

The Women's Association of the Tudeh Party of Iran, 1944-
1948: The National and Transnational Struggles of a Left
Feminist Group

By

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Abstract

This thesis explores the domestic and international activities of the biggest Iranian left-feminist organization of the 1940s era: Tashkilat-e Zanan (Women's Association). Based on archival materials from the National Library and Archive Organization of Iran, and the Archives of Islamic Republic of Iran in Tehran, periodical press, memoirs, and a congress report of the Women's International Democratic Federation of which the WA was a member organization, this thesis tried to answer three questions: 1) What assumptions have shaped the leftist and feminist historiography of the Women's Association? 2) What were the origins, agenda and strategy of the WA in its struggle for women's rights? 3) How did Iranian women struggle for women's rights through their fight against imperialism? Through a critical review of the Iranian leftist and women's movement literature, I identified three assumptions stemming from the Cold War paradigm, which have led feminist historians to exclude the WA from the mainstream narratives. These assumptions were: 1) the independent women's rights movement ended in 1932, when the last "independent" women's organization, the Patriotic Women's League (PWL), was banned by the Iranian government 2) The women's organizations of the post-1940 era, were 'subservient' to the parties to which they were affiliated 3) Women's rights issues became 'secondary' and 'subordinate' to the issues emphasized by the WA. I argue that my findings allow me to challenge these assumptions and to posit instead that the WA was a left-feminist organization that consistently fought for women's rights, that it did so with an emphasis on anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, and that the WIDF provided an important platform and support for the WA and its political struggle regarding the interrelated fields of women's rights and anti-imperialism.

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Introduction

This thesis is about the domestic and international activities of an Iranian left-feminist women's organization called the Women's Association, between 1944 and 1948. Mainstream western feminist historiography focusing mostly on liberal and 'gender-only feminism,' generally overlooked women's organizations with a broader political agenda, such as Third World women's organizations and/or those with a socialist or pro-communist orientation.¹ These ideological biases, which stemmed from the Cold War paradigm, can even be traced in the works of scholars who have studied Third World women's movements.² For instance, scholarship on the Iranian Left and the women's movement has been mostly silent about the left-feminist women's organizations of the post-1940 era; focusing instead exclusively either on the male members of the political parties,³ or on what are considered independent women's organizations.⁴

These two ideological biases towards the Iranian left-feminist women's organizations intertwined with a methodological obstacle and affected the Iranian Left and feminist historiography. Dominance of the national perspective in the Iranian Left and feminist historiography led scholars to exclude inter/transnational dimensions of women's movement in

¹ Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991," *In Women and Social Movements International—1840 to Present (WASI) Online Archive*, Eds. T. Dublin and K. Kish Sklar, 2012, http://wasi.alexanderstreet.com/help/view/the_womens_international_democratic_federation_widf_history_main_agenda_and_contributions_19451991.

² For the impact of the Cold War on the mainstream Western feminist historiography see Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (September 2010): 547–73, doi:10.1080/09612025.2010.502399.

³ Two excellent examples of Iranian scholarship that excluded women's participation in the leftist groups are Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1999).

⁴ For example Eliz Sanasarian devoted a chapter to Women's Organization of Iran (1966) in Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression From 1900 to Khomeini* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1982); Camron Michael Amin, "Globalizing Iranian Feminism, 1910–1950," *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2008): 6–30, doi:10.2979/mew.2008.4.issue-1.

Iran during the post-1940 era.⁵ In very concrete terms, these ideological and methodological biases led historians to overlook the most radical, the biggest and the most influential women's organizations of the post-1940 era in Iran: the left-feminist Tashkilat-e Zanan (Women's Association) (WA), affiliated with the communist Tudeh Party of Iran. This thesis aspires to move forward towards a re-thinking of the activities of the Women's Association by considering it as a left-feminist organization; it does so by analyzing the domestic and international activities of the Women's Association during the years of 1944-1948 and by placing the activities of the WA in the wider context of the Cold War competition between the USA and USSR.

The Women's Association was founded in 1944 in Tehran by some progressive communist Iranian women, elite and educated and unofficial members of the Tudeh Party of Iran (women were not allowed to be a member of the Party in its first years of activities 1941-1946). The WA, soon after its formation expanded with branches in different cities. It published a women's journal called *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening) from 1944 till 1948. The WA became a member of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) in 1948 and participated in international congresses and conferences held by the WIDF. WIDF was the most influential women's organization of the post-1945 era, but is still quite unknown among Western feminist historians.⁶

The WA and its journal were closed down by the Iranian government in 1949. It continued publishing journals for women during its two years of underground activities between 1949 and 1951. In 1951 these women managed to establish another organization called The Organization of Women of Iran (OWI). The OWI published its own journal called *Jahan-e*

⁵ See Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004).

⁶ de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

Zanan (Worlds of Women). However, the organization stopped working after the 1953 CIA coup in Iran which led to overthrow of Mosaddeq's government and persecution of Tudeh members.

Despite the scope of its activities, there is no comprehensive account of the history of the Women's Association. Most historians of Left and women's movement in Iran, either ignored its activities or dismissed it in one or two pages. The overall image that emerges from the scarce literature about these organizations is negative: they are depicted as non-autonomous, gender blind, followers of male members of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party, and ideologists without sufficient organizational structures and networks. Although historians mostly overlooked the history of the WA, according to historian Francisca de Haan "the question is not only who or what was excluded, but what worldview was constructed as a result."⁷

The exclusion of women from the main body of leftist and feminist historiography and the exclusion of the so-called woman question from the activities of the majority of the communist movement reflect not only an androcentric perspective that existed and still exists in modern Iran historiography, but also the impact of Cold War thinking on the feminist historiography. In order to re-evaluate this predominant image, I seek to answer to a number of questions.

1- What assumptions have shaped the historiography of the leftist/communist Iranian women's organizations of the post-1940 era, in particular the Women's Association of the Tudeh Party of Iran?

2- What were the origins, agenda and strategy of the Women's Association in struggling for women's rights?

⁷ Francisca de Haan, "Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-Ae, and Claudia Jones," *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 174–89.

3- How did Iranian women struggle for women's rights through their fight against imperialism?

Relying on Francisca de Haan's argument, I claim, first that because of the Cold War and the oppression of communism in Iran, feminism and the women's movement in the main body of literature were reduced to the liberal and so-called "autonomous" women's movement with a focus on equality between men and women. This perspective, which defines liberal feminism as "real" and "advanced" feminism and regards other forms of feminism such as nationalist feminism, socialist feminism or communist as backward or problematic, prevents historians to see the women's movement in the Third World countries or take them seriously. Therefore, I believe this work is a step towards acknowledging the communist/socialist women's organizations as feminist organizations and as part of the women's movement.

My second claim is that the fact that the Women's Association was affiliated with the Tudeh Party and had a strong connection with the communist world, should be studied in the context of domestic situation in Iran and international situation and that these two levels should be considered together in order to answer the main research questions of this thesis.

This thesis aims to contribute to the history of the Women's Association, and to the almost unwritten history of the Women's International Democratic Federation, and to approach the activities of the WA from a transnational perspective, which was never thoroughly done before. In this study, first, I explore the communist women's roles in the women's movement from the post-Constitutional Revolution era (particularly between 1920 and 1940) to the post-1940 era, and I contribute to the characteristics of the women's movement of the post-1940 era. Moreover, in this work I consider a number of assumptions which have shaped the historiography of the left-feminist organizations of post-1940 Iran, in particular the Women's

Association. Second, this thesis explores the Women's Association's main agenda and its strategy to struggle for women's rights, and its strong connection with the Tudeh Party of Iran, and with the Communist world. Third, I take into account the global factors, especially the WA's participations in the WIDF's activities, and explore how Iranian women struggled for women's rights through their fight against imperialism.

It is important to emphasize that it is a transnational perspective that has made my analysis possible. The dominance of the national perspective in the leftist and feminist historiography prevented historians to consider the international dimension of the Third World women's movement. So, I believe that this thesis is also a step towards a more complex understanding of the women's movement in a Third World country.

Methodology, Sources and Terminology

To prove my arguments in this thesis, I have consulted archival materials, periodical press, memoirs and the WIDF conference reports. The archival materials are from the National Library and Archive Organization of Iran, and the Archives of Islamic Republic of Iran, both located in Tehran. The archival material that I used in this thesis include a series of confidential Iranian government documents pertaining to the issuing of passports for leading figures of the Women's Association to participate in the first WIDF women's international congress in Paris in 1945. In addition, there is a series of letters written in 1946 by leaders of the WA to the parliament, newspapers and political parties as part of a women's suffrage campaign. The archival sources were invaluable for me in providing an analysis of events from the perspective of the leading figures of the Women's Association, insights into the activities of the forgotten women's revolutionary such as Jamileh Sadighi, and crucial glimpses into the organizational

networks of the Women's Association in different cities. Due to the focus of the historical publications on the development of the political parties in the capital, Tehran, there is little information about the women's movement in other provinces. In addition, the archival materials help me to trace the early international activities of the Women's Association. For example, the letters written by Jamileh Sadighi to the parliament, newspapers and several different political parties in 1945 show the early international connections of the WA.

In addition, I used three memoirs and autobiographies in my thesis. I focused on these sources for two purposes. First, I used them in order to provide information about the Women's Association's activities which have not been documented anywhere else. For instance, Women's Association's member, Najmi Alavi provides invaluable information about the formation of the Women's Association in 1944, or the fact that it was the Women's Association which started a campaign for adult women's education for the first time in Iran in 1944 and this has not been described yet by any other historians. Second, memoirs and autobiographies provide information about the main agenda and programs of the Tudeh Party of Iran and the Women's Association. For instance, Nouredin Kianouri in his autobiography provides some information about the female membership of the Tudeh Party of Iran. He mentioned that the communist women who later founded the WA requested to become a party member in 1941, but the chairman of the Party, Eskandari refused their membership.

Memoirs of Mariam Firouz are the other sources that I used in my thesis. This book is a long interview which was conducted by authority in the Islamic Republic in 1994 with Firouz. In my view, the credibility of these memoirs is questionable, because as a communist and feminist under persecution after 1978-1979 revolution, Firouz has denied to answer lots of questions of interviewers. Although there have been many attacks on these memoirs by opponents of the

Tudeh Party, this book was useful for me as the only available interview with Firouz. Considering the facts that she was in prison between 1983 and 1987 in the Islamic Republic because of her political activities, and being banned from any public political engagement thereafter, one can easily understand why her answers to the questions of the interview are not accurate and informative. For example, she does not say much things about the Women's Association, which she was one of the leading figures of that. But there are some information about the early international relationships of the WA, and also about some of the WA's leading figures. In my view, this book is more like a confession than memoir in which Firouz does not want to confess.

Periodical press is one of the primary sources that I used in this thesis. A close examination of three issues of the Women's Association's journal *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening) published in 1945 and 1946, provided me with information about the perspective of its members about the woman question. *Bidari-e Ma* was published between 1944 and 1948 and was the organ of the WA. This magazine provides the depth and continuity of information that is essential for contextualizing information from the memoirs and conference reports. The periodical press brought me closer to answering certain specific questions, such as what the position of members of the Women's Association was about the Family Law of 1931 or how the Women's Association related the struggle against imperialism with the struggle for women's rights.

But it is the WIDF conference reports and published books that inform the intellectual soul of this study and pose some of the greatest theoretical and methodological challenges as I will explain in chapter four. The WIDF turned into a political compass for the Iranian women to pursue their broad agenda, which was struggling for women's rights through struggling against

imperialism and colonialism. The WIDF conference report and brochure that I used in this thesis include a book published by the WIDF in 1948 called the *Women of Asia and Africa*, and the report of the WIDF Second Women's International Congress in 1948. The WIDF conference report provides some unexplored information about the international relationships of the Women's Association. For instance, none of scholarly studies of the Iranian women's movement mentioned that the Women's Association hosted the WIDF Inquiry Committee in Iran, which was organized by the WIDF in order to explore the conditions of women and children in South East Asia. In addition, these materials helped me to show the engagement of the WA with women's issues. All of the WIDF's conference reports and the book that I used are deposited in the digital archive of the Women and Social Movement, International-1840 to present which I have accessed through the Central European University library.

Throughout this work I have used the words 'feminism' and 'feminist' for the women's movement in Iran and its leading figures. My definition of feminism is based on Kumari Jayawardena's definition. In her definition, feminism "goes beyond movements for equality and emancipation which agitate for equal rights and legal reforms to redress the prevailing discrimination against women."⁸ She states that "while such movements often advance the struggle for equality, they do not challenge the existing framework of men-women relations in which the subordination of women is located."⁹ In my thesis, I used the word 'feminism' in this larger definition.¹⁰ In addition, according to this author, feminism is not a "recent phenomenon, rooted in Western society [... and] was not imposed on the Third World by the West, but rather

⁸ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986), 2.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ I am aware of the complexities and debates around word "feminism," especially in regard to the Left. For, in my view, convincing arguments to refer to Communist women in this context as "feminist," see Eric S McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 5; and Carole Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham and London: Duck University Press, 2007), 31-40.

that historical circumstances produced important material and ideological changes that affected women.”¹¹

I used the phrase ‘left-feminism’ and ‘left-feminist’ to characterize the Women’s Association and its leaders. This phrase derived from a definition which Ellen C. DuBois provides in her article “Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism.” DuBois states:

By ‘left feminist’ I mean a perspective which fuses a recognition of the systematic oppression of women with an appreciation of other structures of power underlying American society (what we now most often call ‘the intersections of race, class and gender’). Therefore, by left feminist, I also mean an understanding that the attainment of genuine equality for women- all women- requires a radical challenge to American society, the mobilization of masses of people, and fundamental social change.¹²

Although the WA regarded feminism as a bourgeois idea, I characterized it as a left-feminist organization in the history of the women’s movement in Iran based on this definition.¹³

Outline of the thesis

In the first chapter I will provide the historical background necessary for my work. In this chapter I will explore different historical periods of the twentieth century Iran since the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 in order to understand the historical situation in which the women’s movement developed. First, I will consider the origins, course and consequence of the Constitutional Revolution in 1906-1911, which is an important context that helps to understand the situation in which early feminism emerged in Iran as an integral part of the nationalist movement. Second, I will provide information about the post-Constitutional period of 1911-1940, the activities of the communist women’s organizations of the time, and Reza Shah’s

¹¹ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 2.

¹² Ellen C. DuBois, “Eleanor Flexner and the History of American Feminism,” *Gender & History* 3, no. 1 (1991): 81–90, 84.

¹³ I borrowed this idea from the work of Francisca de Haan, “Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-Ae, and Claudia Jones.”

state-feminism, known as the Women's Awakening Project (1936-1941). Finally, I will elaborate on the post-1940 political era and the formation of the Women's Association.

Chapter two is devoted to the theoretical framework and historiographical overview of the related fields. I discuss that the impact of the Cold War on the mainstream feminist historiography is one of the most important factors that affected the way in which the history of the leftist women's movement is written. In this chapter I answer the first question of the thesis: what are the main assumptions that have shaped the leftist and feminist historiography of left-feminist women's associations of the post-1940, in particular the Women's Association. Therefore, this chapter is structured based on the fields of literature that this thesis is built on and aims to contribute to. These three principle fields are the historiography of post-1945 transnational feminism and women's movements, particularly the history of the WIDF; the historiography of the Iranian Left in the post-1940 era; and the historiography of the women's movement in Iran.

Finally, based on my critical review of some of the best publications in the fields, I will identify three assumptions that have shaped the historiography of the Women's Association and which have led feminist historians to overlook the activities of the Women's Association. The first assumption is that the Iranian women's movement lost its independence when the last "independent" women's organization the Patriotic Women's League (PWL) was banned by Reza Shah in 1932. The second assumption is that the women's organizations of the post-1940 era, which were formed in association with political parties, were the 'subservient' to the parties to which there were affiliated. And the third is that women's rights issues became 'secondary' and 'subordinate' to the issues emphasized by the Women's Association.

Chapter three is devoted specifically to the second question of the thesis. In order to answer the question about the origins, goals and strategy of the WA in struggling for women's rights, I will consider the history of some socialist/communist women's organizations of the post-Constitutional Revolution, namely the Patriotic Women's League (1922-1932), the Women's Awakening (1923-1926) and the Messenger of the Prosperity of Women (1927-193-), to show the continuous activities which were carried out by communist women to achieve change. I believe that the similarities between these three communist organizations with the Women's Association of the 1944 prove that first, the women's movement did not end in 1932, second that the WA followed the same goals and activities as previous organizations. In addition, I will consider the WA's goals and agenda. My findings in this chapter allow me to challenge the second assumption that stress on the subservience of the WA to the Tudeh Party. I discussed that the WA were not a subservient to the Party but rather a left-feminist organizations with the anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist perspective.

In the fourth chapter I will consider the international relationships of the Women's Association with the WIDF in order to answer the question of how Iranian women struggled for women's rights through their fight against imperialism. In this chapter, I discuss that the WIDF created an important political atmosphere for Iranian women on the political Left to struggle against imperialism and that Iranian women succeeded to draw the world's attention and attract support from WIDF for their struggle for women and children's rights in Iran. In addition, I will discuss how the WIDF was engaged with the domestic problems of the WA and how the resolution of the Congress included the children's problem in Asia. I will argue that the WA did not miss the opportunity to struggle for women's rights by having a broader political agenda than gender-only feminism. This chapter provides me information to challenge the third assumption

that women's issues became secondary to the WA. I discussed that women's issues were crucial for the WA not a secondary issue. They struggled for women's rights through struggling against imperialism because they regarded imperialism and colonialism as one of the main causes of women's oppression in Iran and other Third World countries.

In conclusion, I will argue my main research questions and discuss the implications of my findings.

Chapter 1- Historical background: Feminism, Socialism, Communism and Nationalism in Iran, 1906-1949

In this chapter I will provide a historical background of the Iranian women's movement from the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911 till 1949, and will explore different historical periods in which the women's movement has developed. In addition, will explore the relationship of the women's movement with the nationalist movement in which the socialists and communists were the most influential actors in bringing the women's question to the fore. It is important to elaborate on the history of the socialist and Communists groups in Iran, which were formed since 1906 against the ruling dynasty and foreign powers in particular Russia and Britain, and to provide information about the domestic and international situation of Iran in order to understand the environment in which the women's movement formed. However, not all events and facts related to the women's movement and nationalism of that time are included in this chapter, but only those that are relevant to the topic of this thesis.

The historical background presented in this chapter is based on published historical literature. It covers the period of the Constitutional Revolution and the rise of early feminism in Iran during 1906-1911. By the Constitutional Revolution historians mean the "anti-Qajar movement" that was formed in 1906 by a coalition of different socio-economic strata in response to foreign intervention and the corrupted ruling dynasty (Qajar dynasty) so as to establish a national assembly and to have a constitution for Iran. Focusing on existing accounts of the participation of women during 1906–1920, in the first sub-chapter I will show that women's participation in political struggles first emerged in Iran as part of the nationalist movement. While the women's groups became more organized, women started to request and demand women's rights and to struggle against the 'traditional patriarchal' and 'religious structure' (1.1).

The chapter also includes a sub-chapter devoted to the women's movement during the post-Constitutional period of 1911-1940, and Reza Shah's Women's Awakening Project of 1936-1940. The spread of socialism and communism throughout the country during the post-Constitutional revolution, particularly between 1920-1940, brought about a shift in the women's movement. The 'woman question' was discussed publicly and a number of women's organizations were formed with a strong connection with the Socialist and Communist Parties such as the Patriotic Women's League (1922) and the Messenger of the Prosperity of Women (1927). However, Reza Shah (1925-1940), started to suppress the opposition, including the women's organizations and formed its own model of organizations following Mussolini's Fascist party and Mustafa Kemal's Republican Party. Reza Shah started the Women's Awakening Project of 1936-1940 in the process of modernization of Iran. This project brought about some changes in women's life and provoked some opposition (1.2).

The chapter also includes a sub-chapter devoted to the rejuvenation of the women's movement in the early 1940s during the second Pahlavi era, and the formation of the Women's Association of the Tudeh Party of Iran in 1944. The abdication of Reza Shah enforced by Allied Forces in 1940 provided political freedom in Iran and led to the proliferation of political parties (including the formation of two Communist parties) and women's organizations. One of the most radical women's organizations which was formed during this period was the Women's Association of the Tudeh Party in 1944 (1.3).

In this chapter I rely on Kumari Jayawardena's argument that "the emergence of early feminism in Asia should be studied in the context of the resistance to imperialism on the one hand, and to 'feudal monarchies' and 'traditional patriarchal' and 'religious structure' on the

other.”¹⁴ Such a perspective provides the basis to see the important role the Women’s Association’s played during the 1940s. (See chapter 3 and 4). In my view, the Women’s Association, which was affiliated with the Communist Tudeh Party of Iran, pursued its struggle for women’s rights through the struggling for Iran’s independence.

1-1 The Constitutional period and the early women’s movement, 1906-1911

An “anti-Qajar movement” formed during the last two decades of the nineteenth century in Iran, which led to the Constitutional Revolution in 1906–1911. In August 1906, a union of intellectuals, merchants, clerics and craftsmen, through violent and non-violent demonstrations, forced the Qajar court to convene a national assembly for Iran. The first National Assembly (hereafter Majles) opened on October 7, 1906, and a Constitution was ratified by the Fifth Qajar King of Iran, Mozaffar od-Din Shah (1853-1907) in the same year. As Iranian historian Ervand Abrahamian states, the election of the first Majles affected the development of the political organizations.¹⁵ The revolution also accelerated the formation of a women’s movement in Iran. However, as I will discuss in detail in chapter two, the significant role women played in this revolution is still an understudied subject.

Many historians have discussed the causes of the Constitutional Revolution and explored its different aspects. Iranian historian Parvin Paidar states, “during the last two decades of the nineteenth century, economic interference by and cultural contact with the West became

¹⁴ Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (New Delhi: Kali for Women; U.S. Distributor: Biblio Distribution Center, 1986), 56.

¹⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, “The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 10, no. 3 (August 1, 1979): 381–414, 408.

channeled into a concrete anti-Qajar movement.”¹⁶ The anti-Qajar movement which led to the Constitutional Revolution was a response to the corruption and oppression of the Qajar dynasty (1785-1925), and to the economic and political domination of nineteenth century imperialists in Iran namely Russia and Britain.

Abrahamian mentions that at the end of the 19th century, Iran experienced “a series of military defeats suffered in two Russo-Iranian wars and three Anglo-Iranian wars that ended with the Treaties of Turkmanchai (1827) and Paris (1857).”¹⁷ During that time, Iran was surrounded by two European empires, namely, Czarist Russia in the north and the British Empire in the south and east. As a result of the Treaty of Turkamanchei, the feudal-monarchic state of Iran, the Qajar dynasty lost an enormous amount of important lands in the north, and those lands came under the Russian control. The Treaty of Paris gave Britain the right to have domination over Harat (in Afghanistan) which was part of Iran’s territory at that moment. These treaties exacted, “harsh commercial capitulations that lowered import duties, permitted Britain and Russia to open trading agencies anywhere within Iran, and exempted their merchants from local laws, tariffs, and road tolls.”¹⁸

It was under this political and economic pressure that the struggle for nationalism started. The political opposition became more organized during the reign of Mozaffar od-Din Shah, who ruled Iran between 1896 and 1906. In order to satisfy the political opposition, he inaugurated liberal policies.¹⁹ He diminished censorship, established schools of political science and agriculture, and most important of all, allowed the formation of cultural and educational

¹⁶ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 50.

¹⁷ Abrahamian, “The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran,” 391.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. 401.

associations.²⁰ The relaxation of political repression encouraged the opposition to create semiclandestine organizations in the years immediately before the Constitutional Revolution.²¹ A number of these organizations played significant roles in the revolution such as Anjuman-e Makhfi (the Secret Society); Markaz-e Ghaybi (the Secret Center); Hizb-e Ijtima'yun-e Amiyun (the Social Democratic Party); Jama-e Adamiyat (the Society of Humanity); and Komiteh-i Inqilabi (the Revolutionary Committee).²²

Abrahamian writes that “the Secret Society, the most important of the organizations, was formed in Tehran in early 1905 by members of ulama [Shii clergy] and by merchants with close connections to the trading and craft guilds.”²³ The Secret Center formed in Tabriz, Iran in 1905 and the Social Democratic Party founded in the Russian Caucasus, in Baku in 1905, “were influenced by the revolutionary socialism of Russian Marxism.”²⁴ The Society of Humanity was established in Tehran in 1905 and was inspired by “the liberal humanism of August Comte”. The Revolutionary Committee was formed in 1904 and “was composed of fifty-seven ‘radical intellectuals’ reflect[ing] the sociological composition of the first generation intelligentsia.”²⁵

Hundreds of grass-roots councils called anjuman were formed throughout the country between 1906 and 1907. “The word anjuman was an old Persian name used by the poet Fardusi in his epic *Shahnameh* to refer to a place of gathering for consultation.”²⁶ It is important to point out here that these were single-sex organizations. Men established their own organizations and excluded women from participating in these organizations. However, women gradually started to

²⁰ Ibid, 400.

²¹ Ibid, 401.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid, 403.

²⁶ Janet Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” *Journal of Women’s History* 1, no. 2 (1989): 65–87. 68.

form their own organizations, especially after 1906 (to be discussed below). These anjumans (or councils) were occupational and communally active organizations which supported the Constitutional Revolution and initially campaigned for electing their candidates in Majles.²⁷ As Abrahamian states, “the elections for the National Assembly acted as a catalyst for the development of political organizations.”²⁸ Indeed, these organizations acted as the “organs of direct democracy.”²⁹ According to an estimation by an Iranian historian, Ahmad Kasravi, in Tehran only, approximately 200 anjumans were established during that time.³⁰ Among them the Anjuman-e Tabriz (Council of Tabriz) in the Iranian province of Azerbaijan, formed in September 1906, is characterized by historians as “the most influential provincial anjuman.”³¹ It played a significant role in the Revolution as well as in post-Revolutionary period.

The Anjuman-e Tabriz published its own newspaper called *Jarideh-e Melli* (the National Newspaper) and after thirty-seven issues its name was changed to *Anjuman*.³² The Anjoman-e Tabriz “reduced bread prices, fixed prices of other basic commodities, and began a secular system of education.”³³ In addition, the Council of Tabriz attempted to establish an alternative government in province of Azerbaijan, Iran. The Anjoman-e Tabriz was in contact with and supported by the Social Democratic Party (hereafter SDP) which was founded in Russian Caucasus, in Baku in 1905.³⁴ The SDP was an offshoot of another Iranian party called Hemmat,

²⁷ Abrahamian, “The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran,” 408.

²⁸ Ibid, 408.

²⁹ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 68.

³⁰ Ahmad Kasravi, *Tarikh-I Mashrutah-Ye Iran (The Constitutional History of Iran)* (Tehran: Amir Kabir Publication, 1951), 207.

³¹ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 68.

³² Touraj Atabaki, *Azerbaijan: Ethnicity and Autonomy in Twentieth-Century Iran* (London: British Academy Press, 1993).

³³ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 68.

³⁴ Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*.

which had been established in 1904 in Baku, aiming to organize the Muslim laborers of Transcaucasia.³⁵

The SDP in Baku was primarily composed of Iranian immigrant workers. During this period, several hundred thousand Iranians were working in the Baku oil fields. The earlier experience of the 1905 Russian Revolution encouraged these workers to radicalize and join the Social Democrats.³⁶ The SDP had a close relationship with committees of the Russian Social Democratic Workers' Party in Baku and Tbilisi.³⁷ The Social Democrats would become more powerful during the Second Constitutional period of 1909–1911, when they formed another party called the Democratic Party in the Majles in 1910. The founders of the SDP in 1917 founded the Hezb-e Adalat (Justice Party), and in 1920 established the Communist Party of Iran (to be discussed later in the next sub-chapter).

The main characteristic of the Constitutional Revolution was the “alliance between the religious and intellectual sectors.”³⁸ The intelligentsia, saw “constitutionalism, secularism, and nationalism as three vital means for attaining the establishment of a modern, strong, and developed Iran.”³⁹ The intelligentsia tried to work with the Qajar dynasty before the Revolution to make certain reforms but its attempts had failed. As Sanasarian states, “any minister who attempted to modernize Iran was removed from the political scene by strong opposition,....., especially [from] the religious leaders.”⁴⁰ During the Constitutional movement, the intelligentsia

³⁵ Ibid, 36.

³⁶ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran.”, p. 68-9.

³⁷ Ibid. 69.

³⁸ Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1982), 15.

³⁹ Abrahamian, “The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran,” 395.

⁴⁰ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 15.

sought an alliance with the ulama (Shii clerics) in order to use the religious feelings of the people against both the ruling dynasty and the imperial powers.⁴¹

The concessions granted by the Qajar monarchy to the imperialist powers during the Westernization process extremely annoyed the ulama. The Islamic clergy was able to mobilize people easily through religious gatherings in the mosques. Through its authority, the ulama succeeded to motivate the masses to march for a written Constitution during the Constitutional Revolution. During the writing of the Constitution in 1906, ideological conflicts started between the conservative ulama and the intelligentsia. According to Sanasarian, the ulama, which formed the anti-secular groups exerted significant power in writing the Constitution. Her explanation about Article 2 of the Constitution shows the influence of the ulama very well:

Article 2 of the Constitution bluntly stated that no legislation contradicting the Shariah (Islamic laws) should pass the parliament. It stated that in each legislative session a board of no less than five high-ranking clergy of the Shiah sect of Islam should be present. As full members of the Majles, they would review the proposed legislation. If they concluded that it contradicted Islamic laws, the Majles could not pass the legislation.⁴²

As Sanasarian points out, the Iranian Constitution was combination of Islamic law, secularism, and Western constitutional precepts.⁴³

Women's Participation

Historians believe that women's activities in the late 1800s and at the early stage of the revolution, were mostly supported by religious leaders. As Sanasarian demonstrates, "because of clerical support, a great number of women felt free to march and shout nationalistic slogans-

⁴¹ Abrahamian, "The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran," 395.

⁴² Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 18.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 19.

behavior or otherwise considered very unladylike.”⁴⁴ Despite the vast participation of the women in the Revolution in various forms, the 1906 Constitution did not grant women any political and social rights. The Electoral Law of September 1906 had granted restricted suffrage to notables, aristocrats, clerics, merchants, landowners and middle class guilds.⁴⁵ But it prevented women from any political participation.⁴⁶ The Law ranked women “among murderers, thieves, and criminals, who were also excluded.”⁴⁷

According to Sanasarian, after 1906, women’s activities became more visible and independent.⁴⁸ As Afary’s work on the origins of feminism in Iran shows, “a new radical women’s movement composed of secret women’s councils called women’s anjumans, emerged during the Constitutional Revolution.”⁴⁹ Iranian women, were not allowed to participate in the public sphere freely. However, women had their own traditional social and religious gatherings which normally took place at home. These gatherings turned into political meetings during the revolution. Women gathered information about the latest political issues at mosques or public religious gatherings such as *rowzeh*,⁵⁰ and discussed them in their secret councils.⁵¹ As women were not allowed to participate in official politics, their activities during this period included

⁴⁴ Ibid, 32.

⁴⁵ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 68.

⁴⁶ See the text of the “Electoral Law,” in Edward Granville Browne, *The Persian Revolution of 1905-1909* (London: Frank Cass, 1966, n.d.), 356-61.

⁴⁷ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 68.

⁴⁸ Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran*, 20.

⁴⁹ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 66.

⁵⁰ In Paidar’s definition, “rowzeh is a religious gathering in mosques and private houses. The ritual that goes with it is that a male or female molla or akhund recites the tragedy of Karbala and sufferings and martyrdom of Shii emaman and their family and followers in the hands of Sunni rulers, while the audience cry and pray.” Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 366.

⁵¹ Badr ol-Moluk Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Women’s Emancipation in Iran*, trans. F.R.C Bagley (New York: Exposition Press, 1977), 13-14, 34.

“circulating information, spreading news, acting as informers and messengers, participating in demonstrations and taking up arms in protests.”⁵²

The existence of the women’s anjumans or secret societies was first publicized by Morgan Shuster, a young American financial advisor to the new government (the government that was convened after the first Majles in 1906). In his 1912 book, *The Strangling of Persia*, Shuster remarked that at least a dozen of secret women’s society existed in Tehran in 1910.⁵³

Shortly after the formation of the Majles in 1906, the creation of a national bank was proposed in order to decrease Iran’s dependence on foreign loans. The project of establishing a national bank was one of the earliest issues around which women’s activities were organized.⁵⁴ Women supported the national bank financially by turning in their wages, jewelry or inheritances. In different cities such as Tehran and Tabriz women joined the movement to boycott foreign goods and to wear locally made fabrics. The boycott of European goods by women was regarded as a step towards the country’s independence.⁵⁵ For instance, Tabrizi women organized their activities and tried to convince other women “to wear their old clothes for some time hoping that the nation would begin to produce its own textiles in the near future.”⁵⁶ Soon after, women started to create their own anjumans and to demand women’s rights alongside their nationalist demands for Iran’s independence.⁵⁷

Initially, women addressed women’s issues by demanding the right of education for girls and to create schools for them. During the first days after the convening of the Majles in 1906,

⁵² Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 52.

⁵³ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 66.

⁵⁴ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 68.

⁵⁵ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 69.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 72.

women turned to the Majles and petitioned for girls' education. However, the Majles' unconvincing response motivated women to start their own activities to further women's rights. For example, one of the first meetings of women was held in 1907 and the meeting called for education for girls. By 1910, fifty schools had been founded for girls in Tehran.⁵⁸ Women's anjumans established during 1907–1908, as well as during the Second Constitutional period 1909–1911, played an active role in the foundation of these new schools.⁵⁹

While the women's movement was growing and women succeeded to organize their own societies till 1910, the ulama who initially supported women's participation in the revolution, gradually started to express their hostility to women's education and political participation. Afari poses that "the conservative members of the ulama opposed the educational reform movement and accused the women involved in it of having Babi (religious reformist) sentiments."⁶⁰ Sheikh Fazlallah Nuri (who later became an anti-Constitutionalist cleric and was executed by the Constitutionalists in 1909) and Sayyid Ali Shushtari (another cleric) issued a religious *fatwa* against the new schools and pronounced them to be contrary to Islam. This fatwa provoked reactionary attacks on young women students and their teachers on the streets and at the schools.⁶¹

Women started to challenge the clerical authority through their organizations and journals. In 1907, Anjuman Horriat Vatan (The Women's Freedom Society, WFS) was established in Tehran. The WFS was established by a number of male and female intellectuals. Its objective was to provide an opportunity for its sixty female members to participate in the activities of a mixed society and enable men and women, particularly women, to overcome their

⁵⁸ Afary, "On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran," 70.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 71.

⁶¹ Ibid.

shyness and embarrassment. “No single men were allowed to attend the society’s meetings, unless accompanied by a female relative.”⁶² The focus of the meetings was “to discuss the situation of women by sharing their personal problems, experiences, and feelings.”⁶³ The meetings were held outside Tehran in secrecy. However, after a few sessions, this secret society dissolved because of a mob attack. Some of the female members of this society, such as Sedigheh Doulatabadi, became women’s rights advocates later in 1910.⁶⁴ The Women’s Society (Anjoman Nesvan) established in 1910 in Tehran, was composed of 150 women whose aim was to struggle against reactionary views. In 1910, the National Lady’s Society (Anjoman Mokhadarat Vatan) was formed by a group of members of the Women’s Society.⁶⁵

On January 8, 1907, Mozaffar od-Din Shah's successor and his son, Mohammad Ali Shah came to power. He was an ‘ardent anti-Constitutionalist’ and had already shown his position by denying to ratify the Supplementary Fundamental Law. Mohammad Ali Shah, after increasing his support among ulama such as Shaykh Fazlallah Nuri, organized “violent anti-Constitutional demonstrations” and then with the help of his Royalist supporters, bombarded the Majles in June 1908 and stopped the Constitutional government temporarily.⁶⁶ The Shah announced martial law and many prominent reformers were arrested, killed or exiled. The Council of Tabriz resisted and fought back. The Royalist forces attacked Tabriz and surrounded the city. The civil war of Tabriz lasted for 11 months. During the civil war men and women fought side-by-side.⁶⁷ It is noteworthy that “The Shah wrote a letter to the clergy in Tabriz requesting their support. In his letter, the Shah attacked constitutionalist ideas of social equality as being against Islam and the

⁶² Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran*, 35.

⁶³ Ali Akbar Mahdi, “The Iranian Women’s Movement: A Century Long Struggle,” *Muslim World* 94, no. 4 (October 2004): 427–48, 428

⁶⁴ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 68.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 69.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 56.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 57.

monarchy and warned the clergy, who, in the guise of rejecting superstition and backwardness, had prompted women to establish women's societies and talk about emancipation.”⁶⁸

According to Afary, in the civil war of Tabriz, “women formed their own contingents of warriors and fought, [...] on the side of the Constitutionalists”⁶⁹ Tabriz stayed quite united in defending the Constitution. *Anjoman*, the journal of the Anjoman-e Tabriz, reported about the fight between constitutionalists and royalists in Tabriz. One report stated: “According to reliable sources, a number of valiant women are dressed in disguise and are fighting the forces of the enemy. These women have occupied a strategically important part of the city and are showering the enemy with their ammunition.”⁷⁰

Women in other cities set up demonstrations against the harsh suppression in Azerbaijan. Some women sold their jewelry, carpets and furnitures in order to donate money to the Constitutionalist of Tabriz. Soon after, the Civil War spread to Tehran and women in support of the Constitution participated in that fight too. They carried pistols under their veils, gave refuge to deputies or hid soldiers in their homes.⁷¹ In the summer of 1909, the constitutionalist forces “with the help of Armenian, Georgian, and Muslim revolutionaries from the Causasus and the Bakhtiari tribesmen from Isfahan”⁷² gained control over Tehran and the civil war ended. Mohammad Ali Shah was dethroned and his son Ahmad Shah crowned by Majles deputies who acted as the constituent body. A number of anti-Constitutionalists such as Sheykh Fazlollah Nuri were executed.⁷³

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 74.

⁷⁰ Quoted in Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 57.

⁷¹ Kasravi, *Tarikh-I Mashrutah-Ye Iran (The Constitutional History of Iran)*, 646.

⁷² Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran,” 74.

⁷³ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 58.

1-2 The post-Constitutional period and the reign of Reza Shah, 1911-40

The post-Constitutional era started with a rapid flourishing of political parties and the expansion of the independent women's movement.⁷⁴ Historians discussed that the Iranian women's movement reached its peak in the 1920s. As Paidar demonstrates, "one of the main political developments of this period was the spread of socialist ideology amongst Iranian reformers which resulted from the radicalizing effect of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917."⁷⁵ In 1920, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Iran were founded. The First Congress of the Communist Party of Iran was held in the northern city of Anzali in 1920. The Communist Party established a socialist republic in Gilan in 1920.⁷⁶ Another socialist movement of this time was established in Azerbaijan and a prominent democrat, Mohammad Khiabani, established the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan in 1920.⁷⁷ The Socialist and Communist Parties, which gradually spread their branches in different cities, attracted women to their activities. Women started forming women's organizations as well as publishing journals for women.⁷⁸

Other political parties, too, were formed during this time. The fourth Majles, held in 1921, was dominated by four political parties: Hizb-e Eslah Talaban (the Reformist Party); Hezb-e Tajadod (the Revival Party); Hezb-e Socialist (the Socialist Party); and Hezb-e Komonist (the Communist Party). The Reformist Party won the majority of seats, and was led by Moddares, a

⁷⁴ Ibid,78.

⁷⁵ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 89.

⁷⁶ For more detail about the Iranian Soviet Republic of Gilan see Pezhmann Dailami, "The First Congress of Peoples of the East and the Iranian Soviet Republic of Gilan, 1920-21," in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*. Ed. Stephanie Cronin (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 85-117.

⁷⁷ For more information about the Democrat Party in Azerbaijan see Atabaki, *Azerbaijan*.

⁷⁸ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 91.

reformist cleric; the Revival Party consisting of moderates came second; the Socialist Party and the Communist Party came last.⁷⁹

According to Sanasarian, “an uninterrupted chain of activities for women’s rights was pursued in the urban centers in three ways: (1) the publication of women’s periodicals, (2) the formation of women’s organizations, and (3) the opening of girls’ schools.”⁸⁰ Reportedly the first women’s periodical, named *Danesh* (Knowledge), was published in 1910 by a society of women and edited by a women oculist, known as Dr Kahhal.⁸¹ Another women’s magazine in 1913 aimed to familiarize women with literature, educate them in childcare and housework, motivate their education, struggle against superstition among women and improve their moral standards. This journal, *Shokufeh* (Blossom), was also edited by a woman.⁸²

Zaban-e Zanan (Women’s Voice), established in 1919 in Isfahan, “was the first women’s newspaper registered in the name of its editor, Sadighe Dowlatabadi.”⁸³ Before that women could not register a periodical press under a woman’s name. This women’s journal is known as one of the influential women’s publication which advocated and campaigned for women’s rights. Sadigheh Dowlatabadi, the editor of the journal, started her feminist activities by establishing a girls’ school at the age of 14 in 1896 in Isfahan. *Zaban-e Zanan* “advocated the education and economic independence of women.”⁸⁴ Several other women’s journals were published between 1920 and 1932, such as *Namey-e Banovan* (Women’s Letter) and *Alam-e Nesvan* (Women’s Universe) in 1920, *Jahan-e Zanan* (Women’s World) in 1921, *Nesvan-e Vatankhah* (Patriotic

⁷⁹ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 123.

⁸⁰ Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran*, 32.

⁸¹ Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet, “Patriotic Womanhood: The Culture of Feminism in Modern Iran, 1900–1941,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 32, no. 1 (May 2005): 29–46, 31.

⁸² Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran*, 32.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

Women) in 1922, *Saadat-e Nesvan* (the Prosperity of Women) in 1927, and *Dokhtaran-e Iran* (Daughters of Iran) in 1931.⁸⁵

1-2-1 The Socialist and Communist women's organizations of 1920-1932

For the sake of a better explanation, I devote a separate sub-chapter to the socialist and communist women's organizations and their publications. However, the activities of these women's organizations were neither separate from the other women's organizations of the time, nor from the nationalist movement. According to Jayawardena the movement for women's emancipation in Iran was an integral part of the nationalist movement during the Constitutional revolution.⁸⁶ The post-Constitutional women's organizations, as Paidar stated, "achieved some degree of separation and independence."⁸⁷ Despite this relative independence, women's organizations and political parties, started to form alliances and to "create mutual support networks."⁸⁸ Many women's organizations of this time established a close relationship with the Socialists, the Communists and the Revivalists, the political parties which they found themselves close to their ideology.

Historians discuss that "the most far-reaching development within the women's movement in this period was the establishment of socialist and communist women's organizations."⁸⁹ The largest and best established of these women's organizations was *Jamiat-e Nesvan-e Vatankhah-e* (Patriotic Women's League) a socialist women's organization which was founded in 1922 in Tehran by Mohtaram Eskandari. This organization was the women's

⁸⁵ Ibid, 33-34.

⁸⁶ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, 57.

⁸⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 91.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ For example see Ibid, 95.

organization of the Socialist Party (1920) and had a strong connection with the Communist Party (1920). A communist women's organization was founded in 1923 called Bidari-e Zanan (Women's Awakening). Another communist women's organization was formed in 1927 in Rasht called the Jamiat-e Payk-e Saadat-e Nesvan (Messenger of the Prosperity of Women).

The Socialist Party was established in 1920 and was led by "Sulayman Eskandari, Musavat, and Qasem Khan Sur, the editor of the radical newspaper *Sur-e Israfil*."⁹⁰ Soon after, the Socialist Party which centered its activities in Tehran, spread its branches in a number of cities, "especially in, Rasht, Qazvin, Anzeli, Tabriz, Mashhad, Kerman, and Kermanshah."⁹¹ A group of intellectuals led by Hossein Jowdat formed "the Cultural Society" in Rasht, and a similar group in Qazvin established "the Educational Society."⁹² Both Societies published their journals, held literacy classes and organized modern theatre, and most importantly for my purpose, established women's organizations.⁹³ The Socialist Party in Tehran not only published four newspapers, but also established "a Tenants' Association and a Union of Employees in the Ministry of Post and Telegraph."⁹⁴ The Socialist Party demanded the "emancipation of women"; "equality of rights before the law for male and female Iranians irrespective of race, religion and ethnicity"; and "the right to elect and be elected for all Iranians without any restrictions".⁹⁵

The Patriotic Women's League (PWL) was set up in 1922 by Mohtaram Eskandari (1895–1924), a Qajar princess. The PWL has been characterized by the historians as one the most active and 'enthusiastic' women's organizations in Iranian history.⁹⁶ Mohtaram Eskandari

⁹⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 127.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid, 128.

⁹³ Ibid, 128.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 89.

⁹⁶ For example Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*; Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*; Hammed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Woman Question' in the

was the headmistress of one of the girls' schools which were established between 1910 and 1920. The PWL published the magazine *Nesvan-e Vatankhan* (Patriotic Women). The aims of the PWL were "the training of young girls, the expansion of national industry, the education of [adult] women, the protection of orphan girls, and the establishment of hospitals for poor women."⁹⁷ The magazine pointed out women's issues such as early marriage, illiteracy, social welfare for women, and political rights of women. "The executive committee of the League consisted of Nurolhoda Manganeh, Falkhr ol-Ozma Arghum, Mastureh Afshar and Safiyeh Eskandari. Later on [around 1926], other prominent women activists such as Sadighe Dowlatabadi and Fakhr Afagh Parsa joined the executive committee."⁹⁸

Although the PWL was the target of numerous attacks by religious leaders, the organization continued its campaign for women's rights and advocated unveiling and women's education until 1932. One of the most famous campaigns of the League (done sometime between 1922 and 1925) was a response to an anti-women's rights booklet written and distributed by some members of the clergy. The members of the League set fire to and burned anti-women literature in the main square of Tehran. They were attacked and arrested immediately, but released soon after.⁹⁹ The League also organized literacy classes for women, published books and set up plays. The League continued to work till 1932 when it was banned by Reza Shah and his anti-communist law¹⁰⁰ (to be discussed on page 36).

Revolution of 1978–79," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 02 (1994): 223–47; J. Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, & the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

⁹⁷ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 36.

⁹⁸ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 96.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Communist women “took up activities within the Communist Party and formed adjacent women’s organizations.”¹⁰¹ The Communist Party of Iran (CPI) was founded in the northern town of Anzali, Iran; in June 1920 at its first Congress it established the Iranian Soviet Republic of Gilan (1920–1921). The congress called for “compulsory free education for all children until the age of fifteen.”¹⁰² The founders of the CPI were veteran Social Democrats who had already formed the Hezb-e Adalat (Justice Party) in May 1917 in Baku, a party sympathetic to the Russian Bolsheviks. The Justice Party expanded its branches among the Iranian community in Tashkent, the capital of the Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic during its three years of activities from 1917 till 1920. It convened its first Congress in 1920 and then announced the formation of the CPI. In the first congress, 48 delegates participated, representing some six hundred members in the Causasus, Central Asia, Gilan and Azerbaijan.¹⁰³

Ahmad Soltanzaheh was elected at the Congress as the CPI’s first secretary and wrote the first Communist statement on the position of women in Iran.¹⁰⁴ The CPI stressed mobilization of women and increased its female membership. As Paidar points out, “Communist women established correspondence with Soviet women’s newspapers and journals such as *Zan-e Shahrgh* (Eastern Women).”¹⁰⁵ There is no estimation of how many female members, the CPI had. According to a report published in *Zan-e Shargh*, in 1921, fifty communist women celebrated International Women’s Day for the first time in Iran in the northern town of Anzali.¹⁰⁶ The CPI encouraged its female membership to participate in the activities of the Patriotic Women’s League, but some young Communist women who found the PWL not radical enough,

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid, 89.

¹⁰³ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 115.

¹⁰⁴ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 97.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

established Bidari-e Zanan (Women's Awakening) in 1923. Women's Awakening worked for three years and organized literacy classes and adult education, plays, and International Women's Day.¹⁰⁷

The Soviet Republic of Gilan collapsed in 1921 and the CPI changed the focus of its activities from the north to the center of the country, especially Tehran. "By 1925, the Communists had branches in Tehran, Tabriz, Mashhad, Isfahan, Anzeli, Kermanshah and underground cells in many of the southern cities."¹⁰⁸ In addition, the CPI organized women's sections within the party.¹⁰⁹ The agenda of the Second Congress of the CPI, held in 1927 in Orumiyeh, "included work among women."¹¹⁰ Resolutions of the 1927 Congress concentrated on the condition of working-class women. The Congress demanded the dissolution of "night shifts for women and children and asked for paid maternity leave for the working women."¹¹¹

In 1927, soon after the Second CPI Congress, a prominent communist woman, Roshanak Nowdoust, who was also a headmistress of a girls' school in Rasht founded a communist women's organization called Jamiat-e Payk-e Saadat-e Nesvan (Messenger of the Prosperity of Women, MPW), affiliated with the CPI.¹¹² Some other important figures of the MPW were Jamileh Sadighi, Sakineh Shabrang, Uranus Bazyab and Shokat Rusta.¹¹³ The purpose of the organization was "the expansion of literacy and awareness among women."¹¹⁴ These women established a library for women and formed classes for adult women. They also celebrated

¹⁰⁷ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 36.

¹⁰⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 129.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 97.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Kashani-Sabet, "Patriotic Womanhood," 35.

¹¹³ "Pioneers of the Iranian Women's Movement," Non-Profit Organization Website, *Voice of People, Peace, Freedom, Social Justice*, (December 13, 2013), <http://wp.sedayemardom.net/?p=12932>.

¹¹⁴ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 35.

International Women's Day every year. Nowdoust was also editor of the organization's newspaper called *Payk-e Saadat-e Nesvan* (Messenger of the Prosperity of Women). The newspaper was published with the help of the Cultural Society formed by the Socialist Party in Rasht. According to Iranian historian Kashani-Sabet, the newspaper "made patriotic motherhood and education a frequent subject of discussion."¹¹⁵ The newspaper also concentrated on the cause of the working class and the rural women who worked under difficult conditions in the rice fields in a northern part of Iran, Gilan. Nowdoust, in some articles published in the newspaper, motivated active women "to pay attention to the needs of such diligent rural women and to lead them to the path of education and enlightenment."¹¹⁶

The reality of prostitution in Iran was one of the main topics discussed in *the Messenger of the Prosperity of Women*. Nowdoust in one of the articles argued that prostitution was a social problem in Iran because women did not have financial independence and depended on their spouses for support. In her perspective, prostitution in Iran was related to women's unemployment in urban areas and limited wages earned by women in rural areas.¹¹⁷

Nowdoust strongly believed that women should work in affiliation with the other societies and should not follow their feminist ideas individually. In one editorial of the journal she wrote: "many individual women who are not connected with associations have 'feminist' beliefs and view the question of women's freedom [...] apart from national interests."¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Kashani-Sabet, "Patriotic Womanhood," 35.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 35.

Reportedly, as historian Kashani Sabet points out this is one of the earliest uses of the term ‘feminism’ in an Iranian periodical press.¹¹⁹

1-2-2 Reza Shah, the Women’s Movement and the Project of the Women’s Awakening, 1936-1940

In December 1925, Reza Khan, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, dethroned the Qajar dynasty through the Majles, and the Majles offered him the imperial throne. Thus the Pahlavi regime came to existence. About two years after he became king, Reza Khan closed down all independent newspapers and destroyed the political parties. The Revival Party, which had supported Reza Shah, was banned and its leaders, such as Dr Mosaddeq and Taqizadeh, were isolated. The Revival Party was replaced first by the Hezb-e Iran-e Now (New Iran Party) and later by the Hezb-e Taraghi (Progressive Party), “an organization modeled after Mussolini’s Fascist party and Mustafa Kemal’s Republican party.”¹²⁰ The Socialist Party was dissolved, too.¹²¹

In 1927, shortly after the Second Congress of the CPI, Reza Shah (1925–1941), who had consolidated his position as a dictator, banned all trade unions, arrested many of the CPI members or exiled them. This was partly because the CPI, which initially supported Reza Shah, at its Second Congress denounced him as an imperialist stooge and “called for a revolution of peasants, workers, and national capitalists against the Pahlavi regime of the feudalists, semi-colonialists, and comprador capitalists.”¹²² Some party members died in prison, and others remained jailed until 1941, notably Pishavari and Ovanessian. Indeed, only party leaders who

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 138.

¹²¹ Fred Halliday, *Iran, Dictatorship and Development* (Harmondsworth ; New York [etc.]: Penguin, 1979).

¹²² Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

were already in exile in the Soviet Union could survive the harsh suppression. But some of them, such as Sultanzadeh, Nikbin and Sharqi, disappeared and presumably died in the Soviet Union, during the Stalinist purges of the 1930s.¹²³ The dictatorship of Reza Shah did not only hamper the development of the political parties, but also affected negatively the progress of the women's movement in Iran.

In the 1930s, Reza Shah was faced with the growth of leftist opposition both in Iran and from Iranian in exile, especially a group which was organized by dissident Iranian students in Europe in 1930. He responded to the opposition with a brutal suppression of all political activities against the Pahlavi regime. In 1930, to counter these activities, Reza Shah ordered the passage of a law to make communist and anti-monarchic activities illegal. The new law banned all organizations which propagated a "collectivist ideology."¹²⁴ According to Abrahamian, "the document used the vague and Arabic term *Ishteraki* (collectivism) to include socialism as well as communism and anarchism."¹²⁵ The most important arrest occurred in May 1937, when the police arrested fifty-three men, "accused them of establishing a secret ishtiraki organization, publishing a May Day manifesto, organizing strikes in the Technical College and in a textile factory in Isfahan, and translating such 'atheistic tracts' as Marx's *Das Kapital* and *The Communist Manifesto*."¹²⁶ These fifty-three detainees became famous as 'the fifty-three' and a few years later in 1940 founded the Tudeh Party of Iran. According to Abrahamian, a majority of 'the fifty-three' "came from the ranks of the younger generations of Persian-speaking intelligentsia residing in Tehran."¹²⁷

¹²³ Ibid, 140.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 155.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

Similarly, women's organizations were brought under state control. In 1932, the premises of the Patriotic Women's League, which was vandalized by a mob, and its publications were burned while the police looked on.¹²⁸ Communist organization, the Messenger of the Women's Prosperity in Rasht, was banned and two of its members were arrested and sent to a women's prison in Tehran.¹²⁹ The Women's Awakening, another communist women's organization, was also shut down; the Women's Society, in Qazvin, was banned and twenty-four of its members arrested for having communist views. Non-Communist women's organizations were also crushed. For example, a socialist women's organization, Majma-e Engelab Nesvan (Association of Revolution of Women) was shut down in 1928. The *Women's Universe*, which had been published continuously since 1921 by Afaq Parsa, a prominent socialist women's rights advocate was banned in 1935. As Paidar poses "by 1935, when Reza Shah organized an official women's organization, there was virtually no sign of the vocal independent women's movement which had flourished during the previous two decades."¹³⁰

Women's organizations and journals, all banned by 1935, severely criticized Reza Shah's policies towards women. Socialist and Communist women rejected legislation introduced by Reza Shah in 1931, particularly the Civil Code, and regarded the marriage, divorce and inheritance laws as oppressive to women. The Civil Code had been completed by Reza Shah. Reza Shah, who intended "to rebuild Iran in his own image of the West,"¹³¹ set out some important changes in 1931, including the secularization of the judiciary. However, while new secular laws covered most other areas of social life based on the French law, the *shariat* (Islamic

¹²⁸ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 102.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 140.

canonical law) continued to be the base of the family law in Iran.¹³² Subsequently, while the secular courts and judges were responsible for other areas of social life, religious courts and judges remained in charge in the case of family problems.¹³³

From 1936 to 1941, Reza Shah carried out his Women's Awakening Project. According to Amin, this was "a state feminism project that offered new opportunities in employment and education for some Iranian women in exchange for the requirement that all Iranian women abandon their veils in public."¹³⁴ Related to this project Paidar puts it "for the first time women became a focus of state policy. Women's emancipation was considered an important aspect of national progress."¹³⁵ In his visit to Turkey in 1934, Reza Shah was impressed by the social and legal reforms that Mustafa Kemal had completed in the country. The Turkish Civil Code, women's participation in education and employment, a ban on veiling, women's suffrage in 1934, motivated Reza Shah to start the Women's Awakening Project in Iran.¹³⁶ After his return from Turkey, Reza Shah organized one official women's organization, the Kanun-e Baovan (Ladies Center) in 1935 under the presidency of his daughter Princess Shams Pahlavi and the supervision of the Ministry of Education.¹³⁷ In 1936, he forcefully ordered women to unveil themselves.¹³⁸

¹³² Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 109.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Camron Michael Amin, *The Making of the Modern Iranian Woman: Gender, State Policy, and Popular Culture, 1865-1946* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002), 1.

¹³⁵ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 103.

¹³⁶ Shirin Mahdavi, "Reza Shah Pahlavi and Women: a Re-Evaluation," in *The Making of Modern Iran: State and Society under Reza Shah, 1921-1941* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 54.

¹³⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 104.

¹³⁸ For more information about the unveiling see Hamideh Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

The aim of the Ladies Center was not to gain equal rights for women. Most of its activities were organized around charity projects.¹³⁹ For the first time, women's organizations were systematically structured in charitable activities. Reza Shah did not believe in women's rights. Rather, he cared about those aspects of women's lives which presented Iran as a country en route to modernization.¹⁴⁰ Indeed, Reza Shah directed the women's organizations to leave their political demands and to concentrate on charitable activities.¹⁴¹

1-3 The post-dictatorship proliferation of political parties and the women's movement, 1940s

World War II and Reza Shah's abdication enforced by the Allied Forces in 1941 brought about political freedom for the country. Historians have characterized the decade of the 1940s in Iran as the era of "parliamentary policies."¹⁴² The support provided by the Allied Forces and the conciliatory policies of Mohammad Reza Shah (1941–1979), Reza Shah's successor, resulted in a proliferation of political parties and the rejuvenation of women's organizations. "women's activities in this period regained independence and previously existing tendencies of nationalism and socialism within the movement continued alongside monarchism."¹⁴³ The 1940s brought some women's issues to the fore: women's suffrage, more political participation and "the concern of working women."¹⁴⁴

During this period, different political parties were formed within and outside of the Majles. On the religious side, Ayatollah Khomeini became an explicit critic of Reza Shah's

¹³⁹ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 68.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement."

¹⁴² Janet Afary, "Steering between Scylla and Charybdis: Shifting Gender Roles in Twentieth Century Iran," *NWSA Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 28–49, 35.

¹⁴³ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 120.

¹⁴⁴ Afary, "Steering between Scylla and Charybdis," 35.

policies which affected the country for almost one decade. A new fanatical Islamic group called Fadaiyan-e Islam (Crusaders of Islam) was established. Dr Mohammad Mosaddeq formed the National Front which was a group of nationalists and socialists. In the Royalist ranks, Hezb-e Mardom (the People's Party) was founded and dominated the Majles for the next thirty years. Within the leftist camp, the Tudeh Party of Iran was established in 1941 by a group of Marxists who were released from Reza Shah's prison.

The Communist Tudeh Party of Iran is characterized by Abrahamian as the only political party of the time which aimed to mobilize women.¹⁴⁵ The Women's Association was organized by the help of some communist women and pioneers of the women's movement in 1944 within the Tudeh Party. The founding members of the WA were often women who had "achieved prominence in their own professions"¹⁴⁶ or the pioneers of the early women's rights movement, especially the Patriotic Women's League affiliated with the Socialist Party or the Messenger of the Prosperity of Women, affiliated with the Communist Party. Zahra and Taj Eskandari, Mariam Firouz, Dr Khadijeh Keshavarz, Akhtar Kambakhsh, Badr ol-Monir Alavi, Aliyeh Shermini, and Jamileh Sedighi were some of the leading figures of the WA. Its objective was "complete political, social and economic liberation of women."¹⁴⁷ The WA began to publish a journal called *Bidar-e Ma* (Our Awakening) in 1944.

The leadership of the WA criticized Reza Shah's policies and expressed their ideas through *Our Awakening*. In their view, the aim of the Reza Shah's modernization was further exploitation of women.¹⁴⁸ Although there was a relative freedom in the country in the early 1940s era, there are some hints that there was pressure exerted on the WA during its activities.

¹⁴⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 335.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 72.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

For example, when the members of the WA intended to participate in the Women's International Congress in Paris in 1945, the government issued their passport too late for them to buy a ticket to go to Paris. This Congress was the founding congress of the Women's International Democratic Federation.

In 1944, the Tudeh Party's deputies in Majles presented a bill demanding women's suffrage, but it failed. In the following years the members of the WA campaigned for women's suffrage and started a long-term struggle for the enfranchisement of women. The WA also started a campaign for the education of adult women, which was a continuation of the work done by socialist and communist women in post-Constitutional period.

The WA was banned in 1949 when the government attacked the Tudeh Party of Iran and all of its affiliated organizations were shut down. In 1951 the female members of the TPI succeeded to open another women's organization under the title of the Organization of the Women of Iran and pursued its activities until the 1953 U.S central Intelligence Agency's coup against Prime Minister Mosaddeq.¹⁴⁹ Again, the political parties were dissolved, and strict censorship was imposed on the media. The political organizations and associations in opposition either disappeared or went underground and a new era of dictatorship was started by Mohammad Reza Shah.

The 1953 coup and overthrow of the popular and Prime Minister, Mosaddeq, is one of the most important historical events in Iran. Indeed, the 1953 coup marked the years in Iran influenced by Cold War competition. The Cold War competition between the U.S and USSR, influenced negatively the political progress of Iran. Some historians even discussed that "if

¹⁴⁹ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

Mosaddeq had not been overthrown, the [1978-1979] revolution might not have occurred.”¹⁵⁰ This is mostly because the new government after Mosaddeq suppressed all of the political parties and activities till the 1978-1979 revolution. Therefore, 1953 coup ended the democratic progress of Iran, which had been started since the early twentieth century towards more independent from imperialist powers and more democratic form of government. According to historian Gasiorowski, after the coup “thousands of National Front and Tudeh supporters were arrested.”¹⁵¹ Overthrow of Mosaddeq in 1953 which was a prominent liberal and nationalist since the Constitutional Revolution, can also be seen as a turning point in the history of Iranian women’s movement. For, the political suppression of the post-1953 influenced women’s movement progress as well.

As I discussed above, the history of the women’s movement in Iran is intertwined with the history of broader political movements such the communist or nationalist movements. From the Constitutional Revolution to the era of nationalism in the 1940s, several left-feminist women’s organizations were formed, affiliated with the Communist and Socialist Parties. The left-feminist Women’s Association, which was formed by some prominent left-feminist women activists and a new generation of left-feminist in 1940s, formed as one of the affiliated organizations of the Tudeh Party of Iran. The Tudeh Party of Iran and the Women’s Association played a significant role in the Iranian political scene.

However, the political oppression of the Tudeh Party of Iran and the Women’s Association, both under the Pahlavi regime and in the Islamic Republic under the influence of the Cold War, affected its historiography negatively. Scholarly studies of the Tudeh Party have

¹⁵⁰ Mark J. Gasiorowski, “The 1953 Coup D’etat in Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 261–86, 262.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 278.

been largely neglected. To date we cannot find any comprehensive historical account of the Tudeh Party. Its history is shrouded in myths influenced by the language of the Cold War.

Although some sympathetic accounts of the history of Tudeh Party of Iran have been produced by historians, these all failed to give much attention to the activities of the Women's Association. In the next chapter, I will review some of the best books and articles written in related fields in order to explore the assumptions that have shaped the leftist and feminist historiography of the Women's Association.

Chapter 2- Theoretical framework and historiographical overview

The analysis of the activities of the Women's Association of the Tudeh Party of Iran, which has been largely excluded from both leftist and feminist historiography, sets the task of this thesis. It poses multiple questions about the goals and agendas of this women's association, and the strategy adopted by its leading figures in order to struggle for women's rights. This chapter consists of a theoretical framework for the thesis and an overview of the historiography relevant for the topic.

While historians often acknowledged the significance of the Iranian Left in the political life, the left-feminist women's organizations remain a challenging and understudied topic in Iranian leftist and feminist historiography. The scholarly studies of the Iranian Left largely ignore the role the left-feminist women's movement played in the development of feminist thought and movements in contemporary Iran. Mainstream Iranian feminist scholarship has either ignored the Left-feminist women's movement or focused exclusively on so-called "independent women's organizations"; it has evaluated the Women's Association as deeply "politicized" and an "auxiliary" to the Tudeh Party of Iran. As a result of the Cold War tensions between the USA and the USSR, the Left-feminist women's organizations rarely became the subject of academic interest in Iran. In addition, on a broader scale, as Francisca de Haan argues, the Western feminist historiography generally overlooks the history of the post-1945 international socialist-feminist women's organizations, particularly here the Women's International Democratic Federation (founded in Paris in 1945).¹⁵²

¹⁵² Francisca de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991," in Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, Eds., *Women and Social Movements, International-1840 to Present*, 2012.

This chapter examines the fields of literature that this thesis is built on and aspires to contribute to. In the first sub-chapter I will first, on a broader scale, elaborate on the historiography of post-1945 transnational feminism and women's movements, particularly the history of the WIDF. My emphasis will be on the contribution of the main books in this field-on what they wrote about the WIDF (2.1). There I support Francisca de Haan's argument that mainstream western feminist historiography overlooks women's organizations such as socialist, Third World women's or pro-communist organizations which had broader political agendas than gender equality alone.¹⁵³

In the second sub-chapter, I will change the focus by identifying some of the conceptual and methodological shortcomings of the historiography of the Left in Iran and especially of the Tudeh Party of Iran. These limitations have resulted in exclusion of the largest and most influential women's organization of the post-1940s era: the Women's Association. Nonetheless, the aim of this critical review of some of the best histories of the Leftist movement is not to catch authors' blind spots; rather the aim is to explore what perspective was constructed as a result of this exclusion (2.2); in the third sub-chapter I will review some of the best histories of the Iranian women's movement. I will identify a number of assumptions that have shaped the historiography of the Women's Association and led feminist historians to exclude the history of the WA from the historiography (2.3).

¹⁵³ Ibid.

2.1 Historiography of the post-1945 international women's movement

One of the fields of study which my work aims to contribute to is the history of international women's organizations in the post-1945 era in general, and the history of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF) and its contribution to world politics in particular.

The history of the international women's movement has been the subject of a number of recent studies (Kent 2004; Bolt 2004; Winslow 2006; Smith 2008) which have mainly focused on the history of international women's organizations in the nineteenth and the twentieth century. However, as de Haan states, they mainly confined their discussion of the feminist movement to 'Western' women's organizations considered as 'politically neutral'.¹⁵⁴ These studies subsequently ignored or overlooked the WIDF and its contributions to the women's movement, mainly because of its strong connection with the communist world, and particularly with the Soviet Union. Therefore, the majority of publications on the history of international women's movement excluded the WIDF from feminist historiography, or dismissed the history of its activities to one or two pages.

Some scholars who published scholarly studies on the history of international women's organizations, such as Leila J. Rupp (1997); Karen Offen (2000); and Karen Garner (2010), have mentioned the history of the WIDF very briefly and generally described it as a "politicized" contributor of the Cold War.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

In her 1997 book *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement*,¹⁵⁵ Leila Rupp examines the 'first wave' of the international women's movement, from its origins in the late nineteenth century till WWII. The author describes the work of three international feminist organizations as the major actors of the pre-1940 transnational atmosphere of the women's movement: the International Council of Women (ICW), established in 1888, the International Woman's Suffrage Alliance, founded in 1904, which became the International Alliance of Women (IAW), and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) formed in 1915. She compares these three organizations in order to discuss their origins, goals and their type of leaders.

Focusing on these 'Western' organizations, Rupp does not include a discussion about the WIDF, even when she discusses the international women's organizations after the WWII. She briefly mentions the formation of the WIDF in Paris in 1945 at a congress which was held by "the communist-dominated Union des Femmes Francaises."¹⁵⁶ The WIDF is discussed in the book from the perspective of the members of the International Alliance as a feminist organization with a support for democracy and anti-fascism, and with a program regarding "equality as advanced as the most old-fashioned feminist could require."¹⁵⁷ In her conclusion about the WIDF, Rupp states that the WIDF continued a "socialist tradition of hostility to the bourgeois women's movement"¹⁵⁸ and while developing, it challenged the rights of the older women's organizations in the United Nations. Introducing the WIDF through the perspective of the other women's organizations, Leila Rupp does not investigate the WIDF activities in much detail, and only presents the dominant view towards the WIDF.

¹⁵⁵ Leila J. Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 47.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

In a similar account, Karen Garner in her 2010 book *Shaping a Global Women's Agenda: Women's NGOs and Global Governance*, devotes only a page to the WIDF. Although Garner devotes four chapters to the women's organizations of 1940-1970 there are just a few paragraphs about the WIDF in the context of the activities of the World Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). When the March 1949 session of the UN Commission of the Status of Women (CSW) was decided to be held in Beirut, Lebanon, the World YWCA general secretary, Ruth Woodsmall, was asked by the US State Department to gather information about the regional activities of the WIDF in the Middle East. According to Garner, "the State Department feared that the meeting of the United Nation Commission on the Status of Women to be held in Beirut [...] may be used by the USSR to agitate against the United States in the Middle East."¹⁵⁹

Garner also states that during the Cold War, the WIDF "advocated the immediate emancipation of women and presented themselves as the champions of peace, human rights, anti-colonialism, and women's and children's welfare campaigns,"¹⁶⁰ in contrast with the Western women's organizations which "advocated a more evolutionary liberal democratic approach."¹⁶¹ The US State Department claimed that the WIDF repeated Soviet propaganda and was strongly opposed to consultative status being granted to the WIDF in the UN. This author also continues the Cold War narrative and identifies the WIDF as subservient to the USSR, without any critical view of the role of both superpowers in the Cold War. Garner's book can be seen as an excellent example of the WIDF's absence in the Western feminist historiography.

In spite of its extensive activities and contributions, the WIDF never received much attention from historians, as discussed above. This silence about the WIDF's history is nowhere

¹⁵⁹ Karen Garner, *Shaping a Global Women's Agenda: Women's NGOs and Global Governance, 1925-85*, 1. publ. (Manchester: Manchester UnivPress, 2010), 167-168.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

better pointed out than in Francisca de Haan's studies of the WIDF (2010, 2012, 2013) and the impact of the Cold War paradigm on the history of the international women's organizations, and in particular on the WIDF. In contrast to other scholars, de Haan considers the WIDF not as "a Soviet tool, but [...] a progressive international women's organization that during the Cold War generally supported the Soviet Union."¹⁶²

In her influential study of what she calls "the Cold War paradigm in Western feminist historiography,"¹⁶³ de Haan criticizes a number of assumptions that have shaped the Western historiography of inter/transnational women's organizations, in particular the International Council of Women (ICW), the International Alliance of Women (IAW), and the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). These assumptions are: the western organizations were "politically neutral", there was no interaction between the ICW and IAW which were located "in the West" and the WIDF "behind the Iron Curtain", and the WIDF was deeply politicized, i.e. 'Communist' but not 'feminist'.¹⁶⁴ De Haan believes that the anti-communist campaign by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and the US Justice Department resulted in the status of not-knowing of the historical role WIDF played in the inter/transnational women's movement. Her work is a significant contribution to the historiography of Left feminist activities.

In her 2012 article, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF): History, Main Agenda, and Contributions, 1945-1991,"¹⁶⁵ de Haan characterizes the WIDF as "a progressive, 'left-feminist' international umbrella organization, with an emphasis on peace,

¹⁶² de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

¹⁶³ Francisca de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations: The Case of the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)," *Women's History Review* 19, no. 4 (September 2010): 547-73.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 547.

¹⁶⁵ de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

women's rights, anti-colonialism and anti-racism.”¹⁶⁶ She purposes several reasons why this historiography largely ignored the history of the WIDF. One of these reasons is that the focus of this historiography is generally on liberal and “gender-only feminism” which led historians “to erase or treat as less central women's movements and organizations with a broader political agenda, including a socialist-feminist or pro-communist orientation.”¹⁶⁷

The impact of the Cold War and the “dominance of national and androcentric perspectives over the historiography of women's movements, peace movements and the UN” are two other important reasons that de Haan recognizes for this absence from the feminist historiography and feminist collective memory. In other words, she argues that firstly, the Cold War’s repercussion on WIDF “have negatively influenced the state, location, and accessibility of WIDF archives and the possibility of doing oral history,” and secondly, the national perspective applied by historians prevents them to look at the transnational dimensions of the WIDF. As de Haan summaries insightfully, assuming the WIDF as a “Soviet tool” and comparing it with those Western organizations which were assumed to be politically neutral, underestimates the complexity of the situation. In contrast, she believes that, although the WIDF generally supported the Soviet Union, this does not mean that WIDF was established or funded by "the international Communist movement" or was a "Soviet tool". As she writes “all these things were stated by the U.S. House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), in a 1949 report about WIDF and its American affiliate, the Congress of American Women (CAW).”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

In her recent article, “Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-ae, and Claudia Jones: Rethinking Transnational Feminism and International Politics”¹⁶⁹ published in 2013, de Haan identifies some of the conceptual limitations of the existing historiography as “its strong focus on white, Western, liberal, gender-only feminism”.¹⁷⁰ Demonstrating that “historical narrative and theory also play a role in the construction of the world order,”¹⁷¹ her aim is to understand what worldview was constructed as a result of the exclusion of the leftist feminist WIDF from historiography. Subsequently, she discusses that the exclusion of the WIDF and its contributions “is part of a larger process of constructing white, Western, liberal feminism as hegemonic.”¹⁷² The importance of this article for my thesis is that the author explores the contributions of women’s activists from Second and Third World countries to the international women’s movement, which have been largely overlooked in mainstream historiography.

De Haan identifies the strong focus of the Western feminist historiography on “gender-only feminism” as one of its conceptual shortcomings. By this term, she refers to the strong focus of the Western feminist historiography on “equality between women and men”. She argues that this form of feminism “is constructed as ‘real’ or ‘advanced’ feminism while other forms are constructed as backward or problematic.”¹⁷³ The term “gender-only feminism” is crucial for this thesis. As she argues, as the Third World women’s movements do not meet the requirement of this definition, they are excluded from the historiography as are the leftist feminists with a broader focus than gender-only feminism. In contrast to the Western women’s organizations, de

¹⁶⁹ de Haan, “Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-Ae, and Claudia Jones.”

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 174.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Ibid from Deborah Stienstra, *Women’s Movements and International Organizations* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 1994), xv.

¹⁷² Ibid.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 175.

Haan argues that the WIDF has a “broader, ‘multi-issue feminist’ or intersectional approach,” which attracted many millions of women across the world.¹⁷⁴

2.2 Historiography of the Left in Iran and the Tudeh Party of Iran, 1940-1953

“The Cold War paradigm” has also shaped the historiography of the Iranian Left. Being repressed under both the Pahlavi monarchy and in the Islamic Republic,¹⁷⁵ the Left has never received much consideration from the historians of modern Iranian history. Until recently, the Left was either generally ignored or was viewed by Iran scholarship “through the Cold War lenses of suspicion and hostility.”¹⁷⁶ The female leftist forces received even less attention from the Left historians. The history of the left-feminist women’s organizations, particularly here the Women’s Association, founded in Tehran in 1944, has been often neglected by the historians of the Iranian Left.

In this sub-chapter I will identify some of the conceptual and methodological limitations of the Iranian Left historiography in order to see why the left-feminist women’s organizations has been excluded from the existing historiography. I review three influential sympathetic works written on the history of the Iranian Left, namely, books by Ervand Abrahamian (1982) and Maziar Behrooz (1999), and an article by Fred Holliday (2004), to explore the historiography of the Left. Relying on Francisca de Haan’s argument, I believe that the dominance of androcentric and national perspectives in the historiography of the Iranian Left resulted in exclusion of the

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ For more information about the suppression of the Left before and after the Islamic Revolution see Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁷⁶ Afshin Matin-asgari, “From Social Democracy to Social Democracy: The Twentieth Century Odyssey of the Iranian Left,” in *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left*, ed. Stephanie Cronin (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 37–64, 37.

leftist feminists from the historiography. On the one hand, focusing exclusively on the great men and heroes and anti-heroes of Iran's histories, historians of the Left generally ignored the women and their contributions to the economic, cultural and political life. On the other hand, confining their discussion entirely to the domestic dimension of the movement, Iranian historians excluded inter/transnational dimensions of leftist movements in Iran.

According to historian Stephanie Cronin in her 2004 introduction of the book, *Reformers and revolutionaries in modern Iran: new perspectives on the Iranian left*, “not only has the scholarly study of the Iranian Left been largely neglected, but leftist forces have been the subject of a great deal of ideologically motivated vilification, their history obscured and distorted by the language and preoccupations of the Cold War.”¹⁷⁷ Key example is the Communist Tudeh Party of Iran, which has been characterized by historians as the largest, most important, and long-lived among all the political parties of the 1940-1953 era,¹⁷⁸ but was judged negatively by modern Iranian scholarly studies. The Soviet Union's proximity to, and interest in, Iran brought about this idea among Cold War era scholarly studies that the Tudeh Party of Iran was a Soviet product or a “Soviet puppet”.¹⁷⁹ As historian Afshin Matin-asgari states, “by all accounts, including its own official self-criticism, the Tudeh Party record is seriously flawed.”¹⁸⁰ Most recent writers, even those with leftist sympathies, have evaluated the Tudeh's dependency on the Soviet Union

¹⁷⁷ Stephanie Cronin, ed., *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran: New Perspectives on the Iranian Left* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004), 1.

¹⁷⁸ Haideh Moghissi and 3200 MS, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (Basingstoke, Hampshire [u.a.]: Macmillan Press [u.a.], 1996).

¹⁷⁹ This word articulated by official propaganda of the Pahlavi monarchy in a book published in 1957 called *Seyr-e komonism dar Iran* (Communist movement in Iran), published by Tehran's Martial Law Offices following the 1953 CIA coup.

¹⁸⁰ Matin-asgari, “From Social Democracy to Social Democracy: The Twentieth Century Odyssey of the Iranian Left,” 41.

extremely harshly.¹⁸¹ Yet, in my view, most of the anti-Tudeh discourse published in scholarship, originates not from historical evidence, but rather from ideological biases.

As I mentioned above, one of the reasons that the leftist feminist groups have been overlooked in the history of the Left is the androcentric perspective of the Iranian historians. One of the most comprehensive social histories of twentieth-century Iran written in a leftist view is Ervand Abrahamian's *Iran Between Two Revolutions*.¹⁸² Abrahamian brought about a shift in the study of the left in Iran: first, he offered a more sympathetic view towards the communist Left than the mainstream scholarship; and secondly, he included Islamic trends in his definition of the Left and showed the profound impact of leftist forces in the Islamic Republic.¹⁸³ In his book, Abrahamian examines the history of Iran in the twentieth century, focusing on the Constitutional Revolution, the politics of 1941-53 and the Tudeh Party, and the Islamic Revolution. In his words, the book is "an analysis of the social bases of Iranian politics, focusing on how socioeconomic development has gradually transformed the shape of Iranian politics from the eve of the Constitutional Revolution in the late nineteenth century to the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in February 1979."¹⁸⁴ *Iran Between Two Revolutions* is exceptionally rich in detail, using British consular reports and "material revealed in parliamentary debates, particularly from the time of the First Majles in 1906 to the Seventeenth Majles in 1953,"¹⁸⁵ as well as a plethora of periodical press published in Iran since the Constitutional Revolution.

Regardless of his sympathetic view towards the Left, the book is the history of heroes and male leaders of the political parties who have played influential roles in the history of Iran.

¹⁸¹ Cronin, *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran*, 23.

¹⁸² Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*.

¹⁸³ Matin-asgari, "From Social Democracy to Social Democracy: The Twentieth Century Odyssey of the Iranian Left," 38.

¹⁸⁴ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, xi.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, xii.

Women are noticeably absent in his account. As Iranian historians Kia, Najmabadi and Shakhsari state in their assessment of the modern Iran historiography, women in *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, “remain latecomers [...] with their subjecthood shaped in the wake of their male kin.”¹⁸⁶ According to these authors Abrahamian’s vision of history produces “a masculinist historiography focused on the ideas of these hero/subjects in which the relationships of power that produce those thoughts and subjects are lost.”¹⁸⁷

There is almost no information in *Iran Between Two Revolutions* about leftist feminist activities in the context of the women’s or nationalist movement. Individual women and organizations are mentioned only as an extension of male politicians or parties. For example, he briefly discusses the formation of the Patriotic Women’s League (PWL) in 1922 as part of the Socialist Party’s activities. The author does not give much information about the activities of the PWL, and only mentions one of its activists, the founder of the PWL, ‘Muhtaram Iskandari, the wife of the Sulayman Iskandari,’ leader of the Socialist Party.¹⁸⁸ However, not only is this information androcentric but it also is incorrect because Muhtaram Iskandari was not the wife of the leader of the Socialist Party but only her father’s close collaborator in the Constitutional Revolution.¹⁸⁹

This tendency to describe women activists and their activities as auxiliaries of male-centered organizations and to portray the few women mentioned with their family ties is also conspicuous in the discussion of the Women’s Association of the Tudeh Party of Iran. “The main personalities in these organizations were often the relatives of party leaders- but relatives who

¹⁸⁶ Mana Kia, Afsaneh Najmabadi, and Sima Shakhsari, “Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Historiography of Modern Iran,” in *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture* (New York, N.Y.: I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2009), 177–98, 181.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 127,128.

¹⁸⁹ Kia, Najmabadi, and Shakhsari, “Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Historiography of Modern Iran,” 34.

had achieved prominence in their own professions or have been active in the early women's movement, especially in the Patriotic Women's Society created by the Socialist Party".¹⁹⁰ Although Abrahamian briefly mentions the activities of the Tudeh Party about women's rights, he does not attempt to provide much information about the activities of the WA in his work. Most other scholars refer to Abrahamian's work in their discussion about the Women's Association. In general, as Kia, Najmabadi and Shakhsari have put it, "feminist scholarship has remained a topic of 'special interest,' delegated not to those historians who are interested in general history, but those who specialize in women and gender."¹⁹¹

Another reason for the exclusion of the Women's Association from the Left historiography is that most of the historians of the Left confined their discussion to its Iranian context and subsequently ignored the transnational dimensions of the Left movement. Although around the mid-1990s historians in different parts of the world began "to move beyond the conceptual frames of nationalist historiography"¹⁹² and the transnational shift in the discipline of history had a significant impact on the study of women's movements, the Iran Left scholarship still has not shifted its focus away from the nation state.¹⁹³ Nonetheless, as Cronin states, "the Iranian Left was a product of a particular historical period, its key features often determined as much by the international as by as national environment."¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁰ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 335.

¹⁹¹ Kia, Najmabadi, and Shakhsari, "Women, Gender, and Sexuality in Historiography of Modern Iran."

¹⁹² Marnie Hughes-Warrington, *Palgrave Advances in World Histories* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 73.

¹⁹³ Fred Halliday, "The Iranian Left in International Perspective," in Cronin, *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran*, 19-36, 28.

¹⁹⁴ Cronin, *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran*, 4.

An excellent example of such scholarship that confined itself to the domestic dimensions of the movement is *Rebel with a Cause: the Failure of the Left in Iran*.¹⁹⁵ Iranian historian Maziar Behrooz in his 1999 book examines the history of the leftist movement in Iran in order to understand the reasons for its failure. The book is divided into four chapters. In the first chapter, Behrooz describes the Tudeh activities during 1953-1970 and the role of the Tudeh Party in the 1953 coup d'état. The second chapter is devoted to the Iranian guerrilla movement between 1971 and 1979. In this chapter, the author portrays guerrilla organizations of the period as 'Stalinist'.¹⁹⁶ In the third chapter, the author discusses the factionalism of the Left during 1979-83 which led to its failure. In his last chapter, the author points out some internal factors such as "factionalism and splits, dependence on the Soviet Union (especially on the part of the Tudeh Party), theoretical misreading of Iranian society, errors in military and organizational strategy and tactics, political miscalculations, and the inability or unwillingness to understand and speak the language of the people."¹⁹⁷ Not considering the international dynamics of that historical period, the author even blames the Tudeh Party for the victory of the CIA coup in 1953, which led to the overthrow of the Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddeq and the disbanding of the Tudeh Party of Iran.¹⁹⁸

As a counterargument, Fred Halliday in his 2004 article "The Iranian left in international perspective"¹⁹⁹ examines the history and political praxis of the Left in its domestic, regional and international environments. With proper distance from the myths and assumptions which the Cold War has produced about communism, the author analyzes three major periods in which the

¹⁹⁵ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 61.

¹⁹⁷ Valentine Moghadam, "Review of *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran* by Maziar Behrooz," *Iranian Studies* 33, no. 3/4 (July 1, 2000): 508–10, 509.

¹⁹⁸ Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 24.

¹⁹⁹ In Cronin, *Reformers and Revolutionaries in Modern Iran*, 19-36.

Left played an important role: the years 1917–21, in which Iranian communists established the Gilan Republic; the years of intense political and trade union activity between 1941 and 1953; and the periods before and after the Revolution of 1979, in order to explore why each of these opportunities resulted in a failure for the Left.

Halliday criticizes historians of the Left who exclusively stress internal factors of the failure. Instead of looking for weaknesses and mistakes of the leftist forces in the Iranian context, he suggests that applying a regional and international perspective shows that not only the internal but also regional and international factors played significant roles in the failure of the Left in the 1980s. He believes that the “difficult international context within which the Left forces were obliged to operate”²⁰⁰ should be considered. His perspective is most clear when he discusses the role of the West and of the Tudeh Party in the 1953 CIA coup:

One myth, propounded later by the independent Left and by many nationalists, was that it was the Tudeh failure to act in support of Mosadeq, and in particular the failure to use their secret military apparatus to defeat the 19 August 1953 coup, that accounted for the defeat of the Left. This argument rests, as does the earlier counter-factual position on Gilan, upon a rather one-sided analysis of the forces at play in Iran at the time. Mosadeq did not have an organized following in the country, and, by August 1953, many of his own National Front supporters had deserted him: there was widespread discontent as a result of the impact of the embargo by the West; and the Iranian army, with its powerful friends, was determined to seize power.²⁰¹

Applying an international perspective allowed Holliday to challenge some myths and assumptions which have shaped the historiography of the Left.

Overall, until recently the history of the Left had received little scholarly attention. Among the most sympathetic books and articles which have been written about this topic, such as Abrahamian (1982, 1993, 1999), Behrooz (1999), Chaqueri (1999), and Cronin (2004), there

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 6.

²⁰¹ Ibid, 26.

is no comprehensive account of the historical, political and cultural impact of the Left. The Tudeh Party of Iran has been judged negatively because of its strong connections with the Soviet Union, which have led historians such as Chaqueri to conclude that the Tudeh Party of Iran “was a creation of the Soviet state.”²⁰² In addition, the leftist women’s organizations have been excluded from the existing historiography of the Left. The dominance of androcentric and nationalist approaches among the Iranian historians such as Ervand Abrahamian and Behrooz resulted in the erasure of the history of the leftist feminist groups from the historiography.

2.3 Historiography of the women’s movement in Iran

The Women’s Association is characterized by historians as the most important, biggest and advanced women’s organizations of the post-1940 nationalism era. According to the professor of the Women’s Studies Haideh Moghissi for example, the WA was “the largest and most organized women’s group, it recruited a relatively large number of middle class educated women.”²⁰³ Yet, it has received little scholarly attention and there has still, as yet, been no attempt to provide a comprehensive account of its historical and political role. The ideological bias, which stemmed from the Cold War paradigm, can be traced in the scholarly studies of the Iranian women’s movement, too. The Iranian feminist historiography focused exclusively on so-called “independent women’s organizations”. The binaries of independent/dependent and autonomous/non-autonomous led historians to overlook women’s organizations which asserted a close and strong connection with political parties, such as the Women’s Association which was affiliated with the Tudeh Party.

²⁰² Cosroe Chaqueri, “Did the Soviets Play a Role in Founding the Tudeh Party in Iran? (Résumé: L’URSS a-T-Elle Joué Un Rôle Dans La Créaton Du Parti Tudeh En Iran?),” *Cahiers Du Monde Russe* 40, no. iii (1999): 497–528, 523.

²⁰³ Moghissi and MS, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 94.

The majority of English- and Persian-language publications of the Iranian women's movement failed to give much information about the activities of the Women's Association.²⁰⁴ Despite the scale of its activities (as briefly discussed in the first chapter), the mainstream feminist historiography excluded the organizations of the post-1940 era which had communist or anti-imperialist orientations. Those writers who acknowledged the existence of the Women's Association refer to it episodically and usually dismiss them in one or two pages as being "subservient"²⁰⁵ to the Tudeh Party, or being "auxiliaries"²⁰⁶ of the communist Tudeh Party of Iran. Some historians such as Kumari Jayawardena (1986) and Janet Afari (1989) discuss the activities of the early twentieth-century Iranian leftist feminists, which emerged in relation to the early nationalist movement of 1906-1911. However, there is little written specifically about the 1940s leftist feminism. Authors of books and articles, specifically focusing on the history of the Iranian women's movement, such as Sanasarian (1982), Janet Afari (1989), Hammed Shahidian (1994), Haideh Moghissi (1994), Parvin Paidar (1995), Hamideh Sedghi (2007), and Camron Michael Amin (2008), refer to the Women's Association very briefly and evaluate it negatively because of its alleged focus on class conflict more than women-specific issues, and/or on the struggle for independence, and its supposed subservience to the male-centered Tudeh Party of Iran.

As I mentioned above, the history of early Iranian feminism, which emerged during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-1911, has been more explored than the history of feminism during the 1940s and 1950s nationalist era. Kumari Jayawardena in her 1986 book *Feminism and*

²⁰⁴ Eliz Sanasarian devoted one paragraph to the activities of the Women's association in Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*; Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*; Hammed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Woman Question' in the Revolution of 1978-79," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 02 (1994): 223-47, doi:10.1017/S0020743800060220.

²⁰⁵ See Janet Afary, "Steering between Scylla and Charybdis: Shifting Gender Roles in Twentieth Century Iran," *NWSA Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 28-49, 36.

²⁰⁶ See *Ibid*, 35.

Nationalism in the Third World provides a synopsis, detailing women's participation in democratic and revolutionary movement in selected countries of Asia during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. The book explores the link between early feminism and nationalism in Third World countries and argues that the "struggle for women's emancipation was an essential and integral part of national resistance movements."²⁰⁷ According to her analysis, early feminism in Asia should be studied in the context of the resistance to imperialism on the one hand, and to 'feudal monarchies' and 'traditional patriarchal' and 'religious structure' on the other.

In the chapter which is devoted to early feminism in Iran, entitled "Women's Struggle and 'Emancipation from Above' in Iran," Jayawardena argues that similar to other Third World countries, "women's participation in political struggles first arose in Iran as part of the nationalist reaction both to the foreign powers and to the ruling dynasty".²⁰⁸ Elaborating on the link between feminism and nationalism, the author shows the two contradictory dimensions of national liberation struggles, in first advancing women and then undermining the achievements of women. Jayawardena's work is an excellent example to show that feminism was not imposed on the Third World by the West, even though the influence of Western thought was one of the important elements of historical change in those countries and those changes affected women.

Iranian professor of Sociology, Janet Afari examines the origins of the early feminism in 1906-1911 in much detail. In her 1996 book *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy & the Origins of Feminism*, she devoted one chapter to the history of the activities of individual women and organizations during the Constitutional Revolution. Examining the grassroots dimensions of the Constitutional Revolution, the author

²⁰⁷ Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*.

²⁰⁸ Ibid, 54.

explores “the ethnic, class, and gender dimensions”²⁰⁹ which she believes defined the scope of the Revolution, its limitations and directions. Her work is based on a body of unused documents, such as “letters, articles, and reports by women or about them in the newspapers of the Constitutional period as well as British diplomatic reports, European and American travelers’ accounts, and other secondary sources in Persian, French, and English.”²¹⁰ Afary describes well the successful efforts of women who joined the Revolution in order to fight against the foreign powers and the ruling dynasty by organizing secret councils. “In Iran, a new radical women’s movement, composed of semisecret women’s councils called women’s anjuman, emerged during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906-11.”²¹¹ In her words, the author aims to see women “as not only activists and supporters of the movement but also as critical thinkers who often confronted the male leadership of the Constitutional Revolution on social and political issues.”²¹² According to her, women supported the new parliament, but also opposed occasionally the inactions of the deputies. Women joined the social democratic parties, fought for the Constitution, formed all-girls’ schools, published women’s journals, struggled against imperialism and for independence, and participated in the riots and civil war in 1908-1909 for safeguarding the Constitution.

Although most historians praised the activities of the early socialist feminists during the first years of the twentieth century, they limited the history of the Women’s Association which was formed in 1944 by some prominent leaders of the previous socialist group, PWL, to one or two pages. In one of the earliest books written on the history of the Iranian women’s movement in 1982, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression From*

²⁰⁹ J. Afary, *The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911: Grassroots Democracy, Social Democracy, & the Origins of Feminism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

²¹⁰ Afary, “On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran.”

²¹¹ *Ibid*, 66.

²¹² *Ibid*, 67.

1900 to Khomeini, Iranian sociologist, Eliz Sanasarian describes the characteristics of the women's movement in Iran during the period 1900-1982. Asking such questions as "how successful have the women's organizations been in prompting a movement; what roles have the government, culture, and religion played in promoting or hindering women's rights?; and what form has women's participation in political activities taken?"²¹³ the author applied Jo Freeman's model of social movements to the Iranian women's movements. Jo Freeman's book the *Politics of Women's Liberation* is an analysis of the American women's rights movement of the 1960s.

Applying Freeman's theory, Sanasarian offered a pattern for the history of the women's movement in Iran which most feminist historians subsequently followed. According to her analysis, the women's movement in Iran became visible after WWI, flourished during the post-constitutional period (particularly during the 1919-1932), declined or came under the control of government authority or political parties from 1932 to 1952, and co-opted with the government from 1953 to the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The author believes that the independent women's rights movement ended in 1932 when the last independent women's organization was banned by the government. She states that "since the [Patriotic Women's] League was the last independently formed women's association, 1932 could be considered the end of the women's rights movement in Iran."²¹⁴

In the chapter that is devoted to "the decline of the women's rights movement between 1932-1952,"²¹⁵ Sanasarian briefly mentions the history of the Women's Association in one paragraph. She refers to the WA with a wrong name, the "Organization of Iranian women" and characterizes it as "a branch of the pro-Soviet Tudeh party" and as "one of the most radical

²¹³ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 66.

²¹⁵ Ibid, 53-78.

women's groups", established in 1944.²¹⁶ However, her conclusion is very important for this thesis. According to her, "the major characteristic of women's groups during 1941-52 was their close and 'inalienable' association with various political parties-to the extent that women's rights issues were 'secondary' and 'subordinate' to the (all-male) political parties."²¹⁷ In her analysis, none of the women's organizations of the post-1940s era "enjoyed the independence that was characteristic of the earlier feminist groups, mainly because many of them were connected with a party or society."²¹⁸ Similarly, many other historians, used the words "subservient" for the WA or overestimated the control of the Tudeh's male members over the Women's Association. For example, Hamideh Sedghi in her 2007 book *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, writes about the WA that "its apparent control by the Tudeh's male leadership may help to explain its silence on such gender-specific and patriarchal issues as marriage, polygamy, and divorce."²¹⁹ However, in my view some scholarship, such as Afari (1996) and Paidar (1995), proves that even the earliest women's organizations had a strong connection with a political party, especially the Patriotic Women's League (PWL).

Haideh Moghissi, an Iranian professor of Sociology and Women's Studies, in her 1994 book *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* examines "the ideological and material bases for the absence of an autonomous feminist movement"²²⁰ and tries to unveil the political and cultural grounds "for the left's anti-feminist perceptions, discourses and actions."²²¹ The book is divided into three parts. The first part gives an account of the Iranian women's movement with a focus on women's emancipation

²¹⁶ Ibid, 72.

²¹⁷ Ibid, 73.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 71.

²¹⁹ Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran*.

²²⁰ Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 20.

²²¹ Ibid, 2.

from above during the Pahlavi era (1925-1940). The second part examines the gender discourses of three different Iranian political ideologies: Islamists, secular intellectuals and socialists. The author devotes the third part to the Organization of Iranian People's Fedayeen (OIPF), one of the largest and most popular leftist organizations of the 1978-79 revolutionary and early post-revolutionary time, in order to discuss its position toward gender and sexual inequality within the Organization, which she saw it as part of the Organization's anti-imperialist strategy. Her work is a case study, based on interviews. The author who is one of the former members of the OIPF, conducted 35 interviews with former female members of the Organizations living in exile, mostly in the US.

Although Moghissi's work is a case study of the OIPF, she claims that all leftist organizations of the period, including the Tudeh Party of Iran, had the same perspective on women. She states that the communist women's organizations of the post-1940 era "were not to be organizations of women as women, or a group with particular interests, demands and concerns. Rather there were to be party organs, committed to the general political goals of the party, and sometimes [...] under the male leadership of the Central Committee."²²² According to Moghissi, "anti-feminism and lack of gender consciousness" which is "common to almost all communist women", led Iranian leftist parties to not respect the expansion of the "women's committees" compared to other revolutionary activities.²²³ Moreover, Moghissi points out that as had been clearly defined by the Communist International, the women's organizations and committees were accepted only if they were directly led by the communists in the service of the

²²² Ibid, 91.

²²³ Ibid, 92.

proletarian revolution and that “work among women had generally a low priority” in communist parties everywhere in the world.²²⁴

In her discussion of the Women’s Association of the Tudeh Party of Iran, Moghissi regards the dependency of the Women’s Association on the Tudeh Party as a failure of the women’s movement during 1941-53. She also claims that the “close identification” of the Women’s Association with the Tudeh Party “held back and disoriented [the WA] as a women’s organization.”²²⁵ According to Moghissi, socialist women “by making their politics derivative of the Tudeh politics, missed opportunities for the mobilization of women in support of fundamental changes in women’s rights during 1941-53.” She believes that the Women’s Association as “the most visible, active and highly organized section of the movement”²²⁶ failed to benefit from the political freedom of the period to highlight the issues connected with the individual liberation of women. Moreover, according to her, the Tudeh Party and its women’s organization were following the “theoretical guidelines set by the international communist movement” and by focusing on the “social” and “political” liberation of women, failed to address the issues of love, sexuality, reproduction, and women’s oppression within the family.²²⁷

In the same way, Iranian Women’s Studies professor, Hammed Shahidian in his 1994 article “The Iranian Left and the ‘Women Question’ in the Revolution of 1978-79” argues that the Iranian left including the pro-communist Tudeh Party failed to “adopt a more gender-conscious theory and practice.”²²⁸ In his view, the main purpose of the leftist women’s organizations, “was to promote support for their mother organizations” and this kind of

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid, 95.

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid, 96.

²²⁸ Shahidian, “The Iranian Left and the ‘Woman Question’ in the Revolution of 1978–79.” 236.

participation did not necessary bring a “feminist consciousness” to women. To eradicate sexual inequality which leftist women failed to achieve, he argues that “women need to organize themselves in independent organizations that target male dominance.”²²⁹ Focusing mostly on the Islamic Revolution, he concludes that “censorship, suppression, the harsh conditions of fighting against ruthless and dictatorial regimes and male domination”²³⁰ can be seen as the reasons for this failure.

In addition, according to him, the theoretical orientation of the leftist forces made them unable to analyze the material and cultural basis of women’s oppression. He argues that “considering women’s oppression to be a problem of the ‘superstructure’ that socialism would solve, the left did not recognize the need for an independent struggle against both the material and cultural basis of women’s oppression.”²³¹

As I discussed above, the history of the Iranian Left has either been largely neglected or it has been distorted under the influence of the Cold War conflict. The Iranian leftist feminist attracted even less attention from scholars. Some conceptual and methodological obstacles such as national and androcentric perspectives prevented scholars to provide a comprehensive account of the leftist feminist contributions. In addition, the feminist historians usually treated the leftist feminist organizations as less central, and evaluated them as non-autonomous.

The overall image that emerges from the scarce literature about the Women’s Association is negative: the WA is depicted as non-autonomous, gender blind, a follower of male members of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party, or ideologist (communist or nationalist). Based on my critical review of some of the important works of the Iran leftist and feminist history, I singled

²²⁹ Ibid, 242.

²³⁰ Ibid, 241.

²³¹ Ibid.

out three assumptions which have shaped the feminist historiography of the Women's Association. The first assumption is that the Iranian women's movement lost its independence when the last "independent" women's organization, the Patriotic Women's League (PWL) was banned by Reza Shah in 1932. This assumption is clearly stated by Eliz Sanansarian in her book *The women's rights movement in Iran: mutiny, appeasement, and repression from 1900 to Khomeini*. Other historians such as Mighisi (1994), Afari (1994), and Shahidian (1994) followed this assumption in their works. The second assumption is that the women's organizations of the post-1940s era, were 'subservient' to the parties to which there were affiliated, and the third assumption is that women's rights issues became 'secondary' and 'subordinate' to the issues emphasized by the Women's Association. This assumption is also taken by the above mentioned historians and affected their analysis of the activities of the Women's Association.

These misconceptions may have been risen from the Cold War, when the western feminist historians put a one-sided emphasis on the western/American women's movement. But it is time that these perceptions be reconsidered. Similarly to how western feminist historiography excluded the WIDF on the bases of ideological reasons like it being "politicized" or a "Soviet tool", Iranian feminist historiography also has written off women's political organizations in Iran after 1941, here the Women's Association, because of their affiliation with the political parties. Therefore, in order to understand whether the Women's Association was mere followers of the Tudeh Party, and formed in order to promote the support for the Party, or rather was a socialist-feminist women's organization interested in women's issues, it is important to analyze its origins, the leaders, and its goals and program in a different perspective.

Chapter 3- The Women's Association: origins, agenda, and domestic activities, 1944-1948

In this chapter, I will examine the domestic activities of the most radical and biggest women's organization of the post-1940 era: the left-feminist Tashkilat-e Zanan (Women's Association), from 1944 till 1948. The aim of this chapter is to answer the second question of the thesis which is: what were the origins, agenda and strategy of the Women's Association in its struggle for women's rights? In order to answer this question, I divided the chapter in two parts. In the first sub-chapter I will focus on the origins of the Women's Association and in the second chapter I will explore the agenda, activities and strategy of the Women's Association in its struggle for women's rights. The findings that will be discussed in this chapter allow me to challenge two assumptions which have shaped the historiography of the Women's Association and led historians to overlook the activities of WA. The first assumption is that the Iranian women's movement lost its independence when the last "independent" women's organization, Jamiat-e Nesvan-e Vatankhah (Patriotic Women's League) (PWL) (1922), was banned by Reza Shah in 1932 (3.1). The second is that the women's organizations of the post-1940, which were affiliated with political parties, were 'subservient' to the parties to which there were affiliated (3.2)

In order to challenge the first assumption, using the scattered information about the socialist/communist women's organizations of the post-Constitutional era from published English and Persian language sources, I will provide a historical background of those organizations, asking whether the disbanding of the PWL indeed marked the end of the independent women's rights movement in Iran (3.1). By analyzing some of the activities of the women's organizations of the post-Constitutional period, such as Jamiat-e Nesvane Vatankhah

(Patriotic Women's League, PWL)(1922), Bidari-Zanan (Women's Awakening) (hereafter BZ)²³²(1923), and Peik-e Sa'adat-e Nesvan (Messenger of the Prosperity of Women, MPW)(1927), I will show the connections of these three organizations with the WA which was founded in 1944, as well as the similarities between these left-feminist women's organizations. I will discuss that all of these women's organizations were affiliated either with the Socialist Party or with the Communist Party, had almost the same leadership, published journals for women, emphasized the importance of women's education, and sought to establish international relationships. Therefore, based on these similarities, which have always been overlooked by historians, I will argue that the disbanding of the PWL in 1932 cannot be assumed as the end of the independent women's rights movement in Iran, and that the Women's Association of the post-1940 era can be characterized as similar as its predecessors.

To question the second assumption, I consulted the 1944 Tudeh Congress report in *Documents of the national conference of the Tudeh Party of Iran*, published by Tudeh Party in 1986, three issues of the WA's journal *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening) published in 1945 and 1946, and three memoirs namely the memoirs of Najmi Alavi, a founding member of the Women's Association, published in Tehran in 2004, the memoirs of Nouredin Kianouri, an influential member of the Central Committee of the Communist Tudeh Party who was Mariam Firouz' husband, published in 1992 in Tehran, and the memoirs of Mariam Firouz, a leading figure of the WA and an important member of the Tudeh Party, published in 1995 in Tehran.

Based on the 1944 Tudeh Party Congress report, the memoirs of Najmi Alavi, and the memoirs of Nouredin Kianouri, I will explore the unwritten history of the WA in the early years of its formation in order to show what were objectives and programs of the WA and who where

²³² In order to avoid confusion, I use (BZ) for Bidar-e Zanan (Women's Awakening) and (WA) for the Women's Association.

the leading figures of the association. In addition, based on the other sources mentioned above; I will explore two of the important activities of the Women's Association, namely, publishing a journal for women and the Campaign for Adult Women's Education started in 1944. Based on these activities, I claim that the fact that the WA was an affiliated organization of the Tudeh Party and followed the same line as the Tudeh Party, did not mean that the WA was subservient to and followers of the Tudeh Party. Rather, I will characterize the WA, as a left-feminist organization with an emphasis on the anti-colonial/anti-imperialist struggle. Together, in these two sub-chapters I aim to answer the second question of my thesis about the origins, agenda, and leading figures of the WA.

3.1. The characteristics of the post-constitutional socialist/communist women's organizations

Many historians argue that the WA never enjoyed the independence that was the striking feature of the earlier feminist groups in the post-Constitutional era.²³³ As I mentioned in chapter one, the establishment of post-Constitutional women's organizations which were affiliated with Socialist and Communist Parties are considered as the most far-reaching development within the women's movement of the post-constitutional period. The most important of these organizations were three organizations, out of which, the PWL (1922) affiliated with the Socialist Party, and the BZ (1923) and the MPW (1927) affiliated with the Communist Party of Iran.

²³³ See Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement, and Repression From 1900 to Khomeini* (New York, N.Y.: Praeger, 1982); Janet Afary, "Steering between Scylla and Charybdis: Shifting Gender Roles in Twentieth Century Iran," *NWSA Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 28–49; Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994); Hammed Shahidian, "The Iranian Left and the 'Woman Question' in the Revolution of 1978–79," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 26, no. 02 (1994): 223–47.

In order to question this assumption, in this sub-chapter I will explore some characteristics of earlier women's organizations formed in the post-Constitutional period and compare them with the Women's Association of 1944. They were selected for two reasons: first, they were all women's organizations which enabled the activities of communist women; and second, their characteristics are typical of the women's organizations of the period.

I noticed that there were certain similarities between these women's organizations. All of these three organizations were affiliated with Socialist and Communist Parties.²³⁴ As discussed in chapter two, the early women's emancipation movement was an integral part of the constitutional movement. However, in the post-Constitutional era, (particularly between 1911 and 1932) women began to take responsibility for their own movement. Although, as historian Paidar states, these women's organizations had achieved some degree of separation and independence in the post-constitutional era from the political parties they were associated with, the link between women's organizations and political parties have always been important.²³⁵

The women's movement experienced an extraordinary surge in the post-constitutional period as women's organizations and periodical press proliferated. For the first time, issues such as gender inequality were discussed publicly by women's groups and intellectuals. The women's movement benefited from the radicalized political atmosphere created by the influence of Bolshevism, which led to the rise of feminism, socialism and communism in Iran.²³⁶

In addition, the political repression between 1911 and 1917 provided an opportunity for women to lead the women's movement. While male revolutionaries were preoccupied with other

²³⁴ Parvin Paidar remarks that PWL formed in association with the Socialist Party in Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 95; and Ervand Abrahamian demonstrate the PWL created by Socialist Party in Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 335.

²³⁵ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 93.

priorities such as “the long period of Majles closure [1911-17], the suppression and exile of political leaders, and the foreign occupation of the country”²³⁷ women could situate themselves in the forefront of their movement. In general, the women’s organizations succeeded to gain a voice and to give more visibility to women’s issues.

However, the relative independence of women’s organizations gained in the post-constitutional period does not mean that they were not affiliated with political parties. For example, the PWL, which as we have seen in chapter two, most historians characterized it as the last Iranian ‘independent’ women’s organization, was established by a group of socialist and communist women and was affiliated with the Socialist Party in 1922.²³⁸ In addition, the Communist Party (1920) encouraged its female membership to participate in the activities of the PWL. But some communist women who found the PWL less radical than they expected, established the more militant Women’s Awakening in 1923.²³⁹ Another communist women’s organization, the MPW, was established in 1927 in Rasht. All these women’s organizations of the post-constitutional period, as Paidar put it, continued to see women’s emancipation “in the context of national development.” In her words:

Women’s groups and sympathetic political parties continued to share a similar view of women’s emancipation, and raised similar demands on women’s rights. Education, veiling, seclusion, child marriage and polygamy continued to be the main areas of the campaign and struggle for women’s organizations and sympathetic political parties.²⁴⁰

As is clear, the Iranian women’s movement had a close relationship with political parties from its very beginning.

Another common feature of the earlier socialist/communist women’s organizations and the Women’s Association of 1944 was the publishing of a journal for women. The first Iranian

²³⁷ Ibid, 93.

²³⁸ Ibid, 95.

²³⁹ Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran*, 36.

²⁴⁰ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 91.

women's newspaper was established in 1910. Although women had been contributing to progressive journals, even before the Constitutional Revolution, between 1910 and 1930, more than 20 women's journals and newspapers were published.²⁴¹ There are many similarities between the various communist women's journals, such as *Nesvan-e Vatankhah (Patriotic Women)* (1922), *Peyk-e Saadat-e Nesvan (Messenger of Women's Prosperity)* (1927) and *Bidari-e Ma (Women's Awakening)* (1944). All of the left-feminist women's organizations mentioned above considered the periodical press an important vehicle to spread their ideas and gain support from the masses. The PWL's journal, *Nesvan-e Vatankhah*, was published from 1923 till 1926 and "operated as a vehicle to recruit new members and advance women's cause."²⁴² The main issues that this journal covered were social reforms, women's rights, girls' education and literature. In addition, *Nesvan-e Vatankhah* was the organ of the PWL and women used the journal for announcing their activities. In a similar way to PWL, the MPW (1927) had its magazine under the title of *Peyk-e Saadat-e Nesvan*, edited by Roshanak Nowdoost, which is considered as the first communist women's magazine ever published in Iran.²⁴³ This journal was published with the assistance of the pro-Soviet Iranian Cultural Society in Rasht which was established by the Socialist Party.²⁴⁴ As I will explain in the next sub-chapter, communist women gained an extensive experience from journalism in these years and continued it in the post-1940s era in order to spread their ideas.

Another common feature between these left-feminist women's organizations of 1920-1932 and the Women's Association of 1944-1948 was their emphasis on the expansion of

²⁴¹ Janet Afary, "On the Origins of Feminism in Early 20th-Century Iran," *Journal of Women's History* 1, no. 2 (1989): 65-87, 68.

²⁴² Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran*, 34.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 35.

²⁴⁴ Abdolsamad Kambakhsh, *Nazari Be Jonbesh Kargari Va Komonisti Dar Iran [A Look at the Communist and Workers' Movements in Iran]* (Entesharat Hezb Tudeh Iran., 1972), 1-30.

literacy. The expansion of literacy was always one of the most important objectives of left-feminist women's organizations in Iran. For example, among the PWL's goals were: "to promote the education and moral upbringing of girls; and to spread literacy among adult women."²⁴⁵ The PWL opened a school for adult women in Tehran in 1932.²⁴⁶

During the three years of its activities, the BZ set up adult education and literacy classes for women.²⁴⁷ The main purpose of the MPW was the expansion of literacy and awareness among women. It founded a library for women and set up night classes for them. These communist organizations also used their publications to raise awareness among women of the importance of literacy. Denying the ability of the State to educate the female population, these women encouraged literate women to educate other women. In my view, it is unlikely that when the Women's Association started its campaign for adult education in 1944, it was a new decision; it is much more likely that they did so based on the previous experience and activities of the left-feminist leaders of the women's rights movement in Iran.

Another interesting pattern emerging from a comparison of these socialist and communist women's organizations is their attempt at establishing inter/transnational relationships within the women's movement. For example, Paidar uses a historical document in her book which shows that female members of the Communist Party (1920) established correspondence with Soviet women's newspapers and journals such as *Zane-e Sargh (Eastern Women)*.²⁴⁸ The PWL sent representatives to the fifth International Congress of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in Paris in 1926.²⁴⁹ There is some evidence that the PWL

²⁴⁵ Badr ol-Moluk Bamdad, *From Darkness into Light: Women's Emancipation in Iran*, trans. F.R.C Bagley (New York: Exposition Press, 1977), 67.

²⁴⁶ "Alam Nesvan," 10th year, no. 4, July 1930, p.182.

²⁴⁷ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 97.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 97.

²⁴⁹ Pari Shaykh ol-Islami, *Zanan Ruznamenegar va Andishmand Iran [The Women Reporters and Thinkers of Iran]*. (Tehran: Musgraphic, 1972), 101-102.

participated in the meeting of the Asian Women's Congress in India in January 1931.²⁵⁰ In 1932, the PWL also hosted the Oriental Women's Congress in Tehran in co-operation with the government.²⁵¹ Participants from several Muslim countries participated in the Congress.²⁵² In addition, according to a historical document provided by historian Nahid, a report in *Eastern Women* shows women of the Communist Party celebrating International Women's Day in Iran for the first time in 1921 in the northern town of Anzali, where fifty women took part in the celebration.²⁵³ As one can see from these examples, Iranian women developed international relationships from the early 1920s and this legacy was transferred to the next generation of the women's movement in the post-1940 era as part of the Women's Association's ideology and strategy.

It is also worth mentioning that several pioneers of the women's movement joined the WA when it was established in 1944, such as Jamileh Sadighi and Alieh Shermini. It seems to me that the similar leadership points to a continuity in attitudes and perspectives.

The life and activities of Jamile Sadighi, who was a prominent Communist leader in the Messenger of the Prosperity of Women (MPW) illustrate this fact. Although she was a prominent women's activist in Iran for a long time, there is not much information about her life in general. According to the scattered information in various publications, Jamile Sadighi was born in 1903 in a rural area in the northern Gilan Province of Iran.²⁵⁴ She was only 17 when she started her political activities by joining the Communist Party of Iran in 1920. She was the headmistress of an elementary school (which later became a high school) and founded the first kindergarten, both in

²⁵⁰ Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 40.

²⁵¹ See Ghulām Rizā Salāmī and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Nahzat-I Nisvān-I Sharq*, (Oriental Women's Movement) (Tehran: Shirzah, 2005).

²⁵² Sanasarian, *The Women's Rights Movement in Iran*, 67.

²⁵³ Abdolhosein Nahid, *Zanan Iran Dar Jonbesh Mashruteh [Iranian Women in the Constitutional Movement]* (West Germany: Jonbesh Mostaghel Zanan Irani Dar Kharej Az Keshvar, 1981), 102.

²⁵⁴ Mahnaz Matin and Naser Mohajer, "Mahrokh Kasmaei Minooie," *Gooyanews*, April 6, 2006, <http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2006/03/045797print.php>.

1924 in Rasht, Gilan.²⁵⁵ In 1927 She was one of the founding members of the MPW which was affiliated with the Communist Party. She was also one of the first female political prisoners in Iran who was jailed in 1936 by Reza Shah, accused of doing collective activities (See chapter 1). She was only released in 1941 after the abdication of Reza Shah. She was jailed twice and was forced to live in exile during the Reza Shah's reign due to her communist and feminist-antifascist activities.

Although she became one of the leading figures and influential members of the Women's Association in 1944, no single publication mentions her activities within the organization. My research on archival materials, such as the material related to the women's suffrage campaign in 1944, and the memoirs of Najmi Alavi and Norodin Kianouri show that when the first congress of the Tudeh Party was held in Tehran in 1944, Jamile Sadighi joined the Women's Association and was selected as a Central Committee member of the Women's Association.²⁵⁶ Najmi Alavi in her memoirs recalls that Sadighi was one of the founding members of the WA in 1944.²⁵⁷ The archival material on the women's suffrage campaign and her contribution to the WA's journals namely, *Bidari-e Ma* (1944-1948) and *Jahan-e Zanan* (1951-1953)²⁵⁸ show that she led one of the active local branches of the Women's Association in Gilan Province from 1944 till 1953.²⁵⁹ She also held March 8 in Rasht as a tradition inherited from the Communist Party. She later

²⁵⁵ *Khaterat-e Mariam Firouz (Farmanfarmaian) (The Memoirs of Mariam Firouz)* (Tehran: Ittela'at, 1994), 43.

²⁵⁶ Ibid, 43.

²⁵⁷ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi* (Tehran: Akhtaran, 2005).

²⁵⁸ Having access to all issues of this journal, and the WIDF Congress reports, I characterize Jamileh Sadighi as one of the most influential left-feminist women in Iran before 1953.

²⁵⁹ "Telegraph-i Jamileh Sadighi az taraf-i tashkilat-i zanan-i Gilan be majles-i shoray-i melli dar shekayat az adam-i ejray-i ghanun-i anjoman-e sanfrancisco tavassot-i namayandegan-i azadi khah-i iran dar Khosus-i tasavi hoghugh-i zan va mard [Jamile Sedighi's Telegram, on behalf of the Women's Association of Gilani Women to the National Parliament, Complaining about the Lack of Enforcement of the UN Charter by Iranian Parliament Representatives Regarding the Equal Rights of Women and Men]" (Teharan: Iran Parliament, May 29, 1945), in Library, Museum and Document center of Iran Parliament, http://dlib.ical.ir/faces/search/bibliographic/biblioFullView.jspx?_afPfm=-10fld9skk3.

participated in the WIDF international Congresses from 1948 and had an influential role in the women's movement in Iran as a teacher, journalist, and political activist. She died in 1983 in exile in Moscow. Similarly, some others pioneers of women's movement who have been active in the Communist movement and worked in such women's organizations as the PWL and MPW joined the WA in 1944 in order to continue their struggle for women's rights. However, historians overlooked this fact which is important to understand the activities of the WA.

As discussed in chapter one, when Reza Shah came to power in 1925, the women's movement gradually became under the control of the emerging dictatorship. Although his reformist politics under the Women's Awakening project (1936–1941) brought some changes in women's status, Reza Shah gradually succeeded to depoliticize the active women's organizations of his era by reducing them to charitable activities. The continuing opposition to the women's movement by clerics and Reza Shah ended up in the closing down of many women's organizations, including the PWL, regularly referred to as the last independent women's organization. By 1935 when Reza Shah set up an official women's organization, there was no sign of any non-governmental women's organization which had grown in the post-Constitutional period.²⁶⁰

After the Allies forced Reza Shah to abdicate in 1941, the country experienced an era of freedom. During WWII, the presence of the Allied Forces brought a free political atmosphere for Iran, which led to the proliferation of political parties and women's organizations. Several different magazines and newspapers began to publish again. Communist political prisoners such

²⁶⁰ Ali Akbar Mahdi, "The Iranian Women's Movement: A Century Long Struggle," *Muslim World* 94, no. 4 (October 2004): 427–48,.

as “the fifty-three”²⁶¹ who had been released from jail, picked up their earlier activities, Jamileh Sadighi was also released from prison in this period.

The WA with the help of pioneers of the Iranian women’s movement, such as Jamileh Sadighi and Alieh Shermini, continued in a manner that it learned from the experience of post-Constitutional women’s organizations. For example, seeking international relationships, campaigning for adult women’s education, publishing journal for women, all prove this continuity in their manner and strategy. In my view, working in association with the political parties was the legacy of the socialist tradition that formed the early women’s movement in Iran and was respected by the women of the post-1940 era. In the following part, I will explore the extent to which the left-feminist Women’s Association of 1944-1948 contributed to the women’s movement in Iran and will try to challenge the second assumption, which claims that Women’s Association was mere followers of the Tudeh Party of Iran.

3.2 The characteristics of the Women’s Association of the TPI (1944–1948)

Most historians claim that the members of the Women’s Association followed the same political line as the male members of the Tudeh Party of Iran, which was struggling for the independence of Iran and subsequently, women’s issues became secondary for them. However, in this sub-chapter, I question this assumption by exploring the WA’s activities and their agenda during 1944-1948. I will claim that struggling against imperialism and colonialism was important for these women because they were socialist or communist, regardless of what some men did or did not do. In addition, while it is true that the struggle against imperialism and

²⁶¹ See chapter one for more information.

colonialism was of great importance for the WA activities, this did not mean that the women of the WA did not struggle for women's rights.

In order to see whether the women involved in the WA “gave a higher priority to their male colleagues’ general causes than to their own specific cause of women’s rights,”²⁶² it is necessary to examine the formation of the WA and its activities during 1944–1948. For this purpose, first I will elaborate on the history of the formation of the Women’s Association in 1944, its initial declaration, goals and objectives and its leading figures, then I will focus on two important activities of the WA, namely publishing the journal *Bidari-e Ma* between 1944 and 1948, and the Campaign for Adult Women’s Education, started in 1944.

Formation of the WA

The Women’s Association was established in May 1944 in Tehran, by a group of nine Iranian communist/socialist women activists²⁶³ and unofficial Tudeh Party’s members (women were not allowed to be official party members at that moment). As discussed above, among these women, there were some who had already been political figures and pioneers of the women’s movement, such as Jamile Sadighi and some of them, such as Badrol Monir Alavi, Shah Zanan Alavi, Alieh Shermini, Zahra Eskandari, Mehrangiz Eskandari, and Azam Soroush were educated women who as teachers or headmistress of girls’ school had experience in such social activities as education for girls or adult women. Akhtar Kambakhsh was from the first female generation who graduated in Medicine in Iran.²⁶⁴ The rest of the group was made up of young and fresh political activists who had recently joined the communist movement, either as a result of being members of political families such as Mariam Firouz who was a Qajar princess, and

²⁶² Ibid, 37.

²⁶³ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*.

²⁶⁴ Ibid, 75.

Najmi Alavi, who was from a prominent political family, or because of their educational background.²⁶⁵

According to Nouredin Kianouri's memoirs, the women who later became official members of the Tudeh Party and led the Women's Association in the following years, such as Marjam Firouz, Zahra Eskandari and Shahzanan Vaziri, requested to be the party member a few months after the Tudeh Party's formation in 1941. But, Sulayman Eskandari who was the chairman of the party till 1944, refused to accept women in the Party. Although in the regulation of the Party, which had been approved at the Tudeh Party's first provisional congress in 1942, there was no restriction for women to be Party member, women were excluded from Party membership. According to Abrahamian, Solayman Eskandari denied any feminist demands, including the membership of women in the Party, in order to form an alliance with clergy and nationalists.²⁶⁶

However, according to the Mariam Firouz' memoirs, women participated in the activities of the Tudeh Party, even before the 1944 Tudeh Congress:

For us, it was not important that Iskandari did not allow us to be a member of the Party. We were not part of the Party but whenever the Party held a demonstration or strike, we participated because they were struggling against the Shah anyway. No one can hamper the progress by order. Women have become awakened. Many of those women were aware of the dictatorship when they were waiting for their male relatives outside of prisons.²⁶⁷

After Solayman Eskandari's death in 1944, the Party adopted a more radical vision and decided to let women become members. In May 1944, the first steps were taken by women who intended to form the Women's Association. Several meetings were held in places such as the Party's club or houses of individuals. Reportedly eight political women received a letter from a

²⁶⁵ Ibid, 13.

²⁶⁶ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 272.

²⁶⁷ *Khaterat-e Mariam Firouz (Farmanfarmaian) (The Memoirs of Mariam Firouz)*, 40.

“veteran”²⁶⁸ of the early women’s movement, Alieh Shermini in May 1944, and were invited to participate in a meeting in the Tudeh Party club.²⁶⁹ Najmi Alavi was one of those who received one of these letters. In her memoir, she recalls:

One day in May 1944, I received a letter: “On behalf of the Tudeh Party, we are inviting you to participate in a meeting which will be held in Tudeh’s club in order to create the Women’s Association. We would be happy if you could participate.” The Signature under that letter was for Mrs Alie Shermini.²⁷⁰

Based on this invitation from one of the prominent left-feminist of the earlier women’s movement, seven women participated in the first meeting, namely: Alie Shermini, Zahra Iskandari, Mehrangiz Iskandari, Badri Alavi, Shah Zanan Alavi, Najmi Alavi and Azam Soroush.²⁷¹ Among these seven women, five were from the Alavi and Iskandari families whose members were of the most important members of the Tudeh Party of Iran. The main issue of the meeting was about the recent reactionary provocation by clerics about the women’s situation in society. As I discussed in chapter one, these reactionary provocations had started in reaction to the Reza Shah’s Women’s Awakening Project during the 1930s. In the first meeting women decided to publish a women’s journal as their vehicle for struggling for women’s rights. In the following meetings, these women organized to rent a place for their office. As Najmi Aavi recalls, the leading figures paid the costs related to renting a place and publishing the journal. According to her, Mariam Firouz took the initiative in supporting the WA financially.²⁷² Kianouri also remarked that Firouz sold her properties in order to support the Party.²⁷³

Although some of the leading figures of the Women’s Association became members of the Tudeh Party later, such as Maryam Firouz and Najmi Alavi, according to Najmi Alavi’s

²⁶⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 335.

²⁶⁹ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid.

²⁷² Ibid, 64.

²⁷³ *Khaterat-e Nourodin Kianouri (The Memoirs of Nourodin Kianouri)*, 4th ed. (Tehran, 1992), 206.

memoirs, not all of the women who were members of the WA or/and took part in the activities of the Tudeh Party were a member of the Party. In order to prove her claim, Najmi Alavi referred to WA's journal which was published by contribution of women who were not Party members.²⁷⁴ There is no concrete list of members of the Party or WA available for historians, but some names in the journal prove a claim made by Najmi Alavi. Some young women who later became famous poets in Iran, such as Simin Daneshvar and Jaleh Isfahani, published their poetry or short stories in the journal. Although the formation of the WA received support from some male members of the Party such as Bozorg Alavi and Iraj Eskandari, my material such as the letter of invitation which was written by Alieh Shermini shows that these women were not simply some women whom the Tudeh Party's male members "included to the party", as Abrahamian put it.²⁷⁵ Therefore, Abrahamian has exaggerated the role that male members of the Party played in the formation of the Women's Association.

The first congress of the Tudeh Party took place on August 1944 in Tehran and 164 delegates represented over 25,800 members.²⁷⁶ Reportedly, women officially participated in the congress as delegates of the Women's Association, which was established a few months before the congress in May 1944. Four women, namely Maryam Firouz, Maryam Saberi, Zahra Eskandari and Alieh Shermini, participated in the 1944 congress of the Tudeh Party of Iran.²⁷⁷ The Women's Association was ratified by the Congress as one of the Party's affiliated organizations.²⁷⁸ The congress stressed the necessity of uniting and mobilizing women against

²⁷⁴ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*.

²⁷⁵ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 335.

²⁷⁶ Tudeh Party, "Proceeding of the First Party Congress," *Rahbar*, September 2, 1944.

²⁷⁷ *Tudeh Party- Formation-Dissolution 1941-1989 (hezbe tudeh- az sheklgiri ta foroopashi 1320-1368)* (Tehran: Moasseseye motale at va pajooheshhaye siyasi, 2004), 721.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 754.

‘reactionary provocations’ and the Tudeh Party’s work among women received special emphasis.²⁷⁹

The program of the Tudeh Party of Iran, approved in the first congress, included some specific demands for women. Despite my attempt to find out if women participated in writing the program of the Tudeh Party of Iran, I could not find any historical materials or any text on this issue. Article 6 of the constitution of the TPI was considered as the declaration of the aims and objectives of the Women’s Association. According to this, the WA, set the following goals for itself:

- (1) To struggle towards the attainment of social and political rights for women (right to vote and to be elected) in the Parliament and provincial and city councils
- (2) Improvement of the financial situation of women and safeguarding of their economic independence
- (3) Establishment and enhancement of supporting institutes for destitute mothers and children
- (4) Equality of men’s and women’s rights within marriage and revision of the marriage and divorce laws

These objectives shaped the WA’s activities. The WA demanded equal political and social rights for women, improvements in the financial situation of working women, equal pay for equal work and social insurance.²⁸⁰ Their objectives also stressed the necessity of economic independence for women.

²⁷⁹ *Tudeh Party of Iran : Documents and Views 1984-1986* (Tudeh party of Iran, 1986), 81.

²⁸⁰ Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran*, 124.

A journal for Women: *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening)

The first major activity of the Women's Association was to issue its own journal *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening) in 1944 with the slogan of 'We, too, have rights in this country'. The WA's journal analyzed the position of working women and criticized "the lack of paid maternity leave, nurseries, and welfare rights for working mothers."²⁸¹ Examining the content of three issues of *Bidari-e Ma*, one published in 1945 and two published in 1946, I will try to show how and to what extent the members of the WA were engaged in women's rights issues. These three issues are the only issues that have survived and are available in the Islamic Republic Archive. The rest has not been documented yet in any archives in Iran or abroad. Hopefully it is kept by hand of the WA's members' families.

What can these three issues of the *Bidari-e Ma* show us about the activities of the WA?

The *Bidari-e Ma* was a vehicle for women to address women's issues and to pursue women's rights. Each issue of *Bidari-e Ma* consisted of 20 to 30 pages of branch news and articles. The journal was edited by Zahra Eskandari. According to Mariam Firouz, Eskandari was "the only woman who could apply for the license to publish the journal [...] who had the required education."²⁸² Women who wrote in the journal included Shahzanan Alavi, Najmi Alavi, Badri Alavi, Khadijeh Keshavarz, Simin Daneshvar, Maryam Firouz, Jamileh Sadighi, Mah Malek Qahramen, Farokh laqa Alavi, Azad Farnia, Jaleh Isfahani, Hodayoun Iskandari,

²⁸¹ Ibid.

²⁸² *Khaterat-e Mariam Firouz (Farmanfarmaian) (The Memoirs of Mariam Firouz)*.

Giti Tayar, Malihe Saberi and Safieh Hatami. Some of these women were the members of the WA and some were not.²⁸³

“Iranian Women! Iran’s independence is in your hands!”

The content of *Bidari-e Ma* shows that the main agenda for these women was women’s rights issues and the struggles for the independence of Iran. In an editorial in *Bidari-e Ma* of June 1946, the author declared that “*Bidari-e Ma* which supports especially women’s rights and explains the causes of women’s oppression and directs women to the right solution, also has not given up the struggle against the conservatives [the religious conservatives] and for Iran’s independence.” Most of the articles and reports published in *Bidari-e Ma* were directly related to women’s issues and the rest were Party’s news.

The articles were written by experts in specific areas. For example, one of the important issues which the WA struggled for since its foundation was women’s legal rights. This struggle was pursued in three different areas such as family law, labor law and political rights. Some of those who published in *Bidari-e Ma* were lawyers, such as Homayoun Eskandary. Publishing articles on legal issues, *Bidari-e Ma* seemed to have two purposes. First, they criticized the Pahlavi Shahs and the Civil Code introduced by Reza Shah, as oppressive to women, and second, they tried to raise awareness among women about their civil rights, the rights that they already had and the rights that they had never experienced.

In one article in *Bidari-e Ma* titled “The situation of Women in Iran in the Civil Law” published in June 1946, Eskandary criticized in detail the Civil Code introduced in 1931 by Reza Shah (See table) and marked out the marriage, divorce and inheritance laws as the most discriminatory against women in the Civil Code. In conclusion, the author asked women to

²⁸³ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*.

demand such reforms in the Civil Code as the prohibition of the temporary marriage,²⁸⁴ women's right to their property, to divorce, and to custody of their child, the prohibition of polygamy, and equal rights of inheritance. In another article in the same issue, the author tried to introduce women to their rights enshrined in the Civil Code, as according to the author, 90 percent of women were not aware of their rights.²⁸⁵

“Economic independence brings a woman social dignities!”

The struggle for a labor law was also an important issue discussed in the journal. The journal had a radical view on the working condition of women. The WA, which emphasized the need to stop the exploitation of women workers in factories, published several reports about the working conditions of women. For example, in one report published in a 1946 issue, the WA reported about the horrible working conditions of 200 women in the capital city, Tehran, in a private workshop. According to the report, women and children from 12 years old to 60 worked in a dark store and there was no place for the children of these women. These women worked from the early morning till late night for a low wage.²⁸⁶ A picture in the same issue shows a huge demonstration in Kerman province in which many working women participated, demanding social welfare.²⁸⁷ The economic independence of women was very important for the WA. Some of the slogans of the journal show this clearly. For example “Economic independence brings a woman social dignities” or “Try to learn a skill to earn your economic independence.”²⁸⁸

²⁸⁴ This type of marriage is only recognized in Twelve Shia Islam and involves the verbal or written agreement of the two parties. The major difference of this marriage is that the duration of this pact needs to be set in advance.

²⁸⁵ “Bidari Ma (Our Awakening),” *The Women's Association* 3, no. 1 & 2 (1946), 44.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 31.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 40.

²⁸⁸ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*, 70.

“Fight against the Superstitions!”

The journal was the official organ of the WA and therefore the association used the journal not only for publishing articles and reports on women’s issues, but also for announcing important meetings, calling for participation in some activities, or publishing petitions or women’s letters from other provinces of Iran about women’s issues. So, gradually, the journal became a space for communication and linking women from different provinces. For example Alavi, in her memoirs refers to a letter sent from another province to Tehran, published in *Bidari-e Ma*, in January 1947 in which an unknown woman reported an attack by clergymen on a girl’s high school. The letter was addressed to the Ministry of Culture which was responsible to protect schools from this kind of attacks:

A group of reactionary clergies attacked Hamedan College and the girls’ high school and expelled girls from the school with absolute obscenity and indecency and shut down the school. We would like to attract the attention of the Ministry of the Culture to this kind of reactionary actions and would like to inquire, why don’t you prevent this kind of reactionary provocations? We are looking forward to seeing that the Ministry of the Culture puts an end to this kind of actions which are a backward step for women.²⁸⁹

“It is only the masses’ awakening which can rescue our country!”

In addition to publishing women’s complaints from different provinces, the journal was used for advocating literacy classes which were held by the WA from 1944 (to be discussed in the next sub-chapter). For instance, in the last page of the issue published in 1945, there is an announcement of the time and place of which classes took place.²⁹⁰ In addition, there were some reports about the progress of the literary campaign. As Alavi recalls in her memoir, a report published in 1944 named some women, such as Farokh Alavi, Badri Alavi, Rahime Adib, Fatemeh Behzadi, Shahidi, and Giahi, as those who had taken the responsibility of teaching adult

²⁸⁹ Ibid, 70.

²⁹⁰ “Bidari Ma (Our Awakening), *The Women’s Association* 2, no. 3 (1945), last page.

women voluntary.²⁹¹ In addition, the association tried to encourage more women to participate in the classes as they were free of charge and open to the public.

The two reviewing issues published in 1946 devoted several pages to literature in two issues published in 1946. Through these pages, the journal tried to emphasize the importance of literacy. In addition, the journal had the aim to introduce women of political importance such as Iranian socialist/communist leaders or those from other countries. In the editorial, the unknown author noted that the *Bidari-e Ma* had tried to make known women novelists and poets such as Parvin Etesami or men novelist such as Sadegh Hedayat or Fereydon Tavallyoly.²⁹²

One of the most dominant topics in the two issues published in 1946 was introducing of socialist-feminist leaders of the women's movement and progressive women such as Klara Zetkin, or Russian and communist novelists and their works. For instance, the editorial board of the journal translated an autobiography of Vera Inber²⁹³ from Russian to Farsi, in order to introduce her to Iranian women titled "Biography of Vera Inber".²⁹⁴ They also invited her to the journal's office and conducted an interview with her about the situation and achievement of women in the USSR and published it in the journal. For example, Inber mentioned that women achieved equal rights with men in all aspects of life and that no one could violate this venerable law and that the USSR had tens of outstanding female scientists.²⁹⁵

²⁹¹ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*.

²⁹² "Bidari Ma (Our Awakening).", 1-3"

²⁹³ INBER, VERA MIKHAILOVNA (1890–1972), Soviet Russian poet. Vera Inber's best-known work is Pulkovski Meridian ("The Pulkovo Meridian," 1943), a classical, restrained poem of some 800 lines, which ranks as one of the best long poems on the theme of war in Soviet literature. Juish Vertual Library Retrived at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/judaica/ejud_0002_0009_0_09517.html>

²⁹⁴ "Bidari Ma (Our Awakening), 13."

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 55.

Bidari-e Ma was banned in 1948 when the government attacked the Tudeh Party and its organizations.²⁹⁶ This journal is evidence that the WA's members struggled for women's rights consistently and were aware of the international women's movement. They used the journal to make links between different branches of WA in other provinces and also as a space for publicizing women's issues from cities which were far from the attention of politicians in the capital.

The Campaign for Adult Women's Education

One of the most important activities of the Women's Association during 1944–1948 was the campaign for adult women's education. According to Najmi Alavi's memoirs, receiving letters and reports from different cities of Iran regarding the reactionary provocations from Islamic clergies about women's education, Women's Association decided to launch a new program for adult women's education.²⁹⁷ Although the Women's Awakening project by Reza Shah had increased the number of girls' schools, the government never provided any educational programs for adult women or workers. In addition, most educational opportunities were found in big cities while women in rural areas never received any education, except for religious education from the Islamic clergy. That is why the Women's Association, following article 6 of the Tudeh's Constitution, intended to raise the standards of women's education through the establishment of evening classes for women.

Najmi Alavi in her memoirs states that an article published in issue number 8 in 1944 of *Bidar-e Ma* addressed the Ministry of Culture and proposed some practical suggestions to the government, such as reforms in the girls' school program which was inadequate for what the

²⁹⁶ Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 98.

²⁹⁷ Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*.

girls needed in their life to know, or preventing reactionary provocations in small cities which led to closing down the girls' schools. Among those suggestions, one was the proposal to open literacy classes for adult women.²⁹⁸

In 1944, the Women's Association succeeded to gain a license in order to hold literary classes for women. In her memoir, Najmi Alavi remarked that Badri Alavi and Farokh Alavi were the main activists who pursued to open these classes.²⁹⁹ In addition to these two women who started the campaign, *Bidari-e Ma* mentioned names of teachers who voluntarily participated in this campaign: Rahimeh Adib Qods Tiv, Fatemeh Behzadi, Shahidi and Shahrbanu Giahi.³⁰⁰ They held classes in schools situated in poor areas of Tehran and also in the WA office. Their purpose was to target illiterate working women who lived and worked in the poor areas.

There is no estimation about the number of women who participated in these literacy classes, but according Alavi, one report, published in *Bidari-e Ma* in 1946, shows that over 1000 illiterate women attended a huge meeting held by the WA to celebrate the first year of the Adult Women's Campaign. The report mentioned some speeches of Maryam Firouz and Badri Alavi at this meeting in which they stressed the progress of the women's movement in the world, particularly in Great Britain and demanded the same rights for Iranian women.³⁰¹ According to the report, Firouz mentioned the achievement of the women's movement in Britain:

Today, British women not only gained places in the parliament, they also are part of the cabinet. These British women were not born lawyers or ministers, but rather the society gave them the opportunity to improve. If this social situation would be created in other countries as well, women would have more opportunity to progress. According to the

²⁹⁸ Ibid, 71.

²⁹⁹ Ibid, 72.

³⁰⁰ Bidari Ma, 1944, issue 5, p. 28.

³⁰¹ Ibid, 1946, issue 6.

United Nations Charter, women have to have the right to vote. Iranian women should have this right as well.³⁰²

Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter allow me therefore to challenge two assumptions that have shaped the narratives and interpretation about the women's organizations of the post-1940 era. The first assumption remarks such post-Constitutional left-feminist women's organization as the PWL as more independent women's organization than WA and that points that 1932 was the end of the independent women's rights movement. In order to challenge this assumption I explored some of the activities of three socialist/communist women's organizations of the post-Constitutional period: Jamiat-e Nesvane Vatankhah (Patriotic Women's League, PWL) (1922), Bidari-e Zanan (Women's Awakening) (1923), and Peik-e Sa'adat-e Nesvan (Messenger of Prosperity of Women, MPW) (1927). Comparing the activities of these three organizations with the WA in 1944, I demonstrated that not only did these women's organizations share some common characteristics, but also their similar leadership and ideology indicate the continuity in the movement. Therefore, I argue that it is problematic to regard the disbanding of the PWL in 1932 as the end of the independent women's rights movement in Iran.

In order to challenge the second assumption which emphasizes the subservience of the Women's Association to the Tudeh Party, I explored the formation of the WA in 1944, introduced its leading figures, and more specifically elaborated on two important activities of WA: publishing a journal for women and the campaign for adult women's education in 1944. My findings in this chapter allow me to question the subservience of the WA to the Tudeh Party. I believe that the activities of the WA and the characteristics of its members show that it is

³⁰² Hamid Ahmadi, *We, Too, Have Rights in This Country: the Memoirs of Najmi Alavi*.

incorrect to assume that these women were as mere followers of the male members of the Party, and not to see them as inspired by transnational left-feminist ideology.

This brings about another question, if these women's organizations share common features and activities, why do historians have different narratives and interpretations of their history- characterizing the PWL as the last independently formed women's organization and characterizing the WA as the subservient to the Tudeh Party? Relying on Francisca's de Haan's argument, discussed in chapter two, I believe that this is partly because of the Cold War paradigm which affected the historiography of the post-1945 women's organizations. In this paradigm, liberal Western feminism is believed to be real and advanced feminism, while other forms of women's movements are considered backward or old fashioned. By establishing binaries such as independent/dependent or political/neutral, dominant Western feminist historiography excluded important sections and activities of the women's movement of the Third World from feminist historiography. This erasure affects movements which emerged in association with political parties, or as integral part of nationalist movements. Therefore, in my view, the Women's Association of the post-1940s era can be characterized, similarly to its predecessors, as a left-feminist women's organization.

Chapter 4- International relationships: Iranian women, the WIDF and anti-imperialism from 1945 to 1948

In the previous chapter, I reviewed the domestic activities of the Women's Association of the 1944-1948. In this chapter, I will analyze the international links the WA made with other women's movements abroad by means of participation in the Women's International Democratic Federation from 1945. The aim of this chapter is to answer the third question of the thesis, which is: How did Iranian women struggle for women's rights through their fight against imperialism? In order to answer this question I will focus on the unexplored activities that the WA took up in relationship with the Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF). Therefore, this chapter first provides a brief history of the WIDF and then examines the relationship of the WA with the WIDF. The findings of this chapter will let me to challenge the third assumption which has shaped the historiography of the women's organizations of the post-1940s era, particularly the Women's Association, namely, that women's rights issues became 'secondary' and 'subordinate' to the issues emphasized by the Women's Association.

Focusing on some unused documents such as a series of letters written in 1946 by leaders of the WA as part of a women's suffrage campaign to the parliament and political parties, and the memoirs of Mariam Firouz written in 1994,³⁰³ I will first explore the WA's early international relationships through the 1946 WA's campaign for women's suffrage. I argue that the campaign tried to put pressure on the national parliament of Iran by referring the deputies to international standards of human rights such as the UN Charter. Then, I argue

³⁰³ *Khaterat-e Mariam Firouz (Farmanfarmaian) (The Memoirs of Mariam Firouz).*

how the WA broadened its relationship and attempted to address the international community directly by participating in the WIDF activities in 1947. Drawing on Iranian women's participation in the WIDF's Inquiry Committee sent to South East Asia and Iran in 1947; the contribution to the preparatory committee of the Conference of the Women of Asia in 1948; the WA's delegate's speech at the WIDF second congress in 1948; and the WA's members' contributions to WIDF publications, I argue that the aim of the WA in seeking an international relationship was twofold. By means of participation in the WIDF's activities, the WA first, aimed to struggle against imperialism and its impact on women's oppression in Iran, and second, against the politics of patriarchy in Iran and its influence on women's condition. The WIDF provided an important political atmosphere for Iranian women's rights activists on the political left to struggle against imperialism and patriarchal authority at the same time.

4.1 The Post-1945 inter/transnational women's movement: the WIDF

Francisca de Haan characterizes the Women's International Democratic Federation as "a progressive, 'left-feminist' international umbrella organization, with an emphasis on peace, women's rights, anti-colonialism and anti-racism."³⁰⁴ The WIDF was founded immediately after World War II, at the so-called first Women's International Congress in Paris in late November 1945. Around 850 women from forty different countries and from diverse backgrounds participated in the conference, representing 80 million women. The WIDF adopted four principles which shaped the goals of the organization. These principles were "the fight against fascism; for democracy and peace, for the extension of women's

³⁰⁴ de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

rights; for the improvement of the condition of children.”³⁰⁵ De Haan’s explanation about the goals of the WIDF illustrates them very well:

The WIDF 1945 Statutes specified that the organization’s goals were: active participation in the struggle for the complete annihilation of fascism; shared action to organize women in all countries of the world to defend their rights and to achieve social progress; the protection of public health and in particular the physical and mental health of children; and strengthening the friendship and unity among women in the whole world.³⁰⁶

The WIDF was an umbrella organization with a diverse membership. According to de Haan, the WIDF had 135 member organizations from 117 countries, in 1985. Some of these organizations were affiliated with a Communist Party and some were independent women’s organizations.³⁰⁷

In addition to the WIDF principles and program which were so appealing, the WIDF was more inclusive, compared to older women’s organizations such as the International Council of Women and the International Alliance of Women. This characteristic drew in other women’s organizations from across the world.³⁰⁸ For example, because the WIDF paid attention to colonized people and their struggle for independence and maintained an anti-war, anti-racist stance, many women’s organizations from Third World countries joined the WIDF.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁵ “Second Women’s International Congress: Account of the Work of the Congress Which Took Place in Budapest (Hungary) from the 1st to the 6th of December, 1948 [hereafter: Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948] (Paris: Women’s International Democratic Federation, 1949),” n.d., Women and Social Movements, International-1840 to Present.

³⁰⁶ de Haan, “The Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF).”

³⁰⁷ de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women’s Organisations.”

³⁰⁸ de Haan, “The Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF).”

³⁰⁹ For more information about the involvement of the women of the Third World see “Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948”; Katharine McGregor, “Indonesian Women, The Women’s International

An important part of the WIDF activities was its involvement in the United Nations. A small group of women that among them Jessie Street later became involved in the WIDF, played an important role in including women's rights in the UN Charter, with the support of the Soviet representatives.³¹⁰ The WIDF got Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1947. However, in 1951, when the WIDF became a direct target of the U.S. government's anti-communist policies, it was forced to move its headquarters from France, and in 1954, it lost its consultative status at the UN. According to de Haan, the reason for this attack on the WIDF was the WIDF initiative in 1951 to send an inquiry committee to Korea to document the crimes committed by the US and South-Korea during the Korean War under the UN-flag. The WIDF then published the findings of this inquiry committee as *We Accuse* and received considerable global attention.³¹¹

In addition, the WIDF held and sponsored ten influential congresses on women's and children's rights from 1945 till 1991 in different countries. Hundreds of women's organizations participated in these congresses. Participation also sparked campaigns such as urging French mothers not to send their sons to fight in the colonial war in Vietnam³¹² and the sending of inquiry committees to Asian countries in order to document war crimes committed by the different countries involved, or to learn about the work conditions of women and children in different countries. The WIDF also succeeded to unite millions of women to defend peace and to

Democratic Federation And the Struggle for 'Women's Rights', 1946–1965," *Indonesia and the Malay World* 40, no. 117 (July 1, 2012): 193–208, doi:10.1080/13639811.2012.683680.

³¹⁰ de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid.

struggle for women and children's rights. In general, as de Haan put, "in terms of official membership, the WIDF was the biggest post-1945 international women's organization."³¹³

Iranian delegates and the WIDF

In 1948, the WA affiliated itself with the WIDF at its second international congress in Budapest under the title of the Organization of the Women of Iran as the WIDF 1948 Congress Report shows.³¹⁴ However, such evidence as memoirs of Mariam Firouz, and the WIDF brochure called *the Women of Asia and Africa*³¹⁵ show that the WA had been following the WIDF's activities from its formation in 1945. It seems that the WA's founding members were in contact with some of the founding members of the WIDF. Mariam Firouz in her memoir recalls that, in the early years of the WA's activities, she met the French Marie-Claude Vaillant-Couturier in Switzerland,³¹⁶ who was a member of the French Communist Party in Paris after 1934 and would become the first Secretary-General of the WIDF.³¹⁷ According to Firouz, Vaillant-Couturier told her that the WIDF was going to be founded in Paris and the WA could join it. She also recalls that the WIDF sent its journal to the WA in Iran and that the journal content was totally devoted to the struggle for women's rights.³¹⁸

The WA was established before the WIDF, but one can see the commonalities in their demands and principles. For example, the declaration of the WA, discussed in Chapter 3, includes exactly the same goals that one year later, the WIDF's declared as their additional goals.

³¹³ de Haan, "Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations."

³¹⁴ "Second Women's International Congress ... 1948," 21, 545.

³¹⁵ "The Women of Asia and Africa: Documents: Report of the Commission of the Women's International Democratic Federation Which Visited the Countries in South East Asia [hereafter *The Women of Asia and Africa...1947*] (Budapest: Women's International Democratic Federation 1948).," n.d., *Women and Social Movement, International-1840 to Present*. Accessed through Central European University. At [www](http://www.ceu.edu).

³¹⁶ *Khaterat-e Mariam Firouz (Farmanfarmaian) (The Memoirs of Mariam Firouz)*, 72.

³¹⁷ de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

³¹⁸ *Khaterat-e Mariam Firouz (Farmanfarmaian) (The Memoirs of Mariam Firouz)*, 72.

The WA demanded equality of rights between men and women, improvements in the financial situation of working women, equal pay for equal work and improvement of the social services.³¹⁹

As de Haan put in her 2012 article, the additional goals of the WIDF were:

complete equality for women and men; equal work and equal pay; equality for women in the domains of education and professional training; more and better social services and security for working women and women in the countryside; and protection of mothers, regardless of marital status.³²⁰

These shared goals and objectives motivated the WA's leaders to try to join the WIDF from its very beginning in 1945 and affiliate the WA to the WIDF.

In 1945, three founding members of the WA, namely Mariam Firouz, Shahzanan Vaziri and Zahra Eskandari, aimed to participate in the WIDF first international congress in Paris, but the government did not issue their passports on time. Seven letters exchanged between the WA, Iran's prime minister, the interior ministry of Iran and the immigration officials between 10 November and 4 December 1945 show that, although the prime minister authorized their passports, the immigration officials did not carry out the order.³²¹ More research might reveal the main reason for this refusal to issue the passports for the WA's members. Historian Amin proposes as one reason that "both the government and women's organizations seemed to be aware of a new global terrain—one where an appeal to a global audience signaled a break with masculine local authority."³²²

³¹⁹ Hizb-i Tūdah-'i Īrān, *Documents of the National Conference of the Tudeh Party of Iran* (Tudeh Party of Iran, 1986), 68.

³²⁰ de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

³²¹ "Darkhast-i Tashkilat-i Zanan dar Khosus-i Ezam-i Se Namayandeh Be Kongerey-i Beinolmelali-i Zanan dar Paris [Request of Women's Association Regarding the Travel of Three Representatives, Vaziri, Eskandari, Firouz to the International Congress of Women in Paris]" (Tehran: Interior Ministry Press, 1945), in National Library and Archives of Islamic Republic of Iran.

³²² Amin, "Globalizing Iranian Feminism, 1910–1950."

The WA published a complaint in its journal *Bidari-e Ma* in 1945,³²³ and reported that the Iranian government, issued the passports only two days before the congress. By then it was too late to buy a ticket to Paris. The WA sent a telegram to the 1945 congress in which they explained the situation. The WA telegram to the WIDF was published in the WIDF 1945 congress report:

De Téhéran – par télégramme du 25 Novembre 1945

la délégation iranienne fait connaître que le gouvernement empêchant son départ, elle n'a ni avion aucun autre moyen de transport.

Le télégramme est signe: MARIAM FIROUZ³²⁴

4.2 The 1946 WA's Campaign for Women's Suffrage

In March 1946, about a year after the formation of the UN, the leaders of the WA started a campaign for women's suffrage in Iran. In 1944, a deputy from the Tudeh Party of Iran introduced a bill to the parliament asking for women's suffrage, but it failed.³²⁵ The following years, according to the archival materials documented by the Iran Parliament, when all the members of parliament, somehow refused the bill and it seemed that the bill was buried, the leaders of the WA in Tehran and its local branches in other provinces and cities such as Gilan, Babol and Shahi wrote a series of letters of protest to the parliamentary committee asking to

³²³ "Bidari Ma (Our Awakening)," *The Women's Association* 2, no. 5 (1945), 37-38.

³²⁴ "Congrès International des Femmes; Compte Rendu des Travaux du Congrès Qui S'est Tenu à Paris du 26 Novembre au 1er Décembre 1945 [hereafter Congrès International des Femmes ... Décembre 1945] (Paris: Fédération démocratique internationale des femmes, 1946)," 1946, in *Women and Social Movements, International-1840 to Present*, 471.

³²⁵ Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982), 335.

reform the electoral law, according to the United Nation Charter, which required complete equality between sexes.³²⁶

Although Iran was one of the 51 member countries of the 1945 San Francisco Peace Conference (the founding conference of the United Nations), and its delegates were deeply involved in different committees of the UN and signed the UN Charter,³²⁷ Iran never respected its international commitment to human rights. But based on the letters written by WA's leaders to the Iranian Parliament, it seems the UN Charter was a source of reference for the members of the WA in their 1946 campaign for women's suffrage.³²⁸

The WA like the WIDF regarded the United Nations Organization as an influential international organization, which could prevent war and improve women's rights.³²⁹ Referring to the UN Charter, the leading figures of the WA's local branches such as Jamileh Sedighi and Mariam Saberi, attempted to put pressure on the TPI's and the other parties' delegates in the Parliament for women's suffrage and women's candidacy for the Parliament and the City Council.³³⁰ Here I mention two of these letters which were written a few days after 1946 March 8, International Women's Day, by Jamileh Sadighi and Mariam Saberi.

³²⁶ “Telegraph-i Committe-i Eyalati-i Tashkilat-e Zanan-i Gilan be Nokhost Vazir [Ahmad Ghavan] Mabni Bar Darkhast-i Tasvibb-i Layeh-e Ghanuni Darbarey-i Tasavi-i Hoghugh-i Siasi- Ejtemaei- Eghtesadi-i Zanan va Mardan ke az Tarafe Feracson-i Hezb-i Tudeh be Majles-i Shoray-i Melli Pishnahad Shode Ast [Telegraph of State Committee of Association of Gilani Women to the Prime Minister, Ahmad Ghavam, regarding the request for the Approval of a Bill on Political-Social-Economical Equity of Women and Men, Proposed by the Faction of Tudeh Party to the National Parliament] (Tehran: Iran Parliament, 1946)” in Library, Museum and Document center of Iran Parliament.

³²⁷ Seyed Hassan Amin, “Iranian and the Foundation of the United Nations,” *Forouzeah*, no. 5 (winter 2012): 4–13.

³²⁸ For example see letter written by Mariam Saberi, “Telegraph-i Tashkilat-i Zanan-i Babol va Shahi dar Mored-i Hashte March [Telegram of the Women's Association of Babol and Shahi Regarding the Celebrating of the 8 of March]” (Tehran: Iran Parliament, March 8, 1946), Library, Museum and Document center of Iran Parliament.

³²⁹ For more information about the WIDF and its opinion about the UN look at de Haan, “The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF).”

³³⁰ See for example, “telegraph-i Jamileh Sadighi az tarafe tashkilate-i zanan-i Gilan be mjales-i shorai-i melli mabni bar darkhast-i entekhab-e zanan dar majles-i shorai-i melli va anjoman-i shahr [Jamile Sedighi's Telegram from the Women's Association of Gilan to the National Parliament regarding the Request of Women's

The letters, were written by the WA's leaders mainly based on international standards. One of these letters has been written by Jamileh Sadighi leader of the Women's Association of Gilan (WAG), one of the active branches of the WA (See as chapter 3). The letter was written a few days after 1946 International Women's Day.

Jamileh Sadighi, in her letter noted that the San Francisco Peace Conference had declared "equal political, social, civil, and economic right for women with men and the Iran's national parliament ratified the resolutions".³³¹ She stated that:

Based on the UN Charter, which has been signed and passed by the Iranian parliament, we, members of the Women's Association of Gilan, which is the representative of hundred thousand of Gilani Women, know it our right to request the Fourteenth parliament's attention to the 1944 Tudeh Party's introduced bill on the equal political, social and economic rights for women.³³²

The letter asked the fourteenth national parliament to consider the UN Charter, which declared equal political, social, economic and civil rights for men and women, and to reform the electoral law based on the bill presented by the TPI in June 1944.

Another letter from the northern cities of Babol and Shahi, written on 10 March 1946 and signed by Mariam Saberi on behalf of the WA of Babol, requested the different parties, associations, magazines and the Parliament, to cooperate in performing the resolutions of the San Francisco Conference.³³³ The letter reported the celebration of International Women's Day in Babol and Shahi in which 500 intellectual women and men participated and asked for equal social and political rights.

Candidacy for the National Parliament and the City Council]" (Tehran: Iran Parliament, March 11, 1946), in Library, Museum and Document center of Iran Parliament.

³³¹ Ibid.

³³² Ibid.

³³³ "Telegram of the Women's Association of Babol and Shahi Regarding the Celebrating of the 8 of March."

The campaign for women's suffrage, started by the WA leaders in 1946, demonstrates clearly that the WA's members tried to challenge the domestic patriarchal authority by referring the parliament to international standards. Although the WA's women's suffrage campaign did not succeed to achieve suffrage for women, the campaign can be seen as the first step of seeking international alliance in the struggle for women's rights in Iran.

In 1947, the WA took this effort one step further. The WA sought to find a global audience by means of participating in the WIDF International Committee for the Defense of Women's Rights (ICDWR), particularly by preparing reports about women and children's rights in Iran for the UN in 1947.³³⁴ There is a difference between this new activity pick up by the WA leaders in the UN and the campaign for women's suffrage. The latter addressed the Iranian parliament's delegates by referring to international law, but the former addressed the international community directly and ask for help.

The ICDWR was formed at WIDF council meeting in 1947 in Prague.³³⁵ The WIDF had a council which met at least once a year, in which all council members participated and directed the WIDF in between the congresses.³³⁶ As the 1948 WIDF congress report explained, the aim of the ICDWR was to keep the WIDF members informed of women's condition in different countries, "to follow up their struggle, and to benefit those who are backward by the experience of the more advanced."³³⁷ In order to achieve this goal, the WIDF which had gained Consultative Status in the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and its Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) in 1947, issued a questionnaire in cooperation with the CSW and sent it to each WIDF section in order to prepare a report.

³³⁴ "Second Women's International Congress ... 1948," 40.

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ de Haan, "The Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF)."

³³⁷ "Second Women's International Congress ... 1948," 40.

Although the WA was not yet an official section of the WIDF, it was one of the forty countries which contributed to the preparation of this report. The WA helped the WIDF to provide information about women's rights in Iran through the questionnaire for the CSW.³³⁸ The CSW received a great wealth of information on the political, economic and legal situation existing in different countries with the contribution of the national sections of the WIDF such as Iran. The WIDF later in 1948 prepared a pamphlet in order to make known women's condition in different countries.³³⁹

4.3 Iranian women, the WIDF and the fight against imperialism: how did Iranian women struggle for women's rights through their fight against imperialism?

In this sub-chapter I argue that the WIDF provided an important political space for the WA's delegates in their struggle against imperialism, which they regarded as a major cause of women's oppression in Iran. Moreover, the WIDF provided a good opportunity to challenge the domestic patriarchal authority. Through participating in the WIDF activities including its congresses, the WA aimed to attract support from the large body of members of the WIDF for the women's rights movement in Iran, and the WA regarded the women's movement as connected to its broader struggle against imperialism. In addition, the WA attempted to include the problems of Iranian women in the WIDF resolutions such as the resolutions of the WIDF 1948 Second International Congress.

The WIDF Inquiry Commission to South East Asia and Iran

³³⁸ Ibid.

³³⁹ Ibid.

The Iranian women's rights activists found a new political compass for their activities in the WIDF. Alliance with an international body also provided a means through which they could draw attention to women's and children's condition in Iran. So the WA participated in the activities of the WIDF when in 1947 the WIDF sent an Inquiry Commission to South East Asia in order to study the living and working conditions of women and children.³⁴⁰ This commission was sent upon the requests of the women of Asia by letters from countries such as India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and Vietnam, asking for help in their struggle for the defense of the rights of women and children. The WIDF's Fourth Session of the Executive Committee met in Stockholm in September 1947, where they decided on the need to send a special commission to study the condition of women and children in India, Burma, Malaya, Indonesia and Vietnam. From February to April 1948, the WIDF Inquiry Commission visited South East Asia and documented the working condition of women and children in South East Asian countries.³⁴¹

On their way back from South East Asia, the Commission succeeded in making contact with the leadership of the Women's Association in Iran and through the WA's network among the women workers, the Inquiry Commission as able to observe the working and living conditions of women and children in the various industrial enterprises of Tehran and Isfahan.³⁴² There is no evidence to decide whether the WA requested the WIDF to visit Iran or vice versa, but based on my analysis I suggest that the WA took the initiative to invite the Inquiry Commission to visit Iran. This is based on the fact that the WIDF Commission originally aimed to document the condition of women in South East Asia and Iran was far from them, geographically and historically. However, the WA found this opportunity important to show the

³⁴⁰ For more information see "The Women of Asia and Africa...1947."

³⁴¹ Ibid, 7.

³⁴² Ibid, 43.

world and in particular the imperialist countries such as USA and Great Britain how their policies in Iran affected Iranian women's and children's work and living condition.

Using their networks among women workers in industrial cities, WA leaders were able to host the WIDF Inquiry Commission in Tehran and Isfahan. The WA had built significant networks among women's unions such as the five hundred-strong union of women carpet weavers.³⁴³ By enabling the Inquiry Commission's members to visit some factories and carpet workshops in Tehran and Isfahan, the WA members tried to show the horrible working conditions of women and children to the international community.

The WIDF's Inquiry Commission's report was published in a brochure titled *The Women of Asia and Africa*, which was divided into two parts. The first part is called *This Is What We Saw*, which is the report of the Inquiry Commission on each country, and the second part was devoted to a discussion about this report by the preparatory committee of the Conference of the Women of Asia (to be discussed later).

The Commission's report on Iran starts by mentioning the religious' reactionary provocations which during that time led to a violent campaign against women in Iran. They stressed how religious leaders were engaged in intensive propaganda to force women to wear the veil. The report wrote that "the democratic forces of Iran, weakened by the persecutions which followed the events in Azerbaijan, cannot, today fight actively against the attacks of the reactionary circles."³⁴⁴ In addition, the Commission also reported about Iran's electoral law which did not include women's suffrage. But the report was mainly devoted to the living conditions of women and children workers in Isfahan and Tehran. According to the report,

³⁴³ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 292.

³⁴⁴ "The Women of Asia and Africa...1947," 43.

women received only half of men's wages and often less than that, for equal work. Having seen the working conditions in other Asian countries, the Commission compared them with those in Iran and showed that in some cases the living conditions of women in Iran were as terrible as those in South East Asian countries.

Living conditions of the workers here are as terrible as in the Khaura region in India. The workers live either in caves, or simply in holes in the ground, which they dig for themselves near the factories. During the great rains, both children and adults are the victims of accidents.³⁴⁵

According to the Commission's report, seven hundred women were working in the industrial enterprises of Isfahan, but were only employed as "secondary" workers. The Commission pointed out that the law regarding maternity leave allocated only 15 days after childbirth. Moreover, they mentioned that often women gave birth to their children at work "for the leave prescribed by law is not respected."³⁴⁶

Another topic which the report covered for all the countries they visited was the health conditions of children. In Iran, the Commission documented a total lack of the most elementary hygienic conditions. They wrote that "99 percent of the workers' children suffer from tuberculosis, ulcers or smallpox. The death rate of working class children in Iran reaches 80 percent."³⁴⁷ According to that report, children suffered not only from diseases, a huge amount of children between ages five to ten were employed in the workshops of the carpet industries.³⁴⁸

The Commission drew the conclusion, after comparing the horrible working conditions of women and children across the different countries they observed, that the root cause of this situation lay in the "terrible crimes of British Imperialism in the colonies and the so-called

³⁴⁵ Ibid, 34.

³⁴⁶ Ibid.

³⁴⁷ Ibid, 35.

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

independent countries.”³⁴⁹ From their perspective, “illiteracy and oppression of the people, mass death by famine and disease” were the result of the “British civilizing” in these countries.³⁵⁰ The report was presented at the WIDF Second International Congress, which was held in December 1948 in Budapest and attracted other women’s organizations’ attention and that of the WIDF leadership, etc.

Later, this report received international attention since the WIDF sent a well-documented report of the Inquiry Commission to the Commission on Human Rights, the Commission on the Status of Women, as well as to the General Assembly.³⁵¹

The preparatory committee for the Conference of the Women of the Asia

During the course of the visit of the WIDF’s Inquiry Commission of the South East Asian countries, some women’s organizations recommended the WIDF to hold a conference on the women of Asiatic countries in October or November of 1948.³⁵² The Inquiry Commission’s members, in a message to the women of Asia, pointed that “our commission has understood the anxiety of the Asiatic women who, after having struggled against the Japanese invader, see the war being spread through the will of men thirsty for profits and avidly reaching out for domination.”³⁵³ The WIDF, which emphasized peace as a precondition for maintaining women’s rights in the world, saw the need for a conference on women and children issues in Asia. It supported the proposal presented by women of Asian countries for the conference and it called democratic women’s organizations across the Asiatic countries “to gather together, in

³⁴⁹ Ibid, 36.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ “Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948,” 43-44.

³⁵² Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948, 463.

³⁵³ “The Women of Asia and Africa...1947.” 170.

preparation for this conference.”³⁵⁴ The aims of the conference of the women of Asia were: “the unity of the women of Asia and of the Women around the world for national independence, for democracy and for peace; the defense of the rights of women; and the defense of children.”³⁵⁵

The WA from Iran was among those Asian democratic women’s organizations that replied to the call for the conference and participated actively first in the preparatory committee that came together in Budapest in 1948,³⁵⁶ and later in the Conference of Women of Asia that was held in Peking in 1949.³⁵⁷ Preparatory meetings for the conference of the Women of Asia were held on the days following 23 November 1948 in Budapest. Among them, 8 delegates were from China, India, Vietnam, Iran, Korea, Mongolia, the Soviet Socialist Republics of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and Pakistan.³⁵⁸ The participants prepared a brochure on the working and living conditions of women and children in Asia and Africa, which were later distributed at the second congress.³⁵⁹ They also prepared reports on the development of the women’s movement in the colonial and semi-colonial countries of Asia and Africa to present to the Second Congress of the WIDF.³⁶⁰

According to the second part of the WIDF’s *Women of Asia and Africa*’s brochure, the report prepared by the Iranian delegation mentioned that women in Iran had no protection as workers and worked under the most unsanitary conditions.³⁶¹ In addition to providing detailed information about these conditions, she pointed out several causes of Iranian women’s oppression. These causes included the historical role played by British and American

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ “Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948,” 472.

³⁵⁷ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125.

³⁵⁸ “Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948,” 472.

³⁵⁹ Ibid, 473.

³⁶⁰ Ibid.

³⁶¹ “The Women of Asia and Africa...1947,” 82.

imperialism in Iran, modern and traditional industry, the impact of WWII on the position of Iranian women, and Iranian legislation based on the Koranic laws. She lamented the fact that there “is no law to protect [women and children at work] and when taken ill, they are mercilessly fired and replaced by others equally hungry.”³⁶²

The report discussed the occupation of Iran by British and Soviet troops during WWII and expressed appreciation of the role of the Soviet Army, which treated Iranian people as “brothers” while the British treated them as slaves.³⁶³ At the same time, the report pointed out that American imperialists had obtained economic and military control of Iran in order to make Iran into a military outpost against the USSR. Report explained how both British and American imperialism, and Iranian feudal lords and agents, benefited from the cheap labor of women. Report also mentioned that the women flocked to industrial centers in masses; there they worked for 12 to 14 hours per day under the most difficult conditions and still were hardly able to buy themselves bread for the day. In the carpet industry women worked as slaves. The report wrote, “born artists, with skillful fingers create carpets of worldwide reputation and magnificent design,”³⁶⁴ while their bodies became deformed due to the position in which they had to work for hours on end. The text reported that “this deformity often leads to death when later they get married and become pregnant.”³⁶⁵ The text mentioned the oil field areas where enormous profits were made by British and American imperialists, but where fathers sold their daughters “for 1,000 francs” and women were often used to “draw the plough to break up the soil.”³⁶⁶

³⁶² Ibid, 84.

³⁶³ Ibid, 81.

³⁶⁴ Ibid, 85.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Ibid.

The report pointed out such important issues as unemployment, which made women a ready prey to prostitution; unequal wages; child marriage under the age of 10; the lack of medical care; and in general poverty among women. As a result of poverty, women were not able to attend primary school. According to her, 90% of Iranian women were illiterate during that time.³⁶⁷ Even the few girls' schools that existed from the last decades were closed down by clerics. In addition, she noted the high rate of opium consumption among children who were forced to consume opium by their parents in order to make the children deactive. Infant mortality in Iran reached 90%, according to this report, and the mortality rate was high even in the later years of childhood.³⁶⁸

The Iranian delegation in this report stated that Iran had been “The Bridge of Victory”³⁶⁹ in WWII. Although Iran had not been a “theater of war in the proper sense of the word,”³⁷⁰ and was not directly afflicted by the war, the country gave valuable services to the Allied Armies stationed in Iran. According to the report, British and American imperialism, bolstered by feudal lords and agents in their payroll, hampered the democratic progress that Iran had been enjoying since the last decades. This was effected through one mass murders- for example, in Azerbaijan in which people were close to establishing a democratic political system - torture, and imprisonment of anyone suspected of harboring thoughts of freedom and human rights.³⁷¹

The text mentioned the ten objectives that the women of Iran wanted to achieve:

1- The independence of Iran

³⁶⁷ Ibid, 86.

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

³⁶⁹ Ibid.

³⁷⁰ Ibid.

³⁷¹ Ibid, 87.

- 2- That the imperialist countries evacuate our land, that they respect the rights of our people and do not entangle them into their policy of aggression.
- 3- The right of mothers to their children
- 4- Equal rights to women in marriage
- 5- Equal pay for equal work
- 6- The application of labor legislation for women and special legislation protecting mothers (maternity leaves, etc).
- 7- Outlawing child labor until the age of at least 15 years.
- 8- Compulsory free education for all children
- 9- Creation of funds for children of workers and peasants to enable them to study at high schools and universities.
- 10- Creation of crèches, hospitals and maternity homes in all communities.³⁷²

These were the very same objectives that later became the driving objectives of The Organization of the Women of Iran (OWI) founded in 1951.³⁷³

In addition to external causes of women's oppression such as imperialism and WWII, at the end the report stated that the Iranian legislation which was based on the Koranic laws and had not changed for centuries, restricted the rights of women and even entirely suppressed them. The laws of inheritance, marriage and divorce, and suffrage were mentioned in detail and criticized in this report. From this perspective, this text tried to criticize the patriarchal legislation which influenced women's rights in Iran.

WIDF Second International Congress in 1948 and Iranian women's contributions

³⁷² Ibid, 88.

³⁷³ The WA members formed the OWI in 1951, two years after the WA was banned by the government in 1949. The organization took the same objectives which Mariam Firouz discussed at the WIDF second international congress in 1948. The name Organization of the Women of Iran also is derived from the name that was ratified in the 1948 WIDF congress WIDF for the Women's Association when it joined the. the WA could not continue its activities after its delegates turned back from the WIDF second international congress.

The Second Women's International Congress of the WIDF took place in Budapest between 1 and 6 December 1948. In this congress, 390 delegates from 51 nations participated from different parts of the world. The membership of the WA in the WIDF was ratified at this congress under the title of The Organization of the Women of Iran (OWI).³⁷⁴ Four delegates from Iran attended the congress in Budapest. Two of them, namely Maryam Firouz and Homayon Eskandari, were elected as members of the WIDF Council and the other two, Zahra Eskandari, and Dr. Akhtar Kianouri, were elected as substitute members of the Council.³⁷⁵

During the course of the 1948 congress delegates heard reports and speeches from representatives from many countries. In her speech, Iranian delegate Mariam Firouz specifically addressed the American and English delegates in the Congress and asked them to tell their people of the crimes committed by the US and England in Iran after WWII.³⁷⁶ She stated that the Congress was convened "to unveil the truth and the truth for us is poignant, revolting. It is in the name of an oppressed nation, in the name of our women and children living in dire poverty that we speak to you."³⁷⁷

Firouz first addressed American women and told them the truth about a "humiliating" pact signed by the Iranian and American government by which according to her, Iranian people were effectively handed over as slaves to the American imperialists. This refers to the agreement relating to a military mission in Iran which was signed on 6 October 1947 in Tehran. This agreement broadened the powers of the American military in Iran. According to article 12 of the pact, American officers had the right to visit all the areas of Iran, to see all secret documents of

³⁷⁴ "Second Women's International Congress ... 1948." 545.

³⁷⁵ Ibid, 551.

³⁷⁶ Ibid, 501-505.

³⁷⁷ Ibid, 503.

the Iranian Army and Iranian officers were to stand by and be available at their disposal.³⁷⁸ Mariam Firouz interpreted this treaty as a policy of war and said in her speech that “we Iranian women and mothers declare loudly that Iranian people will resist and oppose this policy.”³⁷⁹ She asked American delegates to tell their people that, “supported and strengthened by American imperialism, the reactionaries in Iran crushed the young peoples’ movement in our province of Azerbaijan and in two months massacred 50,000 people – men, women and children.”³⁸⁰

In a similar way, she addressed English women by saying “we speak particularly to our English friends.”³⁸¹ Mentioning the presence and activities of British companies in the oil fields and the exploitation of men and women there, she told the congress that:

It is you, English women who must remember the bloody imperialism of your country. It is you who must keep before your eyes these bands of starving children with bloodshot eyes, blinded by ophthalmia, these mothers harnessed to ploughs who sell their children for lack of bread, these men mad with thirst who kill each other for a drop of water. [...] tell your people that it is in the name of the English people that these crimes are committed.³⁸²

Speeches delivered by women from various Asian countries underlined the fact that imperialism still existed in countries recently freed from colonial rule. Kormanova, delegate of Poland, declared in her written report about “the condition of children and the defense of their rights”³⁸³:

in the colonial and dependent countries of Asia and Africa, the situation of children has been still more aggravated by war. Colonial oppression and economic domination by the

³⁷⁸ Abdolreza Hushang Mahdavi, *Iranian’s Foreign Policy in Pahlavi Era* (Tehran: Peykan, 1994), 125.

³⁷⁹ “Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948,” 503.

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

³⁸¹ Ibid.

³⁸² Ibid, 504.

³⁸³ Ibid, 379.

English, American and French imperialists of these countries still exist, despite the proclamation of the so-called independence of certain countries.”³⁸⁴

The women of Asia, including those from Iran, succeeded to grab the attention of other members of the WIDF through active participation in the second WIDF congress, through co-operation with the Inquiry Commission and the effort they made in showing the children’s problems in their countries. Komarova’s report on “the condition of children and the defense of their rights” (mentioned above) showed that the conditions of children in different countries with different levels of development were considered. And subsequently, the congress prepared a resolution on children’s rights. The resolution noted about Iran:

In Iran infant mortality reaches 80%.³⁸⁵ In the south, the misery of the population is extremely great; naked, starving children wander around the country in search of bread. In the towns, they search the rubbish along with the dogs and at night they sleep in caves, where often whole families live. Children work 10 hours per day from the age of 4.³⁸⁶

The resolution on children’s rights was prepared by a committee that was elected at the Second Congress and included 16 members. From Iran, a substitute member of the Council, Dr. Akhtar Kianouri participated in this committee.³⁸⁷ In my view, the presence of Kia Nouri from Iran, and also representatives from other Asian countries, influenced the resolution to a great extent. This can be seen in the fact that the resolution considered the problems of children in Asian countries as well as other countries (See Table 4).

<p>1)in the sphere of child health protection and the creation of normal</p>	<p>a) the guarantee of a minimum livelihood to workers, a minimum sufficient to assure the feeding of their children and normal living condition;</p>
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³⁸⁴ Ibid, 393.

³⁸⁵ This is not an exact percentage because Mariam Firouz in her speech noted that infant mortality is 90%.

³⁸⁶ “Second Women’s International Congress ... 1948,” 395.

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 458.

living condition	<p>b) the prohibition of employment of children under 14 years and the recognition of such exploitation as a crime punishable by law;</p>
	<p>c) the limitation of the working day for adolescents to 6 hours, and the insuring of conditions for health protection, the organization and increase to the maximum of technical training;</p>
	<p>d) the organization of state children's consultation for mothers and children, children's homes, kindergartens, the increase for appropriations for public, health protection; the creation of medical establishment for children and the instruction of free medical consultation for all children;</p>
	<p>e) the rooting out of the causes of juvenile delinquency, the prohibition of the children's prison, the organization of institution for reduction.</p>
2)in the sphere of education and ideological training of children	<p>a) the introduction of all countries of free primary education in the native tongue, irrespective of the nationality, race or economic position of a child;</p>
	<p>b) the creation of a condition indispensable to democratic education by the explosion of reactionary and pro-fascist and a harmonious development through childhood and professors and teachers from schools and other academic institutions; the writing and circulation of really scientific text books; the prohibition of</p>

	publications and movies which deprave children and vounge people and cultivate gangsterism and hatred for other people; the development of teaching program;
	d) the dissolution and prohibition of children's and young's people reactionary and pro-fascist organizations, which train children in the spirit of militarism and racism;
	e) the increase of state subsidies for the education and training of children and adolescence.

The resolution on the report on the condition of children (source: Second Women's International Congress...1948, 457,458)

A few months after the Iranian delegates came back from the December 1948 WIDF Budapest Congress, the Tudeh Party of Iran was banned by the government and all its affiliated organizations came under attack.³⁸⁸ However, the WA continued its activities underground. Two years later, the members of the WA established another women's organization under the title of the Sazman-e Zanan-e Iran (Organization of the Women of Iran), the name that was ratified at the WIDF's second congress in 1948. The declaration of the new organization was the one which WA's delegates declared in the WIDF second congress in Budapest. Later, the OWI participated in the WIDF and WIDF sponsored congresses, such as a 1952 Conference in defence of children held in Vienna, Austria, and the WIDF 1953 congresse held in Copenhagen, Denmark. The OWI was banned in 1953, when the Tudeh Party of Iran became the target of an anti-communist campaign pursued by Amricans and Mohammad Reza Shah in Iran.

³⁸⁸ Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 335.

The findings of this chapter allow me to challenge the assumption that the women's rights issues became 'secondary' and 'subordinate' to the issues emphasized by Women's Association. I tried to answer the question that how the WA struggled for women's rights through their fight against imperialism. The WA in their struggle for women's and children's rights sought international contact in order to attract support for their struggle from other women abroad. The aims of seeking the alliance were, first, to struggle against imperialism, which was regarded by the WA as an important cause of women's oppression in Iran; and second, to struggle against domestic patriarchal authority. WA leaders in the campaign for women's suffrage which they started in 1946, frequently referred to the UN Charter as an international commitment to human rights and tried to remind the parliament of this commitment to the international community. Since 1947, the WA's leaders broadened their international relationship through participation in the WIDF activities. WIDF congress report and brochure show that the WA participated actively in the WIDF Inquiry Commission sent to South East Asia and Iran in 1947. Iranian women hosted the Commission members in Tehran and Isfahan. The Committee prepared a report about the living and working conditions of women and children, which was presented at the Second WIDF Congress in 1948 and published as a brochure. In addition, four Iranian delegates played an active role at the WIDF second international congress in Budapest in 1948. Mariam Firouz became a member of the preparatory committee of the Conference of the Women of Asia, which was held in 1949 in Peking. She also held a speech at the WIDF 1948 congress in which she addressed the American and British representatives participating in the congress. Her aim was to publicize the crimes that American and British governments committed in Iran during and after WWII. Another woman from the WA, Kianouri, became a member of a committee

to prepare the resolution on children's rights in the second congress, mostly based on the reports of the Inquiry Commission. In general, the Iranian women tried to attract the support of the extensive membership of the WIDF for their domestic activities, and at the same time to fight against imperialism in an alliance with other women's organizations in the world. In other words, not only did the WA refer to the international standards of the human rights, but they also attempted to discuss the problem of women and children in the 1948 WIDF international congress, hoping to improve the human rights in Iran and especially the rights of women and children.

Based on these findings, I argue that the women's issue were not a secondary issue for WA. Rather, they emphasized anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, because they were left-feminists who regarded peace as the precondition of women's rights. It does not mean that by focusing on peace and struggling against imperialism and colonialism which brought war and conflict for countries, it did not put the women's agenda as its priority, but it means that these women struggled for women's rights through the struggling against imperialism and colonialism and women's right issues was the main agenda of the WA.

Conclusion

This thesis has focused on the domestic and international activities of the Iranian left-feminist Tashkilat-e Zanan (Women's Association or WA) between 1944 and 1948. Despite the scope of the WA's activities, the mainstream Iranian leftist and feminist historiography has largely overlooked its history or dismissed it in one or two pages. Focusing mainly on so-called independent women's organizations, historians characterized the WA as non-autonomous, gender blind, followers of the male members of the Central Committee of the Tudeh Party of Iran, and being politicized without adequate organizational structure. The exclusion of the WA from the mainstream narratives is the result of an androcentric perspective in modern Iran historiography, as well as the impact of the Cold War thinking on the leftist and feminist historiography.

In addition, the national perspective applied by Iranian historians prevented them from considering the international dimension of the leftist women's movement. However, relying on what Francisca de Haan says in her articles about the post-1945 inter/transnational women's organizations, I argued that my aim is not just to find the blind spots of other historians' works, but rather to seek "what worldview was constructed as a result." The erasure of such organizations as the WA and WIDF from the mainstream historiography, according to de Haan's argument, "is part of a larger process of constructing white, Western, liberal feminism as hegemonic."³⁸⁹

In this thesis, I sought to answer three main questions. First, what assumptions have shaped the historiography of the left-feminist Iranian women's organizations of 1940s, in

³⁸⁹ Francisca de Haan, "Eugénie Cotton, Pak Chong-ae, and Claudia Jones," *Journal of Women's History* 25, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 174–89, 174.

particular the Women's Association of the Tudeh Party of Iran. To answer this question, I reviewed the best and most important literature of Iranian leftist and feminist historiography and identified three main assumptions about the WA. These assumptions are first, that the Iranian women's movement lost its independence when the last so-called "independent" women's organization, the Patriotic Women's League (PWL), was banned by Reza Shah in 1932. The second assumption is that the women's organizations of the post-1940 era, which were formed in association with political parties were 'subservient' to the parties to which they were affiliated. The third assumption is that women's rights issues became 'secondary' and 'subordinate' to the issues emphasized by the WA.

My second main question was: what were the origins, agenda and strategy of the Women's Association? To answer that question, I focused first on the activities of three left-feminist organizations of the post-Constitutional Revolution, namely Jamiat-e Nesvan-e Vatankhah (Patriotic Women's League) (1922), Bidar-e Zanan (Women's Awakening) (1923), and Jamiat-e Peyk-e Saadat-e Nesvan (Messenger of Prosperity of Women) (1927). Based on English- and Persian-language published literature, I compared the activities of these three left-feminist women's organizations with those of the Women's Association and showed the continuity in the activities which were carried out by communist women in the struggle for women's rights until 1948.

My discussion about the activities of these four women's organizations allowed me to challenge the first assumption that has shaped the existing scholarly literature, which is that the Iranian independent women's rights movement ended in 1932. My research showed that it is wrong to assume that the Iranian women's organizations of 1920-1932 were independent. In addition, there was all that continuity and no real change in the character of the activities.

However, in the “language” of the Cold War and in the Western liberal perspective, women’s organizations have to be “autonomous” to be taken seriously (always a prior assuming that women’s organizations in Western countries were “autonomous”). Therefore, the communist women’s organizations of the post-1940s era has been characterized as non-autonomous and “backward”.

The second way to answer the above mentioned question is to address the goals, agenda and activities of the WA. Based on my research on the 1944 Tudeh Congress report, three issues of the WA’s journal *Bidari-e Ma* (Our Awakening) published in 1945 and 1946, and three memoirs, namely the memoirs of Najmi Alavi, Nouredin Kianouri, and Mariam Firouz, I showed that the goals and the main agenda of the WA were premised on their struggle for women through struggling against imperialism in Iran. The domestic activities of the Women’s Association concerning women’s issues, for example, consisted of publishing a journal for women and holding a campaign for adult women’s education. These findings allowed me to challenge the second assumption in the literature, which is that the women’s organization of the post-1940 era were ‘subservient’ to the parties to which they were affiliated. I argued that the WA was not subservient to the Tudeh Party, rather, it had its own agenda, not imposed on them by the Tudeh Party of Iran. Therefore, I characterized the WA, as a left-feminist organization with an emphasis on the anti-colonial/anti-imperialist struggle.

The third question this thesis tried to answer was: how did Iranian women struggle for women’s rights through their fight against imperialism? To answer this question, I explored the international links that the WA made with the WIDF through participating in the WIDF’s activities. Based on my research of archival materials such as a series of letters written in 1946 by leaders of the WA as part of a women’s suffrage campaign to the Iranian Parliament and

political parties, and on the memoirs of WA leader Mariam Firouz written in 1994, I showed how the WA put pressure on the Iranian Parliament by referring the deputies to international standards. Focusing on Iranian women's participation in the WIDF's Inquiry Committee sent to South East Asia and Iran in 1947; the contribution to the preparatory committee of the Conference of the Women of Asia in 1948; Mariam Firouz's speech at the WIDF second congress in 1948; and the WA's members' contributions to WIDF publications, I argued the international activities of the WA and that the Women's Association sought international relationships in order to address both the domestic patriarchal authority and imperialism.

The last chapter provided material to challenge the third assumption, that women's rights issues became secondary and subordinate to the issues emphasized by the WA. I argued that women's issues did not become secondary to the WA, rather the main goal of the WA was to struggle for women's rights. The WA pursued this goal both nationally and at an international level, as their involvement in the WIDF showed.

The exclusion of the WA from the mainstream narratives must be seen as part of larger process of creating a liberal feminist hegemony. As I discussed above, this is a worldview created as a result of the exclusion of the left-feminist women's organizations from the historiography. In this perspective the mainstream Western feminist historiography, which emphasized the political neutrality of the liberal feminist women's organizations, excluded the non-white, non-western, and not-liberal women's organization.

My thesis can be considered as a contribution to the history of the Women's Association by answering the questions proposed in this study. However, the scope of materials such as periodical press and oral history pose new questions, not only regarding the history of the Women's Association, but also about the impact of the Cold War and anti-Communist campaign

in Iran on the fate of the left-feminist movement in the next decade, in 1953 when the CIA coup happened in Iran, and also after the 1978-1979 Islamic Revolution at both domestic and international levels.

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