1997; Khosrokhavar, 2004). This has resulted in an educated generation of women moving away from traditional gender roles and participating in various aspects of social life.

Women's participation in the environmental movement is considered to be empowering by many women, enabling them to question traditional gender roles and contribute to social change. Furthermore, by collaborating with communities toward a collective purpose, women see themselves as able to gain a sense of agency and purpose that may have been denied them previously (personal interview, December 25, 2021). Fadaee (2011) contends that individuals who participate in collective action related to environmental issues may do so for various reasons, including improving their social status or personal mobility. They may also have political or instrumental motives. Successful social movements, however, are typically those that can balance *both* personal/social needs *and* political/instrumental objectives. This suggests that social movements draw upon various motivations and interests to sustain themselves and achieve their respective aims.

3.5.2 New Social Movement Theory: A Critical Analysis of Iranian Environmentalism

A social movement refers to a form of social behavior that lies between bureaucratic and revolutionary behavior. While bureaucratic behavior tends to be characterized by a relatively low level of organization and structure, revolutionary behavior typically involves a high level of

organization and structure. As a result, social movements occur in the middle of this spectrum when individuals join in order to struggle for one or more set objectives.

Herbert Blumer's *symbolic interaction* approach considers social movements as "collective behaviors" that aim to create a new order of life. These movements arise from unrest and are motivated by discontent with current affairs and a desire for a new order of life (Blumer, 1958; 1978). Turner and Killian (1987) expand on Blumer's definition of social movements by highlighting the aspect of resisting change. More specifically, they argue that social movements emerge as a means of objectifying personal struggles in order to find an identity and create new values in the surrounding world.

This signifies that social movements are typically formed to address a specific issue or set of issues in a particular area of a particular society – such as the domain of politics, culture, or economics – at a particular time. These movements are often formed by groups of individuals who feel that the existing power structures or social institutions are not adequately addressing their needs or welfare. It should be remembered that these definitions of what a social movement is, all emerge against the backdrop of the prevailing atmosphere of the modern world and its self-reflections, as based on the modern discipline of sociology. As the modern world has become more interconnected and interdependent, people have increasingly recognized the significance of collective action and social organization to address shared concerns and pursue common objectives. Sociology developed as one particular approach to the study of social subsistence and welfare. It conceived of society as a dynamic entity transitioning from "tradition" to "modernity," from "faith" to "reason," from "reproduction" to "production," and, as Tönnies (1887) expressed, from "community" to "society." This perspective, based on modern Western assumptions, merely categorized social actors on the basis of its self-image and its self-understanding of modernity. As such, it was only possible to be categorized as either *promoting* or *hindering* modernization. Such definitions of social movements, however, were all themselves merely reactions to (and reflections of) the prevailing atmosphere of the modern Western world now gathered under the heading of sociology.

Contemporary social theorists have suggested that given that old social movements were conceived of and understood in light of their own contexts and assumptions, NSMs demand attention and new forms of analysis since they emerge due to new sets of general social change. Such changes, they assert, affect social control, and are resisted by new social movements. This

trend in sociology draws on observations by critical theorists such as Touraine (1981; 1996; 2000), Habermas (1987), and Melucci (1986, 1991, 1996), who have noted changes in contemporary society which have subjected individuals to increased control and surveillance (Crossley, 2002, p. 150).

Touraine (1988) and Melucci (1985) draw a line separating old and new social movements based on their connection to the ideals and norms of industrialism by focusing on economic issues and the state. They highlight the role of advanced capitalist modes of production and rapid industrialization in Western societies in giving rise to post-industrial societies. These new societies are characterized by the dominance of information technology and the service sector. According to Touraine (2000), the type of sociology he refers to as *classical sociology* can no longer account for and address today's issues. He (1981, p. 232) refers to contemporary society as a *post-industrial* or *programmed society*, while Melucci (1988, p. 331) dubs it a *complex society*. Touraine acknowledges the existence of multiple movements and interest groups, and he argues that every society is centered around a particular mode of organization, which he calls its *historicity*, leading to one central conflict and struggle. Thus, it may be asserted that the thesis of NSMs reflects a shift in *historicity* and the corresponding change in the central struggle of Western societies rather than any particular *empirical feature* of these movements (Touraine, 1981, pp. 23-24).

In contemporary post-industrial society, NSMs have emerged that differ from the older social movements that emerged during the industrial age. These new movements are characterized by their focus on *post-material concerns*, such as environmental protection, social justice, and individual rights. The idea that social movements are associated with industrialization and post-industrialization, however, is itself rooted in historical observations of social movements in Europe and North America during the 19th and 20th centuries. During this time, industrialization led to significant social and economic changes, including the rise of the working class and increased urbanization, which gave rise to social movements such as labor unions, feminist, and environmental movements.

It is important to note, however, that such associations between social movements and industrialization *do not apply* to all societies. Many societies that have not experienced industrialization or post-industrialization have also had social movements that have sought to address various social and political issues, albeit social movements that do not always fit the descriptions and categories of old or new social movements as theorized by modern Western social

theorists. For example, anti-colonial and independence movements in Africa and Asia, the Civil Rights movement in the United States, and the Arab Spring movements in the Middle East were all social movements that emerged in societies that had not experienced industrialization or post-industrialization in the European sense. Therefore, the assumption that societies that have not experienced industrialization or post-industrialization (in the modern Western European sense) do not have social movements is flawed.

Social movements can emerge in any society that suffers from issues or grievances that individuals desire to address, regardless of the level of industrialization or post-industrialization of that society (Scott, 1990, pp. 79-81). It may be added that designating the European conception of modernity as a necessary condition for understanding new social movements is also problematic. Given that subjectivity, the state-society relationship, and democracy are all primarily conceived within the framework of European modernity, new social movements, even if they are not modern European, end up becoming conceptualized by categories and evaluated based on standards that are modern European. The historical evolution of new social movements and concomitant phenomena and concepts in non-European contexts is sorely needed.

Industrialization has had significant and far-reaching effects on many aspects of society in the West, including on the nature of *labor*. Here, the impact of *mechanization* demands attention, for it refers to the replacement of manual labor with machine labor, a shift that has led to increased efficiency and productivity in many industries. Other significant changes have also resulted, especially in *demographics* (in terms of urban and rural migration), *social relations* (in terms of the emergence of enormous, complex organizations in many industries, as well as the shift away from traditional social structures and towards more formalized relationships), and *values* (in terms of a transition from a predominantly religious worldview to a secular one). The experience of industrialization and modernization in the Third World differs from that of the Western world. While the four areas of change (labor, demographics, human and social relations, and values) are also found in the Third World, other factors, such as *colonialism* and *foreign intervention*, have significantly impacted its economic and cultural Development. These factors have often led to extreme reactions against Western cultural imperialism, resulting in withdrawal and isolation. Therefore, it is essential to consider the Third World's cultural and historical contexts when analyzing industrialization and modernization in these regions.

According to Moghadam (2017), Iran's industrialization process was not an isolated phenomenon but a part of a more comprehensive global effort. As a term, the *semi-periphery* refers to countries that are not wholly industrialized, although not entirely peripheral or underdeveloped either (Moghadam, 2017, p. 622), and as such, it may be applied to Iran. Capitalism and working-class expansion in Iran occurred more slowly and moderately compared to European nations (Moghadam, 1987; Bayat, 2010). Moreover, the working class in Iran differed in its characteristics and modes of operation from its European counterparts. And even though the communist movement existed in Iran, it never caught on to the point of becoming a central movement in the country. Historically speaking, social movements in Iran have tended to be anti-imperialist and anti-authoritarian rather than anti-capitalist. Consequently, the environmental movement in Iran operates under conditions and constraints that differ significantly from environmental movements in the European or North American contexts.

Contextual variations between Iranian environmental movements and those in Western contexts can be identified along political, cultural, demographic, social, and economic lines. The environmental movement in Iran, for instance, operates within a semi-authoritarian political system, which often reduces the scope and effectiveness of environmental activism in the country. Additionally, the unclear nature of CSOs in Iran can also be said to affect the ability of environmentalists to organize and advocate for their cause. Cultural, demographic, and economic factors also need to be taken into account as they may also influence the environmental movement in Iran, possibly creating additional challenges and limitations. The relationship between the Iranian state and the Iranian environmental movement's relationship, for instance, is quite complex and often unclear and unpredictable. While the movement has a certain degree of independence, there are numerous restrictions imposed on it by the government. As such, Iranian environmentalists operate primarily through state-registered NGOs. All this suggests that theories of new social movements, even those that distinguish between industrial and post-industrial societies, need to be re-examined in light of specific emerging contexts (Fadaee, 2011, p. 93).

Afrasiabi considers that the foundation for a wider grassroots environmental movement in Iran was established in the late 1990s, specifically during the tenure of Khatami (Afrasiabi, 2003, p. 433). He asserts that the simultaneous development of the environmental movement from both grassroots and government bureaucracies during the Khatami era has led to overlapping interests and cooperation between the two, complementing civil society's role in the environmental

movement (Ibid). This new development helped usher in new “discourses, narratives, counter-narratives” (Fadaee, 2011, p. 93) and forms of resistance that varied markedly from conventional frameworks of national sovereignty. It may be said that the Iranian environmental movement’s characteristics are to some extent associated with new social and political movements led by intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971) – i.e., they suggest that individuals are involved in the movements who seek to educate and empower the masses as they struggle to overcome. In Iran, the intellectuals leading the new social and political movements, including the environmental movement, are educated and come mainly from the middle class. This group is crucial in mobilizing other social and political movements, including those led by students and women, which share similar objectives and values.

It is essential to point out that Iranian environmentalism, one of the social movements that emerged from this period, originated from a movement primarily centered on formal grievances in the context of a conflict between the state and citizens. However, the movement eventually raised new grievances and concerns that were not necessarily related to initial sources of conflict. This points to the fact that social movements are not static entities but are shaped by their shifting historical contexts and the broader dynamic social and political forces surrounding them. The environmental movement in Iran constitutes an emerging strand in social and political activism that aims to address environmental issues through cultural and social change. In this regard, it should be remembered that the perceived lack of direct political action does not mean the Iranian environmental movement is not political. Rather, Iranian environmentalists’ critique of the political order is different in its approach from more conventional social movements of the past in Iran.

It can be observed that environmentalists in Iran are not seeking to overthrow the established political and economic systems but instead are focused on increasing awareness of environmental issues and promoting cultural and social change. In Iran, various aspects of the environmental movement may be co-opted by the authoritarian regime in power, a prospect that can have severe consequences for the movement and the country. Doyle and Simpson (2006) argue that such precariousness of such co-optable aspects may point to what can be described as a narrow, post-materialist version of environmentalism that suggests two inter-related phenomena: 1.) a focus on lifestyle choices rather than systemic change and 2.) a shallow and tepid version of civil society which does not challenge the underlying power structures of the regime (Doyle and

Simpson, 2006, p. 750). Indeed, civil society in Iran needs to be clearly defined, and the new social movements that have emerged in Iran cannot be separated from politics.

Unlike Europe, the activities of civil society in Iran are often closely tied to the state and its performance. A significant number of new social movements in Iran emerged from the Reform Movement of the late 1990s, an intra-governmental political movement. As a result, the assumption by Western theorists of new social movements that such movements necessarily form and then function *separately* from the state is inaccurate and irrelevant in the Iranian context. According to Afrasiabi (2003), during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, there was a convergence or “dovetailing” of two environmental forces in Iran: social environmental movements from below, on the one hand, and state-endorsed environmentalism from above, on the other. This means that these two forces were not necessarily in opposition but instead had the potential to complement and reinforce one other. It also implies that the Iranian government may be limiting the ability of environmentalists and social movements to engage in broader political or social issues and may be seeking to control their actions and modes of communication. Moreover, such involvement by the state may also force environmental movements to become *apolitical* due to the threat of possible repression (Doyle & Simpson, 2006, p. 759). Given the highly politicized nature of Iranian society and its institutions, including CSOs, many activists of social movements in Iran are aware of the political implications of their role. This means that they are not only concerned with social issues but also with the policies and actions of the state.

Despite all that has been said, environmental activists cannot be absolved of criticism. While the merits and contributions of the environmental movement in Iran have been discussed and analyzed thus far, there are still significant issues and challenges that need to be addressed. The criticism of the movement is primarily related to its effectiveness or limitations as well as the strategies and tactics that have been employed by environmental activists. Moreover, the lack of academic treatment of environmental and social movements in Iran may reflect a broader lack of interest in societal issues, which may be due to political factors prioritizing other research areas or policies. Whatever the reason may be, the general lack of awareness and concern could be detrimental to the effectiveness of environmental action in Iran since it may limit the resources and support offered to such movements.

Aside from a few notable exceptions (Afrasiabi, 2003; Fadaee, 2011 & 2012), issue-specific movements in Iran, such as the environmental movement, have not been the subject of in-depth

and systematic study. To be sure, in recent years, Iranian academics have started to examine environmental activism in Iran from various perspectives. However, they acknowledge that their work is some of the first significant efforts in a field that can be considered as yet an *unexplored area of research*. The authors who *have* conducted research on environmental movements in Iran present diverging narratives, although some basic overlaps can be detected. This implies that there is no clear consensus on the nature, dynamics, and impact of these movements among scholars and researchers, and that there may be competing perspectives and interpretations of the available data. While there may be a lack of scientific research on environmental movements in Iran, it is likely that a number of factors contribute to the discrepancy between policy objectives and policy implementation in the realm of climate and environmental policy. One factor that may play a role, for instance, is the highly restrictive societal conditions within which environmental and social movements are forced to operate in Iran. Considering the interplay of multiple factors, such as political and economic structures, cultural norms, and historical contexts, is essential to gaining a more comprehensive and in-depth sense of the distinctive nature of Iranian environmental movements. Future research endeavors could explore how such factors interact and contribute to environmental policy outcomes in Iran. It would also be beneficial for researchers to consider the perspectives and experiences of local communities and environmental activists in Iran in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the environmental movement and its potential impact on policy. Furthermore, scholars need to approach this topic with cultural sensitivity and avoid relying solely on European/Western theories and experiences. By incorporating diverse perspectives and engaging in cross-cultural dialogue, researchers can contribute to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of environmental movements and their role in shaping policy outcomes.

Apart from the aforementioned shortcomings, the differences between the environmental movement in Iran and the new social movements in Europe are rooted in the two regions' different historical and cultural contexts. More specifically, it may be noted that the slower pace of capitalist Development and industrialization in Iran has led to different concerns and priorities among Iranian activists (Yaghmaian, 2002, pp.24-25). Instead of focusing on post-materialist and anti-consumerist values, Iranian activists are more concerned with issues of identity, culture, and political rights.

New social movement theory *does* emphasize the significance of cultural dimensions in shaping human actions and beliefs. Moreover, the theory recognizes that some issues, such as

environmental crises, have planetary dimensions and affect individuals directly, leading to the interdependence of global concerns. Both of these provisions allow for the distinctively Iranian experience to contribute to environmental activism in a number of ways and at multiple levels. In addition, the loose structure and composition of the Iranian environmental movement align with the theories of Touraine (2000) and Melucci (1996), in which social movements are typically loosely structured and composed of individuals from the educated and middle-class strata of society. These groups have the resources, education, and cultural capital needed to mobilize and sustain a social movement. In the Iranian context, the environmental movement has been led by individuals from the educated and middle-class strata of society who have been able to operate their resources and knowledge to organize and mobilize others around environmental issues. The observations thus far suggest that these patterns are consistent with those observed in European environmentalism. Moreover, the lack of democracy in Iran means that the media does *not* have the same level of freedom or autonomy as in many Western countries. Despite these challenges, however, the media has played an essential role in facilitating the growth and Development of the Iranian environmental movement. Through various channels, including traditional media outlets, social media, and alternative media, activists have been able to raise awareness about environmental issues and mobilize support for their cause.

According to Melucci's theory (1996), the environmental movement in Iran is formed by conscious individuals whose identities are redefined in civil society and formed as a fluid and invisible network that slowly shifts and turns into a social movement. He specializes in the role of typically *imperceptible networks between individuals in daily life* to identify the root causes of movements. Melucci asserts that in the current complex and information-rich society, people constantly create and exchange *new unseen behaviors* as part of their daily routine and that these experiences fuel movements. Hence, even when a movement appears to have lost momentum due to external pressures, its fluid and imperceptible network of relationships among its followers, which persists in their daily lives, continues (or may continue) to serve its intended purpose.

In this regard, environmental activists often explore alternative methods to resist the prevailing societal norms and challenge existing power structures. When presented with an opportunity, they ask individuals to mobilize and protest against environmental injustices. Unlike traditional movements that aim to gain political power through organizations and political parties, supporters of these new environmental movements prioritize the creation of a platform for their

members to express their opinions in civil society. In other words, such movements focus on creating spaces for citizen participation, promoting bottom-up decision-making rather than seeking to attain power and influence through conventional means.

The situation in Iran may be described as a tragic example of *the good suffering with the bad*, symbolizing the presence of individuals within the country who work to secure the interests of outside forces. When the well-being of the environment is co-opted as a political tool, it ultimately leads to its destruction, while those who take responsibility for protesting and fighting against environmental disasters with compassion and a sense of civic duty are often the targets of oppression. The destruction of the environment and the oppression of activists are intertwined in the Iranian context. It is a phenomenon that often leads to discouragement and despair and needs to be properly examined and addressed.

4. Reimagining the Ecofeminist Paradigm: Artistic Manifestations and Connections

4.1 The chronology of the emergence of modern art in Iran

While modernity refers to the 16th and 17th centuries as a transformation in the pattern of Western human life, one may argue that modern life coincided with the advent of the Enlightenment in the 18th century and the first Industrial Revolution in the 19th century (Hall et al., 2011, p. 35). Kant (1784) argues that the epoch of Enlightenment epitomizes the questioning of human rationality. Yet, one of the significant puzzles of modernity lies in the fact that modernity itself could not be defined and questioned. Many thinkers attempted to resolve this conundrum, yet somehow further contributed to the enigma. Hence, there remains the question of the meaning of modernity. The notion of *fluid modernity* offered by Zygmunt Bauman (2000) neatly clarifies the dilemma, responding to the question, “What is modernity?”

In Iran, the question of the meaning of modernity resulted in the appearance of two approaches, the essentialist and the nominalist. In the opinion of the essentialists, modernity has an essential nature that originated as a historical phenomenon only in the West. Admittedly, one can refer to modernity only when the conditions are given. According to this approach, the (modern) human subject is considered the main feature of modernity. The modern subject purportedly has the courage to use reason to rationalize itself and its world, per Kant’s appropriation of the motto *sapere aude* (dare to know), which sets the tone for his 1784 essay “*Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?*” In the essentialists’ view, modernity as a whole is not divisible – i.e., it cannot be divided into parts that would then be broken down into modern and non-modern elements.

Iranian intellectuals who adhere to nominalists, meanwhile, hold that modernity possesses a non-fixed essence, which belongs to a particular historical period and localization, and [the modernization opportunity] persists. *Modernity* is a complex phenomenon with which individuals selectively engage. While some aspects of modernity can be embraced, others can be dismissed, leading to a diverse and nuanced relationship with the concept. According to this approach, it is possible to characterize the idea of contextual or regional *modernities* and thereby speak of *Indian*

modernity or *Iranian modernity*, each exhibiting distinct manifestations and dynamics of modernity in that specifically defined context.

The question of the nature of modernity has also led some postmodernists to ponder whether it is possible to define post-modernity *without* a proper understanding of “the modern definition” (Lyon, 1999). The two interpretations formed in this direction can be considered modernity as episteme and modernity as technology. In Foucault's view, as presented in *The Order of Things* (2001), modernity constitutes a sort of *episteme* (cognitive system)¹⁶⁰ that differs from previous cognitive systems regarding the approach to God, the world, and humankind. Conversely, *technology* (not only as a machine but also as social forms of organization and management) represents the outcome of modernity. Modernity has impacted Iran's society, art, and culture in the broadest sense, both in terms of *episteme* and in terms of *technology*.

Broadly defined, modernism has emerged through a sophisticated formative process, which, in simplified terms, can be divided into four broad areas, namely the political, economic, social, and cultural spheres. Modernism in the political sphere has brought about the emergence of the secular state and the deterritorialization of the church. Within the economic sphere, modernism can be detected in the widespread prevalence of capitalism and the Development of various forms of technology. New class divisions, various forms of social formation, and separation point to the impact of modernism on the social sphere. In the cultural domain, meanwhile, modernism is evident in the transition from theism to atheism and in transmutations in gender relations (Hall et al., 1999, p. 3).

In contrast to approaches critical of modernity that consider it a crisis of theology and political-ethical philosophy, proponents of modernity assert that it represents the emergence of a new discourse that, first and foremost, transforms the mode of production. By assuming and adopting this definition, history, and society are then conceived of as domains of human exploitation that require evolving legal frameworks for governance that mirror the way human beings produce and reproduce their history and society, devoid of the manifestation and emanation of God (Turner, 1992, pp. 27-28).

¹⁶⁰ As outlined by Foucault in *The Order of Things*, the term *episteme* relates to the underlying, organized structures which shape the production of scientific knowledge in a specific historical and cultural context. It represents the “unconscious” set of rules and frameworks that define the potentialities and limitations of knowledge at a particular time. This concept can be seen as an epistemological field defining the terms of knowledge's potentiality in a given time and place. It is frequently compared to Thomas Kuhn's concept of *paradigm* (1970), which also highlights the influence of shared beliefs and frameworks on scientific knowledge and progress.

Determining a particular point in time that marks the onset of a modern era in a society is challenging, and in this respect, Iran is no exception. On the one hand, it may be said that the question of modernity in Iran has sparked ongoing debate over the course of the last three centuries. The issue of how challenging it is to define what modernity really is when it begins (and for our purposes, what *Iranian modernity* is and when it begins) becomes clear by referring to more recent historical contexts. In the public imagination, for instance, the period from the 1960s all the way to the Islamic Revolution in 1979 is often said to mark the manifestation of a materially prosperous period of Iranian modernity. This view of modernity, however, may be anachronistic, given that for the majority of Iranians at the time, a proper examination and comprehension of the nature, varieties, and far-reaching implications of modernity did not take place. Rather, in most instances, a superficial and unreflective emulation of the West in the various domains of society became equated with modernization. This unreflective, popular, and ideologically charged attitude toward Western forms of modernity – either in terms of conformity to or reaction against Western expressions – prevalent at the time, thus influenced the way in which modernity would be conceived, theorized, and lived in Iran.

However, aside from the question of the temporal origination and bounds of modernity, some theorists have also pointed to its specific spatial (i.e., geographic) aspects (Mitchell, 2000). The process of modernization is widely conceived to have originated and spread throughout Europe, whence its exportation to increasingly more expansive areas outside the West. As a result, after the onset of Western modernity and in the wake of Western imperial and colonial exploits, the history of non-Western regions often consists of non-native imitations or interactions with Western modes of modernity. In this respect, being modern or post-modern has often simply meant behaving exactly as the West behaves (Mitchell, 2000, pp. 1-2). Weber's perspective on modernity (1948), meanwhile, emphasizes the emergence of a new social organization through the spread of rational bureaucratic structures.

In place of a straightforward binary distinction between modern and non-modern, one may also consider the degree and extent to which different aspects of modernity within societies have or have not proved fruitful. This allows for a nuanced classification and allows for societies to be differentiated along lines that are *non-modern* or, *less modern* or *more modern*, which underscores the necessity of re-examining the history and rediscovering the basis of traditional and modern societies. On the basis of such an approach, Iranian society can be considered *semi-modern*, with

its political, economic, and social structures undergoing some level of modernization without them reaching particular levels observable in the most prominent Western industrial nations. The adoption of this approach to modernity in the context of Iran allows for subsequent interpretations of the interrelationship between art and the various facets of Iranian society in the context of what may termed *Iranian modernity*.¹⁶¹

The art of each nation is the product of the ontology, thought, and spiritual conditions created by its inhabitants. Consequently, the aesthetic roots and the paths that art takes emphasize the social ideology and philosophical approaches underlying that art. Furthermore, art serves as the site of the interplay of some of the most significant historical and artistic currents emerging from the cultural, social, racial, religious, ethnic, and geographical aspects of a particular region. In the contemporary world, this also includes the interaction of local and global factors. The potent influence of Western art on the East is expresses itself in a form of art that is neither thoroughly Western nor native.

In the case of Iran, the emergence of the new wave of modern art has eclipsed or almost eliminated traditional art, in large part due to the obscuring of the aesthetic sensibility of Eastern artists in the course of their studies in Western academic institutions. Shifts in European art tradition, centered primarily on the individual artist and personal creativity, did not take place in pre-modern Iran. Due to Iran's distinct encounter with modernity, the issues of identity, legitimacy, and shared comprehension differ from the way they have been framed and engaged with in the European context. In Iran, the disconnect between the performing arts and literature, for instance, has led to a decline in the significance of visual culture and its connection with the masses. And rather than drawing on their own traditions in facing the challenges of the future, many Eastern thinkers have often imitated the West by *distancing* themselves from their traditions.

¹⁶¹ Iranian society has dealt with modernity since the late Safavid period (1501-1736), particularly from the beginning of the Qajar period (1794-1925) and has evolved from a non-modern society to a semi-modern. Following Roueen Pakbaz (2006), foreign influences in 17th-century Isfahan enabled Iranian artists to integrate new cultural and artistic approaches (Pakbaz, 2006, pp.140-141). This led to the Development of a distinct style that combined perspectival techniques from European art with traditional Iranian elements, known as *farang-y-sazi* or "making foreign." With the assistance of European scholars, in 1851, the Qajar dynasty founded Dar al-Funun, a secular polytechnic college established to offer higher education. The painters, influenced by such new concepts, began to pursue other subjects for their paintings, a move which caused artists to become more socially engaged. It should be noted that the interpretation of the term "semi-modern" evokes the impression that there is an "original" to which other societies share a similarity, which refers to the same essentialist position that modernity has an unattainable "originality." The term's usage, however, only highlights aspects of these societies becoming modern in terms of episteme and technology.

The nature and impact of the role of culture in Iran has been at the center of the challenges the country has faced since the early 20th century. Culture and politics are strongly intertwined in Iran, with even independent modern art movements being bound to the socio-political context. Modernism in Iran emerged along socio-political lines and was influenced by the Shi'ite religion so that it incorporated popular culture and religious elements. Since religion is the dominant force in Iranian culture, it frequently exerts powerful influence over various cultural domains.¹⁶²

In 1962, Al-e Ahmad's work *Weststruckness (Gharb-Zadegi)*¹⁶³ was published, popularizing the term *West struck (Gharb-zadeh)*, which referred to those blinded by the illusions of modern Western so as to emulate it mindlessly. *Gharb-zadegi*, meanwhile, was meant to signify the condition of individuals who have been "struck or intoxicated by the West." The term *Gharb-zadegi* was actually coined by the Iranian philosopher Ahmad Fardid. It has been translated into English as *Occidentosis*, *Westoxication*, *Westoxification*, and *Weststruckness* (Grigor, 2014, p.94). Al-e Ahmad characterizes *Occidentosis* as a disease like tuberculosis (Al-e Ahmad, 1962/2006, p.27). The term was meant to point to a manifestation of intellectual and cultural stagnation caused by the colonial and neo-colonial dominance of the West over the East. Through their writings, reformists like Jalal Al-e Ahmad sought to formulate an imperative for Iranian society, calling for an ideological reform through an alternative approach more closely aligned with Iranian values rather than a blind imitation of the West.

As for the practice of the arts in modern Iran, it can be dated to the late Qajar period, which was one of political instability combined with the necessity of reformation. The period produced both cultural and artistic reforms, leading to a reinvention of the arts and the way artists perceived themselves and their work. A wave of new ideas entered into an otherwise stagnant environment in the early twenties. The process of cultural transfer acquired an academic basis. However, due to various factors, modernity and the processes of cultural transfer did not transfer modernity in the same way or with the same significance as in its Western context. Therefore, during this process of transfer, key components, such as rationalism, subjectivism, and critical thought, were not transmitted in the fundamental sense but were only adopted provisionally.

¹⁶² For further insights into the relationship between culture, politics, and society, see Nematollah Fazeli. "Politics of Culture in Iran: Anthropology, Politics, and Society in the Twentieth Century." (Routledge, 2006).

¹⁶³ The word *Gharb* signifies the West, and *zadegi* is refers to being infected or struck with disease. Al-e Ahmad suggests that a disease is an external accident propagated in an environment that is predisposed to it (Al-e Ahmad, 1962/2006, p. 27)

Eventually, three main currents emerged against modernist art in Iran. One group considered the path to salvation to consist of a process of a complete disconnect from the past, relying extensively on the imitation of Western innovations. A second group, traditional in sentiment, perceived any foreign element as both detrimental and hostile to Iranian culture, regarding modernist Iranian paintings not only as an imitation of Western styles but also as a deviation. A third group emphasized the necessity of preserving cultural integrity and transcending alienation, considered the prospect of rebuilding cultural society so as to create a platform for the formation of a national art movement that would allow artists the freedom to choose and simulate the modern achievements of Europeans (Mojabi, 1995).

While modernist movements such as Cubism, Surrealism, and Expressionism emerged in Europe, Iranian art stagnated in the early 20th century. Iranian artists instead tended to create academic expressions of Iranian subjects, focusing on scenes of family reunions, street views, landscapes, and still life (Emami, 1986, p. 641). This artistic divergence reflects the dichotomy between European avant-garde experimentation and a more conservative stance in Iran.

The beginnings of contemporary Iranian art can be traced back to the founding of the Madrasah-yi Sanaye-i Mostazrafeh in 1911. The Fine Arts Academy was headed by Kamal-ol-Molk and its evolution can be divided into four periods: 1910-1942; 1942-1958; 1958-1979, and 1979 to the present. It should be noted, however, that these divisions serve as a practical framework for historical research and may not necessarily reflect the actual phases of artistic Development (Pakbaz, 1999; Diba, 2013). Following the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1905, Persian literature reacted swiftly to the changing political and social landscape. However, further advances were required in painting and other artistic fields to introduce new artistic styles. Modernism catalyzed a turn toward figurative art in Iran, prompting artists to explore depictions of the natural world (Daftari, 2002). In contrast to contemporary European styles like Impressionism and Symbolism, Iranian 19th- and early 20th-century artists tended toward depictions of naturalistic appearances (Emami, 1986).¹⁶⁴ In the 1940s, significant events led Iranian art in a new direction and marked the dawn of contemporary and modern Iranian art (Pakbaz, 1999, p. 168).¹⁶⁵ However,

¹⁶⁴ Regarding the formation of modern Iranian art, Diba states that the absence of a unified national artistic identity in modern Iranian art can be attributed to factors such as the influence of Kamal-ol-Molk, local aesthetic preferences for realism, and Iran's cultural isolation during that period (Diba, 2013, p.47).

¹⁶⁵ In this context, "*high art*" refers to academic and traditional art, while "*low art*" pertains to popular and commercial art. Note, however, that the categories mentioned are not absolute and may overlap. For further coverage of this issue,

due to neocolonial tendencies and the influence of foreign and local circles, Iranian forms of art lacked coherence and personal identity (Daftari, 2002, p. 44).

The Second World War and the deposition of Reza Shah led to a significant change in contemporary art in Iran (Pakbaz, 2002, p. 202). Western of the Allied Forces and contact with Western culture encouraged artistic innovation (Yarshater, 1979, pp. 364-366). Artists drew inspiration from the Russian realists, French impressionists, and notable figures such as Cézanne and Van Gogh, which led to experimentation with different styles such as Impressionism, Cubism, Surrealism, and Abstract art (Issa et al., 2001, p. 14; Maleki, 2010, p. 27). The *Apadana Gallery Club* (*Apadana-Kashaneh-y Honarha-y Ziba*) and the *Fighting Cock Art Society* (*Anjoman-e Honari-ye Khoros-e Jangi*), for instance, developed into vibrant platforms for modernist artists who explored the realms of Cubism and Expressionism. Simultaneously, a lively public and press controversy erupted between advocates of traditional and new art forms. As the first modern art gallery in Tehran (1949-1950), the Apadana Gallery promoted contemporary art through exhibitions, lectures, and gatherings, fostering awareness and appreciation of modern art concepts in Iran.¹⁶⁶ The founders of the Khoros-e Jangi Association, meanwhile, including Jalil Ziapour, sought to promote the modernization of Iranian society by way of *the new arts* (*honarha-yi jaded*) as influenced by the European avant-gardes (Mir-Abedini, 1998, p. 193). To this end, the association published the Khoros Jangi Magazine in 1950. The Khoros Jangi Association's members, called Fighting Cock Surrealists, led a movement that had a significant impact on modern Iranian art (Foroutan, 2016). Khoros Jangi Magazine's very first issue, which addressed the state of art and the condition of culture in Iran, included an article by Ziapour, in which he writes:

“From the beginning, the [artist's] aim and method ought to be dissimilar from the one that prevails under our sight. But fortunately, the artistic environment in Europe, particularly in Paris, made a profound impression on me and reinforced my convictions. Our artists frequently complain about our environment not being conducive to art, not encouraging artists, and people failing to comprehend

refer to “*Modern Art and Popular Culture: Readings in High & Low*” by Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik. (New York: Harry N Abrams Inc., 1990).

¹⁶⁶ Based on an interview between Siamak Zende Del and Mahmoud Javadipour, one of the founders of the Apadana Gallery, which took place in the autumn of 2013, was recorded in the documentary “*Three Decades of Iran's Modern Art: Apadana-Kashaneh-y Honarha-y Ziba*,” directed by Amir Hossein Behbahani.

art! However, such objections seem more pointless than being fact. In general, they are unaware of the essential principle stating that “the artist should be the one to ensure a conducive and artistic environment, not the people,” and [so, they] are unaware that the artist is responsible for these adverse surroundings” (Ziapour, 1950, p. 12) [Translated from Persian by the author].

Ziapour emphasized the responsibility of progressive artists to educate audiences accustomed to superficial and imitative art and to open a new level of awareness and understanding for them. The exhibitions in Tehran between 1941 and 1966 played a crucial role in promoting modernism, shaping art concepts, and encouraging art criticism.¹⁶⁷

With the holding of the Tehran Biennials, modern artists proclaimed an independent and official presence vis-à-vis the public for the first time. From this point forward, despite the two decades since its official inception, the Fine Arts Academy (under the purview of the government’s art policymakers) accepted modernism in Iran. However, the fact that Iranian society still more or less inhabited the quasi-classical naturalistic atmosphere of the arts and was therefore unable to accommodate the tendency of Iranian artists towards modern trends should not be overlooked (Mohajer, 1998, p. 48). Eventually, modern art entered a process of growth and expansion that has experienced ebbs and flows all the way up to the current era.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 led to profound political, cultural, and artistic shifts, including those of orientation and criteria in art. From 1986 to 1987, Iranian artists started to resume working and reconstruct the contemporary art of Iran under the weight of a reevaluation of art and themselves as artists. The prevailing tendencies in Iranian art during this time, which mirrored the prevalent ideals of post-revolutionary ideology, resulted in a distinct rupture in

¹⁶⁷ Due to the authorities’ lack of support and policies, modern artists took the initiative to establish independent art galleries as the demand for permanent exhibition spaces grew. The following galleries can be mentioned: Apadana Gallery, established in 1949 by Mahmoud Javadipour and a group of artists (Pakbaz, 1999, p. 891); Gallery Esthetique, established in 1954 by Marcos Grigorian (known as Marco) (Grigorian, 2007, p. 4); The Atelier Kaboud, established in 1950 by Parviz Tanavoli (Tanavoli, 1991, p.6); Iran Modern Art Gallery, initiated in 1955 by Jazeh Tabatabai (Ibid); The Gilgamesh Gallery by Hannibal Alkhas in 1961 (Tanavoli, 1991, p.6); The Qandriz Gallery, opened in 1964 under the direction of Roueen Pakbaz in collaboration with another group (Pakbaz, 1999, p. 893); and Seyhoun Gallery opened in 1966 under the direction of Masoumeh Seyhoun (Tanavoli, 2004, p.21). During this time, the biennial became progressively incorporated and internalized by the state administrators of fine arts and the organizers of biennials through the organization of Tehran Biennials. In 1958, Marco Grigorian, an Iranian delegate and international jury member, organized the first Tehran Biennial. It was a major government-sanctioned event intended to create a modern artistic tradition with an ethnic twist.

Iranian art. The ideology of the revolution that dominated the artistic ambiance of Iran was opposed to any and all forms of artistic modernism, thus restricting what Iranian artists were allowed to draw upon. Pakbaz's remarks help shed light on the context in which Iranian art operated at the time.

“The youth who came to the field in the wave of the revolution opposed all forms of modernist art, exhibiting an extreme and ideological reaction. Following the invasion of Iran by the Iraqi army and during the years of war (1980-1988), creating mural paintings, paintings, and posters with epic, religious, and political themes gained popularity. Under these circumstances, some Modernists migrated to Europe and America. Several others ceased working for a while, while some of the most renowned artists altered their styles under the influence of the prevalent tastes and considerations of the times. [...] In the 1980s, the third generation of modernists also emerged, gaining new insights and transmitting them to the new generation despite the existing restrictions” (Pakbaz, 2002, p. 128).

Contemporary Iranian art has drawn inspiration from various sources, including modern European movements, although many such works predate the revolution of 1979. In the period following the revolution, however, Iranian artists had difficulties achieving their identity-based objectives, both in terms of form and content and in being able to distinguish themselves from broader currents in international art. This led to a renewed focus on traditional artistic roots and a global search for an original sense of identity that would have global implications. The question of personal and cultural identity shifted to the forefront, preoccupying artists and intellectuals in equal measure. The movement to revive tradition involved a hermeneutic approach in which the materials of the past were reinterpreted to meet the demands of the present. Artists grappled with the challenge of distinguishing between imitation and appropriation. Despite the significant hermeneutic shifts that occurred during this time, some consider it a period of crisis, given that many works did not correspond to the true essence of contemporary art.

By the end of the 1990s, a new set of trends, approaches, and methods emerged in Iranian art, driven largely by changes in Iran's political, cultural, and social conditions. During this time, the impact of conceptual art paved the way for theoretical and philosophical discussions on art and

led to the development of what came to be known as the *New Art* (Hosseini-Rad, 2004, p.70). Popular among the younger generation, the New Art movement drew inspiration from global artistic movements while incorporating local features. The prominent features of symbolism and allegory reflected the influence of Iran's national religious culture, the interplay between tradition and modernity, and an exploration of contemporary global issues.¹⁶⁸ The following five features can be said to characterize the New Art:

- 1.) The majority of works of art are *mortal* or *ephemeral*, as if the erosion and obscurity process of the work is itself a part of the creation of the artwork.
- 2.) The audience's *participation* plays a significant factor in the creation process and the work's semantics.
- 3.) Various artistic genres are *combined, interwoven, and integrated* with one another.
- 4.) The presence of *indigenous and national-religious subject matter* is one of the principal elements that characterize such art. Thus, such works of art exude a distinctively *conceptual* tendency.
- 5.) Works of art may be presented *inside or outside the gallery space*. Outside the gallery, such works of art may be presented in the form of installations, performance art, and land art. Inside the gallery space, artwork may be presented by way of performance techniques such as multimedia art, video installations, and photography arrangements.

Despite these developments, the New Art movement lacked a deep sense of reflection, which translated into a rather unsteady experience. The relationship between Iranian art, politics, and economics is a complex one, and this period is no exception. Art associated with the highest level of government, the executive branch, tends to be focused exclusively on the proliferation of political propaganda. However, artwork created under the purview of the government is not necessarily propaganda. Such work is required, however, to adhere to strict regulations in terms of its content, form, production, and display. Shishjavani (2019) divides the institutions involved at the nexus of culture and art in Iran into four categories based on the political economy: 1.)

¹⁶⁸ At the dawn of the movement was an exhibition held in 1921 by artists who were aware that their works would soon be demolished; they began to cover the walls and floors of the four-story rooms of an abandoned house with their works to initiate an unusual experience. According to Pakbaz, "Undoubtedly, the desire to replace the old with the new was hidden in the concept of self-destruction. The artists were among the first group who displayed artworks not in a conventional manner but on a site under demolition, which was to be destroyed along with the building (Pakbaz, 1999, p. 131). See Thompson, N. (ed.). *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*." (Creative Time Books, 2012):152.

governmental, 2.) state, 3.) public, and 4.) private. Given the restrictions within which they must work, many artists in Iran express political issues by adopting an abstract artistic approach [*entezai*], whether in oral or written form.

Despite the contention of numerous artists and theorists, the presidency of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005) and its form of cultural administration did result in the emergence of a new generation of artists and the beginning of a new artistic movement in Iran (Honarbin-Holliday, 2008, pp. 163-164). The impact of the socio-political shifts in Iran was echoed in the domain of art, albeit with somewhat of a delay, under the supervision of Alireza Sami Azar as the director (1999-2005) of the Museum of Contemporary Art (TMoCA) in Tehran.¹⁶⁹ TMoCA promoted apolitical visual arts through group exhibitions and collaboration with the Centre of Plastic Arts of Iran.¹⁷⁰ In an interview with Herfeh Honarmand in 2003, Mohammad Zeimaran criticized exhibitions of new art and conceptual art of the era, emphasizing the dominance of “the concept” in Iranian art and the lack of substantial results (Zeimaran, 2003). Later that year, TMoCA held an exhibition featuring new artistic expressions, particularly the New Art, focusing on Persian garden and landscape design. Subsequent exhibitions of the New Art at the Student Club of Tehran University demonstrated progress in methods of reflection and implementation.

Private galleries also took on a significant role in this period, displaying new artworks and contributing to the development of a new generation of artists in contemporary Iranian art. From 2001 to 2004, private galleries in Tehran exhibited a series of artworks that included the New Art,

¹⁶⁹ At the beginning of 1967, the concept of establishing a permanent space for exhibiting Iranian and contemporary Western art was conceived, albeit the construction was completed in 1977. The museum’s building, one of the rare specimens, resembles modern Iranian architecture inspired by traditional architecture and reflects the philosophical concepts of Iran. Both the design and architecture of this building belong to Kamran Diba. The design of the skylights is reminiscent of the wind towers used in traditional Iranian cities. For more, see Kambiz Navai. “*An Architectural Analysis: The Museum of Contemporary Art, Tehran, Iran.*” (International Journal of Architectural Research, 4(1).2010): 194-207.

¹⁷⁰ In the post-revolutionary era, the TMoCA transformed and embraced new art forms. It expanded outdoor exhibitions to an urban scale, challenging traditional notions. The museum hosted the first Iranian conceptual art exhibition in 2001, initiating a significant art movement. In 2003, in an interview with the Herfeh Honarmand, Severi recounted the issues involved in considering the title of the first exhibition of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Tehran, noting, “As for the title of the exhibition, I have to express that ‘new art’ was adopted due to the fact that we intended to include such arts among painting, sculpting, photography, which have their own spaces, associations, biennials and dedicated exhibitions, by considering the arts that have appeared in the world over the last four decades and that have influenced such arts as painting and sculpture. This title, a broad term, potentially includes sub-categories, including video art, installation, fine art photography art, or integrative art, which we were intrigued to discuss” (Severi, 2003, p. 131). Since its inception, TMoCA has exhibited contemporary Iranian art and diverse contemporary art from around the world. For instance, from February 25 to April 16, 2004, the museum hosted a 20th Century British Sculpture exhibition, which included the works of fifteen British sculptors.

Conceptual Art, and New Media. These works of art dealt with themes such as mythology, mysticism, ontology, women's issues, identity, alienation, social struggle, and the clash between tradition and modernity (Sami Azar, 2005). Subsequent exhibitions featured site-specific and participatory art. Pakbaz (2002) characterizes this new generation of art in the following terms:

“In the contemporary Iranian art scene, modernist tendencies have been marginalized by the new generation of artists, including women, who have emerged with their concerns and demands. This generation may not even recollect the revolution or war events. It has been raised in a confined environment and declares its identity through a distinct language. It seeks to express itself in a variety of ways, both in thought and action, but still faces the unresolved issues of the time. This generation stepped into the cultural space provided during the eight-year Reform Era. [...] The issues addressed by these works [of art] are multifaceted, from personal to social concerns, from feminist sensibilities to concerns about environmental degradation and from nostalgia for ancient rituals to the distressing realities of contemporary life, which are often depicted through elaborate declarations” (Pakbaz, 2011, p. 128).

Severi (2003) has drawn attention to the necessity of the presence and continuation of contemporary artistic tendencies and their role in acknowledging the influence of global conditions on the country. He states, “Although we do not have such social, economic, industrial, technological, and philosophical conditions, however, we are significantly affected by such conditions. We cannot deal with pure purism like in the past, and even within the boundaries of culture, we cannot solely address our traditional and indigenous issues. Indeed, whether one prefers it or not, globalization has its effects in all corners of the world, and precisely we, who are touched by this condition in our country, obviously cannot create works only through our traditional mediums. Moreover, the new media and approaches include the appropriated forms that correspond to the demands of diverse and indigenous cultures” (Severi, 2003, pp. 130-131). It was such moments of reconsideration that proved significant in charting new ways for artists to express a wide variety of political, social, and philosophical issues through new mediums, something that had previously In this connection, expressing a wide variety of political, social, and philosophical

issues in the form of such mediums, which previously had been eschewed by the artists and mainly the abstract canvas for theoretical and structural considerations, became significant.

In this regard, it is worth mentioning that in a personal interview conducted with the artist Nadalian at Paradise Art Center in January 2020, he shared related insights into the concept and position of new art in Iran. According to him, all art must incorporate a *new* feature to be considered art. Being new is not enough to transform something into a work of art, but it is an essential component. When art is *not* new, it reproduces past ideas and attainments. The unintentional repetition and reproduction of past art has the tendency of turning such work into a form of industrial production. However, consciously referring to a past significance or pictorial tradition to create meaning in a new context *can* render the work *new art*. The term *new* in the New Art represents a desired or undesired agreement that deals with new (modern) art or tradition. This intra-border correspondence parallels the distinction between painting and miniature painting, although the translation of the two words appears identical to foreign audiences. Therefore, the word *new* tends to be used more locally and has greater significance in the local context than internationally. The New Art in Iran refers to the impact of various types of unconventional art that emerged in the West and America after Minimalism. These influences have taken on local characteristics in the cultural context of Iran. This type of art, of which the most traditional form is conceptual art, possesses particular characteristics and components ranging from perspective to procedure and includes various modes such as video art, video installation, photography installation, performance art, environmental art, and multimedia art.¹⁷¹ It should be noted that the origins, development, and contextual frames of environmental art in the West have also influenced the development and emergence of the New Art in Iran. It is crucial, therefore, to examine the origins of environmental art in Iran, and identify the specific characteristics of this art form as well as some of its notable representatives.

¹⁷¹ Paradise Art Center on Hormuz Island is an educational and residency center dedicated to promoting environmental and social art.

4.2 Unveiling Environmental Art: Examining the Existing Literature

Since the terms *environment* and *art* intersect in the field of *environmental art*, the question arises as to what results from this merging of the concepts. What dynamics will be set in motion by this multi-layered encounter? A vast majority of the literature on environmental art approaches such questions from the perspective of art history as centered on the early period of the 1960s and 1970s, during which *earthworks* or *land art* emerged as a contemporary art movement (Lawrence, 1972; Baker, 1976; Carpenter, 1983; S. Friedman, 1983; Hall, 1983; Rosenthal, 1983). During this time, environmental art was referred to as *Earth Art*, *Land Art*, and *Earthworks*, with these terms being used interchangeably (Maltitsky, 1992; Tiberghien, 1995; Kastner & Wallis, 1998).

Land Art arose in the late 1960s in the United States as artists sought to challenge traditional art spaces. By creating outdoor installations located directly on the land, artists blurred the lines between art and the environment (Kastner, 1998, p. 11). Although land art has been associated with public accessibility, it should be noted that not all land-based artwork is accessible to the public. As a reaction to the artificiality and commercialization of art in America, the term *Environmental Art* came into being during the same period, representing artistic reactions to concepts of nature. In a period of social transformation characterized by the challenging of established institutions and the shift from accepting authority to contesting it, environmental art appeared on the scene as part of the broader cultural shift from mainstream culture to counter-culture (Weintraub, 2012). While Land Art does not exclusively address environmental issues, it has become more socially integrated into the prevailing culture compared to previous forms of Earth Art (Weilacher, 1996; Kastner, 1998; Boettger, 2002).

During the initial period of its emergence, artists of the environmental art movement basically reacted to the emerging environmental concerns by exploring innovative approaches that incorporated scientific elements into the creative processes (Kastner and Wallis, 1998; Bower, 2011; Smagula, 1983). Artists became increasingly distant from visual life, their inspiration being more rooted in primitive societies that closely connected with the natural environment and lived in complete harmony with it. Along these lines, environmental artists of the time thought that substantial creative activities in pre-industrial societies and ancient periods are still a valid artistic pattern to follow, effectively incorporating many such elements into aspects of modern life and thereby expanding the role of art in the contemporary world (Smagula, 1983, p. 383).

As Smagula has noted, this approach suggested a return to nature, albeit not the rural nature and the ideals of the ages of the past but rather an expanded vision of the environment and an awareness of the direction of the role of the economic, psychological, and cultural aspects that impact the life of individuals (Ibid). And this is indeed how environmental artists chose to participate in nature; by living, witnessing, and interacting with nature rather than merely representing it. In other words, in the artistic creation of the *process* of the result, the genuine concern is *not* simply to create a “final result.” Rather, the aim of environmental artists was to work *with* the natural environment, conceptual notions, bodies, personal experiences, and the inner comprehension of the relationship between human life and the environment (Smagula, 1983, p. 385).

Aware that galleries and museums are not the only suitable places for the presentation and exhibition of works of art, environmental artists created a substantial amount of their art in natural settings and used natural materials. Such ongoing evolution highlights the complex interplay between artistic expression, commercial considerations, and the desire to create meaningful connections between art and the environment (Rendell, 2006, p. 24). Moreover, from its inception all the way up to the present day, the primary concern of environmental art has been the conservation of the environment (Baker, 1976, p.75).¹⁷² It may also be asserted that throughout the course of its existence, environmental art has sought to create conditions for improving the situation of human life on the earth (Blandy et al., 1998).

The terms earth art or land art, environmental art, and eco-art have inevitably come to be used in ways that overlap. Weilacher (1996) has observed that in the contemporary context, there is a prevailing tendency towards indiscriminately applying the term *environmental art* to various forms of artistic design of public space without adequately assessing their real significance and artistic value (Weilacher, 1996, p. 9). And while finding a consistent purpose has proved to be challenging, generally formulated key characteristics of environmental art have included the use of natural materials, most often in natural settings, to create works of art that allow the environment

¹⁷² Using television as a virtual museum in his 1969 exhibition Land Art, Gerry Schum questioned the commercialization of art. In collaboration with artists including Richard Long, Barry Flanagan, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Marinus Boezem, Jan Dibbets, Walter de Maria, and Mike Heizer, Schum blurred the boundaries between gallery spaces and the screen and revolutionized the presentation of environmental art. For more details and comprehensive information, please refer to Schum, G., & Schum-Wevers, U. LAND ART. Fernsehgalerie Gerry Schum Television Gallery. Long - Flanagan - Oppenheim - Smithson - Boezem - Dibbets - De Maria - Heizer. [Katalog zur Fernsehausstellung TV Germany Chanel I, April 1969]. (Hannover: Hartwig Popp, 1970).

to communicate its message, thereby contributing to environmentally friendly attitudes and behaviors. Many works of earth art or land art have been inaccessible to the public, set in remote locations, and ephemeral in design. Therefore, earth or land art has often been presented by way of photography and written texts, which offer descriptions and explanations of such works of art. Other forms of media, such as film, have allowed for environmental art to be represented in exhibitions and museums (Lailach, 2007, p. 500).¹⁷³

In addition to the aforementioned terms, two additional terms adopted by the art world are worth mentioning, namely *site-specific art* and *ecological art*. The site-specific or work/site relationship originates in minimalist sculptures of the 1960s, where the object/site response is defined as initial and determined (Kaye, 2000, p. 4). Thus, site-specific art involves the penetration of the *surrounding*, *literal*, or *real* physical space in the viewer's experience of the work of art, and the traditional dichotomy of the *virtual realm* created within the artwork versus the *real space* generated by its surrounding context comes to be challenged and reimagined, allowing for the site to be transformed into the *opposite of the literal space* in which the work is situated. Besides the connection between the space and the artwork, one significant parameter of the site-specific work is the formation of what is referred to as the phenomenal space of the observer's body (Ibid).

The lexical distinction between environmental and ecological, meanwhile, relates to the space-environment difference. When the term *ecological* is defined in literal terms, emphasis is placed on ecosystems and environmental cycles and reciprocal relationships between living organisms in the environment (Kagan, 2011, p. 272).¹⁷⁴ Wallen defines *ecological art* as the dynamic intertwining of ecosystems' material, biological, social, governmental, and chronological dimensions. (Wallen, 2012, pp. 234-235). *Ecological art* has also been described as an extension of *environmental art* (Maltitsky, 1992) insofar as the former seeks to address environmental issues and revitalize the ecosystem and human interaction with nature. The distinction between the two

¹⁷³ It can be considered a kind of art that does not make the Earth a place to present a work of art. Instead, the Earth itself *becomes* the work of art. As Heizer asserts, "The work is not put in a place, it is that place." (Heizer, quoted by Lailach, 2007, p. 54). Dennis Oppenheim, Walter De Maria, and Andy Goldsworthy have also expressed similar sentiments to Heizer.

¹⁷⁴ Ecological art was founded on practices that had emerged in the late 1960s, namely a variety of art that persists as methods of social-ecological interaction, with common principles and diverse characteristics. With the publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962, Rachel Carlson documented the devastating environmental effects of the overuse of pesticides, which she referred to as "elixirs of death." According to Carson, pesticides ultimately affect all species due to the structure of the animal food chain. Refer to William Cronon. "Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature." (W.W. Norton & Company, 1995).

terms stems from a historical appreciation of *environmental art* as focusing on *artistic concepts* as opposed to in-depth explorations of environmental perceptions. As is common in the visual arts, curated exhibitions play a crucial role in highlighting major themes of concern as well as significant developments in particular art movements. It is also worth noting that the meaning and use of the terms in question can vary from region to region. For instance, Weilacher (1996) has suggested that the word *environmental art* is more common in the United Kingdom and applies across the board to all environmental works of art, whereas the term *land art* predominates across most of mainland Europe. The terms *earthworks* or *earth art*, meanwhile, appear to be in greater use throughout the United States. And *site-specific art* and *ecological art* are applied to artwork in North American and European regions.

Krauss (1979) provides a framework for comprehending the structural parameters and conceptual relationships involved in incorporating sculpture, architecture, and landscape in postmodern artistic practice (Krauss, 1979, p.38). Her framework is also a helpful tool for analyzing and assessing the various components that constitute works of environmental art (Table 2).

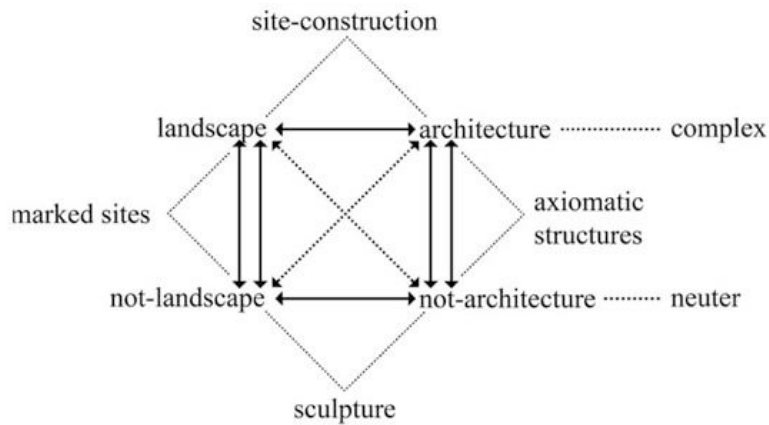


Table 2. Rosalind Krauss's diagram of postmodern Sculpture (1979)

In Krauss's diagram, *marked sites* refer to works of art that make direct interventions or alterations in the natural landscape. Photography is frequently used to capture and document such marked sites so as to preserve and disseminate them beyond their immediate physical existence. (Krauss, 1979, p. 41). If an object is deemed *not landscape* and *not architecture*, it qualifies for consideration as sculpture. Nevertheless, what might be a logical notion could be reversed so as to

include an object that may be referred to as both *landscape* and *architecture*, giving artists an “expanded field” for making sculptures that can effectively encompass multiple entities rather than be defined merely by the medium (Ibid, p. 38). Indeed, this landscape/architecture combination has been particularly pertinent to environmental art. Spaid (2002) provides a widely referenced definition of environmental art, considering it less monumental than land art and using nature as a medium to heighten the viewer’s awareness of nature’s phenomena. Regardless of whether such art is labeled earth art or land art, this form of art describes site-specific sculptural projects that utilize on-site materials to create new forms and in which unexpected objects are imported into the natural surroundings in order to develop collaborative environmental interventions.

Environmental art has given rise to a broad spectrum of sub-fields in recent decades, including ecological bio art, eco-conscious design, body art, eco-acoustics studies, social sculpture, ecological documentation, activist art, generative art, eco-art education, recycled art, and ecofeminism, to name a few (Cameron, 2012; Weintraub, 2012; Bower, 2011). These sub-fields reflect environmental art’s interdisciplinary nature and its diverse approach. Ecofeminist art, for instance, has enabled artists to address environmental issues through a feminist perspective, exploring the intersections between gender, power, and the natural world. Ecofeminist artists strive to challenge dominant narratives, hierarchies, and systems of oppression that contribute to the exploitation and destruction of women and the environment.

Examining the works of women artists in environmental art can be described as belonging to either cultural or social ecofeminism (Wildy, 2011, p.55). Those artists who primarily adopt symbolic representations and incorporate religious or mythical elements to express their ecological concerns may be said to belong to cultural ecofeminism. Those artists are more aligned with social ecofeminism, engage actively in environmental activism, and incorporate concrete actions into their artistic practice (Ibid). Cultural ecofeminism draws on symbolism, including the Great Mother, the Goddess, and Gaia (Merchant, 1980; 1996), to highlight the interconnectedness of creation beyond patriarchal civilization. For instance, the ancient Iranian goddess Anahita is revered as the “Mother of Waters.” She embodies youth, beauty, and grace, depicted as riding a luminous chariot pulled by four elemental horses: wind, cloud, rain, and hail. Anahita’s connection to water symbolizes fertility and the vital sustenance of life (Bahar, 1983, p. 36; Amouzegar, 2008, pp. 22-24). In terms of artistic creation, reference to Anahita suggests the way in which femininity can become a source of inspiration for creativity in connection with the natural world. Through

imagery, cultural Ecofeminism seeks to break down patriarchal structures and promote harmony with the environment by paying homage to the essence of the natural world. Social ecofeminism in the context of art, meanwhile, stresses the interplay between humans and nature and questions the separation of nature and culture (Wildy, 2011, p. 56). Artists who adopt this approach focus on remedying environmental degradation by engaging in direct, practical collaboration with the Earth.

4.3 Emerging Horizons: The New Era of Environmental Art in Iran

The Anthropocene is a geological epoch shaped by the significant impact of human activity on the Earth's ecosystems and geological processes.¹⁷⁵ More specifically, it signifies the profound influence of human-driven Developments, particularly industrialization and technological advancements, in shaping the planet's environment. The Anthropocene underscores the notion that human beings have become a dominant force in shaping the Earth's ecological and geological systems - a development with major consequences for biodiversity, climate change, and other environmental phenomena. Given the magnitude of such changes, it is not surprising that many contemporary artists, including Iranian environmental artists, in collaboration with scientists and environmental activists, have addressed the Anthropocene as a theme of their work and effort.

In considering environmental art, it is important to consider the ways in which art approaches the environment. Art may be said to address the environment in two ways; on the one hand, through romantic notions of a return to nature, and on the other, via critical reflection on its destruction. In the context of environmental art, some artists advocate reconnecting humans with nature, emphasizing the necessity of restoring the lost bond between the two. They believe that humans have become alienated from nature and that art is a potent tool for restoring this connection.

In examining and studying environmental artists, three distinct categories can be identified. The first category consists of environmental artists who foreground natural landscapes and scenery, emphasizing the ontological connection between nature and art by rendering the environment as a natural habitat. The second category includes environmental artists who focus on the urban environment and nature by presenting the environment as a site habitat. In practice,

¹⁷⁵ Crutzen and Stoermer introduced the term *Anthropocene* into scientific discourse by publishing an article entitled "*The Anthropocene*" in the *Global Change Newsletter*. (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000): 17-18.

these artists often critique consumerism and the urban lifestyle of city dwellers. The third category comprises of those environmental artists who convey a sense of the environment as a political habitat by infusing their artistic expressions with political meaning.

The association of Iranian artists with environmental activists has been significant in bringing about the spread of environmental discourse in Iran. It must be remembered that, in general, Iranian artists of a traditional bent have represented the Iranian environment through cultural archetypes, while more modernist Iranian artists have explored abstract perspectives and micro-narratives of the environment. The environmental art movement in Iran, meanwhile, actively explores and engages ecological and social dimensions of human life and reflects the varying interpretations of the environment in contemporary life. Since the 1980s, women artists have turned to environmental art for political, cultural, and social reasons to express their specific concerns. This particular form of art has allowed them to engage critically with social, cultural, and political issues. In a sense, environmental art has been a liberating medium through which women artists have sought to communicate their message to society. However, environmental art has not been the only means of artistic expression and communication for women. Women artists of various genres have also engaged in social activism so as to heighten awareness and encourage social involvement in notable causes.

Environmental art in Iran has gone through many ups and downs over the past few decades. One of the challenges has been the emergence and growth of art groups and the retention of active artists in the field. The lack of facilities, ongoing financial problems, failure to integrate artists, absence of government support, and many other such difficulties have placed countless artists in precarious circumstances. The implication has been that many capable artists have had to abandon art in earnest.

The belated recognition of environmental art in Iran can be attributed to a number of factors, especially those related to creating a conducive context for the emergence of genres of art. These factors include social conditions and circumstances, the state of the global art market, the prevalence of the modernist worldview in the Western world (which emphasized the independent value of art objects), the dominance of formalist concepts, and how all of these factors were encountered and interpreted in the Iranian context. To gain a clearer sense of the emergence and significance of environmental art in Iran, it is worth turning to significant examples of the movement.

In 1963, a distinctive garden was created near the village of Parvard in southeastern Sirjan, Kerman Province, as a form of protest against land reforms. *Bagh Sangi*, or The Stone Garden, defied conventional gardening by using stones instead of plants (Figure 7). The trees in the garden were made of dried logs, and large stones were suspended from branch-like wires. The rock garden was created by Darvish Khan Esfandiarpour, a deaf and mute landowner from the Bochaghchi clan in Kerman province and served as his defiant response to the Shah's land reforms.



Figure 7. Parviz Kimiavi. "The Garden of Stones" (1976) ¹⁷⁶

No discussion of contemporary Iranian environmental art would be complete without mentioning Ahmad Nadalian, a pioneering artist who began creating works of art in 2003. Not only has Nadalian offered environmental art a distinctive artistic approach, but he has also established Pardis Polour as a significant center for environmental art in Iran. ¹⁷⁷After initially

¹⁷⁶ A scene from the film, depicting the life of Darvish Khan and his remarkable stone garden.

¹⁷⁷ Nadalian, a proclaimed land artist, has created temporary installations called "*chideman*" made of carved stones and pebbles. He considers these remote natural spaces "utopian ideals" and "lost paradises" that allow him to escape the pollution of Tehran, a city which he considered "polluted in every way: environmentally, politically, and morally" (Grande, 2006, pp. 32-34). A documentary film by Mojtaba Mir Tahmasb (2003) titled "*The River Still Has Fish*" features Nadalian, whose carved stones near a river were damaged by construction workers. The film highlights the detrimental effects of disruptive human intervention on Iran's natural environment. Moreover, in their respective publications, Robert C. Morgan in "*Marked in Stone and Sand: An Iranian Sculpture Brings his Art to the River*,

working independently, Nadalian began to involve the local community in his artistic activities. He hosted art classes and encouraged groups to participate in projects. In addition, he organized artist residency programs in Tehran, the island of Hormuz, and Polour in Mazandaran, as well as a series of environmental art festivals to inspire young Iranian artists to explore remote regions of Iran so as to promote environmental awareness. His approach catalyzed other creatives to leave large Iranian cities and seek refuge in the country's remote regions, areas where they could organize field trips and collaborative art projects that may (or may not) be environmentally related. Since 2002, Nadalian has organized numerous environmental art festivals events that both display and allow for the performance of art in natural environments. The festivals, often referred to as interactive workshops for university students and artists, highlight the social and cultural demand for such cultural and artistic movements over the last two decades.

Mahmoud Maktabi, in his essay for the 2016 Nature-Art Variations exhibition catalog, reflects on the experiences of artists who explore nature without financial motives, challenging the academic establishment and traditional artists to validate such work as art. Maktabi highlights the sacrifices made by these artists, who operate outside the commercial art world and their contribution to the development of a distinct artistic character. He argues that restrictions and limitations do not (necessarily or always) impede artistic growth but can become the very conditions that artists willingly accept to preserve their freedom and creative expression (Maktabi, 2016, p. 206). Maktabi explains that in the absence of the busy city environment and rigorous university coursework that disapproves of any artistic style from Picasso onward, artists can experience the freedom of expressing artistic feelings in any way desired. In settings such as the festivals organized by Nadalian, artists can express themselves without restrictions (conversation with Maktabi, 2019).

Indeed, the emergence of such festivals has served as a platform not just for existing artists but also for young and emerging artists to express their creativity beyond the confines of the academy and other conventional contexts. By providing a space dedicated to the arts and free from academic barriers, such festivals foster an artist's creative potential and have gained widespread recognition. (Personal interview with Nadalian in Hormuz residency, November 2019). The

Beaches - and Parks." (Landscape Architecture, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2008), Edward Lucy Smith in "Art Tomorrow." (Terrail editions, 2002), and Barbara Stieff in "*Earth, Sea, Sun, and Sky: Art in Nature*." (Prestel, 2011) all have made concerted efforts to introduce and showcase the environmental art of Ahmad Nadalian.

festivals are not limited to a fixed annual schedule but are dynamic and responsive events throughout the year. Their flexibility enables agile reactions to emerging environmental issues and captures the attention of artists, environmentalists, and the general public.

However, Iranian environmental art must not be viewed as purely anti-urban or non-urban. In fact, in contrast to the dualistic view that pits city against nature, several Iranian environmental artists have started focusing on *urban nature* and highlighting its environmental issues. Such artists call attention to the plight of natural landscapes in cities threatened by rapid urbanization. Historically, Iranian cities have often been constructed in harmony with nearby mountains and rivers, resulting in a symbiotic relationship between urban and natural environments. However, the uncontrolled growth of cities and water, soil, and air pollution has severely disturbed the urban ecosystem. By identifying threats to urban nature, the Iranian environmental artists seek to inspire a sense of responsibility and urge individuals, communities, and political decision-makers to act accordingly. They stress the necessity of urban planning that prioritizes environmental sustainability and the mitigation of environmental degradation. These artists hope to initiate dialogue with their artistic expressions, inspiring change and fostering a deeper appreciation of the interconnectedness between urban areas and the natural world.

At present, Neda Darzi is considered one of the remarkable figures who is active in this field. Neda Darzi's academic education and exposure to various art forms provided her with new working mediums, such as video installations and general art. In 2010, Darzi founded a non-profit project called Persbook, which combines the words "Persian" and "book" (in reference to Facebook). Darzi's aim was to establish a platform where a collective spirit could be created by way of sharing more positive images and ideas to heal communities in the aftermath of the Green Movement. Because, in her view, Facebook was largely being used to portray violence, she was keen to alter this tendency (Interview with Darzi, November 2019). Persbook originally started as a Facebook page and was envisioned as a replacement for the established biennials hosted by organizations such as the TMOCA and other officially affiliated groups.

Darzi's desire was to expand the field of environmental art in order to include more artists addressing social and environmental concerns in their work. While acknowledging the efforts of individuals such as Ahmed Nadalian and his students in this field, she noticed that subjects such as water, forests, and deserts still receive scant consideration by artists. Recognizing the necessity of collective action, she highlighted the significance of forming a group where each artist could

express an individual perspective on specific subjects while collectively promoting a unified message (Conversation with Darzi, 2020). Persbook's selected works were exhibited online and in galleries in Tehran between 2010 and 2016. However, starting in 2016, the works of art have been exhibited in remote areas such as the deserts and forests of Iran. These site-specific installations offer conceptual insights into improved community living space alternatives.¹⁷⁸

4.3.1 Approaching Contemporary Environmental Art in Iran through the Lens of Landscape

Environmental art blends seamlessly with the natural landscape and encourages interaction between the viewer, the artwork, and the environment. It highlights the significance of the landscape and human interpretation. Artists aim to elicit and challenge the viewer's awareness and connection to the evolving environment and its significance. Ultimately, environmental art seeks to influence the viewer's relationship with the landscape. The definition of the term *landscape* is vast and varied, like *painting* or *art* in general. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the word signified "a picture representing a natural inland landscape, as distinguished from a seascape, a portrait, etc." By the eighteenth century, the term *landscape* was expanded to "a piece of scenery," particularly "a view or prospect of a natural inland scenery that can be caught from a point with a glance." Then, during the nineteenth century, it referred to "a piece of land with its characteristic features, particularly as the product of changing or shaping processes and agents" (Makhzoumi & Pungetti, 2005, p. 4).

According to Gloria Pungetti (2005), an alternative definition of landscape can point to and provide a visible and dynamic process of development on the earth's surface, a process that is the outcome of changing interaction among animate and inanimate features as well as human elements under varying temporal conditions. All this shows how the term *landscape* has carried a wide range of connotations, ranging from a general sense of perspective to serving as a definite geographical

¹⁷⁸ For instance, in Pressbook's 11th the term *zero waste* as a motion came into activity as an initiative to encourage individuals to reconsider their waste habits and reduce the production of non-biodegradable waste. The motion advocates responsible consumption and production and encourages people to participate actively in waste prevention and the promotion of recycling. The objective centers on reducing the burden on the environment and achieving a state of zero waste where materials are reused or recycled instead of buried or incinerated. The motion emphasizes how individual action is integral to creating a sustainable future and preserving the Earth's resources.

term. Pungetti suggests that the term *landscape* refers to a body of assets that can be seen. It has layers and periods that constitute one site, which may also implicate cultural and political circumstances. As per Pungetti's assertion, one aspect that distinguishes the landscape from ecology is that ecology represents environmental processes that are not necessarily visible. In contrast, the landscape results from the *visibility* of this process, which is constantly changing and evolving the development of the character and spirit of the place (Pungetti, 2005, p.99). The landscape constitutes the physical, ecological, and geographical entity where natural and human patterns and processes exist with each other as a combination. Various significations are offered by and attributed to diverse perspectives of a landscape, each leading to a form of appreciation of some aspects of that landscape.

Such insights and developments in environmental art are significant in offering tools for extracting the categories that will lead to further research in the areas of art reception and analysis. Here, we will make use of D.W. Meinig's article, titled "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene" (1979), which offers a helpful perceptual framework by which humans may approach the environment. In what follows, the works and approaches of contemporary Iranian environmental artists will be introduced and examined according to the ten modes of perception identified and presented by Meinig.

1.) Landscape as the Domain of Nature

One way of beholding a landscape is to see it as nature's domain, emphasizing its control and purity, separate from human influence. Proponents of this view advocate conservation laws to preserve the landscape and limit human impact on the environment (Meinig, 1979, pp. 34-35). Razieh Goudarzi's "Mirror" may be said to reflect precisely this type of deep connection with nature (Figure 8). The natural landscape becomes the mirror in which Goudarzi finds a reflection of herself. She feels a deep sense of rebirth and connectedness with nature as if she is being reborn from the womb of nature. Through her artistic expression, she seeks to restore the bonds that connect her to the vast cosmos. Goudarzi strives to transcend the physical body's limitations in her artistic practice. She strives to cross the boundaries of physical existence and ultimately dissolve all remnants of her presence. This endeavor indicates her deep immersion in and merging with nature, blurring the lines between the individual self and the vast realm of the natural world.



Figure 5. Razieh Goudarzi. “Mirror” Kogan Region, Iran (2017)¹⁷⁹

In the performance, the artist’s body *is* the art itself, embodying Dennis Oppenheim’s concept of being the “material” and the simultaneous distributor, initiator, and receiver of the artistic expression (Boetzkes, 2019, p. 49). This utilization of the body as a medium goes beyond the conventional use of objects of art, creating a heightened physical connection with the natural world. As is evident in Goudarzi’s art, it is by way of this intimate bodily engagement that the artist’s exploration of the environment becomes more immersive and sensorial. This underscores the transformative power of the embodied experience.

2.) Landscape as Habitat

A second way of viewing the landscape is as a habitat – that is, embodying Earth as humanity’s dwelling. This approach highlights the importance of a symbiotic relationship between nature and humans, where humans selectively utilize and reshape the Earth’s abundant resources into desired forms. This perspective portrays humans as creators and conquerors of nature, emphasizing their role in shaping the environment. In the twentieth century, the concept of humans as technocrats exerting control over the Earth to suit their desires marked a profound shift in

¹⁷⁹ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's Instagram page. @raziehgoudarzi.

ideology (Meinig, 1979, pp. 36-37), one whose critique is particularly prominent in environmental art.

In this regard, Maryam Behrouzinia's artwork (Figure 9) is worth examining. The sculptor's work, created in the forests near Chalu village in Mazandaran province, embodies the metaphorical representation of nature as a silent entity wrapped inside a cocoon. It combines natural elements and waste materials to form a malignant mass in nature's heart. This body of sculpture provides a haunting reminder of the reciprocal relationship between humans and the environment, highlighting the profound influence of the environment on humans and the consequent impacts of human activities on the natural world. Behrouzinia's exploration questions conventional ways of viewing and forges new paths of interaction that involve the artwork, the environment, and the viewer. Through these artistic expressions, the artwork encourages reflection on the necessity of sustainable coexistence and harmony between humans and nature.



Figure 6. Maryam Behrouzinia. "Chalu" Mazandaran, Iran (2020)¹⁸⁰

In certain forms of environmental art, the intuitive body of the artist moves away from predetermined categories and classifications and turns towards an initial state of unorganized flesh.

¹⁸⁰ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's Instagram page. @maryambehrouzinia.

Known in Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy (1987) as the "body without organs," this intuitive body is oriented toward a virtual future. Resembling an egg undergoing metamorphosis, it embodies a process of negative becoming. Relying on this viewpoint, multimedia artist Pooneh Oshidari initiated the project "The Hideout II" in the Bavan Gallery pool, which coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 10). Following her previous work, entitled "The Goddess of the Lagoon" (2016/2017), Oshidari conceived "The Hideout II" as a time-oriented project.

The project considers the conditions of the Anzali Lagoon and the ecological threat posed by invasive plants such as Azolla and the water hyacinth (Bavan Gallery, 2020).¹⁸¹ The project, designed specifically for the swimming pool area of the Bavan Gallery, explores the gradual disappearance and concealment of the artist's image, located at the bottom of the pool, which occurs through the passage of time and the rapid growth of floating plants, algae and suspended microorganisms in the water.

As a form of conceptual artwork, "Hideout II" creates an observatory space focused not on the sky but on the Earth. The observation space serves as a station for curiosity and contemplation, constantly transforming during the performance and dynamically interacting with the audience. If such a work of art were implemented in a wetland, it would be considered a form of "ecovention." The image shown in the artwork is a large-format photograph of the artist's face. As time passes and the aquatic plants and microorganisms thrive, the image gradually fades and becomes unrecognizable, symbolizing the effects of time and the intrusion of nature into the human present. The project highlights the dynamic relationship between art, time, and the ever-changing natural environment, inviting reflection on themes of transience, adaptation, and the interplay between human creations and the forces of nature.

However, the reciprocal relationship between nature and human beings to which Oshidari's art draws our attention also refers to a more immediate and pressing issue. Invasive plants like Azolla and the water hyacinth have invaded the Anzali Wetland, primarily due to human interference and error. They now cover large areas of the wetland, blocking sunlight and preventing oxygen from reaching the water. Their rapid growth consumes vital resources, increases water

¹⁸¹ The Hideout (2). Pooneh Oshidari. Bavan Gallery, accessed September 20, 2022. Available at <https://bavangallery.com/portfolio-item/pooneh-oshidari-february-21-march-13-2020/>. I

acidity, and disrupts the ecosystem's delicate balance. As a result, the wetland has suffered a decline in biodiversity, being transformed into a foul-smelling swamp where anaerobic conditions prevail. According to Pooneh Oshidari (2020), "in moments of apparent tranquility and silence, there lies the possibility of hidden perils lurking beneath the surface. It is akin to an unseen force that operates in silence and ignorance, akin to a stealthy illness or a concealed crime. Without any conspicuous indications, danger creeps closer in hushed steps, much like a forest of red moss that steadily expands, replicates, and engulfs the once vibrant lagoon with barely perceptible swiftness. The green monster envelops and stifles the once-roaring lagoon in profound silence, extinguishing its vitality. This process unfolds so surreptitiously that one may be unaware of its occurrence as the transformation transpires with an almost painless subtlety."



Figure 7. Pooneh Oshidari. "The Hideout II" Bavan Gallery, Tehran, Iran (2020)¹⁸²

¹⁸² The photos in question are sourced from the artist's Instagram page. @poonehoshidari

3.) Landscape as Artifact

Viewing the landscape as an artifact highlights the role of human influence, where human creativity and intervention shape natural patterns. This perspective emphasizes the dominant position of humans over nature, where technology and human agency play a significant role. The landscape is seen as a distinct human entity, valued for the harmonious relationship between its features and the extent of human involvement in shaping it (Meinig, 1971, pp. 37-38).

Under Nadalian's direction, this collaborative project was initially carried out by a collective of fourteen women indigenous to Hormuz Island (Figure 11). The soil carpet project was the inception of a continuous implementation of the project over seven periods from 2007 to 2016. Due to environmental criticisms surrounding the event, the project has been suspended for several years.



Figure 8. Ahmad Nadalian. "Fabulous Bird" [Simorgh]. Hormuz Island, Iran (2007) ¹⁸³

Creating the carpet involved transporting several tons of soil to the beach, which led to the depletion and endangerment of specific rare color spectrums in the island's soil. What was initially conceived as a project of pride and a cooperative, non-economic activity for the organizers and

¹⁸³ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <https://nadalian.com/en/life-story/a-fabulous-mythological-bird-a-large-land-painting-by-colored-soil-sand-and-stones-of-hormuz-island/>

participating artists gradually turned into a commodity and served as a justification for the privatization of the lands belonging to the people of Hormuz, effectively removing their control over this section of the coastline. One of the contentious speculations surrounding the soil carpet project is that it has been a central component of a more extensive operation involving the export of soil from Hormuz's red soil mine or smuggling soil from the mine to neighboring countries. This suspicion raises questions about why the event continues to be emphasized and supported by various authorities despite environmental protests.

4.) Landscape as System

A fourth way to consider a landscape is as a system, treating it as a laboratory and even reading it as an interconnected system composed of subsystems. By way of this approach, the elements of the landscape become expressions of the processes that occur within the system. This perspective stresses the interdependence and management of the landscape for environmental and human benefit (Meinig, 1971, p. 38).

In the context of Iranian environmental art, Asieh Mohamadian's artwork, titled "Presence" demonstrates that living in an era characterized by the dominance of iron and widespread environmental pollution necessitates efforts toward improvement and alleviation (Figure 12). Her artwork explores various scales, featuring cylindrical cuts almost touching the minor scale's human skin. The primary focus of this piece is to evoke a sense of presence and captivate the audience, even if only for a brief moment, within a green and tranquil pristine environment. This stands in stark contrast to the outer space surrounding it, symbolizing the influence of industrialization.



Figure 9. Asiych Mohamadian. “Presence” Laleh Park. Tehran, Iran (2012) ¹⁸⁴

5.) Landscape as Problem

In the perspective that considers the landscape a problem, human presence is viewed as inherently harmful and in need of correction. Treating the landscape solely as a laboratory for independent research disregards actual human needs, meaning other viewpoints on the landscape need to be considered adequately. One could say that every landscape evokes anger and alarm, reflecting the societal problems that require significant change (Meinig, 1971, pp. 40-41). This perspective aligns closely with the concept of the landscape as an artifact. Environmental art embraces this viewpoint, utilizing the landscape to address environmental concerns and raise awareness about current affairs.

¹⁸⁴ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's Instagram page. [@as.mohamadian](#)

In the documentary *Examined Life* (2008), the social theorist Žižek, dressed as a landfill worker, debates ecology at a London dump and stresses the meaning of this ignored place. At one point, he quips, “This is where we should start feeling at home.” Here, amid discarded abundance and unwanted goods, Žižek reveals the hidden truth. Humans frequently discard waste, often regarding it as worthless, oblivious to the effort, energy, and financial investment involved in its disposal. The truth is that it does not just disappear.

Recycling and transforming disposable materials like plastic cans, wastepaper, glass, iron scraps, and machinery into artistic creations has given rise to urban environmental art. Artists utilize the abundance of garbage and discarded items to create sculptural volumes aimed at critiquing consumerism and urban lifestyles. By arranging and repurposing waste, these works of art convey a disturbing and unsettling depiction of the potential future of urban nature. The juxtaposition of garbage and waste materials is a powerful visual reminder of the consequences of our consumer-driven society.

In her “Reflections” collection, Khas captures the essence of the exact reflection of nature. In “Reflection of Me” (Figure 13), in particular, her use of the mirror bridges the gap between the physical location of the artwork and the conceptual space. Here, the mirror becomes a transformative tool that blurs the boundaries between the physical realm of nature and the subjective realm of the self. It encourages re-evaluating the dichotomy between the external world and one’s inner perception.



Figure 10. Atefeh Khas. “Reflection of Me” Bisheh Waterfall, Iran (2014) ¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁵ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.atefehkhas.com/reflection-of-me.html>

6.) Landscape as Wealth

Approaching the landscape as wealth suggests the commodification of every aspect of the natural environment by perceiving it merely as a market-oriented economy. It signifies the prevailing belief that land holds inherent value, primarily as a capital asset rather than a cherished home or generational heritage (Meinig, 1971, p.42). This perspective reduces land and its resources to commodities that can be bought and sold at opportune moments, with land speculation as a traditional means to amass riches. Hormuz Island, Iran, has been grappling for years with the contentious issue of hotel construction and eco-tourism, exacerbating the plight of its inhabitants and their right to the city. Despite limited land availability, the island has been relentlessly fragmented for development, leaving its people, who tirelessly pursue progress but remain excluded from its fruits, marginalized. The proliferation of hotels also worsened existing class divisions, widening the gap in a community plagued by water and electricity shortages and deprived of even basic healthcare facilities. Thus, as Hormuz Island's façade is made to appear evermore enchanting, the poverty and deprivation endured by its residents continue to worsen.

7.) Landscape as Ideology

When landscape is perceived as an ideology, it is taken as a symbol of cultural values, ideas, and personal interpretations. Such an approach emphasizes the role of individual perception and collective memory in shaping the meanings of the landscape (Meinig, 1971, p. 42). According to this point of view, the landscape reflects the creator's personality and requires a change in cultural philosophy to exploit it effectively. Atefeh Khas, for instance, in "Metamorphosis II" (Figure 14), highlights the existence of dinosaurs millions of years ago, supported by the discovery of fossils and bones as evidence. While dinosaurs are believed to be extinct today, the artist suggests that they can be resurrected. The artist draws attention to the harmful changes caused by humans over centuries, such as industrial factories, nuclear waste, and plastic pollution, which have had detrimental effects on the environment, including plants, animals, and marine life. This, in turn, raises the possibility of witnessing the emergence of genetically altered creatures

resembling a new generation of dinosaurs. The artist warns against the destructive impact of human negligence on oceans and seas, emphasizing the crucial role of the latter in sustaining life on Earth.



Figure 11. Atefeh Khas. “Metamorphosis II” Romania (2015)¹⁸⁶

1.) Landscape as History

Landscape, as perceived through the lens of history, sees chronology as the scaffold for constructing historical narratives. Objects must be dated in order to trace their origin and the subsequent changes they have undergone. Though not a complete historical record, diligent examination of the visible landscape reveals far more than initially meets the eye (Meinig, 1971, p. 44). Viewing the landscape as history recognizes it both as a record of nature and human activity. The historical perspective highlights the fact that landscape features hold and disclose significance in their temporal context, reflecting the interactions and processes that have shaped them.

In this respect, the forests in northern Iran, commonly called the Northern Forests or Caspian Hyrcanian mixed forests, exhibit a distinctive landscape and diverse plant and animal species. These forests, situated near the southern region of the Caspian Sea, are renowned globally

¹⁸⁶ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.atefehkhas.com/metamorphosis-2.html>

for their broad-leaved and deciduous trees. The Hyrcanian forests, a UNESCO-registered living museum of biodiversity, face imminent destruction due to rampant wood exploitation, landfilling, and the construction of dams and highways, among other things. Urgent conservation measures are imperative to protect this irreplaceable ecosystem.

Tahmineh Mohamadinia's "Metamorphosis" installation (Figure15), explores the continuous and irreversible process of human-induced changes in nature. The artwork portrays the destructive consequences of these changes, affecting not only the physical aspects of nature but also its essence and form. The once vibrant and tranquil trees are depicted as cold and rigid structures, symbolizing the overwhelming compression of humanity's intervention. The installation encompasses a complete and profound change that instills fear and uncertainty, emphasizing the deepening impact of such changes over time. The construction signifies the presence of a physical body and its expanding influence within the environment.



Figure 12. Tahmineh Mirmotahari. "Metamorphosis" Mazandaran, Iran (2019) ¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁷ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's Instagram page. @tahmine_mirmotahari

In the installation, the focus is turned to a particular forest and the need to address the threat *to* that forest. This raises the question of how artists [as environmental activists] may prevent destruction or promote the significance of restoring similar natural landscapes on a larger scale. The approach serves as a critique of imbalanced practices of socio-economic Development, hasty planning in infrastructure projects like the construction of dams, unrestrained deforestation, and the overall effects of human settlement on the natural environment. In a sense, such art projects serve as an elegy for nature, offering a social critique that draws awareness to the environmental policies that, in large part, create and exacerbate the issues at hand.

9.) Landscape as Place

Considering the landscape as a place embodies “physiognomy” and emotional impressions of a specific location (Meinig, 1971, p.45). It involves creating a sensory and evocative experience that captures its unique essence. This perspective highlights a place's unity and diversity, aiming to provide individuals with a memorable and immersive encounter (Bhabha, 1994). Environmental artworks frequently embrace the concept of "site-specific" art, which directly relates to the distinct characteristics of a particular place. The term "site" refers to an intentionally modified area within an environment with significance and meaning within a broader context (Lailach, 2007).

In her work “Bones also Drink Water” (Figure 16), Fereshteh Alamshah arranges desert bones into fish-like creatures and inserts them into the dry riverbed of the Zayandeh Rood River. These ephemeral creatures seem to appear and disappear into the ground. The artwork consists of three different pieces made of recycled materials. The bones, which once belonged to cows, donkeys, and sheep, bear the marks of desert dwellers’ teeth and decay from the sun. Adding a touch of red soil, the artist has textured the writing in a way that harmonizes with nature, the fate of the city, and its inhabitants. Years have passed since the Zayandeh Rood River dried up, leaving Isfahan lifeless and shocked. The cause remains unclear, and no one has been held accountable.



Figure 13. Fereshteh Alamshah. “Bones also Drink Water” Zayandeh Rood, Isfahan, Iran (2011) ¹⁸⁸

The once vibrant river has been replaced by the stench of mud and dead fish, and the city is now left dry, with its historic bridges threatened with collapse. Protests against this tragedy were strictly forbidden, and any artistic expression about the subject was met with resistance. In later years, as the consequences became apparent, there were occasional political changes and events to protest the river’s closure. However, these moments of hope were short-lived, as the situation returned to disappointment and authorities once again drew a red line.

Fereshteh Alamshah’s “Bones Also Drink Water” is a response to the tragic fate of Zayandeh Rood. By supplementing nature with words, her textual works of art draw attention to the visual form of the text itself. Textual art becomes a visual representation, acknowledging its presence as a visual entity. By using words to describe or interpret the Earth, the textual artwork emphasizes the visual nature of language and recognizes that words possess visual qualities. In the context of Alamshah’s “art writings,” such writings take the form of textured markings on nature, created especially from the red soil of Hormuz Island. In other words, the textual work goes beyond a static representation of the Earth. It is a dynamic and transformative process that embodies the powerful and evanescent nature of the natural forces at play. The expression of these elementals within the artwork reflects the artist’s desire to demonstrate that the Earth transcends mere physicality and cannot be fully captured or contained within a fixed form (Boetzkes, 2019, p. 62).

¹⁸⁸ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <https://writeart.ir/en/environmental-art/>

10.) Landscape as Aesthetic

Viewing landscape as aesthetic prioritizes artistic qualities over specific identity or function (Meinig, 1971, p. 46). It emphasizes abstract elements like line, form, color, and texture detached from practical considerations. The landscape becomes a visual tableau, evoking transcendent visual values. Cultural influences have limited significance, as the artist's aesthetic vision guides the creative process. According to Robert Irving, the relationship between art and the environment can fulfill three purposes. Such artwork can “dominate a place, be characteristic to a place, and be defined by a place” (Jokela, 1995, p. 18). Dominant, site-independent artworks overpower and subdue their surroundings to accomplish their objectives, as seen in imposing statues, massive structures, and captivating murals (Ibid, p. 19).

Works of art in the third category mentioned by Irving are inspired by and created in reaction to the environment. The use of the history, narratives, and significations of the place and the artistic process has often been called “interdisciplinary fieldwork” (Jokela, 1995, p. 19). The “Twelve Windvangers” of Atefeh Khas are composed of twelve slender wooden pillars, each ending with a square frame of sewn-in fabric (Figure 17). This installation is located on a hill in Sadra Park near Shiraz. For the viewer, the work's repetition and rhythm convey a keen feeling of the element of wind.

On the one hand, the installation seeks to dominate the wind and capture it in sacks. On the other hand, as currents of wind flow through the mesh sacks, the installation evokes a sense of release. Taken together, Khas's “Twelve Windvangers” creates a sensorial sense of conflicting motion as well as a conflict between the artwork and nature. This juxtaposition of control and release in the artwork encourages the viewer to reflect on broader concepts, including human agency, the boundaries of control, and the interconnectedness of humans and nature.



Figure 14. Atefeh Khas. “Twelve Windvangers” Shiraz, Iran (2015) ¹⁸⁹

The desire to witness and experience beautiful places and the inclination to enhance the aesthetic appeal of specific locations can influence policies that change the landscape. However, it is essential to note that human aesthetics and ecological considerations may not always align. While a landscape may be visually pleasing, it may not necessarily be ecologically sustainable. Furthermore, it remains unclear as to whether the pleasure derived from recognizing a landscape’s ecological, moral, cultural, or social value should be considered part of the “aesthetic experience.”

The categorization of landscapes and their meanings are influenced by two significant social variables: human perceptions of time and place. These variables provide a framework for understanding the cultural concepts embedded within works of art and shape our understanding of landscapes. Considering these variables, one can gain insight into the underlying cultural perspectives and values of diverse landscapes.

¹⁸⁹ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.atefekhas.com/windwangers.html>

4.4 Uncovering Loss and Renewal

The human unconscious comprises individual and collective aspects, with the former depending on the latter. The collective unconscious takes the form of various archetypes: potential, memorized, and hidden forms of desires, aspirations, and experiences (Barrie, 2010). These archetypes can manifest as symbols under particular circumstances. According to Jung (2004), the mother archetype encompasses both actual maternal figures and symbolic representations. It goes beyond individual mothers and includes goddesses and idealized virtual mothers. The archetype finds expression in various symbols associated with pursuing salvation and awe-inspiring experiences. Examples of such symbols include “earth, the woods, the sea or any still waters, matter even, the underworld and the moon, the cornucopia, a ploughed field, a garden, a rock, a cave, a tree, or various vessels such as the baptismal font, or vessel-shaped flowers like the rose or the lotus” (Jung, 2004, pp. 14-15).

The symbols associated with ancient Iranian goddesses known to embody maternal values possess a noted compatibility with Jungian symbols. This compatibility points to a shared human nature of the collective unconscious that transcends temporal and geographic boundaries. Spenta Armaiti, as one of the Amesha Spentas in Zoroastrianism, is closely connected to the Earth (Dostkhah, 1991, p. 667).¹⁹⁰ In sacred literature, she is often depicted as a character representing Mother Nature. Her role involves nurturing and preserving the natural world, emphasizing the importance of harmony and balance in the environment (Rashed-Mohassel, 1987, p. 106). As a divine entity, Spenta Armaiti is revered for her association with the Earth and her role in maintaining the order and well-being of the natural world (Boyce, 1982, p. 72). In addition, similarities can be observed between Spenta Armaiti and other mythological figures. She shares features with Dionysus in Greek mythology, Sandaramet in Armenian mythology, and Gaia, the fertility goddess (Rosenberg, 2000, pp. 69-70).

¹⁹⁰ The *Avesta*, a revered scripture in Zoroastrianism, is a compilation of ritual texts with ancient origins that can be traced back to the second millennium BCE or even earlier. These sacred texts were originally transmitted orally and entrusted to the memory and recitation of devoted Zoroastrian priests. Through their dedicated efforts, the teachings and wisdom contained within the *Avesta* were carefully preserved and passed down from generation to generation, embodying a rich spiritual heritage that has endured for thousands of years. Through the course of history, the *Avesta* has undergone various modifications and adaptations, reflecting Zoroastrian communities' evolving beliefs, practices, and cultural contexts. This dynamic interplay between the oral and written traditions, alongside the flexibility of interpretation, has ensured the continued relevance and vitality of the *Avesta* in shaping the faith and rituals of Zoroastrian adherents.

The persistence of the Anahita cult and its influence on Iranian culture and society indicate this water goddess's profound significance in the ancient belief systems of Iran. In fact, *Ardwī Sūrā Anāhitā* is recognized as a fertility goddess who has a vital role in the process of conception. As part of her divine attributes, she is considered to have the power to purify the man's semen and the woman's womb (Dostkhah, 1991, p. 300). Yasht 5 of the Avesta mentions that she descends from Mount Hukairya to the Farakhkart Lake (Ibid, p. 137).

Based on Carl Jung's interpretation (2004), such symbols tap into the collective unconscious and evoke universal archetypal imagery associated with maternity. The connection between the mountain and the goddess is further strengthened by the association of caves with the womb. According to Cooper (1987), with respect to symbolic significance, caves can 1.) represent the universe, 2.) act as an omphalos or world center, 3.) embody the meeting place of the divine and the human, and 4.) be associated with inner esoteric knowledge and initiation. Considered a symbol of the feminine principle, the cave represents the womb of Mother Earth, a place of burial and rebirth, mystery, and renewal (Cooper, 1987, p. 126). Symbols linked to ancient Iranian goddesses, renowned for embodying maternal values, exhibit a striking alignment with Jungian symbols. This compatibility serves as evidence for the enduring essence of the collective unconscious, spanning beyond the constraints of time and location.

In the context of Iran, the distinction between environmental works of art and applied art becomes apparent. While the former tends to raise consciousness and warnings, the latter seeks to address environmental issues in a more direct and active manner. Regardless of the specific form of art, it should be noted that for most Iranian artists, ideology, spirituality, culture, and contemporary concerns remain intertwined. This characteristic, which transcends the realm of artistic expression, finds its roots in Iranian cultural heritage, particularly influential pieces of literature.

Atefeh Khas's artwork, titled "Virgin" (Figure 18), features a figure positioned in the middle of a mountain with caves. The work alludes to purity, innocence, and the concept of the divine feminine in its most natural and sacred form.



Figure 15. Atefeh Khas. “Virgin Series” Chahkoush, Qeshm, Iran (2015) ¹⁹¹

Laying the body in the mount symbolizes a return to the source, a reconnection with the original forces of creation and the sacred feminine (Sattari, 1994, p. 218). This act can be regarded as a form of initiation or rebirth, in which the individual has a transformative experience, sheds old layers of identity, and is enveloped in the embrace of the mother archetype. The motif can be considered a reflection of the cyclical nature of life, where death and rebirth are integral parts of the symbolic figure’s realm. The cave, with its darkness and mystery, represents the transformative journey of the hero, who descends into the depths of the unconscious, faces inner challenges, and finally emerges with newfound wisdom and vigor.

The phenomenon of syncretism occurs in the postmodern era, where various cultural symbols, mindsets, and worldviews are mixed and made to interact on an individual and collective level. *Myth*, as a powerful symbolic form, permeates various spheres of human activity and demonstrates stability in its elements. Defined as a symbolic narrative associated with religious belief, myth offers accounts of extraordinary events involving deities or superhuman beings (Cassirer, 1951; Malinowski, 2015; Eliade, 1956). Contemporary concern with the interpretation of myths stems from the significant role of myths in shaping worldviews and the symbolic

¹⁹¹ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.atefekhhas.com/virgin-series.html>

comprehension of reality. Eliade holds that myths can evolve and adapt to various cultural contexts. In this way, myths can continue to play a role in shaping collective beliefs, values, and perceptions throughout history.

Levy-Bruhl's work (2018) examines the differences between the modes of thought of "primitive" and "civilized" societies. His analyses offer invaluable insights into the distinct features and patterns of consciousness that emerge at different social and historical stages of development. By examining the thought processes of primitive cultures, Levy-Bruhl highlights the fundamental differences in how these societies perceive and interpret the world around them. Such differences in patterns of thought provide a deeper appreciation of the complexity of human cognition and the various ways individuals and societies construct meaning and make sense of their experiences (Levy-Bruhl, 2018, p. 473).

Myth may be said to encapsulate the essence of existence, harmonizing elements, balancing tensions, and ensuring the stability of traditional norms. It is a vital framework that weaves together the intricate tapestry of society, ensuring its cohesion and durability. In the realm of myth, the intertwined concepts of *return to the origin* and *the cyclical nature of life* have an especially prominent meaning that diverges from *the linear conception of history*. In the former perspective, individuals attain mythic status once the essence becomes the focus of ritual, the source of profound wisdom, and the catalyst for transformative action (Malinowski, 2013, pp.103-106).

In 2019, the 24th Environmental Art Festival was held on the shores of Lake Urmia. The festival's objective was to shed light on the pressing concern over the desiccation of the lake and the related ecological challenges. "The Lake Girls" (Figure 19) by Nooshin Naficy expresses the artist's interaction with the lake, a relation which she rendered in the following words: "I scratch and shave the hard salt skin; your tender and pink body embraces me with a pleasant smell." This poetic language symbolizes Naficy's connection to the natural elements. The act of scratching the salt skin implies a process of revealing and uncovering the underlying beauty and vitality of the lake (Naficy, 2019). Her works of art, much like Mendieta's "Silueta," convey a sense of the body's shared materiality with the earth. Both works emphasize the interplay between the physicality of the body and the natural elements that surround it, creating a dialogue between the human form and the environment.

The "Mothers of the Earth" collection by Nooshin Naficy is a visual representation of the cultural perspective of ecofeminism. It emphasizes the deep harmony and similarity between

women and nature while highlighting humanity's historical discord with the natural world. Through this collection, the artist highlights the symbiotic relationship that primitive humans once had with nature, considering themselves an integral part of the natural order.



Figure 16. Nooshin Naficy. “The Lake Girls” Urmia, Iran (2019)¹⁹²

Throughout history, humans have sought to preserve the essence or soul by attaching symbolic meaning to totems, often in the form of animals and plants (Frazer, 2013, pp. 790-793). The myth of death and resurrection illustrates the human desire for eternal life, which is often manifested in rituals associated with the fertility of plants. This myth reflects a deep-rooted desire for immortality and a belief in the cyclical nature of life and rebirth, with death perceived as a transformative process leading to renewal and continuity (Bahar, 1983; Amouzegar, 2008). The association between totems, rituals, and the pursuit of immortality illustrates the deep connection between human aspirations and the natural world. The plant myth symbolizes the cyclical process of death and rebirth, frequently represented by various narratives of martyrdom, sacrifice, exile, imprisonment, or descent into darkness. Thus, it symbolizes the seed's being hidden in the Earth and its ultimate rebirth.¹⁹³

¹⁹² The photo in question is sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <https://shorturl.at/kuDWZ>

¹⁹³ The story of Siavash in The Shahnameh (Šāh-nāme) represents the theme of death and resurrection. Siavash's tragic death as he steps into the fire symbolizes a demise, while his triumphal appearance out of the fire symbolizes his resurrection (Ferdowsi, 2000, p.250/3). This theme is further reinforced by the growth of the plant known as the “blood of Siavashan,” which symbolizes rebirth and immortality (Bahar,1983).

In Plato's philosophy, the pre-existent knowledge of the soul is forgotten upon entry into the physical world. Mircea Eliade draws upon Platonic *anamnesis* – i.e., remembrance in the wake of oblivion or unforgetting as knowing by way of recollection – in order to explore the theme of death and rebirth in various mythologies. According to Eliade (1978), death is seen as a form of rebirth and an opportunity for the individual to connect with forgotten knowledge. The drinking of the soul from the source of Lethe symbolizes the process of forgetting, while anamnesis represents the recollection of latent knowledge within human experience (Eliade, 1978, pp. 197-198). Therefore, in the context of myth, "knowing amounts to recollecting," and can be conceived as remembering or reconnecting with mythic narratives, archetypal symbols, and the collective wisdom embedded in cultural myths. This, in turn, means that myths contain profound truths and universal patterns that resonate in the human psyche. Individuals can tap into a broader consciousness and gain insights into their own existence and the broader cosmological order by engaging with myths and their symbols.

Furthermore, Goudarzi's statement and performance explore the deep connection between life and death, portraying death as a transitional phase that can be embraced and valued for its inherent beauty and its potential for rebirth (Figures 20 & 21). She stated, "In the performance of 'Like Sleep' in different environments, I leave myself alone with death for a few minutes and prepare myself for it. When my body is relaxed somewhere in nature, I am not alone but a part of a greater world. It could be said that death is a deep sleep, and sleep is the light death (concerning verse 39:42 of the Qur'an). Sometimes, I put a coffin with flower motifs on myself to show the beauty of this sleep." The grave, decked out in plant imagery, acts as the artist's visual representation of the beauty she finds in this sleep-like state. Through the juxtaposition of death and beauty, she invites the audience to reflect on the transformative nature of death and the potential for renewal and rebirth.



Figure 17. Tara Goudarzi. “Like Sleep” Hormuz Island, Iran (2010)



Figure 18. Tara Goudarzi, “Like Sleep” Noshahr Cemetery, Iran (2009)¹⁹⁴

A thought occurs upon seeing this image: Lorenz's work “Queer Art: A Freak Theory” (2012) explores the concept of bodies bound in textiles and how it disrupts conventional notions of political identity. Arguing that when confronted with such a body, it becomes difficult to

¹⁹⁴ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <https://shorturl.at/dkILY>

identify surface features such as gender, family background, sexuality, age, weight, or appearance (Lorenz, 2012, p. 54). This visualization of bodies challenges and subverts dichotomies such as male/female and able/not able by refusing to support or conform to them. Instead, bodies are presented that exist outside of these dichotomies and defy categorization. Lorenz refers to this practice as “radical drag,” a term that describes the transformative and destabilizing nature of these bodies in relation to established norms and identities. At first glance, this image evokes a sense of the transformative power of drag. Drag destabilizes the conventional meaning of apparel by depriving it of its symbolic connotations. The spectacle becomes introduced, disrupting the established link between clothing and political identity. Lorenz posits that wearing clothing opens up a space of “deferral and gap” that allows individuals to explore agency and subjectivity (Lorenz, 2012, pp. 19-20).

Goudarzi’s performance transcends the boundaries of human subjectivity. The figure depicted defies classification as a human being and challenges traditional categorizations. Lorenz suggests that this mysterious presence should be viewed as a “bundle” with no claim to personhood (Ibid, p.55). Rather than adhering to a fixed identity, this figure represents a deviation from conventional norms. Goudarzi’s bundled figure constantly transforms, moving through the landscape and refusing to be confined to a stable position. She embodies affective states, similar to Deleuze’s notion of the body without organs. The body without organs represents an indiscriminate state of being prior to conceptual frameworks and meanings (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p. 151). Deleuze and Guattari emphasize the distinction between psychoanalytic interpretation and anti-psychiatric experimentation. It challenges the psychoanalytic focus on fantasies, emphasizing instead the stripping away of fixed meanings and subjectivities. It invites a more fluid and liberating conception of identity, free from the constraints of established frames. The concept of being bound adds to the complexity of the interpretation. It indicates a disposition to confront and question the constraints imposed by social norms and conventions. The body encounters empowerment and a sense of release by pushing against the boundaries of identity and the subject. It refuses to be squeezed into pre-defined categories and instead relies on its agency and autonomy.

In reflecting on loss and renewal in environmental consciousness, Fereshteh Alamshah perceives the Earth as a metaphorical representation of a woman who symbolizes the mother of nature. Unlike other artists who resort to symbols and allegories to convey their concepts,

Alamshah's artistic approach is characterized by a direct and explicit representation of her idea. Alamshah perceives the Earth as a metaphorical representation of a woman who symbolizes the mother of nature.

In her "Plastic Art" collection, Alamshah incorporates plastic materials to create thought-provoking works of art. By wrapping herself, trees, or the figure of fish, she seeks to demonstrate the threatening impact of pollutants on the existence of living beings. In "Jonah's Fishes" (Figure 22), meanwhile, residents of Varzaneh, Iran, join in a performance of Alamshah based on the Qur'anic and Biblical tale of Jonah and the Whale. With the drought-stricken Gavkhooni Pond as a backdrop, the masked performers participate in a moving silent protest signifying collective concern over the exploitation of resources and the depletion of the Zayandeh Rood River.



Figure 19. Frereshteh Alamshah. "Jonah's Fishes" Video Art. Varzaneh, Isfahan, Iran (2015) ¹⁹⁵

The Jonah narrative also contains elements of a symbolic rebirth through water. Jonah's journey leads him into the depths of the sea, where he suffers a metaphorical death and descent into the depths. However, he emerges from the sea through divine intervention, representing a rebirth or resuscitation. In its symbolic meaning, the sea can stand for the primal source of life, the depths of the unconscious, and the transformative power of nature. It is a symbol of transition, change, and renewal. Through her performances, Alamshah aims to evoke a visceral appreciation

¹⁹⁵ The screenshots of the video in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <https://shorturl.at/cBDQ2>

of the adverse consequences of environmental contamination for both the environment and human life. She aims to convey sensations of unease, suffocation, and immobility through the experience of wrapping herself in plastic. Moreover, by placing herself amid these conditions, she seeks to empathize with the plight of creatures affected by pollution by seeking, for instance, to present the sensation of dry branches or those of creatures trapped in polluted waters.

A brief review of the history of performance art reveals that a dark and problematic political context underlies the vast majority of recent radical movements. The political transition, stagnation, and dissatisfaction with the present state of society are the motivations for artists in creating performance art. However, one of the most significant factors for the spread and dissemination of performance art is that such art relates directly to social rituals and rites, which are common in various cultures, so that the impact of performance art is effectively dependent on the spread and efficiency of the performance itself. In a significant number of such works, performing arts artists present a variety of ordinary daily actions under a plasma cover of ritual acts and ceremonies. In this way, they seek to amaze their audiences and share the subject of the work with them in a different temporal context in contrast to the one in which it is currently located.

The analysis of the performing body by Jones (1998), proposes a feminist critique of artistic practices. She highlights how the female body is problematized in patriarchal artistic contexts, challenging the notion of natural coherence. In contrast to the solid, permanent nature of art objects in the masculinist paradigm of modernism, the artist's body and actions are described as fluid, particular, interactive, and transitory (Jones, 1998, p. 27). In the context of Iranian environmental art, Atefeh Khas's artwork offers a personal, introspective expression of this phenomenon. As she explains, "I place my hair in spaces that evoke a sense of femininity" (Figures 23 & 24).¹⁹⁶

Khas's works were created during a challenging period marked by conflicts over the artist's hair. As such, her art reduces the concepts of beauty or ugliness and reveals a deeper exploration of identity and self-perception. Moreover, cutting hair [*gisuboraan*] as a ritual behavior in official mourning has been observed in various cultures throughout history. Its meaning can be explored through the lens of anthropology, archaeology, and mythology and through an understanding of

¹⁹⁶ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.atefehkhas.com/hair.html>

the cultural and belief systems of ancient societies. In these societies, numerous symbols and references to the Mother Goddess can be identified, including the role of hair in funeral and grieving ceremonies (Mokhtarian, 2008, p. 55).



Figure 20. Atefeh khas. “Hair on Wall” [From Hair Series]. Tehran (2008)



Figure 21. Atefeh Khas. “Hair on wood”. Saumur, France (2017)

Here, the artist's work encourages reflection on the possibility that removing hair from her head might bring happiness or a sense of relief to her life. This feeling expresses a longing for freedom from the burden of existence. The work is linked to a turning point in Khas's life, namely when the artist decided to cut off her hair, an act she equated with relief from fatigue or a means to endure the hardships of all those years. In this way, the artist's hair became a tool of self-expression and served as a constant reminder of this transformative experience. Each photograph in the series depicts the hair in the same form in distinct places, further emphasizing the significance and continuity of this personal exploration.

In most of Atefeh Khas's works, femininity and the artist's presence take an essential position. In her works of art, primarily created in a collection, symbols of femininity and feminism assume a special status that can always be considered from another angle. For Khas, a mirror or a woman's shoes and a broken tree with the second half of a woman reflected in the form of a natural wig with growing plants complete each other. In 2013, Khas commented on her "Wig Series" (Figure 25) in the following words: "I knitted a wig. I wore it in different places, and I united my body with nature [...] The earth became my mother, who gave me life, and I will return this birth to her. I got my beauty from her. She braided my hair when I was born, so now I will return it to her. I have made myself a wool wig and worn it in the womb of nature or given her my hair so that I can make a connection between these beauties" (Khas, 2013).

Through this form of artistic expression, Khas captures the essence of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy by depicting that human beings are not separate from the world but an integral part of it. Through visual imagery, the artist conveys the idea of a shared physical existence in which individuals are interconnected like threads in a corporate flesh, tightly woven and inseparable. In her works, ancient and modern female icons are considered, including nature as the half-lost woman of the contemporary era. It is an *anima* that has been torn apart by the *animus* of rational and modern technology, and she intends to collect and present such instances in her performance act.



Figure 25. Atefeh Khas. “Wig series” [from 2008-2016] Mashalak, Iran (2009) ¹⁹⁷

The symbolism of enclosed spaces in stories and legends represents personal transformation and rites of passage. These spaces, such as caves and crypts, serve as catalysts for the growth and enlightenment of the protagonist. Similarly, the concept of the sleep of nature, embodied in the phrase *au bois dormant* (Loeffler-Delachaux, 1985, p. 105), alludes to the belief in life emerging from death. Concurrently, these elements reflect the cyclical nature of existence, highlighting the potential for renewal and regeneration even in periods of darkness or stagnation. The confinement experienced by the heroine mirrors the dormant state of nature, emphasizing the transformative power of overcoming confinement and embracing the vitality of life.

The concept of the Great Goddess or primal feminine essence emerged as a symbolic framework to allow for reconnection with a sense of wholeness and authenticity. By invoking the mythic dimensions of femininity, individuals and feminist movements have sought to reclaim their subjectivity and reassert their identities within a broader narrative of empowerment and liberation. In the Iranian context, where ancient mythologies and cultural beliefs are highly influential, it is significant to consider the complexity of exploring mythic essences in the works of Iranian women artists such as Nooshin Naficy.

¹⁹⁷ The photo in question is sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.atefekhas.com/wig-series.html>

The emphasis on a mythic essence can be seen as an attempt to reclaim and assert a unified subjectivity rooted in the gendered body. It becomes a means, “an alternative form of agency,” for challenging the historical marginalization of women, amplifying their voices, and demanding recognition and equality. However, it is crucial to recognize that in the works of women artists, including Naficy and others, the absence of the body calls essentialist views of identity into question. In collections such as Naficy’s “Mothers of the Earth,” the focus shifts to exploring the contingent and ephemeral nature of the self rather than reinforcing fixed and unified identities. Keeping oneself trapped within the confines of essentialism can limit the potential for a diverse and multifaceted understanding of femininity and identity. There is a risk of perpetuating fixed ideas and binary categorizations that can undermine the objectives of gender equality and social progress. And yet, it should be remembered that the notion that feminism grounds (or should ground) its political power in a “state of nature” is problematic for several reasons:

1. It replaces the dominance of white male patriarchy with the concept of a “female primal state” without questioning the underlying social structures, maintaining the binary division between men within the social order and women outside of it.
2. This notion of a pure state of nature can never be fully realized as a political or liberatory site. It exists only with regard to social structures, defined by what it is *not*, rather than having an independent existence.
3. This perspective relies on a psychoanalytical and linguistic premise that treats pre-Oedipal sexuality as an autonomous entity separate from language and discourse, suggesting a pre-social language from which to discourse.

In effect, such a concept negates a fundamental principle of psychoanalytic theory, which recognizes that sexuality is organized and shaped by social and cultural factors. The notion of a social and female body erases the distinction between infantile sexuality and the process of sexual differentiation and overlooks the complex ways sexuality is constructed and influenced by social norms and structures.

4.5 The Transformative Power of Repetition

Fabric and textiles represent the classifications predating the fiber arts. The term *fiber art* refers to a branch of visual art with new approaches. Its artists create aesthetic creations from natural or synthetic materials such as fibers and other components. In this branch of art, plant and animal fibers, as well as synthetic fibers, are used. Herbal materials include plant fibers such as cotton and linen. Animal fibers consist of sheep wool, goat hair, and silk cocoon. Synthetic fibers, meanwhile, are made of acrylic and plastic. Here, we adopt the terminology of Constantine and Larsen (1980), who use the word *fabric* as the umbrella term for all fibrous structures.

There are various definitions of *fiber art*, which sometimes place it in the category of applied art, occasionally in the field of fine art, and, in some cases, in a combination of fine and applied art. It should be remembered that fiber art is an ancient form, and yet, it has continuously evolved over the centuries. In the contemporary period, especially over the last half century, fiber art has entered the field of conceptual art, where it has occupied a position of special significance (Lunin, 1990, pp. 697-698). Several authors, such as Constantine and Larsen (1973), Brite and Stamsta (1986), Lunin (1990), and Parker (1989), concur with the term *fiber art* or *art fabric* coming to be applied to artists' work in the post-World War II era.

With the rise of second - wave feminism, crafts came to play a significant role as tools of political discourse. Their prevalence and diversification propelled artists who worked in fiber arts. Parker highlights how the initial relation between women and handicrafts involved submission, as the needle represented the tool by which women extinguished facets of the self not consistent with "femininity." However, the needle also represented the tool through which women expressed themselves in a creative manner and even participated in quiet forms of protest (Parker, 1989, p. 163).¹⁹⁸ For a long time, it was assumed that women were to be confined to the household or the private or domestic realm. As such, more noncommercial and generational ties to the needle and fiber crafts were cultivated in women. This development has been linked to the relationship between maternity and domestic labor. In her book *The Culture of Knitting*, Turney explores the

¹⁹⁸ "*The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*" by Parker surveys embroidery practices across the North of Europe from the Middle Ages to the contemporary period. Here, Parker considers how both female and male embroiderers leveraged this craft to portray inventive renditions of biblical or historical issues. In contrast to histories that characterize embroidery as the epitome of female craft, Parker further broadens the comprehension of the medium to include a wide variety of practices that often empower female craftswomen by incorporating themes of social critique and opposition into their work.

gendered nature of knitting, noting its association with ornaments, domesticity, and the domestic sphere. As such, knitting is frequently perceived as an activity closely associated with gender, reflecting societal expectations and cultural perceptions (Turney, 2009, pp. 7-8).

In the wake of the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s, the complexity of the historical motivations surrounding women's domestic crafts came to be oversimplified as the question of women's oppression was cast into the spotlight. Then, in the 1960s and 1970s, an international revolution in fiber art occurred that extended beyond weaving. Artists from the United States and Europe expanded fiber art by exploring the qualities of fabrics. In addition, fiber art evolved multi-dimensionally to include figurative, abstract, and non-objective representations. It is important to note that fiber art has been a feature of the women's movement from its very inception, being intertwined with feminist activity. As such, a number of prominent women fiber artists were members of the women's movement (Prain, 2011, pp. 46-48).

The 1970s and 1980s marked the stabilization of fiber and its social entry into the domain of women's art. More specifically, in the 1980s, fiber art entered the realm of conceptual art under the influence of the postmodern art movement. The new focus of fiber art was on issues such as gender and familial feminism, social politics, behavioral science, and specific material concepts related to fibers (e.g., impermeability). In terms of conceptual and cognitive aspects, fiber art tended toward decentralizing approaches rooted in familiar traditional media such as painting, instead recognizing aesthetic thinking and acknowledging it as one of the most appealing new forms of media in contemporary art (Rosenberg, 2007, p. 42).

Craftivism (Greer, 2011) combines craft and activism by using traditional domestic activities such as weaving, quilting, knitting, and crocheting as political engagement in public spaces. According to Greer, craftivism has gained steam with evolving cultural dynamics and a renewed focus on issues such as gender equality, consumerism, and the effects of industrialization (Greer, 2011, pp. 170-176). The association of fiber art with feminism, which eventually took a step towards postmodernism, established the place of fiber art in the field of postmodern art. However, the conceptual content of fiber art, its contradictions and warnings, conflicts with modernity. Thus, fiber art sometimes refers to the forgotten tradition and occasionally combines both tradition and modernity, seeking to recount what ought to have been accomplished previously (Rosenberg, 2007, pp. 42-44).

By way of raising awareness and engaging in artistic, political, and everyday activism, the efforts of second-wave feminists brought about shifts in perceptions, medical practices, and legislation concerning women's rights and roles in modern societies. The social mechanism of feminism also brought forth arts, such as fiber art, that were inherently associated with women, repurposing the social application of art in the artistic community and the public sphere. Women's social upheavals in the early 20th century provided a platform for women's art to be widely disseminated (Prain, 2011). In other words, art such as fiber art had a social function rather than a purely artistic identity, a role related to the dissemination of the objectives of the women's movement in the 20th century.

In Iran, fiber art has seen exhibitions in recent decades, albeit with a limited number of artists and a lack of comprehensive documentation. The evolution of fiber art in Iran has been different from that of Europe, where contributing features such as tapestries, the Industrial Revolution, the Bauhaus School, and the Lausanne Biennale in the 1960s led to the emergence of fiber art as an art form in its own right. This discrepancy can be attributed to the disparity between industrialization and modernity in Iran and Western European countries, the implication being that the integration and coexistence of fiber art with contemporary trends in art in the Iranian context has been delayed. In Iran, traditional notions of textiles are challenged by incorporating contemporary forms of expression into sewing and weaving techniques. Particularly over the last two decades, such an approach has been adopted by artists as a means of conveying femininity. By employing sewing and weaving as creative mediums, Iranian contemporary art offers a critical lens through which to investigate daily life. Rather than being purely decorative, such works of art serve as narrative documentation of the continually shifting mindsets of Iranian women and capture the essence of the profound change of perspective in Iranian society.

An apt example of this phenomenon is Fariba Boroufar's installation "Penthouse" (Figure 26), in which the artist vividly depicts the plight of Iranian architecture in the face of the modern industrial world. The artwork represents the relentless advance of identity-less contemporary architecture that has overshadowed the cultural values of the past. Boroufar depicts this intrusion as a black mass hungrily devouring the last remnants of the bright turquoise color, symbolic of Iran's historic architectural traditions. The arms of the masses are arranged haphazardly, representing disorder and a lack of connection to the country's culture and way of life. By installing the artwork in an abandoned building, the context reinforces the meaning and significance of the

installation; in the desolate landscape that Boroufar depicts in her artwork “Penthouse,” faint glimmers of hope flicker, tenuously and without support. These remnants from the past float in space, neglected and abandoned. The artwork becomes a potent expression of anxiety amidst the remnants of history, crushed by the weight of layers of pavement and concrete. It captures the imagery of a sentient being trapped in an abyss of emptiness and darkness, where the essence of Iran’s vibrant cultural and artistic tradition is suffocated and extinguished.



Figure 22. Fariba Boroufar. “Penthouse” Manouchehri House, Kashan, Iran (2020)¹⁹⁹

In considering craft and fiber art, the question arises as to why these specific forms of art have emerged as particularly effective forms of environmental artistic activism. The answer may lie in the repetitive nature of the craft, which is frequently overlooked or underestimated. This holds the potential to disrupt fixed identities, and question established hierarchies. It underscores the dynamic and interconnected nature of creation and emphasizes the interplay of various elements within the artistic process. In this way, the repetitive gestures in arts and crafts may be

¹⁹⁹ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's Instagram page. @fariba_boroufar.

said to embody the philosophy articulated in Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition* (1994), which challenges preconceived notions of identity that limit one's comprehension (Deleuze, 1994, p. 50). Deleuze seeks to transcend such frameworks by proposing an ontological perspective that recognizes difference's intrinsic value and transformative potential. Repetition in arts and crafts can thus serve as a means of resistance and subversion that breaks down patriarchal frameworks and provides new opportunities for artistic expression.

Narges Hashemi's "The Green Dream of the House" (Figure 27) is a collaborative effort involving the participation and cooperation of the artist's sisters in the context of family gatherings. It addresses a significant concern of contemporary society, namely the uncertainty of finding shelter and constructing a home. This installation is part of the more significant collection, "The House Breathes," which has been in the process of creation since 2016. From the outset, the collection focuses on creating a space that provides shelter, encourages community gatherings, and fosters interaction between the artwork and its audience.

"The Green Dream of House" consists of a woven structure that creates an immersive and tangible space that provides protection and visibility to the bodies inside. It consists of a container woven from threads and recycled plastic with green columns and a mesh ceiling. This sculpted form entices the audience to step inside as they are enveloped by shadows and invited to ponder the boundaries between themselves, the shadows, and the interplay between reality and representation. Fiber art strives to communicate with the audience in a practical but also aesthetic way. Fiber artwork like Hashemi's thereby often exudes a communicative character, inviting the viewer to engage in introspection in the space created by the artwork and to reflect on the connection between their body and the environment.

Hashemi's work is an example of fiber artwork that may be said to enact Deleuzian difference. Highlighting the affirmative nature of difference, Deleuze invites one to reevaluate how one perceives diversity, identity, and the complexity of existence. Rather than viewing difference as a threat or obstacle, he encourages one to embrace it as a source of growth, creativity, and transformative potential (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 30-31). Corso Esquivel (2019) explores the notion of intrinsic difference in a "border space" or, as he puts it, a "shadow space" that functions independently of conceptual frameworks. This perspective is consistent with Deleuze's concept of "pure difference" and offers an ontological transformation of meaning through the expansion and

co-emergence of concepts (Corso Esquivel, 2019, p. 63). Hashemi's interweaving of shadows in the construction of the house area is thus revealed as interconnected fields of difference.

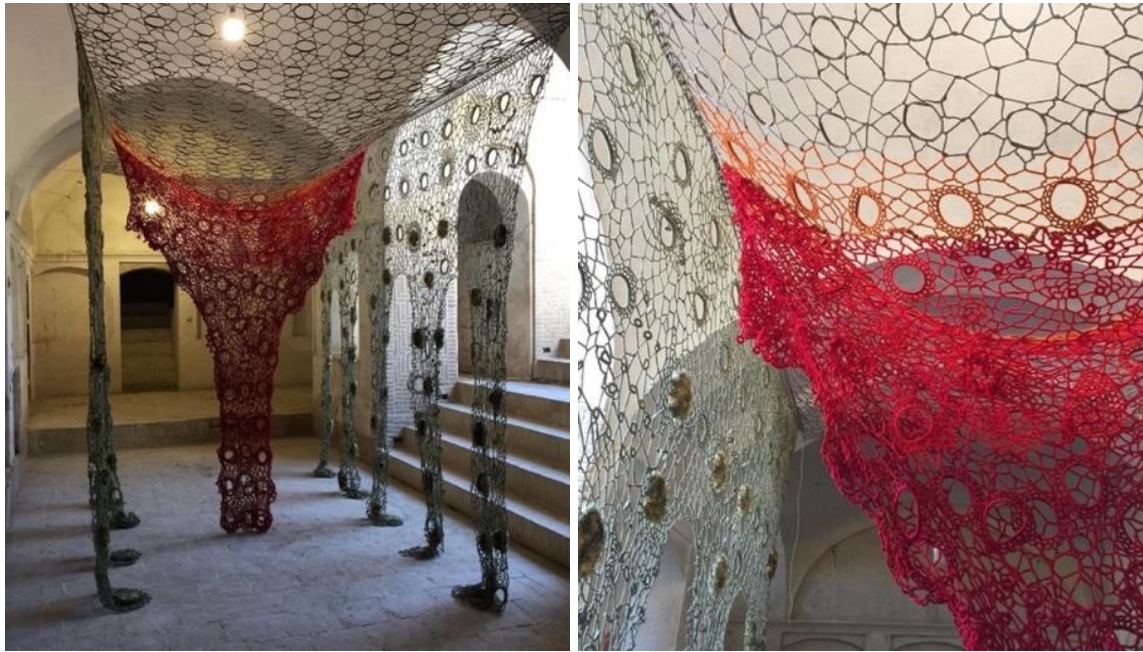


Figure 23. Narges Hashemi. “The Green Dream of the House” Manouchehri House, Kashan, Iran (2020) ²⁰⁰

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari introduce the concept of the *rhizome*, which challenges traditional notions of hierarchical control. They describe the rhizome as a dynamic and horizontal organism that resists a fixed center of position of power. This understanding of transversal movement extends beyond the natural world to encompass a wide range of interconnected networks, establishing “connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles” (Deleuze and Guattari, p.7). Esquivel (2019) highlights the under-researched relationship between the rhizome concept and its restricted application in the feminist discourse on fiber art. By adopting the rhizome, feminist artists engage in transversal activities that defy traditional notions of authority and domination. They forge alternative paths, create new means of expression, and dismantle

²⁰⁰ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's Instagram page. @nargeshashemii.n.

oppressive systems. The rhizomatic approach empowers such artists to question the limitations imposed by patriarchal structures.

In 2020, PersBook's 10th project, titled "Handwork" [Dastkaar], showcased artistic and collaborative projects at the Sahib House site in Kashan, Iran. This site is part of the Manouchehri House residential complex, an exquisite example of traditional Iranian architecture. The project highlighted Iranian artistic heritage and promoted national traditions. Artists engaged with the historical sites of Kashan to reinvent and revitalize Iranian culture in contemporary art. As part of this project, Neda Darzi took the lead in terms of Persbook's collaborative effort, bringing together a group of artists, including Hoda Akhlaghi, Mansoureh Bagharaee, Elham Rahimian, Farzaneh Shahri, Farideh Ebadi, Mitra Makoui, Narges Mohammadian, and Toktam Hemmati (Figure 28).

In "Handwork," the weave's surface undergoes a complementary process, serving as a testament to local artists' skills and interdisciplinary ingenuity. By way of this collaborative endeavor, the artists had come to weave and sew intricate handmade surfaces that aligned with the project's location. The fiber artwork may be said to foster a cooperative atmosphere, transcending individual efforts and creating a rich tapestry of textures. The weaving and crafting process intertwines like human chains, forming a cohesive whole reminiscent of intricate patterns. Drawing on Hentschel's theory (2001) about the connection between space and gender, it can be asserted that artists in Kashan confronted the very concept of gendered spatial arrangements and challenged traditional notions of gender roles through art. They were, in effect, exploring how space can be reinvented, reclaimed, and overturned in order to break down established gender hierarchies.

Some artists create installations or site-specific artwork that reconfigures spaces to challenge gender norms. They may incorporate elements traditionally associated with one gender into spaces associated with another, blurring boundaries, and challenging observers to rethink their preconceived notions. By reshaping spatial arrangements, these artists invite a reevaluation of power dynamics and social constructions related to gender. Other artists, meanwhile, draw on performance and body art to explore the relationship between gender and space. They can use their bodies as sites of resistance to challenge social expectations and reclaim space for marginalized genders. Through their performances, they challenge the traditional binary understanding of gender and emphasize the fluidity and diversity of gender identities.



Figure 24. Collaborative Artwork. “Dastkar Project” Manouchehri House, Kashan, Iran (2020) ²⁰¹

According to the sociology of gender, a gendered division of labor in a society and a gendered allocation of labor can lead to an unequal distribution of resources between the sexes through time (Turner, 1999). Space and gender impact each other. On the one hand, gender is reflected in spatial arrangements and dynamics, shaping how spaces are designed, occupied, and experienced. This can be observed in allocating certain spaces to specific gender roles or in the presence of gendered norms and expectations in spatial contexts. Conversely, space actively contributes to social production and reproduction by influencing social interactions, power dynamics, and the construction of gendered identities. As theorized by Lefebvre (1991), space is socially constructed and is continually shaped by human actions, practices, and meanings. Therefore, understanding the relationship between space and gender requires acknowledging their dialectical nature, where space both influences and is influenced by social actors.

²⁰¹ The photos in question are sourced from the persbook's website, which can be accessed at <https://persbookart.com/gallery-10/>

In this regard, “My Land is Qamsar” (Figure 29), by Neda Darzi (in collaboration with Naghmeh Shirvani), deserves mention. It is a work of art that employs a feminine, ecological, and cultural approach inspired by the traditions and art of the desert region. The installation features forty crocheted pieces arranged on the large pond of the performance site. The fabric, adorned with red and pink flowers, signifies the female body’s connection to the house’s old structures through threads. Adjacent to it, flowers are positioned as a tribute to the traditional way of obtaining rose water. Moreover, the water’s surface evokes a sense of floating that further enhances the visual impact of the installation.

When considering fiber art, it is worth turning to Parr (2010), who underscores the idea that repetition in fiber art goes beyond mere replication. He highlights the “full force of difference,” which refers to the multiplicity and individuality within the artistic process. Each piece of fiber art has distinctive characteristics, textures, and visual elements. The notion of *pre-individual singularities* suggests that fiber artists tap into a realm of creativity that transcends predetermined categories or identities (Parr, 2010, pp. 225-226). It implies that the artistic process is a space where new possibilities emerge and the boundaries of traditional artistic identities are challenged. Through Deleuze’s perspective, the craft is re-evaluated and seen as a manifestation of pure emergence. It reveals a realm of virtual possibilities in which each stitch represents a node in the process of becoming.

Iranian fiber artists, including Neda Darzi and others, as well as those in the field of arts and crafts, can be said to embody the conception of repetition just described. As such, repetition in the context of Iranian fiber art is a dynamic force that contributes to the discourse of art criticism. In the “Dastkar” projects, for instance, in which crochet plays an important role, the metaphorical significance of repetition is evident. In crochet, as in knitting, a single stitch is repeated to create more significant patterns. Each loop, while appearing repetitive on the surface, holds transformative potential. In other words, repetition is transformed into a means of creative inquiry, where each iteration contributes to the evolution of the artist’s practice.



Figure 25. Neda Darzi. “My Land is Qamsar.” Manouchehri House, Iran (2020) ²⁰²

4.6 Unveiling the Body: Tracing Women’s Contributions and Shaping Perspectives on Space

In the Iranian context, women’s bodies are closely linked to their constructed identity, which is strongly affected by the hijab’s emblematic significance. The diverse representations of veiled bodies in Islamic culture frequently trigger politically charged discussions and emphasize the body as a highly charged icon with meaningful implications. The women artists in this study explore the notion of the body and how the body can be viewed as a landscape, a territory that carries personal, cultural, and social meanings. In “Is Any Body Home?” Sobchack (2004) offers the following reflection:

²⁰² The photos in question are sourced from the artist's Instagram page. @nedadarzi

[b]odies, then, can be experienced as home, as house, and as prison. As “Home” [g]rounds us in a felicitous condition of enablement, [p]rovides initial access to the world and [giving meaning] to our lives through its motility, senses, and gravity. As “house,” it is the place [w]e live, [d]ecorate, and display for the edification of both ourselves and others. [This illustrates the multifaceted nature of a “house” and underscores its function not just as a residence, per se, but as a substrate for personal expression and a place for social interaction]. [A]s “prison-house” it is the reified and alien place that grounds us in negativity, denies access to the world in an infelicitous condition of constraint and discipline. [It] locks us up in a room everyone else regards as ours but that we understand as really belonging to “others” (Sobchack, 2004, p.184).

The body can also embody the absence of meaning of place. It can stand for the longing for a site called home and for a sense of dislocation or detachment from familiar landscapes and cultural contexts. In this context, the body becomes a powerful symbol of yearning and the pursuit of a sense of rootedness. The multivalence of the body and the notion of place have been explored in different ways in contemporary art.

In 1970, in an unrenovated Manhattan loft, Jeffrey Lew set up the 112 Workshop by inviting artists interested in “raw,” “rough,” and “unfinished spaces,” such as Gordon Matta-Clark,²⁰³ who famously excavated a hole in the basement floor and planted a cherry tree. This fascination with unfinished spaces and alternative exhibition spaces, prevalent in New York in the 1960s and 1970s, aimed to detach art from commercial institutions and break down narrow definitions of artmaking by encouraging the exploration and expansion of spaces where boundaries could be negotiated and challenged (Beck, 2002, p. 254). In this regard, “raw” became a metaphor for freedom from restrictive definitions of art-making, alluding to a frontier state where boundaries are negotiated. “[R]aw space’ refers to a specific physical state of an architectural structure [and] “raw experience” denotes a social dimension excluded from the generic white-cube gallery space, and it impacts the artists’ encounters with the physical space, the immediate community, and with the audience at large” (Ibid, pp. 254-255).

²⁰³ For further information on the work of Gordon Matta-Clark, see Pamela M. Lee's book *Object to Be Destroyed: The Work of Gordon Matta-Clark* (2000).

According to Homi Bhabha (1994), the experience of *home* includes the “shock of recognition of the world in the home” and the “home in the world.” This indicates that the concept of *the home* involves a dual perspective. On the one hand, it is about recognizing and realizing the wider world within the domestic space, stressing the interconnectedness between the home and the outside world. On the other hand, it involves recognition of the intimacy of the home and its influence on the perception of and engagement with the external world.

How might such explorations of the relationship between the meaning of the body and the shaping of space be related to environmental art in Iran? In contemporary Iranian art, various artists have sought to expand the boundaries of artmaking while creating ungoverned art spaces. The nostalgia for the Pahlavi era, perceived by some artists as a time of greater freedoms, has intensified. One may speak of “the Iranian captivation with raw spaces,” a phenomenon that alludes to a particular framework in which space is perceived as a site of emotional, economic, and political contestation (Karimi, 2022, p. 128).

Gohar Dashty’s artwork offers insights into how contemporary Iranian artists have conceived of the body and the notion of home. Dashty is an Iranian photographer who grew up in the war-torn city of Ahvaz and later moved to Mashhad, a city full of remnants of the past. Her series “Home” includes eight images that capture the dilapidated middle-class homes in Mashhad, where she herself lived briefly (Figures 30&31). The series is a tribute to her formative experiences and memories of her youth in a city far from the war zone where she grew up. The audience’s first encounter with Dashty’s “Home” occurs through relatively large works of art depicting the interiors of old Iranian houses. These depictions display an unconventional setting where the plants are the only inhabitants. There are no discernible signs of human presence. The appearance of plants in such extraordinary locations creates a surreal representation of nature at the very Center of what is usually considered human life. Humans no longer inhabit these homes, and nature, once exploited and controlled by humans, has now reclaimed its place in images that may be described as apocalyptic.



Figure 26. Gohar Dashty. "Untitled" (2017)



Figure 27. Gohar Dashty. "Untitled" (2017) ²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <https://gohardashti.com/home-17/>

The scenes that emerge from Dashty's work remind the audience of the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature as well as the consequences of neglecting the environmental responsibilities bound up with the human condition. It could be argued that there is a subtle aggression in comments such as "nature, man's home, has conquered the most personal place of one's life." Such statements suggest that nature has invaded or taken over man's personal space. Regarding her recent artwork, Dashty maintains that it "is not only a personal exploration about nature but is also about how nature can be political. What happens to the environment when human populations are displaced or destroyed by war? People are transient, while nature is a constant, immutable quantity. Nature will be here long after we are all gone" (Dashty, 2017).

While we may agree with Dashty's contentions to a degree, her comments fail to provide a clear link between the theme of war and the space depicted, and war is neither explicitly nor implicitly referenced in the photographs. It is also worth noting the fact that Dashty's "Home" collection bears a formal and visual resemblance to Anna Schuleit Haber's 2003 "Bloom" collection. This may raise questions about the validity of the evaluation of Dashty's works, even by Dashty herself, suggesting that works that appear to share a "family resemblance" might bear different motivations and seek to engage with different challenges.

That Dashty's artwork bears a resemblance to that of foreign photographers is nothing new. It is a phenomenon that pervades art in general, and in this respect, Iranian art is no exception. In fact, with regard to Dashty's work, such resemblance is already evident long before her "Home" collection. What is distinctive, however, is that Dashty has attempted to put "an Iranian touch" on the notions that exist in contemporary environmental art, "Iranianizing" the way she conveys the desired concepts. This is neither an isolated phenomenon nor something which happens instantly. Rather, it is a gradual process that has occurred progressively in Iran, where the very conception of *appropriation* and its practical implications have differed from the postmodern Western context. Thus, while drawing inspiration from other artists is a common practice in art history, Iranian environmental art by artists such as Dashty, Naficy, and Goudarzi raises questions about the nature and implications of the *boundary* with regard to new concepts and personal styles and, ultimately about the question of *originality* in art. The vague and ambiguous sense of boundary in Iranian artistic expression calls for further examination and evaluation.

Let us now turn to the way in which the body features in Iranian environmental art. The human body stands in the Center of what can be conceived of as a "manifestation of identity."

Issues such as social gender, biological gender, race, and ethnicity are aspects of this manifestation of identity. Thus, humans are known to regularly alter their body shape, hair, and attire in their attempt to become equal, rebel against social conventions, and convey their messages to others. Given that the body has served as a site of identity manifestation, it is not surprising, therefore, that numerous artists have explored the concept of gender by representing their bodies in works of art.

Feminist artists may be said to have reclaimed the female body and depicted it from various perspectives. The association between spaces and female bodies stems from the perceived passivity and physicality attributed to women. Since space is seen as passive and all-encompassing, women are often considered passive beings closely associated with their physicality. This cultural association reinforces the notion that spaces can be metaphorically linked to the contours and shapes of women's bodies. This supports the perspective put forth by Löw (2006), for whom spaces are not merely physical structures but rather sites imbued with symbolic meaning and cultural representations that shape the interactions and encounters between individuals and cultures.

In this regard, Tara Goudarzi's statement in "Offering" appears to reflect a reconceptualization of both the body and space (Figures 32 & 33). It offers a personal artistic expression and experience connected to nature, birth, death, purity, and the relationship between the artist and the environment. In reference to "Offering," Goudarzi states,

"It was black at first, just like a death of a tree. And I was covered (dressed) in white, just like when I was born [...] by the vastness of the beach. The purity of my being experienced the blood of the earth, and then, I was green all over while released [from] all boundaries. In the "Offering," I put on my veil since we have always been together, ever since I was 9, sometimes out of divine love and sometimes out of hatred. Now I only enjoy its purity, its plainness, its whiteness, and I offer all of this to the endless greatness" (Goudarzi, 2009).

The artist's description of being wrapped in white and sensing the earth's blood suggests a deep connection to nature. This connection can be interpreted in the context of environmental art,

in which artists often seek to emphasize the interdependence between humans and nature. It emphasizes reverence for the environment and the recognition of the human's inherent bond with it. The focus on the role of black, white, and green as emblematic colors can be analyzed through an environmental lens. The black, likened initially to a tree's death, may represent environmental degradation or the loss of natural habitats. Whiteness, associated with purity, may symbolize the artist's desire for a harmonious and sustainable relationship with nature. The green, mentioned to be "everywhere" and representing liberation from boundaries, could represent growth, vitality, and environmental awareness.

Bachelard's abstract exploration reveals the duality of the fusion of elements in the material imagination. Through a metaphorical "marriage," opposing elements acquire sexual characteristics that symbolize the sexes. When feminine elements such as water and earth combine, a nuanced masculinity emerges to assert dominance. This intricate interplay solidifies the connection and transforms imaginary constructions into tangible manifestations. Bachelard's observation delves into the enigmatic profundities of the elements' merging and the symbolic nuances in the vast realm of the imagination (Bachelard, 1983, p. 95).



Figure 32. Tara Goudarzi, "Offering" Hormuz Island, Iran (2009)



Figure 33. Tara Goudarzi. “Offering” Goldasht, Khorramabad, Iran (2009) ²⁰⁵

Returning to Goudarzi’s “Offering,” we notice mention of the artist donning a veil and having done so since the age of nine. This veil is potentially intended to signify the artist’s recognition of the hidden connections between gender and environmental issues and her exploration of power dynamics in these realms. The title “Offering” itself may hint at sustainability with the artist’s sacrificing her purity, plainness, and whiteness to “infinite greatness,” signifying perhaps a desire for a sustainable and reciprocal relationship with the environment. Furthermore, this sacrificial act could be read as a call to respect and protect the natural world, underscoring the artist’s commitment to environmental conservation and the significance of preserving and valuing the earth’s natural resources.

As is evident through Goudarzi’s work and those of some of the Iranian environmental artists already alluded to in this study, the body assumes a significant role beyond that of ‘mere body.’ As the medium through which artists may create their works of art, the body now evokes signification beyond the way it is often conventionally defined. For many artists, using their bodies in the performing arts is a way to regain control over their bodies and be skeptical of gender. The presence of women and the issue of gender in the world of art are phenomena that demonstrate the diverse nature of gender relations in society.

²⁰⁵ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.arttara.com/offering.html>

Social, cultural, religious, and economic contexts have played an essential part in the emergence of women's art in all eras, both as artists and as objects of art. The Social mechanisms have undoubtedly shaped a kind of gender relation that is crucial to the manner in which women have inhabited the world of art and the dimensions their presence has taken on. A number of environmental artists have used materials from nature and their bodies as the most accessible and primary objects or mediums to improve their own relationship with nature and to convey their message to audiences, and this certainly applied to prominent Iranian environmental artists.

Despite the rich interplay between space and the body in environmental art that has already been alluded to above, the two may be said to be part of the act of witnessing. According to Stoddard (2009), the term *witness* encompasses the legal concept of an eyewitness who testifies to what is witnessed and authenticates a lived experience in the present moment. The term extends beyond mere recognition to include the embodiment of evidence through physical presence. It relates to witnessing something beyond what can be readily confessed or perceived (Stoddard, 2009, p. 30). The contemplation of pain in performance involves the perception of what is being presented and the audience's predisposition to identifying and responding to specific aesthetic expressions as painful. Stoddard introduces the term *witnessing* to emphasize a more nuanced understanding of the performance moment, highlighting the inherent connection between spectatorship, response, and responsibility (Ibid). *Witnessing* involves more than just visual perception; it involves a physical and ethical commitment characterized by endurance, suffering, and responsibility. The term *witnessing* connotes an embodiment of another's pain, a phenomenon that transcends mere observation. Personal history, intimate relationships, and responses to images of human suffering reinforce this understanding. Pain has a communicative power through its affective qualities, encompassing the experience's intangible aspects and contributing to its profound impact (Zembylas, 2006).

In the realm of environmental art, the concept of *affect* focuses on the artist's engagement with the environment and the audience's affective response to the work. Like Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of the term (1987), in environmental art, affect represents an unpredictable and excessive force that transcends traditional artistic boundaries. The affective experience allows for a transformative and potentially radical engagement with the environment as the boundaries between the self, the artwork, and the natural world blur, opening up new opportunities for environmental awareness.

Fereshteh Alamshah's "The Spirit of the Tree" (2010) explores the profound imagery of plastic, which she witnesses as a representation of various human industries, including the chemical and nuclear industries. Her work draws attention to plastic products and the relentless pursuit of comfort and power without any consideration of the consequences of such ambitions on nature (Figure 34). Alamshah's work draws attention to the way nature's entanglement in plastic waste piles mirrors humanity's entanglement in its own creations. The artist's connection to the dry and bent plastic tree catalyzes a deeper comprehension of the life and death of a real tree. Through this connection, Alamshah can empathize with the tree's struggles, feeling the breaking of branches, the withering of veins, and the inability to move and breathe. This intimate experience allows the artist to address the connection between nature, the spirit of the tree, and the human spirit. By intertwining these three elements, the artist emphasizes their inseparability and highlights the tremendous impact industrial modes of human life have had on the natural world.

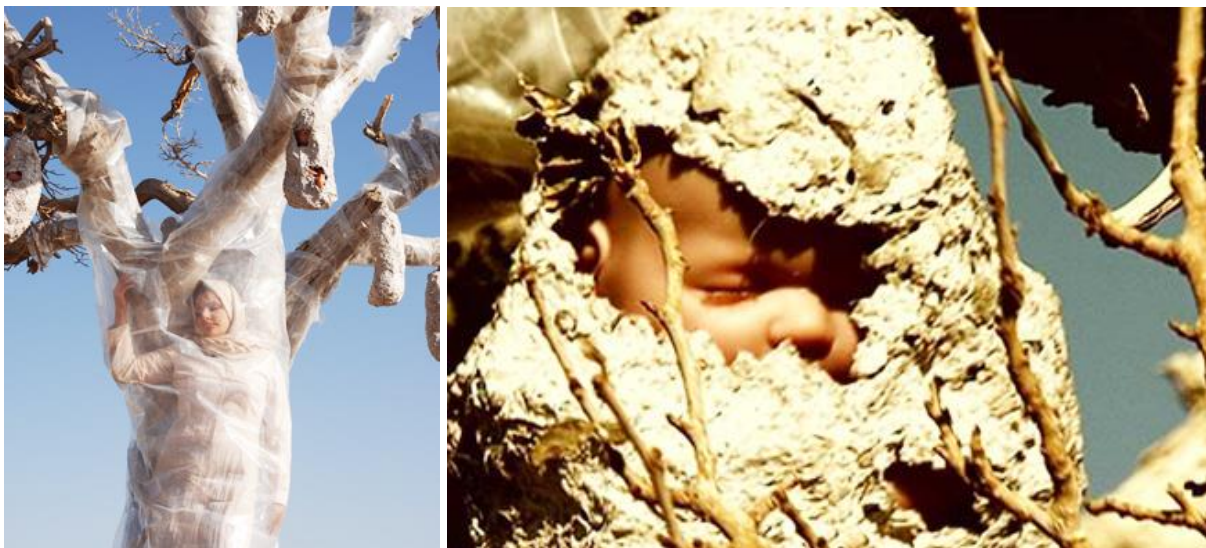


Figure 28. Fereshteh Alamshah. "The Spirit of the Tree" Hasan Abad, Isfahan, Iran (2010) ²⁰⁶

It should be noted that the use of the body as an installation or performance in environmental art or land art in nature differs considerably from performance art inside a gallery

²⁰⁶ The photos in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <https://shorturl.at/fiwJ4>

or museum. In works such as Alamshah's, environmental artists directly connect their body to nature. Here, the body becomes an object positioned in nature so as to encourage the audience's engagement with nature through the significance and content of the artist's work.

Collections of artworks that involve and focus bodies have allowed environmental artists to explore how behaviors and social relations establish gender through politics and power. A number of environmental artists have staged temporary and short-term performances in nature in front of their audiences in order to integrate and identify themselves (through the body, which is the primary element of the artist's interaction with nature) with their environment. Such artists consider themselves a part of nature and the environment surrounding them.

The theme of seventh annual Persbook Art Festival centered on creating art near the pigeon towers in Dorcheh, near Isfahan, Iran. This marked the first time that Persbook had supported large-scale site-specific projects outside the traditional spaces of galleries and museums. The presence of pigeon towers and pigeons in specific fields has established a stable relationship between humans and their surroundings, something which could be observed in the outskirts of Isfahan City before the industrialization of agriculture.²⁰⁷ However, with shifts in attitudes toward nature and the implementation of agricultural industrialization, significant changes occurred in the relationship between humans and their environment. This is evident in Isfahan City's fields. Over time, traditional agricultural techniques were abandoned, and the pigeons that had once played a role in the agricultural ecosystem were removed as the towers began to deteriorate or were simply abandoned. Persbook's project, through the involvement of the art and architectural community, aimed to highlight the significance of architecture and sustainable design in the drylands of Iran and raise public awareness of the need to restore and rejuvenate such structures.²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ While the appearance of pigeon towers in various regions varies, the Iranian pigeon loft is distinguished from pigeon lofts in other countries because its sole function is manure collection. This functional distinction reflects in the construction features of Iranian pigeon towers, uniquely differing from the ones in Europe. See Ayatollah Mirzaei. "Comparison of some features and functions of pigeon towers in Iran and England." (Social Sciences Quarterly, No. 37. 2006): 109-139.

²⁰⁸ Most landscape architects define the nature of their practice in terms of ecological and naturalistic principles, emphasizing preserving the integrity of natural features and ecological values. Prominent figures in this field include Ian L. McHarg and John Ormsbee Simonds. In the book "Design with Nature" (2019), McHarg provides an ecological perspective on environmental crises and argues that this perspective is essential to sustainable living. He emphasizes the significance of environmental sustainability and sensitivity in landscape architecture, particularly concerning the relationship between humans and nature. Similarly, other landscape architects such as Simon Bell, John L. Motloch, and Anne Whiston Spirn have emphasized the relationship between humans and nature, highlighting the significance of the mutual interaction between the two.

The exploration of space in Iranian environmental art, however, is not limited to site-specific art. Numerous Iranian artists have expressed their sense of space using the medium of video. In the video art “Diapason” by Minoo Iranpour, the term *diapason* is primarily associated with the word “frequency,” which can be interpreted as the range of sounds or vibrations the human ear perceives (Figure 35). As the video unfolds, it captivates viewers with a scene featuring a man carrying a notebook and swiftly flipping through its pages. The camera follows his purposeful stride as he makes his way toward the pigeon’s house.

This opening sequence serves as a reminder of Hentschel's theory of *Raumsex*, a concept she introduced to examine the gendered dynamics of space and perception. Drawing on Hentschel’s insights (2001), Iranpour emphasizes the significant role of gendered power dynamics and social expectations in shaping one’s experience and comprehension of space, particularly in art and visual representation. The concept of *Raumsex* illuminates the process by which space is feminized, implying a subordinate or passive mode of positioning. At the same time, the viewer often assumed to be male and dominant, takes on an active and empowering position (Hentschel, 2001, p. 12).

In the context of Iranpour’s video, “Diapason,” this may suggest that the pigeons cooing and flapping their wings generate a frequency that completes the atmosphere and provides a sense of harmony. The sound of pigeons and the tower can be seen as a metaphor for the natural world, where every living thing and element creates a balanced and harmonious ecosystem. Both the sound of the pigeons and the presence of the paper floating through the air may exemplify what phenomenologists call *lived space*, referring to how the environment and surroundings are experienced and imbued with meaning through our embodied interactions with them. In this sense, the desolate pigeon towers could be seen as a particular kind of lived space steeped in history and meaning shaped by human and natural forces. The scattering of seeds in the tower symbolizes an act of maintaining and preserving this ecosystem.

In a statement about “Diapason,” Iranpour states,

“Therefore, Jehovah (God of Jews) drove him out of the Garden of Eden. In ancient religious books such as the Torah, disobedience of divine law is seen to have a feminine aspect. According to other readings, this temptation allows for love and its frequency is a part of completion. Diapason is primarily associated with the word ‘frequency,’ and frequency results from a stimulus with a broadly

influential echo. Love is a human stimulus completing all life” (Persbook, 2018, p.15).



Figure 35. Minoo Iranpour. “Diapason” Video art. Iran (2018) ²⁰⁹

Iranpour’s reference to Jehovah and the Garden of Eden suggests religious or mythological associations, while the idea of disobedience as a feminine aspect may evoke gender connotations. Taking a phenomenological perspective, however, it would be appropriate to consider how such religious and mythological connotations shape the way one experiences the natural world, both in terms of how one perceives, comprehends, and interacts with it.

Nooshin Naficy’s engagement with the theme of the pigeon house in Persbook’s 2018 art festival differed from that of Iranpour (Figure 36). Naficy adopted a site-specific performance art approach, calling her work “Bottles of Tears.” Naficy described her work in the following way: “Humans and the outcomes of modern life drown all kinds of animals, one by one, in their blood or in the tears of human beings! Forty glass bottles will be filled with water, with clay birds sitting at the bottom. A woman will arrange them in holes in the pigeon tower. The location is shaped by either dawn or evening light. Within 10–20 minutes, the clay birds will be mixed with water and dissolve, becoming nothing but a mass of mud” (Persbook, 2018, p.21).

²⁰⁹ The video art, lasting 3 minutes and 30 seconds, features contributions from various artists and collaborators. Cameraman: Kavous Farzadi, Editing: Minoo Iranpour, Composite Sound: Minoo Iranpour and Mohsen Kohestani. Performers include Mansor Dehestani, Ali Farzadi, Mina Iranpour, and Minoo Iranpour: [Link to Video](#).

Naficy's "Bottles of Tears" and her description thereof hints at the theme of environmental degradation and the negative impact of human actions on nature. The artist's use of glass bottles and clay birds alludes to the fragility and vulnerability of the natural world, while the dissolution of the clay pigeons can be regarded as a metaphor for the dissolution of the boundaries between humans and nature as well as the recognition of the interdependence of all living things. Furthermore, the arranging of the bottles in the pigeon tower by a woman can be interpreted as a figurative defiance of patriarchal power, which has historically devalued and exploited both women and nature. The reference to "dawn or evening light," meanwhile, connotes a sense of temporality and transience and underscores the notion that the harm inflicted by human activity may be irreversible and have permanent consequences.



Figure 29. Nooshin Naficy. "Bottles of Tears" Dorcheh's Pigeon Tower, Isfahan, Iran (2018) ²¹⁰

²¹⁰ The photos in question are sourced from the persbook's website, which can be accessed at <https://shorturl.at/cHK56>

In order to gain insight into how meaning emerges via the visual medium in the context of environmental art and how this is rooted in cultural dynamics, it is worth turning to Gillian Rose. In *Visual Methodologies* (2001), Rose identifies a set of “human signs” that observers interpret when engaging with visual representations. Such signs include the representation of bodies, behaviors, and actions in conjunction with the presence of furnishings and scenes. Rose emphasizes that deciphering these signs demands a comprehensive comprehension of the visual images that signify social relationships and distinctions, particularly those rooted in culture.

The question of how social relationships are mediated by way of culture requires an examination of the question of power. The geometry of power that signifies the patriarchal system extends its influence over the collective life of individuals and immerses them in its sphere. Individuals may often lack self-awareness and are denied the opportunity to become conscious of the “other,” which hinders their potential to connect with others who have had similar experiences throughout history. As a consequence, both the individual and the collective identities of a subject become diminished to the point that only their physical embodiment – i.e., their relegation to their physical identity – remains. Other aspects of their being – e.g., personal characteristics, cultural affiliation, and social ties – are pushed to the background or neglected (Rose, 2011, pp.91-94). Consequently, a woman’s sphere of action, behavior, and agency is limited to her physical body, which is constrained by the predefined boundaries of role and expectation assigned to her by her particular social context.

Foucault’s approach to power (1892) emphasizes resistance and provides a comprehensive understanding of its dynamics. The characteristics of critical resistance include its transnational nature, the goal of influencing the effects of power, direct challenge to authority, focus on individual positions within power structures, and engagement with effects of power related to knowledge, ability, and competence. These struggles contest the imposition of control that disregards individuality and identity determination through surveillance. In essence, such power transforms individuals into subjects (Foucault, 1892. pp.781-782).

The examination of the works of Rose and Foucault makes it evident that socio-cultural formations of identity are complex, encompassing a person’s self-interpretation and the person’s cultural position within society. The concept of *identity* reflects the temporal and local aspects of an individual’s life and their background and connection to a particular land or place. Identities are not formed in isolation but are shaped and defined by the societies in which individuals exist.

The tendency towards the “dissolution of the feminine identity” as subjected to masculine norms can be observed in the works of Tara Goudarzi, particularly with regard to “human signs,” including the body and the domain of action. Through her extensive involvement in environmental art and performance art in recent years, Goudarzi has gained international recognition. Her works of art in nature are deeply grounded in her culture and religious beliefs. For Goudarzi, however, the primary audience is herself and the potential of her body. She seeks a direct connection between her body, the earth, and nature (Conversation with Goudarzi, 2019). Among the elements that distinguish Goudarzi’s works from the likes of Mendieta or Van der Molen are the artist’s body being completely covered in performances and installations in nature, an aspect that reflects indigenous beliefs, culture, and societal structure. The use of the body as a principal medium in her works reveals the potent traces of religion and culture in Goudarzi’s life and work. In “Curl Up,” the body is presented purely as a part of nature (Figures 37& 38). As Goudarzi explains, “curling up and being crumpled in the environment is a kind of research for me. I’m searching to find an answer to my question. Who am I? And where do I belong to? When I squat in a small place, I see myself as a bit of a great creation. While squatting, I have a familiar sense; like I experience my embryo period again” (Goudarzi, 2009).

In Goudarzi's performances, we see a connection to Mircea Eliade's concept of hierophany and the transformation of the sacred. Her work depicts seemingly ordinary objects or spaces that undergo a transformation through the lens of her art and assume a profound significance. Just as Eliade in “The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion” explores the idea that every hierophany, even that of the simplest and most elemental nature, has a deep meaning. He emphasizes that an object or phenomenon in which the sacred is manifested undergoes a process of transformation, becoming something more than its ordinary form would otherwise suggest. Despite this transformation, however, it retains its essence and remains connected to the larger cosmic context in which it exists (Eliade, 1956, p. 12). A sacred stone, seemingly indistinguishable from other stones from a mundane perspective, takes on a supernatural reality for those who perceive its sacredness. Goudarzi’s body of performances depicts situations of suffering and the pursuit of solace in objects within the context of a male-dominated society. She explores finding refuge and regaining agency as a female subject, frequently in hidden spaces that merge with one’s identity.

Merleau-Ponty (2012) describes human existence as an existence amid the world in which the individual is intertwined with the surrounding environment. In this perspective, there is a connection between the body and the world, a shared embodiment. This notion of connectedness and unity with the world also applies to the artist, who locates a sense of unity and belonging in architectural and natural objects through the artist's practice. The artist's placement and engagement with these elements serve as a means of expressing this connectedness and existence in the world. Embracing the body in the artworks and staging performances in natural landscapes, the artist establishes a deep connection and identification with the surrounding environment. This intimate engagement with nature blurs the boundaries between the artist and the natural world, resulting in a symbiotic relationship.



Figure 37. Tara Goudarzi, "Curl Up" Hormouz Island, Iran (2011)



Figure 38. Tara Goudarzi, “Curl Up” Hormouz Island, Iran (2009) ²¹¹

A noticeable instance of this occurs in Goudarzi’s Mask Series, in which the artist uses various natural materials to create disguises that blend with the various regions’ specific geography, culture, and natural elements (Figures 39 & 40). By embodying these elements, Goudarzi expresses a deep connection and integration with her surroundings, ultimately blurring the distinctions between her identity and the natural world. In “Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics” by José Muñoz (1999), disidentification is explored as a mode of social relations in which identity emerges within intersecting ideological paradigms. This disidentifying approach challenges the dominant ideology and enables partial accommodation while contesting and opening spaces for political change. As influenced by Judith Butler’s performativity theory (1993), subjectivity is viewed as a process of becoming oneself through

²¹¹ The photos in question are sourced from the artist’s website, which can be accessed at <http://www.arttara.com/squat.html>

performative acts that involve both the affirmation and potential resignification of identity (Butler, 1993, pp. 219-220). Goudarzi's artistic practice exemplifies disidentification by rejecting fixed identities and engaging in performances that disrupt conventional notions of femininity. Through these acts, Goudarzi challenges not only female identity but also the notion of identity and its associated ideological assumptions of stability and singularity.

Goudarzi (2009) explains that "looking into the mirror, the reflection staring back feels unfamiliar, like a stranger's face, instilling fear within me. Seeking solace, I find myself drawn to hiding my face, finding a sense of closeness to my true self and a glimpse of inner peace. However, delving behind the mask does not always guarantee tranquility; sometimes, a more disconcerting visage emerges. This sense of hiding seems to be a shared experience, as we all seek ways to protect ourselves. My masks vary, ranging from haunting to beautiful, each carrying a unique message. I often select these masks from the world around me, whether my home or the embrace of nature, as I yearn to explore and discover myself within these surroundings."

The body serves as the principal vehicle for perceiving and interacting with objects. Through bodily schema experiences and sensory perceptions, the mind builds a relationship with objects and gains a more profound comprehension of them (Lawlor & Toadvine, 2007, p. 296). Phelan's analysis (1993) addresses the intersubjective nature of identity formation and highlights the complexities involved. Identity emerges through the limits of bodily expression and the imprecise transmission of meaning through signifiers. Through the dynamic relationship with the Other, identity is contested and claimed by establishing the boundary between the self and the Other. A sense of loss accompanies this process of identity declaration and identification as it acknowledges the impossibility of fully embodying the other while at the same time recognizing the interdependence that shapes self-perception and existence (Phelan, 1993, p.3). By engaging with the world through a physical presence, artists gain a more immediate and physical appreciation of their surroundings. In this way, existence can be understood as one object among other objects and as a perspective from which objects are experienced.



Figure 39. Tara Goudarzi. “A Mask of Yellow Weeds” Cloud Forest, Shahroud, Iran (2018)



Figure 40. Tara Goudarzi. “A Mask of Moss” Mashalak Jungle, Nowshahr, Iran (2009) ²¹²

²¹² The photos in question are sourced from the artist's website, which can be accessed at <http://www.arttara.com/mask.html>

4.7 Bridging Nature, Concept, and Activism

The conceptual art movement transformed the perception of art. Instead of being based on a hierarchical perspective, conceptual art prioritized active engagement with culture (Grande, 1995). According to Foster (1996), this conceptual dimension helped situate art in a political and sociological context. In the mid-1960s, environmental art was considered to be a form of conceptual art, coinciding with the passage of artistic material and the desire for artistic ideas, the material replaced wholly by the idea and the concept and, in this regard, approached increasingly by way of the following post-modernist aspirations (Kastner & Wallis, 1998): 1.) a sarcastic and paradoxical critique of existing, primarily catastrophic facts, 2.) a nostalgic and reminiscent view of the premodern past, 3.) a combination of genres, 4.) a transregional and global perspective of world crises such as environmental pollution, and 5.) recourse to a variety of virtual and digital media to create, represent, and record oneself. Postmodern art, including the environmental art movement, challenged and repudiated earlier notions that privileged male creativity and excluded non-white racial groups. It became a platform for feminists, minorities, and environmental activists to express their reactions to cultural change through both art and theory. By way of the postmodern art movement, art incorporated the landscape and used it as the medium of creation (Weilacher, 1996, p. 12).

The earlier extraction categories take meaning on the basis of two original variables: the human perception of time and place. In this way, one can draw attention to the cultural concepts that prevail at the core of the work of art (Kastner and Wallis, 1998). In conceptual art, the notion of place and time as “concepts of meaning” comes to be considered in the landscape.

Aside from the aforementioned general conceptual approach to art, the most significant contemporary approach that has emerged in the field is a sense of “mythical action” based on postmodern perspectives of the category of feminism, an appreciation of the concepts of femininity, and the emergence of landscape in various cultural spheres. This view considers a kind of equilibrium between the concepts of nature and procreation, which arises from a mythical core that has roots in ancient Iran. For instance, belief in The Tree of Life and Nature has always been associated with the concepts of *woman* and *life* at the core of Iranian culture. Such mythical-cultural semantic associations are naturally reflected in Iranian works of art.

Environmental art, however, extended beyond local concerns with myth and culture, helping to raise awareness about the ecological crisis in a global context. Marshall McLuhan considered the emergence of common global concerns, including the pervasive environmental crisis, as one of the critical factors in the world's coalescence into a global village (Wehrmeyer & Mulugetta, 1999, p. 140). Due to their remarkable potential and ability to turn the world into a unique village by way of common issues, concerns, and aspirations, environmental artists may be said to occupy a special place in McLuhan's theory of media and global culture.

Lippard (1983), one of the first notable observers of the environmental art movement, identified a widespread dissatisfaction amongst artists unwilling to conform either to the conventional aesthetics of "art for the sake of art" or the dominant authorities of the artwork distribution "industry." She highlights the dichotomy within the art community. On the one hand, there are artists who passively conform to established norms, and on the other, those who actively resist the commercialization of their work. The dissatisfaction of the latter group stems from their rejection of the hierarchical system of stereotypes and the constricting structures of formal art movements. By expanding their vision beyond their artistic media, such artists recognize the broader contexts of "politics, nature, history, and myth" as sources of inspiration and relevance (Lippard, 1983, p. 6). In her 1983 work, Lippard's entire effort was focused on reversing the modernist assumption that to be in the world, one has to give up art, or indeed that to be in art, one has to give up the world.

Whereas Lippard calls assumptions regarding art into question, Bell observes an urgent need for a "new vocabulary" in which the concept of *limits* takes center stage. These limits include limiting growth, preventing environmental destruction, curbing arms proliferation, and respecting the limits of biological nature (Bell, 1976, p. xxix). According to Bell, aside from emphasizing the artistic aspect of land and environmental efforts, more effort must be invested in education and awareness.

Most contemporary environmental artists have held the view that the widespread activities of pre-industrial societies remain the proper artistic patterns to follow. Such artistic patterns can be performed effectively in various facets of modern life, thus expanding art's role in the world. First and foremost, this kind of work urges a return to nature, not to the rural (pastoral) and idealized nature of the past century, but more to a broader vision of the environment and an awareness of the role that economic, psychological, cultural, and biological factors play in human

life. While in the context of conventional forms of art (e.g., painting and sculpture), knowledge of nature leads to the creation of the final work, in environmental art, the process of knowing and examining nature is part of the creation of the work of art itself. Both Amy Lipton and Patricia Watts, the founders and curators of Ecoartspace (a U.S.-based organization promoting and curating ecological art), define this approach as

[a] paradigm shift in the viewer's perception [which plays a central role] in challenging the predominant value system [while] works of artwork cross the line from traditional art production and institutionalization [and even extend] into the larger context of human and non-human natural communities [by] focusing on [a form of] existence that depends upon its survival (Lipton and Watts, as cited in Kagan, 2011, p. 272).

Through an emphasis on the notion of existence and its intrinsic reliance on survival, such a perspective highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence among all living species. Environmental artists incorporate a variety of approaches in creating work, including the following: material transformation, process-oriented approaches, collaboration, transformation of inartistic matter, unconventional performances, emphasis on the natural order, site-specific art, and revival of ancient values. The interaction between artists, nature, and the audience in environmental works of art is carried out with objects and symbols, generally in an unsheltered space of nature. Part of the process of communication and transmission of the message is achieved through the physical arrangement of the elements of this gathering in its environment.

What Kester (2004) calls “dialogical aesthetics” is the potential possibility of a dialogical relationship between the artist, the artwork, and the audience that makes the distinction between the three disappear and establishes connections that enable the observer(s) of the work to have a conversation with the artist, with this response, in turn, becoming part of the work. Kester also finds the artist to be more of a conversational collaborator than an “expressive agent” (Kester, 2004, pp. 3-4). He considers the tradition of modern art to be an *anti-discourse* tradition, based on distinguishing itself from other forms of culture and unable to accept a mode of discourse based on institutionalized communication in the mass media (Ibid).

From Kester's point of view, *discursive or dialogic art practice* includes three main elements. Firstly, it involves interdisciplinarity and relies on various disciplines, including critical theory, social history, and the life sciences. Secondly, it encompasses multiple registers of meaning that extend beyond the physical object or the individual viewer to include a dynamic relationship with various sites, temporalities, and discourse systems. Lastly, it includes *dialogic indeterminacy*, a concept that suggests that significance in art is not completely indeterminate but can instead be analyzed at particular junctures, promoting dialogic feedback (Kester, 2004, pp. 3-5). What Kester puts forth is based on environmental art's ability to interact with other social contexts. He is, in effect, describing how environmental art can contribute to the construction of a dialogical public space. On the basis of Kester's insights, it may be asserted that environmental art offers the possibility of dialogue, rendering the work of art an *act* and allowing the artist to become an *activist*.

The question arises as to who actually creates activist art. A clear examination of this question requires an exploration of the diverse range of artists and art collectives using creative expression to advocate for social change, challenge power structures, and raise awareness about various issues. The term *action* is frequently used in contemporary discourse. However, its precise meaning remains ambiguous. The ambiguity of this concept is particularly apparent in the field of art, where clichéd and imprecise definitions have occasionally associated activism with superficial and objectionable reactions.

Arendt suggests that *action* is one of the fundamental and essential activities of human life, distinct from the activities of *labor* and *work* (Arendt, 1998, p. 7). According to Weber, meanwhile, *action* can only be comprehended in the context of individuals' subjective motivations and intentions. (Weber, 1989, p. 13). Consequently, the investigation of one's knowledge and comprehension of the environment can be deduced from one's actions. However, it should be noted that an *action* is basically an act based on a *preconceived intention* of the actor, and in the absence of this intention, the behavior becomes an *unconscious act*. The action thus can be said to involve a process of *measurement* and *choice* among different options and plans, and this choice occurs as a situation becomes controversial and ambiguous to the actor (Ritzer, 2010, p. 321). The term *action*, therefore, can be defined as an *act propelled by internal motivation involving choice and deliberative reflection*.

Actors are not considered passive recipients but rather active co-creators of the social scene. From a social constructionist perspective, an activist actively and consciously strives to construct and shape social realities and does so continuously (Ibid, p. 352). Consequently, creating a body of art can be regarded as a manifestation of *social action*, as it represents a social performance of the artist that elicits social responses following the presentation. Social action, then, involves a structural framework, with the underlying layer consisting of values and symbols providing meaning to other values. Roles, values, and symbols – i.e., the elements that form the basis of social action – contain both an external sense and are internalized by individuals. In other words, social actions have both an objective and a subjective dimension (Rocher, 1924, p.113).

Actions can be divided into three categories. The first category includes actions in which the individual's behavior is influenced on the basis of the individual's social status or position in society. The second category covers actions that are driven by the struggle of opposing interests and are primarily motivated by the pursuit of individual gain. Finally, the third category consists of actions that are autonomous and aimed at changing the social structure itself. Such actions seek to achieve transformative change within society. The main characteristic of *artistic action* is its inherent orientation toward *freedom*. However, it is crucial to recognize that the artist's independence of action does *not* imply a disconnect from the given social structures or context but action *within* it. In other words, in any social environment, any action (including that of an artist) contains a measure of influence and bears consequences for society.

According to Lippard, activist art can be divided into three distinct camps: 1.) mainstream or “high art” community artists, 2.) political artists who work in political organizations, and 3.) community artists who work with grassroots groups (Lippard, 1995, p. 348). Lippard highlights the significance of community collaboration, particularly concerning activist art, highlighting its intimate connection with both audiences and power dynamics. She also distinguishes between two types of artists: the political artist and the activist artist. The political artist is one who “makes gallery/museum art with political subject matter and/or content,” while the activist artist actively engages with and addresses the “social and/or political context” (Lippard, 1999, p. 49). Martin (2015) as well, draws a distinction between political art and activist art. While political art embodies and visualizes emotions and ideas related to the political realm, activist art addresses a specific audience directly and catalyzes social and political change (Martin, 2015, p. 5). Felshin (1995), meanwhile, argues that art exhibited in museums and galleries lacks activist engagement,

often being inaccessible to the general public. Considering the significance of conceptual art and performance in the 1960s and 1970s, the definition of an activist artist can be taken as follows:

For activist artists, it is no longer simply a matter of adopting [...] inclusive or democratic aesthetic strategies [or critiquing] representation within [...] the art world. [They] have created a cultural form that [seamlessly incorporates] critical aesthetic practices, [a]ctivism, and community organizing. [T]hese artists engage in representation, attempting to change the conversation, empower individuals and communities, and stimulate social change (Felshin, 1995, p. 26).

Weintraub (1996) offers another important distinction in this context, highlighting the connection between individuals involved in activist art and their origins in the art scene as opposed to politicians who enter politics. The two groups may be said to have different motivations. Some artists address broader social concerns and use their art to raise awareness and spark conversations about universal issues. This comparison between art activists and politicians underscores the distinct motivations and objectives behind the creation of activist art in the art scene.

Contrasting activist artists and politicians, however, demands a closer examination of the term *the political*. Rosalyn Deutsche's understanding of *the political* is in part etymological, so that the term is traced back to the Greek word *polis*, which refers to ancient Greek city-state. In this sense, *the political* encompasses the concept of the *polis* as a space in which freedom and virtuosity are expressed. It is a realm in which the individual is not subject to coercion and is not driven merely by the necessities of life. In her examination of *the political*, Hannah Arendt notes that it encompasses phenomena, dialogues, and actions that are tangible and significant in human history. It is, in effect, a space of choice and equality where individuals can engage in dialogue and shape events. In this regard, *the political* is bound up with the concept of *public interest*. Arendt posits that the concept of public interest encompasses two interconnected dimensions. The first dimension is the *space of expression*, a realm where freedom and equality can be actualized. This dimension is realized when citizens unite and express themselves through words and actions, seeking to persuade and convince one another. The second dimension, referred to by Arendt as the *common world*, relates to the physical realm of objects that individuals share. Arendt argues that, in addition, individuals require a *space of appearance* and a unifying force to coalesce and create

a sense of community (Arendt, 1958, pp. 141-157). Any form of human life becomes unfeasible without a world that directly or indirectly affirms the presence of others (Arendt, 1958, p. 63).

Rosalyn Deutsche questions the term *political art* since it implies that other art forms have no political significance. She also takes issue with the term *feminist art*, insinuating that art itself is free of sexual politics (Deutsche et al., 2001, p. 100). Although Robinson agrees with Deutsche that all art can be considered political, she finds it more appropriate to conceive of *feminist art* as art influenced by feminist thought rather than the term connoting a specific categorization. This broader perspective recognizes that no art is free of sexual politics (Robinson, 2019, p. 249). Thus, the discussion of feminist art involves examining art created from a feminist standpoint that intersects with the politics of feminism and challenges social norms.

Chantal Mouffe's distinction between *the political* and *politics* provides yet another abstract framework for understanding social dynamics. For Mouffe, *the political* represents the dimension of antagonism and the emergence of conflict that transcends specific location, persisting as an omnipresent possibility. It embodies the distinction between friend/enemy and challenges existing power relations. *Politics*, on the other hand, encompasses the discourses, practices, and institutional structures that contribute to maintaining social order. These political activities are inherently conflictual since they are shaped by and interwoven with the dimension of *the political* (Mouffe et al., 2001, p. 99).

What is to be made of the oft-mentioned conflict between art and politics? Artists' malaise may be said to stem not from the distrust of society but their skepticism of the political realm. According to Arendt, the conflict between art and politics arises from the relationship between artists and politics, and this conflict should *not* be resolved (Arendt, 1960, pp. 216-218). Both art and political products require a public space for visibility and engagement. Arendt distinguishes between the creative arts, which produce tangible objects, and the performing arts, which strongly relate to politics in that they rely on an audience for their virtuosity. The existence of a space for appearances, however, cannot be assumed in every community (Ibid, p.217).

The distinction between political artists and activist artists, as explored by Lippard and augmented by way of Arendt's terminology, sheds light on different approaches to artistic practice. Political artists engage with political dimensions in the world of art, utilizing the space of appearances granted by the *polis*. Activist artists, on the other hand, actively participate in the *polis* as actors, seeking to create an impact beyond the confines of the art world. It is noteworthy that

Lippard's perspective, although aligned with Mouffe's notion that all art carries a political dimension, diverges from Arendt's understanding of the term *political*. Lippard primarily focuses on artists who address politics within the world of art, differentiating them from those who directly engage in politics-as-activism and strive for broader societal influence. However, it is important to recognize the fluidity and complexity of these categorizations, as artists often navigate both realms of practice, blurring the boundaries between political and activist art.

Let us now turn our attention to Iran in order to consider the relationship between art, politics, and activism. In Iran, two narratives shape social discourse. The first narrative is the *master narrative* (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2014), which is frequently unquestioned and deeply embedded in the collective consciousness. Various institutions and power structures uphold this narrative and represent a particular worldview and interpretation of history, culture, and social norms. Aside from the dominant narrative, however, there is what can be called a *counter-narrative* that questions and resists the dominant norms. This counter-narrative emerges through personal narratives, artistic expressions, and grassroots movements that seek to present alternative perspectives to the dominant one, challenge existing power structures, and envision an alternative path forward. These two narratives interact and influence each other in a complex feedback loop. The *counter-narrative* (McKenzie-Mohr & Lafrance, 2014) catalyzes action in the form of resistance, bringing forth new questions and alternative ways of thinking.

Through their creative efforts, countless artists in Iran perform a critical role in driving and amplifying the counter-narrative, fostering critical consciousness, and inspiring transformational collective acts in society. When closely examined, however, a major difference can be detected between contemporary Iranian conceptual art and its Western counterparts. In Western conceptual art, artists often intertwine their social engagement with the political sphere. By bringing social issues into the larger realm of political and administrative institutions, artists in the West critique political issues that have led to inappropriate social realities either through direct or indirect influence. Indeed, the social activism of Western conceptual artists becomes more evident as artists venture into wider spheres, including political events and government institutions. By engaging directly with these domains, Western artists intend to address and challenge socio-political issues with greater visibility and effect. This direct engagement empowers them to confront and critique the existing power structures and systems that influence social reality.

The oppression of the female gender, coupled with the significant presence of women in Iranian society, has led to a conflict over the representation of women in Iranian art. This conflict revolves around the acceptance of women's ownership of their bodies and the fear of liberating them. It poses a significant challenge to Iranian society and Islamic countries as women's bodies become a battleground for various social perspectives. The struggle for women's rights and the power of disposal over the body is exacerbated by the conflict between preserving traditional norms and the desire for individual autonomy. Moreover, feminist movements in Iran challenge the policies imposed on women's bodies, aiming to protect their natural and legal right to bodily autonomy.

Despite facing societal obstacles, feminists employ various strategies to advocate for women's rights in Iran, aligning their actions with the principles and conditions of Iranian society. The ever-changing political scene in Iran has shaped women's experiences and activism and influenced how their struggles are portrayed in artistic expression. Iranian women have often made use of subtle strategies to struggle for women's natural rights since, in Iranian society, feminist politics must proceed cautiously in order to maintain its influence and impact.

The influence of religious and traditional forces, as well as political factors, all combine to affect the representation of and the struggle for women's bodies and their natural rights in the country. Issues such as the forced unveiling and veiling, as well as historical circumstances surrounding these phenomena (described and examined in Chapter 2), demonstrate how different agents and forces in Iranian history have exploited women's bodies, using them as a platform for seeking political advantage and displaying their power. As a result, the real significance and autonomy of women's bodies have been undermined amid such political disputes. In contemporary Iran, the representation of women's bodies in art is caught in the crossfire of political opinions, particularly regarding the objectification or freedom of the body. This conflict remains unresolved as two opposing groups, the conservatives (who value the honor of the body and national identity) and the opponents of religious tyranny, consider the female body a symbol for their concerns.

As far as environmental art in Iran is concerned, the lack of critical engagement has led to challenges in addressing environmental change. However, Iranian artists, particularly women artists, who actively engage with the environment through their artistic practice *can* embody the role of aesthetic witnesses. By perceiving and responding to affects, women have been expanding the space between suffering and its realization, providing a platform wherein to raise ethical

questions and provoke dialogue. Through acts of dis-identification, these artists have continually navigated the complexities of ideological interpellation and recognized the significance of feelings in authenticating the “real.” Their performances of pain, loss, and mourning have created a space for viewers to experience a sense of disorientation and breakdown of distinctions, evoking an empathic sense of uncertainty that mirrors the affective texture of trauma (LaCapra, 2001).

Iran is a nation grappling with collective trauma, a fact evident in its ongoing social crises in which attempts at unity and solidarity among citizens have failed to establish a strong foundation. Collective trauma is a poignant reflection of a society’s distress and failure to establish a cohesive sense of unity among its citizens. As an integral part of society, each individual plays a crucial role in fostering integration. However, when subjected to traumatic experiences resulting from political strategies, the entire fabric of the nation becomes susceptible to disintegration. In the context of late-capitalist societies, a profound longing exists to attain the unattainable, a notion that Slavoj Žižek identifies as “the Lacanian Real” or the embodiment of the ungraspable (cited in Wallis & Duggan, 2011, p. 14). Žižek contends that while traditional art brings pleasure, modern art, with its capacity to inflict hurt, paradoxically fulfills the audience’s desire for a transformative experience. In this regard, contemporary Iranian environmental artists can be described not only as bearing witness to the environmental crisis but also as challenging viewers to develop a more profound sense of the interconnectedness with both the environment and the social conditions of the human experience.

5. Epilogue

A number of thinkers have considered the ground from which theories emerge or which govern their structure to be problematic. As Althusser (1969) has noted, the main issue consists in identifying how a theory conceptualizes issues and provides problem-solving methods. This implies a theory's problematic discovery. All research, theory, and discourse reside in a problem, although most are unaware of that problem. In the context of Iran, it may be asserted that any political discourse seeking to transform Iranian society needs to consider the issues of gender relations and the status of women. Since the structure of Iranian society, its power dynamics and values are intimately intertwined with how women are perceived and treated, as well as how the roles of women are defined, this work's prevailing problematic has consisted of exploring the intersection between Iranian women's witnessing of the male-hegemonic power structure, the role of witnessing in environmental art, and the expression of environmental and political concerns in artwork so as to illuminate gender dynamics in contemporary Iranian society.

The first stage of this research effort adopted a historical approach, in which phenomena were studied in the context of time. Their characteristics and evolution were examined, and their interaction with various interrelated factors, events, and trends were considered. This approach addressed the fact that the underlying factors related to the subject under study are neither determined nor predetermined, and the effects of the factors examined are not homogeneous. Put differently, the situation of women (the dependent variable) and the social, cultural, political, and economic factors and events (the independent variables) affect each other in a complex and frequently protracted way. By applying the historical method, the study examined five distinct periods: 1.) The Pre-Constitutional Movement, 2.) The Constitutional Movement, 3.) The Pahlavi Government, 4.) The Islamic Revolution, and 5.) The Post-Revolutionary Period. This subdivision allowed for a focused analysis of the social, governmental, and political characteristics of the respective eras. Examining political discourse in Iran spanning the pre- and post-revolutionary periods revealed a complex narrative informed by cultural, ideological, and political factors. Several key discourses were identified amid this complexity, namely traditional patrimonialism,

absolute modernism, and ideological traditionalism (Bashirieh, 2003, pp. 63-64). These dominant forms of discourse were juxtaposed next to the discourse of resistant democracy, which has been the voice of the opposition since the onset of the Constitutional Revolution.

The current study has explored developments concerning three key variables: 1.) ideas concerning women's issues, 2.) social movements and initiatives to improve the status of women, and 3.) government policies relating to women. Exploring and reflecting on the various variables occurring throughout each period of contemporary Iranian history makes it possible to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue under consideration. Taking an in-depth approach, the work has considered the social and political inequalities confronting women, including gender roles, seeking to address those issues. Historically, gender and politics have been intimately intertwined in Iran, shaping social hierarchies and relationships.

In the contemporary context, gender issues are critical socio-political topics that are constantly being debated around the world, whether to legitimize or delegitimize certain ideologies or agendas. Indeed, governments directly regulate and endorse particular gendered values and norms. The concepts of *gender policy* and *gender politics* have grown in significance, pointing to the intricate interaction between gender and politics. Such concepts highlight how gender issues are addressed within political systems and highlight the multi-layered dynamics involved. *Gender politics* has emerged as women have questioned and challenged inequality and discrimination through social and political action. It seeks to reshape established norms and propose alternative frameworks for addressing gender issues. This involves challenging the traditional power structures and advocating for change to promote a more equitable society. In contrast, *gender policy* addresses government initiatives to shape and alter women's and men's social status, interactions, and behavior (Bacchi, 1999).

One of the goals of this study has been to examine the distinct dynamics of gender policy and gender politics in the Iranian context. Since the Constitutional Revolution, Iranian women have assumed an active voice in society, playing a pivotal role in major socio-economic and political Developments in the country. Women's participation in critical turning points in modern Iranian history may be said to have reached a culmination in the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Following the revolution, however, debates ensued about whether women ought to remain engaged in public activity or return to the domestic sphere. From the outset, women opposed

marginalization, seeking to become more integrated into the social structure so as to actively shape social Developments.

In Iran, women's resistance has manifested itself in various ways, including direct engagement with institutional bodies such as academia, the reclaiming of women's bodies, and the highlighting of femininity. Such collective actions are complex and have indeed complicated the power dynamics in Iran. They are often rooted at the micro-level and permeate women's daily lives. Most notably, such acts of resistance frequently occur with no conscious intention or expressed lead or organizational purpose. Drawing upon Asef Bayat (2013), such phenomena have been referred to as forming a *non-movement* in which women question established norms and structures in subtle but impactful ways, flouting expectations and the prevailing power dynamic. The concept of *quiet encroachment* is also a significant one for this study, unveiling the terms *silent*, and *protracted struggle*, one in which a pervasive advancement takes place. Such a struggle highlights the agency and resilience of individuals who are seeking to challenge existing power structures and achieve incremental progress in their individual lives, even in the face of limited resources and systemic obstacles. This becomes an essential component of the analysis of events in Third World countries, particularly in the Middle East. Bayat's approach to the politics of presence, as expressed in *non-movements*, is rooted in diverse theories drawn from the post-structuralism, post-modernism, cultural studies, and theories of new social movements, including the *emancipatory politics* of Anthony Giddens, the *sub-politics* of Ulrich Beck, and the notion of *micro-power* of Michel Foucault. Given that Bayat's notion of *non-movements* provides a fertile theoretical foundation for investigating a vast array of phenomena, it has been employed in this work to investigate the relationship between gender and power in Iran.

The study of everyday life plays an essential role in cultural studies and serves as the primary domain for exploring meaning in this field. Theories of everyday life can be divided into three types: 1.) phenomenological theories that focus on meaning and the system of consciousness, 2.) critical theories rooted in Marxism that examine power relations, and 3.) postmodern perspectives that analyze cultural symbols. This study has underscored the critical view of resistance by focusing on everyday life and its significance for social change. It has emphasized the concept of resistance in daily practices and experiences by employing the concept of *non-movements* to show the impact of behaviors and actions that occur outside formal political activities and struggles within a political system, such as that of Iran. The study has sought to demonstrate

how everyday practices and actions can frame social and political relations. By focusing on *non-movements*, the research has shown that while the Iranian political system has striven to exert control over bodies, ways of life have emerged that exercise power in the personal and private spheres. This phenomenon highlights the complex connections between individual agency, social dynamics, and political power structures in Iran and beyond.

The research evidence indicates that two critical factors influenced the evolution of the status of Iranian women: "social movements" and "governmental approaches and policies." While intellectual currents and notions shaped the discourse on women's issues, tangible changes occurred through the complicated interplay between social movements and government policies.

The women's movement in Iran faces external and internal challenges, including the significant impact of the government and religion on the formulation of women's demands. The relationship between government and civil society can be convergent or divergent with regard to civil demands. Furthermore, the movement faces additional pressures from patriarchal rule and Iran's authoritarian government, leading to restrictions on women's rights. Before the revolution of 1979, the government focused on expanding women's presence in the public sphere, while after the revolution, it sought to exert stricter policing over women's domestic spheres. In addition, women's organizations frequently have been encouraged to prioritize labor rights and social issues rather than engage in broader political activism. When considered historically, it can be concluded that the Iranian government's espousal of globalization and alignment with women's global demands effectively declined after the revolution. It is significant to note that the government's support of or resistance to global women's demands has varied depending on the expediency of political ideologies and priorities. In contemporary Iranian history, some governments, particularly those with reformist and leftist ideologies, have displayed a higher tendency toward globalization and convergence with women's global demands than governments with fundamentalist and right-wing ideologies.

In addition to the political and ideological leanings of ruling governments in Iranian history, in this study, we have identified two further factors that have exerted an influence on feminism in Iran. One aspect that has affected Iranian feminism has been the colonial discourse, which has attempted to both conquer Western feminism and assert the epistemological authority of Western culture. This discourse may be said to have hindered the development and recognition of feminism in Iran by labeling any activity or movement by women as "mere imitations" of the

West or as “deviations” from the original feminist ideals. This has promoted a binary view of the West as somehow “authentic” and the East as “non-authentic,” disregarding diverse cultural perspectives and undermining the legitimacy of alternative feminist models.

In the context of Third World feminism, women from the East often have experienced limited agency in determining the nature and scope of their demands. This has been exacerbated by the dominance of Western feminism and the promotion of export feminism, which can normalize women’s suffering in the East. More specifically, within existing cultural frameworks, the struggles of Eastern women can be normalized and interpreted based on predetermined ideas and desires, disregarding their actual life experiences. It is essential to recognize that even in the 21st century, many Eastern women struggle to meet their most basic needs. The voices and experiences of these women ought to be heard and understood on their own terms, unfettered by the imposition of external narratives. Thus, although acknowledging that there are commonalities between the feminisms of various societies that remain essential, this study has sought to make this acknowledgment with a measure of caution in order to avoid the tendency toward cultural homogenization. In other words, by avoiding the assumption of universal feminist values and instead conducting cross-cultural research, this study has sought to offer a more nuanced perspective of women’s diverse experiences in Iranian society so that women’s lives in various societies can be understood more effectively.

A second key factor influential on feminism in Iran that has been explored in this study has been the dominant Iranian nationalist discourse, which often disregards the multiple voices of parallel feminisms in various Iranian cultures and socioeconomic classes. This discourse has routinely emphasized a centralized feminist paradigm and sought to undermine the authority of marginalized groups. Its discourse has promoted a singular notion of Iranian feminism as representative of all women in Iran without seeking to comprehend life on the margins or the diverse experiences of women. The dominant nationalist discourse has not addressed the benefits of centripetal feminism or attempts to decentralize the dominant discourse.

Recent discussions in Iran have emphasized the need for open dialogue and the establishment of harmonious relationships by way of technology. In pursuit of this objective, fields of study such as environmental education, environmental aesthetics, and biodiversity have made significant progress in Iran over the past few decades. Critiques of modernity from an environmental standpoint have led to intellectual movements that have challenged unsustainable

practices and widespread disregard for the Earth's ecosystems, plants, and animals. These movements have called for a fundamental reexamination of prevailing notions of development and modernization. In exploring the origins of the environmental crises, such attempts have identified factors such as industrial technology, rationalism, capitalism, and anthropocentrism. From the ecofeminist position, all such factors are rooted in the patriarchal structure of contemporary science.

Ecofeminism may be said to have emerged as a distinctive current among the various forms of modern critique, highlighting the interconnectedness of environmental issues and gender inequality. Furthermore, ecofeminism has sought to highlight women's inherent connection and affinity with nature. Some ecofeminists have argued that this connectedness stems from biological factors, whereas for others, it stems from social and cultural distinctions and constructs. By focusing on such connections, ecofeminism has striven to question and transform the patriarchal systems that perpetuate the exploitation of women and the environment. As Plumwood (1993) has argued, the oppression of women represents only one facet of a broader system of parallel forms of oppression sustained by a dominant ideological structure. In a structure of oppression, the dominant Party or group (referred to as the colonizer) employs a variety of rhetorical and conceptual strategies to advance its agenda at the expense of another Party or group (referred to as the colonized), which may include women, people of color, or animals. This structure of oppression can manifest itself in various forms, though such forms are often intertwined and mutually reinforcing. By exploiting power dynamics and profiting from existing systems of domination, the colonizer maintains and perpetuates its domination while further marginalizing and oppressing the colonized. This intertwining of various forms of oppression underscores the need for comprehensive analysis and collective action so that such structures of oppression can be challenged and eliminated.

In this study, we have asserted that the notion of femininity transcends women's biological and physical aspects (i.e., morphology) and crosses the boundaries of gender and sexuality. Femininity extends beyond societal expectations that women be submissive and obedient, pushing the boundaries of passivity and conformity to social norms. Femininity and womanhood encompass a broader spectrum of characteristics and forms of expression that defy rigid categorizations, and they can be perceived as a position within the social scene that embodies resistance to structures of control and oppression. In other words, they encompass whatever is

denied or marginalized by systems of domination. Hence, femininity transcends the category of *women* in the literal sense, instead representing a collective force that stubbornly resists hegemonic forms of power. In this sense, femininity also encompasses other oppressed groups, such as ethnic minorities, Queer, Trans, and men who refuse patriarchal oppression.

In this ongoing struggle against the patriarchal order, the body emerges as a contested terrain, a battleground for asserting agency and questioning established norms. Similarly, patriarchy can be understood as a concept tied to the notion of "men," not solely in the sense of their inherent identity but rather in their historical association with dominant roles within structures of control and oppression. The patriarchy establishes a system intended to subjugate women and men who deviate from the prescribed ideals of "masculinity" as a source of power and authority in society. Consequently, femininity, masculinity, and patriarchy operate and reinforce themselves beyond the simplistic dichotomy of woman/man. They encompass complex social dynamics and power relations that extend beyond the confines of gender, encompassing a broader spectrum of experiences and struggles.

In parallel with other domains, the field of art has also been actively engaged in this pursuit. The Earth, which once served only as a surface for art, has become a *body* of art, signifying a profound shift in artistic perspective and practice. However, understanding the nature of artistic activism involves a closer inspection of how it manifests itself in social activity. In recent decades, as the politics of neo-liberalization and various forms of political oppression have taken root, marginalized narratives and oppressed forms have multiplied. In response to such conditions, nongovernmental organizations and grassroots movements have formed to support the marginalized and challenge oppressive systems.

In the context of Iran, ecofeminism has been establishing itself as an independent and influential force. The theory has yet to gain widespread recognition and influence within the artistic and social movements of the country. Environmental movements in Iran arising from environmental crises have faced significant challenges. The absence of the necessary prerequisites and conditions for a thriving social constructionist perspective in Iran has meant that many environmental issues and concerns have failed to gain public attention and have not been recognized as social issues. This has resulted in a limited appreciation of their relevance. Access to scientific sources, particularly on social and environmental issues, remains either limited or excluded from publication and inadequately produced, further hindering comprehensive

knowledge in these areas and impeding informed discussions. In addition, the lack of individuals and groups who actively promote and advocate environmental causes in Iran continues to pose a challenge to the proper prioritization of environmental issues on the national agenda. In effect, there are hardly any dedicated individuals or groups who are actively working to highlight the significance of environmental issues.

Given the lack of public awareness and open discourse about environmental issues in Iran, discussions and occasional verbal and documentary evidence have been replaced by more practical and earnest actions, which highlight the government's ineffective role in addressing the country's environmental challenges. Activists who deviate from the state's agenda are labeled "subversive elements," leading to political complications and accusations of endangering national security. Moreover, compared to Western society, perspectives on environmental discourse vary in Iran. Some consider environmental matters strictly apolitical issues for the common citizen and something that should completely be under state control. Others highlight its transformative potential for fostering a more democratic society. In this study, raising public awareness about environmental challenges has been deemed an essential step toward addressing those challenges in any society, including Iranian society. This necessarily involves an examination of the role of the media. While critical to disseminating information, the mainstream media often provides event-driven coverage that lacks depth and the long-term perspectives needed to address complex environmental issues effectively. In this regard, Iranian media is no exception.

The history of environmental art reveals a complex and diverse set of approaches by which artists have responded to the environment. However, it is important to note that the complexity and diversity of environmental art extends beyond artistic reactions to the adverse effects of human activity on the environment. Indeed, it entails a profound discourse that unfolds as artists engage in conversations about environmental issues. Environmental art, as well as women's art, focus on cultural parameters, including social mechanisms, political issues, medium elements, and various individual and collective constructions.

As far as environmental art in Iran is concerned, it is important to recognize how the expression and representation of environmental concerns has been and continues to be influenced by particular social and cultural factors such as the oppression of women. The patriarchal structures and gender inequalities in Iranian society can impact how women artists address environmental issues and engage in ecofeminist discourse. Women's voices and perspectives may encounter

challenges and limitations in expressing environmental concerns, engaging in activism, or otherwise navigating the intersection between feminism and ecology. Despite such obstacles, numerous women artists in Iran have consistently identified ways by which to call into question and transcend gender oppression by way of artistic practices, thereby contributing to a broader dialogue on environmental sustainability and social justice. This study has not only sought to describe the environmental challenges faced by the Iranian people and the socio-political challenges faced by Iranian women in particular but has also striven to present the artwork of noteworthy Iranian environmental artists who have offered responses to both sets of challenges.

The ecofeminist movement in Iran cannot be said to be formal or official, and ecofeminist theories may not be widely known to Iranians at large. However, several Iranian artists have incorporated ecofeminist elements into their works of art, albeit in individualistic and independent ways. The woman, who is frequently confronted with objectification, takes refuge and searches for similarities in objects that resemble her own experiences. The Iranian environmental artists mentioned in this study may be said to merge with and immerse their sense of self "...in the surroundings to escape the dominant subjects' oppressive presence" (Fischer-Lichte, 2008; Mueller, 1994).

The fact that sparse documentation exists on Iranian artists in general and Iranian environmental artists, in particular, presents a considerable challenge to any serious researcher in the field. One notable reason for this is the lack of substantial collaboration between active environmental artists in Iran and relevant organizations and institutions responsible for the execution of diverse environmental art projects. This suggests that a potential gap or limited engagement exists between artists and environmental initiatives on a broader scale. Indeed, the absence or limited presence of environmental NGOs and institutions, coupled with the lack of support for environmental art projects by both governmental and private organizations, have significantly impeded the implementation of sustainable environmental art initiatives in Iran. These factors continue to pose numerous challenges to Iranian environmental artists in their efforts to create long-lasting impact on nature.

Identities may be said to affirm individuality while at the same time addressing universal issues. Drawing on global cultural influences and incorporating local elements, Iranian environmental artists have contributed to a more comprehensive discourse on art in Iran and around the world. The examination of the selection of artwork by Iranian women environmental

artists in this study reveals both the extensive range of this form of art and the field's evolution. Whereas ecofeminism acts as a lens through which to understand conceptual strands, it is worth noting that not all artists in Iran identify expressly with feminist principles. Thus, it would be more accurate to say that the works of art presented in this study constitute significant bodies of work that offer insights into the intersection of art, the environment, and gender dynamics in Iran.

Through their distinct forms of artistic practice, the artists covered in this work have navigated the tensions between tradition and modernity, ultimately extending the boundaries of artistic expression and contributing to a more diverse and interconnected art world. Their work often reflects the complexity of their socio-political context, offering nuanced perspectives that challenge prevailing narratives and challenge observers to reconsider their own biases. Based on the analysis of the categories in this survey, one may argue that the fundamental essence of expression in environmental art resides in its ability to alter perspectives and imbue audiences with a new sense of meaning. This process passes through an initial phase of defamiliarization, which then leads to a reassessment and rethinking of established perspectives. This particular artistic approach may be said to be rooted in the concept of perception and how it shapes the way both artists and audiences view the realm they inhabit.

6. Bibliography

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