

CHAPTER EIGHT

Green Movement: A struggle against Islamist Patriarchy?

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Many here and some in Iran are waiting for and hoping for the moment, when secularization will at least come back to the fore and reveal the good, old type of revolution we have always known. I wonder how far they will be taken along this strange, unique road, in which they seek, against the stubbornness of their destiny, against everything they have been for centuries, “something quite different.”

Michel Foucault, 1988, p. 226¹

Wearing a colorful hand- made Turkmen scarf beneath her loose black chador, Zahra Rahnavard, a university professor of Arts and Political Science accompanied her husband, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, the main reformist candidate in his presidential campaign in summer 2009. Holding hands with his wife, Mousavi also challenged the hegemonic gender ideology of the Islamic Republic based on impenetrable public/ private division. Some days before the 2009 Elections Mousavi also published his agenda for women, which was extraordinary in the post revolutionary context. The agenda included many legal, economic, and socio-political rights and reforms women activists and ordinary women had for many years demanded.² Years before, at

the juncture of the consolidation of the Islamist government, he had also maintained, “If women go back to kitchen, the revolution fails.”³ Perhaps Mousavi had also realized that women had to resist against the forces of the time determined to exclude them. This trend was contrary to the massive participation of women in the 1979 revolutionary processes, which made Ayatollah Khomeini confess that the revolution was impossible without women. Nevertheless, after the revolution the Islamists set up the division required women to devote themselves to domestic domain, because men are considered more appropriate to manage the socio-political and economic affairs. Although in the post revolutionary Iran many women and men challenged this stereotype via different activities, the Green Movement witnessed the most defiant struggle against gendered apparatus of the Islamic Republic. This was exemplified not only in actions, but also in symbols and slogans. The picture of the revolutionary couple hand in hand and adorned with the slogan “Mousavi, Rahnavard, Equality Between Men and Women,” [Mosavi, Rahnavard, tasavy e zan o mard] was distributed among the people in the days that preceded the elections seemingly promising a new era in which women, ethnic groups, and other marginalized parts of the society would be treated more equitably. In such a context, it was not by chance that the two conservative candidates, Mohsen Rezai and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, also appeared in public accompanied by their wives, even if the latter were thoroughly wrapped up in their black chadors. Contrary to them, Zahra Rahnavard was more than a silent company. Soon after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, she criticized the compulsory *hejab* stipulated by Ayatollah Khomeini and other Islamists.⁴ Actively involved in the electoral campaigns of his husband, she unequivocally condemned both political autocracy and gender discrimination including the compulsory *hejab* in her public speeches and interviews.⁵ In many occasions after the Elections she also vehemently criticized the way the government treats women.

The Green Movement is immensely characterized by the novelty of its political actions. Equally important, it was marked by its political subverting symbols thanks to the alternative non-state social media. Apart from the aforementioned picture, speeches, and memories of Rahnavard and Mousavi, another image that captured imaginations was that of the killing of Neda Agha Soltan, a 26 year old woman and student of Art, caught on camera-phone. She was reportedly shot to death by a plain-clothes Basiji in Amir-Abad Street during one of the huge post-electoral street protests in Tehran. Whereas Zahra Rahnavard represented many religious women of the older generations, whose hopes for a just society were nullified, Neda represented women of the younger generations. Her death was very challenging for the conservative rule and this was the reason why the government did its best to manipulate it. Claiming the video artificial, the state media concertedly attributed it to the foreigners and oppositional groups. Despite these efforts, Neda became the icon of the Green Movement. Her death unmasked the systematically intertwined autocratic and discriminatory rule of the country. Very much disenchanted by the promises of the rulers of the country, the young Neda became the voice of many ordinary Iranian young women, who had no memory of the Islamic Revolution and were very much apolitical; yet inevitably end up with taking action against their destined fate. Her death equally symbolized the suffocation of women's demands in today Iran. Yet, this was not just the Iranian government, which tried to manipulate her death. The monarchist opposition also tried to appropriate Neda's death. Calling Neda his daughter, the former Crown Prince of Iran Reza Pahlavi, son of the deposed Shah, broke down crying⁶ at a press conference held on June 22, 2009.⁷ Similar disingenuous gesture towards women was exhibited by Mahmoud Ahmadinejad after Neda's death partly in order to cool down the public anger and shock provoked by her death. He suggested that three women would be appointed as ministers in his cabinet should he be elected.

However, Ahmadinejad's claim was greeted with much skepticism by the reformists and feminists who viewed it as more of a trick than a genuine concern for the predicament of Iranian women.⁸

Apart from Neda and Rahnavard thousands of women actively participated in the Green Movement. In doing this, they have also challenged the hegemonic settings intended to internalize in them. Nevertheless massive participation of women in the political processes of the country was not particular to the Green Movement. Since the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, if not earlier, the history of Iran has witnessed that women from different strata of the society have always actively participated in the political processes.⁹ Women of diverse backgrounds have demonstrated on the streets in support of the national movement of 1952 led by Mohammad Mosaddegh, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 led by Ayatollah Khomeini, and the reform Movement of 1997 led by Mohammad Khatami. What is striking in the Green Movement, therefore, is not the massive participation of women, even the diversity of their religious and secular background. In this article, my argument is that regardless of the consequences of the Green Movement and its future shape and achievements, the participation of women in the Green Movement deeply and more effectively trespassed the binary oppositions of public/private, manly/womanly, feminine/ masculine on which the gendered power relations of the post-revolutionary Iranian society, heavily grounded. Thus, the Green Movement seems to be an epicenter, shaken not only the political order, but importantly the systematic gender discrimination of the post- revolutionary Islamist apparatus.

For instance while the images and backgrounds of Zahra Rahnavard and Neda Agha-Soltan are very different from each other in terms of the two types of Iranian women that they

represent, with one being secular and the other religious/ pious, they do share a common trait; the two women obfuscated the demarcations of religiosity and secularism, yet, both of them also embodied a contrast with the officially presented picture of the womanhood. Looking at some of the initiatives embarked upon by women in the Green Movement, this article attempts to answer the following questions: So far as gender apparatus of the political order is concerned, what role have women's social movement and civil society activism played in the Green Movement? How broadly have gender issues been addressed and included in the Green Movement and to what extent could these developments change the notion of womanhood, and gendered dichotomy of the male supremacy which has been so central to the conservative rule in post-revolutionary Iran?

Based largely on eye-witness accounts, fieldwork, and socio-political research done both before and after the emergence of the "Green Movement," as well as the news and analyses that appeared on various Iranian websites and Persian blogs (Weblagestan), this essay will, further, trace back some of the reasons for the vast participation of women from diverse strands in the Movement. It will also speculate on some of the challenges that the movement faced in order to contradict the government's repressive tactics effectively.

Against Humiliation

Perhaps more than any other factor, a common sense of humiliation among different strata of the society instigated the Green Movement. Apart from the deficiencies of the Ahmadinejad's government and his policies, including abuse of power and arbitrary rule, his and his allies' personal manners, acts, and speeches were intentionally countercurrent, targeting social

mannerism. As an instance, publically ridiculing women in an official parliament session he jokingly said that men cannot be loyal to one wife. This saying was accompanied by the laughter of other conservative parliamentarians. Unifying around “Human Dignity” as the leitmotif of the oppositional candidates, many people were determined to stand against the systematic humiliation on the part of Ahmadinejad and his allies. The reformist factions, pro- civil rights groups, and different strata of the society on the one hand, and the conservative camps including Ahmadinejad and his allies, the Supreme Leader, the majority of the parliament, the judiciary, the Islamic Republic Guardian Corps, Basij organizations, the governmental seminary and the conservative *ulama* on the other hand. The oppositional factions claimed the elections fraudulent and accused Ahmadinejad’s administration of manipulation of votes. Consequently different strata within society rallied against the election fraud, and subsequent socio-political repression. Soon after the announcement of the result of the elections, the conservatives not only began arresting some leading members of the reformist parties but also attacked violently the peaceful demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people who had poured into the streets to protest against Ahmadinejad’s government and the electoral fraud. During the next several months, a number of mass demonstrations that came to be seen as constituting the “Green Movement” took place in major cities, especially in Tehran. While they began initially as protests against electoral fraud, with time, the demonstrations became increasingly radicalized, eventually targeting the Supreme Leader and the entire political establishment. Street protests were fiercely suppressed and finally the leaders of the movement, Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi along with their wives were put under house arrest since January 2011.

Ahmadinejad's Discriminatory Policies Towards Women

Although institutionalized discrimination against women has characterized the past thirty years of the Islamic Republic, the neoconservatives have shown much determination to backlash against much of the progress that had been made by women and by eight years of a reformist government (1997-2005). For the purpose of this article, I will focus mainly on some of his discriminatory gender policies and the responses to them on the part of ordinary women, and political and civil activists.

In the course of his first term as President (2005-2009) political freedom decreased dramatically. A range of independent newspapers and journals, as well as civil society organizations including women's associations were shut down and many civil and political activists intimidated and imprisoned. At the same time, these policies were followed by the consolidation of different economic and financial governmental organizations and paramilitary sections like the Basij.¹⁰ Ahmadinejad's inclination towards autocratic rule resulted in the cancellation or abolition of a number of administrative institutions like the Management and Planning Organization which had been responsible for the economic planning and management of the country. Such actions resulted in, among other things, the harsh criticisms of a range of conservative and reformist groups, accusing him of ignoring the law and the Constitution, thereby further deepening the split among the political elite.

From the beginning of the conservatives' take-over of power in 2005, they have been suspicious of women's civil right activism.¹¹ It was during Ahmadinejad's tenure that the gender quota system to limit the number of female students attending university was re-introduced. Moreover, the government's ideological machine was backed by institutions such as the "Center for Women and Family Affairs" which had proposed plans such as the "Family Bill" introduced in the summer of 2007, making it easier and more straightforward for men to take a second wife.

This bill also imposed taxes on women's alimony.¹² Another program, called the Mercy Plan [tarh e rahmat], was introduced in 2006, with the goal of teaching housewives to be more obedient to their husbands; yet another to ban women from work outside the home, and to promote polygamy. There was also an attempt by the government to enforce the "Plan to Promote Public Chastity," forcing all institutions to strictly enforce both women's dress codes as well as the rule against the mingling of men and women in the workplaces, universities, and many other public spaces.¹³ Similarly, in order to limit the participation of women in public life outside of the home, women's working hours were reduced to allow women to have more time for family chores. In short, all these programs had for aim to confine women to the home and to compel them to take care of their husbands for fear that the husband would take another wife.

Perhaps Ahmadinejad's most aggressive policy was the "Social Security Plan" [tarh e amniat e ejtemaee].The plan mostly targeted "improperly-veiled" women, leading in turn to the harassment and police searches of thousands of young women on the streets of Tehran and other cities. It also included men, many of whom were arrested as being "hooligans and saboteurs", and taken to the places like Kahrizak camp, south of Tehran.¹⁴

As a result of these policies which were aimed at both the middle and lower- middle class women, many women became increasingly politicized. By the time of the 2009 Presidential Elections, many people from different strata of society became mobilized to vote for other candidates. The basis of the motivation for many was to stop Ahmadinejad from winning a second term.

In April 2009, almost two months before the presidential elections, about forty women's groups joined together to create a "Women's Coalition" in preparation for the elections. Without

supporting any particular candidate, the Coalition raised two specific demands for the consideration of the candidates: the ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the revision of Articles 19, 20, 21 and 115 of the Iranian constitution enshrining gender discrimination. A number of women also chose to participate actively in the electoral campaigns of the reformist candidates. Among them was Jamileh Kadivar, a well-known reformist political activist, and former parliamentarian, who came forward as the main supporter of Mehdi Karroubi's electoral campaign. As a reformist candidate, Karroubi not only promised the conditional ratification of the UN Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women that had been previously blocked by the Guardian Council after its ratification by the sixth reformist majles (1999-2003), but he also promised the loosening of the compulsory *hejab* regulations.

Politicization of Women

In addition to women activists, many students and ordinary women also joined the groups opposing Ahmadinejad, because of his damaging and discriminatory policies regarding women. Therefore, the Presidential Elections of 2009 was also the manifest of the politicization of women from all sections and backgrounds. During the presidential campaign, a number of students and civil rights activists, university professors, artists, intellectuals, and journalists published separate statements, in which they invited people to participate in the elections and vote for the reformist candidates. According to some observations, women voters outnumbered men, which was very similar to the Presidential Elections of 1997. Many women also participated in the mass demonstrations that followed the elections. They constituted not only the

ranks of the prominent political civil activists, and journalists, but also have continued to pay a high price for their activism by being arrested, convicted and sentenced to long prison terms. Compared to the previous events in the history of Iran, this time the number of women prisoners was quite significant.

As has been argued, the politicization of women is very much rooted in the Islamic Republic's gender discrimination and the four years of Ahmadinejad's presidency. The institutionalized discrimination affected middle class women hardest. With regard to lower class women, while it is not yet clear what percentage from among them might have voted for the reformist candidates in the Presidential Elections of 2009, no definitive conclusion can be drawn either that the majority of men and women from the lower classes voted for the conservative candidates in the 2009 Presidential Elections. In fact the findings of some research carried out regarding women and their political participation in different poor suburban areas of Iranian cities including Mashad, Tehran, Zahedan, Bam, and Kerman between 2006 and 2007 indicate that many women from the lower class strata of society might have voted for Mousavi, since his economic agenda was based on social justice and he was known as an effective politician during the eight years of war with Iraq (1981-1989).¹⁵

According to my findings in a recently conducted research,¹⁶ a large number of lower class women¹⁷ voted for Ahmadinejad in the 2005 Presidential Elections. However, many of them were not satisfied with the subsequent economic policies of his government when interviewed two years later. They maintained that the most important problems they suffered from included unemployment (of both male and female members of the families as well as their husbands as the head of the household and the main breadwinner), high rates of inflation, increasing prices of basic needs including the cost of accommodation, drug addiction of many

men, women, and youth, and the inability of families to financially help their children start their own families. In fact, Amadinejad's economic policies have impoverished many lower classes. Therefore, even if the Green Movement began first and foremost as a middle class phenomenon especially with regard to its organization and social networks, there is evidence that its appeal broadened to comprise many people from the lower classes. Nevertheless, the political participation and mobilization of the lower classes seem to have been restricted to less costly actions like casting votes rather than taking part in mass demonstrations. Despite this, according to my personal observations at least at the beginnings of the mass street demonstrations, large anti- government protests did take place in the less affluent parts of south Tehran, where the lower classes traditionally live.

By and large, even though many members of the lower classes were not satisfied with the economic and political conditions that they lived in,¹⁸ in the long run they seem unlikely to become involved in those actions that were considered to have a high risk factor and political consequences that they could ill afford, unlike the middle classes that could take a chance. The level of participation of the lower classes in summer 2009 seems to have been very much similar to that of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. As indicated by Asef Bayat,¹⁹ the majority of the lower classes were not only among the last strata of society to join the revolution but also among the first to leave it behind. As is well known, it was the young, educated middle classes that constituted the main agents of the Iranian Revolution.

Agonistic Practices In Antagonistic Context

So far as women and gender relations are concerned, the Green Movement was characterized by side-stepping the public/private demarcation, a socio-politically constructed boundary which has nevertheless proved crucial for the gender ideology of the Islamic Republic. It was not only women, but also to some extent a large number of men including the reformist leaders, who bypassed the public/private divisions. Merging the public/private roles, many women participants at different levels managed to embark on both domesticated roles like being mothers, wives, daughters and independent citizens at one and the same time. Therefore, the Green Movement, among other things, seems to have been tremendously empowering for those Iranian women, who were somehow involved in it. One of the women's aims was to change the power relations in a more egalitarian and less discriminatory way. However it would be more accurate to consider the movement as a process. That is why it would be safe to speculate that the Green Movement would most likely had a lasting impact on Iranian society, politics, and culture regardless of its full success in the near future.

It was not only ordinary women and women political activists that were involved in the movement, but there were also numerous civic activists, some of whom continue to be in prison at the time of writing this article. Although many women were not involved in the activities of women's organizations like the "One Million Signature Campaign", the Green Movement was able to surpass many civic activities including those particular to women's organizations. This was because the emergence of a new political situation necessitated different kinds of actions. The Green Movement was first and foremost nurtured by an antagonistic situation as indicated by the main characteristics of the post-electoral politics. According to Chantal Mouffe,²⁰ a political situation is antagonistic if the confrontations between different groups reach such a

point of hostility that society and politics get divided into adversarial camps. The same situation seems to be the case of the aftermath of the 2009 Presidential Elections. Whereas before the elections, many political and civil society activists though with difficulty could proceed women's demands, as a result of the antagonistic situation of the aftermath of the election, many of these activities have been fragmented. In addition, many activists voluntarily or forcefully left the country. By and large, the post-electoral atmosphere witnessed a decline in civil activities on the part of different sections. Consequently other political and civil institutions and parties including Jebhe ye Mosharekat along with its Women's Branch, Human Rights organizations and NGOs including the Association of Human Rights Advocates head by Shirin Ebadi, the Noble Peace Prize Winner, were shut down, whilst some of their members were imprisoned. Furthermore, the One Million Signature Campaigns, as the most effective campaign against the discriminatory policies of the neoconservative started in 2005 similarly declined dramatically and many of its activists either left the country or became much less active. Thus, despite strong conflict between society and politics, the pre-electoral circumstances seemed to be more suitable for collective civic activities compared to the post-electoral era.

Nonetheless, suspension of the civil society activities and social movements does not necessarily entail their cancellation or dissociation from the political demands embodied in the Green Movement. Among the associations and groups whose activities were more political in nature, as for instance, the Islamic Student Associations were incorporated in the Green Movement, and henceforth some of their most active members such as Bahareh Hedayat, who was elected as the head of the Women's Department of Tahkim Vahdat Islamic Student Association, were jailed. Other civic organizations including those of women were either surpassed or became fragmented and marginalized with some of their members joined the

“Greens.” So long as the antagonistic situation endures, it seems that previous civic and political activities will remain suspended. Consequently, the post-electoral era has brought about at least two major differences with regard to civil society organizations in general and gender specific in particular: First, a deep change in the state-society relations resulting in the loss of trust and the emergence of an openly antagonistic situation, and secondly, the replacement of different kinds of civic activism with an overarching political movement, giving rise to the an increasing policing of the society on the part of the authorities.

The Campaign of Veiled Men

Despite the suppressive and very unpleasant situation of the aftermath of the election, so far as gender equality is concerned, the Green Movement signals a new era. If this era terminated to a more democratic future, it is likely to be vested with stronger level of gender equality. This would be evidently due to the struggles of women in the post-revolutionary Iran, yet particularly the significant challenging role women played in the Green Movement.

The presence of women in the movement has not been limited to their standing alongside men and supporting them in their endeavors. Rather, the Green Movement provided an opportunity for many women to play a dual role: on the one hand, they became directly engaged in the political process in their capacity as independent civil and political activists, advocates, journalists, artists, and street protesters, and on the other, as wives, mothers, and daughters of men. While women managed to play these overlapping roles, they also succeeded to trespass the well established demarcation set up by the post-revolutionary ideological apparatus. Men too, in effect, began to question the stereotypical roles embodied in the social norms and encouraged by the regime. The campaign in support of Majid Tavakkoli represents a good example.²¹ Majid

Tavakkoli, an active student, was arrested and jailed because of his outspoken public speech in the middle of street confrontations. Soon after his arrest the state run media published his pictures, in which he was most probably forced to wear a black chador and *Maghne 'e* [a piece of cloth covering head and neck]. They allegedly claimed that by wearing chador, he planned to run anonymously. Regardless of the actual event, distribution of these pictures apparently aimed at dehumanizing Majid by means of womanizing him. The pictures and allegations provoked fierce anger among the Greens. In response, many men, in the inside and outside of the country wore chador and scarves in solidarity with Majid and distributed their pictures on social media. In conclusion, the campaign initially launched in support of Majid, also targeted the compulsory *hejab* as was the case of Majid. Thus, contrary to the repetitive message of the Islamic government that “*hejab* is immunity” [“*hejab masouniat ast*”], the campaign deployed the idea that not only women, but also men are dehumanized by the compulsory *hejab*. This action also was an evident rupture with the events took place at the advent of the Islamic Revolution, when many men either neutrally or sympathetically watched the violent public actions against unveiled women by the hardliner Islamists.

The campaign possessed another symbolic dimension: whereas in the Islamic Revolution, many unveiled women became veiled in solidarity with their veiled counterparts, in the Green Movement men became veiled in solidarity with another man. This signaled a dramatic change in the symbolic order of the society. Contrary to the propagated notion maintaining women as essentially “weaken” [zaifeh], both the action of the government in forcibly veiling of Majid and the campaign of the Greens illuminated that femininity and masculinity are socially constructed. Apart from challenging the fixed essentialist notions of femininity and masculinity, which were reinforced after the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the campaign also defied the

underlying gender ideas of the Iranian Revolution of 1979, in which men and women demonstrated in separated lines. It would be premature to conclude that because of the actions such as the above, the entire society realized the instability of gendered notions and roles. Nevertheless, due to some opportunities opened up by the Green Movement, many men and women unprecedentedly challenged these demarcations and it is likely that these actions shape the historical memory.

Love as Politics

Above all the actions and mediations initiated by women under the umbrella of the Green Movement clearly blurred the boundaries between the private and the public as illustrated in numerous examples notably women's love letters and the "Mourning Mothers." Following the arrest and imprisonment of a large number of activists in the wake of the 2009 Presidential Elections, the publication of a series of love letters by the prisoners' wives in the Internet and social media protesting against the unjust and brutal actions of the government towards their husbands and also expressing their sentiments towards their husbands was unprecedented. By referring to the violent atmosphere in the country, these letters represented not only a political testimonial and act of defiance but also an unparalleled action bypassing the public/private distinctions and hegemonic socio-cultural stereotypes.

In the Iranian culture, love is treated conversely. While in the Sufi tradition (as for Hafez and Rumi), worldly love is celebrated as a way towards spirituality, in the constellation of Islamism and orthodox conservative *ulama* it is regarded by and large as shame. Therefore, speaking of love in the public is a debunking action. As mentioned earlier, the picture of

Mousavi and Rahnavard showing them hand in hand was an outbreak in the post-revolutionary Iran. In the context, where almost none of the politicians appear publically with their wives, it was anti hegemonic. The love letters campaign by bringing beauty into public radically shook the domestic/ public dichotomy as pivotal for the Islamist gender attitudes. It was initiated sometime around January 2010, by the wives of political prisoners, whose husbands were illegally in jail for some months. In response to these letters some male political prisoners also wrote their own love letters. Notable among these letters was that of Fakhrossadat Mohatashami-Pour, the reformist political activist. She wrote to his husband, Mostafa Tajzadeh, the well known reformist politician, and vice versa.²² “In my opinion” Fakhrossadat writes, “it is necessary to document all senses, moods, thoughts and talks of these days as part of the history of our revolution and our contemporary history.”²³ Publicizing love and transforming it to a political action in order to make politics more human, women’s initiative evoked lots of jubilation among the Greens.

In another similar instance, when the families of the political prisoners gathered in front of the court waiting for their relatives to come out, a wife of a well-known reformist politician addressed him by crying out, “I love you.”

It seemed that for the first time in the contemporary history of Iran love was brought into public not as a shame as is still considered by the conventional culture and politics, but as a human phenomenon and simultaneously a very effective political measure.

Other similar initiatives imply the same intervention of spheres and roles. Among them, was the founding of a group known as the “Mourning Mothers,” who came together to stand peacefully and protest the killings and acts of violence perpetrated against the Iranian youth and

women. The initiative was in fact rooted in the previous campaign launched in 2007 by some women activists aimed at fighting against all acts of war and violence. Originally called “Mothers of Peace”, it was set up to mobilize women against military attacks, nuclear proliferation and armaments and any other actions that could instigate war.²⁴ After the death of Neda Agha Soltan and Sohrab Arabi, a 19 year-old young man reportedly murdered in prison, the campaign was reoriented towards actions against the violent suppression of the demonstrators and dissidents by the Iranian security police and plain clothes. This was very much influenced and inspired by the experiences of women in other countries like Argentina where the mothers of the “disappeared” and people murdered by the military Junta initiated the act of mourning as a means of protest and opposition. The “Mothers of the ‘disappeared’ set off a series of mourning ceremonies, adding political meaning to their expressions of grief, so that their acts of mourning took on significance as a means of protest and opposition.” Similarly the “Mourning Mothers” initiated weekly gatherings in different public places lighting candles in the memory of those who had been murdered.²⁵ Despite their peaceful protest, they were attacked by the police several times, leading to the arrest and imprisonment of a number of them in early January 2010. The “Mourning Mothers” represent another example of the diverse role played by women in the Green Movement.

A third example consists of the cases of women’s interventions to save lives of both sides in the street demonstrations. On many occasions when the police arrested the youth on the streets, women stepped forward and attempted to release them from the hands of the security police. On other occasions, women mediated between the angry protesters and the police on the conflict situations and when security police fell into people’s hands. As equal citizens they saw no conflict between political involvement on the one hand, and “motherly” non violent actions

on behalf of the whole nation on the other. Hence, the same women who chanted against the government, at other occasions initiated different campaigns and involvement to prevent violence against their own children. Again these instances are manifestations of how deep women could disintegrate the established notion of femininity as was defined by the ideological apparatuses.

In addition to the numerous instances of women's involvement, it also would be worth mentioning another unprecedented dimension of the Green Movement, namely, the publicizing of issues such as sexual harassment which would have been considered too taboo to be discussed in public in the previous thirty years. The challenge against male supremacy as a fundamental aspect of Iranian politics, increasingly, gained a central role in the Green Movement. Therefore, although there were many women, who participated in the movement and played a major role in the whole process, the issue at stake went far beyond that. The sexual harassment and humiliation of the opposition in fact uncovered the aim of the phallogocentric hegemony to feminize its opponents as a way of discrediting and silencing them. In order to counter this, many "Greens" while disseminating information, gradually began publicizing reported violations. For instance, even though the news regarding Kahrizak detention camp as revealed mostly by Mehdi Karroubi was totally shocking and distressing, it also broke many taboos, and for the very first time, motivated public discussions against the feminization and harassment of the political opposition as a systematic action that had been resorted to by the Iranian regime over the past thirty years. While similar actions had been experienced by the members of the oppositional groups in the past, they had never managed to discuss it publically either out of fear of becoming stigmatized or out of the internalization of the same principle that it is the victims of harassment, and not the agents of torture and persecution that are the guilty party.

Conclusion

Although the Green Movement has been suppressed by all means, the role of women in this symbolically subverting event was quite decisive in a number of ways. As has been argued, women took advantage of the Green Movement as an opportunity to cross the constructed socio-political division between the public and domestic, and feminine and masculine, and to claim equal citizenship through political action. Having become politicized as a result of discriminatory humiliating actions of the conservative government of Ahmadinejad, many women from different sectors of society and with various levels of political participation and experience became increasingly involved in the political process. Therefore, among other things, the Green Movement was proof of the failure of the conservative gender hegemony through the indoctrination of domesticity and discrimination, even though many women's civil activities of the previous years had been fragmented and suspended as a result of the antagonistic situation.

At the same time, the Green Movement provided an opportunity for men to revise many stereotypes that had been ruling the minds. The large protests, inadvertently, raised a number of issues that had been considered taboo in the past. Among them was the sexual harassment of the male and female prisoners that had always been a concern but had never been addressed in public before. Following the dissemination of the news about the torture and harassment of the detainees, it seemed more difficult to ignore it and sweep it under the carpet as had been the case in previous years.

One could argue that it was because of the Green Movement that women's demands regarding equality have been heard by more people. This is the case with the new family law, which is going to be ratified by the Majles in 2011. Whereas before the 2009 Presidential Elections, it was mostly women activists who protested against the bill, now many more people, from different walks of life, are aware and talk about this. Despite this, many questions remain unanswered; among them, the extent to which women's claim to equality and full-fledged citizenship will be incorporated into the current and future politics of Iran, and whether their major role and rights will be recognized by any government in the future.

Commented [S1]: It is not ratified yet, but I think it will be in the coming months.

Perhaps Foucault's remark on the Iranian Revolution, at the beginning of this article sounds still credible with one exception: Similar to the previous events, the Green Movement was neither secular nor religious, but beyond both secularism and religiosity. It was an incident in which many women and men from different identities have participated. This time also people rebelled against the stubbornness of their destiny, against everything they have been for centuries and despite previous rebels. But perhaps it also will be chronicled as a unique incident due to unprecedented debunking role women along with many men played in it.

Notes

¹ Michel Foucault, Lawrence D Kritzman, Alan Sheridan, "Iran: The Spirit of a World Without Spirit", in *Politics, philosophy, culture: interviews and other writings, 1977-1984* (Routledge, 1988), pp. 211-226.

² “Five Goals and Forty Five Strategies for Solving Women’s Problems”, *Kalame ye Zabz*, No. 11, 30.5. 2009.

³ Mir-Hossein Mousavi’s Interview, *Zan e Ruz*, No. 1058, February 1985.

⁴ Parvin Paidar, *Women and the Political Process in Twentieth Century Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

⁵ *Kalame ye Sabz*, No. 1, 18. 5. 2009.

⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sIFIQ2kLzyY>

⁷ As indicated by Nicholas Mirzoeff , the death was used by the Crown Prince for making a renewed claim to be the “father” of Iran and of Iranian women. See: Nicholas Mirzoeff, “What We Saw: Politics in the Mirror of Neda Agha-Soltan,” *Social Text: Periscope*, November 2009.. <http://www.socialtextjournal.org/periscope/2009/11/what-we-saw-politics-in-the-mirror-of-neda-gha-soltan.php#more>

⁸ Nazanin Shahrokini, “All the President’s Women”, *Middle East Report*, 253, winter 2009.

⁹ Parvin Piadar, Ibid; Eliz Sanasarian, *The Women’s Rights Movement in Iran: Mutiny, Appeasement and Repression from 1900 to Khomeini*, (Praeger, 1982).

¹⁰ Kaveh Ehsani, “Survival Through Dispossession: Privatization of Public Goods in the Islamic Republic,” *Middle East Report* 250 (Winter 2008).

¹¹ Homa Hoodfar, “Activism under the Radar: Volunteer Health Workers in Iran,” *Middle East Report* 250 (Spring 2009).

¹² Many women activists at the time opposed some articles of this bill permitting polygamy and requested the parliament to revise it. They also started campaigning against these articles bill through different means including sending letters to the deputies, informing people about the

consequences of this code, and finally gathering in the parliament building to negotiate with parliamentarians. Due to these efforts the family code was temporarily suspended. In the meantime it also was criticized vehemently among others by Zahra Rahnavard and Ashraf Boroujerdi. See the links below:

<http://khabaronline.ir/news-34755.aspx>; <http://www.fardanews.com/fa/pages/?cid=99926>;
<http://emruz.info/ShowItem.aspx?ID=27131&p=1>

¹³ Fatemeh Sadeghi, “The Foot Soldiers of the Islamic republic’s Culture of Modesty,” *Middle East Report* 250 (Spring 2009).

¹⁴ At the time when the Plan was being carried out, some news came out posing that Kahrizak is a detention camp, in which people experienced the most severe mistreatment, without having any access to law. The news was not taken serious until sometime after the election the camp turned out to be a horrible hidden detention centre that the young protesters were taken into. According to the news, some of them have been tortured to death, while others have been raped and intimidated. The maltreatment was scandalous; therefore, some month after the Majles tried to investigate the case and take the main person, namely Saeed Mortazavi, before the court. However the investigation was blocked. Finally the court convicted not the main individuals in charge, but some soldiers, who reportedly was ordered. The case was finally closed without any clear result. Mortazavi has been later appointed by Ahmadinejad as the head of another key organization in the administration.

¹⁵ Fatemeh Sadeghi, “Lower Class Women and Tradition in Iran,” *Goftogu*, 56 (Summer 2010): 127-146.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ By lower class women, I mean women from low income families, who hardly have access to formal education as the middle class women do.

¹⁸ This is again based on the interviews before the election as well as the conversations I have had with some people.

¹⁹ Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movement in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997). See also Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, "The State, Classes, and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution," *State, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 3 (Spring 1985): 3-40.

²⁰ Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political: Thinking in Action* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

²¹ Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "Broken Taboos in Post-Election Iran," *Middle East Report Online*, December 17 2009. <http://www.merip.org/mero/mero121709.html>

²² www.kaleme.com/1389/11/08/klm-45273/

²³ bayaniye02.blogspot.com/2011/01/blog-post_3176.html

²⁴ <http://www.motherspeace.com/>

²⁵ <http://www.madaraneazadar.blogspot.com/>; <http://www.motherspeace.com/spip.php?article84>