The Girls of Enqelab Street:

Media Representation and the Question of Collective Identity

By

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Abstract

The Girls of Enqelab Street (GES) is one of the most important protests in the history of women's social struggles in post-revolutionary Iran. This thesis analyses the specificities of this protest by drawing upon Alberto Melucci's model of new social movements and Asef Bayat's conceptualization of Iranian women's social movements, 'nonmovement. One of My main concerns is to investigate the ways in which the protest's collective identity is constructed. I suggest that GES has a 'semi-virtual nature' which makes it susceptible to be appropriated by different social and political actors. I use 'semi-virtual nature' to refer to the ways in which GES, albeit inadvertently, extended its public reach through social and political discourses that are being formed across different media platforms. Given the GES's 'semi-virtual nature', this research demonstrates the ways in which the protest is represented in media outlets inside and outside Iran. I intend to show that the protest's politics of representation in media ignores the rich diversity among the GES's women actors. In order to do so, I examine media texts from the selected mainstream media outside the country, BBC Persian and online Iranian state-run media, Khabaronline. For the analysis of the media texts, this thesis has deployed discourse analysis and close reading. Discourse analysis of the media texts has been conducted based on Norman Fairclough's approach laid out in his book, *Analysing Discourse*. Furthermore, since the protest was initially spread and named through social media platforms, GES's representation in social media is briefly analysed through the hashtag themes in Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Finally, by investigating the published interviews of the protest's three women actors inside and outside Iran, Shaghayegh Shajarizadeh, Azam Jangravi and Narges Hosseini, I aim at showing how diversity of motivations and emotional involvements among these women actors could potentially complicate the way we think about women's activism in today's Iran.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of original research; it contains no materials accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where appropriate acknowledgment is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate:

Body of thesis (all chapters excluding notes, references, appendices, etc.): 26,630 words

Entire manuscript: 28,824 words

Signed: Elham Mohtashamzadeh

Note on Translation and Transliteration

My thesis follows the transliteration scheme of *Iranian Studies.* However, in some exceptional cases, I retain the transliteration of certain key words in the way that they are most commonly known. For instance, the word ‘hejab’ is rendered ‘hijab’ throughout my thesis. Most translations from Persian are mine unless a text is directly quoted from another secondary source.

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Introduction

It was February. I was a participant in a crowded room related to the Girls of Enqelab Street (GES) protest in Clubhouse[1]. There were women outside the country as well the brave ones inside who were passionately narrating their stories of gender oppression in Iran. I was in an emotional roller coaster, facing women who were living with overt and unjustifiable discriminations that I was sadly familiar with flesh and bone. Those soulful voices sometimes shaking with outrage, grief and disappointment but courageously narrating their lived experiences under the Islamic Republic regime.

Suddenly a beautiful Afghan voice trembling with fear and rage attracted my attention. Narges started talking about her own feelings and her painful experience living under Taliban's regime. Narges who said that she has been inspired by Iranian women's resistance against the Islamic Republic's patriarchal laws such as compulsory hijab, finished her talk with this sentence: "I wish Afghan women had someone like Masih Alinejad". A sudden silence fell over the stage. One of the women present in the room asked Narges why she had wished so. Narges replied: "because the Iranian women and girls of Enqelab Street have a representative". I objected that Alinejad is not the representative of all Iranian women! But a well-known woman activist who was present in the room interrupted me and said: "Masih is the representative of all the women who are inside the country fighting hijab and other gender discriminations! you are not living in Iran anymore; so, you are not one of them. Masih Alinejad is the representative of them not you!".

I have thought about that intense moment, in which I felt hurt and excluded as an outsider. Although the heated debate over insiders as authentic and outsiders as inauthentic is familiar for Iranian women activists in exile, what made the encounter particularly important to me was because I was positioned in some ways as a privileged elite.[2] My privileged elite position was taken for granted not only as I did not live in the country but also because of my educational background. For this reason, I was not considered as one of those Iranian women who are presumed to be represented by Masih Alinejad. This assumption is highly problematic not just because some of the main GES actors as I will

[1] The company introduces itself as "a place for casual, drop-in audio chats. When you open the app, you'll see "rooms" full of people talking, and have the opportunity to explore different conversations. For more information See: https://clubhouseapp.zendesk.com/hc/en-us/articles/360062719313-What-is-Clubhouse-

[2] For example, see: Sadeghi (2010), Mouri & Batmanghelichi (2015) and Mahdi (2004, pp. 436-437).

delineate in the last chapter are middle-class, educated women but as Iranian women who are fighting gender oppression are extensively massified and divided into ordinary and elite. Furthermore, one might ask how Alinejad is assumed to be the representative of not only a large and diverse (class, ethnicity, and age) community like Iranian women but more importantly, how she is considered as the representative voice of a protest whose actors are from various groups of Iranian women. As most participants of the protest including the initiator of the movement are inside the country and many of them are anonymous, how could one speak of their real identities, motivations, and demands? How GES as one of the most significant protests of Iranian women after the Islamic Revolution, is associated with Alinejad's campaign, *White Wednesdays* against obligatory hijab?

Girls of Enqelab Street: Splendour of a Protest

This research deals with the Girls of Enqelab Street (*Dokhtaran-e Khiyaban-e Enqelab*). It refers to a series of protests against compulsory hijab. On December 26th ,2017, a young middle-class woman named Vida Movahed, silently stood on a utility box in one of the busiest streets of Tehran, Enqelab (Revolution) Street and removed her scarf. Movahed who wore pants and a dark sweater -unlike the usual Monteau that covers Iranian women's body in public spaces- tied her white scarf to a stick and waved it above her head like a flag towards the crowd.

Following her arrest, the images and videos of her protest were widely circulated on social media through the hashtag "where is the girl of Enqelab street" (#دختر_خیابان_انقلاب_کجاست؟) as her identity was still unknown at the time. Movahed's protest against compulsory hijab occurred few days before widespread demonstrations in more than 100 cities in Iran in 2017. Inspired by her act, many women from different class and age range protested in similar way in most big cities of Iran and published their photos in social media. The photos and videos became viral and encouraged the various groups of people including men and even religious women to peacefully protest compulsory hijab. The protest gained a wide range of international attention and became the matter of importance to the state as well. According to Iran's Police Department, 29 Women were arrested for protesting compulsory hijab in the same way, days, and weeks after Movahed's solitary act. The protest was later named the Girls of Enqelab Street when three women protested at the same spot in Enqelab street.

I believe that the Girls of Enqelab Street (GES) bears some specific features which distinguishes it from other women's movement in Iran[3]. One of these features that is central to my analysis is its semi-virtual character. By semi-virtual character, I mean the ways in which GES, albeit inadvertently, extended its public reach through social and political discourses being formed across different social media platforms as well as Persian-language media outlets outside the country.

Despite foreseeable risks, Movahed, and later other actors, protested alone which not only reinforced the performative aspects of the protest but made the social and political diversity among Iranian women visible. Furthermore, this solitary performance makes the protest genuinely radical for the following reasons: first, it uses and reappropriates the bodies and spaces that have been in the hands of the Islamic Republic. Women's bodies have been oppressed and censored by the regime and GES protest brings into focus the Butlerian precarity of women's body (Butler, 2015, p.66). Movahed and other GES actors exposed their precarious and vulnerable bodies to resist the systematic gender oppression of the Islamic Republic.

Second, GES protest bravely reappropriates the street as the stage which has often been monopolized by the regime to flaunt the massive scale of its fervent supporters and to show its legitimacy. GES's solitary act highlights the stark contrast of a brave girl standing on a platform alone with the dramatically assembled crowds of the regime's supporters often gather for political events.

More importantly, GES Ironically used Enqelab (Revolution) street which is the birthplace of the Islamic revolution for its protest. As Bayat notes , Revolution Street marks not only a bridging line between "the rich and the poor, the elite and the ordinary, the intellectual and the layperson, the urban and the rural" but crosscuts "the social, the spatial and the intellectual" (2010, pp. 186-187).Unlike the stealth spaces of Masih Alinejad's campaign "My Stealthy Freedom"[4], GES's actors protested in the most central areas of Tehran including Enqelab Street to make the very forbidden female body visible. The effective use of urban spaces by the GES actors is one of the key features of the protest. The actors used the parks' benches, street curbs and utility boxes in a unique way to link the

[3] Some of these specific features of GES are touched upon but not excessively discussed in A. Marie Ranjbar's article, Soapboxes and Stealth on Revolution Street: Revisiting the Question of 'Freedom' in Iran's Hijab Protests (Ranjbar, 2021, pp. 348-350).

[4] Masih Alinejad, a self-exiled Iranian journalist created a Facebook campaign against compulsory hijab in 2014 called My Stealthy Freedom in which women were simply asked to share images and videos of themselves removing their hijab. https://www.facebook.com/StealthyFreedom/

protest to the domestic urban life as much as possible. Thus, the GES actors turned these very ordinary spaces into "extra-ordinary places of political meanings" (Bayat, 2010, p 186). For example, the effective and meaningful use of utility boxes by the GES actors as a platform for the protest forced the regime's authorities to change the physical shape of these boxes by adding gable roofs to them. As Ranjbar astutely puts it, GES was not "clearly staged for global consumption" which refers to Alinejad's campaign in which women post their images either in natural secluded arenas like mountains and beaches or in empty, cosy, and beautiful streets of rich neighbourhoods that are particularly attractive for US audience (Ranjbar, 2021, p.354).

FIGURE 1 VIDA MOVAHED

Concerning GES's semi-virtual character, Butlerians' concept of transposable political space (2015, p.73) could be useful to explain the ways in which GES creates its collective identity despite its solitary mode of action. Considering the important role of social media in mobilizing other actors that joined the protest on the ground, what Butler calls transposable political space (by drawing upon Arendt 's conceptualization of "space of appearance") is shaped through the very space between the actor on the ground and the potential future actors who are watching, circulating the images and videos, and finally joining the protest of the previous protestor.

Another point that is worth mentioning is that Movahed and other actors of the GES protest dressed modestly to put the emphasis on their act rather than their appearance. Movahed's dark sweater, jeans, sneakers and her simple hair style did not attract the public attention to her body. Her cleaver use of dark and loose outfit differentiates her image from Alinejad's campaign images. It also thwarted the state's potential accusation of presenting

the seductive image of unveiled woman similar to what the Islamic Republic establishes as the Western women.

FIGURE 2 A GES ACTOR WHO IS USING A STREET BENCH TO PROTEST COMPULSORY HIJAB

Furthermore, Movahed and other GES actors did not have any political slogan or specific signs. Their silent protest makes it highly distinctive among other women's protests in Iran. In this regard, silence had a unifying and protecting role (Ranjbar, 2017, pp. 615-616). Unifying as it unified Iranian women with different political, social, and religious backgrounds and protecting because it protected women from heavily illegal charge of provoking *Fetneh*[5] which in general refers to any political protest against the regime. Also, silence could help women to remain anonymous and allowed them to refuse any political position.

Finally, the distinct performative mode of the protest made it not only adoptable for anyone regardless of gender, class, age, or ethnicity but created adequate discursive space for different groups of women and later men to participate.[6] Standing silently on a platform and fashioning a white scarf to a pole like a flag offered a wide range of possibilities for even religious women to join the protest. One of the iconic actors of GES was a *Chadori*[7]

[5] Fetneh in Farsi has different meanings but, in this context, it means disturbance and sedition.

6 Few Men joined the GES women protestors including Majid Azizi who was arrested for protesting compulsory hijab and in solidarity with GES women. He was sentenced to a year in prison. https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/%D9%85%D8%AC%DB%8C%D8%AF_%D8%B9%D8%B2%DB%8C%D8%B2%DB%8C

7 Chador is an outer garment worn in public spaces that covers the head to the ankles. It has been considered as the ideal form of hijab by the Islamic Republic.

(hijabi) woman[8] from the city of Mashhad (one the most conservative cities of Iran)[9] who silently stood on a telecom box holding a black scarf. In this respect, the protest has a great potential to bridge the competing gender discourses in post-revolutionary Iran (Sadeghi, 2010)[10] and to be simply a common ground for secular and religious feminist activists in and outside the country. The symbolic participation of men and religious women is a testimony to the fact that the protest succeeded in attracting a wide range of Iranians inside the country.

Drawing upon Alberto Melucci's theory of new social movement and Asef Bayat's conceptualization of 'nonmovement', I intend to conduct an analysis of strategies deployed by different actors involved in the creation of what came to be known as GES to shed some light on its unique process of collective identity formation and to illustrate the inadequacy of the existing theoretical frameworks in understanding the complex nature of GES. What follows from this, I would argue, has some theoretical implications that could potentially complicate the way we think about Iranian women's new forms of activism. Moreover, I intend to illustrate that despite recent theoretical attempts to define women's social struggles in Iran in the works of scholars such as Asef Bayat (2007) and Ali Akbar Madi (2004), their proposed analytical frameworks, namely 'nonmovement' and 'collective act without actors' lack enough conceptual elasticity to capture the complex nature of GES. In that regard, the 'semi-virtual character' of GES is central to my analysis. By 'semi-virtual character', I mean the ways in which GES, albeit inadvertently, extended its public reach through social and political discourses being formed across different social media platforms as well as Persian-language media outlets outside the country. Different actors, including, social media (Facebook and Instagram), state-run online media (khabaronline) and main-stream oppositional media outside Iran (BBC Persian) along with the participants of the movement (women on the ground), by circulating the images and videos, each has a significant share in creating what I call GES's 'multi-sided identity'. I will focus on some of the features such as "internal solidarity", "external environment" and "activated relationships" through which Melucci tried to define collective identity. In this regard, this research seeks to answer the following questions: in which ways is the protest constructed and reconstructed in the

8 For more information for the news coverage of her protest, see: https://ir.voanews.com/a/iran-women-rights/4233019.html; https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/feb/02/tehran-hijab-protest-iranian-police-arrest-29-women

9 Mashhad is the capital of Razavi- Khorasan province. It is a holy city as in the 9th century A.D. Imam Reza was poisoned and martyred in the city whose holy shrine is visited by millions of people every year.

10 Sadeghi identifies three competing gender discourses in post-revolutionary Iran, naming them as the fundamentalist discourse, the religious revisionism and secular feminist discourse (2010, p.210).

contemporary Iranian political discourse through its representation in media outlets? What are the social and political implications of such representation in media? How does GES acquire different and at times contesting meanings through constant appropriation of its goal by different social and political actors? Who is defining the movement and to what end? And finally, to what extent has the political appropriation of the movement by different media outlets rendered GES void of its originary meanings as it was enacted by individual women on the streets of different cities in Iran?

FIGURE 3 AN IMAGE OF VIDA MOVAHED WHO IS WAVING HER WHITE SCARF ON A UTILITY BOX

Women's Social Movements in Post-revolutionary Iran

Although Iranian women massively participated in the demonstrations which brought about the Islamic Republic regime in 1979 (under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini), after the revolution they faced a wide range of discriminatory laws. The implementation of Sharia law created many boundaries between women and men in society. For instance, women were banned from some sports and professions and their public presence was allowed if they dressed properly. When Iranian women faced the law of forced hijab and other imposed restrictions, they took to the streets in large number on International Women's Day on March 8th, 1979. Accused of being puppets of the Western imperialism, women protestors were attacked by the regime's mobs.

In the first decade of the revolution, Iranian women continued pressing the regime for equal rights, but the Islamic Republic developed counterstrategies to supress women's resistance and to abolish all women's organizations. The law of compulsory hijab widely limited women's presence in public sphere particularly secular women (mostly middle class and upper-class women) who opposed complying with the law of compulsory hijab. While

new job opportunities were offered to religious *chadori* women, many secular women not only lost their professions but also their public active lives. Women and men activists were either arrested or forced to leave the country (Mahdi, 2004, pp. 434- 437).

The Reformist era (1997-2005) under Mohammad Khatami's presidency, witnessed "relative socio-political openness" (Tohidi, 2016, p. 81). The discourse of civil society along with the relatively free press noticeably improved women's social and cultural status. But when the demagogue Mahmoud Ahmadinejad became the president in 2005, whatever khatami did was reversed by hardliners. Thus, millions of angry and heartbroken Iranians who unprecedently had participated in the presidential election of 2009 which shockingly resulted in Ahmadinejad's second term of presidency, took to the streets to protest the validity of the election's result. The nationwide unrest called Green Movement (*jonbeshe sabz*) which was a massive but nonviolent demonstration "owed much of its non-violent spirit to the women's struggle" (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010, p.83). During the Green Movement, Women were protecting male demonstrators from being attacked and beaten by the regime's riot police forces. It is important to note that women's active participation in the reformists 'campaigns, organizing rallies, marching in the streets to distribute posters and pamphlets to support Mir-Hossein Moosavi (the reformists' candidate) before the election was magnificent and indeed concerning for the state.

Despite the state's ruthless repression of women activists, intellectuals and writers, women's non-violent campaigns and protests have never stopped. Successful attempts like *One Million Signatures* (2006)[11], *Morning Mothers or Mothers of Laleh Park (2009)*[12]are good examples that show Iranian women's tenacious efforts for fighting the patriarchal state of Islamic Republic. Although Iranian women's resistance after the revolution has been always a true challenge for the state, Girls of Enqelab Street as has been discussed, is unique in so many ways.

Literature Review

There is a substantial body of scholarship on social movements that it is almost impossible to do justice to it. Instead, the key trends are summarized here. As the institutional approach to social movements and a dominant paradigm in response to inadequacies of

[11] For more on One Million Signature Campaign see Noshin Ahmadi Khorasani's book *Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality, The Inside Story* (2009).

[12] See https://womennewsnetwork.net/2009/10/08/mourning-mothers-iran-stand-with-activist-mothers-worldwide/

reductionist Marxian approach (Buechler,1995) in the wake of social movements in 1960s, Resource Mobilization theory, outlined by McCarthy and Mayer Zald (1973,1977), Oberschall (1973,1978), Gamson (1975) and Tilly (1978), elucidated the rational behaviour of social movements based on which the movements are responses to costs and rewards of actions (Jenkins,1983). The theory also accentuates the importance of internal and external environmental forces in shaping the behaviour and the development of social movements (Picardo, 1988).

Later, in response to Resource Mobilization Theory's inadequacies to explain new forms of social movements, major social scientists offered alternative theories (New Social Movements theories). Some of the main debates were presented by Manuel Castells (1977,1978,1983), who focused on cultural identity analysed class-based and non-class based urban social movements and the role of urban issues in reconstructing urban social life, Allain Touraine (1977,1981,1985,1988) who argued for a historical shift towards a post-industrial society, viewed social movements within "subject seeking" and "system seeking" logics, Alberto Melucci(1980, 1985,1989) who contended that new social movements that are entangled in everyday life are messages that express new conflicts, tendencies and modalities in modern information-led societies. Melucci emphasized the cultural aspects of social movements and the role of collective identity [13]as both the constituent and the achievement of social movements. Moreover, social scientists like Guesfield (1994), Melucci (1989) and Muller (1994) identified hidden, temporary, submerged, and networked groups underlying social movements (Buechler,1995). Manuel Castells (2009) identified two characteristics for social movements: meaning and identity making and historical background and social networks. He categorized identities into three forms: 1) Resistance Identity which formed by those who are depreciated or stigmatized by the dominant power, 2) Legitimizing Identity that is created by the dominant institutions to expand their domination to activists,3) Project Identity (in feminist and women movements) that is produced based on cultural materials the actors should redefine their position in the society that leads to the transformation of social constructions.

[13] Others who challenged the very process of constructing collective identity as well as identifying group interests are Snow (2001), Hunt and Benford (2004), Klanderman (2005), Gusfield (1994). Sociologists like Habermas (1984) who discussed the significant role of autonomy and self-determination (Buechler, 1995) categorized social movements in two groups of resistance movements and liberation movements. Diani and McAdam (2003) worked on facilitating and constraining role of networks in mobilization of collective actions as well as the link between political context and social networks.

The impact of social media on social movements has been the subject matter for a lot of social movement theorists, for example, interwoven online and offline spheres and the erroneous dichotomy of virtual /real was discussed by Wilson (2006) and Meek (2011). Wright discussed the role of transnational communication provided by social media in social movements' mobilization. Wright explained that as horizontal civic spaces, social media can enrich the democratic character of social movements (2004). Concentrating on Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street, Manuel Castells (2012) argued that while the state media are in the hands of the state power, the cyberspace provides a safe site where networks of hope and outrage are linked. Another example is Kim& Lim (2019) who highlights the significant role of social media particularly Facebook in mobilization of forces in Arab Spring movements. In addition, Goodwin and Jasper (2003) wrote about the importance of communication networks in internet-based movements like the movement in Egyptian Revolution.

The growing integration of social media into the fabric of everyday life has provided opportunities for historically silent voices of women to be heard as well as creating new forms of activism. Iranian women have used the cyberspace effectively to raise their voices against dominant patriarchal power of the Islamic Republic. A number of Iranian scholars have addressed social networks and their significant role in facilitating women's movements and women's activism in Iran. For instance, Tahmasebi-Birgani (2017) views social networks particularly Facebook as a potentially transgressive interactive, and empowering platform with numerous possibilities for ordinary Iranian women to practice activism and to express their "female assertive subjectivity".

Examining two successful cases of cyber-feminist groups; Feminist School (inside Iran) and My Stealthy Freedom (outside Iran), Shojaee (2016) casts light on the challenges and difficulties of Iranian cyber-feminism including organizational problems. She argues that although these cases functioned well to attract millions of Iranian women inside and outside the country, they fall short of achieving any political change. Moghadam (2019) takes a historico-political view on cyberspace in Iran by identifying three periods of Internet use: 2000 to 2008, 2009 to 2010 (Green Movement period) to 2011-2013. Mohgadam contends that cyberspace in Iran has been a gendered space. She argues that despite the masculine character of the Iranian cyberspace, women have succeeded in using it actively to their own advantage. Gheytanchi (2015) focuses on the ways in which Iranian women have used social networks to challenge the regime's strict gender roles, particularly motherhood. She uses the example of Iranian mothers who have used Facebook to run campaigns like

"Mothers in Black" or "Morning Mothers" in the aftermath of the presidential election in 2009 to force the regime to be accountable for killing their sons.

Iranian women's social movements have been the subject of study by many Iranian scholars, for example, Mahdi (2004) offers a historical account of Iranian women's social movements starting from the nineteenth century with particular attention to post-revolutionary Iran's women's movements to explore the strategies adopted by women. Mahdi characterizes new women's movements as 'collective acts without actors'. Hoodfar &Sadeghi (2009), look at the ways in which Iranian women's movement established their base in the 2000s and argue that Iranian women's movements do not fit into the classic models of social movements and their demands go beyond ethnicity, class and generation.

Girls of Enqelab Street and its particular features has been briefly examined by the Iranian scholars. Hashemi (2018) casts light on the Iranian women's agency through examining their involvement in key political moments in the modern history of Iran. Along with studying the Green Movement, Hashemi shortly discusses GES as a response to Alinejad's My Stealthy Freedom project. She contends that GES utilized hijab symbolically as a revolutionary flag to challenge the Islamic Republic's moral code. Thus, Hashemi concludes that GES female actors place themselves within the history of political participation of women in Iran. Ranjbar (2021) compares My Stealthy Freedom and GES to bring to light the very politics of recognition which strengthens the common orientalist representation on women's rights in Iran. Through exploring the ways of My Stealthy Freedom's publicization of GES, Ranjbar argues that social aspects of GES remain invisible.

Theoretical Framework and Thesis Structure

Two concepts are central to my analysis of the specific features of GES, collective identity and 'nonmovement'. As these concepts are substantially explained in the first chapter, here, I just briefly discuss their definitions. I will base my discussion on Albrto Melucci's definition of collective identity as I find it theoretically relevant to the construction of collective identity in the GES protest. Melucci defines collective identity as a process of producing conceived and shared definition by different individuals or groups (1995). The term, 'nonmovement' employed by Asef Bayat refers to the new forms of activism of ordinary people in the Middle East, particularly Iran. Concerning Iranian women's activism, these dispersed and noncollective everyday practices, Bayat argues, are formed based on instant unspoken communications among women called "passive networks" (2010).

I have deployed discourse analysis for analysing media texts in chapter three and four. In the use of discourse analysis, I have consulted N. Fairclough's book, *Analysing Discourse* (1999). In addition, I have used close reading for the analysis of the selected interviews in my final chapter.

Media texts, interviews and social media constitute the main body of primary sources for this thesis. Media texts are used to examine the ways in which the Girls of Enqelab Street has been represented in Persian- speaking media both inside and outside the country. For the media outlets outside the country, BBC Persian's popular show called "Page two" (*Safhey-e do*) has been chosen as it is one of the main BBC's political shows in which important events are discussed by Iranian academics, activists, and political experts and commentators. Khabaronline has been selected for the texts which represents the state officials' ideological values and debates, and it is easily available online for most Iranians who do not necessarily watch the state's television. In line with the content of these media texts, I have briefly explored GES's representation in social media through related hashtag themes in Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. In doing so, I have examined the themes of GES hashtags in relation with political concepts and discourses in those platforms from 2018 to 2019.

To study the main GES actors' motivations and interests, I have used published interviews conducted with two of the actors who have fled the country, Shaghayegh Shajarizadeh and Azam Jangravi and one who is still in Iran, Narges Hosseini. I have also conducted a short phone interview in Farsi with Azam Jangravi, one of the actors who lives in Canada.

In chapter one, I analyse GES in the light of Melucci's theorization of new social movements and its central concept "collective identity" and Bayat's conceptualization of 'nonmovement'. In chapter two, three and four, I explore GES's representation in social media (Facebook and Instagram), mainstream media outside Iran (BBC Persian) and online media inside the country (Khabaronline) focusing on its 'semi-virtual character'. In the final chapter, I examine the published interviews of three women actors of the protest, Shaparak Shajarizadeh, Azam Jangravi and Narges Hosseini.

Chapter 1
Girls of Enqelab Street: Movement or 'Nonmovement'?

This chapter concerns with unique characteristics of the "Girls of Enqelab Street" (GES) in the light of two particularly significant approaches in defining new social movements both in the western and Iranian context. I will draw upon Alberto Melucci's theory of new social movement (1989) and Asef Bayat's concept of 'nonmovement' (2007) in the specific context of women's movements in Iran, to bring into light various aspects of the "Girls of Enqelab Street" (GES) which do not easily fall into either definition of social movements. In doing so, first, I will examine the concept of "collective identity" as the major characteristic central to Melucci's theory which differentiates the "new" social movements from the "old "forms of collective actions (Vahabzadeh, 2001, p.612). In this respect, I argue that the semi-virtual character of GES and the collective identity it crafts, complicates Melucci's definition of the term. Second, by examining the concept of 'nonmovement', I posit the pitfalls of such conceptualization of women's movements in Iran, particularly in the case of GES. My aim in this chapter is not to to make a comprehensive analysis of Melucci's theory of new social movements, rather, I raise a couple of points which help this research to achieve a better understanding of the complex nature of GES in the light of Melucci's theory as one of the leading figures in the study of new social movements. Therefore, although I am mindful of the limits of this analysis, I hope it shed some revealing light on the dire need for further studies on new forms of women's collective actions in Iran.

To begin with, I will examine the extent to which certain features of GES could be analyzed based on Melucci's theory of new social movements. Later, I will be attentive to bring into light the extra context of GES and its complex nature (with the focus on the concept of "collective identity) that cannot be explained by Melucci's definition of new forms of collective action.

Although Melucci's new social movement theory is based on new forms of collective action in Western context, it offers a fairly comprehensive conceptual framework to analyze and understand the complex nature of GES. Firstly, because Melucci's model concerns with submerged networks and small groups in everyday life in informational societies which are not necessarily formed through a formal organization, but rather "informal relationships connecting core individuals to a broader area of participants and users of services" (1985, p. 799). In the case of GES, Movahed's solitary act is connected to a vast body of future participants and supporters of her act through social networks and media outlets. In other

words, GES is formed and expanded gradually through the representation of Movahed's individual act in social media and among online users. Moreover, GES is to some extent an example of a sub-group in everyday life (young middle-class women at first), who are involved in a non-structured informal collective action, by which they "organize their behavior, produce meanings and actively establish relationships" (1989, p.36). Although the solitary nature of Movahed's act seems far from organizational forms, still it offers a blueprint for the act of the following actors. Her very performative silent act of simply standing on a utility box while waving her scarf has a great potential to be repeated by the subsequent actors. In other words, it can be easily reproduced in any place and any time with no need to a leadership, organizational and mobilization strategies. In this regard, as Movahed's performance is not marked by any specific political slogan or message, it could potentially offer possibilities of building relationships with not only those who support and repeat her act but also with others who witness her act either on the ground or online regardless of their individual political stance. These networks of relationships that are formed through the very act of watching Movahed's solitary act could be considered as the key feature of GES. Although Movahed's performative act is vulnerable to being co-opted and reappropriated by any actor, it has a considerable potential to cross the political and social boundaries. This bears particular significance in the context of post- revolutionary Iran in which compulsory hijab has been extremely politicized not only by the Islamic state itself but by its opponents outside the country. Nevertheless, the actors of GES faced the state's severe reaction as their act was immediately associated with anti-imperialist opposition forces outside the country. The inevitable hyper-politicization of GES's collective act by the state could not be fully conceived unless one takes it into account the political salience of hijab and women's body as one of the main the ideologic basis of the Iranian regime. I will return to this point when I discuss GES's representation in media in the following chapter.

To return to the features of new collective actions, Melucci points out that actors in the new forms of collective action are temporary and "have a growing symbolic function" which could be arguably understood as "prophetic function" for the reason that they reveal the existence of a major problem in their society. These agitators pursue the goal of bringing change to people's lives based on the belief that people can fight for general changes that may not result in political reforms (1985, p.797). The GES actors are temporary and accidental, partly because of its semi-virtual nature. As mentioned before, GES is formed, known, and spread through its representation in different media outlets. Thus, its actors are

involved in the act temporarily and accidentally as each actor is replaced by the other, albeit, in a non-linear manner. Although the collective commitment of the GES actors seems temporary and reversible, it does not mean that GES does not build a collective identity. Rather, it gains its power from building varying networks of interactions and consequently, relationships both virtually and on the ground. Such fluidity makes GES less vulnerable to the state's repressive strategies.

The prophetic function of these temporary actors is embodied in Movahed's solitary and symbolic act. In other words, these girls act as a "new medium", as female "prophets without enchantment" who announce that there is a major discrimination taking place in society (p.801). Melucci accentuates that new "organizational forms" are not "instrumental" to achieve a goal, but they are a goal in themselves. Thus, the goal of the movement is in fact, its form (p.797). Here, I would like to draw insight from Melucci's description of contemporary collective actions to explain the importance of the form of the Girls of Enqelab Street. In this regard, GES's very informal, dispersed, and accidental networks of actors who are constantly replacing each other introduces a new form of collective action in which each potential resistant force can be replicated. Therefore, GES's potential is demonstrated through the replication of these women (the actors) who are determined to challenge the dominant social and cultural codes in a possibly non-ending resistance. In this sense, the form is not only the goal but also the message of the collective action: we are innumerable!

While the above-mentioned features of GES could be explained by Melucci's model of new social movements, there are certain characteristics of GES that cannot be fully explained by his model. My focus is on the key feature of his theory and his fundamental concern when discussing the shift that marks the move from the traditional forms of social movements to new cultural-based movements. To analyze GES from a Meluccian lens and in relation to the concept of collective identity, firstly, it will be helpful to dissect the meaning of the concept. As Melucci himself stresses, rethinking of the concept is crucial to overcome the dualistic view of structure and behavior which has always existed in the study of social movements.

Collective Identity

In his seminal book, *Nomads of the present: Social movements and individual needs in contemporary society* (1989), Alberto Melucci represents a shift from traditional forms of collective actions which were mainly political based on race, class, etc. to new

contemporary conflicts in post-industrial Western societies which have cultural forms (p.23). According to Melucci, the new forms of collective action are based on dimensions of daily life such as space, time and more important to my analysis, individual and group identity. Melucci bases his theory on the gap in the study of social movements between the structure and the meaning. Put differently, Melucci discusses the divide in the structural study of social movements which refers to the "objective conditions" and the "subjective motives" that shape a collective action. He contends that the gap between "the behavior and the meaning" has never been filled theoretically by social scientists. Thus, his main concern is the ways in which a collectivity is formed by the social actors who recognize themselves as a part of it. In other words, Melucci investigates the very formation process of a collective which results in a theoretical and methodological shift from a monolithic understanding of collective actors towards a "processual approach to collective identity" (Johnston & Klandermans, 1995, pp.41-43).

In his effort to define collective identity, firstly, Melucci discusses the tensions and contradictions created when the word identity is used and invoked as permanent in defining an apparently solid and coherent collective actor. Being aware of this issue, he views identity as a constitutive element of the term "collective identity", and he employs it as a temporary "analytical tool" in his approach (as in his opinion, there is no linguistically better equivalent). For Melucci, collective identity is the unifying element that enables collective actors to be conscious of their own acts, to recognize its effects and to attribute them to the collective action as a collective body. Therefore, collective identity not only requires the social actors to be self-reflective, but it produces a sense of belonging and "social recognition" among actors to acknowledge the outcome of the action and to exchange the roles strategically. Finally, discussing the effects of the collective action, Melucci explains that collective identity enables the actors to have a sense of temporality which helps them to relate the action to its effects (pp.46-48).

It is important to note that, according to Melucci, collective action is not a predictable and instantly visible process. Rather, collective action is a process of symbolic meaning making which is gradually formed through sets of rules, different forms of organization and leadership. In this respect, collective identity should be understood with regard to the external environment, which provides opportunities and limitations for social actors. Melucci sees collective identity relationally, which means that collective actors can constitute collective identity only in relation to other social actors. Therefore, constant recognition of others and being recognized by others (even by opposition) is the key factor

in shaping collective identity. Moreover, Melucci emphasizes the internal solidarity which guarantees and strengthens identity and explains that collective actors need this solidarity "to make sense of what they are doing". Furthermore, he asserts that internal solidarity helps the actors gather and concentrate on their resources. Melucci identifies three cardinal entwined features for collective identity: "formulating cognitive frameworks concerning the goals, means and environment of the action", "activating relationships among the actors who communicate, negotiate and make decisions" and "making emotional investments, which enable individuals to recognize themselves in each other" (1989, pp.33-35).

As explained above, therefore, this partially stable "we", according to Melucci, is formed based on "three orders of orientation": the end of the action, means of the action and the field of the action. he defines the collective identity as "interactive and shared definition produced by several individuals (or groups at a more complex level) and concerned with orientations of action and the field of opportunities and constraints in which the action takes place". This "interactive and shared definition" of the three orders, according to Melucci, is constructed through the process of "repeated activation" of the individuals' relationships. (1995, pp. 42-45).

To understand what kind of collective identity GES builds, it is important to examine the ways in which the repeated process of individuals' relationships is activated. As mentioned earlier, Movahed's solitary act was repeated by other women and later a few men, after the images of her protest were circulated through social media (mainly in Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter) and later in mainstream media outside the country. Thus, the networks of relationships are built in an accidental and virtual way, which makes the process of activation of relationships, if not impossible, very unlikely to happen. In other words, because of the semi-virtual character of GES, its collectivity cannot be fully formed based on an interactive and shared definition of the action's ends, means and the environment in which the action takes place. Therefore, the question is how the partially stable "we" is built and in which ways it defines itself, if the actors are not able to repeatedly negotiate or interact? What is the common ground on which the actors negotiate and understand the action's ends, means and environment? How do the actors make sense of what they are doing?

Again, as mentioned earlier, Melucci sees collective identity in relation with the external environment in which social actors constantly negotiate the opportunities and the constraints. For the actors of GES, the external environment does not exist in the Meluccian sense. Although the actors are able to reproduce the same act in an external environment

individually, the environment does not have the function of providing a sense of opportunities and constraints through the actors' constant negotiations and interactions. The external environment for the actors of GES is not merely the specific locations selected by the actors to perform the act. To put it differently, the negotiation process if there is any, is conducted in the virtual public space where the actors make sense of what they do and what field of constraints and opportunities their action takes place in. Therefore, the virtual space through which the actors are informed of the act of one another (continuity of the collective action), complicates Melucci's definition of collective identity. In this regard, even if the virtual space functions as an environment where the actors can possibly realize the opportunities and limits, it does not provide any chance of negotiation and interaction or decision making among the actors. However, it is crucially important to note that talking about the external environment, inevitably brings into light the key role of the watching crowd in the formation process the performative act of GES. The watching crowds who are filming each act is an inseparable part of GES solitary performances. To put it differently, there is an invisible interaction taking place between the watching crowd and the actor that is a crucial element of the performance. In other words, the crowd is themselves the accidental actors who are involved in the action to some extent. Without their presence, the performance cannot be delivered effectively. Furthermore, the meaning making process is left malfunctioned and the message can hardly be conveyed and translated into social codes.

Moreover, Melucci insists on the importance of internal solidarity in building a collective identity. But for GES actors, there is no possibility to build such an internal solidarity at least through the relationship and interaction with each other. This raises the question that if there is no internal solidarity in the Meluccian sense among the actors, what kind of solidarity do GES actors form through which they are able to concentrate on their resources? Furthermore, as Melucci emphasizes, the sense of belonging and being recognized by the other actors is an integral part of the formation process of collective identity. For GES actors, however, it is unlikely to feel a sense of belonging to the group of individuals who are acting solely in different geographical locations. Nevertheless, by following the images and videos of solitary acts of other women who are participating, actors are able to acquire a sense of recognition and being recognized virtually by other actors. However, this sense of recognition cannot be shared among the actors and thus, it might become almost barren.

Moreover, as Melucci asserts, collective actors need a sense of temporality (integrating the past and the present into unity) to be able to define the act as something

continuous and united. Therefore, continuity and permanence of the collective act over time are undoubtedly the integral elements in the formation process of collective identity (1995, p.49). In this respect, not only time but also space go beyond their physical dimensions for GES. Its semi-virtual nature provides a non-linear, fragmented time when the process of the collective action takes place. In this sense, GES challenges the Meluccian sense of time and space to some extent. In other words, although Melucci points out that time and space "lose their physical limits" in societies based on information, he emphasizes that continuity and permanence of the action over time helps the actors to make sense of what they are doing.[14] (1989,pp. 83-84).Thus, as GES takes place in different virtual and physical time and space, the "we" it crafts is a temporary, fragmented and is constantly being replicated. In this regard, such continuity of the action based on time and space, does not necessarily occur in the case of GES. Rather, the combination of virtual and physical time and space causes constant disruptions (discontinuity) in the formation process of collective identity. In other words, GES's collective identity is dispersed, incoherent and fragmentary and in this sense, it can be multiplied. It can be said that GES's collective identity is the product of the Movahed and the following actors' solitary acts on the ground and the multiple forms of representation of their act in virtual time and space. The link between GES's collective identity and its representation in media will be discussed further in the following chapters.

Finally, it is important to note that Melucci's methodology in studying new social movements concerns with the internal and external tensions and relationships within the field of action. He discusses the emerging "multilevel, multifaceted, often contradictory aspects of identity". In line with Melucci's concern, this research suggests that GES should not be considered as a unity, rather, it should be understood as a process and in a relational manner, that is to say, in relation with internal and external tensions, as well as the existing relations of power in the political landscape of Iran. However, the semi-virtual character of GES and the ways in which it interacts with the power relations in the field of possibilities and limits to some extent complicates the Meluccian model. In this regard, the internal and external tensions experienced by the actors in GES has a hybrid nature (physical and virtual) which consequently affect the interaction of the actors and the state's power. Although the complexity of the internal tensions and the mechanisms of social bond and trust among the actors of GES should be taken into an adequate consideration in a broader study, at this point,

[14] Melucci shortly discusses "the inner time of feelings and emotions which unifies fragments of personal identity" (1989, p.84)

it is important to mention that in the case of GES, actors are in the system of interaction in a virtual network anonymously because of the state's control over these social networks. Therefore, the process in which the actors trust one another takes place not only on the ground but through the representation of each act in social media. Through this representation, the accidental, temporary, and anonymous actors are able to achieve a basic understanding of the action system they are involved in. Challenging compulsory hijab exposed to women by the state from the beginning of the Islamic revolution is the fundamental, clear concern of GES. Although, the extent to which the actors share a common belief or understanding of hijab cannot be known, the very basic aim of the action is clear to the actors. The GES actors are, at least, fully aware of the risk and the consequences of any objection to compulsory hijab. Moreover, through the representation of the action in social networks, the following actors increasingly gain a better understanding of the opportunities and the constraints as well as the state's reaction. This allows the actors to recognize and reconstruct the opportunities and limits. Equally important, it is through the representation of GES in media that the actors realize the temporariness of the situation in which they make decisions individually as well as their responsibilities towards one another (the future actors). But one might ask, what links the actors and helps them trust each other's act? What keeps them loyal to one another? What ensures them that they are together in what they are doing?

Although Melucci emphasizes the role of emotional investment in the formation process of collective identity and the ways in which individuals gain a sense of belonging to a group/ community he does not elaborate more on how feelings operate within a social movement (1995 p.45). At this point, it may be useful to draw on Durkheimian insights, particularly on his broadly known concept of "collective effervescence" as it might be more helpful to understand how affective connections make GES actors establish bonds and trust one another.

"Collective effervescence" which places the social prior to the individual refers to a social force that creates a strong collective identity. "Collective effervescence" results from the common moods, beliefs and contagious emotions that are present in the repeated manner of ritual which leads to social integration. "Collective effervescence" helps us to understand the ways in which a moral community comes together and maintains a collective action. According to Durkheim, "once the individuals are gathered together a sort of electricity is generated from their closeness and quickly launches them to an extra-ordinary height of exaltation" (Durkheim, 1995, p.217). In the case of GES's actors, the degree of closeness is enacted through "collective effervesce". These common moods and emotions are

contagious, therefore, they provide a sense of trust and togetherness, even though, they are mainly built through the representation of the act in the media. These young women experience collective emotions which are associated with the very familiar feeling of being discriminated and repressed by the state's repressive policies. The collective experiences which are deeply rooted in the collective memory of Iranian women whose rights and demands have been largely ignored by the state from the beginning of the revolution. Collective effervescence is defined as the force that brings individuals together and helps them to be incorporated into the collective action. Durkheim believes that radical social innovations could possibly happen through the experience of collective effervescence (Bellah, 2005, pp.183-189).

Read in this fashion, experiencing collective effervescence, is a force that not only creates a sense of internal solidarity among women of GES but also motivates them to be involved in innovative forms of action. In this regard, Movahed's initial performance evolved by the following actors into more creative forms, from using different urban spaces like street curbs or benches in parks to waving red or black scarves. It is important to reiterate the key role of the watching crowd (real or virtual) in generating collective effervescence. It is through the act of watching the GES's performative acts that, contagious emotions are exchanged among the audiences and the actors. As a result, an intense emotional atmosphere is established in the scene which helps the actors to feel that their act is recognized. Needless to mention that the state's behaviour adds to the intensity of the moment. Therefore, the watching crowd participate in the action and should be taken into serious consideration in analysing GES.

It is important to note that two key approaches of social movements; resource mobilization theory and new social movements theory have been criticized by feminist scholars. Relevant to this research is the feminist critical view to Melucci's approach to social movements. As mentioned earlier, in the Melucci's model, collective action is analysed and assessed as a process. However, in assessing this process, Melucci's model of cultural turn of contemporary social movements based on which social movements are non-political but more cultural and intertwined with the fabric of everyday life (private sphere), leaves the crucial social movements' politics almost untouched. As Weiner explains, Melucci's focus on identity-building opens possible theoretical spaces for assessing relational complexities as well as autonomous social spaces in which formation, continuity, and adjustment occur. These required free social spaces (free from formal institutional control and repression) though, are not related to political systems. In other words, gender

relations in private sphere of everyday life in Melucci's model are left undiscussed as they are considered as non-political. Thus, both gender and power relations and the ways in which they are established, constructed, represented, and reproduced are not explored by the Melucci's approach. The feminist lens, however, emphasizes the significance of changing the complex power relations in materializing social change. It also accentuates that identity cannot be thought outside gender (Weiner, 1994).

'Nonmovement'

My inquiry in this part is meant to examine the extent to which GES can be analysed and understood through what Asef Bayat calls 'nonmovement' as an alternative to "westo-centric" model of social movement (2010, p.108). It is essential to note that this research does not aim at employing Bayat's theory of nonmovement by which he refers to the new forms of movements in the Middle East in general. Rather in my analysis, I will focus my concentration on what Bayat discusses as women's 'nonmovement' in his book *Life as politics: How ordinary people change the Middle East* (2010) which is pertinent to the new forms of women's activism in the Middle East, and particularly in his article "A Woman's 'nonmovement': What It Means to Be a Woman Activist in an Islamic State" (2007).

In his attempt to conceptualize the new forms of social movements in the Middle East which as he argues cannot be understood and defined in the light of theories of social movements in the Western context (such as Arab Spring and Iran's Green Movement), Bayat asserts that the new indigenous political reforms(projects) in the region are marked by "a blend of democratic ideals and religious sensibilities". He defines 'nonmovements' as "collective actions without collective actors; they embody shared practices of large numbers of ordinary people whose fragmented but similar activities trigger much social change, even though these practices are rarely guided by an ideology or recognizable leaderships or organizations". According to Bayat, this "quiet encroachment of the ordinary" refers to lengthy mobilization of detached individuals and subaltern groups (including middle-class women) in urban life who seek to achieve their "right to city". Discussing women's 'nonmovement', Bayat contends that women's activism under authoritarian, patriarchal regimes (secular or religious) take the form of the 'nonmovement'. As a result of the authoritarian regimes' severe repression of any campaign or movement which pursues gender equality, women adopt various strategies that are less likely to face violent repression by the state. These low-risk strategies are focused on the "mundane practices of everyday

life" which encompass a wide range of ordinary activities such as doing sports, playing music in public, working outside home, pursuing education, fixing their own cars or male-dominated activities such as mountain climbing, car racing and bike riding. As Bayat points out, these mundane doings aim at normalising the cultural and social presence of women in the prohibited or male-dominated domains of the public sphere. By doing so, women challenge the state-imposed ideological imperatives, the gender-division in public and private spheres and widely assumed gender roles in society (2010, pp.15-17).

In the light of what was said above, Bayat argues that by involving in these dispersed ordinary activities which shows women's "power of presence ", they assert their will as public players who "capture trenches of power base of patriarchal structure" (p.88). Echoing Najmabadi who recognizes Iranian women's struggles as social movements, Bayat contends that the Iranian women's movements have not been passive, "hidden", "defensive" or "individualistic" but "progressively encroaching" (p.99).

Bayat's theorization of women' 'nonmovement' is useful for this research as it aims at explaining the very innovative forms of women's activism in Iran and other Middle Eastern countries. Although I am aware of the inadequacies of such a totalizing approach which homogenizes the Middle East as a monolithic entity, it has a certain theoretical value for my research at this point.

The theory of women's 'nonmovement' is pertinent to my discussion of GES to the extent that it frames the everyday effort of Iranian women to challenge the patriarchal order of the state. In the case of GES too, young middle-class women resist the state's "coercive moralizing" by asserting their "power of presence" as public actors in the public sphere. Again, GES could be viewed as "aggregated dispersed collective sentiments" as Bayat defines women's 'nonmovement'. However, GES's collective identity is not built through what Bayat calls "passive networks" (p. 110). The concept of "passive networks" becomes problematic in analysing GES as it assumes that actors are unconscious of what they are involved in. However, women of GES are conscious of what they do and their complex webs of communication in social media and in public space cannot be explained as merely passive forms of recognizing common styles, behaviour, or concerns.

Although GES can be viewed as what Bayat calls "collective presence" such an interpretation has the inherent risk of undermining the agentic qualities of GES. Collective presence as discussed by Bayat emphasises the ability of women and their power of presence to discover new venues of freedom against all odds (p.102). However, Bayat's differentiation between collective presence and collective protest based on assuming threat or disruption as

an integral part of a protest, will inherently devalue Iranian women's assertive will (including GES actors) to claim their space in the public sphere.

Thus, the significant role of GES women's strong will and their awareness of what they decide to be involved in as a collective act against patriarchal order should not be ignored. Furthermore, Women of GES do not merely wish to be visible in public space in "opportune times"[15] rather they create their own specific space and time to publicly demand what they want.

The other point is Bayat's accentuation on ordinariness of the actors of nonmovement particularly women's 'nonmovement', which makes their acts almost irrepressible. The element of ordinariness is partly defined by women's involvement in everyday ordinary practices. Ordinariness which makes women encroach the state-colonized and male-dominated social spaces quietly is in stark contrast to the GES actors' non-ordinary defiant gesture. Their non-normative act is the opposite side of women's innocuous collective endeavours in 'nonmovement'. The GES actors bravely spotlight their female body's precarious presence in male-dominated public arena to protest the state's oppression. Their non-ordinary act disrupts the very state-led masculine order of the society and therefore, it directly threatens the state's representation of the public order.

Finally, Bayat explains that the common sense of threat by the moral police and the shared feelings of affinity and empathy among women who do not even know each other shape solidarity in women's nonmovement. Some feminist scholars have emphasized on empathy as an important requirement for feminist solidarity (e.g. Collins 2000), however, some like Hemmings have found it problematic and inadequate to develop an affective solidarity (2012). In the case of GES, although the significant role of affects in forming solidarity among actors, should be taken into serious feminist consideration in future studies, it could be reductive and problematic to explain the complexity of the affects that the actors faced through the protest by Bayat's model of 'nonmovement' which merely considered feelings of empathy and affinity. In other words, Bayat's consideration of affinity and empathy has the risk of universalizing affects and ignoring the cultural and social backgrounds of the subjects of these affects as well as assuming "the subject's experience as sound engagement with others" (Hemmings, 2012, p. 153).

[15] Bayat uses "opportune times' twice in the book, however, he does not explicitly describe what it means. I believe that in the context of Iranian women's activism, "opportune times" refers to accidentally less-oppressive moments and spaces that can be potentially used by women to form a more organized collective act (p 104).

GES's specific characteristics complicates Melucci's theorization of new social movements to some degree. It does not fall easily into the category of 'nonmovement' which Bayat offers to formulate women's social struggles in Iran. The protest gains different and at times contesting meanings through its representation by media outlet inside and outside the country. I suggest that GES possesses what I call a 'multi-sided identity'. The 'multi-sided identity' of GES will be the core of the next chapter. In the following chapter, I will focus on the representation of the protest in social media and later in BBC Persian and Khabaronline to explore the protest's 'multi-sided identity'.

Chapter 2
GES in Social Media

This short chapter explores the GES's representation through hashtags in Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. I examine the hashtags' themes used to refer to Girls of Enqelab Street's protest in these social media platforms from 2018 to 2019. By taking a brief glimpse at hashtags and their themes, I wish to bring to focus the concepts by which the protest was represented in social media platforms. Along with exploring GES's representation in media outlets inside and outside the country, which is the topic of following chapters, this short section illuminates another aspect of the protest's representation which shape its 'multi-sided identity'.

As it was mentioned earlier, images and videos of Movahed's protest was initially circulated through social media. Despite the hassle of internet filtering problems, Iranian users deployed social media platforms not only to spread the protest's images and videos but also to name the protest as Girls of Enqelab Street.

These three online social platforms have been chosen based on their popularity and accessibility among Iranian users. Although each platform has its own distinct atmosphere which attracts different users, their common feature is the use of hashtag as an effective tool for tracing the related information, bringing the focus to an important event or a topic and raising awareness as well as creating local and international groups (Schapowal & Schnur, n.d., p.8).

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are the main social media platforms used by Iranians. Although there is no accurate estimation of number of Iranians using different online platforms, according to a report by ISPA (Iranian Students Polling Agency) in February 2021, 73.6 percent of Iranians over eighteen years of age use social media, out of which 45.3 percent use Instagram, 3.3 percent use Facebook and 2 percent use Twitter. It is important to note that Facebook and Twitter have been filtered by the state since 2009, which means that Iranians' access to these platforms is merely possible by using a VPN (virtual private network).[16] Thus, the popularity of specific platforms like Instagram among Iranians, is to some extent related to the fact that it is easily accessible without using any VPN.

[16] For more on filtering and Internet restrictions in Iran, see https://time.com/6139988/countries-where-twitter-facebook-tiktok-banned/
https://old.iranintl.com/en/iran-in-brief/foreign-social-media-apps-remain-highly-popular-iran-despite-blocking

Needless to mention that, considering the Internet speed in Iran and the VPN usage, sharing images and videos in Instagram is much easier than in Facebook and Twitter.

Since Iranians started to use Twitter in the occurrence of the presidential election in 2009, it has been considered a highly effective platform in the political atmosphere of the country. It is worth mentioning that despite the state's ban, some Iranian state officials particularly the conservative and the hardliners use Twitter as an online political platform whereas, Instagram and Facebook are not commonly used by the state officials as a political cyber space.[17] It is in stark contrast with the majority of the population who use Instagram to share their feelings, lifestyles and general opinions with others.

Although online support efforts through hashtags have been critiqued for giving internet users a false sense of social participation and social change, in authoritarian countries like Iran where the possibility of collective action is scarce and media censorship is strict, using a protest hashtag can create a sense of community and belonging as well as setting a collective mood during a protest. Today when a protest takes place, associated hashtags are being searched by millions of people to follow the protest. Sometimes, great collective identity can be created when people from marginalized and excluded groups unite around a hashtag (Tufekci 2018). Moreover, Hashtags are helpful way to trace the information related to the protest and to attract the attention to the content (Schapowal & Schnur, n.d.).

In the case of Iran, using English hashtags provides possibilities for the users to attract the global attention to local protests, political events, and the state's repressive behavior towards political prisoners. Considering the semi-virtual form of the GES protest, hashtags not only helped the protest and its actors to be noticed in local and global scales but also accompanied by images and videos, hashtags functioned as an effective way to develop many networks and interactions among the users who supported the protest and those actors who became inspired by the initial protestors and joined the protest.

In Facebook, GES was represented limitedly and mostly through Masih Alinejad's online campaign pages like My Stealthy Freedom and White Wednesdays. The main hashtags with which the protest was associated in Facebook are "compulsory hijab", "freedom", "hope of freedom", "torture", "freedom of choice", "violence against women", "women's rights", "human rights", "violation of human rights", "forced hijab", "freedom of

[17] see https://www.rferl.org/a/iranian-politicians-twitter-ban/28701701.html

speech", "gender equality", "White Wednesdays" and "My Stealthy Freedom". In Instagram, key Farsi hashtags related to GES are: "no to Islamic Republic", "no to compulsory hijab", "no to obligation", "no to control over women's body", "women's freedom", "women's rights", "free Iran, human rights", "I am a subversive" , "hail to the Shah", "Islam is a misogynist religion", "feminine revolution", "Girl of Enqelab Street are multiplying", "optional clothing", "I cannot breathe in Iran" and "I am a woman I am a human". Twitter's Farsi hashtags are "Vida multiplies", "I am a subversive", "free hijab", "no to compulsory hijab", "boys of Enqelab street", "no to Islam", "women's rights", "human rights", "no to religious government", "no to Islam", "it is not impossible", "mental torture", "Masih Alinejad", "White Wednesdays", "My Stealthy Freedom", Masih's Mafia, "forty years failure" and "free Nasrin".

As it can be seen, there are considerable similarities among GES's related hashtags in three social media platforms. Mainly, the protest is represented by the concepts like compulsory hijab, human rights, and women's rights. As I will show in the next chapters, GES's association with the universalized discourse of human rights later was used by the social and political actors to situate the protest within their specific political agenda. In other words, the very universal character of the human rights and freedom of choice discourses allows for the appropriation of the protest's independent voice by different social and political actors including Islamists, reformists, and subversives. Furthermore, considering hijab and its ideological position not only in the political landscape of the Islamic Republic but also for western audience makes the protest potent to be branded as the offshoot of other western-based campaigns against compulsory hijab particularly Masih Alinejad's online campaigns.

Noticeable differences of the hashtag themes that represent GES in three social media platforms are worth mentioning. While in Facebook, the impact of Alinejad's campaigns on the representation of the GES protest is evident by the hashtag themes like "White Wednesdays" and "My Stealthy Freedom", Instagram and twitter hashtags are more specific in terms of their reference to Islam and political agendas. For instance, the GES protest's representation by the hashtag "Hail to the Shah" (*Javid Shah*) demonstrates how the protest is connected to the subversive discourse by the sympathizers of the previous regime. In the same fashion, GES is associated with the anti-Islam discourse by the hashtags like no to Islam, no to religious government and Islam is a misogynist religion that create a link between hijab and misogyny on the one hand and on the other hand between Islam and the Islami Republic. The importance and ubiquity of anti-Islam discourse and its linkage with

subversive discourses like Reza Pahlavi's supporters in Iran's current political climate highlights the role of the GES's representation with regard to Islam as a retrospective and misogynist religion. Hashtags like "Islam, a misogynist religion" or "no to Islam" which assumes the Islamic Republic's reading of Islam as the only accurate account of Islam problematically places the protest within the anti-Islam discourse.

Finally, it is important to pay attention to GES's representation in relation to Alinejad's anti-compulsory hijab campaigns. As I will discuss in following chapters, this sort of representation ignores independent and diverse voices of the GES women actors and confines it within a specific political discourse. In the next chapter, the protest's representation in a mainstream media outside Iran will be examined.

Chapter 3
GES in Media Outside the Country: BBC Persian

GES's semi-virtual nature has made it susceptible to be appropriated by different social and political actors. By semi-virtual character, I mean the ways in which GES extended its public reach through social and political discourses being formed across different social media platforms as well as Persian-language media outlets outside the country. Different actors, including media outlets like BBC, Iran International and VOA along with the participants of the movement (women on the ground), social media users and feminist activists who supported the movement by circulating the images and videos, and the Iranian state media, each has a significant share in creating what I call GES's 'multi-sided identity'.

In this chapter, I examine the ways in which these different actors constitute a 'multi-sided identity' for GES. I seek to answer the following questions: in what ways is the protest constructed and reconstructed in the contemporary Iranian political discourse through its representation in media outlets? What are the social and political implications of such representation in media? How does GES acquire different and at times contesting meanings through constant appropriation of its goal by different social and political actors? Who is defining the movement and to what end? and finally to what extent has the political appropriation of the movement by different media outlets rendered GES void of its original meanings as it was enacted by individual women on the streets of different cities in Iran?

BBC Persian

Launched in 2008, BBC Persian is the Persian language TV operated by the BBC which conveys the latest political, social, economic and sport news related to Iran and the world. With its headquarters in London, BBC Persian broadcasts for eight hours a day, seven days a week, from 17.00 to 01.00 hours – peak viewing time in Iran and its programs are available online and via satellites in Iran. BBC Persian News TV channel is among the most popular satellite media inside the country[18] along with Iran International despite the state's jamming (Maleki,2021).[19]

[18] The survey "Iranians' attitudes toward media" was conducted from February17 to 26, 2021. https://gamaan.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/GAMAAN-Iran-Media-Survey-2021-English-Final.pdf

[19]The jamming of satellites reached a peak following the widespread protests against the re-election of incumbent President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in 2009. The Islamic regime strongly limits citizens' access to

My focus in this part is not on BBC Persian's short news broadcasting, rather, I will concentrate on Page Two (Safheye-Do), an analytical program in which the most important political and social events in Iran are discussed with Iranian experts, analysts, and activists mostly outside the country. The program has been chosen as it offers long discussions through which people from different political standpoints are invited to analyse the social and political event and discuss their thoughts with others in the panel. The genre of the program which is discussion panel is a "two-way non-mediated communication" (Fairclough, 2003, p. 77) with a dialogical manner which is helpful for the purpose of this research as it brings the dynamics of different voices into light. Moreover, the genre of the media texts here (panel discussion), in which two types of exchange: Action- exchange and knowledge- exchange and two types of speech function: questions and statements (p.106) occurs helps this analysis to reveal and examine the networks of social relations among the participants and therefore, among the ideological positions they take which in the long run result in situating the movement within different ideological discourses. In other words, the genre of the text provides an efficient context for examining the ways in which GES is represented and appropriated by the participants.

I will focus on excerpts from two panel discussions both of which were aired in 2018 while GES was still taking place in different cities of Iran. The panel discussions are available in BBC Persian's YouTube channel as well as BBC Persian TV archive. The program introduces its goal as analysing the most important events of the week through interviews with influential figures inside and outside the country. Moreover, the program furthers its aim at holding a meticulous view to officials and political activists' performance in the region and in the world.

In terms of structure, the panel discussion starts with a challenging question which is later discussed with the panel. The question is read by the host, and it is followed by a short report of the event containing related videos and images. The report which is supposed to give the viewer general information and the chronology of the event, is presented by another host (in this case a female). Finally, the main host of the show introduces the panel and discusses the questions with them (two or more guests). The panel discussion's structure provides two different types of the texts and tones, the official report of the event contains description, images and videos and a less official format of the discussion panel. While the

independent news and information. More information in this article published on the website of Radio Farda. https://en.radiofarda.com/a/iran-staellite-jamming-health/29364815.html

official tone of the report is to capture the reality of the protest for the viewer, orienting them towards factuality, the panel discussion is to provide what the viewer is unable to see and know but is related to the mediation of the 'exports' interpretation. In other words, the main purpose of the panel discussion is to break down what seems to be the objective reality of the event into meanings and implications that are presented by different activists and analysts.

Text One

The first excerpt is from a panel discussion broadcast on February first, 2018, under the title of: "how feasible is the demand of Girls of Enqelab Street?". In this episode of the program, four people were invited; three women activists and journalists (present online and outside England) and one man who was introduced as an expert on Iran's political issues inside BBC studio in London. The following excerpt has been taken from the BBC Perian YouTube channel and translated to Farsi.

Host: How feasible is the demand of Girls of Enqelab Street?

Host: Ms. Hosseini, why the demand for freedom of hijab is that important? Why does it matter that a piece of cloth is on the head or not?

The host starts with a 'Wh' interrogative" sentences which according to Fairclough give the interviewer – here the host- more leeway to achieve more acceptable replies (p.118). Agine, the main question or the title of the panel discussion: "How feasible is the demand of Girls of Enqelab Street?" draws on the assumes that the demand of the protest is known by the speaker as well as the panel. Although the host seems to take a neutral position about the protest by asking a question which invites the viewer to be prepared for hearing the answers from the panel, he adopts a hesitant tone. This 'wh' integrative which could be seen as a knower-initiated knowledge (p.110) establishes an uncertain ground for the further discussion implicating the speaker as sceptical about feasibility of the GES's demand. Moreover, the second and third questions "Why is the demand for freedom of hijab that important?", "Why does it matter that a piece of cloth is on the head or not?" reduces the politics of wearing hijab to just another dress code and trivializes its importance by reducing it on a scale of importance by "that important" and categorizing it as an item in an overgeneralized collective term, "piece of cloth". As a result, the ordering of the first and the second questions, the importance of "freedom of hijab" is implicated of a lesser

relevance. This implies a tension between two voices or perspectives; women who participated and supported the protest and those who do not think it is "that important". At the same time, the hijab is considered as a monolithic entity within each voice through the discussion, as if it assumes that there is a unified understanding of hijab for all Iranians. What is not taken into consideration in the program is the fact that Iranian women wear different types of head scarves signifying their age, class, religious and social backgrounds. More importantly, when hijab is reduced to merely a head headwear in the second question, other ways of covering the body, as part of the religious dress code are ignored. Also, the second question not only disregards those women who must wear hijab against their will, by eliminating the object of the question but also sets up a universalizing category of 'all Iranian women' as a position for whom hijab matters a lot and for the same reason. Again, the question is asked in a way that one might think hijab is a problem for all Iranians, let alone for all Iranian women.

> **Hosseini**: Its importance is exactly that. Woman's body has been a tool for forty years, controlling woman's body became a tool for exercising despotism and discrimination and they were not aware of that …this is not about whether there is piece of cloth on the head or not…now the whole society has become aware… I feel that it has become aware that it was more than a piece of cloth that we thought it is. This piece of cloth is a flag by which they (Girls of Enqelab Street) are now pointing to the whole despotism and discrimination. It becomes the mark of the fight and what we actually had put aside in the periphery comes to the centre when a woman's control over her body is taken away from her. Particularly as you know woman in the Islamic Republic has been symbolic from the beginning.

Hosseini's response to the host's questions, reduces controlling women's body to wearing the hijab and head scarf. That is, it ignores other ways of exploiting women's body by the state within the 40 years which is reinforced by accentuating the importance of wearing hijab in the very beginning. This reductionist view towards women's oppression becomes more problematic when the category of "women" is produced in the second phrase "*Woman's body has been a tool for forty years, controlling woman's body became a tool for exercising despotism and discrimination*" as a unified category which not only turns a blind eye on the state's various ways of oppression towards women which have not affected them evenly as they are from different ethnic, class, religious and social bases but also homogenizes the oppressive laws by reducing the it to compulsory hijab. For example, it simply ignores Kurd or Balochi women who have been suffering from multiple discriminations in Iran. There is also some self-orientalization in the claim that "*controlling*

woman's body became a tool for exercising despotism and discrimination", as if controlling women's body should be done by despotic regimes alone and not by so-called democratic states.

Hosseini's understanding of the regime's history naturalises a linear narrative - which is also the state's narrative - in which all Iranians are thought to have been in favour of the Islamic regime from the beginning: "*Now the whole society has become aware… I feel that it has become aware that it was more than a piece of cloth that we thought it is*." This narrative overlooks the history of those who were against the regime as well as those Iranian women who protested against obligatory hijab from the very early years of the revolution.[20]

In the same manner, "*the whole society*" in the beginning not only homogenizes the Iranian society (a society made up of various cultural, social, ethnic, and religious status) but it ascribes the awareness of compulsory hijab as an issue to "*the whole" Iranian society*. Taking the use of the pronouns into consideration, in the phrases like, "*we thought it is*" and "*we actually had put aside*", implies that the speaker identifies with a community of activists who in her judgement, underestimated compulsory hijab at the beginning of the revolution. As it was mentioned above, the "*we*" is historically reductive as it simply ignores other women (activists) who have protested compulsory hijab from the beginning and makes a value assumption that all women activists were unaware the significance of hijab laws.[21] Paradoxically then, while Hosseini's response highlights the importance of the issue of hijab, it seems to reduce power of the fight against despotism by reducing it to the fight against compulsory hijab. Even the moment that acknowledges a change in the history of the fight is to mobilize the centre / periphery binary that does not allow for asking what has made the change possible: "*It becomes the mark of the fight and what we actually had put aside in the periphery comes to the centre when a woman's control over her body is taken away from her*". It only serves the purpose of bringing the fight against compulsory hijab to the front as the most important one and the one that has been overlooked by the activists.

As it can be seen above, in Hosseini's response, a collective is created around the specific definition of hijab and its significance for particular activist groups. In the same fashion, GES's act is defined and constructed in relation to this specific understanding of

[20] On 8 March 1979, more than 100,000 women gathered on the streets of the Iranian capital to protest the new Islamic government's compulsory hijab ruling, which meant that women would henceforth be required to wear a headscarf when away from home. see https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/women-protesting-hijab-1979/

[21] Homa Darabi immolated herself by pouring petrol over her head on 21 February 1994, after she had taken her hijab off in a public thoroughfare near Tajrish as a sign of protest compulsory hijab. She passed away next day. See, for instance, https://en-academic.com/dic.nsf/enwiki/5098800

hijab and the groups of women activists (mostly secular middle-class feminists) to whom the issue of compulsory hijab was not a priority and now it is. The GES girls are not only named as those who awakened the Iranian society and intellectual secular activists like Hosseini regarding the importance of hijab but, their act is discussed as a matter of importance for the whole Iranian society. In this respect, groups of religious women from different age, class, and ethnic backgrounds for whom hijab is either acceptable or not a priority, are assumed to be part of this collective. It is worth mentioning that for many Iranian women with religious or traditional families, hijab provided opportunities to be present in public sphere (Mahdi, 2004, p.437). In other words, in religious families, husband and fathers of these women who had found the society threatening, now allowed them to take jobs and have social activities. Also, it should be noted that for Muslim women activists and later for post-Islamic feminists, hijab was not either a barrier or a priority. Post- Islamic feminists for instance, aimed at combining religiosity and gender equality within the Islamic discourse (Bayat, 2010, p.90).

> **Host**: Ms. Hosseini you pointed out that actually the whole society is involved with this view and change…maybe we can discuss that more. Ms. Alinejad, is this really the whole society?

Here, a contextual shift from Hosseini to Alinejad occurs. This shift facilitates the specific direction the host wants Alinejad to head in by his question. In other words, the host sets the stage for Alinejad to reveal her ideological position (as the representative of Iranian women). The "Actor-initiated" move (Fairclough, 2003, p.108) starts with an evaluative statement in which part of Hosseini's claim is used and highlighted to provide the context for '*Yes/no' Interrogative* statement "*is this really the whole society?"*. Moreover, the use of the adverb *really* to both emphasise and question the validity of the "*the whole society*" as a unifying category.

> **Alinejad**: I want to say something very honestly here. Those who are now in this panel are like teachers for me. I have learnt from those who have analysed this movement these days and in these years that I have been in contact with ordinary women, I, myself have been mature and I have corrected many mistakes inside me. So, let me talk about my personal experience. About those who are present in the campaign. We have taken the flag of the protest generation by generation from women in different decades and the movement that has been formed now is a potpourri of the supressed protests. After the 1979 that women protested, that huge demonstration was supressed because all the people thought that there were bigger problems in the society and first, they should be solved. The reformists who insisted many times that first the political reforms should be done and then reforming women's rights will be done automatically. I want to emphasise that as a woman who is in contact with ordinary women and learns from them a lot that the reality is that all these protests are in fact rage, a revolt

> (riot) against being ignored. Our problem is not hijab at all, our problem is the aggression that exists in the society. Our problem is the religion's interference in our private lives. In our most private choices. I am the girl who everybody says why do you talk about your personal life so much? Because my personal life is more important than all the political issues. The unawareness that was imposed on me…the brainwash that was imposed on these Iranian women… from the age of seven, a fake identity was imposed on us and whenever we protested, they said: shhh! There are more important things…shhh! bigger civil freedoms should be talked about, and they never thought that a woman like me who cannot decide on her own body, how this regime allows her to decide on more important issues?

Alinejad's response starts with a seemingly humble statement in which she paradoxically draws a line between all women scholars who have analysed the movement including those who are present in the panel and the ordinary women with whom Alinejad has had the chance to be connected. Thus, an activist/ scholar binary is implicitly produced in which activism is credited to have more importance or more impact on Iranian politics. Moreover, this distinction, implicitly defines ordinary as opposed to educated to highlight the importance of women's lived experience. Therefore, the lived experience of women who are not educated is considered as less important than highly educated women particularly regarding compulsory hijab. In addition, being educated here is simply regarded as a class privilege which is not applicable to Iranian society where women have outnumbered men in entering public and private universities at different educational levels.[22] Given these points, the speaker links ordinariness with the GES protest which results in detaching the movement from any intellectuality and eventually connects it with her campaigns for protesting compulsory hijab according to which anonymous ,ordinary women protest the hijab laws [23] This way, a specific form of political activism is defined and legitimated by the speaker and other ways of activism are undermined.

The resolution of the apparent discreditation of academic, expert reflections in comparison with lived experience happens in the following sentence that simply makes a claim to Alinejad's lived experience: "*So, let me talk about my personal experience. About*

[22] Statistics on the enrollments of female students in universities in the academic year 2006/07 indicate that women constitute about 70% of university students in medical sciences and basic sciences, about 60% of students in humanities and arts, and 47% of students in agricultural and veterinary sciences. The proportion of women in universities is low only in technical and engineering fields. https://www.mei.edu/publications/educational-attainment iran#:~:text=Currently%2C%20more%20than%2055%25%20percent,was%20literate%20(Table%201)

[23] In 2014, Alinejad created the My Stealthy Freedom campaign to provide a platform for Iranian women to protest compulsory hijab rules. As part of this campaign, she has initiated a number of sub-campaigns including White Wednesdays (2017), Walking Unveiled and My Camera My Weaponn (2018).

those who are present in the campaign." More importantly, Alinejad positions herself as the one who knows the women "*who are present in the campaign*" (the GES girls) and for that reason, her personal experience of encountering these women not only separates her from other women in the panel discussion (women scholars) but grants her a more important position to talk about the movement and its reality.

The GES protest is assumed as the continuum of Alinejad's campaigns against compulsory hijab such as *My Stealthy Freedom*. The use of "We" in the following sentence "*We have taken the flag of the protest generation by generation from women in different decades and the movement that has been formed now is a potpourri of the supressed protests*" indicates that this "We" is built upon Alinejad's problematic self-positioning in which GES is appropriated and it is considered in line with Alinejad's anti-obligatory hijab's campaigns and within the discourse of subversion. In this regard, the "we" implicitly fabricates a history for GES which results in overloading the movement with specific political meanings and implications. In this fabricated history, decades of women's struggles for gender equality in Iran are assumed to be merely over compulsory hijab.

In addition, such collective integrates all women's protests in different periods of Iranian history regarding hijab and views them not as diverse phenomena with their singularities but as a colourless whole. Furthermore, in the following sentence "*After the 1979 that women protested, that huge demonstration was supressed*", the issue of state-imposed dress codes is limited to the framework of Islamic regime and compulsory veiling after 1979.[24]

Given these points, Alinejad's position in the panel as the most authentic voice is established and consolidated. By placing compulsory hijab as the most significant issue from the beginning of the revolution and through highlighting it as the only issue regarding which political parties (reformists and subverts) have been indifferent, Alinejad situates her campaigns and consequently her own position as the most authentic one. The following sentence "*I want to emphasise that as a woman who is in contact with ordinary women and learns from them a lot that the reality is that all these protests are in fact rage, a revolt, a riot against being ignored*." Clearly demonstrates how GES protest is appropriated and placed within the discourse of subversion. Also, as it can be seen above, the reality of the

[24] For instance, part of Reza Shah's modernization project was compulsory unveiling (*Kashfe-hijab*) and forced adoption of western dress codes in 1936. In this respect women's struggles in that period is implicitly considered less important. For forced unveiling, See (Mahdi,2004) (Kar & Farshi, 2008, p.77).
https://www.choices.edu/video/how-did-unveiling-affect-women-during-the-pahlavi-dynasty/

protest is defined by Alinejad as "*a revolt against being ignored*". The established "we" which homogenizes all the women of GES, and its supporters defines itself as a secular force that objects the "*religion's interference*" in women's "*private lives*". Needless to mention that within the discourse of the Iranian Islamic regime, the interference of the religion is not merely limited to women's private lives, thus, the accentuation of the Islam's interference in private sphere implicitly assumes that the public sphere and women's social existence is not as important as their private lives. Therefore, private, and public spheres are assumed to be separated and detached from one another. It also implies that the private sphere is an apolitical space where women should have their free choices regardless of the politics that rules their public and social lives.

More importantly, the use of "I" and "me" along with Alinejad's emphasis on her own personal life, implicitly sets the stage for her position as the representative voice of "all the Iranian women" who have suffered from compulsory hijab. Also, the following sentence "*The unawareness that was imposed on me…the brainwash that was imposed on these Iranian women. from the age of seven, a fake identity was imposed on us...*" is a good example of how one voice is centralized and represented as the most progressive and authentic voice while the other voices (veiled women) are considered as brain washed and regressive. At the same time, the very last sentence "*they never thought that a woman like me who cannot decide on her own body, how this regime allows her to decide on more important issues?*", implicitly sets up the other 'front line' the speaker is positioning herself when assuming that all men are free subjects who are able to decide on more important issues in the Islamic regime.

> **Host:** Mr. Barzin, there was a mention of revolution and riot We can talk about them symbolically but practically, when we look at the act of Girls of Enqhelab Street, it is not a revolution, it is a civil disobedience without violence. Absolutely peaceful. One might say that it is a revolution in my view, but this political action based on the definition is a reformist act. Well, a big part of the society has accepted these reformist approaches. But why there is still a resistance against this reformist act if the society has accepted the path to reform and if it is in this path as many analysts insist?

As it can be seen, the question is formed as a reaction to Alinejad's response in which GES is defined as a revolution or a riot. It starts with the host's rejoinder in which he challenges Alinejad's view on GES by placing symbolic vs. practical. The host's way of interaction with Alinejad in defining GES, gives him an authoritative position in the panel. To put it differently, by using a passive sentence in the beginning and later by the phrase

"one might say", the host disparages Alinejad's subjectivity and her position as one of the guests of the panel.

More importantly, by referring to what is assumed to be the correct definitional distinction between a revolutionary act and a peaceful civil protest, the host frames GES as a non-violent civil disobedience. His claim is supported by using the intensifying adverb "absolutely" in this phrase "*absolutely peaceful*". Again, the phrase, "*these reformist approaches*" assumes a history for GES in which it is a continuum of previous reformist actions. Moreover, in the last two statements, general categories of "*a big part of the society*" and "*many analysists*" are established. Although it seems that the host's concern is to include other voices of the society by not generalizing the whole Iranian society in relation to hijab, the making of ideologically established categories, not only reduces the dialogicality of the statement, but they consolidate the above-mentioned claims of what GES assumes to be, who assumes to accept and support GES and finally who has enough power to confirm the claims. Finally, the last statement assumes a resistance against GES's act within the Iranian society for which there is no solid, factual evidence. In this regard, there has not been any study or a collective act from the society against GES's protest except for the regime's response which I have discussed in chapter one.

> Barzin: I would like to respond to Ms. Alinejad as she mentioned that the whole society has come to this understanding that it should target the whole despotism and that she said our problem is not hijab, we want a revolution. I think it is to some extent an illusion and it is not the reality. Ms. Alinejad is not the representative of the whole Iranian nation. She can represent part of the Iranian society and she is respectable only to that level. But she is not the Iranian nation. About your question, I see this phenomenon as a civil disobedience and I see it related to the reform movement(Jonbeshe-Eslahat) [25], I am not saying that these two are equal but they are related in a sense that we define civil disobedience as there is an objection to a specific legal issue and we break the law to show our objection in order to provide a basis for changing the law and we do this without violence and peacefully. This is civil disobedience and in my opinion the act of Girls of Enqelab Street is definable and interpretable within this framework. This civil disobedience is a baby that came out of this reform movement. This baby looks like it and it has a peaceful characteristic.

Barzin's reaction to Alinejad's talk is a good example of an interaction in which power relation is revealed. In this respect, two discourses of subversion and reform are produced through the speakers' interaction. Barzin accentuates that Alinejad's view of GES

[25]The Reform Movement (1997-2005).

as a revolution, or a riot is an illusion. This way, his view of GES which is situated within the discourse of reform is assumed to be closer to reality. By calling Alinejad's view as an illusion, Barzin belittles Alinejad's perception of her position as the representative of the whole Iranian nation and questions the collective which is produced by her. Like the host, Barzin views GES as a civil disobedience[26] but he furthers this view by relating GES to the Reform Movement (*Jonbesh-e Eslahat*). The Reform Movement, however, is assumed to be consistent while there were different political parties and agendas within the movement that made it far from a coherent political faction. Nevertheless, Barzin's statement, submerges GES girls and their act within a specific political ideology with its particular goals and strategies.

It is important to note that what is mentioned as Reform Movement mainly refers to an era which starts with the presidency of Mohammad Khatami in May 1997 who was elected by an overwhelming majority (it is named as 2nd of Khordad Movement). The Reform Movement consisted of several political parties, and it was supported by many influential leftist Islamic intellectuals such as Abdolkarim Soroush.[27]. Khatami attracted many groups of people and intellectuals by promising political reforms, institutional democratization, more personal freedoms, and a different foreign policy based on conciliation with the west which he called "Dialogue Among Civilizations" (*Goftegooye Tamadonha*). During his presidency, pressures on women's hijab was eased and the cultural segments gained freedom to be active, reformist newspapers were published. The movement is believed to end in 2005 by the presidency of Mahmood Ahmadinejad (Masroori, 2007)[28]. In spite of their differences, some believe that the presidency of Hassan Rouhani in 2013,

[26] Rawls defines civil disobedience as "a public, non-violent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government" (Rawls, 1971, p.320).

[27] The Reform Movement (*Jonbeshe-Eslahat*) consisted of several political parties including Islamic Iran Participation Front (*Jebheye-Mosharakate-Eslami*), Association of Combatant Clerics (*Majmae-Roohaniyoone-Mobarez*) and Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution Organization (*Mojahedine-Enqelabe-eslami*). Some of the Key figures of the Reformation Movement were Mohammad Reza Khatami, Saeed Hajjarian, Mostafa Tajzadeh, Hadi Khamenei and Behzad Nabavi.

[28] In 1999, many student leaders, journalists and reformist clergies were severely attacked, jailed, and killed by the hardliners in the aftermath of student demonstration in Tehran University. Following the event, reformists in sixth parliament (*Majles*) were under intolerable pressures and many of Khatami's reformist laws which were passed in the parliament were rejected by the Guardian Council. Khatami's reform project could be translated as creating new Islamic civilization or new Islamic democracy (*Mardom-Salary-e-Dini*) which was a combination of Islamic values with liberal western values not politically but intellectually. The reinterpretation of Islam through the lens of western culture. He accentuated on practical commitment to the constitution, and he stated that criticism is the only way to find the truth, but it requires freedom. (Masroori, 2007).

was a continuum of the Reform Movement as both offered alternative politics of change and hope to Iranian society (Behravesh, 2014, pp.262-263).

To return to Barzin's response, although he seems to be cautious about situating GES within the discourse of the reform, by defining civil disobedience and the emphasis on its peaceful character, he assumes that other women's movements in post-revolutionary Iran have not been peaceful. Also, civil disobedience is assumed to be part of the Reform Movement based on its peaceful nature and the more importantly the reform is reduced to the Reform Movement (*Jonbeshe-Eslahat*). Finally, the last statement "*This civil disobedience is an infant that born out of this reform movement. The infant looks like the reform movement, and she/he has a peaceful characteristic."* implicitly infantilizes GES and assumes a sub-identity for it. In other words, attaching GES as an infant to the Reform Movement as its origin ignores GES's independent political and social character and loads it with specific political agendas and meanings. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that there is no evidence of the GES's performance's use of any motto or specific political sign as an affiliation to any particular political party or affiliation.

Text Two

The second excerpt has been selected from another episode of the program Page Two (Safheye-*do*). It was broadcast on January 23,2018 after Movahed's first act in Enqelab Street. It is important to note that the order of texts is based on the importance of the texts in terms of time and the length of the discussions. In this episode two guests were invited. Victoria Tahmasebi-Birgani who is associate professor of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies in the University of Toronto and Leily Nikounazar, journalist and PhD researcher at the Literature and Cultures Department of the Katholieke University of Leuven.

The title question of this episode is "*who was the girl of Enqelab Street and what did she want?*". The episode starts with as short video of Vida Movahed's act and a brief introduction in which Vida Movahed whose identity was unknown at the time is introduced by the host and based on Nasrin Sotoudeh's information, an Iranian lawyer and human right activist who was Movahed's lawyer.

> **Host**-What does it mean to flag a scarf in the busiest time of the most crowded part of Tehran? Should it be viewed as an individual and instant act, or it should be interpreted within the context of the majority of Iranian women's reaction to the law of compulsory hijab? Ms. Tahmasebi, what is your take on what we saw in this short video and how would you interpret the act of this woman?

As it can be seen, the question is framed to limit the guests' answer to interpret Movahed's act either as individual and immediate or as a continuum of a historical protest of all Iranian women against obligatory hijab. More importantly, using modal verbs and the passive form of the first three questions creates a sort of abstraction in a sense that the agency of Movahed is obfuscated. In other words, the protest is represented by highlighting the action of "*flagging the scarf*", thus, the actor of the protest is rather elided.

> **Tahmasebi:** […] What is very important here and we should remember is that this woman's fight is a non-violent fight and Iranian women, and their movements have always been the pioneers of non-violent fight in Iran which is based on a very simple principle and that is civil disobedience, this girl has gone on a platform, and she has waved her white scarf without any word. This civil disobedience is a political action, and it is different from passivity.

Tahmasebi's answer to the question bears clear resemblance to Barzin's answer in the previous excerpt. She emphasises the non-violent form of Movahed's act and defines it as a civil disobedience which results in connecting the protest to the reform discourse. Also, Movahed's silence during the protest is assumed to be another proof of a civil disobedience but in the next sentence, the speaker's accentuation on Movahed's act as an active and political character implies that civil disobedience is associated with passivity and apoliticality.

> **Nikounazar**: The event that happened in Enqelab street and in White Wednesdays or as a part of My Stealthy Freedom campaign or similar campaigns is the continuum of the changes that are happening in women's clothing in forty years. Forty years of altering the signs. Forty years of changing the Islamic dress codes. It is the continuum of that, and it should be viewed broader as a discursive chain which does not only include the girl of Enqelab street. It is interesting that this act coincided with the event of December (*dey mah*)[29]and all of these is the continuum of a revolution that has been going on under the skin of the society. Compulsory hijab is a repressive law and there is no reason for Iranian women to accept it.

Similar to Alinejad's view in the previous text, Nikounazar attaches Movahed's act to My Stealthy Freedom and Masih Alinejad's campaigns against compulsory hijab. Here

[29] Anti-government protests in December and January 2017. Protests started in the northern city of Mashhad, spurred at first by concern over the country's stagnant economy, high unemployment, inflation, and alleged corruption of officials of the Hassan Rouhani's government. Cities such as Kermanshah, Sari, Ahvaz, Qazvin, Karaj, Isfahan, Qum, Zahedan and some parts of Tehran witnessed demonstrations organised through social media. See https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/03/tens-of-thousands-of-people-protested-in-iran-this-week-heres-why/
https://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2018/01/irans-protests-start-bread-uprising-180108100952458.html
https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2018/jan/02/timeline-iran-protests

again, Movahed's act is viewed as a continuum of all women's movements after the revolution which implicitly not only assumes Alinejad's campaigns as unifying umbrella that embrace all Iranian women's demands and struggles in post- Iranian society but also appropriates Movahed's protest as one of Alinejad's campaigns. In this regard as it was discussed earlier in the first analysis, GES protest is situated within the discourse of subversion. Moreover, Movahed's protest is associated with the nationwide demonstrations of December 2017 and both protests are viewed as a continuum of a "*revolution under the skin of the Iranian society*". This implicitly homogenizes Iranians' various political, social, and cultural demands and problematically accommodates them merely under the discourse of subversion and revolution. It is worth mentioning that the widespread demonstrations of December 2017 were series of leaderless protests of various groups of Iranians which were initially economic based against Rouhani's neoliberal policies but later as the regime restricted the access to Instagram and the messaging apps to block the spread of the protests' information, turned to a violent political struggle with the regime. Thus, as various cities of Iran were involved, I believe, the protesters' political standpoints, class and ethnic backgrounds and their demands cannot be ignored and simply connected to the subversion discourse.

> **Host:** Ms. Nikounazar, do you think this gradual move (referring to Tahmasebi's view) should be continued or what may be considered as non-conformist actions, that someone takes off her scarf in the street? do you think this act helps what you pointed out or what Ms. Tahmasebi pointed out as a movement that has been going on for decades? or does it make the whole thing worse? I mean these kinds of radical acts.

The question is interestingly similar to the host's question in the previous excerpt where the host rephrases the guest's speech, and the ways in which the guests represent the movement are assumed to be the reality of the movement. As it can be seen here, Movahed's protest is represented by the guests as a radical or a conformist action which is directly situated either in the subversion discourse or in the reformist discourse. In addition, there are two different assumptions in the host's question: a propositional assumption that, Movahed's protest is a radical act which connects it to an evaluative assumption that these supposedly radical acts result in the state's stricter treatments regarding hijab. Consequently, compulsory hijab is assumed to be the central issue based on which the reformists are differentiated from the subversives.

> **Nikounazar**: Look! there is no way when it comes to hijab except that this path should be continued. Look the hijab issue in Islamic Republic is complicated. It

> is simple to understand on the one hand and on the other hand, it is very complicated. In fact, hijab is the decoration and window of Islamic Republic. if you take hijab from this regime, its form is distorted. On the other hand, the government in Iran is a religious government, a religious government basically, takes its power from woman's body, actually from controlling and imposing limits to woman's body. This Islamic hijab and the mere presence of Islamic Republic as a religious regime is so intertwined that if you want to get passed the Islami hijab, you will inevitably leave the Islamic Republic behind. Therefore, if you consider any fight against compulsory hijab, you can consider it as a radical fight.

Again, in Nikounazar' s response like Alinejad's in the previous excerpt, the discourse of compulsory hijab (not the Iranian women's right to choose their attire) is prioritized and placed in the frontline of the subversive discourse. There are propositional assumptions that establish the linkage; for instance, "*the mere presence of Islamic Republic as a religious regime is so intertwined*" or "*if you want to pass the Islami hijab, you will inevitably leave the Islamic Republic behind*". Moreover, compulsory hijab is assumed to be the pillar of strength in the Islamic Republic, as though it is the only existential foundation of the Islamic regime.

> **Host**: It is a pity Ms. Nikounazat that our time is limited unfortunately. You view hijab or getting rid of hijab as an existential threat for Islamic Republic, don't you think that this view turns it (compulsory hijab) to an unsolvable issue? One sentence please!
>
> **Nikounazar**: This issue is unsolvable, yes! People should find a way to pass it through. Form this angle that you explain, it is unsolvable but there are ways and people will find it.

The ending interaction between Nikounazar and the host interestingly demonstrates the ways in which power relations are at work. In this respect, the interrogative clause "*don't you think that this view turns it to an unsolvable issue?"* and later the imperative *"One sentence please!"* limit the guest's response to yes or no to achieve the desirable answer. The question makes the assumption that any fight against compulsory hijab is necessarily a fight against the Islamic Republic.

Conclusion

As it can be seen above, GES is constructed and reconstructed in different ways through the discussions by the host and the guests' representation of the movement. Also, the analysis demonstrates the particular ways in which GES acquires contesting meanings through its representation in BBC Persian. In other words, the protest is situated within either

the subversive or the reformist discourse by these political actors based how they define GES and its goals. Through these representational processes the protest's actors' diverse personal, social, and political views and backgrounds as well as their self-perception of the protest and its aims are largely ignored. The homogenization of various feminine interests and their socio-political standpoints which is done through these insufficiently inclusive discourses problematically silences GES's miscellaneous voices. It is highly important not to forget that these discourses which appropriate GES's actors' protest, in fact turn a blind eye to these women's agency and awareness of what and why of their protest, as well as how they perceive themselves as participants of the protest.

What can be understood through the analysis of these media texts is how the politics of representation is at work to appropriate the protest. In other words, the discourse analysis of the panel discussion texts, reveals the ways in which the power structures are at play to produce the contestant meanings for the protest and to shape different discourses based on which GES is defined and perceived. Finally, the reductive accommodation of GES within either the reformist or the subversive discourse problematically reinforces the widely mentioned secular/ religious dichotomy with which many Iranian women do not identify (Sadeghi, 2010, pp.222-223).[30]

[30] Sadeghi challenges the secular/ religious dichotomy by pointing out their failure in mobilizing Iranian women from various class, ethnic and cultural and religious backgrounds. She contends that many Iranian women from working class do not identify with either secular or religious feminism and agendas. Majority of Iranian women according to Sadeghi are not interested in changing the laws which have been the focus of secular feminists in Iran, rather they are interested in changes in social and economic and power structures in Iranian society. It is important to note that Sadeghi differentiates among "Islamist feminism", what she calls religious revisionist women (*Zanan e noandish e dini*) who supported Islamic Republic and possibility of progress in women's right in its context and religious intellectual women (who offered new ways of Shiite jurisprudence which would be less strict with women as well as accentuation on women's role in modern era) and she emphasizes that the ways in which these groups challenge patriarchy is crucially different (215-217).

Chapter 4
GES in State-run Online Media: Khabaronline

This chapter deals with the ways in which GES is represented through an online state-run media, Khabaronline. My analysis aims at examining dissenting voices within the Islamic regime regarding GES and compulsory hijab. Through the analysis of the selected excerpts taken from the speeches of supreme leader Seyed Ali Khamenei and two government officials, Ali Motahari and Fatemeh Koulaei. I argue that despite the state's severe treatment of the actors of the GES protest (long sentences), there are ambivalent attitudes about compulsory hijab from within the regime which shows the state's struggles regarding hijab as well as the importance of the GES's protest to challenge the state's ideological notion of compulsory hijab.

I will use close reading to examine the texts' details such as themes and concepts to discern deeper meanings and discourses through which GES is represented. These short excerpts represent different, contesting voices which could complicate and even challenge the common perception that the state has a singular homogeneous attitude about compulsory hijab. Thus, too much should not be made of the state's strict treatment of GES, rather, the regime's view on hijab and GES protest should be seen in relation to the social and material realities of Iranian women as well as tensions between different voices from within the Islamic Republic.

As it was mentioned above, my focus is on Khabaronline; an online audio and video media which claims that offers the latest reports and in depth-news analysis of the most important events in Iran and in the world. The website, which was launched in 2008, introduces itself as a news agency which tries to go beyond merely reporting the news of the events and to take a careful look at their hidden sides to find their hidden recesses. This news agency describes itself as committed to Islamic Republic rules, regulations, and ideology.[31]the texts have been selected based on their importance in terms of addressing the GES's protest and consequently the issue of compulsory hijab.

[31] For more on Khabaronline' s policies and editorial board see: https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/822035

Text One

The first text is an excerpt from a speech given by Sayyid Ali Hosseini Khamenei; the current supreme leader of Iran on March 8th, 2018, published on Khabaronline website. The speech was delivered while some of the girls of Enqelab street were being arrested and the protest was still going on.[32] Khamenei is the second leader of the Islamic Republic after the death of the first leader, Ayatollah Khomeini from 1989 to the present. The supreme leader is a Shiite cleric who is the most powerful political authority in the Islamic Republic. The supreme leader is the head of state and the armed forces. Although executive, legislative branches of the government are constitutionally independent and their members are elected by the people, practically, they are a robber-stamp for the supreme leader. In other words, all the final decisions regarding major policies of the country are directly or indirectly influenced by the supreme leader.[33]

It is worth mentioning that the supreme leader's speeches are crucially important in determining the country's macro policies and resolutions. These speeches are given on different occasions based on the political, social, and cultural importance of the events and occasions.[34] The following speech was delivered for rather a small audience of like-minded poets, religious singers (*mad'ahan*) and admirers of Imams and their families on the occasion of Fatimeh Zahra's birth, which is signeted as women's day in the Islamic Republic. I am going to analyse the text in terms of three issues: the reiteration of who counts a properly 'Muslim woman'; the importance of 'immunity' through wearing the hijab in the face of 'deviations'; and women's lack of moral compass which makes them susceptible to 'frailty' and 'deception'.

The first quote is to focus on the meaning of 'Muslim woman', the object of political concern at the time of the arrest of the GES actors:

> Woman in the Islamic logic and Islamic ontology has a role model. There is a framework determined for woman. This framework is a perfect framework. This means that an Islamic woman is that being who has faith (*iman*) chastity (*efaf*), in charge of the most important part of human's nurture. She is effective in

[32] The speech in Farsi is accessible in the following links
https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/761068/%D8%B1%D9%87%D8%A8%D8%B1
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frkmwNo3tAY&t=325s&ab_channel=PersianDoc

[33] To understand the Islamic Republic's mixed system of government, it is important to understand the concept of Velāyat-e faqīh. For more on this see:
https://referenceworks.brillonline.com/entries/encyclopaedia-iranica-online/shiite-doctrine-ii-hierarchy-in-the-imamiyya-COM_10671?s.num=0&s.f.s2_pare

[34] For instance, the supreme leader's televised speech in the first day of the Iranian new year (Nowruz) in which he names the state's major resolutions for the coming year.

> society. She has scientific and spiritual growth. She is the head of the very important unit of family, a source of tranquillity for man. All of these along with the feminine characteristics like elegance, like tender- heartedness and like the potential for receiving the divine's lights. This is the role model of Muslim woman… In the opposite side, there is a deviated role model which has been different in periods of time. Today, that deviated role model is the Western role model. The Western woman in our time, instead of all the distinguished and outstanding characteristics of what we see in Muslim woman, the main characteristic of the Western woman is that she should be able to attract men's attention and she should be exposed to men's pleasure. Thus, you see that today's Western woman's characteristic is to be naked.
>
> […] the Western woman is the symbol of consumption, makeup, ostentatiousness, and a tool for sexual excitement of men. Other things they say like gender equality and things like this are all just words, just the surface of the story, the reality of it is what was said.[35]

The speech aims at establishing the category of 'the Muslim woman' by constructing her other, 'the Western woman'. The Muslim woman is clearly defined based on what he believes as Islamic values such as chastity (*efaf*) and faith (*iman*) which are later linked to motherhood as well as wifehood. Thus, as it can be seen, the Muslim woman is characterized through her relation to either her children or her husband. To put it simply, the Muslim woman is not described as an individual with her own voice, rather she is an infallible being who is identified by her role in the family. Her feminine features such as tender-heartedness and elegance make her a pure, submissive being whose domestic responsibilities should be fulfilled perfectly. Nevertheless, the Muslim woman's role in society is mentioned in relation to education that comes along with spirituality. Thus, the paradoxical figure of Iranian Muslim woman is shaped through a combination of her active public presence and her subjugation to the domestic gender roles. Considering women's social life in today's Iran, the unique female subject formed in the Islamic Republic has been a controversial figure which has caused tensions and struggles for the Islamic regime itself (Terman, 2010).

The opposite Other of the Muslim woman is the deviated figure of the Western woman whose 'nudity' exposes her to male pleasure. The nudity and deviation are linked and placed in stark contrast to chastity and faith. Thus, based on this narrative, the Western woman is a monolithic being who is nothing more than an object of the erotic male gaze because of her nudity. It is worth mentioning that the concept of nudity in this context, implies bear-headedness. Finally, the Western woman is portrayed as a morally corrupted

[35] See, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=frkmwNo3tAY&t=325s&ab_channel=PersianDoc

being without agency who consumes and is consumed by men. More importantly, these characteristic features come to be associated with the concept of gender equality, which thereby is considered as the fake face of reality of the Western woman, discouraging any Iranian woman to (wish to) go along with such a political movement. It is important to note that the supreme leader's emphasis on gender equality has a lot to do with the increasing awareness about feminist concepts and women's rights in Iranian society that has caused grave concerns for the regime.

The second quote foregrounds the importance of 'immunity', to prevent 'deviation':

> […] Islam blocks the path that takes woman to this point of deviation. It has not allowed it to happen by introducing hijab. Islamic hijab is a means of woman's immunity not a means of woman's limitation. Today, the flag of independent cultural identity is in the hands of Iranian women. Iranian ladies today are announcing their independent identity and cultural independence by wearing hijab and they export it to the world. it means that the world is hearing a new word. Woman can be active in public arenas; she can have a deep social influence.

Here, the meaning of nudity and hijab is developed when contrasted by wearing the hijab which defined as the foundation of moral values and 'the' means of sovereignty. Nudity which at this point of the text is to be associated with the West comes to be Western sin, trying to allure women to corrupt themselves. So, wearing the hijab, paradoxically, comes to mean its exact opposite means of political and cultural autonomy. The compulsory headwear is defined the founding moral value of the Islamic Republic, granting women's immunity from deviation to alien cultural values that, by implication then, should deprive them from their alleged freedom. Furthermore, this one-sided focus on women implicates only them to be susceptible to moral corruption while men are left invisible, allowing them to act as sinners who are not only punished or reprimanded but whose conduct, including their dress-code, is not seen of relevance at this moment for public disciplining and moralizing.

Most importantly, the hijab is considered highly important as an identity code for Iranian women that distinguishes them not only from Western women but from other Muslim women as well. For the Islamic Republic, the hijab has become one of the solid pillars of "Islamic revival" in Iran which aimed at retrieving Islam as a political power, women's headwear functions as a site for. An interpretive and innovative reading of Islam in which the Iranian social order was reconstructed. (Shirazi-Mahajan, 1993, p.59). Bringing the hijab back to the Iranian society after the Pahlavi regime, particularly in contrast with the early

Pahlavi era (1925-41),[36] in which women were forced to unveil, can be seen as a major symbolic element of the Islamic revival in Iran. In other words, as opposed to unveiling as a symbol of Western liberation and part of Reza Shah's modernization program (Mahdi, 2004, p.430), the Islamic Republic's new model of hijab offers a (paradoxically) modernized image of Muslim woman. Thus, the unique figure of Iranian Muslim woman is formed through her active presence in public arenas as well as in private spaces as mother and wife (Bayat, 2007, p. 162).

The public and private distinction plays a crucial role in what the Islamic Republic wishes to introduce as the 'progressive hijabi woman' to the world. To put it differently, women are assumed to be the pioneers of progressive hijab in the world as a marker of collective sovereignty. The quote draws on this legacy and puts a great deal of emphasis on the independent cultural identity of the Iranian woman, indirectly singling her out as a role model other Muslim women in the world. I cannot help but say, as if a compensation for the loss of the possibility of choosing to wear the hijab or not, without being forced to think of herself as a morally corrupt failure.

The third quote concerns with women's lack of moral compass which in the speakers makes them susceptible to 'frailty' and 'deception':

> I tell you, one major part of the enemy's soft war and mental war in our country regard to this matter.
>
> Look! Enemies of the Islamic revolution are constantly involved in conspiracies, and this is our honor that for forty years, Islamic Iran has been constantly the target of conspiracies, a lot of money is being spent, billions…I want to talk about the issue of hijab. They spend a lot of money, they do a lot, they employ hundreds of media outlets of all kinds to be able to influence this sensitive point, the independent cultural identity of Muslim woman. They really kill themselves outside the country, our enemies, through different ways. A lot of money is spent to run these televisions, radios and social media and internet websites, and they constantly advertise, they say, hundred times to do what the result is that finally four girls are deceived and take off their hijab in the street. A few people...a lot of money, a great deal of effort and thoughts are behind this. They are trying. It is futile, their effort is futile. Its result is that four girls somewhere are deceived or find different motivations, some of them may even receive money …I do not know …I cannot say it for sure …they take off their scarves to say we are (It is said sarcastically to point out that these girls wanted to show off as modern

[36] In the course of the twenty years that Reza Shah was in power, a number of policies were promoted by his regime that had a deep effect on the everyday lives of Iranians particularly Iranian women suffered from the forced unveiling (*Kashf- e- hejab*) in 1936. Veiled women were frequently assaulted in public by the police and their *Chador* or scarf was torn off forcefully. For women from the lower class who were told that taking off their hijab is the worst sin, being forced to unveil was traumatizing (Chehabi-1993).

> women) …all that effort is summed up in this small, ridiculous result. Well, there is no problem to this point, what makes me sensitive is that suddenly you see that the issue of compulsory hijab is addressed by some elites (*khavas*), pay attention please! This means that some people, okay I would say unknowingly, I hope it happens unknowingly, follow the same path as the one that the enemy has not been able to pursue in the country with all those costs. They follow the same path, among them there are journalists, pseudo-intellectuals, clergies…they say Imam Khomeini said women should wear hijab did not mean all the women. This is nonsense! We were there at the time, we know that! How could it be like this? Imam stood firmly against an evident unlawful act(*monkar*) that was implemented by Pahlavi and its followings. He said hijab must exist.

This part of the speech brings the political and ideological aspects of the ongoing GES protest into the focus and the protesting Iranian women's resistance against compulsory hijab is considered as part of the West's long-term conspiracy plan to weaken the Islamic Republic's values. Thus, the GES protest is situated within the imperialist project of the West and representing the West's contemptuous attempt to deceive Muslim women in the name of gender equality. The GES protestors are either disparaged as a few girls (and not 'young women') who are deceived by the enemy's media or considered as political pawns used by the West. In both accusations, these girls are not active agents who performed the act consciously, rather they are viewed as passive, immature and frail beings who are not able to voice their own demands. Through belittling the GES actors as being fooled by the harmful Western powers, these women's voices are discredited and the potential threat of a collective women's protests compulsory hijab in the future is withdrawn.

More importantly, the supreme leader's sensitivity to those elites (*khavas*) who question compulsory hijab by referring to Khomeini's ideas and demands in the early years of his regime can be read as the voice of the current struggle for the Islamic Republic that is silencing the oppositional voices from within. These critical voices are accused of the allegedly worst possible act: falling for the West and follow its path to harm the Islamic regime. Thus, the Iranian regime uses the anti-imperialist rhetoric and appeals to the anti-imperialist sentiments[37] in the country to blame and supress the women's quest for equal rights, including or rather symbolized by the freedom of hijab as an "exogenous idea" (Tohidi, 2016, p. 77).

The closing part of the speech illustrates the significance of the public sphere for the Islamic Republic as a "training" space:

[37] According to Tohidi (2016), anti-imperialist feelings among some pro-democracy groups are rooted in British and Russian Empires' strong influence in 19th and 20th century Iran. The key role of British and CIA in the 1953 coup against Mossadegh and the nationalization of oil industry is one of the examples of the events that caused anti-imperialist sentiments among Iranians (p.77).

> We have not said if somebody in her place takes off her hijab, we follow her. No, we do not follow her. It is her own place, and it is her private thing. The act that is done in public, in the street, is a public act, it is social act. It is a public training. This brings responsibility for a government that came to power in the name of Islam. A religiously prohibited act (*haram*) must not be done openly in public in the country.

GES's protest is said to be threatening the regime because it openly addressed compulsory hijab in the public space of the street. Considering the different types of hijabs among GES protestors such as *rusari* or *chador*, each with their own particular social meanings, the protest provided opportunities for women from different class, religious and cultural backgrounds to participate. In this respect, the participation of *chadori* women in the protest is of particular relevance. The Chador, hence religious women wearing them, symbolized most powerfully the importance of freedom of choice, an act that could potentially resulted in attracting more women and men to join the protest.

Text Two

The second text is part of a well-known Iranian conservative politician, Ali Motahari[38]'s short answer when he is asked about Girls of Enqelab Street, on February 25th, 2018, published in Khabarobline on the same day. Ali Motahari who is known as a conservative reformist is the son of Morteza Motahari a famous politician, Islamic thinker and writer who was assassinated in 1979. Morteza Motahari is well-known for his books and speeches about different Islamic topics and concepts which deepened the foundation of Islamic Ideology of the regime. More importantly, his book, *The Question of Hijab* (*Mas'le-ye hejab*) which was published in 1968, is believed to have a great influence on the Islamic Republic's ideologies and views regarding hijab.[39]

> These issues should not be broadcast in media a lot because we do not have any problem as hijab. Our women will not cooperate with this group. Thus, this issue is not important and in my point of view media should not address it. One of the tools that these groups use to achieve their goal is that the issue of improper hijab (*bad-hijabi*) should be constantly addressed in the media to say that this is a big issue in the society.

[38] Ali Motahari represents Tehran, Rey, Shemiranat and Eslamshahr electoral district in the Parliament of Iran since 2008. He was Second Deputy of the Parliament of Iran from 2016 until 2019.

[39] Morteza Motahari tried to make a link between religious intellectuals and university. Because of the ideological differences, he was banned from teaching, and he retired in 1976. Many of his ideas including his views on hijab were harshly criticized by clergies of the time. https://www.iranchamber.com/personalities/mmotahari/morteza_motahari.php

> …Our ladies have chosen hijab themselves, today there is no serious obligation in regards with hijab in the society. Today, ladies appear, comfortably and as they want and there is no strictness about compulsory hijab. Of course, a lot of ladies do not wear hijab appropriately. Hijab cannot be obligatory with force. Those who cultivate improper hijab are after promoting nudity in the society.[40]

Similar to the supreme leader, Motahari views the media (satellite channels) as the main source of the contestations of compulsory hijab. He asserts that the media inside the country should not cover the topics that are of interest to the oppositional media outside the country as reporting on the events is part of '*these groups'* plan to represent hijab as if a big problem in the Iranian society. In a manner not dissimilar to the supreme leader, Motahari sees GES protest as the imaginary enemy's plan which is implemented by the media. The group GES is called disparagingly as "*this group*", which mobilizes the propositional and value assumption that GES is an identifiable group of women supported by an imaginary enemy (Ahmadypour, Hafeznia & Juneidi, 2010). Here, GES is demonized through the we / they binary by which the imaginary enemy is separated from the loyal Iranian citizens. The alleged 'appraisal' of 'our women' in fact is implicated as an act of ownership and sounds more like a threat: "*Our women will not cooperate with this group*". Similar to the supreme leader's speech, GES is anonymized and at the same time, stereotyped as a "*group*" not only to intensify the sense of alterity but to belittle their act as well as their voice, signalling to the non-participating women that they should not consider joining but look at them in horror

More importantly, the existence of compulsory hijab is denied because for Motahari improper hijab (*bad hijabi*) is not even considered as hijab. Thus, Iranian women's everyday resistance to compulsory hijab and the state's increasingly coercive measures[41] over hijab is totally denied. Finally, like the supreme leader, Motahari uses nudity as a Western feature to situate the GES protest in the subversive discourse.

Text Three

The third text is a short comment on GES protests and compulsory hijab, made by Elaheh Koulaei, one of the 513 women candidates for election to the Iranian parliament. She

[40] See, https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/758238/%D9%85%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%81%D9%82%D8%A7%D9%86

[41] Women are usually stopped, assaulted, and threatened in the streets by the morality police (*gasht-e ershad*) because of improper hijab or make-up. Many young women use their smart phones to record their confrontations with the morality police or vigilant Islamists (Amer-e-be-Maroof). https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/03/iran-pro-government-vigilantes-attack-women-for-standing-up-against-forced-hijab-laws/
https://www.rferl.org/a/videos-shed-light-on-violent-assaults-on-iranian-women-over-dress-code/29816609.html

is a political scientist and a reformist intellectual. Koulaei was a member of the Islamic Iran Participation Front (*Jebhe-ye Mosharekat-e Iran-e Eslami*) and a member of the sixth parliament of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

> It is not possible to promote Islamic values with jailing and lashing. The Omid Fraction[42] will examine the law of compulsory hijab by inviting experts from universities and seminaries (*hozeh*) and then it makes the required reforms. The parliament should take an action to reform the law of obligatory hijab. Introducing these reforms at the right time is undoubtedly common sense. Compulsory hijab for Muslim women which is the matter of serious controversies is not our topic of discussion. What is obligatory is to respect women's free choice. Women themselves will respect their local values.[43]

This short but powerful excerpt exemplifies a critical voice within the presumably homogenous political discourse of the Islamic Republic. Nevertheless, sharing with the other two, unconditionally pro-regime texts, this one also takes what is described as Islamic values for granted and as the acceptable common ground for all Iranians. As it was mentioned before, this results in homogenizing the Iranian society as if a homogenous community of believers but in fact of the specific reading of Islam that the author subscribes to. At the same time, such an assertion ignores the fact that these values problematically coexist with Iranians' ethnic and traditional values.

However, it is still important to point out that Koulaei has felt the necessity for a reformist act regarding the law of compulsory hijab, which demonstrates the significance of hijab on the political agenda of the Reformist Movement. The state's harsh response to the GES actors is considered useless and respecting women's free choice is instead demanded. Needless to mention that the rhetoric of freedom of choice regarding hijab represented by some reformists is fallacious in a regime like the Islamic Republic where the religious doctrine has been consolidated by an authoritative, centralizing, and powerful state that has targeted women as a marker of its identity (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010).Moreover, the local values that Koulaie claims to be in the hands of Iranian women themselves, cannot be Isolated from the strong influence of the state's forty- year-old religious principles and policies.

[42] Omid fraction was a fraction affiliated to the Reformist movement and it was one the fractions in the tenth parliament of Islamic Republic of Iran which was founded in May 2016. Mohammad Reza Aref was the head of Omid fraction.

[43] See https://www.khabaronline.ir/news/758238/

Conclusion

As it was clear from the analysis of first two texts on behalf of the regime, GES is defined through their association with concepts like, deviation, nudity, immunity, and frailty. Through the association with these concepts that come to mean the Western enemy of the Islamic Republic, the GES protest is situated within an anti- imperialist discourse. Through making these clearly discursive links, the GES women are belittled as docile, morally frail beings who are either deceived or hired by the Western media– hence anything but autonomous beings, which they would claim to be. In addition, in Motahari's speech, GES actors are deindividualized and demonized as disloyal, brainless laborers. In this regard, there is a concentrated effort to discredit feminist activists as alien forces outside the country who contrary to their alleged agenda, have been fighting against the allegedly 'content because dutiful Iranian women' when inviting them to go 'nude' in public and protest the compulsory hijab. More importantly, there are critical voices within the regime like that of representative of the reformists politicians that question the obligatoriness of hijab in the name of defending women's freedom of choice. These voices, however, have been silenced and repressed by the same logic of depreciating the Islamic values of the country.

Chapter 5
The GES Women Actors on the Ground

This chapter deals with the way in which three actors of the GES protest describe their motivations and feelings that led them to participate in the protest. Through the close reading of their published interviews where they have explained what motivated them to be involved in the protest, I wish to bring into light the importance of diversity of intent and motivation among the protestors in how we comprehend GES's collective identity. More importantly, based on what was discussed in the previous chapters, this chapter demonstrates how GES is represented by its own actors. I am simply attentive to cast light on the important role of the GES actors' motivations and their understanding of their act and its end in forming the protest. Finally, I would like to focus on the relationship between these different motivations and the ways in which the protest has been represented by media and the activist Alinejad for their own political purposes.

Shaparak Shajarizadeh

> Obviously, you are not advocating regime change and some are saying that you are being used or allowing yourself to be used by those especially in the US. pushing for regime change, are you being used you think?
>
> She replies with a smile*:*
>
> I have not been in touch with anyone from US. and this is the mindset of people that think women do not have a voice. This is me! I was always believing in change and wanted change in my country with other Iranians, but I did not have the chance. Now I have the chance and you see this the human rights situation; the violation of human rights is getting worse and worse in my country. What am I supposed to do? Do nothing? Now I have a platform as a human rights activist, and I am going to use that to just tell the world that these are happening in Iran and open your eyes to the violation of human rights in Iran and support the Iranian people and not the government.

This excerpt that has been taken from the interview carried out by France 24[44] on February 27th, 2020[45], regarding Shajarizadeh' s book co-written Rima Elkouri[46] called *Freedom Is not A Crime* published[47] in 2020 can exemplify how the discourse of human rights and the discourse of regime change have become inexorably intertwined with compulsory hijab protests in Iran. Since 2014 when Masih Alinejad's Facebook campaign *My Stealthy Freedom*[48] started, the discourse of compulsory hijab in Iran has been strongly influenced by Iran - US geopolitical relations. The campaign which was supposed to simply voice all Iranian women's stories of struggling with compulsory hijab became a controversial site of the imperialist plot to harm the Islamic Republic's values. As Tafakori puts it "association with My Stealthy Freedom is repeatedly utilized to render suspect any form of activism around the hijab" (2021, p.48). Mobilizing the West's support which has mainly done through economic sanctions has been the agenda of some Iranian activists including Alinejad.[49] Although, the sanctions have been imposed from the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, the discourse of the West's support of human rights and the rhetoric of preventing Iran from achieving nuclear power by enforcing sanctions particularly came to the focus in 2012.[50] Needless to mention that economic sanctions have perpetuated the state's patriarchal order since the beginning of the revolution.

As it was mentioned earlier, the Iran-US geopolitical relations have always influenced the discourse of human rights and particularly women's rights in Iran. Trump's

[44] France 24 is an international news channel which is broadcast 24/7 in French, Arabic, English and Spanish. "France 24 gives a French perspective on global affairs through a network of 160 correspondent bureaus located in nearly every country". https://www.france24.com/en/about-us

[45] The interview was in English, and it is accessible here: https://www.france24.com/en/middle-east/20200227-interview-shaparak-shajarizadeh-in-iran-there-are-no-differences-between-fundamentalists-and-reformists

[46] Rima Elkouri is a well-known Canadian journalist and author of the book "Manam" and Pas envie d'être arabe : Chroniques et reportages 2000-2014"in French.

[47] In this book, Shajarizadeh "shares the inner conflict she experiences between the defence of her ideals and the danger to which she has exposed those closest to her. She helps us understand how ordinary the path to activism can be, as well as the personal costs that come with it". https://www.frenchrights.com/freedom-is-not-a-crime

[48] By 2016, My Stealthy Freedom campaign achieved 1 million followers. Alinejad's followers in Instagram increased from 3.8 million in August 2020 to 6.7 million by May 2022.

[49] See https://twitter.com/alinejadmasih/status/1233513498069610501
https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2021-12-02/u-s-senators-seek-sanctions-on-iran-over-alleged-plot-to-kidnap-journalist

[50] "In July 2012, the Obama Administration took two actions to further isolate and penalize Iran for its refusal to live up to its international obligations regarding its nuclear program, and to hold accountable financial institutions that knowingly provide financial services to Iranian banks that are under U.S. sanctions for their connection to illicit activities. These steps are part of President Obama's commitment to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons by raising the cost of Iran's defiance of the international community." https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/07/31/fact-sheet-sanctions-related-iran

administration officials paid assiduous attention to the GES protest using the opportunity to call for regime change in Iran. His tweet on December 2017 clearly not only shows the significance of the GES protest and the nationwide unrests that followed it for the Republicans' political agenda, but it brings into light Trump's conditional allegiances with Iranians[51] that utilizes the discourse of universal human rights against the Islamic Republic. He tweeted in Persian and English:

> Many reports of peaceful protests by Iranian citizens fed up with the regime's corruption and its squandering of the nation's wealth to fund terrorism abroad. Iranian government should respect their people's rights including right to express themselves. The world is watching!

The influence of Iran and the US's geopolitical relations and the US's use of the discourse of human rights, particularly Iranian women's rights for pushing the regime change in Iran (Moaveni, 2018) manifests itself in Mike Pompeo[52]'s speech about "Human Rights and the Iranian Regime," at the Department of State on December 19, 2019.[53] Pompeo talked about the Iranian women who protested compulsory hijab peacefully[54] to point out the Iranian regime's desperate attempts to control Iranians' voices. In another speech in the Heritage Foundation in October 2019 Pompeo says:

> As seen from the hijab protests, the brutal men of the regime seem to be particularly terrified by Iranian women who are demanding their rights. As human beings with inherent dignity and inalienable rights, the women of Iran deserve the same freedoms that the men of Iran possess.[55]

Moreover, in his twitter account, he posted a photo of Movahed's protest on the 26th of November 2019 and wrote:

[51] Trump libelled Iranians during his presidency; calling Iranians a terrorist nation while during the unrests in 2017, he used the chance to call Iranians brave to stand against the Islamic regime. See https://www.chinadailyhk.com/articles/119/229/23/1507889501190.html
This is in sharp contrast to his tweet on January 11th, 2020, Trump's tweeted in Persian "To brave and suffering Iranian people: I have stood with you since the beginning of my presidency and my government will continue to stand with you. We are following your protest closely. Your courage is inspiring". https://www.ccn.com/donald-trump-tweets-in-persian-to-pump-up-iranian-protests/

[52] Mike Pompeo was the director of the Central Intelligence Agency in 2017 - 2018 and the 70th United States secretary of state from 2018 to 2021.

[53] The full speech can be accessible here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtclpjNaAQI

[54] Yasaman Ariyani was arrested in April 2019 after peacefully protested obligatory hijab in Metro in Tehran train station on March 8th, giving flowers to veiled women. She had protested compulsory hijab in different streets in Tehran walking unveiled. Later, her mother, Monireh Arabshahi was also arrested as she supported her daughter in her protests. Ariyani had sent videos and photos of her protest for Alinejad's White Wednesday Campaign. https://www.iranhumanrights.org/2019/04/tehran-metro-anti-compulsory-hijab-protester-mother-arrested/

[55] https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mikepompeoiransanctionsheritagefoundation.htm

> Today and every day, we stand in solidarity with the women of Iran, who face the wrath of a regime that has institutionalized and condoned violence against those who demand equality whether for the way they wish to dress or for their desire to pray & worship freely.[56]

As it can be seen in the examples, the discourse of human rights and in its centre, Iranian women's rights is instrumentalized to isolate the Islamic Republic through the economic sanctions. In line with the American political agendas, Alinejad has been promoting the discourse of sanctions and the regime change based on the regime's violation of women's rights. In an interview she points out the Iranians' widespread demonstrations in November 2019 and states:

> people are fed up with the regime, so they came out in the street more than 100 cities across Iran last November. So, people want change, they want an end for the Islamic Republic.[57]

In this respect and as it was explained in the previous chapter, women's activists and social actors who have faced the accusation of being hired by the West and the Western media from the Islamic Republic have been under the pressure of distancing themselves from the diasporan activists and particularly from the American-based activists like Alinejad to be able to continue fighting the patriarchal regime of the Islamic Republic. As Tohidi points out women activists inside the country "have been carefully navigating between identity politics, a cultural pressure for "authenticity" and the quest for national independence on the one hand and aspiration for individual rights and universal values such as equality, human rights, freedom of choice and democracy on the other hand" (Tohidi, 2016, p.78).

Shajarizadeh was one the girls of Enqelab Street who was arrested on 21st of February 2018 in Gheytarieh street in Tehran where she tied her white scarf to a stick and waved it. She was involved in White Wednesday[58] campaign before being arrested regarding GES protest. At the time of her arrest Shajarizadeh received legal support from the prominent Iranian human rights lawyer, Nasrin Sotoudeh[59] who legally represented her and other young girls of Enqelab Street including Vida Movahed. She was sentenced to two years in prison

[56] https://twitter.com/secpompeo/status/1199105823013818368?lang=en

[57] https://www.defiance.news/def041-masih-alinejad

[58] White Wednesday is a social media campaign founded by Masih Alinejad that encourages men and women to post images on social media of themselves with white or no headscarf to protest compulsory hijab in Iran. https://www.mystealthyfreedom.org/topics/news/white-wednesdays/ https://www.facebook.com/whiteswednesdays/

[59] Nasrin Sotoudeh has dedicated her life and career to defend women's rights activists and opposition activists. She has been imprisoned many times and she has been charged with "acting against national security" and "propaganda against the regime" for which she was sentenced to 11 years in prison and prohibition on practising law and leaving the country for 20 years.

and an eighteen-year suspended prison term in 2018. Shajarizadeh escaped from Iran while being released on bail and now, she is living in Toronto with her family. She has stated to be beaten up and sent to solitary confinement during her arrest.

After her scape from the country, Shajarizadeh has been supported by the New-York based Iranian Journalist, Masih Alinejad. Shajarizadeh received international prestigious women's award in Geneva, Switzerland in February 2020 for her endeavours in defending women's rights in Iran. she spoke out for women's rights and compulsory hijab in Canadian Senate in 2018, supporting the call led by former Canadian justice minister Irwin Cotler, the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights and members of an all-party parliamentary caucus for Canadian Magnitsky sanctions against Iranian human rights abusers. Shajarizadeh was named in the BBC's list of 100 inspiring and influential women from around the world in 2018. She is a senior fellow at the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights.

The controversies around Shajarizadeh's activism started when she appeared in an Instagram Live, scared, and sad, talking about her 20- year prison sentence. She sadly cried while rumours spread that in fact, she had left the country a month earlier. Shjarizadeh has been strongly supported by Masih Alinejad. Their friendship is believed to start long before Shajarizadeh's involvement in GES[60] as she had protested compulsory hijab through Alinejad's campaign White Wednesdays. Moreover, Shajarizadeh mentions Alinejad's effort and dedicated her act to Alinejad while performing as one of the GES protestors.[61]

Girls of Enqelab Street has been closely associated with Alinejad's campaign White Wednesdays. Although Movahed, the initiator of the protest and other actors who could leave the country have not linked GES with Alinejad's campaigns, Shajarizadeh has repeatedly connected GES to Alinejad and her online anti-compulsory hijab campaigns in her interviews. The association of GES and White Wednesdays became stronger as the protest was fully covered by Alinejad not only in her Facebook and Instagram pages but also in her show called Tablet broadcast by VOA Persian.[62] Thus, the important role of Alinejad's appropriation of the GES protest and her support for Shajarizadeh in reinforcing the discourse of regime change in Iran should be taken into careful consideration. Moreover, it

[60] https://twitter.com/nfatourehchi/status/1016666573220835329?lang=en

[61] https://www.facebook.com/whiteswednesdays

[62] Tablet is a TV show hosting by Masih Alinejad which covers the most important events and demonstrations and campaigns in Iran.
https://www.youtube.com/c/TabletShow/about
https://ir.voanews.com/z/4531

is important to note that Shajarizadeh's activism has been provoking the highly- charged accusations of women's rights activists particularly the GES actors of being used by Western imperialist regimes.

In this respect, GES has been monopolized by one actor (Shajarizadeh) and her narrative of the protest's aims and perspectives is being centralized as the main account based on which the protest is being defined and situated within specific political discourses. Given these points, there is a clear link between the representation of compulsory hijab as the frontline issue of the human rights' violation in Iran by the American officials of the time supporting Alinejad's campaigns and reinforcing discourses of severe economic sanctions and regime change.

FIGURE 4 SHAPARAK SHAJARIZADEH

Azam Jangravi

> A peddler was selling books next to the electrical platform… I walked around the platform several times because I was still scared. I thought about Viana and what she would do if I got arrested. I told myself again that Viana should not grow up in a country like this, and that gave me strength. I climbed on the platform and held aloft a white headscarf. I didn't say a word. I felt like I was the most powerful woman in Iran, silently shouting for her rights.[63]

Azam Jangravi was arrested on February 15th 2018 and sentenced to three years in prison. She was working in a woman's institute when she decided to do the same act as Movahed. She was politically active working in Association of Reformist Women (*majma-e- zanan-e- eslahtalab*) which was officially established in 2017. It was formed by a group

[63] https://opencanada.org/i-felt-like-i-was-the-most-powerful-woman-in-iran/

of women from the Reform party who aimed at demanding women's share of power as women were less politically active after Khatami's presidential period.[64]

Through a phone conversation with me, Azam Jangravi refused to talk about Shajarizadeh and her feelings and thoughts about her and she preferred to talk about her life, her motivations, and the emotional background of her action:

> What made me choose this path was the process of my divorce and my traditional family, my traditional and religious mother. And, as I was a girl who was raised in a traditional and ordinary family, I mean I was not raised in an educated and intellectual family; so, all of us, me and my brothers did everything ourselves to grow in every level.
>
> I was a spoiled girl, and I was emotionally dependent on my dad. Even at the time of my marriage unlike now, I was a very dependent woman and I use to think that it should be like this. You know…but gradually, that happy girl who use do sports, a girl who always liked to laugh loudly, became a weak woman who was abused and go through domestic violence. It was extreme, he would lock the door and I was not even allowed to go shopping alone. All of these made my nature…. when I look at my family carefully, they are brave people, and they take risks. Gradually I take this power from my daughter. So, this is a general biography of Azam Jangravi, it means a person who was raised in a traditional and religious family with a mother with thoughts that belonged to 50 years ago and with a father who thought when I did that act as a girl of Enqelab Street, I destroyed his reputation and the family's reputation. Imagine my father found it out after three months! When I talked to my father, when he understood it…it was like a victory for me. He once had stood against some of our relatives, and he had said 'I am proud of my daughter!'…you know. In my opinion, you should change your society around you first and then you can be an activist in the society. and well I could change my family's beliefs to some degree.
>
> Later, because of these things, I enter the politics and gradually I started being active in Kargozaran and then in Association of Reformist Women. I was also working in the Centre for Women and Family Studies of the University of Tehran[65] for some years and Kahrizak Charity Foundation[66] was one of the reasons, actually, I started from there…socializing. All of this made me be where I am now. The Centre for Women and Family Studies had also a key role because I could see there more, the girls who were abused, women who were bread winners and no one supported them, for instance last time, the person who strongly affected me emotionally was an eleven or thirteen-year old girl who I met in the Social Emergency a place where children are kept, girls who escape (from their families)are kept, the girl had been raped by her grandfather three times …so , she had escaped from home. Her grandfather was her guardian but

[64] For more on this see https://www.irna.ir/news/83671402/%D9%85%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9

[65] https://cws.ut.ac.ir/

[66] Kahrizak is a charity foundation that was established by Dr. Mohammed Reza Hakimzade with the hope of helping people with disabilities and people with untreatable disease and elderly people in 1972 in Kahrizak in Ray County.

behzisti[67] did not accept her. Her case worker was talking to us in a meeting with Ebtekar[68] and her group (we went with them) in Social Emergency in Ray County. That girl affected me emotionally…*behzisti* (Iran's Social Welfare) could not accept her as she committed suicide, when her grandfather raped her, she cut herself. They said she had a mental problem, and we cannot accept her. This was the worst thing I had ever seen in my life. I cried for a week. The day I went to buy book for her, I think the girl's name was Mehrnoosh, I am not sure. I do not have a good memory. But I had promised her to teach her reading and writing. And even I wanted to do something that ...you know the Social Emergency does not keep women who escape or women who do not have any place to stay for more than three days, so, we talked to social workers, and we made them keep her for a week. I even talked to my father to rent a place for her though it was not legal …but it was far better than sending her back to the grandfather who had raped her…

You see, all of these were the reasons that made me reach to that point that day, that day I did not have any plan to go up on the platform to be honest… but I was following the news about Girls of Engqelab Street. I had also been thinking about what Vida Movahed had done, about her bravery. I wanted to do the same thing, but I was frightened. That morning, I felt a little less afraid.

Before protesting, Jangravi officially posted this in Instagram:

I, Azam Jangravi (Azi) started my political activity concentrating on women's rights. I am a member of the Association of Reformist Women and in the Kargozaran Party with the hope of bringing reforms (Eslahat)[69] but I am tired. One should act. Talking is enough. I do this for freedom, for ending the laws and regulations that are against us; women, and I accept all my act's consequences. My act is not related to any organization, political group or individual either inside or outside the country. I do this act for fighting compulsory hijab.[70]

Like Shajarizadeh, Jangravi was accused of being hired by Americans and Israelis. When she refused to confess that she was threatened to be deprived from the custody of her daughter which was hers at the time as she was divorced. The court affixed the verdict to her divorce file and her daughter's custody was taken away from her in the trial. Jangravi left the country when she was released on bail and went to Tureky. While she was in Turkey

[67] See https://www.behzisti.ir/

[68] Masoumeh Ebtekar was former Vice President of Iran for Women and Family Affairs from 2017 to 2021. She was the first female member in the cabinet of Iran. She was also the head of the Department of Environment from 1997-2005.
https://www.bionity.com/en/encyclopedia/Masoumeh_Ebtekar.html

[69] Kargozaran was a group of technocrats who challenged the conservative monopoly of the Militant Clergy Association and announced its support for Rafsanjani's policies, promising change and reform. It was famous as the right wing of the Reform Party. It was established in Ali Akbar Rafsanjani's presidency in 1995 (the fourth president of post-revolutionary Iran from 1989 to 1997). https://www.refworld.org/docid/3df4be498.html

[70] https://www.instagram.com/p/BfOApS-HkWM/

with her daughter Viana got accepted in engineering in York university. Jangravi and her daughter refuged to Canada, and they have been living there since then.[71]

Unlike Shajarizadeh, Jangravi has not linked her act as one of the GES protesters with Alinejad's campaigns. She has stated that her protest had nothing to do with Alinejad's campaign White Wednesdays. She has not been supported by Alinejad and she has refused to be named as the representative of the protest.

It is not a far stretch to argue that different priorities have shaped Jangravi and Shajarizadeh' s activisms. In Jangravi's conversation with me and in her published interviews, social and legal problems of women in Iran which strongly affected her own social and material life have derived her towards activism. For Shajarizadeh, human rights and freedom have been the incentives. These two are good examples of the variety of motivations and social and material realities of women who became involved in the GES protest. It not only shows that lumping varying motivations of the actors together in a specific political discourse of either subversive or reformist is problematically reductive but also it indicates the symbolic value of hijab for some of these actors. As it was mentioned in chapter three, GES actors were from different age, class, and religious background, therefore, their lived experience with compulsory hijab were widely diverse.

In this respect, the diverse social and material lives of women who were involved in the protest cannot be ignored and reduced to a specific political agenda. While both actors indicate that they have done it for freedom, for Shajarizadeh who had actively participated in Alinejad's popular campaigns before being involved in the GES protest, freedom is translates to liberal concept of human rights, and it results in the discourse of the regime change. In line with Alinejad's account of Iranian women's movements in need of being supported by the Americans in the name of freedom and human rights, Shajarizadeh has employed the liberal notions of freedom and human rights repeatedly in her interviews and speeches. Jangravi, on the other hand, had been tired of the Reformists' political mottos thus, she clearly distanced her act from both reformist and subversive discourses to accentuate the independency of her act.

[71] The full text is available here in Farsi https://www.radiofarda.com/a/azam-jangravi-on-judge-mansouri/30681532.html

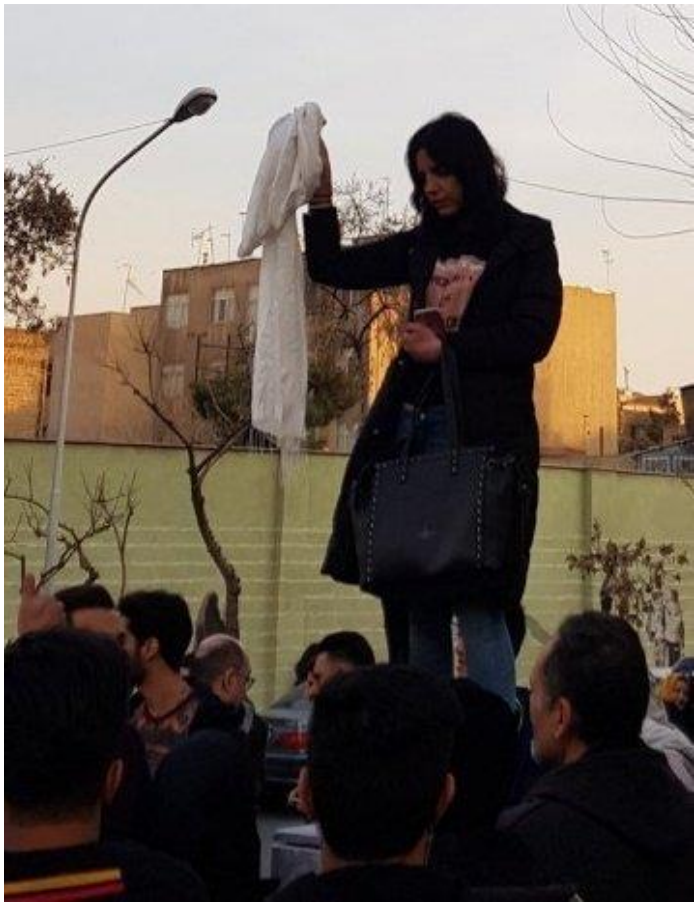

FIGURE 5 AZAM JANGRAVI

Narges Hosseini

> I emphasise that I did not have any connection with anyone. And my decision was an independent decision. It was just me. I only believed in my own action. It was neither accidental nor caused by becoming carried away because of being brain washed. I did not cause any disturbance or riot. I just showed that protesting compulsory hijab is my right and I demanded my right. Protesting is a citizen's right, and I exercised my right.[72]

Narges Hosseini was the second girl of Enqelab Street who was arrested on January 3oth and sentenced to two years in prison. She was 32 when she was arrested came from Kashan to Tehran to continue what Movahed started. Hosseini studied sociology, and at the time she was arrested she was about to start her master's studies. While she was in Gharchak prison, she became sensitive to the women prisoners' problems, and she wanted

[72] https://www.kampain.info/archive/17783.htm

to do something for them[73]. Hosseini is still living in Iran. This is an excerpt from an interview with Radio Farda after her temporary release on bail from Gharchak Prison with which was published on Marh 10th, 2018.[74]

> -*why did you come to Tehran without informing your family that you were planning to protest?*
>
> -I could not inform anyone because if I had told them, the first person to disagree with me would have been my father. When I was in Kashan, I thought about this a lot. Vida Movahed's act was wonderfully special to me. I told myself, it is a pity that this act dies down. I had a doctor appointment on Thursday before the protest and no one became suspicious why I was going to Tehran. When I was at my sister's place from Thursday to Monday, I was thinking about it all the time, if it was worth paying the price or not and to what extent I can bear it. what about my mother and my father? I was studying in a university where my father was a chef. all his colleagues knew me…what would my father feel at that moment when one of them shows him my photo? My father's feeling mattered to me a lot. So, I calculated everything and finally I concluded that this is a pity if this act does not continue. Even if it does not go anywhere, it will show that Vida was not alone. There is someone supporting her and if no one does anything it is because of its costs.
>
> -*What did you say in the trial to defend yourself?*
>
> My defence was that I do not accept this allegation as I have not committed any crime. I believe in Islam, but this hijab is based on a personal understanding and this personal understanding forces me to wear this hijab. I do not believe in this personal perception of hijab based on which I am present in this trial.
>
> -*How much do you believe in what you did? Even after the verdict, do you still believe in your action?*
>
> I have believed in my action from the beginning and now I believe in it even more. I believe that it was right, no matter what the verdict is. It does not matter. What I did, was a social responsibility, and it must have been done. If I had not done it, someone else would have done it. It was not a personal responsibility or something that I did based on my personal interest. No, it was not like that. I believe that it was a responsibility and I think doing your responsibility is the best thing and the right thing that everyone can do.

As it can be seen, Hosseini states that she believes in Islam. She seems to be religiously literate, when She talks confidently about her resistance against what she calls

[73] https://melliun.org/iran/157922

[74] https://www.radiofarda.com/a/narges-hosseini-interview-on-protest-against-mandatory-hijab/29090527.html

the personal understanding of the Islamic Republic of hijab. Like Jangravi, for Hosseini, her social responsibility is a great motivation to join Movahed's protest.

In another interview[75], Hosseini states that she is not sorry about what she did. She adds:

> I wanted to be completely differentiated with Ms. Alinejad, that is why I chose Monday and Mondays for me are still green Mondays. The Green Movement was a non-violent movement and the act of Vida Movahed for me was a non-violent act too. I tied a green ribbon to my hand to say that I am not dependent on anybody and if there is anything I am emotionally attached to is the Green Movement. I wanted to link these two acts in any cost. The non-violent Green Movement and this protest that was beautiful for me to continue. I did not want this act to be stopped. The judge told me many times that Vida Movahed was insane, it does not matter to me. This was a beautiful act, and I did not want it to die down.

Again, like Janravi, Hosseini is determined to keep a distance from Alinejad's campaigns. For her, the Green movement and its non-violence characteristic is highly influential. Hosseini does not want her act to be associated with the White Wednesdays' campaign. She added her own symbol (the green ribbon) and consequently her own meaning to the protest.

Considering Hoessini' s personal concerns about her father, her social status as a university student of sociology who lives in a small traditional city like Kashan, and finally her understanding of social responsibility, she exemplifies the complex nature of the GES protest. In other words, similar to Jangravi, multiple contesting factors shaped Hosseini's determination to join the protest.

Thus, the problematic representation of GES as a unified protest within a specific political discourse particularly by Masih Alinejad is reductive and it ignores and silence the diverse voices of women who participated in the protest

Indeed, in the context of the Islamic Republic where the utilization of women's body for the state's ideological purposes has a long history, one might ask why the popular campaigns like Alinejad's that have been strongly advertised and supported by the American government continue stressing compulsory hijab as the ultimate symbol of human rights' violation in Iran (familiar for the Western audience) while for instance, the recent Islamic Republic's population law (rejuvenation of the population and support of family bill) which prohibits sterilization and free distribution of contraceptives in the public health care

[75] See https://www.kampain.info/archive/17783.htm

system[76] has not been highlighted by these popular campaigns. Movements like the working-class movements or the recent teachers' movements and their women activists have not been equally supported or highlighted as the efforts to reach freedom by the Alinejad's popular campaigns. In this respect, Sepideh Gholian is a good example of this double standards. Sepideh is a 23-year-old labour rights activist and a freelance journalist who was arrested for covering the protests of Syndicate of Workers of Haft Tappeh Cane Sugar Company[77]. She started documenting Arab women's torture in her diaries on life in Ahvaz Intelligence Detention Centre and Sepidar Women's Prison that was published in July 2020[78]. Gholian has been one of the brave women activists who is fighting the patriarchal Islamic Republic in different ways. Although she was first arrested in relation to Haft Tappeh' s protest, later she dedicated herself to narrate the Arab women prisoners' struggles in Sepidar and Boushehr's prisons. Gholian and her resistance has not been extensively supported by Alinejad, the Western media or by the mainstream oppositional Iranian media. Given these points, I do not mean to discuss the problematic use of hijabi women as the symbol of unfree woman by Alinejad's campaigns that is based on popular Western feminist concepts like freedom (Hirschmann, 1997), rather, I am attentive to stress the importance of the politics of representation of GES and accordingly hijab in relation to the specific concepts and therefore, political discourses. Thus, the significant role of representing the diversity of independent voices of women activists in GES protest is crucial not only as it prevents the state's hard-liners and radical Islamists from accusing Iranian women's activism to "Zionist and American agenda toward a regime change through a velvet revolution" (Tohidi, 2016, p.79) but also it demonstrates that Iranian women activisms are organized around diverse concerns rather than ideological dispositions.

By examining on published interviews of three GES protestors on the ground; Shajarizadeh and Jangravi and Hosseini, I mainly intend to bring to light the very diverse feelings, motivations, and socio-political persuasions of these actors. as I showed, the importance of this diversity is highlighted when the protest is represented solely as an

[76] The bill, which was approved on November 1st ,2021, has been threatening millions of Iranian women's lives.
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/12/01/iran-doubles-down-abortion-contraception-restrictions/
https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/11/10/iran-population-law-violates-womens-rights

[77] A trade union established in 1974 for the workers of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industrial Complex.

[78] *Tilapia Sucks the Blood of Hur al-Azim* narrates sexual humiliation of Arab women, forced shaving in the corridors, rape and chemical lobotomies, racism and psychological manipulation in Sepidar Prison. See https://ahwazmonitor.info/articles/tilapia-sucks-the-blood-of-hur-al-azim/

offshoot of Alinejad's campaign against compulsory hijab White Wednesdays or My Stealthy Freedom. GES has a multifarious character that goes beyond specific political agendas and thus, it not only offers considerable potential for the Iranian activists who are dealing with increasing predicaments of the repressive regime of the Islamic Republic but also helps us to understand the multifaceted and complex nature of new forms of women's resistance in Iran. It brings into focus the importance of women's individual and material lives in repressive regimes like the Islamic Republic, their different emotional involvements, and their diverse ways of resistance against patriarchal state.

FIGURE 6 NARGES HOESSEINI

Conclusion

As I have illustrated, the Girls of Enqelab street (GES) possesses specific features which makes it almost unique among women's protests in post-revolutionary Iran. Yet, theoretically, the protest cannot be fully explained either by the Meluccian model of new social movement or by Asef Bayat's conceptualization of Iranian women's social movement, 'nonmovement'. One of the particular concerns of this research is to demonstrate the theoretical inadequacies of both models to grasp particular aspects of this protest, particularly the protest's collective identity formation. The process of collective identity construction in social movements has one of the focal concerns of social scientists from various standpoints (e.g., Melucci 1989, Castells 2004, Snow 2001, Van Stekelenburg, 2013). In this regard, I have aimed to show the significant role of the 'semi-virtual character' of GES in the collective identity that it produces.

Furthermore, the GES's semi-virtual nature and its unique ways of unintended mobilization makes it quite susceptible to be appropriated by different political discourses. Through the analysis of the protest's media representation in four chapters of this research, I have tried to show the very relationship between the collective identity that the protest could possibly construct and the ways in which GES has been represented in social media as well as in Persian media outlets outside and inside the country. The protest's media representation which demonstrates its appropriation by different social and political actors creates what I call 'multisided identity' of GES.

More importantly, the diverse and at times contesting voices of the protest's women actors complicates the generic and generalized notions of women's collective actions against the state's patriarchy in Iran. In the last chapter, examples of the GES women actors' diverse motivations, social interests and emotional involvements have been illustrated. I brought into focus the relation between women as individuals and the ways in which women constructed social solidarity in the GES protest. In this respect the question of what is at stake when Iranian women's social struggles in the Islamic Republic are reduced to "collective acts without actors"[79] or 'nonmovement' remains crucial in my analysis. This research wishes to contribute to the existing literature on the Iranian women's innovative forms of activism as

[79] Mahdi characterizes new Iranian women's movement as "collective action without actors" (2004, p 443).

well as the ways in which Iranian women establish social solidarity in their struggles against the patriarchal state.

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