Women, Agency and Spaces of Protest:

Lessons from the Iranian Revolution

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The Arab Spring heralded a new era of women's grassroots participation in protests and demands for a more democratic and accountable model of governance. Yet despite being pivotal to the success of popular protests, women's spaces in the post-uprising period remain in many cases closed, if not more restrained. Why has this pattern been persistent in revolutions, radical transitions and social movements in the Middle East? Why are movements for progress continuously turned to repression in terms of women's spaces and places in society? Even before the upheavals and popularization of the Arab Spring, the experiences of women in other movements in the region reveal a similar pattern. This paper focuses on the Iranian Revolution and the tension relative to women's agency in the peripheral spaces in social movements. It argues that women's intervention and unification is far more legitimate, developed and represented during the initial and often spontaneous stages of populist movements. In response to reclaiming previously closed political spaces there is a need to narrate, extend and reconfigure women's agency and discourse in popular uprisings. Lessons from women in Iran demonstrate the significance of the post-movement spaces as crucial sites for resistance.

Introduction

Much analysis of the Arab Spring and, more specifically, gendered analysis, has relied on academic and theoretical models to examine the sudden surge of regime change and transitions throughout the region. Much of this literature has focused on the rapid Islamization of post-uprising societies and its impact on women's roles and positions. There has been less exploration of women's agency in the spaces of protest. Women's contributions and influence throughout the Arab Spring was unprecedented in terms of participation and activism. Yet, despite this monolithic, visible, and vocal presence, the period following the uprisings witnessed little change, if not a backlash regarding women's rights.

This paper is focused on the Iranian Revolution of 1979 as a comparative framework to gain insight into women's roles in movements and as agents of change. The non-gendered nature of the Iranian Revolution is unique in providing a rare perspective, particularly as it successfully toppled the old regime and led to wide scale social change. Some three decades later, although Iran has not experienced the same bottom-

up movement sweeping the region, it can offer insight in the form of lessons that may be useful in analyzing women's agency. Situating women in the context of spaces of protest and its indiscernible borders and boundaries reveals much about gendered relations and power. This multi-textured lens offers a broad insight into women's agency, but such analysis would be incomplete without exploring the systematic layers; it is important to recognize the progression of the institutionalization of gender that has taken place. In Iran, women's demands for change have been a continuous struggle to stand as active subjects rather than objects of history. Women have learned to claim and reclaim their spaces, to write and rewrite their place in history, and to speak rather than be spoken about.

Women's contributions and influence throughout the Arab Spring was unprecedented in terms of participation and activism.

Participation by women in social movements is not unique to the Arab Spring or the Iranian Revolution. What is rather exceptional is the opening of public spaces typically guarded within borders of the masculine gaze. Women's presence in the streets among men intensifies their right to public spaces. This is somewhat exceptional given social norms that often exclude, discipline, regulate and marginalize women in public spaces. From this perspective, it can be argued that spaces of uprisings as sites of protest seek inclusion. Rage directed at injustices and demands for change unify communities with appeals to non-gendered masses to take to the streets in solidarity and in defiance of authority. In many ways, women witness an interruption of norms for a window of time with access and prospect for autonomy in public spaces. While restricted and guarded, this powerful shift takes place at the outset of the movement or in the initial stages. Yet, it has been difficult to continue the momentum. The post-movement period remains dominated by patriarchal control over political spaces. Women's demands and rights are abruptly fragmented from the movement's goals and considered as distinct. The tension amid ownership of public and political spaces can be seen as escalated and torn between the feminine and masculine. In the post-uprising period, it is expected that women will withdraw to previously granted spaces and let the men do the work.

This pattern poses several significant questions that will guide this paper in terms of women's agency, explored in the context of the Iranian Revolution as a backdrop to the Arab Spring. For example there is a need to further examine the tendency for revolutions and poplar uprisings to visualize women's place in society by looking at the past. This paradoxical pattern is somewhat unique to social movements throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the larger Muslim world that seems to unceasingly look to the past when it comes to a vision for the future. Furthermore, why is the path of the movement's future driven and moving forward with the goal of bringing about social change and yet, often going backward for women? Many movements share an inclusive agenda with non-gendered goals of justice, equality and liberty. These slogans are not ideologies that should be defined and explored within a gender specific paradigm. At what point are the aspirations for equality and civil liberty considered

distinct and segregated? How does the demand of a collective movement for justice often turn to injustice for women?

Places, Women, and Society

The exploration of women's place in society must take place through the legacy of historical events and ever-changing political landscapes. The history of the women's movement in Iran is in many ways similar to other global and national movements that aim to contest political, economic, social, and cultural inequality. Iran's contextual specificity is the unique way in which dissent organized in the form of revolutions, protest, and uprising has been a continuous feature of society. Historically, bottom-up movements have provided the Iranian people with an effective mechanism for resistance and a vehicle for change (Foran, 1994). Social movements have been influential in meeting demands and objectives from ousting the regime to street protests in reaction to unfair state practices such as rising food prices or increasing public transport fares. In examining women's self-representation, agency, and place in the structure of social movements, several points can be observed. First, the status of women is rarely improved following a popular uprising that aims to oust a government in favor of a new regime. Furthermore, while states have the primary responsibility for ensuring and protecting the rights all citizens, the demand for gender equality and representation have typically been excluded.

Participation by women in social movements is not unique to the Arab Spring or the Iranian Revolution.

Various ideologies apparent in transitional states ranging from monarchy, feudalism, socialism, or Islamism have each constructed a particular vision for womanhood. Yet, despite the converging and diverging systems of governance, each vision has fallen short of providing conditions that lead to real improvements in women's lives. This is ironic given that broader gender relations have remained as a priority in each states' policies. Many governments have championed an agenda of reform regarding women's issues, particularly in promising equal rights with men. In every transition, social norms and national consensus pertaining to gender relations and women's roles have changed dramatically. Observing the pattern in women's rights demonstrates that change, however trivial at times, has not been cumulative. It is not unusual to see tangible progress with regards to women's rights subsequently repealed following an uprising, a crisis, or regime change. What is often branded as necessary strategy towards progress by one government can be obliterated by its successor.

The right to mobilize has enhanced women's opportunity to exercise agency. Participation in popular protests can be considered as action, though it does not by itself guarantee outcome. In Iran, persistent women's demands for change have come about as a consequence of specific actions directed through resistance and focused on advancing women's rights, rather than in the context of non-gendered mass uprisings. The prioritization of issues through gender-explicit efforts has ensured that women's rights are given appropriate consideration. In terms of agency, there

are two contrasting and intertwined levels that have catalyzed women's struggle for rights. First, at the individual level, women's activism has focused on raising critical consciousness and empowerment from the bottom-up. While this has been essential, individual agency also necessitates strength through collective action. Systematic and institutionalized discrimination against women invoked through the state apparatus, supported by constitutions and laws, requires a macro approach.

In Iran, the most fundamental space harboring a significant shift in the relationship between women and state has been civil society. Discriminatory attitudes and institutions have typically excluded and limited women's roles to mothers and wives tending to household chores, raising children, and maintaining the honor of the family. This status quo prescribes an unequal distribution of power within the family and the public sphere and reinforces the domestication of women. Women's activism within the domain of civil society has successfully mediated the opening of otherwise closed spaces for public participation. Civil society organizations have been instrumental in promoting gender equality. Iran has been unique in contrast to many of its neighbors in featuring a powerful, dynamic, and vibrant civil society. The history of women's participation and organized activism in civil society dates back to the early 1900s. Given the lack of formal political representation and impediments from religious organizations, civil society has provided women with an alternative space for active leadership.

Iranian women's collective action dates to 1906 and the Constitutional Revolution; this paved the way for a parliament to replace feudal and dynastic governance. During this period, women openly criticized the stagnation of the political, economic, and social institutions under corrupt rulers. The increasing reliance on foreign imports, rising food prices, and general economic deprivation highlighted the looming political crisis (Abrahamian, 1979). A series of public protests catalyzed women's participation in the uprising to end the regime. Utilizing non-violent strategies, women organized protests and encouraged the consumer boycott of foreign products (Afary, 1996). Many sold jewelry and personal items to raise funds and finance the establishment of the first National Bank. The revolution was successful in inaugurating the constitution and a new style of government that was representative of the people. Despite the political changes and the development of the National Assembly, women were barred from the political process. The constitution did not grant women voting rights.

Few gains were made in achieving rights for women. The uprising did not advance gender specific issues but the very visible presence of women was effective and a positive achievement in a different way (Hoodfar, 1999). It was a significant landmark in shifting women's approaches to social protest in several ways. It provided women with valuable lessons in approaches to collective political activism. Change at the national level would require the strengthening of participation in civil society and more specifically, bottom-up activism. This would involve building alliances with other sectors of society, in this case the clergy, in constructing a counter narrative regarding women's place in society. On a broader level, the enduring social and cultural consequences would impact generations to come by encouraging participation and expanding women's roles in society.

From Discontent to Protest

In the aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution, women were struggling with a two-fronted battle. The experience of challenging autocratic rule by means of popular action and advocacy had politicized a growing number of women. On the one hand, many were actively engaged with a strong voice of opposition and participation in protests. This approach seemed limited as it obscured a furtive reality. The public discourse on women's roles remained inequitable. The paradoxical interpretations of womanhood in society were dominated by patriarchal dogmas rooted in the minds of society that assigned the public realm to the control of men and the domestic one to women. To successfully challenge social norms would involve changing and reinterpreting perceptions of women's role in society. Women's lack of control over political power and inability to implement reform was directly linked to access to education. This would be women's most important source of strength. It would only be through education that women could gain an individual consciousness of rights. Therefore, education became the focus of social and cultural transformation. The issue itself was also less contentious; not many people would argue against women's right to education.

Conservative clerics and traditional factions had neglected and restricted the right to education. Time and time again, the rationale given was that the ideal Islamic woman was a mother and wife. The dominant perspective framed education as linked to a liberal agenda that had no place in the life of women. Collective action was therefore focused on prioritizing the campaign to demand for the right to education. This approach acknowledged that strengthening women's political consciousness had to start with an engaged and integrated strategy at the individual and community levels. Wide scale programs in education could lead to the politicization of women and to holding government accountable regarding gender inequality and discrimination. Women's empowerment via literacy and the broader education movement that remains active until today launched after the Constitutional Revolution.

By 1910, despite fierce opposition from the clergy, from conservative patriarchal groups, and from religious leaders that had considered educating girls as a shame to the country, some 50 schools were established. Since the education of girls had typically been considered a bold and defiant measure, advocates were careful to conceptualize objectives as a necessary component of the country's advancement. For many clergy in the influential religious sector, the education of girls was a direct threat and assumed to be only the beginning of other measures that aimed at liberating women, such as unveiling. The proper role of women became a serious political question given the impact on the social and family structure. Women's demands for equality were connected to broader questions of political and social emancipation. Linking such concepts to an individualistic western framework would make it easier to dismiss efforts aimed at women's liberation as foreign. With the women's movement branded as an infringement on national identity and an insult to family values, public perceptions would turn against it (Hoodfar, 1993).

Women activists set up various associations and local chapter societies that met in secret to plan and discuss strategies to move forward. Many wrote open letters to the clergy openly challenging and offering new interpretations of women's role in Islam. Girl's education had become a primary tool for women's empowerment (Sedghi, 2007).

Basic literacy programs were aimed at reaching women from different backgrounds, particularly targeting rural, uneducated, and lower socio-economic classes. Many schools were funded privately with a focus on accessibility and providing adult education and night schools. By 1907, the Women's Association for Freedom, *Anjoman Azadi Zanan*, became the first non-government organization (NGO) focused on advocacy. This was followed by other organizations advocating for the right to education, financing schools, orphanages, and health clinics. During this time, one of the most important tools in ensuring communication at the different levels of society were women's writings in newspapers and specialized periodicals. Initially focused on education, the various publications were instrumental in opening discussions of taboo topics such as marriage, domestic violence, economic, and legal rights. This proved to be a significant source of influence as it enabled ideas and exchanges to move beyond urban cities and reach smaller communities and towns. The goals of the movement were to encourage women's education for the nation's progress, while at the same time employing the spirit of Islam and cultural traditions. To delegitimize the critics, advocates put forward the argument that girl's education was best for Iran in providing opportunities for society to move forward toward progress (Ettehadieh, 2004, p. 88). Women advocates were very well aware that self-democratization with an emphasis on education would be a catalyst in raising women's politicization.

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State, Modernity, and Women

The Constitutional Revolution was followed with the dynastic reign of Reza Shah Pahlavi and Iran's transition to a modern state. Reza Shah considered women as significant actors in his vision for progress and contemporaneous with rapid economic development, industrialization and wide scale reforms. The ideological Iranian woman and her appearance was closely linked to the symbol of a secular modern nation-state (Vatandoust, 1985). Societal roles and stereotypes of women began to reflect this shift. During this time, the number of female students in elementary and secondary schools rose considerably. The University of Tehran was the first to admit women with by-laws for compulsory education.

Iran changed into a modern state with a monarchy, but for some it was also moving towards alienating significant segments of society. Reza Shah intended to separate religion and limit the role of the clergy, particularly in areas where they exercised tremendous power, specifically in the administration of laws and education. Many consider Reza Shah's structural changes and policies as responsible for the liberation of Iranian women (Shahidian, 2002). Not everyone was welcoming of these secular reforms, as the critics considered modernization as outwardly imposed and based on a western model. Many members of the clergy were influential local leaders, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas, where they had a large following among the masses as well as the business class. With strong social ties to communities, religious leaders

were considered as the only legitimate local force representing the needs of the poor. For many, the clergy also played a role in holding the state accountable with an informal system of checks and balances. Skeptics questioned the implications of Reza Shah's model of economic, social, and political measures driven by the western nation-state model.

While many of Reza Shah's policies were controversial, the imposition of a dress code was what caused outrage among the masses. During this era, women's clothing and appearance came under state control and was highly politicized. Political conditions played a significant role in ascribing meaning to social practices in public spaces. Regulating women's physical appearance with veiling and unveiling practices contributed to the state and government's ability to exercise authority and power. Reza Shah intended to change people's appearances in public, in-line with other European countries (Chehabi, 1993). The first step in this approach was a royal decree that would ban women from donning all Islamic veils (*chador* and headscarf). The veil was considered regressive and an obstacle to women's entry into the public sphere (Milani, 1992). Reza Shah's vision for an ideal family or, more specifically women's roles and positions in society, was modeled on western European archetypes. This assumed that the alteration of women's appearance could be directly transported from other contexts. The changes reflected in European women's roles and public appearance had been achieved through the women's movement and the evolution of gender relations there. It was not forced and based on a blueprint. Such a model was now being imported to Iran without the necessary organic public consensus. Other countries undergoing sweeping reforms, such as Afghanistan and Turkey, had taken a more gradual approach by discouraging veiling. Iran's strategy for unveiling women was rapid and with direct enforcement aimed at tangible and firm results (Amin, 2002).

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The implementation of the ban as a state policy intended to liberate women from the cultural and religious values that linked the veil to devoutness and purity. Women's empowerment and autonomy became associated with unveiling as a symbol of independence and modernity. For many women, the state imposed model represented a demonstration of power over rights rather than the promotion of agency. This was an important lesson since it strengthened the difference between institutional change and local activism. It also characterized the tension between individual choice and state control of collective identity in terms of the meanings attached to womanhood. Many elite, middle class and urban women welcomed the ban as a step towards freedom from suppression. They were able to accept unveiling and benefited from the changes. For others, the practice of unveiling as a symbol of liberation simply ignored and neglected structural inequalities that generated discrimination. State imposition of the ban had, in some way, reinforced rather than challenged patriarchal power structures. There was also a backlash against the ban among older traditional women

who had known nothing but the veil. The diverse attributes of the veil were linked to meanings other than religion. Some women refused to leave their homes because appearing without the veil in public was reprehensible (Esfandiari, 1997). This has remained one of the central critiques of Reza Shah's policies since he was not able to lure the masses into adopting many of the reforms. The wave of discontent would later escalate and eventually lead to the Iranian Revolution.

When Reza Shah was forced to abdicate, his son Mohammed Reza Shah was named successor. The reign of the much younger Reza Pahlavi symbolized a beacon of progress for women's rights and modernity. Hoping to take a more moderate approach than that of his father, Reza Shah lifted the restrictions on veiling. The ease in enforcement was comforting to some women who continued the practice in resistance. By now, veiling was increasingly an indicator of economic and social class. The twofold categorization considered women wearing the veil as traditional, religious, rural and of a lower socio-economic class (Mir-Hosseini, 1996). Women not wearing the veil were able to enter the labor market and secure positions in the government and ministries. With rapid industrialization, women that had traditionally held low status jobs were able to enter a more diverse work force.

Reza Shah was able to amend many of Iran's legal codes to support modernization. Iran's legislation was based on *sharia* laws with religious jurists residing over the courts. Reza Shah abolished the religious courts, but religious jurists still ruled over family matters, some areas of criminal law, and other familial issues, such as inheritance. Despite the scale of reforms and social changes taking place under the umbrella of modernization, the rights of citizenship and political participation remained restricted by legal codes. It took five decades, but women finally secured voting rights in 1963 and the ablilty to use electoral politics to negotiate voting power. Another important landmark during the reign of Reza Pahlavi were modifications of the judicial legal system and the transition to civil laws. The Family Protection Law of 1967 was the largest and most comprehensive set of legal initiatives aimed at improving women's lives. At the time, it was considered the most progressive and innovative piece of legislation throughout the Islamic world (Halper, 2007). Prior to the law, there was no official legal remedy, particularly for women from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and women lacked access to legal proceedings that could be initiated against men. The Family Protection Law and its amended version in 1975 completely altered women's rights in the domestic sphere. Historically, the law was considered as one of the first steps towards gender equality, with women granted similar rights to men in family matters. The most significant of such changes was the transfer of power and decision-making in family disputes to civil courts. These legal measures snatched the monopoly of power away from the clergy and the traditional patriarchal (and often informal) model that governed disputes on family matters. Another fundamental change was the age of marriage, which was raised to 18 years for girls. The law curbed the right of a man to divorce his wife without her consent or acknowledgement. It also made it much more challenging for men to take additional wives, requiring the permission and consent of the first wife, as well as the courts. Since all marriages had to be registered under the new law, temporary or multiple marriages conducted informally would not be legally acceptable. This challenged the ease with which polygamy was practised, given that men could marry

up to four wives. Temporary marriages were abolished and polygamy was made more difficult under strict legal control. In cases of divorce, the courts determined the custody of children and whether it would be more beneficial for the child to live with the father or the mother. The right to divorce that had been the monopoly of the husband was extended to women with administrative powers transferred to civil courts.

These top-down legal initiatives and policies were a significant triumph. Their objectives institutionalized women's individual rights as citizens in family matters and reformulated women's activism and mobilization to focus on strategic goals that bring about institutional change rather than individual public participation. Legislative support helped to enhance women's role in the family and the private sphere but also changed the direction of women's activism. Women's activism was increasingly institutionalized. Community activists were generally supportive of legal and institutional changes but dissatisfied at the loss of autonomy given the increasingly strict state scrutiny. State-controlled women's organizations were regulated and encouraged to align with government policies and their underpinning ideology. Institutional backing provided many organizations with a visible presence but limited services to a more traditional approach of aid and charitable work (Girgis, 1996). This undermined the independence and significant work conducted by grassroots organizations or those focused on political mobilization.

There were multiple factors associated with the end of the Pahlavi regime. Some argue that the policies of enforcing modernity and repression alienated many Iranians. This helped to escalate revolutionary mobilization, particularly among the poor and marginalized sectors (Rasler, 1996). The secular policy of the Pahlavi regime had represented itself as brining modernity to Iran, but the western approach and increasing foreign intervention backfired. Widespread dissatisfaction among the masses, the clergy and students led to growing support for the collective uprising to end the Pahlavi rule.

Another Regime, A New Iranian Woman

The Iranian Revolution was able to provide an open space to mobilize women across all backgrounds to demand rights for all citizens. The streets as public spaces provided the setting for unity between women who were previously labeled and divided as traditional, religious, wives, mothers, urban, secular, or educated. Echoes of millions of Iranians could be heard from the loud chanting and the stomping of feet in the streets. When the streets were filled, thousands took to the rooftops at night to demand liberation, freedom, and an Islamic Republic. Now women could be seen in the public sphere, or in private spaces (e.g., the rooftops of homes). The Iranian Revolution ignited a gender-specific call by demanding women's participation even beyond these protests; women of all backgrounds were urged to take up the cause against the regime's injustices. The Revolution was able to appeal to all sectors of society within a paradigm of a distinctly Islamic struggle of morality against what it has declared as the forces of westernization. In terms of agency, without a doubt one of the most extraordinary components of the Iranian Revolution was the vision for transformation; a transformation to resist old class lines that had typically divided women and to now bring them together to unite in the streets in solidarity with, and

equal to men. The call to women had also been unusual in another way. The clergy, headed by Ayatollah Khomeini, had initially broken gender norms by encouraging women to participate in the protests, labeling this participation as a duty. For many educated urban middle class women this initiative was appealing and refreshing albeit rather unusual, initiated by a religious leader. Women were asked to shed identities imposed by capitalist exploitation, which portrayed them as sexual objects. Some of the most affluent women who had studied and lived in western societies and who devalued anything local, were re-veiling as a symbol of solidarity with the masses. More importantly it was a gesture of support for the poor and working classes, both male and female (Afshar, 1985). While the participation of urban secular women had come as a surprise, it was the presence of millions of traditional, religious, and relatively uneducated women that made a significant difference (Hegland, 1986).

The Iranian Revolution had achieved its objective in overthrowing the Pahlavi regime. Ayatollah Khomeini was once again appealing to women to act as political agents and as a united front to support the new Islamic Republic by voting in a national referendum. The idea of an Islamic Republic was forwarded as a system that could ensure the rights of all those that had resisted the Shah's regime. This assurance should have included women, but within days of the establishment of the Islamic Republic, a new gender policy was put in place. This new policy was justified as essential to reform society and as a way for the new regime to distinguish itself. New laws curtailed women's visible political roles by controlling and regulating their lives in the private and public spheres. With the Revolution framed as a power struggle between forces of modern westernization and traditional Islam, women were once again the targets of radical reforms with the aim to "liberate" them. The new Islamic Republic's vision was to restore the nation's dignity through the restitution of honor and piety.

Politically, women held on to the right to vote and run for parliament. In practice, social restrictions stealthily encouraged women to focus on family roles and domestic obligations. Higher education and economic independence were considered as liberal ideologies eroding social morals (Kar, 2010). New laws would primarily focus on women's bodies as sites for the elimination of foreign influence, with strict enforcement of the Islamic dress code. A new decree on dress codes requiring mandatory veiling in public was revealed two days before International Women's Day on March 8th, 1979. This was not the first time women were ordered to conform to state ideology through physical appearance, as Reza Shah had done the same with mandatory unveiling. However, the new political ideology that applied to gender relations in private and public spheres would have a major impact on women's lives. The new social restrictions were clearly discouraging women from taking up a visible presence in society. Sexual segregation in the work place, in public transport, and in schools and recreational areas was enforced as necessary to control interactions between the sexes. Socially acceptable spaces of employment for women were confined to nursing and teaching in segregated areas where interaction was limited to the same sex. Despite the promises of the Revolution, the vision for Iranian women was a return back to, not away from the traditional values of Islam.

Streets as Spaces of Protest

Streets as spaces of protest are significantly and distinctly gendered. Far from

reflecting a benign and passive collective identity, spaces of protest reflect a connection to the past. Streets and subjects mirror the relationship between power and gender. Bodies, voices, physical, and material objects that dominate spaces of protest suggest a masculine authority. Furthermore, despite the non-gendered nature of many uprisings, the access and use of violence remains exclusive to men. In contrast, movements exclusive to women are often positioned in a feminine framework with the inherent implicit and explicit narratives and values.

A common pattern in protests, popular uprisings, social movements and revolutions is the vastness of public space in terms of women's participation in what at first appear as gender-neutral streets. Women's physical presence and participation in the streets during popular uprisings is reflective of the democratic nature of many social movements. In the initial stages, spaces of protest are open and integrative. Yet, the post-uprising space seems to reproduce the same patriarchal dominance by restricting women's political participation. Possession of space is reverted back to masculine ownership and at times with ensuing violence. It is often the post-revolutionary spaces that prohibit the presence of women and infringe on their rights.

This requires some rethinking about women's roles in uprisings, particularly the ripe time for participation. It is more appropriate to consider women's agency and roles in motion and circular rather than a straight line. Hence, the more appropriate metaphor to reposition women in spaces of protest may be "reclaiming their place". The uprising or protest may provide an open space for defiance and resistance. However, for women demanding freedom, the uprising is just the beginning of the struggle. It is the post-uprising period that demands women's focus. This can be conceptualized as "the revolution after the revolution" in opening what is an otherwise closed space in the struggle to demand change.

When the streets clear and the revolution ends, the women's movement begins a longer struggle. In terms of mobilization, it remains challenging to replicate women's enthusiasm to continue activism after the revolution has ended. In the initial stages of the uprising, following long and exhausting days of uncertainty, anxiety, and fatigue, many women simply demanded a return to some sort of normalcy. Socio-economic backgrounds also play a role in the number of women that can consistently turn up to demonstrations and street protests that take place in public spaces. This is even more evident in the post-revolution period as survival, rather than fighting for rights, takes priority for many women. The political instability that governs post-protest spaces can be particularly harsh to women who are heads of households. Economic pressures, mainly as a result of business closures, curfews, and instability can lead to loss of income. Crisis usually causes interruptions to service delivery and particularly to those in need and a reliance on social services. Women are directly impacted by a weak and fractured socio-economic system that dominates post-revolutionary spaces. The post-uprising period witnesses sweeping and radical changes to women's positions in society in terms of implementing state policies. It is this substantial and determinant space that requires women to remain proactive in resistance. Ironically, it is also the same space where women are faced with increasing impediments. Obstacles in the private sphere, as well as patriarchal pressure to return women back to the domestic sphere, makes it easier for state policies to take effect,

often unchallenged. Post-revolutionary spaces are exclusionary. The intense and rapid politicization of women in spaces of protest is followed by deliberate marginalization by new regimes in the post-uprising period.

The Iranian Revolution and women's struggle to reclaim political spaces illustrate such challenges. The post-revolutionary spaces were almost immediately closed, barring women from the political process and participation in governance. The new gender policies restricted all aspects of women's agency with respect to mobility, education, private life, family relations, social groups, and economic distribution. In terms of public appearance, veiling - now a practice framed as Islamic and a symbol of a pious nation, became mandatory. Several institutions were authorized to monitor and discipline women who violated the Islamic modesty codes (Yeganeh, 1993). Law enforcement agencies, morality police and the newly founded Revolutionary Guards were in charge of protecting and guarding public spaces, particularly the streets. Enforcement was not exclusive to state actors, as the job of moralizing the streets by punishing women's bodies was a duty extended to volunteers. Many women would cover their entire bodies with the long black veil to avoid street harassment. There was punishment for violations, including arrests, beatings, floggings, and public shaming (Graves, 1996).

The Iranian women's uprising started once again, this time against the very regime they had supported. It is important to consider this period as leading to a formal division in what had been a united front during the Revolution. The very same women that had participated in the Revolution were again struggling to secure their basic rights, this time protesting against the policies of the Islamic Republic. Hundreds of demonstrations erupted across the country to voice concern on compulsory veiling and the broader harsh treatment of women. The post-revolutionary spaces suppressed much of what women had gained in terms of legal reform. However, it was not long before women started developing new strategies to continue the struggle for equal rights. Thousands of women took to the very same streets, now confident of the spaces they would need to reclaim in resistance. It became clear to women that most of their male counterparts that participated with them in rallies and demonstrations were not prepared to provide support in what had now become a struggle against the new regime.

The promises of the Iranian Revolution, while a disenchantment for some, had turned into a vast opportunity for millions of women. The Islamic Republic relied heavily on the masses for support and loyalty as it had established one of the largest social welfare systems aimed at improving health, education, and the economic wellbeing of its supporters. The new elite, the previously marginalized masses now dominated the public sphere based on a new identity as Islamic subjects. Women committed to the Islamic revolutionary goals were permitted to enter the labor market and were provided with opportunities in government, as well as administrative and security jobs. The number of educated women and their entry into universities after the Revolution improved considerably, with women often outnumbering men. These women, despite institutional barriers, pushed the boundaries further and made concerted efforts to dominate the public arena, especially in the fields of medicine, engineering, literature, and mass media. Furthermore, a new army of

revolutionary women loyal to the regime was part of the guardians of the state, parading and dominating the very public streets where they had rallied. Since the Revolution, women that benefited from the increasing access to education mastered religion enough to offer counter explanations of Islam that advocate for equality and liberation. While Iranian women have continued to strive for the same goals to advance their place in society, they are no longer a united front. With clear ideological differences, old class lines changed, moving those marginalized prior to the Revolution to the front lines of influence. A new empowered and dynamic group of Islamic women came to dominate the discourse on liberation and equality.

Change is Different from Transformation

While the Revolution fell short on its promises of freedom and liberation for all Iranians, the real impact on women's roles and agency must be explored through an integrated framework that situates women in the present reality. The dissatisfaction with the Revolution has in many ways paved the way for a much stronger resistance movement (Paidar, 1995). Activism since the Revolution has propelled women deeper into the public sphere to reclaim their rights. Women remain powerful and central despite continuous efforts to obscure and curtail their roles in society. The emergence of a unique consciousness among Iranian women is the result of and response to the inhibitions and limitations of the last three decades. Daily struggles and confrontations with the state have underscored the values of the Islamic regime as implemented in policies that impact women's lives. There is an increased acknowledgment that inequality and injustices are not restricted to women, and this has helped reposition state obligations to individual rights.

In any society, discontent and conflict is necessary in generating encounters that can lead to exchange, rather than simply change. Change within the context of popular uprisings has always come about. Looking at the Arab Spring and the examples of Egypt, Libya, and Tunisia demonstrate that change has been fairly easy to attain. Yet, exchange leading to social transformation has been challenging. Many movements, revolutions and uprisings have focused on ending something. In 1979, Iranian women's revolutionary demands were focused on toppling the Shah's regime. However, in social transformation, the goal is not simply to end something but to shape what is desired (Lederach, 2003). At the very least, opening a national dialogue that is focused on a shared vision for the future is a goal. Dominance and discriminatory policies against women are global and universal; such policies are not Islamic or a particular feature of a religion or state. Direct action should be taken to transform policies and normative gender relations in society. This can only take place by focusing on networks that eliminate all forms of oppression.

Since the Iranian Revolution, locating agency in the context of social movements has presented a paradox. Women have gone beyond the formal political networks to remain the strongest and most influential voices calling for reform within government policies. The advances in achieving rights have taken place outside the realm of collective uprising. There may no longer be a united women's front, but there is a greater focus on individual resistance. Expressions of discontent have moved in different directions with a focus on smaller gains. The space for protest is much more internal with an air of what is being termed as a progressive, but

dispersed, women's movement. This framework has a self-reflective dimension through which women have become active agents in constructing their own narratives and lives by reinterpreting imposed structures and relationships. Situating women's agency requires analyzing the interconnections within the meaning of womanhood through historical experiences that have shaped gender identities. In today's Iran, women have been hesitant to accept any particular ideology underpinning a movement. This is evident by the inability of the Green Movement in 2009 to appeal to large sectors of society, as was the case in the 1979 Revolution.

The issues concerning women have become some of Iran's most politicized. There is shared discontent and yet, less focus on popular uprising. Instead of a pragmatic shift in looking for opportunities within the state to guarantee basic rights, many women have used ballot box tactics to vote and rally around leaders, including the clergy, in challenging policies rooted in fundamentalism and patriarchy (Azari, 1983). Reclaiming Islam is a new discourse to empower and transform women's position. It has served as a platform to guarantee the right to education, work and civic participation in society. In the private sphere, women are also reinterpreting Islam to effectively resist family opposition as well as the state's attempt to reintroduce patriarchal and misogynist legislation. For many women, this new and dynamic form of empowerment has emerged as a direct result of gender-specific roles in the Revolution.

Secular women are also narrating their individuality within this framework with firm resistance. The daily challenges of living under the gaze of state surveillance and its army of actors regulating and guarding women's bodies in public and private spaces has been difficult. The distinct resistance to authoritarianism can be seen in reclaiming bodies, which have become ideological battlegrounds. In a collective and yet individualist approach, women tried to oppose state discipline and the punishment of bodies. They have looked for creative ways to disrupt imposed structures with their use of makeup and clothing as forms of civil disobedience. From this perspective, the individual agency in reclaiming power over bodies and physical appearance becomes collective when it transmits a political message that resists domination. The past dependency of women on organizations, structures, and mainly the state has been replaced by a highly confident attitude to demand rights.

Conclusion

The Iranian Revolution, at the broadest level, has been a prominent example of women's agency, mobilization and collective resistance. Women that participated in one of the greatest revolutions of the 20th century have a collective memory of its accomplishments and the non-gendered vision for liberation. The experience of Iranian women is also telling in the nature of popular uprisings that are accompanied by the instantaneous struggle against patriarchy within the movement. In terms of direction, popular uprisings have recurrently looked to the past as a way to bring back an epitome of the future. Religion wrought in a mantle of ideology and the path forward has too often been used as a manifesto and remedy for those in search of a vision for the future. The struggle for women's rights is divided between two opposing models that are recurrently narrated as rivals: a western democratic secular state under the rule of law contrasted with an Islamic system that harkens

to an idyllic glorious past. In Iran, neither model has led to the transformation of women's space in society without a struggle.

In an increasingly global world with an interdependence of societies, it is no longer possible to constrain the vision for the future while looking to the past. To integrate and strive for ideas based on rights, equality and justice does not have to be branded as a threat to local culture. In the post-Arab Spring space it has become evident that attempts to address democratic change through women's rights has continuously come up against a persistent tendency to articulate such issues as un-Islamic and a threat from the west. At the same time, throughout the Middle East and the broader Islamic world, the development of an independent women's voice continues to grow in strength and significance. It is impossible to predict the outcome of these different but interconnected challenges taking place in the aftermath of the Arab Spring. What is clear is that it offers the opportunity through a united action of ensuring that women become a vital part of the changes that impact their lives. Depictions for the future and ultimately the vision for change must begin in the minds of people interrupting the past rather than the endless reinterpretation that further inhibits lives.

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