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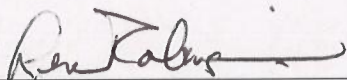
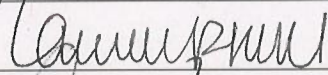
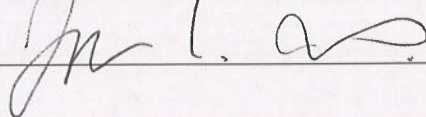
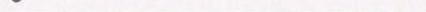
Political Science

by

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## Abstract

The modern day Iranian woman enjoys access to higher education, job mobility, and even voting rights, yet she is forced to adhere to strict clothing laws and is bound by sex segregation laws every day. This paper analyzes the inherent paradox of both freedom and repression by providing a timeline of the life of a woman in Iran after the dramatic Iranian Revolution in 1979 and the emergence of Islamic theocracy embodying the means of power in Iranian society. With an understanding of the mix of both freedom and repression, this paper then investigates the reaction and response from women to their treatment to provide an understanding of how the modern Iranian woman has emerged and how post-revolutionary laws have contributed to both her advancement and constraints. This research argues that the government's choice to grant freedoms, while also instituting strict gender based laws in Post-Revolutionary Iran, has created the modern day paradoxical Iranian woman who is both highly integrated into civil society yet subjected to harsh and discriminatory laws (Terman, 2010, p.289).

*Keywords:* Iranian women, women's rights, Iranian Revolution, Khomeini, Islamic Law

## Introduction

In our human minds, we inherently crave cohesion and want everything to fit into a certain box with a label so we can make sense of life's many variables. Although this way of thinking makes it easier to process and understand different aspects in life, women in the Middle East do not typically fit that mold. It is no secret that many women in the Middle East are subjected to harsh and discriminatory laws that hinder their progress, solely because of their gender. Although, in the same manner, many Middle Eastern women are highly integrated into the public sphere and play an active role in the advancement of society. Women in Afghanistan and Pakistan are required to wear a religious veil and are subjected to arguably intrusive laws concerning when and how they can engage in the public sphere (Beck & Keddie, 1978, p.91). In harsh contrast, women in Lebanon and Jordan, for example, can hold elected office and play an active role in the political system (Beck & Keddie, 1978, p.175). They also have dozens of work force opportunities that many other Middle Eastern women only dream of having (Beck & Keddie, 1978, p.175). A woman's life in Lebanon or Jordan sharply contrasts the life of a woman in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

It would seemingly follow that Iranian women fall into one of these extremes, but in Iran that is just not the case. Iranian women present a unique, yet challenging, situation in the Middle Eastern socio-political landscape. One scholar even argued that women in Iran are "better off than a woman in most other Middle Eastern countries" (O'Reilly, 1979, para. 7). Their lives reflect a mix of a variety of Middle Eastern countries because of the government's choice to tighten the reins on women's rights at some points in history and their choice to grant more progressive freedoms at other times. Iranian women emulate a paradox because they have both Western freedoms, like the right to education and vote, but they are also tightly gripped by the

Iranian government through religious based laws (Terman, 2010, p.289). Thus, Iranian women do not fit the construct that our mind desires to have where it is easy to place the women into a box with a label (Terman, 2010, p.289). Rather, they present a paradox that is worth understanding. This paper seeks to argue the idea that the ebb and flow of state-sanctioned women's rights and opportunities in Post-Revolutionary Iran has created the modern day paradoxical Iranian woman who is both highly integrated into civil society, yet also subjected to harsh and discriminatory laws (Terman, 2010, p.289).

## Historical Overview

### *Women in the Qajar Dynasty*

To fully understand the life of a woman in Post-Revolutionary Iran and how that has shifted over time, it is paramount that one is aware of what life was like for women under the two major regimes prior to Khomeini: the Qajar Dynasty and the Shah of Iran. The Qajar Dynasty was comprised of a variety of leaders all from the Qajar family, ranging from 1796-1925 ("The Qajar Dynasty," n.d.). During the Qajar Dynasty there was an overall push by both men and women for stronger rights for women because women had almost no authority over integral aspects of their life, including divorce, marriage, and finances (Keddie, 2007, p.20). Author Gholam Reza Afkhami, argued that during this time "patriarchy dictated the norms by which [women] lived and the clerics... dictated the content and form the norms took" (Afkhami, 2009, p.238). Women could be "easily divorced and the age for marriage was extremely low" so they were essentially at the will of their male family members, namely their husband if married and father if unmarried (Daniel, 2002, p.90). With little control over their own lives and men

governing almost all their actions, the push among women for increased rights came with great momentum.

One of the first issues that the women focused on was increased educational rights. Up until then, women's education was confined to the home, whereas men's education was completed in an actual school building (Osanloo, 2009, p.25). Many women sought to develop and increase their education, so this presented a huge push for women's education in schools. Their efforts for change were met with success as the first school of girls opened during the Constitutional Revolution (Osanloo, 2009, p.25).

The Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 was a time where a group of people "called for limiting the powers of the dynastic rulers" (Osanloo, 2009, p.24) This created an uproar and suddenly a variety of topics were up for debate, including the rights of women. Although the Constitutional Revolution didn't directly impact the rights of women in a traditional sense like the adoption of new laws or policies, it started the conversation on women's rights, often referred to in Iran as "the woman question" (Osanloo, 2009, p.25). Women would plead for the government to hear their problems and consider helping them by writing articles and letters to lawmakers (Daniel, 2002). According to Columbia University's Director of the Center for Iranian Studies, Elton L. Daniel, one main argument from women was that "not until women became educated and literate could they nurture good children for society [and help] Iran advance," something that the government ultimately wanted (Daniel, 2002, p.72). The Constitutional Revolution under the Qajar Dynasty got the conversation started about women's rights and the Shah continued and propelled the conversation with his adoption of Western policies in regards to the treatment of women. At the time women did not know it, but as the Qajar Dynasty came to a close, a powerful father-son duo would soon revolutionize all of Iran

for generations to come, bringing some of the very changes they were looking for, but at a steep price.

### *The Start of Pahlavi Rule*

In 1925 a man named Reza Shah Pahlavi came into power after a coup, lead by Pahlavi, overthrew the longstanding Qajar Dynasty. When Pahlavi, known as Reza Shah, became the Iranian leader, he immediately started a program of rapid modernization and it was no secret he desired to turn Iran into a more modern country with Western practices (Keddie, 2007). One scholar even went so far as to say it was “forced rapid modernization” because so many of the people had been used to traditional and conservative practices (Keddie, 2007, p.20). Even though the rapid modernization was rejected and abhorred by some, it brought many of the changes that Iranian women were looking for. Suddenly issues like “education, literacy, employment and legal rights” of women were being discussed and changes were being implemented (Osanloo, 2009, p.25). Laws were also now being codified, which provided a certain legal protection for women (Osanloo, 2009, p.25). This allowed everyone to be aware of the laws and provided a clear basis on which issues were punishable by the government. In addition, Reza Shah promoted the legal rights of women by changing the minimum age that a woman could be married to no less than 13 years old (Keddie, 2007, p.20). On the whole, women’s issues were being discussed and women saw their place in society beginning to shift (Osanloo, 2009, p.26). Through his many changes and initiatives to benefit the status of women, it was clear that Reza Shah took a strong liking to Western attitudes and practices and wanted to implement them in Iran.

Overall, the life of a woman under Reza Shah looked promising, but nothing could have prepared them for what he was going to do next. In 1936 Reza Shah introduced a practice he learned from Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the leader of Turkey, that no one saw coming (Keddie,

2007, p.20). To further his desire to make Iran more progressive and more like Western countries, Reza Shah outlawed the Islamic hijab and women were forced to unveil in the streets and all across society (Keddie, 2007, p.20). This was a change that rocked Iran for many generations to come, as traditional Islamic practices ordain that women wear the “hijab in front of any man they could theoretically marry” (“Hijab,” 2009, para. 4). Although not all Muslim women wear the hijab, in one small act, the right to choose whether to wear it or not was immediately taken away. This act seems extremely contradictory if Reza Shah’s main goal was to create a more Western society because many Western countries pride themselves on giving citizens the freedom to choose and providing minimal compulsory laws that effect private life. Some people went even so far as to call this decree a “traumatic experience” for women (Afkhami, 2009, p.240). Police were ordered to go into the streets and forcibly unveil any woman they saw wearing the hijab and punish her, which led to increased tension and mistrust with the government (Afkhami, 2009, p.240). This provided the perfect scene for Reza’s Shah’s eventual forced resignation and journey to exile (Afkhami, 2009, p.366). It was a monumental social inhibitor that made women feel uncomfortable and naked, forcing them to stay inside with family members, instead of going outside in front of male non-family members without a hijab (Afkhami, 2009). This had drastic negative impacts on the major reforms that Reza Shah had instituted for women because suddenly many women didn’t feel comfortable in public schools and jobs, so they stayed at home, not taking advantage of their new opportunities (Afkhami, 2009). A law that was made to push society forward actually did the opposite and acted as an inhibitor to progress.

Just five years after his ban on the hijab, Reza’s Shah’s reign came to a close when he was forced into “exile and replaced with his young son,” Mohammad Reza Shah (Osanloo, 2009,

p.26). The future of Iran was uncertain and it was unclear what new policies the new Shah would implement for women. One thing was obvious though, the new Iranian leader would need to win back the trust and approval of many women if he had any chance at maintaining legitimacy.

*Life Under Mohammad Reza Shah*

At just 22 years old Mohammad Reza Shah became the monarch in Iran in 1941 after his father was forced to abdicate. A young, likely nervous, and unexperienced man was ultimately thrust into the highest power in all of Iran, and Iranians were left wondering what their new leader would do now that he held such high authority. During his reign, Mohammad Reza Shah, typically known as the Shah of Iran, continued his father's strive for modernization and focus on competing to stay at the same level as many other Western countries (Osanloo, 2009, p.26).

The Shah's reign is best known for three major events: Operation Ajax, the White Revolution and the Iranian Revolution, in that chronological order. Operation Ajax occurred in 1953, but its cause dates back to 1951 when a man named Mohammad Mossadeq came into power as the Prime Minister of Iran ("Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi," n.d.). With that role he was supposed to work alongside the Shah and in Iranian government, but a strife pertaining to oil got in the way of his role ("Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi," n.d.). During this time, Iran had an agreement with an organization called the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (Latham, n.d.). The AIOC was in control of Iranian oil fields and helped facilitate the production and selling of Iranian oil, but many Iranians were growing increasingly frustrated because they believed the AIOC was "unfairly benefitting" from the deal (Latham, n.d., para.1). This started a controversy and Parliament was quick to get involved. Mossadeq, who was in Parliament, "demanded a renegotiation of the standing agreement and the Iranian people were quick to rally behind him and make him their honored leader," making the Shah no longer the most powerful man in Iran

(Latham, n.d., para.1). Iranians were angered and believed that their portion of the oil money generated was going to other nations, so they took to Mossadeq's call for action (Osanloo, 2009).

U.S. leaders were extremely afraid of this fast mobilization of angered Iranians and didn't like that Mossadeq and his allies didn't want to work with the United States, so the U.S. took drastic measures to ensure the Shah regained his position as the supreme leader (Latham, n.d.). In 1953, the United States Central Intelligence Agency staged a military coup d'état, complete with protestors in the streets and bribery of Iranian police officers, in an effort to get the Shah back into power (Latham, n.d.). Their efforts were met with great success and the Shah was back in power as the ultimate leader (Latham, n.d.). This action by the U.S. government angered Iranians and led to tensions that mounted in the Iranian Hostage Crisis years later (Latham, n.d.).

With the Shah back in power he ruled Iran with an iron fist and contributed to major "brutal political repression" in his own country (Terman, 2010, p. 294). This led to even further increased tension among the Shah and the people and caused a divide between the political elite and the regular citizens. Mistrust surrounded the government and Iranians were fed up with the Shah's treatment of his people. To make matters even worse, in 1963 the Shah started the "White Revolution" ("Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi," n.d.) The White Revolution was a national development program that garnered tons of international support, but tanked what little domestic support was left ("Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi," n.d.). Initiatives in the White Revolution sought to strengthen the physical area in Iran and help to Westernize the country ("Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi," n.d.). This included giving women the right to vote in 1963, something that was strongly opposed by Islamic cleric, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (Kian, Farhi, Pesaran, Rivetti, 2012, p.62). Khomeini was extremely vocal about his dislike for the Shah and his changes to Iranian culture and the Iranian's liked this about Khomeini (Kian et al.,2012, p.62).

Consequently, Iranians were enraged when Khomeini was sent into exile by the Shah (Kian et al., 2012, p.62). It was no secret that the Shah was much more secular and Khomeini was a more traditional religious man. The Shah's decision to exile a man who was seemingly looking out for the interest of the people led to an even further divide between the Shah and the people and widened the gap between government and the citizens.

Even though the Shah introduced reforms that Iranians strongly opposed, he also introduced a variety of new opportunities that increased the demand for women in the workplace and extended their familial rights. In 1967 the Shah created the Family Protection Law which extended the rights of women in relation to "marriage, divorce and custody" (Keddie, p. 2007, p.21). This new law was extremely contrary to traditional Muslim practices and beliefs. Even from exile, Khomeini was able to tell Iranians not to follow the Family Protection Law and oppose its teachings (Kian et al., 2012, p.62). Khomeini was away from Iran, but still was able to drastically influence Iranian politics and put a rift between the Shah and his people, which only reveals his charisma and authority, something that proved valuable to his future reign. To aid Iranian women even more, the Shah increased the minimum age of marriage for girls from 15 to 18 years old, a total of 5 years more than the minimum age when he came into office (Kian et al., 2012, p.62). These changes seemed great for the future of Iranian women, but they must be examined with careful consideration of the underlying conditions surrounding each new law, the timing of each initiative, and their effectiveness. As Professor and Director of the Center for Gender and Feminist Studies at the University of Paris Azadeh Kian put it, there was discrepancy between the statutory changes that the Shah enacted versus the practical effects of those statutes (Kian et al., 2012, p.62). In addition, the Shah was mostly unable to connect with his female constituents and mobilize them to embrace the new changes he desired (Kian et al., 2012, p.62).

Most of the Shah's new laws only benefitted urban and educated women, whereas the majority of women actually lived in rural areas (Kian et al., 2012, p.62). Because of this, most women were left without access to the Shah's new opportunities, which further alienated the majority of women from the Shah. On the other hand, Khomeini capitalized on the Shah's shortcomings and directed his efforts at the poor, rural people because those were the ones most neglected by the Shah's reforms (Keddie, 2007, p.23). Suddenly the rural poor people felt noticed and appreciated by a person in authority and that led to their mass support for Khomeini.

### *Mounting Tensions Erupt, Creating a Major Change*

Even though the Shah brought many necessary changes to Iran, he didn't acquire enough support or resources to really back his efforts, which, coupled with Operation Ajax and the Shah's oppressive rule, provided the perfect storm for the Iranian Revolution. During the Shah's reign he focused primarily on "modernization and secularization", two things that Iranians were highly weary of, so the tension between the people and the government only increased during his time as ruler (Tohidi, 2016, p78). One of the major problems that a great majority of Iranians faced under the Shah was mass poverty with little means to afford day to day necessities (Latham, n.d.). There was an overwhelming notion among Iranians that the West was taking their share of the country's oil wealth and the Shah was at the head of these actions because of his close relationship to the West (Latham, n.d.). Khomeini was highly aware of the issues that Iranian's faced, even from exile, so his main pitch for pushing people to revolt against the Shah was the idea that if he came to power he would fight "in the name of the dispossessed, especially those who were the most dispossessed of the nation's recent wealth from oil" (Osanloo, 2009, p.28). People already had the notion that the West was taking their wealth and resources and because they often attributed the Shah with the West, he eventually became the enemy too.

During the Shah's reign women in Iran were extremely religious and felt that the Shah was defiling their Islamic womanhood through Westernization (Brooks, 2008, p.73). Khomeini capitalized on this crumbling relationship between the Shah and the people and stressed the idea that he would save them from the "tyranny of the West" (Brooks, 2008, p.71). Both men and women alike were propelled to fight in the Revolution under the belief that Khomeini was going to come back to Iran and restore Islam, nationalism, and national wealth. The expectation among most women in particular was that if Khomeini came into power that he would fight for their place in society, bring back the freedoms they once knew, and provide financial relief to all Iranians (Osanloo, 2009, p.29). These expectations were somewhat met initially through the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was signed after the Revolution to make Khomeini the Supreme Leader, because the Constitution details a "discussion of equality and rights, promising all citizens many social guarantees", but as we will see once Khomeini established himself as leader, those promises were anything but kept (Osanloo, 2009, p.29). Even though some women participated in the protests because they believed in Khomeini's promises, a significant portion of the female protestors participated out of fear of what might happen if they didn't (Osanloo, 2009, p.28). One woman is reported saying "Our friends would go to demonstrations- maybe ten of the two thousand even knew what the revolution was about and what it meant. We did not know. But if we didn't go, they would say we didn't agree" (Osanloo, 2009, p.28). This acted as a type of semi-forced participation and was extremely influential in getting a large majority of the population to protest. Overall, there were a lot of rumors and assumptions being circulated throughout society about what Khomeini was going to bring, some true rumors and many untrue rumors, but nonetheless the belief that something and someone better might be available was enough for both men and women to protest.

During the Revolution, which lasted a little over a year, Iranians came out in mass protest of the Shah and to show their opposition and unity against a man threatening to take away their traditional Islamic practices. Many women wore the hijab as a “symbol of dissent” against the government and the hijab united all women, regardless of social class or age. (Brooks, 2008, p. 65). It should be noted that although a majority of the “revolutionary forces were divided in politics, [they] were united in their cause”, and went to the demonstrations with their primary focus on getting the Shah out first and then dealing with the new leader after (Brooks, 2008, p.73). On February 11, 1979 the Shah was ultimately thrown out of power and replaced with the largely popular Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who promised to bring about the changes and religious adherence that Iranians desired. The Iranian Revolution drastically changed the lives of women in Iran and replaced the life they knew with a completely opposite new “normal.” Khomeini was sure to bring about change, but no one, not even Khomeini, could fully predict just how influential his changes would be in the lives of the Iranian people.

## **The Reign of the Ayatollah Khomeini**

### *Month of Chaos and Confusion*

As the Ayatollah Khomeini finally won the strong battle for power and chaos was on the rise, only one thing was clear, change was here and here to stay. When Khomeini came into power on February 11, 1979 he had a clear plan and quickly showed Iranians that the country would never be the same again (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.439). Throughout his years in exile, Khomeini had a plethora of time to calculate the most effective and revolutionary change he could create, so when he finally rose to power, he moved quickly, asserting his dominance and control over all areas of everyday life. It didn't take long for Khomeini to institute his pre-

mediated plans for the future of Iran, complete with a revolutionary change for the lives of all citizens, especially women. During the Shah's reign, Khomeini and his allies felt strongly against the Shah's introduction of voting rights for women, so when Khomeini finally came to power, voting rights was of primary concern, although it was an initiative that gained little traction (Keddie, 2000, p.406). Just a mere 15 days after Khomeini took power he was already asserting his dominance and clearly showing people his beliefs on female inferiority. On February 26, 1979 Khomeini repealed the Family Protection Law that the Shah instituted in 1967 to protect the rights of women and children (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.439). This act "gave women the right to divorce, ...custody of their children upon the court's approval, and increased the minimum age of marriage for girls from 13 to 15 years old" (Kian et al., 2012, p.62). With Khomeini in power, much of those liberties ceased to exist and women were left being regarded as second-class citizens. As one scholar put it, the revolution was actually "a revolution of men against women" (Ebadi, 2012, p.53). Khomeini reigned at the head of much of the changes immediately following the revolution, which would cause a scholar to refer to the revolution as a war against genders. The repealing of the Family Protection Law sparked fear and uproar into the lives of women around Iran. In one small act, Khomeini was able to effectively show the country he meant business and he wasn't going to abandon his promises to execute laws and initiatives that aligned with his perception of Islamic law.

Khomeini's swift changes did not stop there. On March 3, 1979 he "announced that women cannot be judges," a change that had little direct impact on the lives of women, but had strong implications about what the future of Iranian politics might look like (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.439). Just three days after his announcement on women judges, Khomeini instituted a change that seemingly would have appeased women, but actually infuriated and mobilized women to

fight back against the regime. On March 6, 1979 Khomeini enacted a law that said women must wear the hijab at their work (Gheytanchi, 2000, p. 439). During the Shah's reign, women were enraged when the Shah outlawed the hijab in his attempts to create more a Western country. In response, the fight against the Shah's banning of the hijab was a major catalyst for women's involvement in the revolution. It would seem to follow then that women would agree with Khomeini's new "forced hijab" law since they fought so hard for the ability to freely wear it under the Shah. This was certainly not the case, and lead to protests and upheaval against the regime. The women's response to Khomeini's new law can be attributed to the notion that no one wants to be told what to do- whether that means being forced to do something or being told not to. One woman protestor reinforced this idea by saying "The point of the [protests] was [our] freedom to choose. We have nothing against the chador ([another form of the Islamic hijab]); we are only against compulsion" (O'Reilly, 1979, para. 4). Since the revolution, the hijab has become a main "symbol of the Islamic Republic" because many people argue that the hijab law was the most visible change to come from Khomeini's Iran (Keddie, 2000, p.410). On the same day that Khomeini instituted the law that said women just wear the hijab in the workplace he gave a speech, primarily directed at women in the holy city of Qom. During this speech, he refers to women as "lion hearted", "respected sisters", and "beloved and courageous sisters", and goes on to praise women as fierce fighters in the Revolution, which led to confusion about what Khomeini was actually going to do as the new ruler and what he truly wanted to see happen in the lives of women (Bendorf, 1999, p.263). The mounting tensions after the repeal of the Family Protection Law and the institution of the forced hijab law set the perfect scene for an uproar, headed by women seeking change to the new laws.

On March 8, less than a month after Khomeini came to power, there was a planned International Women's Day celebration that "turned into a protest against Khomeini's announcement about the veiling [or law about the hijab] of women and banning of the Family Protection Law" (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.439). Women went into the streets "asking [the] prime minister to hear their plea", but unfortunately, they were only ousted out and attacked by the regime (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.439). The main goal among many women was to raise awareness and consciousness about the lives of women and women's rights so that the conversation could be started about what the life of women would look like in Post-Revolutionary Iran (O'Reilly, 1979). Some women were at the protest to denounce Khomeini's new reforms, but many were there simply to remind everyone that women weren't going away and they were going to make sure that Khomeini's campaign promises were followed through with (O'Reilly, 1979). Amongst all the chaos after the revolution, many women were protesting to tell others to not forget about them and to share with others that women were not going to forget what they fought for against the Shah. For some the protest was used to actively voice opposition with the government, but to others the protest was used to create a "safeguard" against the possibility of women's rights issues just being dismissed (O'Reilly, 1979, para. 6). The latter women used the protests as a way to remind the government that they were still there and still expecting them to follow through on their promises for a better life for women. Throughout the protest, women were able to unite around the common idea that changes to the lives of women were necessary and women were not going to let any chaos stand in their way of making sure Khomeini's promises before the revolution were executed. There was an overwhelming fear among women that the pre-revolutionary promises that were made by Khomeini and the Islamic leaders were not going to be kept, so this protest was pivotal (O'Reilly, 1979). Even so, in response to the protest,

Khomeini said he was just simply “suggesting [that women wear] modest dress,” not mandating it (O’Reilly, 1979, para. 3). This left women in a quandary with a choice to either re-strategize to try to fight the regime or come to terms with their new life. To add to the women’s new reality, just a few weeks later Khomeini announced that new sex-segregation laws would be in place at beaches and sporting events so couples, parents, and children could not attend parts of public life together (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.439).

In the United States after a new president is elected the media often focuses on the question “What will the president do in the first 100 days?” and regards those first 100 days as pivotal and extremely telling of what their main desires or goals are for their presidency. If we apply the same standards to Khomeini’s first even 46 days, it is clear he wants to bring Islam back into Iranian government and radically change the access and opportunities of women in Iran. In just 46 days Khomeini made three monumental changes for Iranian women and it was clear he was going to wage a huge war against women and the lives of Iranians would drastically change under the new leader.

### *Theocracy over Democracy*

Khomeini wasted no time after his first three initial reforms against women in creating the Islamic Republic he campaigned for during the revolution. In August of 1979 Khomeini “select[ed] members of the Council of Guardians [which is] a clerical organization with the power to overrule presidential and Majles (Parliament) candidates” (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.439). With this change he clearly showed the public that the Islamic religion was going to be the driving force in government with supreme power to overrule the elected officials. He now gave clerical officials superiority over the elected officials, which only shows he prioritized Islamic adherence over anything. In that same month he also banned a local left-leaning newspaper and

ousted any person or organization that threatened to stand in his way (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.439).

With these two radical changes to public life, Khomeini made a clear statement to the Iranian people that he was here to stay and change was coming whether they liked it or not.

To push his agenda and ideology even further, Khomeini made a radical governmental change that affected the interworking's of people's private, familial life. In October of 1979 Khomeini replaced the Family Protection Courts with the Special Civil Courts (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.439). According to attorney and scholar Gabriel Sawma, the "special civil courts [were] presided over by religious judges" (Sawma, 2015, para. 6). Previously, the Family Protection Courts were an extension of the Family Protection Law and dealt with all civil issues relating to family matters, like marriage, divorce, annulment and custody (Sawma, 2015). After Khomeini's introduction of religious clerics into government and his clear agenda to make Islam the center of government, all family legal matters were then decided by religious judges through the new Special Civil Courts. Khomeini also announced that the Special Civil Courts would not be congregated or confined to the capital, but that there would be 80 branches of the court "set up around the country" (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.440). By this change Khomeini explicitly told Iranian citizens that the government was going to be highly integrated into the personal lives of people and there was no longer a clear distinction between public and private life. It can be argued that this was the government's way of regulating the actions of people all across the nation and ensuring they adhered to Islamic law in family matters. The blurring of lines between public and private life showed that the government was going to be somewhat omnipresent and take away the rights of the lay people to make legal decisions that would impact their familial life. By entering the homes of women, whether directly or indirectly, the government quickly became an invited guest into the private lives of Iranians. These small, but powerful, changes opened the

door for more monumental changes to private life and gave a clear sign to Iranians that Islam was going to be the new basis for government and thus, theocracy was here to stay.

*The First Sign of Female Advancement Creeping Through in Khomeini's New Iran*

Just under one year later in June 1980, Khomeini finally revealed his first sign of a possible new trend towards the increased rights of women and increased representation in government. Although this possible sign of increased rights crept through, it would not be Khomeini's Iran if it was not also met with a right being taken away. This idea of increasing some rights or representation, while also taking away others was a hallmark of Khomeini's regime and Iranians saw the first sign of this in June 1980. Khomeini announced that "women were required to wear [the] hijab in all governmental offices" (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.440). This new law, added to the prior mandatory hijab wearing in the workplace, further revealed to Iranians that the Islamic government was clearly supreme over all and governmental officials have no problem with fusing religion and government together to create religious based laws. Just when it seemed like there was no sign of women regaining or gaining any rights or freedoms under Khomeini, he made a change in government that presented the opportunity for the future reemergence of women in the public sphere.

Under Khomeini a group called the Majles was extremely powerful in government and helped Khomeini execute a number of reforms that he desired to institute. The Majles is also known as the Iranian Parliament and there are three sections of the Majles that work in government to put the Iranian leader's plan into action (Kian, 1997, p.79). During June of 1980 Khomeini decided to give women a voice in government by allowing the election of four religiously conservative women to the First Majles (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.440). This was the first time in Khomeini's reign that he gave women a glimpse of increased rights or representation in

government. Finally, women saw a small stride towards moving from second-class citizens to having a more integrated and active role in society. At the same time that this new change occurred, women were also being told they had to wear the hijab in governmental offices (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.440). This presents the first major sign of a paradox emerging where women were both being granted representation and integration into civil society and they were experiencing religious-based laws that intruded on their right to freely choose what they could wear and when. Another important aspect to consider when interpreting the election of these four women into the Majles is the fact that they each came from religiously conservative, traditional, and established families in Iran, so their ideology closely matched the regime's (Kian, 1997, p.79). One scholar, Elham Gheytonchi, argues that these women were elected because of their "[proficiency] in the Quran and religious matters," as opposed to their experience working with governmental officials or understanding of the government (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.441). This notion can be attributed back to Khomeini's strict religious adherence in government and desire to create an Islamic based government where religious laws supersede any non-religious ideologies. Although this was an increased right and opportunity for Iranian women, it needs to be examined with caution because of the four women's ties to traditional Islamic practices and their reason for being elected. Nonetheless, women were introduced into government during Khomeini's first few years in office, something that was not to be expected considering his previous treatment and oppression of women during his first year. The emergence of women in government was a hopeful new sign of the future advancement of women and brought hope into the lives of Iranian women who wished to regain their everyday freedoms under the Shah.

*The Emergence of Censorship in Media to Control Women*

Following the new sign of advancement, the Iran-Iraq War began just a few months later in September 1980 (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.441). The war brought increased tensions and international turmoil. Although there was an increased focus on international affairs throughout the war, Khomeini and his regime did not lose focus on domestic issues surrounding women. The regime balanced domestic and international issues to ensure that women's issues at home would not grow so large that a mobilized movement against Khomeini would rise, much like what happened under the Shah. To combat this fear there was yet again more interference into the personal lives of women and a trend towards making sure the media and its message aligned with Khomeini's ideologies. To ensure that the government's message on women was shared and reinforced throughout popular culture, Khomeini's regime directed a conservative Islamic woman to start a women-run newspaper geared towards women's issues called *Payam-e Hajar* (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.441). This newspaper argued that Islamic family laws and the treatment of women in regards to child custody were actually justified under Islam, and the regime "highly praised...women as mothers," instead of just people (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.441). Instead of completing abolishing all forms of expression by women, the regime focused on introducing propaganda and shifting the focus to how well women were performing in their role as a mother. By focusing on women as mothers, the newspaper sought to defend the idea that the women's place in society was in the home and applauded her role there, rather than any role in the public sphere (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.441). Under Khomeini women were "defined in the constitution in terms of their familial status and duties," rather than who they were as people or even citizens (Keddie, 2000, p.410). Consequently, it is no surprise that *Payam-e Hajar* highlighted a woman's role in the house because the newspaper closely aligned with Khomeini's regime.

*Payam-e Hajar* was started “under direct government order” and was used as an instrument to explain why it is right and acceptable for the government to treat women in a certain way and to convince them their primary obligation was to the family (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.441). With the introduction of *Payam-e Hajar* it is easy to get the sense that the government could almost feel the mounting tension among women so they knew they needed to bring in a somewhat creditable source in the eyes of women (another woman) to back up their claims and promote their agenda.

### *1983: The Year of Integration and Disintegration*

1983 brought much of the same as women saw spouts of advancement with equal spouts of inhibition of rights. Throughout the year, all schools beneath college level became sex segregated (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.442). Elementary, middle and high school students who once had class alongside the opposite sex were now forced into separate schools based on their gender. Although this wasn't a monumental shift in the rights of women, it should be noted that this action by the government further separated the two sexes and by separating them, perpetuated a stigma of one sex being inferior to another. In making the schools sex-segregated, the regime limited the access of women and further polarized the two genders, making a clear distinction that they were different and thus, should be treated differently. This governmental action is a clear foreshadowing to the government's future choice to make many public places, like beaches and sporting events, gender specific.

As another way to polarize and differentiate men and women, the government also chose to enact an extremely strict law that would forever change the treatment of Iranian women in the public sphere. During the same year that schools became sex-segregated, the “Majles [chose to create a law] stating that 74 lashes are required for any woman who fails to adhere to strict hijab [laws]” (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.442). In this one action the government clearly showed their

continued adherence to Islam, even if that meant hurting Islamic women, and demonstrated that they truly desired to fuse Islam and government together and weren't going to put up with any violation of the law. Not only did women see their sense of freedom to choose to wear the hijab taken away earlier in Khomeini's reign, but now they saw the severe and cruel mistreatment and dehumanization of women if they rose up against the veiling law.

Given the two dramatic limitations for women in 1983, it would seem likely that the government would continue to take away the rights of women and impart even stricter religious based laws to control women's actions. Surprisingly, that was not the case, which led to yet another occurrence of women being confused about their status and role in society and what the government wanted that role to look like long term. 400 women were now offered the opportunity to attend seminary at the Qom Seminary in the holy city of Qom, Iran (Gheytaichi, 2000, p.443). These women were now able to get a religious education from one of the leading seminaries in Iran. This action, in conjunction with the other rights and opportunities that the government has given women thus far under Khomeini, leads me to conclude that the government has no real issue with giving women advanced rights, just as long as they further the government's desire to integrate law and religion and educate women on the ideology of Islam and how that affects their role in society. The government may choose to grant women more opportunities and freedoms, but it comes with acknowledging the notion that most of the advanced rights are connected to Islam and its integration into everyday life. This is an important idea to grasp when analyzing the government's choice to allow greater freedoms and opportunities at some points and deny those freedoms and opportunities at other points.

*Women on the Slow, but Steady Rise*

After the inconsistent nature of the government in 1983, Iranian women seemed to finally enjoy a couple years of steady increase in access and opportunity. In the Summer of 1984, four more women were elected in the Second Majles, the Iranian parliament (Gheytaichi, 2000, p.444). These women came from various backgrounds and educational levels. Three of the women only held a middle school educational level, while the other one held an advanced Master's degree. Having a majority of the women who were elected into office have little formal education leads to obvious speculation as to why they were chosen to fill the positions. Scholars do not pinpoint an exact reason, but it can be argued that this may have been yet another way that the government controlled the outcomes in parliament. The government may have been using the women's lack of education as a tool to manipulate the women into voting the way the government wanted things to go. Because the women were uneducated, they may have been seen as easier to control and easier to convince to vote or adopt a certain policy that would have coincided with the regime's agenda. It is important to analyze the government's choice to grant more progressive opportunities with a fair amount of speculation and careful discernment, because as revealed in the past, the government seems to always have a clear agenda, and use people's strengths and weakness to make sure that agenda is pursued. Although the reason behind allowing four more women to be elected in the Second Majles is unknown, this is a prime example of a step towards women's involvement and expanded opportunities and representation, even if their newfound position was possibly only to further the regime's agenda.

Following the election of four women into the Second Majles, women saw another opportunity for religious education, much like what they experienced when the Qom Seminary allowed over 400 women to study there. In 1985, the Society of Al-Zahra, an Islamic school,

opened its doors in the holy city of Qom. As one scholar noted, "this [was] the first time the holy city of Qom [allowed] a religious center for women" (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.444). This was a large step for women's educational rights and the center is still educating women today. According to their website, the center's main goal is to educate women on Islam and help teach them how to educate others on its ideology and practice ("About Jameat-al'zahra," n.d.). An important aspect to note is the second portion of the center's goal: to help teach the woman how to educate others on Islam. Previous religious-based advancements for women, like allowing women to learn at the Qom Seminary, would lead one to conclude that the government allowed the Society of Al-Zahra to open because women would have the ability to share Islam and its practices with others. Women are often seen as the head of the day-to-day functions of the house, so the government may have seen that as an opportunity to educate the future generation of Iran (the women's children) on Islam. This would allow the children to have a basis of the religion and may make them more likely to support the government's integration of Islam into government when they become adults. The Society of Al-Zahra's emergence as a women-focused religious education center had large implications for the educational rights of women and highly aided in the possible belief that the government only chose to grant more progressive freedoms if it meant furthering Islam and its fusion into politics.

In the same year that the Society of Al-Zahra opened, the government made another change that increased the status and rights of women in Iran. In February of 1985, the Majles passed a law that said women can have full custody of their children if it is deemed that the father is not deserving of custody (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.444). Prior to this change, women were denied much of their maternal rights and the father and his side of the family had almost full control over the children, even in times when the father was found to be unable to provide care.

Now, women were able to attain custody of their children, something that although seen as small, had huge implications for the future maternal rights of women and the Majles growing empathy and attention to women's issues.

The next year surprisingly brought much of the same for Iranian women as they seemed to adapt to a new normal where they saw various increases in opportunity and advancement from the government. In April 1986, a government backed organization called the Revolutionary Guards Corps "announced its program of military training for women" (Gheytaichi, 2000, p.445). According to BBC News, the Revolutionary Guard Corps was supported by Khomeini and set up to not only "defend the Islamic system of government [in place], but also to counter balance the forces of the military system that was already in place before the Revolution" ("Profile: Iran's Revolutionary Guards," 2009, para. 1). The Revolutionary Guard was organized in 1979 immediately after the revolution, but seven years later they chose to allow women to enter the group as volunteers ("Profile: Iran's Revolutionary Guards," 2009). This was a dramatic shift in the trajectory of Khomeini's reign because Khomeini was extremely connected to the Revolutionary Guard and heavily relied on them to ensure that his new laws were kept by the people. The Revolutionary Guard would arrest and control people who demonstrated in the streets and their main job was to protect the regime and make sure opposing forces never got too large or mobilized ("Profile: Iran's Revolutionary Guards," 2009). For Khomeini to allow women to enter the Revolutionary Guard was a major step in his ideology towards more women involvement in public life. The Revolutionary Guard was seen as his prized possession and weapon against anyone who wanted to protest his governmental changes, so allowing women into the Revolutionary Guard was huge for the future of Iranian women. Just like when analyzing other times that Khomeini's has done things to increase the rights and opportunities for women,

this change needs to be examined with particular emphasis on why Khomeini may have chosen to allow women into the Revolutionary Guard. In analyzing the years proceeding this announcement, it is easy to argue that allowing women in the Revolutionary Guard was yet another example of when the government made a change in its policies to allow more opportunity and rights for women, but with a politically motivated rationale. It can be argued that they thought to themselves: we will give women increased rights and opportunities so they believe that they are advancing in society, but in actuality our main motive is that ultimately this is going to help us and help legitimize our government. We can afford to give women this small advancement, if it means our government will be more legitimate in the eyes of women. Even so, women saw a huge advancement with this change and got a glimpse of government support for their desire to become more integrated citizens.

*The End of an Era. Chaos to come?*

Just two years after the announcement that women could volunteer for the Revolutionary Guard, the regular Iranian military finally got to leave the bloody combat lines of the Iran-Iraq War when Khomeini announced the end of the long and tense war. The Iran-Iraq War was brutal and caused the standard of living to plummet (Brooks, 1989, para. 10). Prior to the revolution, Khomeini campaigned on helping the financial status of the country but after the war “the gap between lower-class and affluent Iranians [was] wider than ever” (Brooks, 1989, para. 10). The expectation was that Khomeini was going to help, not hurt the poverty level in the nation, but unfortunately, he did not live up to his promise.

With the war finally finished and peace in sight, another election for the Third Majles occurred. Three women with varying educational levels won the election and became the women representatives in the Third Majles and kept the tradition of women being elected into

Parliament. Women were able to clinch representation in each Majles, which shows their place in society was not declining, even amongst many of Khomeini initial mandates to suppress women.

Just as women were starting to see flashes of real and sustainable change under Khomeini, the unthinkable happened and Khomeini suffered five heart attacks in ten days and eventually died on June 3, 1989 (“Khomeini Had 5 Heart Attacks,” 1989). Khomeini was the first leader after the overthrow of the Shah, so the nation was left in confusion and apprehension about what the future of the Islamic state would look like.

### **Iran After Khomeini**

After Khomeini’s startling death a new Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, was appointed by Iran’s Council of Experts which is “a group picked by the ayatollah to oversee his succession” (Brooks, 1989, para. 1). One scholar said that “many analysts [said] Mr. Khamenei doesn’t have the charisma to fill the leadership role of [Khomeini]”, but nonetheless he rose to power and once again changed the trajectory of women in Iran (Brooks, 1989, para. 17). Prior to Khomeini’s death, if a man and a woman wanted to divorce, the power to divorce was held only by the man. After Khomeini died, the Majles, with three newly elected women, introduced a bill that would “transfer the power of divorce from the husband to the Special Civil Court” (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.445). The Special Court would deal with the divorce and now “men had to provide a sound argument to the court” on why they should be able to divorce their wife (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.445). This provided women protection from being divorced whenever their husband felt like it and left with little to no means to support themselves. This change afforded women more power in their marriage and moved towards equal rights for both husbands and wives.

*The Newfound Women's Role*

In 1992, just three years after Khomeini's death, there was another election for the Majles. During the election, nine women were elected into the Fifth Majles, the largest number at any one election to date. Women clearly saw their role in the public sphere and in government increasing, and this was allowed by the government because in order to run for office the nomination has to be approved by the Council of Guardians, the group of clerics and layman that make sure legislation and reform aligns with Islamic tenants and beliefs (Samii, 2001, p. 644). These women came into office with a variety of political ideologies. Some were more conservative and aligned more directly with Khomeini and the strict adherence to an Islamic government and others were more reformed and took a more liberal approach to politics, focusing on women and family issues through a less religious lens. One woman who got elected, Marzieh Vahid-Dastjerdi, is particularly important to note. Vahid-Dastjerdi is a doctor whose ideology closely followed the Islamic regime's beliefs (Gheytnchi, 2000, p.446). According to sociologist and scholar Elham Gheytnchi, Vahid-Dastjerdi was extremely adamant about drafting a proposal that would make "hospitals and medical conditions comply with sharia (Islamic law) through the segregation of sexes" (Gheytnchi, 2000, p.446). Vahid-Dastjerdi wanted men and women to be separated in hospitals based on Islamic law (Gheytnchi, 2000, p.446). On the other hand, Maryam Behruzi, a lawyer, came into the Majles with different goals and a less conservative attitude. She "began speaking out in defense of women's rights at a time when the government was calling for a return to traditional Islamic values", so her focus was on family issues, rather than maintaining Islam in everyday life like Vahid-Dastjeri argued (Rappaport, 2001, p.65). It can often be assumed that women who were elected into the Majles were the segment of women against the Islamic regime because they would be the ones most

adamant about seeking change, but Vahid-Dastjerdi provides a clear example to refute that claim and show that both conservative and reformist women were being elected into office.

In addition to 9 women being elected into the Fifth Majles, in April 1994 the Majles allowed women to “become legal consultants in the Special Family Courts and Administrative Justice Courts” (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.447). Legal consultants are similar to lawyers, but with less education. Lawyers are there to advise clients, whereas legal consultants only explain the legal options that a person has. One scholar has explained legal consultants in Iran as actually being able to “make judicial decisions in practice” (Keddie, 2006, p.294). In any case, the government’s choice to allow women to be legal consultants was another huge step in integrating women into not only the legal system, but civil society in general. To further that claim, just a year later in 1995 “the Judiciary Branch [announced] the employment of 100 female legal consultants,” which meant that the new law passed in 1994 had an effect on the Special Civil Courts and the Judiciary (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.447).

As the term of the Fourth Majles was coming to a close, candidates were beginning to announce their desire to run for the Fifth Majles. During that time “305 women [announced] their candidacy for the Majles” (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.447). This extremely large amount of women wishing to gain a seat in the Majles had huge implications for what the future Majles would look like. Despite 305 women wishing to run for a spot in the Majles, only 179 were actually approved by the Council of Guardians to run. The Council of Guardians has the sole authority to deny or approve someone from running in an election and they operate as the sovereign body. The Council of Guardians’ choice to both limit opportunity and access for some women, while expand opportunity and access for others is a clear example of the paradoxical nature of the government in regards to women. On one hand, they allowed 179 women the

opportunity to gain a spot in government and help to change their future and the future of all women in Iran. On the other hand, the same council denied 126 women their opportunity and right to run for the Majles. The Council of Guardians both helped and hindered women from voicing their concerns as members of the parliament, which shows the paradoxical nature of the government's actions.

Following the Council of Guardians decision to allow 179 women to run for election, 14 women were able to win a spot in the Fifth Majles (Gheytauchi, 2000, p.447). This number of women is more than any other amount of women who had been elected to the Majles at a single time. Most of the newly elected women held advanced degrees like M.D.'s, Ph. D's, and M.A.'s, while all but two held at least a bachelor's degree (Gheytauchi, 2000, p.448). The election of these 14 women into the Majles is a clear example of a time when the government increased the opportunities and access of women in Iran and allowed them to have a voice among the men who were typically in control of government.

Aside from political involvement, the government also had been extremely inconsistent in their treatment of women who wish to participate in regular every day activities, such as sports games and shopping. At times in history the government has denied women the ability to go into the city without a male family member with them. At other times women have been encouraged to participate in sport's games, much like what occurred in 1996 when women had their first opportunity to participate in a public sporting event (Gheytauchi, 2000, p.448). Even though women were now able to be athletes and play their games in public, they were still being told they had to wear the hijab and that some of them couldn't run for the Majles. In this way, it seems as though women were regarded as second class citizens on some days and praised for

their abilities on other days, which can be highly confusing for a woman trying to understand her role in an Islamic state.

*Change Here to Stay or Quickly Gone?*

In 1997, president Mohammad Khatami was elected and even though he came with a reformist attitude and was seen as more progressive than his successor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, women saw a number of setbacks during his presidency and saw the clerics and the Majles threaten to inhibit the future rights and opportunities of women. Khatami's election was the first time in the nation's history that there was a nationwide election (Allen, 1999, para. 1). In addition, women made up 2/3rds of the voting population (Allen, 1999, para. 5). Even today women play an "active role as voters in presidential elections [and are] counted on by political candidates, so it is somewhat surprising that women saw so many setbacks under Khatami, even though they had a huge part in electing him (Borbor, 2008, p.118). When Iranian women wanted to join the United Nations' Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, one of the clerics, Ayatollah Hossein Mazaheri, said that Iran could not participate. He based his reasoning on the idea that "it did not comply with sharia law" (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.449). One can only imagine what the Iranian women were feeling in this moment. They had worked so hard to make the government treat them as more than second-class citizens and yet here was a powerful cleric saying he didn't want to join a group of other nations for the elimination of discrimination against women because he said that didn't follow Islamic law. In essence, he was arguing that sharia law did justify the discrimination of women and he wasn't going to help Iranian women become more integrated into society like the men were.

As disappointment likely spread into the hearts and minds of Iranian women, they were hit with yet another setback and denial of rights. In April 1998 the Majles announced that "any

instrumental use of women's pictures that denies them 'their dignity granted by Islam' is strictly forbidden in publications, movies and other media" (Gheytanchi, 2000, p.450). The Majles set up a system of preemptive censorship which highly inhibited the ability of women to appear in print and digital media. Because the Majles verbiage, "denies them 'their dignity granted by Islam'," is so subjective, this law had the potential to drastically change the livelihood of women, especially ones who rely on print and digital media as a job, either as a writer, actor, or the like.

In Iran's customary paradoxical nature, women also experienced major advancement and opportunity during Khatami's reign. While Khatami was the leader, "women's organizations multiplied" and women-centered NGO's formed (Keddie, 2007, p.26). This was contradictory to what women had seen around them which was strict Islamic laws and lack of empathy for women's advancement in society. This mix of both opportunity, freedom, and advancement with government sanctioned oppression and callousness is what has led to the modern Iranian woman we see today.

### *The End of Century*

By July 1998 one person proved that maybe suppression of the rights that women had just fought for wasn't the future of Iran. Meymanat Chubak, who was a female legal consultant, was "appointed by the head of the legislative branch" and became an integral part of the legislative branch, something that no other woman had done so far (Gheytanchi, 2000, p. 450). By being appointed by the head of the legislative branch, Chubak proved that women can make it into a high position in government and have the potential to hold even higher offices in the future. This advancement and increase in state-sanctioned rights showed that the future of Iranian women in government was not bleak, as thought before when the clerics and Majles threatened

their security. Rather, women had the potential to create great change in Iran and become an essential part of the legislative system.

As the turn of the century came near, it became time to elect a new group into the Sixth Majles and female representation in the Majles did not stop that year. Eight women were elected into the Majles, but what is even more important to note is the women's ranking in the results (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.451). Five of the eight women ranked under #25 in the election results with the top woman vote- receiver getting the 9<sup>th</sup> highest amount of votes among all the winners (Gheytonchi, 2000, p.451). Every election for the Majles has hundreds of winners so for five of the eight women to be in the under the top 25 is remarkable (Gheytonchi, 2000, p. 451). The Council of Guardians, headed by the government, allowed these women to run in the election so this was a step by the government to advance the status of women and provide them increased opportunity in the public sphere.

#### *Accomplishments of Shirin Ebadi*

It should be noted that in 2003 human rights attorney Shirin Ebadi was the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, an award only given to a select few (Keddie, 2007, p.27). She received this award for her work on the "rights of women, children, and dissidents" (Keddie, 2007, p.27). Before the Iranian Revolution, Ebadi was a successful lawyer with a booming career, but after Khomeini said that women could not be judges in 1979, Ebadi lost her role as judge and was moved into a secretary position (Ebadi, 2012, p.54). Rather than succumb to the government's new laws and policies, Ebadi worked to advocate for the rights of women and inform women that there is a better life available for them if they fight (Ebadi, 2012, p.54). This radical work to change the rights of women landed her as a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize and ensured she was a clear leader in the fight for greater rights for women.

### *Oppression Under Ahmadinejad*

In 2005 a conservative leader named Mahmoud Ahmadinejad rose to power and became the new president of Iran. With his new role he brought his conservative ideology into government and Iranian's saw yet another shift in the president's ideology. Under Khatami, Iranians had experienced a more reformist president, but Ahmadinejad had a clear conservative ideology based on his prior affiliation with the Abadgaran-e Iran-e Eslami, also known as the Developers of Islamic Iran (Wehrey et al., 2009, p.25). The Abadgaran-e Iran-e Eslami is comprised of many Revolutionary Guard Corps members and other conservative leaders, so it became obvious that Ahmadinejad was going to bring very similar beliefs and practices to the presidency as Khomeini brought after the Revolution (Wehrey et al., 2009, p.25). Ahmadinejad's did not fail to bring about radical change and drastically influence the lives of women. His presidency was so controversial and tense that one scholar even referred to it as "Iran's 'Third Revolution'" (Wehrey et al., 2009, p. 25).

Under Ahmadinejad women were told they were valued at half of a man's value in cases of appearing as "witnesses and in inheritance and compensation for crimes" (Keddie, 2007, p.26). This continued to crush women and provided an even larger gap between men and women and further emphasized the idea of an innate difference between how men and women should be treated. In addition, Ahmadinejad's presidency was known for "increased repression of the media and civil society organizations, including women's groups [and the] introduction of anti-women bills", so overall Ahmadinejad ruled very similarly to Khomeini and instituted more government based oppression (Tohidi, 2016, p.82). The tension between the women and the government came to a head in 2006 when "women's rights activists initiated a campaign to end legal discrimination against women" in an effort called the One Million Signatures Campaign

(Keddie, 2007, p.29). The One Million Signatures Campaign was a campaign that was started to bring together women of all areas of society to “educate them on the injustices” that were occurring in government and allow them to voice their needs (Keddie, 2007, p.29). This campaign had the potential to bring about awareness and mobilize a huge segment of society, but on June 12, 2006 the government violently attacked people participating in one of the campaign protests (Keddie, 2007, p.29). The government’s violent attack of the protestors clearly reveals Ahmadinejad’s ideology and oppressive nature. After the protestors were attacked, women experienced many years of oppression under Ahmadinejad which widened the gap between men and women and especially added to the tension between women and government. Ahmadinejad could almost feel this tension and knew that he needed to do something big if he was going to win reelection in 2009. Before he was reelected for a second term, in a last ditch effort to garner more support, Ahmadinejad “unexpectedly appointed two women ministers to his cabinet in order to appease women since they made up his primary opponents during the Green Movement” (Tohidi, 2016, p.83). The Green Movement was an initiative where Iranian women went into the streets protesting the government (Ebadi, 2012, p.56). Iranians were shocked that Ahmadinejad appointed two women to his cabinet because of how much he mistreated and oppressed women during the first part of his presidency. This is a rare example of Ahmadinejad expanding the opportunities of women, but at the same time he was just furthering the idea that women were half that of a man and ordering police to attack women protestors. This clearly shows a paradox in Ahmadinejad’s treatment of women and only added to the confusion on what he wanted the life of women to look like. Ahmadinejad’s presidency ended in 2013, but the effects of his presidency are still visible today and his presidency mobilized hundreds of women to get together and fight the government.

*More Modernization Under Rouhani: What Is the Future?*

Following Ahmadinejad's two terms as president, a reformist president by the name of Hassan Rouhani was elected in office. Rouhani's presidency has been marked as one of modernization and effective change (Tohidi, 2016, p.82). During his presidency thus far, Rouhani has created a "remarkable shift in foreign policy and has [had] success in resolution of the nuclear crisis thanks to [a] diplomatic approach and negotiation with the world powers" (Tohidi, 2016, p.82). Even though Rouhani has a more reformist ideology, very contrary to his predecessor, "there has been very little success in [improving] the status of women/human rights" under Rouhani (Tohidi, 2016, p.82). This can be attributed to the fact that the "ruling hard-liners, [some of Ahmadinejad's clerical allies], still have the upper hand over the president" and have the power to dismiss many of Rouhani's efforts to help the status of women (Tohidi, 2016, p.82). The two sides of government, representative democracy and semi-theocratic autocracy, present the need for an intricate balance of power (Obucina, 2015, p.163). When you have more conservative leaders on one side of government with more reformist leaders on the other, it becomes very difficult for the reformist president to institute change and pass legislation because the theocratic side of government gets the final word. Even though Rouhani has little power to institute real social change since his ideology doesn't align with the conservative supreme leader, he does still have authority over his side of government, the democratic side. Rouhani exercised this authority by "appointing four women to [his] cabinet..." and a few women to mayoral positions (Tohidi, 2016, p.83). Women saw the opportunity to have a larger voice in government in the president's cabinet, but they were also limited in what they could do because of the barriers put on by the conservative religious leaders. It would seem contradictory that four women would be afforded the opportunity by the government to have a political role,

but at the same time they were blocked from pursuing their new role in its entirety because of the government. Even under a reformist president who is usually more receptive to women's issues and opportunities, it becomes clear that women are experiencing a paradox of increased opportunity with discrimination.

## **Reaction of Women to Their Treatment**

The reaction of women concerning their treatment in Post-Revolutionary Iran by both the government and their fellow citizens can be summarized into five distinct sections: They protested, they became literate, they wrote, they embraced the new advancements and opportunities, and they picked themselves up amidst devastation.

### *They Protested*

Following the Revolution's dramatic new laws and policies, women in Iran did what thousands of other people throughout the world do every day, they protested the unfair treatment and demanded change. Protests by Iranian women came in the traditional sense of physical protests in the street, along with less traditional means like attempting to communicate with the leaders. During the Iran-Iraq War when many men went into battle, women rose up and took on the men's jobs (Terman, 2010, p.290). Khomeini's regime "allowed women to enter active, public roles," which completely shifted their role in society during the war (Terman, 2010, p.290). The newfound role of women in government and in the job market was actually "quite visible" and they enjoyed much of the opportunities that they only dreamed they would get to experience (Osanloo, 2009, p.35). The issue that came about after the war was the same issue that rose in the United States following WWII. As the men came back from war, women were expected to return to their roles at home and forgo the new jobs and opportunities they were just

given and give their jobs back to the men. This did not sit well with women so they mobilized to protest and voice their concerns about their job loss (Keddie, 2006, p.292).

Jobs weren't the only thing taken away at the end of the war. If a woman's husband died in war, "according to Islamic law, the [woman] had to give up custody of their children to their husband's families" (Keddie, 2006, p.292). This infuriated women and caused them to mobilize and protest at extreme rates. Their efforts were met with great success when the law was overturned (Keddie, 2006). Women protested as a way to respond to their treatment and the government's neglect for their role as a mother and equal co-parent. Protests in Post-Revolutionary Iran were frequent and took on a variety of forms. Women used protests as a way to react to the government's rule and decisions to ensure their voice was heard among competing voices.

In addition, family issues sparked mass protests in Iran as issues of polygamy, divorce, custody, and marriage fell into the hands of men under Khomeini's rule. Women were often left without a voice and subject to a man's decision about their family structure. Renowned Iranian scholar, Nikki Keddie explained it by saying "women felt the shock of being deprived of rights after the revocation of the Family Protection Law," which provided protections against issues like polygamy, divorce, custody and marriage, so they joined together and protested against their treatment (Keddie, 2006, p.293). Throughout much of the Post-Revolutionary time, women used protests as a vital tool against the government and its oppressive nature and often found great success as laws were reformed and new, less intrusive policies were enacted.

### *They Learned*

Literacy has always been a longstanding struggle in Iran, since most people learn how to read and write in school, but access to school for Iranian women was limited before the

Revolution. Iranian women reacted to their treatment after the Revolution by actively trying to become literate and learn what was being discussed in government (Haddadi & Zarvani, 2014, p.50). Their rational came from the idea that if we can understand what is happening in government, then we can become more actively involved in in the decision-making process to ensure justice (Haddadi & Zarvani, 2014, p.50). Many women took it upon themselves to try to learn how to read and write, because they knew that becoming literate was an imperative step towards regaining some of the rights they lost during the Revolution. Women successfully learned to read and write and the literacy rate in Iran almost doubled, with it being 48% before the Revolution, and then jumping to 90% in 2011 (Obucina, 2015, p.181). Iranian women didn't let illiteracy stand in their way of reforming the oppressive nature of the government, but instead they learned to read and write so they could play an active role in adapting the life of an Iranian woman.

### *They Wrote*

Another way that women reacted to their treatment came in the form of written documents, whether that was books, publications, magazines, or the like. It can be argued that women's literature was the most prevalent way that women reacted to their treatment in Post-Revolutionary Iran. Beginning in 1980, just after the Revolution, women-written publications were a paramount resource for women to communicate with one another and work to mobilize and unite their efforts. One publication, entitled *Zanan*, edited by Shahla Sherkat, was a major instrument in getting women from all over Iran to talk about the injustices created by the government and getting them to prepare to fight the government's discrimination (Keddie, 2006, p.294). Sherkat was extremely keen on how to connect with her readers, so "many of the arguments in *Zanan* included reinterpretations of Islam" (Keddie, 2006, p.294). By using Islam

in her publication, Sherkat didn't exclude religious women from hearing her argument. The government almost always used Islam to support their argument, so Sherkat, knowing this about the government, instead showed how some of the government's rational was flawed because reinterpreting some Islamic beliefs reveals that they are in fact contrary to the government's actions.

Women's publications were also highly used to share stories between women about the treatment they experienced from their families and the government. One magazine in particular "featured stories of the suffering women experienced under despotic husbands, such as wife-beatings, suicides, and loss of children" (Keddie, 2006, p.293). These heart-wrenching stories were shared in the hopes that if more women were aware that others were experiencing the same pain as them, they would come together and protest the patriarchal society and the strict government-backed inferiority of women. Just like protests, women's publications were created to mobilize women and provide them an outlet to express how they were feeling and the treatment they were receiving.

Women also used writing as a way to advocate for themselves and advocate for the less-educated women who were left voiceless. Nobel Peace Prize winner Shirin Ebadi used writing as a way to express her feelings and promote human rights work (Ebadi, 2012, p.54). She was able to effectively use her role as a Nobel Peace Prize winner in 2003 as a platform to educate the world on the practices of the Iranian government and mobilize people all across the world to join the fight for equality and better treatment of women in Iran. Writing acted as a mechanism to organize and mobilize Iranians inside the country and as a way to educate the rest of the world on the treatment of Iranian women, especially in comparison to the treatment of Iranian men, so they could potentially aid in the efforts for reform.

### *They Embraced*

As previously noted, not all effects of the Iranian Revolution negatively impacted women. Although the large majority of reforms hindered the progress of women, there were distinct initiatives and policies that helped the status of women and contributed to the paradoxical status of modern women. Consequently, many women reacted to these positive reforms by embracing the new opportunities such as educational rights and the ability to receive a formal education. Along with educational rights, many women embraced their new job opportunities and ability to advance from strictly maintaining the house, to having jobs in the public sphere. Women were now going to school in larger groups and becoming political figures, entrepreneurs, and “entering highly visible positions” (Keddie, 2006, p.293). This revolutionized the future of Iran and came as a result of Iranian women’s decision to embrace the positive changes that came to their life after the Revolution.

### *They Rose*

One of the hardest and most influential things that women did in response to their treatment after the Revolution came from the simple idea: we need to rise and fight. Instead of backing down, women fought their issues head-on and mobilized one other to present a united front to the government. Many women adopted the belief that fighting the government was the only way to “achieve high social status”, so instead of letting hiccups stand in their way of real change, they moved forward despite setbacks (Haddadi & Zarvani, 2014, p.50). They rose up against the government and fought for the rights they were denied. In addition, now the young people in the nation are “challenging the revolutionary leaders who are now in their 60s and 70s”, which is only likely to cause more change (Obucina, 2015, p.182). It would have been easy

for Iranian women to just let the government take over every aspect of their life and reinvent what it meant to be a woman in Iran, but instead these women rallied together, fought and rose above the chaos to try to evoke real and lasting change.

## Conclusion

Women in Iran embody two lifestyles, seemingly contradictory. They are encouraged by the government and given opportunities to become integral members of society and have a part in the interworking's of Iranian life, yet that same government is arguably the biggest barrier in women reaching their full potential in areas like work, school, and social settings. As evidenced by history, the paradox of the modern Iranian woman did not happen overnight, but rather as each president and Supreme Leader came into power women saw times when their rights were increased and they had greater opportunities given to them by the state. At the same time, they saw many times when they faced blatant discrimination and religious oppression. Under Khomeini they saw his unwavering Islamic adherence as he often interpreted Islam to mean female inferiority and male superiority. But even with Khomeini's strict religious based laws and reinvention of civil society, women also experienced increased political opportunity and religious based education, which highly contributed to the paradox we see today. Under Khatami women saw increased censorship of women in the media, but also a large increase in opportunities to serve as elected officials. This advancement and constraint was authorized by the government and increasingly added to the paradox that women have embodied since the Revolution. Under Ahmadinejad women experienced even more signs of a paradox when Ahmadinejad ordered the attack of women protestors, but then surprisingly appointed women to his presidential cabinet, giving them a large window into the interworking's of the presidency.

Under Rouhani women are currently experiencing a barrier to change because of the religious side of government's desire to have women educated and integrated into society, but also not letting them attain any new rights.

Over time women have seen their identity in society dramatically shift back and forth, which begs the question: How can Iranian women start to see less of a paradox and more overall increased rights and opportunities? It can be argued, based on history and the present legal system, that the only way women will see lasting change is if they receive the support of the religious clerics, namely the Supreme Leader and his inner circle. Within the legal structure it is clear the Supreme Leader always has the final say, regardless of what the president wants, so gaining the approval of the religious leaders is paramount for real change.

Women don't fit a construct where they can be labeled as free from government based oppression or bound by the government's actions; they are unique. They are worth investigating. They are worth knowing and hearing their stories and struggles. As history has shown women are not taking their mistreatment and oppression lying down, but rather they are fighting. Women are utilizing the freedoms they have received from the government to work against the barriers and oppression that the same government is instituting, which is likely to push the envelope within the relationship between the government and the people. In the future, the paradox may exist less and less because of Iranian women's desire to fully integrate themselves into society with minimal means of discrimination and government based oppression. The idea of shrinking the paradox of freedom and oppression has the potential to completely reinvent the idea of a modern Iranian woman and highly aid her future role within all facets of Iranian society.

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