ERASMUS UNIVERSITY ROTTERDAM

Erasmus School of History, Culture and
Communication

SILENT VOICES

An investigation into women's perceptions of their rights in twentieth century Iran

408783

Jeanne Bolloré

Supervisor: Dr. K. Willemse

Second reader: Prof. Dr. D. Douwes

Table of contents

Introduction

On the 27th August 2014, the United Nations issued its latest report on the human rights situation in the Islamic Republic of Iran – Iran, hereafter – depicting a situation which 'remains of concern', most predominantly in the very contemporary issue of women's rights, as 'some draft laws (…) further erode women's protection from forced marriage and rights to education, work and equal wages'.[1] Reported issues pertaining to women include violations of rights to fair trial, rise of domestic violence, recrudescence of child marriage, discrimination in regards to access to secondary education and reproductive health services, and high gender disparity in the labour force.[2] Drawing upon such reports, international media – and most predominantly, Western media – have regularly portrayed Iran as a backwards country, laden by its systematic human rights violations, repression of women's emancipation and high censorship resulting in unlawful imprisonments of journalists and activists.[3] In October of the same year, several acid attacks in Isfahan have brought to the forefront of the media the health and safety risks women incur in everyday life as a consequence of laws mandating the wear of proper *hijab*.[4] Iranian family law – handling family affairs such as divorce or children's custody – has been coined 'an extremely patriarchal interpretation of the sharia'[5]: the penal code and legal framework are deemed unfavourable to women, most particularly within the realms of family and labour law.

More recently, however, new and conflicting views of the country have spread across social media platforms. Among others, testimonies of young Iranians aim to convey images of 'the real Iran' – symptomatic of the gap between Western media reports and daily life experiences in the country. The Instagram and Facebook pages 'Rich kids of Tehran' and 'Meet the real Iran' have recently gained momentum and count thousands of followers. The former is described by its admins as follows: 'The image of Iran has been damaged and manipulated by the media for many years. What you will see here through this page are pictures mainly taken by ordinary Iranians, to help non-Iranians break stereotype about Iran.'[6] Similarly, the 'Rich kids of Tehran' Instagram account aims to show 'stuff they don't want you to see about Iran'.[7]

---

[1] United Nations, General Assembly, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: report of the Special Rapporteur*, A/69/356 (27 August 2014), available from undocs.org/A/69/356. p. 3

[2] *Ibid*

[3] Granick, J. (2005). Nixing the news: Iranian Internet censorship. *Harvard International Review*, *27*(2), 11.
Shahidi, H. (2007). *Journalism in Iran: From mission to profession*. Routledge.

[4] Shirali, M. (2014). *« Les Iraniennes sont attaquées au vitriol au nom de la charia »*. [online] Le Monde.fr. Available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2014/10/29/les-iraniennes-attaquees-au-vitriol-au-nom-de-la-charia_4514125_3218.html [Accessed 12 Jun. 2015].

[5] Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action. p.2

[6] https://www.facebook.com/pages/Meet-the-Real-Iran/457822884273989?fref=ts

[7] https://instagram.com/therichkidsoftehran/

Consequently, one may wonder how reliable UN reports and Western media are in portraying a true account of the human rights situation in Iran. Whilst much effort has been thus far dedicated to the investigation of Iran's macro-level compliance with international human rights standards, it appears that little research has been conducted in order to gain understanding into the ways citizens experience the situation. Accordingly, I here aim to fill this gap through the provision of an account of Iranian women's lived experiences and perceptions of their rights.

Iran provides a compelling case for said study by virtue of its singular historical and religious contexts. Over the course of the 20th Century, Iran has undergone unprecedented structural changes. Under the Pahlavi, from 1925 until 1979, the country was an absolute monarchy. Its two successive Shahs – Reza and Muhammad Reza Pahlavi – both instigated authoritarian governments, which advocated secularism and modernity. Following the 1979 popular revolution, Iran became an Islamic Republic. Western influence was stalled, and a theocratic constitution was established. Patriarchal *shari'a* laws were accordingly applied, prompting change in women's societal duties and rights. As an Islamic state, Iran today stands out as one of the chief opponents to the universality of the human rights paradigm – vividly debated within the international community. In fact, during the World Conference of human rights, held in Vienna in 1993, Muslim countries – i.e. Iran, the Sudan – were among the leading contesters of the relevance of human rights in non-Western contexts, using countries' rights to cultural specificity and self-determination as legitimate grounds for the human rights violations perpetrated in their respective countries.[8] The concept of human rights, and, more saliently to this thesis, that of women's human rights, is argued by some to be inherently incompatible with the values of Islam. Consequently, in this thesis, I address the need for the universality debate within the human rights scholarship to be relocated to the micro-level, rather than remaining an abstract, macro-level political tool and purely empirical debate.

In light of this, the present thesis will be led by the following research question:
How do Iranian women who experienced the 1979 Islamic Revolution, both those who stayed and those who migrated, perceive and rationalize changes in their rights in Iran following the installation of an Islamic Republic?

This thesis will subsequently be divided into three focal sub-questions, as follows:
1. What historical trajectory did the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights take to include women's rights?
2. What place did women's rights occupy in the political strategy of the successive Iranian governments prior and following the installation of the Islamic Republic in 1979?
3. What social, economic and legal changes have Iranian women experienced alongside the changing religious and political context following the 1979 Islamic revolution?

---

[8] Tibi, B. (1994). Islamic Law/Shari'a, Human Rights, Universal Morality and International Relations. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 277-299.

1. Conceptual framework

In order to engage with the aforementioned inquiries, I essentially rely on the use of three pivotal concepts – human rights and women's, gender, and discourse. Firstly, the notion of human rights is crucial to conducting this research by virtue of its salience within both history and international relations. Human rights are theoretically universal in nature; therefore its discourse occurrence in women's narratives will be investigated in this research. Second, gender constitutes a key point in this thesis – women's perceptions being the foci of research. Theorizing gender, particularly with relation to its different interpretations across cultures, will allow for a better understanding of women's narratives in the research. Finally, the concept of discourse and its relationship with identity will permit for an in-depth analysis of women's historical narratives, particularly in relation to women's rights and gender.

1.1. Human rights and women's rights

The concept of human rights is thought to be Western in origin, where it emanated from natural law principles.[9] Natural law was conceptualized by European thinkers of the 17th Century, such as Hobbes and Locke. It has been defined as 'a precept, or general rule, found out by reason, by which a man is forbidden to do that which is destructive of his life, or takes away the means of preserving the same; and to omit that by which he thinks it may best be preserved.'[10] This set of universal laws derives from nature – in the sense of the state of nature in which humans evolved prior to living in societies.[11] Therefore, these are inherently universal. Hobbes outlined a set of nineteen natural laws in his *Leviathan*, which promote – among others – concepts of human dignity, justice, and property.[12]

Today, we refer to human rights as the rights articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, issued in 1948. Human rights are defined by the United Nations as 'rights inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status'.[13] Kirchschlaeger attributes five constitutive attributes to the concept of human rights:

> *'Human rights are **categorical** (every human being has these rights, they cannot be denied to anyone), **egalitarian** (every human being has the same rights), **individual** (human rights apply to every human being as individual and protect the latter from violations by a collective recognizing at the same time the important role of a collective for the individual), **fundamental** (human rights protect basic and essential elements of human existence) and*

---

[9] Ignatieff, M., Appiah, A., & Gutmann, A. (2003). *Human rights as politics and idolatry*. Princeton University Press.
Morsink, J. (1999). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: origins, drafting, and intent*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
Teson, F. R. (1984). Internatioal Human Rights and Cultural Relativism. *Va. j. Int'l L.*, *25*, 869.

[10] Hobbes, T., & Curley, E. (1994). *Leviathan: with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668* (Vol. 8348). Hackett Publishing.

[11] Rousseau, J. J. (1896). *Du contrat social*. Alcan.

[12] Hobbes, T., & Curley, E. (1994). *Leviathan: with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668* (Vol. 8348).

[13] Ohchr.org, (2015). *What are Human Rights*. [online] Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx [Accessed 24 Aug. 2015].

> *indivisible* *(the whole catalogue of human rights must be respected, they are complimentary).'*[14]

The universality of the human rights paradigm however raises controversy among scholars. The debate being crucial to this research, it will be discussed in depth in the third chapter of this thesis.

Women's rights have not always been a component of human rights, and only became part of the international agenda in the 1990s. The introduction of women's rights in the human rights paradigm has caused a shift in the reach of international law, and conferred it with a wider realm of action – inside the home.[15] This introduction has however set forth some discrepancies. One of these concerns the grey area between the right to self-determination of nations – allowing individuals to freely choose and exercise their culture, religion, and elect their representative government[16] – and women's rights. In fact, the right to self-determination theoretically "allows" for discrimination against women, as long as these are warranted by one's culture or religion.[17] The international community often denounces Islamic countries for their violations of basic women's rights and non-fulfilment of gender equality. Specifically, Mayer identifies three principal areas in which governments use *shari'a* to justify human rights abuses: religious minority discrimination and the condemnation of apostasy, punished according to *hudud* stipulated sanctions, and the unequal treatment of women.[18] Iran, as an Islamic Republic, is one of them.

1.2. Gender

The World Health Organisation defines gender as 'the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men.'[19] Gender is typically defined in opposition with biological sex, although both are closely intertwined.[20] Gender is determined by a range of elements: (1) biological sex – male, female, intersex, (2) social structures – e.g. gender roles, and (3) gender identity. Consequently, one's gender may be opposed to one's sex. Sex, as a biologically determined attribute, cannot be changed throughout one's life, whilst gender may be variable.

Gender ought to be conceptualised not as a single factor determining one's identity, but as one of its constituting elements.[21] Accordingly, diversity among women may only be studied alongside

---

[14] Kirchschlaeger, P. (2011). Universality of Human Rights. The EWC Statement Series, 22.

[15] Coomaraswamy, R. (1997). Reinventing international law: Women's rights as human rights in the international community. *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*, *23*(3-4), 1249-1262.

[16] United Nations General Assembly, *The right of peoples and nations to self-determination*, A/RES/637 (16 December 1952), available from http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f0791c.html

[17] Coomaraswamy, R. (1997). Reinventing international law: Women's rights as human rights in the international community.

[18]Mayer, A. E. (1991). Islam and human rights: Tradition and politics. p. 95

[19] Who.int, (2015). WHO | Gender. [online] Available at: http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/ [Accessed 24 Aug. 2015].

[20] Udry, J. R. (1994). The nature of gender. *Demography*, *31*(4), 561-573. p. 561

[21] United Nations, (2015). Important concepts underlying gender mainstreaming. [online] Available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf [Accessed 21 Aug. 2015].

other constituting components. This notion of intersectionality refers to the idea that different building blocks of identity – for example, class, generation, religion, and national identity – need to be studied as interactive as 'the interplay of race, class, and gender, often (results) in multiple dimensions of disadvantage'.[22] In this thesis, I aim to understand which elements of identity influence women's notions of women's rights.

In this thesis, I focus on gender as performative.[23] According to this argument, advanced by Judith Butler, 'gendered behaviours [are] representations of gender'.[24] Moreover, 'in order to be recognizable to others and ourselves, our gender must be performed within particular cultural and historical boundaries'.[25] States and religion – and their ensuing discourses – therefore have a salient role in delineating and negotiating gendered identities.[26] American cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead first introduced the concept of 'temperament' with her comparative ethnographic study of 'primitive' societies. Her breakthrough research revealed the existence of gender roles in non-Western societies differing from those found in Western cultures.[27] Gender roles are socially learnt and 'institutionalised through education systems, political and economic systems, legislation, and culture and traditions'.[28]

Specifically pertaining to this research is the role of women within Islamic societies. Authors argue that the role of women in Islamic societies – and most particularly the privileges conferred to men, stem from verse 4.34 of the *Qur'an*, assigning men as women's guardians (*quwwamun*).[29] Accordingly, women in Islamic societies are primarily expected to fulfil their role as spouses and mothers. Men, on the other hand, are the head of the family. They are therefore anticipated to provide for, and protect their household.[30] This gender role stems from the classical bourgeois notion of a

---

[22] Macionis, J., & Gerber, L. (2011). Sociology. p. 310

[23] Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre journal*, 519-531. p. 519

[24] Shepherd, L. J. (2010). Sex or gender? Bodies in world politics and why gender matters. *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A feminist introduction to international relations*, 3-16. p. 8

[25] Thapar-Bjorkert, S., Shepherd, L. (2010). Religion. *Gender matters in global politics: a feminist introduction to international relations*. Routledge.

[26] *Ibid*, p. 269

[27] Mead, M. (1963). *Sex and temperament in three primitive societies* (Vol. 370). New York: Morrow.

[28] United Nations, (2015). Important concepts underlying gender mainstreaming. [online] Available at: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf [Accessed 21 Aug. 2015].

[29] Pickthall, M. M. (2015). *The meaning of the glorious Quran*. Leeway Infotech LLC.
Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.
Willemse, K. (2005). On globalization, gender and the nation-state: Muslim masculinity and the urban middle class family in Islamist Sudan. *David, T./van Driel, F.: The gender question in globalisation. Changing perspectives and practices. Williston: Ashgate*, *159*, 178.

[30] Fahmy, M. (2002). La condition de la femme dans l'Islam. Editions Allia.
İlkkaracan, P. (Ed.). (2000). *Women and sexuality in Muslim societies*. Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR)/Kadının İnsan Hakları Projesi (KİHP).
Karmi, G. (2005). Women, Islam and patriarchalism. *Women and Islam: Images and realities*, *1*, 165.

nuclear family, meaning the dichotomy between the man as a breadwinner and the woman as a mother and housewife.[31]

In Iran, women have experienced tremendous change in their gender roles over the course of the twentieth century. Prior to the revolution, the Pahlavi dynasty rule – from 1925 until 1979 – instigated a shift away from traditional gender roles for women. The Shah's will to modernize the country and follow Western standards has meant that veiling was discouraged, and women were invited to participate actively in the public sphere – traditionally restricted to them. Ensuing the revolution however, with the establishment of an Islamic Republic in the country, women's role in society was drastically altered: women were expected to observe traditional Islamic gender roles and were accordingly fended off the public sphere.[32]

1.3. Discourse and identity

Roger Fowler, in defining the ambiguous concept of discourse, asserted that:

> *'Discourse' is speech or writing seen from the point of view of the beliefs, values and categories which it embodies; these beliefs etc. constitute a way of looking at the world, an organization or representation of experience – 'ideology' in the neutral non-pejorative sense. Different modes of discourse encode different representations of experience; and the source of these representations is the communicative context within which the discourse is embedded.'[33]*

Accordingly, discourses – such as, with relation to this research, the women's rights discourse – ought to be understood within their particular settings. In this thesis, one particular type of discourse is of interest, that of orientalism and othering. Mills asserted that discourses are 'principally organised around practices of exclusion'.[34] In line with this argument is the concept of orientalism and othering. Orientalism was a term coined by Edward Said in 1978, that the author uses to describe any type of cultural bias held by the West over the Orient.[35] In this thesis, I base my topic on the fact that the West uses the condition of women in Iran and other Islamic nations in order to legitimise their interventions, in turn denigrate said nation-states and build a boundary between different cultural traditions. Therefore, Western media systematically uses this discourse to define Muslim women, as an entirely homogenous category.[36]

Discourse is intricately linked to identity. In this thesis, I study women's historical discourse. Therefore, their collective memory and resulting identity is investigated. Collective memory, also called social memory, was notably conceptualised by French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs. In his work La memoire collective, he describes the notion as memory that is common to groups of two or

---

[31] Abu-Lughod, L. (Ed.). (1998). *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton University Press.

[32] Paidar, P. (1997). *Women and the political process in twentieth-century Iran* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

[33] Cited in Mills, S. (1997). Discourse: The new critical idiom. *London and New York: Routledge*. p.5

[34] Mills, S. (1997). Discourse: The new critical idiom. p. 11

[35] Said, E. (1979). Orientalism. 1978. *New York: Vintage, 1994.*

[36] Moors, A. (1991). Women and the Orient: A note on difference. *Constntcting Knowledge: Authoiry and Citique in Social Science, ll4-l2Z. London: Sage.*

more people, and can be transmitted through generations.[37] Collective memory is focal in the study of historical culture – the investigation of how 'mnemonic communities' engage with, and relate to the past.[38] In Time Maps, Zerubavel explores and theorises this relationship. With a focus on narrative, he aims to identify patterns through which people communicate, and in turn associate with the past. Relevant to this thesis are two of his central concepts, namely plotlines and historical continuity.

Achieving historical continuity in a historical narrative consists in linking the past with the present in order to make them flow into one, continuous storyline. The author argues that maintaining bridges between past and present is an expression of nostalgia.[39] In some cases, the past can be clearly discerned from the present, in which case narratives are described as historically discontinuous. Historical events are used to create a break in the plotline. Said events, coined 'watershed', are collectively shared across members of one mnemonic community.[40] This concept of 'watershed' is intricately linked to identity:

> 'Temporal discontinuity is a form of mental discontinuity. The temporal breaks we envision
> between distinct periods help articulate mental discontinuities between supposedly distinct
> cultural, political and moral identities.'[41]

In this thesis I use the concept of collective memory, as theorised by Zerubavel, mainly as a methodological framework. Its technicalities and applicability for this thesis will be discussed further in this chapter.

2. Scientific relevance

This research offers scientific relevance in the field of history, as it is anchored in the tradition of historical sociology. The field was formed rather recently by American sociologist Charles Tilly (1929-2008), and aimed to reconcile theories and methods of history and social sciences. In establishing this field, Tilly identified four 'pursuits' that may be undertaken by researchers. These are 'social criticism, pattern identification, scope extension, and process analysis'.[42] In my thesis, I pursue the latter. The author delineates this enterprise as aiming to integrate various processes in analysis – specifically 'organisational settings, individual biographies, interpersonal networks, contested bodies of thought and connections among all of them'.[43] Therefore, through the analysis of said elements in this thesis, I aim to contribute to this newly formed field of interest with my research, using social sciences methods to study historical processes and collective memory.

Furthermore, this thesis falls within one of the most vivid present day debates in international relations, that of cultural hegemony. Western powers frequently denigrate non-western states on the

---

[37] Halbwachs, M. (1997). *La mémoire collective*. Albin Michel.
[38] *Ibid*
[39] Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. University of Chicago Press. P. 36
[40] Ibid, p. 82
[41] Ibid, p. 85
[42] Tilly, C. (1980). Historical sociology. *Current perspectives in social theory*, *1*, 55-59.
[43] *ibid*

basis of their alleged women's rights violations.[44] Said allegations have served as legitimation, for instance,

Human rights and are nowadays central to international relations, have helped build international law, and dictate – to some extent – state behaviour in the international arena.[45] Authors have appealed for more research to be done on populations' perceptions rather than states' mere compliance to the assumed universal standard of human rights.[46] Moreover, women's perceptions of their rights appears to be poorly documented, a startling fact in an international climate where the promotion of human rights is placed at the core of inter-state relations – although the sensitivity of the topic may help explain its research scarcity. It is of primary importance for international organisations aiming to enforce human rights across societies to understand the ways in which individuals experience these rights within varying different cultural, religious, and economic contexts. In my research, I aim to offer a further step to the achievement of this understanding.

3. Epistemology and methodology

In order to engage my research objectives, a qualitative, phenomenological approach was undertaken. The present thesis relies on responses obtained through a questionnaire, gathering the answers of twelve Iranian women. In the following section, I aim to provide the reader with an understanding of the methods and sources that were employed.

3.1. Primary sources

I sought after and selected Iranian women based on their age and country of residence. More specifically, I used 'homogenous sampling' – the selection of a small group of homogenous participants, allowing for this research to undertake a 'detailed investigation of social processes in a specified context'.[47] In light of this, the target population comprise two main groups of potential participants: women currently living in Iran, and women who migrated from Iran and now live in Western countries, allowing me to obtain potentially diverging views with relation to women's different socialisation. In order to guarantee that women are able to compare and contrast their rights situation between two historical contexts – i.e. pre-1979 and post-1979, my target age for women was around fifty years old. Two women were significantly younger than this target age, Farah and Donya. Upon analysis of their answers, I decided to include them in this study due to their different opinions. Their opinions on the comparison between pre-1979 and post-1979 Iran are based on what they have

---

[44] Abu-Lughod, L. (Ed.). (1998). *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*.

[45] Risse, T., & Sikkink, K. (1999). The socialization of international human rights norms into domestic practices: introduction. *Cambridge Studies in International Relations*, *66*, 1-38.
Reisman, W. M. (1990). Sovereignty and human rights in contemporary international law. *American Journal of International Law*, 866-876.

[46] Preis, A. B. S. (1996). Human rights as cultural practice: An anthropological critique. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *18*(2), 286-315. p 311

[47] *ibid*

been told. Women currently living in Iran being extremely difficult to reach to, their sample group only comprised four participants. The migrant group involved eight women, seven living in France and one the Netherlands. The threshold number of twelve participants was observed in order to avoid repetition, whilst still providing substantial and significant material for case study analysis. [48] A demographic description of the sample group can be accessed in Table 1, hereafter. All names have been changed to guarantee participants' anonymity.

TABLE 1. Sample group description

Participant	Age	Place of residence	Education	Occupation	Religious background	Year of departure from Iran
Azadeh	50	France	Bachelor's degree	School director	NA[49]	1984
Nazanin	51	France	PhD	Orthodontist	Islam	1981
Taraneh	54	France	PhD	Architect	NA	1978
Nasrin	50	France	PhD	Medical doctor	Islam	1983
Farah	36	France	Bachelor's degree	Front office manager	NA	2004
Jaleh	53	France	Master's degree	Engineer	Islam	1979
Maryam	45	France	Master's degree	School director	NA	1975
Shirin	63	Netherlands	High school diploma	Store employee	Islam	1986
Goli	54	Tehran	Bachelor's degree	Housewife	Islam	-
Donya	32	Tehran	Bachelor's degree	Laboratory employee	Islam	-
Arezu	55	Tehran	Bachelor's degree	Teacher	Islam	-
Laleh	50	Tehran	Bachelor's degree	Housewife	Islam	-

As depicted in the table above, participants are highly educated, and the women living in Iran belong to the urban elite. This here has to be taken into consideration, as it reduces the generalizability of the research. It does not however reduce its validity, this research being representative of one particular Iranian social group.

Pursuant to the explorative nature of this thesis, Iranian women's experiences were gathered by means of open-ended questionnaires and interviews. [50] The questionnaires can be consulted in Appendix 1. An introductory section to the questionnaire aimed to gather personal information on participants: age, place of birth, country of residence, highest level of education, current occupation,

---

[48] Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc
Wolcott, H. F. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: CA. Sage Publications, Inc.
[49] Not applicable: participants did not answer this question
[50] Flick, U., von Kardoff, E., & Steinke, I. (Eds.). (2004). *A companion to qualitative research*. Sage.

marital status, number of children, and religious background. The first page of the questionnaire served the purpose of an informed consent form, notifying participants of the nature, goal, and design of the study. Similarly, I notified participants in the interviews prior to the meeting, and asked them to give me their informed consent. Anonymity of the participants was guaranteed through the use of aliases in this thesis. Moreover, participants under the age of 18 were excluded from the research.

I collected women's testimonies by means of a questionnaire for most participants – i.e. twelve of them. I relayed links to Google Forms questionnaires to potential participants via email, in which I informed them of the nature, goal, and design of the study. My views on the subject and my research question were however not communicated, in order to avoid participants from observing or deviating from seeming projected conclusions to this study.[51] I interviewed the three other participants via Skype, in Farsi. The translation of the transcripts was done by me, and checked by a native speaker. Questionnaires and interviews followed the same structure, and were devised drawing upon methods outlined in Max van Manen's *Researching Lived Experience*.[52] The approach combines phenomenology and hermeneutics methodology: 'Phenomenology describes how one orients to lived experience, hermeneutics describes how one interprets the "texts" of life'.[53] The author asserts that, in order to best research lived experiences, all questions asked must be driven by the leading research question.[54] Moreover, questions must be both specific and elusive – leaving interpretation to the participants based on their own experiences. Finally, questions must follow a logical pattern. For this research aims to combine a historical perspective with social sciences methods, questions followed a historical pattern. Accordingly, participants were systematically asked to recall their perceptions and experiences prior to the 1979 Iranian revolution up to present days.

For analysis I rely predominantly on the works of three authors. First is Zerubavel's book *Time Maps*, which I introduced as a part of my theoretical concepts.[55] His writing allows for an analysis of historical remembrance and conceptualisation of the past among the interviewed women. His notion of emplotment is central to my analysis. Plotlines are the narrative expression resultant from the mental process of emplotment - that is, linking events together in a structured and coherent manner. Plotlines are argued by the author to reflect social identity and social 'norms of remembrance'.[56] Consequently, members of one single mnemonic community are expected to articulate history following similar patterns, or plotlines. Zerubavel identifies three main types of plotlines in the way individuals articulate and remember the past: progress, decline, and zigzag. Remembering history through progressive plotlines entails that, in short, now is better than before. This sort of narrative can be observed when talking about modernisation or industrialisation, which

---

[51] Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated.

[52] van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Suny Press.

[53] *Ibid*, p. 4

[54] *Ibid*, p. 66

[55] Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*.

[56] *Ibid*, p. 11

has brought progress to industries. Decline plotlines on the other hand suggest a feeling of nostalgia, which again is observed when talking about modernity – for example, "with video games children do not play outside anymore". Zigzag plotlines involve either rise and fall or fall and rise scenarios. In zigzag plotlines, a watershed typically acts as a turning point, after which history changed its course. Zerubavel asserts that 'all visions of change represent mnemonic traditions'. [57] In mnemonic communities using 'watersheds', individuals tend to assign some unity to the divided time periods. Moreover, this separation causes the two periods to be defined in opposition to each other. More often than not, these 'watersheds' are "institutionalised", i.e. they are present in museums and history books, among others. They serve the purpose of 'chronological anchors', through which individuals conceptualise time.[58] Periodization is argued by Zerubavel to be inherently social, because there are many ways of periodizing the past, any system of doing so that is shared by members of a community suggests its social nature.[59]

The second author of prominence in my thesis is Haleh Esfandari. In her novel *Reconstructed Lives*, she touches upon the topic of the changes in Iranian women's lives after the 1979 revolution, based on her interviews of 32 women.[60] Although her focal point resembles that of my thesis, her work is aimed at the public eye and is non-scholarly. Therefore, her analysis of women's testimonies is rather superficial. Moreover, the author appears to have an agenda. She was herself detained in an Iranian prison for 110 days because of her activist work. I therefore expect my results and testimonies to differ from her conclusions. Her findings are discussed in Chapter 3. Finally, Reza Afshari's article *An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights* is extremely relevant for my research in two ways.[61] Firstly, the author positions himself as a migrant and recalls his experiences in the country. This will allow me to deeper understand and analyse the testimonies of the major part of my participants. Second, the author includes the very focal point to this thesis of the universality of human rights in his testimony. Although this article is not scholarly – as recognized by the author himself, it provides for a compelling testimony in this research.

Due to the limited time afforded to this research, women were mainly asked to fill in questionnaires. In comparison to interviews, this has reduced the extent of their answers and held back spontaneity. Moreover, some of their answers could not be investigated in detail through a dialogue. As stated earlier, the women who participated in this research are all highly educated women living in urban areas. Therefore, their experiences as analysed in this thesis cannot represent accurately the views of all Iranian women. However, they constitute a strong basis for my argument.

---

[57] Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. p.36
[58] Ibid, p. 90
[59] Ibid, p. 96
[60] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
[61] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 235-276.

3.2. Secondary sources

The main body of secondary literature I used was composed of various scholarly articles. In order to gage a meaningful understanding of the debate on the universality of human rights, I based my first chapters on the work of both non-western and western scholars. Scholars holding a western view on the debate were Preis, Kirchschlaeger, Donnelly, Brems, and Mayer. For a non-western view, I used the works of Tibi, An-Na'im, and Coomaraswamy. In order to investigate the historical trajectory of Iran over the course of the twentieth century, I largely based my second chapter on the work of Abrahamian for his complete, comprehensive, and prominent work. For checks, I used Daniel and Axworthy. In order to grasp a full picture of life in Iran for women, in chapter three I relied on the works of Moghadam. For a legal overview of women's rights in Iran, I used Nayyeri's summary, which was very complete and provided a full understanding of contemporary laws in Iran, with a particular emphasis on those directly affecting women. Another author I significantly rely on in this thesis is Valentine Moghadam. She has written a number of articles on the situation of women in Iran throughout the 20th century, which will allow for greater comprehension of the topic, as well as contrast with my final results. Finally, I also used Esfandiari's novel as a secondary source. Because her topic of interest is so close to that of this thesis, her work served as a check for my own results.

3. Structure of the thesis

In this introduction, I aimed to provide some background into the reasons why I chose this topic, how I approached it, and the ways in which it is scientifically relevant. Following, Chapter 1 will provide an overview of the focal debate to this thesis on the universality of the human rights paradigm. Chapter 2 will offer the reader with a historical background of 20th Century Iran, with particular attention given to the situation of women. Subsequently, in the third Chapter, I will review changes experienced by Iranian women over the course of the twentieth century, and contemporary discriminatory Iranian laws. Next, three chapters of analysis will examine primary sources in relation to secondary sources, as follows. In Chapter 4 I will focus on the ways in which women conceptualise the 1979 revolution. Chapter 5 will analyse how women experience their rights with regards to the past. In Chapter 6, I will aim attention at matters of religion, politics, and human rights in Iran. Finally, the thesis will close with a final summarizing conclusion.

CHAPTER 1. The Universality of Human Rights

In this chapter I engage with my first research sub-question, namely *'What historical trajectory did the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights take to include women's rights?'*. Central to this question is the debate on the universality of human rights, and its relevance for Iran in the current Islamic context. Since its inception in 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – UDHR hereafter – has been the object of vivid debates in academia. Specifically, the universality of human rights is being questioned, with particular attention to its 'transferability and cross-cultural validity'.[62] The debate comprises two main proponents: Universalists and cultural relativists. The purpose of this chapter is to offer the reader with a comprehensive and critical analysis of the arguments surrounding this debate. In the first part of this chapter, I will report on the process that has led to the creation of the UDHR. Following, in a second part, I will review the arguments held by universalist scholars. The third part will analyse those of their opponents – i.e. cultural relativists – with particular reference to Islam. Finally, the closing paragraph will provide the reader with a summary of the core arguments pertaining to the debate, and the subsequent implications for this thesis.

1. The creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

In the wake of the Second World War, upon the realisation of Nazi crimes against humanity, members of the United Nations came to the realisation that the UN charter did not suffice in defining Human Rights. Consequently, in 1946, the organisation appointed Eleanor Roosevelt to the head of the drafting Committee, comprising eighteen members, for what will become the UDHR.[63] The drafting process lasted two years and included nine writers. The list of members and writers of the Drafting Committee can be consulted in Table 3, on the following page. Canadian representative John P. Humphrey became the primary writer of the UDHR's first draft. Following, French representative Rene Cassin was pivotal in determining the structure of the second draft, which he based on the *Code Civil,* constitutive of France's citizens' rights since 1804.

The UDHR's final text consists of 30 articles, aiming to determine and proclaim fundamental, universal human rights. The text was approved on December 10th 1948, upon the favourable votes of 48 countries. No countries country voted against the declaration. However, the voting encountered eight abstentions, including that of Saudi Arabia. The country's abstention in the voting process for the UDHR was justified by officials as ideological. In fact, two articles of the final text were said to violate *shari'a* law.[64] These regard the right to equal marriage, and to apostasy and to change religion

---

[62] Preis, A. B. S. (1996). Human rights as cultural practice: An anthropological critique. p. 288

[63] See introduction to Morsink, J. (1999). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: origins, drafting, and intent*.

[64] Abiad, N. (2008). *Sharia, Muslim states and international human rights treaty obligations: A comparative study*. BIICL.

– article 16 and 18, respectively.[65] Iran positioned itself in the same way following the instigation of the Islamic Republic. In 1982, Rajaie Khorassani – the representative of Iran to the UN – declared that the UDHR derived from Western ideologies that are inherently incompatible with *shari'a* law.[66] The opposition of some Muslim countries to the theoretically *Universal* Declaration of Human Rights sparked the debate regarding its universality and applicability across cultures, reviewed in the following sections.

TABLE 3. Drafting Committee members.

Countries	Drafters	Main role
Australia	William Hodgson	N/D
Belgium	-	-
Byelorussian Soviet Socialist Republic	-	-
Canada	John Peters Humphrey	Principal drafter - first draft
Chile	Hernan Santa Cruz	Socio-economic rights proponent
Republic of China	Peng Chun Chang	Mediator
Egypt	-	-
France	Rene Cassin	Determined second draft structure
India	Hansa Mehta	Gender equality proponent
Iran	-	-
Lebanon	Charles Habib Malik	Commission on HR rapporteur
Panama	-	-
The Philippines	-	-
United Kingdom	Charles Duke	N/D
United States	Eleanor Roosevelt	Chair of the drafting committee
Union of Soviet Socialist Republics	Alexandre Bogomolov	N/D
Uruguay	-	-
Yugoslavia	-	-

The legal reach of the UDHR is limited. In theory, signatory states have no legal obligations resulting from their agreement with the stated principles. However, in practice, countries that violate the covenants associated with the UDHR will systematically be condemned by the international community of states. States therefore have economic, political and ideological interests in successfully implementing HR through gaining of international recognition.[67] Moreover, the UDHR has served as the basis for a number of international laws and international treaties, including the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women – the CEDAW, to which Iran is not signatory along with only four other countries in the world. Its principles are therefore focal in inter-state relations and have set standards for state behaviour within the realms of their sovereignty.

---

[65] UN General Assembly, (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. *UN General Assembly*. See articles 16 and 18
[66] Littman, D. (1999). Universal human rights and human rights in Islam.*Midstream*, *42*(2), 2-7.
[67] Buchanan, J. M. (1965). An economic theory of clubs. *Economica*, 1-14.

2. Universalists

The core assertion of the UDHR lies in its universal, unequivocal applicability.[68] Drawing upon this, universalist scholars argue that some principles pertaining to the UDHR are indisputably held across cultures. This has been evidenced through cross-cultural studies, aiming to identify moral standards and principles that are conceived in all cultures. Such studies have shown the recurrence, and therefore universality, of principles such as human dignity and injustice.[69] Moreover, states across the globe have increasingly adopted human rights standards to structure their politics, and human rights have been widely institutionalised – hence increasing their 'cross-cultural legitimacy'.[70] States are enticed to agree to the Declaration and abide by human rights principles under indirect threat of non-recognition by the international community – that can in turn lead to economic and political sanctions.

One of the arguments held by cultural relativists concerns the fact that the declaration was written only by Western powers.[71] To counter this claim, universalist authors such as Susan Waltz – an American political writer, through the analysis of historical accounts of discussions that led to the creation of the UDHR, proceeds to show that firstly non-Western countries, here labelled 'small states', actively participated in the process.[72] She places a particular emphasis on the role held by Muslim states in the drafting of the Declaration.**[73]** Although she does indeed show that such states were involved in discussions, her articles have little convincing power as she herself outlines a instances where countries have made propositions that were dismissed by greater powers such as the US. As shown in Table 3 (page 14), Western countries were indeed holding the upmost power and say in the drafting of the Declaration. Waltz's study does not constitute a powerful argument due to her contradictory stances, and she unintendedly works to confirm the cultural relativist cultural relativist argument according to which the UDHR is an instrument of American structural domination.

Upon reviewing literature, I have found one argument advanced by universalists to be convincing. Held by a number of authors, the stance refers to the reasons why human rights originated in the West, and was called the 'functional universality' argument.[74] Here, the UDHR is said to be a response to the emergence of the 'modern nation-state, market economies, and industrialisation'[75] and

---

[68] Kirchschlaeger, P. (2011). Universality of Human Rights. The EWC Statement Series, 22. p. 22

[69] Das, V. (1995). *Critical events: an anthropological perspective on contemporary India*.

Nandy, A. (1990). *At the edge of psychology: Essays in politics and culture* (p. 42). Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Falk, R. (1992). Cultural foundations for the international protection of human rights. *Human rights in cross-cultural perspectives: A quest for consensus*,*45*. p. 54

[70] An-Na'im, A. A. (1999). The cultural mediation of human rights: the Al-Arqam case in Malaysia. The East Asian challenge for human rights, 147-168. p. 153

Taylor C., Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights, in: Bauer J. R./Bell D. A. (ed.), The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights, Cambridge 1999, 124-144, p.23

[71] *Ibid*, p.23

[72] Waltz, S. E. (2001). Universalizing human rights: The role of small states in the construction of the universal declaration of human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *23*(1), 44-72.

[73] *ibid*

[74] Donnelly, J. (2007). The relative universality of human rights. Human Rights Quarterly, 29(2), 281-306. p. 287

[75] *Ibid*, p. 287

their subsequent – potential – threats to citizens. Human rights principles are in this light said to be the 'result of accumulated experiences in dealing with the abuses of the modern state and market economies'.[76] Authors holding the 'functional universality' argument maintain that because modern nation-states were first instituted in Western Europe, it is only natural that the UDHR and its 'philosophical underpinnings' were instigated by such ideologies.[77] Therefore, under this argument, the spread of state structures – originally unfamiliar to all societies, has meant that the UDHR applies across countries, irrespective of cultural beliefs, values, and traditions.[78] In fact, Preis even argues that 'human rights have become culture'.[79]

Finally, universalists argue that human rights law is one that 'accommodates the greatest diversity of alternative cultural conceptions of human dignity'.[80] Human rights apply to all citizens regardless of their culture; therefore, asserting the universality of human rights does not mean a rejection of cultural specificity *per se*.[81] Moreover, Universalists claim that human rights are rarely enforced – sovereign nation-states being the sole bearers of territorial authority. Therefore, in theory, states do not have to comply with international human rights standards.[82] In practice, however – and linking back to the theory of clubs – this argument holds little truth. In fact, states are often compelled to follow said standards in response to the probability of their exclusion from international relations – as is demonstrated by Iran, to some extent, or North Korea, among others: 'protecting internationally recognized human rights is increasingly seen as a precondition of full political legitimacy'.[83]

2. Cultural relativism and Islam

Cultural relativists, on the other hand, assert that 'because there is no universal culture, there cannot be universal human rights'.[84] Human rights are here seen as a tool for Western neo-colonialism.[85] Authors refute the 'historical and anthropological universality' of human rights. That is, historically, societies

Sloane, R. D. (2001). Outrelativizing Relativism: A Liberal Defense of the Universality of International Human Rights. *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, *34*, 527.

An-Na'im, A. A. (1999). The cultural mediation of human rights: the Al-Arqam case in Malaysia. The East Asian challenge for human rights, 147-168.

[76] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 248

Donnelly, J. (2007). The relative universality of human rights. p. 287

[77] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 259

Sloane, R. D. (2001). Outrelativizing Relativism: A Liberal Defense of the Universality of International Human Rights.

[78] Howard, R. (1992). Dignity, community, and human rights. *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives: A Quest for Consensus*, 81-102.

Donnelly, J. (2007). The relative universality of human rights. p. 287

[79] Preis, A. B. S. (1996). Human rights as cultural practice: An anthropological critique. p. 290

[80] Sloane, R. D. (2001). Outrelativizing Relativism: A Liberal Defense of the Universality of International Human Rights.

[81] *ibid*

Donnelly, J. (2007). The relative universality of human rights. Human Rights Quarterly, 29(2), 281-306. p. 281

[82] *Ibid,* p. 283

[83] *ibid*, p. 289

[84] Tharoor, S. (1999). Are human rights universal?. *World Policy Journal*,. p. 1

[85] Brems, E. (1997). Enemies or allies? Feminism and cultural relativism as dissident voices in human rights discourse. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *19*(1), 136-164. p. 142

Forsythe, D. P. (1991). *The internationalization of human rights*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

have never shared and accepted common guiding moral principles. [86] Such moral principles traditionally emanated from 'divine commandment, natural law, tradition, or contingent political arrangements'.[87] Religion therefore adds another layer of complexity to the debate on the universality of human rights.[88] Consequently, ever since the establishment of the UDHR in 1948, the debate has remained particularly lively in relation to Islam. Whilst the UDHR vouches for one's freedom 'to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance"[89], said behaviours are sentenced under Islamic law as *hudud* – crimes against god, and castigated by corporal punishments.[90] The UDHR also calls for the freedom of individuals to marry at "full age" and with "full consent", and endows partners equal rights during marriage[91] - rights which are not guaranteed under Islamic law.[92] In addition, whilst in Islamic societies women are not considered equal to men *vis-à-vis* the law, human rights promote the equality of all individuals, regardless of their gender.[93]

Cultural relativists focusing on Islam support the view that Islam and human rights, in their current form, are not compatible, based on literal interpretations of the *Qur'an*.[94] Their arguments are threefold. Firstly, authors such as Syrian scholar Bassam Tibi assert that human rights may only be founded on religion and defended by god. Therefore, human rights law may only stem from *shari'a* laws.[95] Second, scholars stress that the individualistic nature of the human rights discourse is incompatible with Islamic societies, founded on tribal relations and a strong sense of community.[96] Dwyer argues that the importance given to the individual in human rights law originated in response to the dismantling of the family in Western countries, which makes human rights principles inapplicable in Islamic societies, in which family is the basis of social order.[97] Finally, some Muslim scholars reject the applicability of the notion of rights in Islam. Indeed, in Islam, duties take precedence over rights: Islamic religious values 'lack the notion of individual rights to be asserted against the state. Instead, Islamic norms stress religious duties.'[98]

---

[86] Donnelly, J. (2007). The relative universality of human rights. p.284

[87] *Ibid,* p. 286

[88] Brems, E. (1997). Enemies or allies? Feminism and cultural relativism as dissident voices in human rights discourse. p. 142

[89] UN General Assembly, (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. *UN General Assembly*. 217 A (III), supra note 1, article 18

[90] Cerna, C. M. (1994). Universality of human rights and cultural diversity: implementation of human rights in different socio-cultural contexts. *Human rights quarterly*, 740-752. p.751

[91] UN General Assembly, (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. *UN General Assembly*. 217 A (III), supra note 1, article 16

[92] Cerna, C. M. (1994). Universality of human rights and cultural diversity: implementation of human rights in different socio-cultural contexts. p. 751

[93] UN General Assembly, (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. *UN General Assembly*. 217 A (III)

[94] Tibi, B. (1994). Islamic Law/Shari'a, Human Rights, Universal Morality and International Relations.
Dwyer, K. (1991). *Arab Voices: the human rights debate in the Middle East*(Vol. 13). Univ of California Press.

[95] *Ibid*

[96] *Ibid*

[97] Dwyer, K. (1991). *Arab Voices: the human rights debate in the Middle East* (Vol. 13). pp. 111-112

[98] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 267

Said scholars have however faced various criticisms. The major one, that of anachronistic and incongruent thinking, targets old traditionalist for applying modern terminology of human rights onto the traditional concepts of the *Qur'an*.[99] Moreover, the group of scholars is criticised for their alleged hidden political agenda, being 'determined to maintain the traditional patterns of authority and subordination'.[100] Specifically referring to Iran, Hooglund argues that the argument of cultural specificity is employed to swerve international attention from the latent issues of the country, including its persisting human rights violations and gender equality issues.[101] Reza Afshari asserts that, with the spread of state structure and capitalistic economies, societies have become secular as a whole.[102] He argues that the Iranian society has become somewhat individualistic, 'where the individual sits in a private office, engages in specialised work, and leaves the office behind the wheels of a private car selected according to the individual's taste'.[103] He accordingly concludes that a secular declaration is required in order to protect citizens from the dangers entailed by modern nation-states and capitalistic economies.

3. Women's rights in the universality debate

The universality debate has become particularly vivid following the introduction of women's rights as a part of human rights. Universalists argue that women's rights ought to take precedence over cultural specificity, whilst cultural relativists view feminist discourse as a tool for Western cultural imperialism in the face of cultural specificity.[104] As I explained in the introduction, there are underlying issues to the introduction of women's rights in the human rights paradigm – i.e. the grey area between self-determination and women's rights –, which causes the UDHR to 'allow' for discrimination against women.[105] The international community often denounces Islamic countries for their violations of basic women's rights and non-fulfilment of gender equality. Iran, as an Islamic Republic, is one of them. Shari'a law being patriarchal in nature, women and men are not afforded the same rights under Islamic law – therefore adding a layer of complexity to the alleged non-reconcilability of Islam and human rights advanced by cultural relativists.

4. Concluding remarks

This literature review has presented the two sides of the debates on the universality of the human rights paradigm. While universalists argue for the unequivocal applicability and relevance of human rights across cultures, cultural relativists do not. Particularly, some Muslim scholars of the latter view

---

Tibi, B. (1994). Islamic Law/Shari'a, Human Rights, Universal Morality and International Relations.

[99] Mayer, A. E. (1991). Islam and human rights: Tradition and politics. p. 206

[100] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 268

[101] Hooglund, E. (2011). Gender in Contemporary Iran. *Iranian Studies*.

[102] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 241

[103] *Ibid*, p.241

[104] Higgins, T. E. (1996). Anti-essentialism, relativism, and human rights. *Harv. Women's LJ*, *19*, 89. p. 794

[105] Coomaraswamy, R. (1997). Reinventing international law: Women's rights as human rights in the international community.

argue that Islam is not compatible with core principles of human rights. In this debate, one argument stood out as convincing. I agree with the cultural relativist core stance according to which it appears impossible that human rights are universally shared, in their totality, across cultures. However, the 'functionalist universality' argument held by universalists stood out as particularly significant: the UDHR is the best tool that was developed *so far* in countering the risks entailed with modern state structure and market economies. However, it is unrealistic to assume allegedly universal laws to work within all cultural contexts. Therefore, research is needed in order to investigate the extent to which said laws function in different contexts. Authors on Iran have pointed out to the anachronistic nature of Iranian law, and its disharmony with current societal mores.[106] Although Iran was a signatory country in 1948 under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's rule, the Islamic Republic's government clearly placed itself as an opponent to the universality of the UDHR.

---

[106] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights.
Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action. p. 2

CHAPTER 2. Historical, political and economic trajectories of twentieth century Iran

In this chapter I aim to provide the reader with a political-economic historical background to Iran, in order to answer the second sub-question leading this thesis, namely *'What place did women's rights occupy in the political strategy of the successive Iranian governments prior and following the installation of the Islamic Republic in 1979?'*. Here, the focus is placed on changes that have occurred in the 20th century and up until today. Specifically, I aim to unveil the trajectories taken by Iran concerning politics, economics, and law. The first part of this chapter will place its focus on the Qajar dynasty, and the period from 1900s until 1925. In the second part, I review political, economic, judicial and social changes under the Pahlavi dynasty, from 1925 until 1979. The third part will focus on the Khomeini era and the instigation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, from 1979 until 1989. In the fourth part I recount the changes that occurred under Khamenei, from 1989 to present. Finally, this chapter closes with a summarising conclusion.

1. The Qajar dynasty – 1786-1925

The Qajar dynasty ruled over Iran for over a century, from 1786 to 1925. Although its six successive shahs were considered despotic, their authority was limited due to the lack of a sound state structure.[107] Under the rule of the dynasty's 4th Shah, Mozafferedin Shah, the breakout of the Persian Constitutional Revolution – 1905-07 – paved the way for foremost structural changes in Iran. The revolution stemmed both from the 1904-05 economic crisis, and a series of events dating back to the nineteenth century – particularly, foreign powers' pressures and coercion. Great Britain's involvement in the country derives from Iran's strategic commercial position, and its control was needed for the British in order to secure commerce routes to India. Russia, on the other hand, aimed to expand its territorial boundaries to the Persian Gulf. In the first half of the century, pressures by both powers resulted in the signature of three far-reaching treaties: the treaty of Golestan (1813) and the treaty of Turkmanchai (1828), through which Iran lost its authority over a number of territories to Russia, and the treaty of Paris (1857), signed with Great Britain, in which Iran conceded to retire from Herat. The objectives of the revolution therefore were to end governmental corruption, and achieve independence from foreign influence. In 1906, a *majles* – parliament – was instituted along with the Persian Constitution, aiming to curtail the power of the shah. The second objective, independence, was however not achieved. In 1907, Great Britain and Russia signed their Anglo-Russian Convention, splitting the country into two zones of influence, the British in the South and the Russians in the South. Moreover, in 1908, Great Britain's discovery of oil in Iran led to a revived interest, and the founding

---

[107] Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A history of modern Iran*. Cambridge University Press. p. 8
Axworthy, M. (2010). *A history of Iran: Empire of the mind*. Basic Books.
Daniel, E. L. (2012). *The history of Iran*. ABC-CLIO.

of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, accentuating foreign coercion and dominance in the country. During the First World War, although the country asserted its neutral position, Iran became occupied by Great Britain, the Ottomans, Russia, and Germany. In 1919, revisions to the Anglo-Persian Agreement were made in order to include Iran into the British Empire. In 1921, a military coup led by Reza Khan marked the end of the Qajar dynasty rule, and the rising of the Pahlavi dynasty.

2. The Pahlavi era – 1925-1979

Reza Shah, during his twenty-year rule, established a state regime built on 'the military and bureaucracy'.[108] He worked to achieve substantial structural changes in Iran. Structurally, Reza Shah's achievements were fourfold. Firstly, with the passing of the Conscription Law in1925, Iranians were required to obtain birth certificates and adopt a family name. Second, Reza Shah created new institutions aimed at centralising the state system. Third, he cancelled out capitulation treaties signed under the Qajar dynasty. Finally, he instigated the use of a common system of measures throughout the country. His main realizations however concerned society. Reza Shah's most controversial and potent action was his promotion of a Western dress code. Iranians were enticed to espouse Western dress, both men and women – who were therefore allowed and encouraged to unveil in public spaces. In 1936, Reza Shah took one step further and prohibited veiling for women. He reformed education, causing a rise in literacy and higher education enrolment. Urban changes, mostly in Tehran, meant that old buildings were destroyed and replaced by modern, Western-styled edifices. Finally, the Shah aimed to reinforce national sentiment through the creation of organisations and spreading of Persian. But his realizations came with a price. The regime encountered vivid criticisms regarding high 'oppression, corruption, taxation, lack of authenticity, and the form of security typical of police states'.[109]

In 1941, Great Britain and the USSR invaded the country in order to retain control over Iran's oil supplies – causing the abdication of Reza Shah. His son Muhammad Reza Shah ascended to the throne and agreed to full cooperation with the Allies. Ensued a thirteen-year interregnum, through which the Shah's power was reduced to control of the military in favour of a succession of prime ministers and unstable parliaments. Throughout the eight first years of his rule, a socialist party – *Tudeh* – gained momentum, and obtained the favour of masses. Its decline in the beginning of the 1950s left the room for an Iranian nationalist movement to emerge, led by Muhammad Mossadegh. His party advocated against the shah and British influence. With support of the people and increased presence in national organisations, Mossadegh succeeded in pushing for the nationalisation of oil industries in 1951, and was appointed prime minister in the same year. In the subsequent year,

---

[108] Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A history of modern Iran*. p. 66
[109] *Ibid*, p. 91
Axworthy, M. (2010). *A history of Iran: Empire of the mind*.
Daniel, E. L. (2012). *The history of Iran*.

Mossadegh organised for the transfer of power over oil industries from the British to Iran, causing important frictions resulting in an oil embargo on Iran. His conflict was also significant with the shah as he asserted his upmost power over that of the shah. In 1953, the United States and Great Britain devised a coup d'état in order to restore the shah's full authority – and in turn reclaim their access to oil. In 1953, Muhammad Reza Shah re-established his reign in line with his father's rule. Where his father failed at building a strong, centralised state, Muhammad Reza Shah succeeded due to newly acquired oil revenues. He expanded the Iranian military further and managed to recruit 300,000 more men, exponentially increased its budget and established a Ministry of War. In 1975, Iran held 'the fifth largest army in the whole world'.[110]

Muhammad Reza Shah's hands-on rule brought about a number of social reforms, under the title of "White Revolution". Again in line with his father's achievements, educational reforms brought the country's literacy rate from 26 to 46% by 1979.[111] Social changes led to a rural exodus, peaking in 1979 with 46% of the country's population living in urban areas. His social program encompassed reforms targeting women's issues. In 1963, women were given a 'right to vote, to run for elected office, and to serve in the judiciary'.[112] In 1967, the Family Protection Law constrained men's right to unilateral divorce, to wed multiple wives, and systematically attain their children's custody upon divorce. Moreover, Muhammad Reza Shah rose girls' legal marriage age to eighteen. Veiling was strongly discouraged, although never proscribed – as his father's 1936 unveiling decree was cancelled in 1941. Moreover, women's access to birth control was eased through the extension of medical care to cover family planning matters – abortion was also allowed during the first twelve weeks of pregnancy. A women's affairs ministry was appointed. These social changes brought about and deepened extant social tensions, leading to an increase in political radicalism. Secular and religious – led by Khomeini – opposition to the regime grew more radical in the 1970s, and called for the instigation of a Republic. Oppositions stemmed from various causes. Firstly, the gap between the rich and the poor became one of the highest in the Third World as a result of top-down development measures employed by Muhammad Reza Shah. Second, social reforms and increased education among the population led to higher expectations, which were not met. The Iranian brain drain meant that health care remained relatively undeveloped.

Long drawn social pressure build-up in the 1970s served as the basis of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, which extended from 1977 until 1979. Abrahamian argues that the shah's autocratic rule caused this accumulation for various reasons. He writes:

> 'In an age of republicanism, he flaunted monarchism, shahism, and Pahlavism. In an age of nationalism and anti-imperialism, he came to power as a direct result of the CIA-MI6 overthrow of Mossadeq – the idol of Iranian nationalism. In an age of neutralism, he mocked non-alignment and

---

[110] Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A history of modern Iran*. p. 124
[111] *Ibid*, p. 134
[112] *Ibid*, p. 134

Third Worldism. Instead he appointed himself America's policeman in the Persian Gulf, and openly sided with the USA on such sensitive issues as Palestine and Vietnam. In an age of democracy, he waxed eloquent on the virtues of order, discipline, guidance, kingship, and his personal communication with God.'[113]

Demonstrations and strikes took place over the two years of revolution, some ending tragically. Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi fled the country in January 1979, marking the end of the Pahlavi era, and the transformation of Iran's political structure into an Islamic Republic.

3.   Khomeini's rule and the Islamic Republic of Iran – 1979-89

Following the revolution, the government in place began writing a new constitution for Iran. The temporary government presented an issue: the views of Khomeini and Bazargan, the democratic and nationalist prime minister, did not align. Khomeini's vision was to apply and institutionalise his vision of Islam in the country. Bazargan, on the other hand, aimed to build a strong Islamic republic on the basis of democracy. The unofficial state of Khomeini and his revolutionary committee dominated discussions. A first referendum ensuing the revolution aimed to gage popular will to the implementation of an Islamic Republic – which got 99% of positive votes. Bazargan, in this instance, advocated for the addition of a third choice in the referendum – a Democratic Islamic Republic. The proposition was swiftly dismissed by Khomeini, who disagreed with the use of the Western term of "democracy". Ensuing the referendum, Khomeini was instituted Supreme Leader of Iran for the entirety of his lifetime, and his authorities surpassed greatly those allocated to shahs.

Khomeini's constitution rests on two core pillars: popular sovereignty and divine will. Although Khomeini's power in the constitution is central, 'some important concessions to democracy' were made.[114] The people was given a right to elect their representatives – the President and the Majles. Voting age was set at fifteen years for both sexes. Moreover, citizens were granted 'basic human rights and civil liberties: the right of press freedom, expression, worship, organisation, petition, and demonstration; equal treatment before the law; the right of appeal; and the freedom from arbitrary arrest, torture, police surveillance, and even wiretapping.'[115] Bazargan was not included in the writing of the final draft constitution, which did not align with his vision for the country. Therefore, the prime minister issued a petition to the Supreme Leader, demanding amendments to be made as his 'proposed constitution violated popular sovereignty, lacked needed consensus, endangered the nation with *akhundism* (clericalism), elevated the *ulama* into a "ruling class", and undermined religion since future generations would blame all shortcomings on Islam'.[116] The Iran hostage crisis of 1979-1981 marked the breaking point of Bazargan, who resigned from his position. Following the admission into care of Muhammad Reza Shah in the United States, 400 students occupied the American embassy in Tehran

---

[113] Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A history of modern Iran*. pp. 155-156
[114] *Ibid*, p.166
[115] *Ibid*, p. 167
[116] *Ibid*, p. 168

for 444 days, persuaded that the CIA would soon initiate a coup d'état. In the midst of the crisis, Khomeini passed his constitution through another referendum, again obtaining 99% positive votes.

From 1980 until the end of his rule in 1989, Khomeini further consolidated the state. The number of civil servants grew exponentially. The military also experienced exponential growth, counting 500,000 men by 1989. Companies left behind by upper class migrants who fled the country ensuing the revolution were nationalised, and the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq war allowed the state to initiate economic protectionism – increasing wealth across the country. In terms of education, Khomeini's measures proved extremely beneficial as, by the end of his rule, 90% of the population was literate. He reformed and improved the medical system, causing a population boom. Judicial amendments were significant, in accordance with *shari'a* law. The 1967 Family Protection Law was cancelled. Consequently, marriage age for girls was lowered back to thirteen years old, unilateral divorce right for husbands was reinstated; women working in the judiciary were purged. The observance of *hijab* for women and Islamic style dress for men was reinstated. Censorship was high, Western heritage and any physical memorials from the Pahlavi era were destroyed. Moreover, Khomeini established a 'reign of terror'.[117] Between 1979 and 1981, he ordered the execution of close to 500 opponents to the regime. Between 1981 and 1985, over 8,000 were killed. In 1988, shortly after a cease-fire with Iraq, Khomeini commanded 2,800 prisoners to be hung. The next Ayatollah in line, Hussein Montazeri, resigned in disapproval of these events. Consequently, Ali Khamenei – the Iranian President – was appointed Supreme Leader following Khomeini's passing in 1989.

4. Khamenei's rule – 1989-present

Upon appointment of Khamenei as Supreme Leader, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani got elected to the presidency of the country with 94% positive votes. Rafsanjani initiated a series of reforms aimed at liberalising the economy. Subsequently, imports on consumer goods began to flow into the country, free trade zones were instated, and the defence budget was significantly reduced. Moreover, following the epic population boom under Khomeini, birth control campaigns were met with great success. Population growth was controlled and applauded by the United Nations, which coined it 'the most successful population control program in the whole world'.[118] Rafsanjani openly criticised the United States after Congress called for an oil embargo on Iran. Economic losses triggered an economic crisis, accompanied by spiralling unemployment rates. In 1997, Rafsanjani's presidency ended, and Muhammad Khatami gained the support of the population, which subsequently voted for him as president.

Khatami's liberal objectives permitted the achievement of improved international relations, bans on torture and unlawful imprisonments, curtailed political executions, among others. The opening of the country to international relations resulted in the lift of the British oil embargo, and the

---

[117] Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A history of modern Iran*. p. 181
[118] *Ibid*, p. 184

reestablishment of diplomatic relations with Great Britain. Liberal deputies of the *majles* worked to improve the status of women in the country, and ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women – CEDAW. However, conservative members of the *majles* struck back, and managed to veto passed reforms that were in opposition with *shari'a*. Moreover, in 2002, Bush's 'axis of evil' speech denounced Iran as a 'totalitarian nightmare', a major threat to world safety, and a human rights violator.[119] These allegations caused the conservatives to rise up in the 2003 municipal elections, the 2004 *majles* voting and the 2005 presidential election, which instituted Mahmud Ahmadinejad to the presidency.

A number of economic reforms established by the new president of Iran started a period of economic growth in the country. Unemployment was significantly reduced and inflation scaled down – mainly through an interventionist ideology, and an increase in oil prices. Ahmadinejad, in 2006, began reforming birth control policies in order to bring fertility rates and population growth up. The situation of human rights under Ahmadinejad is said to have worsened, particularly within the realms of the freedom of speech and assembly, and women's rights. Ahmadinejad reformed family laws to the disfavour of women, and instigated strong repression of women's non-observance of proper *hijab*. Moreover, he implemented a quota for universities – 50% men and 50% women – in order to halter the increased enrolment of women in universities. This reform caused mass protest in universities. Ahmadinejad bolstered the nuclear program and announced in 2006 the successful refining of uranium. This new achievement caused friction within the international community and received particularly negative responses from the United States. His actions caused a major setback for foreign relation efforts initiated by his predecessor Khatami. In 2013, Hassan Rohani succeeded to Ahmadinejad as president of Iran. His main objective concerned the country's foreign relations. In 2015, his efforts to better relations with the United States culminated in an agreement aimed at limiting Iranian nuclear programs.

5. Concluding remarks

Across the twentieth century, Iran has undergone profound changes. At the beginning of the century, its twelve million population was in majority rural. Today, Iran counts close to 80 million residents, of which a staggering 70% living in urban areas. The country experienced spiralling modernisation: in the 1900s, the shah was the sole owner of a car.[120] Education has risen considerably, and the literacy rate in the country ascended from 5 to 90% in one century. However, the most dramatic change experienced by the country was structural. From a decentralised and somewhat powerless monarchy, the country has become an centralised Islamic Republic, often coined totalitarian.

---

[119] Axworthy, M. (2010). *A history of Iran: Empire of the mind*. Basic Books.
Daniel, E. L. (2012). *The history of Iran*. ABC-CLIO.
Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A history of modern Iran*. Cambridge University Press. p. 192
[120] *Ibid,* p. 3

CHAPTER 3. Women in twentieth century Iran

'Women have become the raison d'être *of Islamism […].*
The sight of a bareheaded woman is a challenge to that legitimacy.'[121]

Chapter 2 has highlighted the profound demographic, social, industrial, economic, legal and structural changes Iran underwent over the course of the twentieth century. Consequences of such drastic and relatively sudden changes are reflected in the Iranian society. Women in particular have been described by Valentine Moghadam as the 'major losers of the revolution', and suffered a 'decline of their legal status and social positions in the name of religious revival'. [122] In this thesis, I aim to better comprehend how women's lives were affected by the dramatic changes of the twentieth century.

Consequently, in this chapter, I aim to review literature focusing on the experiences of change by Iranian women across the twentieth century. This will be investigated in the first part of this chapter. In the second part, I will review contemporary discriminatory Iranian laws and their implications for women in Iran.

1. Women's lives in twentieth century Iran

A number of authors have examined the ways in which historical changes of the twentieth century affected women's lives. Haleh Esfandiari, in her book *Reconstructed Lives,* interviewed 32 Iranian women in order to gain perspective on the matter. She gathered women's thoughts on said changes. Prior to the 1979 Islamic revolution, she asserts that interviewed women assert that work opportunities were greater, although men were frequently getting preferential treatment. This is said by the author to be a result of policies under the Islamic republic that aimed to confine women to the home. For example, nurseries were closed, thereby forcing workingwomen to stay home to care for their children.[123]

For Afshar, the inception of the Islamic Republic of Iran has resulted in the creation of a dual society dividing two classes of citizens: males, who enjoy legal and penal protection from Islamic law, and women, 'formally recognized as second-class citizens'.[124] Esfandari's interviews revealed that the revolution 'created devastation' in women's lives.[125] Women believed that the government would be secular, and that the widespread arrests and humiliations they faced daily would not last after the government is instigated. Their expectations from this revolution were great, but were not met.

---

[121] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 257
[122] Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action.
[123] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.
[124] Afshar, H. (1985). Women, state and ideology in Iran. *Third World Quarterly*,7(2), 256-278.
[125] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*.

Subsequently, they have had to adapt to changing gender roles, and decreased rights and freedoms. [126] Women's resistance to the current regime takes three forms according to the author: active disregard of the imposed dress-code, increased presence in universities, and involvement in the workforce.[127] Moghadam likewise argues that women's high level of participation in the economy reflects 'a certain resilience and resistance to domination'[128], and that 'women have increased their visibility and public participation in the Islamic Republic'.[129]

Women also became more politicized in the years leading up to the revolution. Their involvement in political life grew strong through the proliferation of women's organisations. Parvin Paidar highlights the salient role of women in the building of the current government. She describes the different roles and symbolic representations held by women across the century:

> 'The 'modern' woman of the early twentieth century was seen to be an essential element of national progress; the 'Westernised' woman in the mid-twentieth century was regarded as a 'sex-object'; the revolutionary woman of the late 1970s was associated with rejection of Western-style modernisation; and the 'Muslim militant' woman of the late twentieth century was regarded as signifying cultural authenticity and Islamic modernity.'[130]

Paidar argues that women have impacted changes in the regime as much as these have their lives – which ought to be further investigated.[131] Although their involvement in politics is not 'formal', women actively fight for their rights through their organisation into political pressure groups.[132] According to Esfandiari, women's interest in their rights during the pre-revolutionary period was lower than it is now.[133]

2. Law in contemporary Iran

Valentine Moghadam has coined Iranian law 'an extremely patriarchal interpretation of the sharia'.[134] The purpose of this section is to review laws in contemporary Iran that come to undermine women's human rights. I largely base this part on Mohammad Hossein Nayyeri's legal commentary on said laws, published in 2013 in the Iran Human Rights Documentation Centre.[135] His text is split into four different sections: criminal law, family law, inheritance and ownership, and employment and right to work. Consequently, this section will assume the same structure.

---

[126] *Ibid*

[127] *Ibid*

[128] Moghadam, V. (1988). Women, work, and ideology in the Islamic Republic. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *20*(02), 221-243.

[129] Moghadam, V. M. (1999). Revolution, religion, and gender politics: Iran and Afghanistan compared. *Journal of Women's History*, *10*(4), 172-195. p. 190

[130] Paidar, P. (1997). *Women and the political process in twentieth-century Iran* (Vol. 1). Cambridge pp. 356-57

[131] *Ibid*, p. 361

[132] *Ibid*

[133] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*.

[134] Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action. p. 2

[135] Nayyeri, M. H. (2013). Gender inequality and discrimination: the case of Iranian women. *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Available at http://www. iranhrdc. org/english/publications/legal-commentary/1000000261-gender-inequality-and-discrimination-the-case-of-iranian-women.*

One of the basic human rights as stipulated in the UDHR is equality before the law.[136] This principle is not observed in *shari'a* criminal law, and thus in Iranian contemporary law – in which women and men experience differential treatment. Girls' criminal responsibility age is set at eight years old, versus fourteen years for boys. When a woman is murdered, her blood money equals half that of a man. Moreover, if a father is responsible for the murder of his children, he cannot be sentenced to death, and will only be facing three to ten years in prison. This law stems from the high value that is given to family honour in Muslim tradition – borne by female family members – and therefore offers leniency in the case of honour killings. If a man catches his wife red handed committing adultery, he is permitted by law to murder her. Adultery, if not caught on the spot by the partner, is punishable by stoning to death, and is 'applied with more frequency and severity to women'.[137] Men usually do not serve this sentence, as they are able to contract a temporary marriage without the knowledge of their wives in order to engage in extra-marital affairs. Guidelines on the stoning procedures are also unfavourable to women. Men are buried up to their waist, whilst women will be buried to their chest, affording men greater chances of escaping the punishment – in which case their life will be spared. Women's testimony before the law is worth half that of a man, because of their alleged unreasonable, emotional, and forgetful nature. Accordingly, women are prohibited to work as judges, among other positions. Improper *hijab* is punishable by prison sentences and fines.

Iranian family law has been pointed out by human rights activists such as Moghadam to be particularly unfavourable to women. For girls, legal marriage age was set at thirteen years old and fourteen years old for boys. Girls' legal male guardian is permitted to marry their minor daughters in forced marriage, and adult virgins are required to obtain permission in order to marry. Women are unequivocally forbidden to wed non-Muslim men as well as foreigners. Men on the other hand are permitted to marry Jewish and Christian women. Men are also allowed to marry four wives – as long as they can financially support them, and as many temporary wives as they please under *sigeh* contracts. Women, on the other hand, are not permitted to marry multiple men. The contract of marriage under Iranian law comes with rights and duties for both parties. Women are required to obey and submit to their husband, and men are obliged to pay an allowance to their wife in exchange. Upon marriage, men are appointed at the head of the family. Wives need authorisation from their husband in order to apply for a passport and travel outside of the country. Moreover, husbands can prevent their wives to engage in a professional career if he considers it to be 'incompatible with the family's interests or the dignity of him or his wife'.[138] Women are also restricted in their divorce rights. Whilst men may unilaterally divorce their wives, without their consent or knowledge, women may only initiate divorce under 'intolerable difficulty and hardship' in the marriage.[139] Regarding custody, men

---

[136] United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), article 10
[137] Nayyeri, M. H. (2013). Gender inequality and discrimination: the case of Iranian women.
[138] *ibid*
[139] *ibid*

hold priority. Women are given custody of their children until the age of seven in a case of divorce, after their charge is passed on to the father.

Women receive unequal treatment with respects to their allotted inheritance upon the passing of their relatives. Women are considered worth half a man. Consequently, daughters are only entitled to receiving half of what their brothers inherit upon death of their father. Wives, in the case of their husband's death, may get at the most a quarter of his assets. Their inheritance is constricted to a greater extent if the couple has children – in which case the wife may only inherit one eight of the assets. In a polygamous marriage, wives will divide one quarter or one eight of the assets among them. Husbands, on the other hand, inherit all property belonging to their wife.

Women's employment rates have declined under the Islamic Republic, in comparison to the pre-1979 period. Women's employment rate remains lower today than it was during that epoch. However, law in Iran does not prohibit women to work. As was previously stated, women are prevented from accessing judge positions. They are also forbidden to run for presidency. Opportunities for women are great in other job functions, such as teachers and doctors. The aim of the government is to have enough doctors and teachers for women to be treated and taught exclusively by female professionals.

3. Concluding remarks

Women have experienced significant changes in their social and legal status under the Islamic Republic of Iran. Following the Islamic revolution in 1979, changes to the political and legal structure of the country were made swiftly. Iran became an Islamic Republic, and *shari'a* law was applied. As soon as 1981, observance of proper *hijab* was made compulsory. Amendments to the penal code took away the rights of women in family law that had been obtained under the Shah. Their involvement in politics in the years leading up to the revolution has politicised women. Their expectations from the 1979 revolution were great, but were not met. In Iran today, women are constructed as primarily obedient mothers and wives. They are overtly considered as second-class citizens. This status is reinforced by the Iranian Penal Code and Family Law, which stipulate that women are worth half a man. Resultant laws do not procure women with rights equal to those of men – in blatant violation with international human rights standards. Paidar calls for further investigation into the ways governmental changes have affected Iranian women's lives. This is the primary aim of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4. 1979 – the Iranian revolution: women's perspectives

'If no longer an individual's choice, the hijab *becomes a banner of a political movement'*[140]

The purpose of this fourth chapter is to gain a deeper understanding of the ways women experienced the 1979 revolution. Led by the sub-question *'What social, economic and legal changes have Iranian women experienced alongside the changing religious and political context following the 1979 Islamic revolution?'* I will proceed by analysing women's narratives, with the support of historical sources and Zerubavel's concept of collective memory. Moreover, women's testimonies will be analysed in comparison to those obtained by Haleh Esfandari.

In terms of structure, this chapter will open with a depiction of women's testimonies. In this first section, I cite parts of the narrated lived experiences of six women to represent my results: Nasrin, Azadeh, Jaleh, Nazanin, Arezu and Donya. Their testimonies were picked as these participants expressed themselves more extensively about the revolution than other participants. Their views will be placed in relation to participants' who are not cited here. The second part of this chapter will analyse women's transcripts and their experience of historical discontinuity with the 1979 revolution. In the third and fourth segments, I investigate the role women have played in the revolution. The third section will focus on their symbolic role, whilst the fourth will examine women's agency and instrumentality in the revolution. Finally, I will close on a summarizing conclusion.

1. Women's testimonies

Nasrin is a fifty-year-old woman from Tehran, Iran, currently working as a doctor in France. She left Iran in 1983 following the revolution. She comes from a Muslim religious background. She has "almost no direct contact" with family or friends living in Iran, and she does not visit the country regularly, as her last visit goes back to six years ago. When asked about her experience of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, she answered:

> *I was 14 when the revolution happened. At first there were no brutal changes, but very progressively, spread out on the 3 or 4 years following it, there were changes that imposed themselves, first by intimidation and then with the support of the law. (...) I was living in Iran at that time but I was only fourteen years old. I was raised in a military family that was pretty close to the regime, so I didn't have the opportunity or the convictions necessary to participate in it. After the fall of the regime, I of course hoped for a democracy. I remember at that time, mine and everyone's biggest fear was to have a communist regime. This was the case because of the proximity of Iran and the USSR, and also the strong mobilisation of partisans of the communist party -* Tudeh *- during the events. I think at that time no one ever thought that Iran*

---

[140] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 254

could become and Islamic Republic. Not even the Iranians. Not even the revolutionary
scholars.

Azadeh is also fifty years old, and currently lives in France where she works as a school director. She fled Iran a year later than Nasrin, in 1984. She frequently visits the country, at least twice a year, and remains in contact with her relatives living in Iran:

> *I was in Iran with my family at the time and we did participate in the demonstrations. It was*
> *nice to fight for freedom. Now, I regret it, because it has given so much power to religion – it*
> *was ignorance.*

Jaleh is fifty-three years old and lives in France, working as an engineer. She is in contact with her family living in Iran and goes to visit them regularly. She fled the country in the year of the revolution, in 1979:

> *I was 18 years old and I did not really engage in the revolution. I think at the time not many*
> *people were truly understanding what was happening. The majority was caught off guard. Of*
> *course, there was also large numbers of scholars and people close to the clerical or military*
> *elite who were very aware and informed on the situation.*

Nazanin is fifty-one years old. She works as an orthodontist in France, where she has been living since 1981 when she fled Iran. She has family who lives in the country and regularly travels there:

> *I was in Iran during the revolution, and I honestly experienced it as a huge trauma. I knew that*
> *nothing good would come out of it. And the obligation to wear hijab is the worst thing that has*
> *ever happened to me. I never sympathised with the revolutionary spirit.*

Arezu is a fifty five year old woman living in Tehran, Iran. She holds an associate degree and works as a teacher. She grew up in a very religious family and remains a practicing Muslim. Here, she talks about her memories of the revolution and her expectations:

> *I was in my last year of high school before the revolution. I took part in some protests. I*
> *wanted a change in regime. Instead of the dictatorship we had before the revolution, I was*
> *hoping for a better government. Instead, things got worse after the revolution. I am not happy*
> *about the current situation. (...) Women wanted more equality. But I think the main thing was*
> *about employment. Women wanted to be able to choose the job they want, they wanted*
> *freedom of employment.*

Donya is fifty years old and resides in Tehran, Iran. She holds a Bachelor's degree. She is a housewife, and comes from a Muslim religious background:

> *I did not participate in the revolution, however, after the revolution, I became involved in*
> Jahad Sazandegi.[141] *(...) Women who wore the* hijab *were expecting greater security following*
> *the revolution.*

---

[141] *Jahad Sazandegi*, meaning Jihad of Construction, was instituted during the Islamic Revolution in 1979 in order to help build infrastructure under the Islamic Republic. People involved in the organization were volunteers.

Upon analysis of participant transcripts, it becomes clear that the 1979 revolution occurs consistently across participants' discourses on women's rights in Iran during the twenty-first century. The questions that were asked clearly featured the 1979 revolution as central to the history of the country. The revolution unfailingly serves as an anchor in women's testimonies, around which they articulate their historical narratives. This concept will be investigated in the following section.

2. Analysis

Review of transcripts highlight that participants in this research unswervingly employ terminology suggesting a clear break in the way they conceptualise and remember the past. Their 'plotlines' are therefore a reflection of historical discontinuity. Zerubavel argued that 'plotlines' are reflections of social identity. The historical event of the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution is used as a 'watershed' by all women involved in this thesis – reflecting their belonging to a single 'mnemonic community'.[142]

One may wonder why this is here observed. The women in this research have had different life trajectories: some have fled Iran in the 1980s, some in the 2000s, and some currently live in the country. Their ages vary, so do their religious and social backgrounds. Zerubavel explains this phenomenon by arguing that 'watersheds' and conceptions of the past are socially constructed through various means. Upon the building of the Islamic Republic following the 1979 revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini employed various methods in order to eradicate any trace of the 2,500 years of monarchy in Iran. One of these mediums, 'resetting historical chronometers', was used to engrave the 1979 revolution onto Iranians' memory:

> 'Resetting "historical chronometers" at zero typically also involves emphasizing *primacy,* as when the first weekday following the historic 1979 referendum affirming the foundation of Iran's Islamic Republic was explicitly proclaimed by the country's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, "the first day of the government of God".'[143]

Zerubavel argues that 'establishing a new beginning usually presupposes the death of some prior entity'.[144] In line with this, a series of measures were undertaken by Khomeini in the years following the revolution to eliminate and/or taint memories of the monarchy. Streets bearing reference to the Pahlavi dynasty were renamed and historical buildings were destroyed. The establishment of a new Iranian constitution changed the name of the country from Iran to the Islamic Republic of Iran.[145] Literature was censored and textbooks were edited in order to remove any positivity regarding the dethroned monarchy. Iranian elites close to the Pahlavis were purged. Finally, the revolution was awarded a commemorative day on the 11th of February, and the Islamic Republic is celebrated on the 1st of April each year – both celebrated as a part of the 'new beginnings' narrative promoted by

---

[142] Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. p. 82
[143] *Ibid*, p. 91
[144] *Ibid*, p. 89
[145] Similar measures were undertaken by Reza Shah upon his ascension to the throne. One major change was the name of the country, from Persia to Iran in 1935.

Khomeini.[146] Zerubavel maintains that the achievement of this objective involves 'actual efforts to socially engineer a new type of person who would embody the dramatic historical break between the old and the new eras'.[147] Here, I argue that women occupied a pivotal role in the 1979 revolution, and in turn found themselves being the symbolic embodiment of change.

Women's and the veil's symbolic role in Iran can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. Under Reza Pahlavi, women became the emblem of change, modernity, and Westernisation – the shah's main objectives for the country during his reign. The veil was subsequently banned in 1936. His son Muhammad Reza Pahlavi sustained his father's objective with the passing of laws safeguarding gender equality, such as women's right to vote and family protection laws. Women became a façade of modernity for Iran under the Pahlavis.

Likewise, *hijab* became the external sign of these changes upon the outbreak of the revolution and in the years following. Khomeini coined the *chador* to be the 'flag of the revolution'.[148] In fact, women used their *hijab* symbolically. Those who sympathised with Khomeini in protests leading up to the revolution wore their *hijab* as a sign of opposition to the shah. In 1981, *hijab* became compulsory in Iran, as an external sign of religion and tradition in the face of Westernisation and modernity. Women became the symbol of change for Khomeini. He aimed to redefine women's role according to Muslim ideals, and in turn to shift away from that ascribed to women under the Pahlavi, described by himself in a speech given on Women's Day, in 1979: 'During their reigns, Reza Khan and Muhammad Reza Khan vulgarised women, dragging them down from that status they once enjoyed.'[149] Upon the foundation of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini aimed to transform women into "ideal revolutionary women", primarily observing the roles of pious mothers and wives. This shift helped the build-up of the revolution as a watershed for the women here interviewed: Zerubavel points out that watershed often underline deep social identity shifts.[150] This matter will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Women were also agents of the revolution. They participated *en masse* to protests, ensuing calls by clerics for women to rally against the shah. Their expectations from this revolution were high and stemmed from promises made by the leaders of the revolution. Esfandari points out that women were told that their rights would be improved and they would enjoy greater gender equality under a new regime.[151]

Women who participated in this research had various expectations from the revolution. Firstly, women yearned for a regime change. Women were not satisfied with the government of the shah,

---

[146] Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. p. 102

[147] *Ibid*, p. 90

[148] Msu.edu, (2015). *Women & the Iranian Revolution*. [online] Available at: https://www.msu.edu/user/hillrr/161lec27.htm [Accessed 29 Jul. 2015].

[149] Al-Islam.org, (2015). *Great Women of the World*. [online] Available at: http://www.al-islam.org/position-women-viewpoint-imam-khomeini-ra/great-women-world#17-may-1979 [Accessed 29 Jul. 2015].

[150] Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*.

[151] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. p. 52

which was coined a 'dictatorship' by Arezu, and therefore hoped for 'freedom', 'democracy', and a 'better government'.[152] However, the revolution brought about an Islamic theocracy. This regime changed surprised everyone, as illustrated in women's testimonies. Three of the interviewed women actively took part in the protests – Azadeh, Donya and Arezu, and all express some regret in doing so, following the installation of a theocracy. Azadeh says 'Now, I regret it, because it has given too much power to religion – it was ignorance'. Second, women hoped for an improvement of their rights. They however experienced for the most part a decline of their rights under the Islamic Republic. This matter will be discussed further in the next chapter. Women who wore their *hijab* as a sign of support for the revolution took the streets bare-headed following the 1981 law imposing them to observe proper *hijab*. Women did not want nor expected the *hijab* to become mandatory.

Therefore, I argue that women were also instruments of the revolution. Women were rallied by revolutionary leaders under false promises. They helped the overthrow of the monarchy, and their expectations from the revolution were shattered later on. Although the women gathered in an anti-shah movement, they did not support the instigation of an Islamic Republic in Iran.

3. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, participants' testimonies have helped to show their belonging to one single mnemonic community – that of Iranian **women**. They share similar perceptions and narratives of the past, in spite of their dissimilar backgrounds. The revolution is perceived as a break, and in turn their historical narrative is discontinuous, signalling a deep-rooted identity shift among women. This highlights Khomeini's success in symbolically marking the end of the monarchy and the beginning of the Islamic Republic. In this achievement, women held a pivotal role. I argued the role of women in the 1979 Islamic Revolution was threefold. The *hijab* was the symbol of the revolution and its bearers the embodiment of change. Second, women were agents of the revolution. Their involvement and mobilisation in protests stemmed from their high expectations regarding their position. Finally, women were instruments of the revolution. Whilst women supported the fall of the Shah, they did not expect nor desire the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran. Their rights were drastically restricted under *shari'a* law, and in turn their expectations from the revolution were not met. The social, economic and legal changes experienced by Iranian women stemmed from this pivotal historical moment.

---

[152] Azadeh, Arezu and Nasrin's words.

CHAPTER 5. Pre-revolutionary Iran and post-revolutionary Iran compared

As noted in the previous chapter, Iranian women conceptualise the 1979 revolution as a clear break in history, around which they organise their historical narratives. Western media portrays the period leading up to the 1979 Iranian revolution as a time of rights expansion for women. However, as was noted before, this is not how women experienced the pre-revolutionary period. For example, unveiling was made compulsory in 1936, precluding Muslim women to exercise their right to religious expression. In subsequent laws, women were given the right to vote – in 1963 – and family law reforms in 1968 constrained polygamy, gave women the rights to divorce their husband, as well as to the custody of their children, amongst others. From a Western perspective, said changes benefited greatly the situation of women. In light of this, the aim of the present chapter is to analyse the ways in which women experienced social, economic and legal change in the twentieth century, before and after the 1979 revolution.

In terms of structure, I first explore the various ways in which women compare and contrast their rights in Iran before and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Next, I investigate the identity changes women have undergone in two different parts: firstly, gender relations and family life, and second, education and employment.

1. Women's rights in pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary Iran

In this part, I rely on the testimonies of Arezu and Jaleh – who were introduced in the previous chapter, as well as those of Taraneh, Shirin, and Maryam, to exemplify the views expressed by women in this research. On the basis of their wordings and opinions, I relate to the testimonies of all interviewed women for comparison.

Arezu here exemplifies an ambivalent view on the changes of the situation of women after the 1979 revolution:

> AREZU – *'I grew up in a very religious family. Before the revolution, we would not go out in public so much. There were a lot of restrictions on us, particularly because we wore the hijab. For example, at the time, women who wore the hijab were not welcome in governmental jobs. (…) Things got worse after the revolution. I am not happy about the current situation. (…) Before the revolution women had more rights. These rights were restricted since the revolution. Because women now have to wear a hijab, they are able to get better positions in society.'*

Taraneh is a fifty four year old woman who lives in France, where she works as an architect. She fled Iran in 1978, during the outbreak of the 1979 revolution. She remains in contact with her relatives inside the country and regularly travels there. Maryam is forty-five years old. She lives in France since 1975, when she left Iran with her family, and currently works as a school director. Both of their views exemplify the view of some participants that things have got worse for women since the 1979 revolution:

TARANEH – *'The situation of women today is not even comparable to that under the shah. Women have very little rights and are considered to be worth half a man. (...) Under the shah, women had as much rights as women did in Europe. They were not veiled. They could file for divorce, and they could also teach.'*

MARYAM – *'Obviously [before the revolution] women could wear what they wanted, they could also work and vote. But the country was already very inconsistent. They needed an authorisation from their husband to travel outside of the country. The situation was not as bad as it is now. The Iranian society was burgeoning, and civic liberties for both men and women were becoming realities.*

Shirin is a sixty three year old woman from Tehran who has been living in the Netherlands since 1986. She has a Muslim religious background, although she does not practice her religion. Her view is that things have got better for women since the 1979 revolution:

SHIRIN – *'Women have more rights than before, and in the society they are viewed more equally. Their rights are still not where they should be. They are allowed to divorce more freely if they want to. Women work, live alone, and are more independent.'*

In Table 1, below, I give an overview of what women expressed in their respective responses. Three women did not touch upon the topic – namely, Farah, Goli and Azadeh.

TABLE 1. Women's perceptions of change since the 1979 revolution

Perception of change	**Progress**	**Decline**	**Ambivalent**
Maryam		▨	
Nasrin		▨	
Arezu			▨
Laleh	▨		
Jaleh		▨	
Nazanin			▨
Taraneh		▨	
Shirin	▨		
Donya	▨		

As was previously noted, women experienced a change in their rights with the inception of the Islamic Republic and the application of *shari'a* law. As members of the same mnemonic community of Iranian women, participants consistently experienced the revolution as a break in history. However, analysis of women's transcripts concerning their human rights situation in Iran in both periods reveals disparity among them.

Four women in this research believe the human rights situation of women in Iran has gotten worse since the 1979 revolution. Their narratives follow a 'zig-zag in time' plotline, illustrating a change in 'historical trajectory' of Iran. Precisely, these women's narrative follow a rise and fall

scheme.[153] Specifically, women believe their situation to have been rising in the years preceding the revolution, after which point it declined. Following the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which Zerubavel would call a 'turning point' in women's narratives, the human rights situation of women is perceived to have fallen.[154] In theorising this schematic representation of the past, Zerubavel pointed out that the past is typically idealised, or 'highly romanticised'.[155] This is the view typically upheld by Western media – involving an idealisation of pre-revolutionary years. Participants however acknowledge that the human rights situation of women was not ideal prior to the revolution, but in line with the rights of women in Europe, in comparison to today. I find Nazanin's words to exemplify this view perfectly: 'Of course, they did not have to wear the *hijab*, but their emancipation was limited to their right to wear a mini skirt'.

Three woman remembers the past with relation to her rights as a fall and rise schema, Laleh, Shirin and Donya. Laleh, in earlier questions, revealed her expectation from the revolution. She said that 'women who wore the *hijab* wanted greater security'. Evidently, this was achieved under the Islamic Republic. However, she also said later on that she tries to 'accept the situation because I do not dare to act'. She also believes that women's rights have improved under the Islamic Republic. This view is shared by Shirin and Donya.

Jaleh, on the other hand, believes that women's rights have not changed since the 1979 revolution. She raises an interesting point, which links up to the next section. She asserts that:

> '*Women's rights in family law (inheritance, divorce…) have not changed at all. But overall, today, women are more educated. I think this explains the growing intolerance towards everything related to the differential treatment of women and men.*'

She therefore believes that, although women's rights have not undergone major changes, women's perceptions have changed due to higher education levels.

Zerubavel theorises that benchmark episodes such as the Islamic Revolution of 1979, as experienced by Iranian women, are the reflection of deep-rooted identity changes in mnemonic communities.[156] The following parts will investigate the identity changes that women underwent over the twentieth century.

2. Education and work

One point that all participants in this research raised is the great improvement of women's education and work opportunities. In this section, I will focus primarily on the words of Jaleh, mentioned in the previous paragraph, as well as those of Donya, Nazanin, Azadeh and Arezu to represent the views of the participants in this research.

---

[153] Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. pp. 18-19
[154] *Ibid*, p. 19
[155] *Ibid*, p. 16
[156] *Ibid*, p. 84

DONYA – *'Women now have better jobs, have better financial security, and are more educated than they were under the shah. (...) They are more educated, paid better, and therefore have more abilities in society.'*

NAZANIN – *'Before the revolution the percentage of women going to university was much lower. (...) Straight after the revolution, the fact that the government made the* hijab *obligatory in universities gave incentives to a lot of families to allow their daughters to attend. (...) It is much more difficult to subdue someone educated. (...) Women have accessed the highest academic and career levels.(...) They are very educated, but still live in a cage – and precisely their education level makes it more unbearable for them.'*

AZADEH – *'Women between 30 and 50 years old have a very active and important role in society. They are the ones that manage the country. However, you don't see them with high titles or job positions very often.'*

AREZU – *'Before the revolution, there were not many opportunities for women to work. Nowadays, women have a lot more choice.'*

Across the twentieth century, and under the Islamic Republic, education rates drastically improved. Literacy rates for the whole population reached 90% at the end of the century. Women's numbers in secondary education have surpassed men's. Women constitute 60% of graduate students today. Eight of the twelve women here interviewed pointed out some improvement in the areas of education and work opportunities for women after the 1979 revolution, regardless of their opinions vis-à-vis the rights situation, as stated in the previous sub-chapter. Consequences of higher education levels are also pointed out. Jaleh and Nazanin, for example, believe that higher education levels of women have made women more aware of their rights and the differential treatment they receive in comparison to men. I would add to this the communications boom that occurred in recent years. The fact that Iranian women have access to social media has meant that they are better able to observe women's situation in other countries, and therefore compare.

Regarding employment, the unanimity in women's responses came unexpected. Women systematically point out that their work opportunities and salaries have risen since the 1979 revolution. Esfandari, in her research, obtained significantly different results. The women she interviewed experienced a decline in their work opportunities under the Islamic Republic. [157] The women interviewed by Esfandari were all very much involved in activist movements in the country – which I believe accounts for the significant difference in our results. Moreover, the women here questioned are all very educated. Therefore, it may be that for this specific group of women, opportunities have improved. The women here interview accordingly point out the remaining salary inequalities, as well as the inability of women to attain high job positions. Moreover, as pointed out in chapter 3, women's employment rates have declined under the Islamic Republic, in comparison to the pre-1979 period.

---

[157] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. p. 77

Although the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s has forced the country to include women in its labour force, women's employment rate remains lower today than it was under the shah.[158] Women who participated in this research however experience an increase in their involvement in the Iranian workforce.

3. Gender relations and family life

Due to their higher perceived involvement in the workforce, as well as the redefinition of women's gender roles under the Islamic Republic, women have experienced a reversal in their gender role within the family as well as in society. Here, I lean on the testimonies of Maryam, Nazanin, Arezu, Laleh and Donya:

> MARYAM – *'The word I would use for their situation is adaptation. They have adapted to this new situation and live their real life hidden. What was crazy is that so many men were fired after the revolution, so ironically it was women that were forced to work. Again, there is a problem in the country: men don't work and women who do, but the government wants us to believe that women are all stay at home mothers and wives! Women today have a strange mix of plenty of liberties, and plenty of restrictions at the same time. It's like a perpetual dance! (...) I mean that they have to lead double lives. They need to be the man of the family when it is needed, and they also need to be stay at home mothers and wives. It's crazy. Iranian women are strong.'*

> NAZANIN – *'Women, like the rest of the Iranian society, are more "awake", and have a thirst for freedom. It is much more difficult to subdue someone educated. The problem is that they know they need to live a lie. For example: almost everyone gets a nose job in Iran – including men. But what surgery is most practiced? Hymen reconstruction.(...) I am always very shocked when I return to Iran by men's dominating attitudes.'*

> AREZU – *'Since the revolution, men's behaviours have radically changed. Their commitment and loyalty have been fading out 100%. I don't think you can trust men anymore. (...) I think today women have more responsibilities. They need to work both inside and outside the home.'*

> LALEH – *'Men's faithfulness towards their family has been fading out. (...) Women's responsibilities have become lighter. There are not many housewives anymore. Nowadays, kids are mainly brought up by schools.'*

> DONYA – *'Because women now have more options outside the house, her responsibilities within the home have declined. (...) Men used to be more dominant. Today, women are becoming more dominant.'*

> NASRIN – *'The situation of women in Iran is, and has always been very paradoxical. Iranian women have had the right to vote for years. They have had access to education and instruction for a long time. They can drive, cure, teach, do business. They represent a great economic,*

---

[158] Moghadam, V. M. (1999). Revolution, religion, and gender politics: Iran and Afghanistan compared.

creative and intellectual strength for the country. So, in appearance, the Iranian woman is a free woman.'

Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, women have experienced a change in their *expected* gender roles, as highlighted in chapter 3. Women's roles were reconstructed by Khomeini as reflections of tradition and religion in the country. Accordingly, women were expected to primarily hold the roles of mothers and wives. However, as a consequence of their involvement in the workforce following the Iran-Iraq war, women have to undertake two roles. Participants point out that women have to lead 'double lives' and have had to 'adapt'. Shifts in gender role, and the involvement of women into the workforce have caused women to drift away from their expected gender roles in a Muslim society.[159] Women therefore struggle in mitigating between their expected gender role, and the role they actually hold. The duality of society and the inadequacy of law in the face of a secular, modern society has been pointed out by various authors, and is exemplified hereby.[160]

Part of this struggle stems from men's behaviour. A number of women believe they cannot rely on men anymore. This was pointed out by Esfandari in her research, in which women asserted that they had lost all respect for men. Esfandari explains this loss of trust in, and respect for men as follows: 'The victory of the revolution meant a resurgence of male superiority and arrogance, an assertion of a claim to control women's lives and their bodies.'[161] Moreover, the resentment that is felt by Iranian women could also be explained by the fact that they feel powerless and subjugated by their male counterparts. Taraneh asserted that 'The current situation of women in Iran is fragile, and fully dependent on men's goodwill.'

4. Concluding remarks

In this chapter, I have analysed the ways in which women experienced legal, economic, and social change following the 1979 revolution. Firstly, women have extremely diverging views in comparing their situation prior and after the installation of the Islamic Republic. Four women have experienced a decline in their rights. Here, I argue that women's perceptions of their rights have changed more than their actual rights have. This was caused by higher rates of education and facilitated by use of social media. Second, alongside spiralling education rates, women here have also experienced an increase in their work opportunities. Lastly, women have undergone deep-rooted identity change during the twentieth century. Their testimonies have highlighted the duality of the Iranian society.

---

[159] Paidar, P. (1997). *Women and the political process in twentieth-century Iran* (Vol. 1). p. 356-57
Fahmy, M. (2002). *La condition de la femme dans l'Islam*. Editions Allia.
[160] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 241
Mayer, A. E. (1991). Islam and human rights: Tradition and politics. p. 95
[161] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. p. 172

CHAPTER 6. Islam, politics and women's rights

___

'Women are at the centre of the debate over culture and authenticity.
They are also central to the issue of the control and exercise of power in Muslim societies.'[162]

This chapter is led by the sub-question: *'What social, economic and legal changes have Iranian women experienced alongside the changing religious and political context following the 1979 Islamic revolution?'* In previous chapters, I have highlighted the deep structural changes that the country underwent during the twentieth century. The country, following the 1979 revolution, became an Islamic Republic. With the application of *shari'a* law, women have experienced their rights in various ways. Most participants have experienced a decline in their rights, whilst three of them have experienced improvement. This is particularly true for women wearing the *hijab*, who experience greater security and opportunities now than they did under the shah's rule. The international community, on the other hand, consistently denounces Iran for its human rights violations, particularly in the area of women's rights. At the core of the orientalist debate is the area of women's rights, denounced by Western powers to denigrate non-western states and evidence their uncivilised nature. The universality debate regarding human rights has taught us that a number of scholars assert the incompatibility of human rights and Islamic laws and ideology. Here, I will focus on women's experiences on the matter. Upon analysis of women's answers, three themes of prominence emerged. Consequently, in terms of structure, I will proceed by, firstly, discussing women's opinions on Islam. The second part of this chapter will focus on politics and resistance in contemporary Iran. Finally, I will gather and analyse women's opinions on human rights and culture.

1. Islam

In this sub-chapter, the testimonies of Maryam, Nazanin, Arezu, Nasrin, Farah and Taraneh illustrate best the views of the interviewed women, and therefore will be used for analysis:

> MARYAM – *'I think that Islam, just as any religion did before, needs a period of reflection and adaptation. It needs to be profoundly transformed. The weakness of this religion is that there are way too many ways of interpreting it. (...) Religion has to be separated from the state. Having a theocracy in any religion is dangerous, and women become the easiest targets!'*

> NAZANIN – *'Here is a politically incorrect answer. I agree with Houellebecq: all religions are stupid, and among them, Islam wins the gold medal. I don't know what his exact words are, but I adhere to that idea. A country with such ingenuity is bridled by a stupid ideology like Islam.'*

___

[162] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. p. 255

AREZU – *'Yes, my perception of Islam has completely changed. The revolution did not turn out as we expected. I think the revolution has caused a loss of religious belief among young people. Real Islam has not been fulfilled in the instigation of the Islamic Republic, and changes were not made according to Muslim ideals.'*

NASRIN – *'I think that Islam needs to evolve with time. Unfortunately, I feel like in the past 20 years Islam isn't evolving with the world, quite the opposite, it has become more rigid and conservative. For me, Islam has changed in Iran and across the world. There is a tendency today to fundamental Islam that is in total inadequacy and disconnection with the world. (…) since forever and even more so since the revolution, her freedom as a woman is subjected to beliefs and rules established by the men and traditions of Islam.'*

FARAH – *'I am not religious and I think that there is no use for such ancient laws in our society these days. I have such a hard time seeing Muslim men and women in Europe!!! They should go and live a couple of years in a country such as Iran to have a real good taste of what religion can do to their lives. (...) I personally think that the younger generation are starting to take more control of their life regarding their status in their families and their parents but they cannot go further in their social status with all the laws that the Islamic governments impose.'*

TARANEH – *'Islam is extremely negatively conceived today, and rightfully so. Islam has become a source of conflict and violence. This religion has unfortunately not adapted to the changes of the past years, and does not fit in the 21ˢᵗ Century.'*

The extracts given above are the views of the participants in this research. Jaleh did not answer this question, Laleh shares Arezu's views. Shirin asserted that her perception of Islam has not changed, and Donya pointed out that her 'thoughts are not always positive'. It is interesting to see that women, regardless of their religious background, offer a very negative view of Islam – Maryam, Farah, and Taraneh are not religious, whilst the other three are practicing Muslims. The first main point raised by Maryam, Nasrin, Farah and Taraneh is the inadequacy of Islamic laws in contemporary societies. Afshari raised a similar point in asserting that the spread of state structure and capitalist economies, societies have become secular as a whole, including Iran.[163] Moghadam also touched upon this topic, and affirmed Iranian law to be anachronistic, both in relation to the current mores of Iranian society, and international standards.[164] Accordingly, Maryam openly argues that religion ought to be separated from the state.

Second, some women point out that Islam, as applied in Iran, remains one of the many possible interpretations of this religion. This was pointed out by Afshari: 'more than one voice is heard in Muslim countries. Each claims authenticity.'[165] Arezu, for example, believes that 'real Islam has not been fulfilled in the instigation of the Islamic Republic, and changes were not made according to

---

[163] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights
[164] Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action.
[165] Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights, p. 266

Muslim ideals'. Finally, Farah and Nasrin both argue that Islamic law is a hindrance to women's emancipation in Iran.

2. Politics and resistance

In this second sub-chapter, I rely on the testimonies of Maryam, Arezu, Farah, Nasrin and Taraneh for analysis:

> MARYAM – *'Religion has to be separated from the state. Having a theocracy in any religion is dangerous, and women become the easiest targets! (...) Everyone in Iran is waiting for one thing. One thing: a change in the regime and the departure of the* mullahs. *When? As soon as other countries stop participating in dialogues with this regime that no one wants.'*

> AREZU – *'We use the* hijab *to fight. I mean, even though my family is very religious, we allow our daughters to choose whether or not they want to wear the* hijab. *We can do this to get back at the government that doesn't give them a choice.'*

> FARAH – *'I do not think that wearing those horrible makeups and looking like prostitutes is part of a protest. I find it shallow and desperate. A woman has no rights in an Islamic government, no future, no name and no heritage!'*

> NASRIN – *'Paradoxically, after the revolution, the number of women enrolled for secondary studies was only getting higher and ended up exceeding that of male students. This is essentially due to the fact that after the revolution, the only path for a woman to escape partially the weights of Islamic tradition (marriage, family) was to study. So I think instruction is the best weapon for women to shaken up the weight of traditions. We also shouldn't forget that one of the most guarantors of the practice and conservation of traditions are mothers. More than anything, I hope and believe that future mothers who are instructed, in communication with the outside world through our new means of communication, are going to change the mentalities of our future generations.'*

> TARANEH – *'They resist and protest in their own ways. For example, they put some make up on. They keep on studying in universities. They also organise financial and psychological help groups.'*

In chapter 4, I argued that the 1979 revolution has politicised women. Maryam and Farah both assert that the inception of an Islamic government has led to the oppression of women in Iran. Their views are highly politicised. Although women's political involvement has been argued to be informal by Paidar[166], Maryam and Farah's words show that political discourse is formally expressed. Women advocate secularism in politics.

Women's testimonies also reveal their informal political involvement. When asked about their ways of coping with and resisting policy, all women here interviewed pointed out to subtle, implicit means to do so – specifically, education, support groups, and the *hijab*. Women's perseverance in education is seen as a means to resist the regime, according to Nasrin and Taraneh. Nasrin believes education to be

---

[166] Paidar, P. (1997). *Women and the political process in twentieth-century Iran* (Vol. 1). p. 361

central to any future change in Iran. She here insists on the gender role of women in Iran: motherhood. She trusts that education will modify women's mentalities, and in turn those of future generations. In addition, according to Moghadam, women's entrance and persistence in the Iranian labour force reflects resistance to their situation.[167]

It appears that the main policy women find necessary to resist is the imposition of a strict dress code. The importance of choice of wear emerges consistently throughout women's narratives. *Hijab* is used by women in Iran to resist policy: women in Iran wear a loose veil on their head, revealing the most part of their hair. Some women wear the chador, and there are raids on women who are not deemed 'properly dressed'. Particularly in the younger generation, women defy the imposed dress code. They wear make up, dress in Western clothes. Makeup was pointed out by both Farah and Taraneh as a means to fight the regime. Esfandari highlighted the importance of resistance through the *hijab*. She asserts that 'The dress code has become a principal battleground between the state and women'.[168]

3. Women's rights and culture

The words of Nazanin, Arezu, Laleh, Nasrin, Taraneh, Farah and Maryam here illustrate participants' opinions on the relation between women's human rights and Islam. Hereafter are their responses to the question: '*Do you think women in Iran should have different rights to European women based on their culture?*'

> NAZANIN – '*Not at all. They obtained the right to vote shortly after French women did. All the Iranian women who live in the West have perfectly integrated themselves and adapted in the society. They have accessed the highest academic and career levels. They aspire to the same rights.*'

> AREZU – '*Culture is completely different to rights. The two should not be mixed. Men and women should have equal rights everywhere in the world, regardless of their culture.*'

> NASRIN – '*I think that to be able to obtain the same rights as Europeans there needs to be a lot of time to change the mentality of the population and mainly mothers. But basically I can't see why they cannot have the same rights. Culture, like anything else, is made to evolve with time and societal changes. Islamic laws maybe made sense at the time of their appearance in a lawless society, in which women needed to be protected from men, but I think this time is long gone.(…) Since forever, despite an apparent societal freedom, the Iranian woman was and still is deprived from her liberty to "be", her freedom as a human being. For example, arranged marriages, the need for your partner's or father's authorisation to leave the territory, the impossibility to live alone and single (or to do so at the price of a total isolation within society), the impossibility of having couple's relations outside of the frame of marriage, the impossibility to access reproductive health services outside of the frame of marriage, the*

---

[167] Moghadam, V. M. (1999). Revolution, religion, and gender politics: Iran and Afghanistan compared. *Journal of Women's History*, *10*(4), 172-195.

[168] Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. p. 133

systematic and clandestine abortion of children conceived outside of marriage that is required and hidden by the family.'

TARANEH – *'No. Women should enjoy the same rights in Europe as they do in Iran. We are all human beings after all.'*

FARAH – *'I think that nothing has changed in spite of all the efforts that women have done during the years after the revolution. Despite the fact that they go to university, work and make money as much as men, women still are not respected as equals and the Islamic laws are against human rights laws. A woman still earns less money, cannot travel alone and her words have no credit against the words of men..'*

MARYAM – *'No of course not! They should not have different rights. They have different visions, and traditions, yes. But I think women can all agree on the rights they need.'*

Women point out that Iranian women are no different to women in the West. They advocate for universal human rights. Women's interest in their rights during the pre-revolutionary period was lower than it is now.[169] In this research, women have pointed out that shari'a law is in opposition with women's rights principles. As discussed in previous chapters, *shari'a* laws do not afford women and men with the same rights, in blatant opposition with the core principle of human rights that is the equality of all human beings.

4. Concluding remarks

In this research, it is clear that women's perceptions of Islam have changed since the revolution. They believe that the changes that were made and the laws that were applied under the Islamic Republic did not fulfil 'real' Islam. Moreover, here, women's discourses are highly politicised and some advocate for a secular state in Iran. The politicisation of women takes various forms. In resisting the regime, women use education, the dress code and work to protest. Finally, women believe that human rights are not culturally specific, and should be the same for all women, regardless of their cultural or religious background. They point out that *shari'a* law is opposed to basic human rights principles.

Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*.

FINAL CONCLUSION

The universality and cross-cultural applicability of human rights has been vividly debated since the creation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Iran, as an Islamic Republic, stands as a chief opponent to the compatibility of Islamic values and human rights, particularly in the controversial area of women's rights. Consequently, Iran is systematically depicted by Western media as a backwards country, hampered by its human rights violations. Whilst much research has been thus far devoted to the examination of Iran's macro-level compliance to human rights standards, investigations of citizens' perceptions on the matter appear to have been poorly documented. Accordingly, I here aimed to explore Iranian women's lived experiences and perceptions of their rights. Iran afforded a compelling case study due to its particular historical and religious context. The country underwent tremendous changes over the course of the twentieth century, leading to the overthrow of the 2500-year monarchy and the instigation of an Islamic Republic in 1979.

The research presented here was led by the research question *How do Iranian women who experienced the 1979 Islamic Revolution, both those who stayed and those who migrated, perceive and rationalize changes in their rights in Iran following the installation of an Islamic Republic?* In order to investigate the abovementioned issues, I structured this thesis around three focal objectives. These are:

(1) What historical trajectory did the formulation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights take to include women's rights?

(2) What place did women's rights occupy in the political strategy of the successive Iranian governments prior and following the installation of the Islamic Republic in 1979?

(3) What social, economic and legal changes have Iranian women experienced alongside the changing religious and political context following the 1979 Islamic revolution?

The final results of this thesis are here presented. In terms of structure, in this conclusion I will proceed by, firstly, presenting my empirical findings and their inferences. Second, the limitations of this thesis will be considered in order to isolate recommendations for future research.

1. Empirical findings

In this section, I will present and discuss this research's findings. In Chapter 4, I placed my focus on women's experiences of the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Analysis of transcripts revealed that women consistently experienced the 1979 revolution as a break in history, around which they organise their historical narrative. This consistency across testimonies, I argued, stems from a range of factors. Firstly, it highlights Khomeini's success in making the revolution and the instigation of the Islamic Republic of Iran a day to remember. Second, women, as a consequence of the pivotal role they held,

perceive the revolution as a 'watershed'. I argued this role to have been threefold. Women were agents, instruments, and, most importantly, the embodiment of the revolutionary spirit.

The fifth chapter of this thesis, drawing upon findings of the fourth chapter, focused on the legal, economic, and social changes experienced by women ensuing the revolution. Women have experienced said changes in various ways. Here, I argued that, although their rights did not significantly change, their perceptions did due to their high levels of education and their increased use of NICTs[170]. Alongside spiralling education rates for women under the Islamic Republic, women have also experienced an improvement in their work opportunities. Finally, as the fourth chapter as shown, the experience of the revolution as a watershed highlights a significant identity change after the revolution. Women's expected gender role was altered, their situation fragile and dependent on men alongside them taking on men's role as breadwinners, and they feel they have to lead double lives and compromise between their expected role and their actual life.

In the sixth chapter, my interest laid in the ways Iranian women perceive and conceptualise Islam, politics, and human rights today. Islam is ill perceived by Iranian women today. They believe that the 1979 revolution has served to taint Iranians' view of Islam. Moreover, women have become increasingly politicised in recent years. Their discourses advocate for a change in regime in favour of a secular state. They believe the current Islamic laws to be in opposition with human rights principles. Women therefore believe that human rights are not culturally specific and ought to be applied across cultures. Women have internalised the discourse of women's rights, around which they frame their arguments.

The human rights frame is deeply embedded in women's testimonies. Although not all refer specifically to human rights, their words and thoughts on the matter reveal that human rights principles have been internalised by all women. Therefore, I would argue that human rights are not culturally specific, but rather that 'human rights have become culture'.[171] Since the inception of the UDHR in 1948, Iran has not been able to remove the frame of human rights from public discourses. Women, regardless of their religious background, argue that human rights and culture are separate matters. Therefore, I conclude that human rights are the best solution so far in order to tackle the potential dangers of 'modern nation-state, market economies, and industrialisation'.[172]

2. Recommendations for further research

This thesis has provided a comprehensive and compelling argument for the universality of human rights and their necessities to guarantee safety in a context of capitalist economy and modern nation states. However, its limitation lies in the sample group that was used. Women participating in this

---

[170] New Information and Communication Technology : internet, social media…

[171] Preis, A. B. S. (1996). Human rights as cultural practice: An anthropological critique. p. 290

[172] *Ibid.*

Sloane, R. D. (2001). Outrelativizing Relativism: A Liberal Defense of the Universality of International Human Rights.

An-Na'im, A. A. (1999). The cultural mediation of human rights: the Al-Arqam case in Malaysia. The East Asian challenge for human rights.

research were highly educated, and living in urbanised areas. Therefore, in order to strengthen the argument, further research ought to be carried out in order to identify potential variations with different sample groups, living in rural areas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abiad, N. (2008). *Sharia, Muslim states and international human rights treaty obligations: A comparative study*. BIICL.

Abrahamian, E. (2008). *A history of modern Iran*. Cambridge University Press

Abu-Lughod, L. (Ed.). (1998). *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton University Press.

Afshar, H. (1985). Women, state and ideology in Iran. *Third World Quarterly*,*7*(2), 256-278.

Afshari, R. (1994). An essay on Islamic cultural relativism in the discourse of human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 235-276.

An-Na'im, A. A. (1999). The cultural mediation of human rights: the Al-Arqam case in Malaysia. *The East Asian challenge for human rights*, 147-168

Axworthy, M. (2010). *A history of Iran: Empire of the mind*. Basic Books.

Brems, E. (1997). Enemies or allies? Feminism and cultural relativism as dissident voices in human rights discourse. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *19*(1), 136-164.

Buchanan, J. M. (1965). An economic theory of clubs. *Economica*, 1-14.

Butler, J. (1988). Performative acts and gender constitution: An essay in phenomenology and feminist theory. *Theatre journal*, 519-531.

Cerna, C. M. (1994). Universality of human rights and cultural diversity: implementation of human rights in different socio-cultural contexts. *Human rights quarterly*, 740-752.

Coomaraswamy, R. (1997). Reinventing international law: Women's rights as human rights in the international community. *Commonwealth Law Bulletin*, *23*(3-4), 1249-1262.

Daniel, E. L. (2012). *The history of Iran*. ABC-CLIO.

Das, V. (1995). *Critical events: an anthropological perspective on contemporary India*.

Donnelly, J. (2007). The relative universality of human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 29(2), 281-306.

Dwyer, K. (1991). *Arab Voices: the human rights debate in the Middle East* (Vol. 13). Univ of California Press.

Esfandiari, H. (1997). *Reconstructed lives: women and Iran's Islamic revolution*. Woodrow Wilson Center Press.

Fahmy, M. (2002). *La condition de la femme dans l'Islam*. Editions Allia.

Falk, R. (1992). Cultural foundations for the international protection of human rights. *Human rights in cross-cultural perspectives: A quest for consensus*, *45*.

Flick, U., von Kardoff, E., & Steinke, I. (Eds.). (2004). *A companion to qualitative research*. Sage.

Forsythe, D. P. (1991). *The internationalization of human rights*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Granick, J. (2005). Nixing the news: Iranian Internet censorship. *Harvard International Review*, *27*(2), 11.

Groenewald, T. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated.

Halbwachs, M. (1997). *La mémoire collective*. Albin Michel.

Higgins, T. E. (1996). Anti-essentialism, relativism, and human rights. *Harv. Women's LJ*, *19*, 89.

Hobbes, T., & Curley, E. (1994). *Leviathan: with selected variants from the Latin edition of 1668* (Vol. 8348). Hackett Publishing.

Hooglund, E. (2011). Gender in Contemporary Iran. *Iranian Studies*.

Howard, R. (1992). Dignity, community, and human rights. *Human Rights in Cross-Cultural Perspectives: A Quest for Consensus*, 81-102.

Ignatieff, M., Appiah, A., & Gutmann, A. (2003). *Human rights as politics and idolatry*. Princeton University Press.

İlkkaracan, P. (Ed.). (2000). *Women and sexuality in Muslim societies*. Women for Women's Human Rights (WWHR)/Kadının İnsan Hakları Projesi (KİHP).

Karmi, G. (2005). Women, Islam and patriarchalism. *Women and Islam: Images and realities*, *1*, 165.

Kirchschlaeger, P. (2011). Universality of Human Rights. *The EWC Statement Series*, 22.

Littman, D. (1999). Universal human rights and human rights in Islam. *Midstream*, *42*(2), 2-7.

Macionis, J., & Gerber, L. (2011). Sociology.

van Manen, M. (1990). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Suny Press.

Mayer, A. E. (1991). Islam and human rights: Tradition and politics.

Mead, M. (1963). *Sex and temperament in three primitive societies* (Vol. 370). New York: Morrow.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Mills, S. (1997). Discourse: The new critical idiom. *London and New York: Routledge*.

Moghadam, V. (1988). Women, work, and ideology in the Islamic Republic. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, *20*(02), 221-243.

Moghadam, V. M. (1999). Revolution, religion, and gender politics: Iran and Afghanistan compared. *Journal of Women's History*, *10*(4), 172-195.

Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Women in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Legal Status, Social Positions, and Collective Action.

Moors, A. (1991). Women and the Orient: A note on difference. *Constntcting Knowledge: Authoiry and Citique in Social Science, ll4-l2Z. London: Sage*.

Morsink, J. (1999). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights: origins, drafting, and intent*. University of Pennsylvania Press.

Nandy, A. (1990). *At the edge of psychology: Essays in politics and culture* (p. 42). Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Nayyeri, M. H. (2013). Gender inequality and discrimination: the case of Iranian women. *Iran Human Rights Documentation Center. Available at http://www.iranhrdc.org/english/publications/legal-commentary/1000000261-gender-inequality-and-discrimination-the-case-of-iranian-women*

Paidar, P. (1997). *Women and the political process in twentieth-century Iran* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

Patton, M. Q. (2001). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (3rd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc

Pickthall, M. M. (2015). *The meaning of the glorious Quran*. Leeway Infotech LLC.

Preis, A. B. S. (1996). Human rights as cultural practice: An anthropological critique. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *18*(2), 286-315.

Reisman, W. M. (1990). Sovereignty and human rights in contemporary international law. *American Journal of International Law*, 866-876.

Risse, T., & Sikkink, K. (1999). The socialization of international human rights norms into domestic practices: introduction. *Cambridge Studies in International Relations*, *66*, 1-38.

Rousseau, J. J. (1896). *Du contrat social*. Alcan.

Said, E. (1979). *Orientalism*. 1978. New York: Vintage, 1994.

Shahidi, H. (2007). *Journalism in Iran: From mission to profession*. Routledge.

Shepherd, L. J. (2010). Sex or gender? Bodies in world politics and why gender matters. *Gender Matters in Global Politics: A feminist introduction to international relations*, 3-16.

Shirali, M. (2014). *« Les Iraniennes sont attaquées au vitriol au nom de la charia »*. [online] Le Monde.fr. Available at: http://www.lemonde.fr/proche-orient/article/2014/10/29/les-iraniennes-attaquees-au-vitriol-au-nom-de-la-charia_4514125_3218.html [Accessed 12 Jun. 2015].

Sloane, R. D. (2001). Outrelativizing Relativism: A Liberal Defense of the Universality of International Human Rights. *Vanderbilt Journal of Transnational Law*, *34*, 527.

Taylor C., Conditions of an Unforced Consensus on Human Rights, in: Bauer J. R./Bell D. A. (ed.), *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, Cambridge 1999, 124-144

Thapar-Bjorkert, S., Shepherd, L. (2010). Religion. *Gender matters in global politics: a feminist introduction to international relations*. Routledge.

Tharoor, S. (1999). Are human rights universal?. *World Policy Journal*,.

Tibi, B. (1994). Islamic Law/Shari'a, Human Rights, Universal Morality and International Relations. *Human Rights Quarterly*, 277-299.

Teson, F. R. (1984). International Human Rights and Cultural Relativism. *Va. j. Int'l L.*, *25*, 869.

Udry, J. R. (1994). The nature of gender. *Demography*, *31*(4), 561-573.

UN General Assembly, (1948). Universal declaration of human rights. *UN General Assembly*.

United Nations General Assembly, *The right of peoples and nations to self-determination*, A/RES/637 (16 December 1952), available from http://www.refworld.org/docid/3b00f0791c.html

United Nations, General Assembly, *Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran: report of the Special Rapporteur*, A/69/356 (27 August 2014), available from undocs.org/A/69/356.

United Nations, (2015). Important concepts underlying gender mainstreaming. [online] Available at: *http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/factsheet2.pdf* [Accessed 21 Aug. 2015].

Wadud, A. (1999). *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

Waltz, S. E. (2001). Universalizing human rights: The role of small states in the construction of the universal declaration of human rights. *Human Rights Quarterly*, *23*(1), 44-72.

Willemse, K. (2005). On globalization, gender and the nation-state: Muslim masculinity and the urban middle class family in Islamist Sudan. In David, T. & van Driel, F.*: The gender question in globalisation. Changing perspectives and practices. Williston: Ashgate*, *159*, 178.

Wolcott, H. F. (1990). *Writing up qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks: CA. Sage Publications, Inc.

Zerubavel, E. (2012). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*. University of Chicago Press.

Websites

https://www.facebook.com/pages/Meet-the-Real-Iran/457822884273989?fref=ts

https://instagram.com/therichkidsoftehran/

Ohchr.org, (2015). *What are Human Rights*. [online] Available at: http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Pages/WhatareHumanRights.aspx [Accessed 24 Aug. 2015].

Who.int, (2015). WHO | Gender. [online] Available at: http://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/understanding/gender-definition/en/ [Accessed 24 Aug. 2015].

Msu.edu, (2015). *Women & the Iranian Revolution*. [online] Available at: https://www.msu.edu/user/hillrr/161lec27.htm [Accessed 29 Jul. 2015].

Al-Islam.org, (2015). *Great Women of the World*. [online] Available at: http://www.al-islam.org/position-women-viewpoint-imam-khomeini-ra/great-women-world#17-may-1979 [Accessed 29 Jul. 2015].

APPENDIX I. Questions for women living in Iran

Original questionnaire – an English translation can be retrieved on the following pages

۱- جنسیت

۲- سن

۳- وضعیت تأهل

۴- تعداد فرزند

۵- محل تولد

۶- کشور محل سکونت

۷- منطقهٔ محل سکونت (شهر، حومهٔ شهر، روستا)

۸- بالاترین مقطع تحصیلی

۹- شغل فعلی

۱۰- مذهب یا زمینهٔ مذهبی

۱۱- در مورد وضعیت زنان پیش از انقلاب، چه چیزهایی به خاطر دارید و یا چه چیزهایی از خویشان زن خود در این راستا شنیده‌اید؟

۱۲- آیا شما در انقلاب فعالیتی داشتید؟ اگر داشتید لطفاً دلایل خود را شرح دهید (تنها در صورتی که آن وضعیت و شرایط را به خاطر دارید)

۱۳- زنان از انقلاب چه انتظاراتی داشتند؟

۱۴- وضعیت حقوق زنان را در ایران امروز چگونه توصیف می‌کنید؟ حقوق زنان در جامعهٔ فعلی در قیاس با حقوق آنان در پیش از انقلاب، چه تغییراتی کرده است؟

۱۵- نظر شما در مورد سیاست جداسازی زنان و مردان در اماکن عمومی (مثل پارکها، مترو، اتوبوس) چیست؟ به نظر شما فواید و معایب آن چیست؟ لطفاً شرح دهید.

۱۶- در ایران امروز، نگرش عمومی جامعه نسبت به مردان چیست؟ آیا این نگرش پس از انقلاب تغییر کرده است؟ لطفاً شرح دهید.

۱۷- آیا هرگز برای شخص شما شرایطی پیش آمده که حقوقتان زیر پا گذاشته شود؟ لطفاً شرح دهید.

۱۸- در جامعهٔ کنونی ایران زنان از چه راه‌هایی با سیاستها و قوانین مقاومت می‌کنند؟ لطفاً شرح دهید.

۱۹ـ امروزه در ایران مسئولیتهای اصلی زن در خانواده چیست؟ آیا این مسئولیتها پس از انقلاب تغییر کرده است؟

۲۰ـ آیا شما خود را یک فمینیست (طرفدار حقوق زنان) می‌دانید؟ لطفاً شرح دهید.

۲۱ـ آیا هرگز به عنوان یک زن، حقوقتان در جامعهٔ امروز را با حقوقی که در گذشته از آن برخوردار بوده‌اید، مقایسه کرده‌اید؟

۲۲ـ آیا هرگز حقوق زنان در ایران را با حقوق آنان در کشورهای دیگر مقایسه کرده‌اید؟

۲۳ـ آیا به اعتقاد شما، به عنوان یک زن ایرانی، شما نیز حق دارید که مشمول همان حقوقی باشید که زنان ساکن در کشورهای غربی از آن برخوردارند یا اینکه اعتقاد دارید به خاطر فرهنگتان، باید حقوقی متفاوت داشته باشید؟

۲۴ـ امروز نگرش شما به دین اسلام چگونه است؟ آیا نگرش شما بعد از انقلاب تغییر کرده است یا خیر؟

۲۵ـ آیا به اعتقاد شما این تغییرات بنا بر آرمانهای اسلامی انجام گرفته است؟

۲۶ـ اطلاعات خود را در مورد حقوق زنان از کجا کسب می‌کنید؟

۲۷ـ آیا نکته‌ای به نظرتان می‌رسد که بخواهید به موارد بالا اضافه کنید؟

English translation

1. Gender
2. Age
3. Marital status
4. Number of children
5. Place of birth
6. Country of residence
7. Area you live in: (urban, suburban, rural)
8. Highest level of education
9. Current occupation
10. Religious background
11. What do you remember, or what have your women relatives told you, about the situation of women before the revolution?
12. Did you engage in the revolution? If so, please explain why. (only if you remember the situation)
13. What were women's expectations from the revolution?
14. How would you describe the women's rights situation in Iran today? How does it compare to the situation before the revolution?
15. Do you thing that segregation in public places (for example, parks, metro) is an advantage or a disadvantage? Please explain.
16. How are men perceived in Iran today? Has this perception changed since the revolution?
17. Have you ever experienced a situation where your rights were not respected? Please explain.
18. Please explain the ways in which women resist policy measures in Iran today.

19. What are the main responsibilities for women in the family today? Have they changed since the revolution?

20. Would you consider yourself a feminist? Please explain.

21. Do you ever think of your rights in comparison to the past?

22. Do you ever think of your rights in comparison to other countries?

23. Do you believe you are entitled to the same rights as women living in Western countries, or do you believe your rights to be different because of your culture?

24. What is your perception of Islam today? Has it changed since the revolution?

25. Do you believe that the changes were done according to Islam ideals?

26. Where do you obtain information on women's rights?

27. Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX II. Questionnaire for migrant women

1. Age

2. Place of birth

3. Country of residence

4. Highest level of education

5. Current occupation

6. Religious background

7. Year of departure from Iran

8. Do you still have family in Iran?

9. Do you sometimes travel to Iran? If you do, how do you perceive women's situation in the country?

10. Do you remember women's situation in Iran before the revolution? If you have lived in Iran after the revolution, can you please describe the change?

11. If you lived in Iran during the revolution, please tell me how you lived it.

12. How would you describe women's situation in Iran today?

13. In what ways do women protest this situation?

14. Do you often inform on women's situation in Iran? If so, through what means?

15. Do you think women in Iran should have different rights to European women based on their culture?

16. Do you ever think of your situation in relation to that of women in Iran? If so, in what ways?

17. In what ways do you perceive Islam today? Has this vision changed since the revolution?

18. Do you have anything to add?