2 Reflecting on an Idealized Past

Memory and Women's Rights Struggles in Postrevolutionary Iran

This chapter asks the following questions: Do women's postrevolutionary rights and roles progress linearly, connecting post-1979 rights struggles to the prerevolutionary era? How do the women I encountered, either during interviews or through memoirs, appraise and relate to this sometimes idealized past? During my time as a visiting professor at the University of Tehran (2012–2014), I met two female PhD students with shared research interests. Quite excited to be with scholars from my own generation, I immediately began to discuss how influential the history of Iranian women's activism had been in my life. As I reviewed this history from the Qajar period to the Pahlavi years and postrevolutionary Iran, the two women gave me blank stares and an almost prerehearsed look of disapproval. They then began to question me on the histories of colonialism. The connection and friendship that I had hoped to establish suddenly seemed unsettled.

Through several months of close interaction, I noted that the two women were critical of the status of women in Iran, but the point of reference to conceptualize or rectify their concerns was rarely guided by a recounting of past women's rights struggles or national gender policies. Even the recent history of the 1980–1988 period was rarely reflected upon, despite the reality that one student's father had served in the Iran–Iraq war. They complained about their struggles to find suitable partners and their frustration toward men who dismissed them due to their age and high academic credentials. One of the students, for instance, told me sadly that she had to reject a proposal from a young man living abroad because he was a follower of the Supreme Leader and she felt that this meant they were culturally incompatible. She also discussed how her strict wearing of a hijab among the faculty was due to her sense of respect for one faculty member in particular and that she (like the rest of us) did not dress that way outside the university.

These two PhD students were also vocal about the vagueness of citizenship rights in Iran. During one late-afternoon group discussion, a debate emerged about satellite television. I stated that everyone having

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

access to it suggested that the state was not serious about preventing people from watching Western television programs. One of the PhD students intervened: "Yes, but it's illegal. We don't want to be categorized as criminals. Do you know that such offenses can prevent us from getting good government jobs?"

I was also surprised when one of the PhD students, who identified with the Hezbollah movement, laughed at my interest in the Islamization of women's rights. She replied, "Are you serious? You came all the way from the other side of the world to study this? There is no such thing as Islamic rights or Islamic social sciences! These are just a bunch of people getting large sums of funding, and it will all end soon when Ahmadinejad leaves."

Over the course of a few months, I realized that the two women did not conceive of, remember, or connect with women's activism in modern Iran the same way that I did. Instead, they relied on their own immediate memories and goals to move into action. These memorable exchanges guided my attention toward a larger trend that emerged in my research: Often during my interactions, women did not try to locate their acts of citizenship within an established historical narrative on women's rights struggles.

Influential feminist studies of Iran suggest that Iranian women continue a liberal rights struggle that materialized during the democratic activism of the Qajar period, resistance movements of the Shah era, and political contentions in contemporary Iran (Afary, 1996; Afkhami and Friedl, 1994; Moghadam, 1992). Historical time is imagined in terms of a progressive move toward a liberal democratic state. For instance, Mojab (2007, p. 13) states:

> The number of women participants in the first revolution [The Constitutional Revolution, 1906–1911] was indeed small. However, step by step they gained more prominence and launched their organizations and publications during numerous struggles that continued until the second revolution of 1979.

Carrying the same linear connection between the past and present with respect to women's rights, Sedghi (2007, p. 21) states that "the most striking continuity across the past hundred years of Iranian history and politics has been the growth of women's agency, its strength and potency."

My purpose in this chapter is to concentrate on the individual's own remembrance of the past and how she renews memories to move history forward in accordance with her own imagination, as well as to focus on the broader constraints and opportunities that shape her present life. The interaction that takes place between individual and collective

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

remembrance requires further attention in the social sciences and within memory studies (Hirst and Manier, 2008). This trend permits the formation of a distorted conceptualization of how change occurs and at times results in overinvesting in a linear progression of history.

I marshal various sources of evidence – including a special issue published by a Hezbollah cultural institute, some of the analyzed articles from which are not publicly accessible – to argue this: At least one reading of Iranian women's conceptualization of their status and formation of rights, roles, and responsibilities in the postrevolutionary era is its nonlinearity and connection to individual goals and memories. I contextualize women's own words from memoirs and other texts within long-term histories of activism in modern Iran and consider the conditions, structural spaces, and opportunities that made their acts of citizenship visible and, at times, invisible. This is a vital context to the more microlevel analysis that follows in the remainder of *Women and the Islamic Republic*. By including this detail on how my interlocutors engage with the history of women's rights, I better illuminate their political consciousness.

I illustrate that there were two dominant tropes that emerged in how women who were politically active during the 1980–1988 period reflected on the idealized history of women's rights in Iran. First, for these politically active women, their individual and diverse memories within the family and community defined their activism. What is missing is a linear reading of the historical past, as in both interviews and memoirs women did not connect their activism to the history of women's rights struggles. I was surprised to find that, among my interviewees, there was no appreciative glance back at activist history in Iran during the Pahlavi Monarchy or the Qajar period.

Second, there was also a strong intergenerational learning process for some women. Both during interviews and in memoirs, women of the left and supporters of Ayatollah Khomeini remember being motivated by their distinct identities as women, by their familial histories (with forced marriages, physical abuse, and unexpected solidarity from male elites), and by witnessing the lives of female relatives who never reached long-held personal desires. Leftist women's emphasis on women's rights and concern with issues pertaining to gender discrimination are also recounted by Tabari and Yeganeh (1982, see especially pp. 143–170). Shahidian (1996, p. 51) notes that leftist women's political interests were significantly shaped by their reflections on Iranian society's patriarchal norms. Afary (2001) has shown that, for some Islamist women, a desire for independence was central to their participation in the revolution and Iran–Iraq war.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

In the final section of this chapter, I highlight how the activism of women affiliated with the post-2009 revamping of the Hezbollah movement has been impacted by remembering their own gendered experiences, those of others in Iranian society where they carry out community outreach work, and the knowledge they gained through friendships forged in Hezbollah cultural institutes with other pious women from different post-1979 generations. I show how this historically contingent experience within Hezbollah cultural institutes encouraged Hezbollahi women, who had initially volunteered for participation in an anti-feminist movement, to challenge this state gender policy. I also demonstrate that a backward gaze at women's rights struggles does not shape Hezbollahi women's activism.

2.1 Politicization and Leftist and Islamist Women's Motivations for Activism from 1980 to 1988

Juxtaposing the similar motivations that brought leftist and Islamist women into revolutionary activism – albeit in different camps – highlights the similarities that leftist and Islamist women shared in their backgrounds. Both leftist and Islamist women were motivated by similar familial and sociopolitical experiences to embrace political activism, and their development into activist citizens was rarely articulated as a devotion to the history of women's rights movements in modern Iran. More specifically, women's immediate gendered experiences and intergenerational exchanges underpinned their politicization. Gendered acts of citizenship were borne out of their specific contextualized realities as non-elite women.

For women affiliated with the left, personal experience with gender boundaries influenced their decision to become politically active. Soudabeh Ardavan was loosely affiliated with the leftist organization aqaliyyat; she spent close to eight years in the Evin and Ghezel Hesar prisons. She was also a sculptor, designer, and sketch artist. Of her reason for becoming a political activist, she notes:

> My family was always worried that people would talk bad about me because I frequented rug shops [to sell her rug designs]. They did not want to be embarrassed before friends and acquaintances, so they tried to convince me to stay away from the bazaar. I was determined to show them that I was cleverer than the men that ran the rug shops in the bazaar. I wanted to show them that I was stronger and "more manly" than those men! Our home was a cold and closed place. My father's rigid attitude had made life difficult for my three brothers and me. My mother was under more pressure than anyone else. She lost her mother when she was six years old, and a few years after that, she lost her father. She ran

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

away from her strict brother at the age of 16 and moved to Tabriz from Maragheh.

She goes on to discuss how her difficult upbringing impacted her understanding of women's rights:

> An atmosphere of constant crisis in our home pushed my brothers and me to think further about the violation of our rights. We were in search of a way to tolerate our difficult circumstances. I should add that I was under more pressure than my brothers. They could go into the streets or play outside. However, because I was a girl, I was denied these rights, and I was forced to sit in the house. Therefore, I took refuge in my drawings. All alone and in the dark, I made a world for my life through color and design. I became familiar with the poetry of Forugh Farrokhzad. As such, I could give meaning to my loneliness and understand it. However, I still did not know what I was to do with the injustice that I saw taking place around me or where I was to receive support from. (Ardavan, 1382/2003, p. 7)

Before the 1979 revolution, the idea that women had to protect their bodies from the male gaze, and that men were responsible for monitoring female relatives' bodies and movements in the name of honor, was more prevalent in the country than it is today (Mir-Hosseini, 2017). Ardavan had to struggle against this historical backdrop as she entered a male-dominated public space.

Other leftist women I interviewed also remembered the injustices that they witnessed within the home shaping their decision to join the resistance against the Shah and, later, the Islamic Republic. Ardavan's gendered experiences pushed her toward political work during the revolutionary period. Familial conflict over women's physical movement into public space has been noted by other scholars of gender and the Middle East (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006).

It was not only women of the left that came into revolutionary work in spite of familial experiences with gender discrimination. Mina Kamaii was a teenager during the revolution and lived in Abadan. Her older brother was a father figure. Like most women from southern Iran, her movement and agency were limited due to the region's conservatism. She reflected on her brother's presence in her life:

> Mehran did not allow us to participate in demonstrations. But we used to go anyway without telling him … Mehran had activities that he would participate in during this time, and he would attend demonstrations. He was in touch with others in the mosque that were active. But he did not allow us to go anywhere. Once my three sisters and I insisted on going, and finally he allowed us to accompany him. I told my mom that I wanted a chador to wear, and she fitted one of her chadors for me. We took Shahram [younger brother] with us too. Many people were there. All the kids from school, the youth that were active in

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the mosque, and … [her digression here]. The ghods mosque was near our home, and the kids from the neighborhood guided us. (Mohammadi, 1381/2002a, pp. 16–17)

Kamaii also remembers how she and her sisters were not allowed to walk home from school, although the school was adjacent to their home. The sisters had to wait under a tree for Mehran to chaperone them. When the war began and Kamaii wanted to stay in Abadan and help behind the front lines, her family objected. In the fall of 1979, Mehran forced her to leave the mosque where she was preparing food. Once they arrived at home and Kamaii refused to evacuate their home, he kicked her in the face and left her with a black eye that lasted twenty days (Mohammadi, 1381/2002a, p. 30).

The revolution did not enable Kamaii to leave the home and participate in sociopolitical activities. Instead, it was a moment of contention within the family over a woman's place, as well as a battle that she was able to legitimize for herself and the women surrounding her.

Kamaii and her sisters could return to Abadan once their mom decided that living with extended family was not conducive to their well-being. Their mother was also impacted by their resistance, which included going on a hunger strike to stress their opposition to leaving Abadan. Kamaii was one of twenty women from Abadan that supported the war efforts by working as volunteer medical assistants. For some women, male guardianship and the limits it posed encouraged them to seek refuge in their role as caregivers in the context of war and also reach out to other women for help. Kamaii's memoir also suggests that domestic violence was at the very least a marginal part of the experience during the revolutionary and war period for pro-Khomeini women who wanted to enter the public sphere. Yet domestic violence rarely appears in the narratives written by or for pro-Khomeini women.

As Milani (1992) states, both women and men are expected to participate in preventing themselves from seeing one another. Adhering to modesty through a series of practices, such as lowering their gaze, is understood as an act of piety. Segregation of genders is more stringent for Islamist women and men, although separation of *mahram* and *non-mahram* (those related and not related) is expected of everyone in public space (Khosravi, 2008). For women such as Kamaii, participating in the war was hardly an easy task due to such gendered norms, which governed Iranian society and public space at the time (as they continue to do today).

For some women, familial relations refined and enhanced their activism. Monireh B. (2009) affiliated with the Marxist group Revolutionary

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Workers Organization [Rah-e Kargar], spent time in prison before and after the 1979 revolution. She states the following about her motivations; family factors into her reflection on the past but from a slightly different perspective than Ardavan's and Kamaii's familial memories:

I was acquainted with political issues because both my brother and sister were arrested during the time of the Shah. All my cousins were in prison. One of my cousins committed suicide under the Shah after being tortured in prison. My house was filled with political discussions. Naturally, when I entered university at the age of 19, I was drawn to political activities. I was not really affiliated with any particular group. The reason I was arrested under the Shah was because I was trying to smuggle in a communiqué to my brother, who was being held in prison. I was held for six months at that time.

Monireh then goes on to discuss how her family history intersected with her own views on women's rights:

I was very active during the Revolution. After the Revolution, I was active because I did not believe that the new situation reflected the principles upon which the Revolution was based. In particular, I disagreed with the compulsory veil, the increased role of the clerics in the courts and Parliament, as well as the censorship of the press, which had led to the banning of most of Iran's newspapers. I became active with a Marxist group, Revolutionary Workers Organization [Rah-e Kargar], and was in this group for about a year and a half before being arrested. The activities were above-ground. We had a student cell, which distributed leaflets in the street about our group's ideals, and we started debates and discussion of important issues in the street and we recruited new members. Our group never believed in armed struggle. (Monireh B., 2009, p. 63)

Monireh frames the origins of her political activism within her familial history of resistance. In another volume (Hadjebi-Tabrizi, 1383/2004), Monireh remembers watching her brother pray with great concentration; she assumed that he was a member of the Mojahedin. Although she considered herself a leftist, she was mesmerized by his dedication. He shared with her books addressing resistance and revolution in other countries, such as Algeria. He also took Monireh mountain climbing, which was another opportunity for her to connect with his politically active friends. Memories of familial activism – cousins, brothers, and sisters that had resisted during the time of the Shah – shaped women's decisions to resist the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran. Issues pertaining to women's rights were only one reason for politicization, and families also impacted their political decisions.

Positive family relations were also remembered by followers of Khomeini as instrumental to their decision to participate in the war. Some 6,428 women were martyred in the war, and 500 of them were warriors at the front lines ("Amaar-e Shohada va Esargare-haye Zanan

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dar Doran-e Defa Moghaddas," 1395). The family of Maryam Farhanian, who became a martyr in the early days of the war while supporting other fighters as a medical assistant in Khorramshahr, remembers the important role her father played in her politicization. According to a close family friend:

Haj Latif [Maryam's father] was mindful of his kids' morality, behavior, and religiosity. He also allowed them to freely decide on their social activism. During that time, you could not find many fathers that permitted all of their sons and daughters to participate in activities having to do with the revolution. (Saalmee nejad, 1391, p. 21)

Farhanian's father is remembered as the person who encouraged and legitimized her activism. Her brother, however, introduced the family to the "message of the Islamic Revolution" (Saalmee nejad, 1391, p. 48):

Mahdi Farhanian was the son of Haj Latif and the first person to bring the message of the Islamic Revolution into the home and introduce the family to Ayatollah Khomeini. The family was religious and this made them receptive to Imam's messages, and Haj Latif and Naneh Hadi had no objections with regard to Mahdi's activism. In fact, it was quite the opposite.

Mahdi brought texts and stories about his activism into the home to further politicize Farhanian:

The entire family, especially Maryam and Fatemeh, gathered around Mahdi and asked to be included in revolutionary activism. Mahdi believed that one has to first strengthen his or her mind and then enter political participation. This is because if a revolutionary person cannot survive under the torture of SAVAK, they can inflict a heavy loss to the revolution itself. Moving in this path came with many difficulties and risks. It required a strong motivation and dedication to the power of God. Mahdi preferred that members of the family, such as Maryam, Fatemeh, and Aghelah, become familiar with religious and revolutionary texts. Every time he brought a prohibited book home, he made it possible for his brothers and sisters to become acquainted with the revolution. (Saalmee nejad, 1391, p. 48)

Farhanian appears to have been influenced by her immediate context and the loving support of male figures. According to one of her sisters, as well as the letters Farhanian wrote to Mahdi after his martyrdom, she had a special affective bond with him (Saalmee nejad, 1391). The circulation of books between her brothers and sisters nurtured her desire to participate in the revolution and war. An appreciative glance at the history of women's rights activism in Iran is missing from Farhanian's story of activism in revolution and war.

During my interviews, I encountered women who did not highlight a politically significant familial background or specific gendered

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

experiences with discrimination as the inspiration behind their politicization. Their gravitation toward leftist and Islamist activism was a "rite of passage" forged through teenage friendships and the broader revolutionary atmosphere (Mottahedeh, 2000, p. 66). As Sohrabi (2019) has recently argued, while the role of *tashkelat* (political organizations) has been studied by scholars as significant in shaping the actions of activists, the centrality of friendships to decisions made by political actors is overlooked. An interviewee affiliated with the Islamic Mojahedin, Haleh B., spent close to three years in prison during the early 1980s and described her motivation for political activism:

> Having a political cause was an answer to people who asked you what service are you doing for your country or what do you believe in. It was fashionable at that time for the youth to be associated with a specific political group and have a political philosophy, even if they didn't really know it well. People would question you and call you pro-regime, elitist or *Taghuti*, if you wore fancy foreign clothes or would be uninformed. Everyone also had a common purpose, being against the Shah. The atmosphere early on was positive and everyone was engaged in dialogue and conversation about what is best and what is right.

In addition to being influenced by the atmosphere at the time, Haleh explains how her everyday life shaped her political path:

> I first got interested [in politics] when I was probably around 13 years old. I was young and living with my mother and brother. My social life revolved around going to school and being with friends. I wasn't raised in a leftist and religious family. So that didn't have an influence on me. My parents were not supporters of the Shah. But they were also apolitical. Through a friend who knew Ali Shariati's family, I was also introduced to his work, which influenced me. Most of my friends at some point became involved with groups like Mojahedin. Some stayed a member. Others left to join other groups. When things got more dangerous, some also got afraid and tried to disassociate themselves from others. (Personal interview, Germany, 2008)

While discussing the production of literature and poetry during the 1980–1988 period, Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak (1985) has argued that where one stood in relation to the Pahlavi Monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic Republic in postrevolutionary Iran determined how a writer was perceived by his or her peers. Through his analysis of the era's literary production, Karimi-Hakkak captures Iran's sociopolitical, post-revolutionary atmosphere and eloquently frames Haleh's approach to relating to an idealized past with respect to women's rights. For Haleh, a particular friendship, and the resultant introduction to one thinker, Ali Shariati, was the origin of her low-level collaboration with the Islamic Mojahedin. The contextual significance of standing for something and having a political philosophy (even a uniformed one) was, for some,

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

more important than one's grasp or even commitment to those ideas, as Haleh's reference to fading friendships after the state's crackdown suggests.

Similar to Haleh, Shamsy Sobhani (Jafarian, 1381/2002) remembers becoming politicized through friendships. Two years before the 1979 revolution at the age of twenty-three, Sobhani signed up for adult education night classes. During these classes in Tehran, where she had recently moved from northern Iran, she became familiar with the work of Morteza Motahhari and his discussion on the importance of hijab for women. She states:

> Reading these books, and friendships with women that were mothers and had a few kids, left a long-term impression on me. These women participated in printing and distributing leaflets on Imam's thought [Khomeini]. I felt like I had gotten some distance from everyday life. My mother would say "Shamsy! A girl must become a homemaker and settle down. You are twenty something years old, and what you are doing will not lead to a blissful ending." Those days I felt very lonely. I wished to speak with someone. Several times I decided to give Motahhari's book *Hijab* to Ruhangiz [her sister], but she was a happy nineteen-year-old that had no patience for reading such a book. (Jafarian, 1381/2002, p. 14)

Sobhani's parents were not aware of the extent of her activism, and the family was not politically active. In 1979 she joined the Revolutionary Guards and was stationed in Kurdistan prior to the start of the Iran–Iraq war due to the region's unrest. She served the Revolutionary Guards as a medical assistant in Kurdistan and later in the war. Exciting friendships, access to ideas that verified their transforming identities as pious women, and a break from the everyday labors younger women in large families endured made political activism appealing. There was no backward glance at the women's rights movement in modern Iran or even reflection on middle-class women's advancements during the reign of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi.

Relationships with women from other generations helped women negotiate their prison experience. Shahrnush Parsipur (2013, p. 155), the acclaimed Iranian writer who spent "four years, seven months, and seven days in prison," recalls that most of the women in prison were young and sought relationships with older and more experienced female prisoners who oftentimes were arrested for nonpolitical reasons. Many of these high schoolers, even after witnessing the execution of friends and family members, were unable to process the severity of their predicament. As an illustration, intergenerational relations within prison also influenced how Nasrin Parvaz decided to engage with the regime:

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

During our recreational time outside, we walked with mother Masturah and talked about our lives with her. It has been some time since she was transferred from the joint committee [*committee moshtarak*] to Evin. Raz and I took care of her. We washed her clothes, and we helped her in the shower. We treated her like our own mother because she was old and kind. She also refused to do as the *tavvabs* demanded. She never talked with the *tavvabs*, and she only had relations with us. She was arrested because the regime was looking for her sons.

Parvaz goes into further detail as to why she found Masturah endearing:

What I found interesting about mother Masturah was the following: although she knew the *tavvabs* were writing reports on her, she still preferred to side with us [Raz and Parvaz]. The code word she used to describe the *tavvabs* was "germs." One day the *tavvabs* told her that we were unclean [*najis*] and anti-revolutionary; therefore, she should not speak with us. She told them that there were only two humans in the room, and that was Raz and Parvaz. (Parvaz, 2002, p. 79)

Parvaz appears to be empowered by witnessing Masturah's resistance. Importantly, she was touched by the fact that Masturah was not motivated by an association with a resistance movement. Instead, the insistence of women from previous generations, often nonpolitical, on maintaining a level of personal independence, preference, and freedom emboldened both young prisoners.

Class issues were important catalysts for women's activism during the 1980–1988 period. This has rarely been acknowledged, especially within the formal narrative of the Islamic Republic with respect to non-elite participation in the war (Ahmadi, 2018). The Islamic Republic's formal narrative emphasizes the religious upbringing of most women who participated in the war. For instance, in a volume published by the Center for Documentation on the Islamic Revolution, it is stated,

We can state that most of the women that were active in the Sacred Defense were raised in middle-class and religious families. They grew up with Islamic teaching, and this contributed to their political and social awareness … from a religious perspective, they were highly committed, and during their participation [in the war], adherence to religious edicts was an important goal to them. (Judaki, 1395/2016, p. 67)

To document the centrality of Islamic norms to the lives of women who participated in the war, the volume offers several examples by referencing the major memoirs published in recent years. For instance, readers are reminded that some martyrs' mothers asked women with improper hijabs to leave their sons' funerals due to their commitment to Islamic attire, and some nurses refused to touch male patients without surgical gloves to make certain they did not touch a man who they are not

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

religiously permitted to be in contact with because of their participation in the war efforts (Judaki, 1395/2016, pp. 68–69).

Similar to women affiliated with the left, however, followers of Khomeini remember their experiences with poverty and shed light on another view on intergenerational connections. While there are no certain figures, it is estimated that during the eight-year conflict there were 171 female Iranian prisoners of war ("Amaar-e Shohada va Esargarehaye Zanan dar Doran-e Defa Moghaddas," 1395). One was Masumeh Abad, a prisoner of war in Iraq for four years. She recounts how she felt when one of her teachers called her father a thief:

> When he used the term "thief," my father's pious face appeared before my eyes. I wanted to scream. I wanted to yell louder than him. I wanted to say that it is true my father is a worker, but he is a great human being. If his body smells like oil, his spirit smells of decency. My heart ached for my father's hands, hands which worked and were worthy of kisses. (Abad, 1395, p. 74)

Like leftist women, Abad recalls her father's economic status and its ramifications on the quality of her life as she frames her politicization at a young age.

At times, then, intergenerational relationships and women's immediate memories intersected to shape their decision to take political action. For Islamist women, political action was not only defined in terms of participation in the war. Marriage to war veterans and men committed to Khomeini was also an important act of solidarity with the state (Akbari, 1390/2011).

Similar to Masumeh Abad, Mrs. Mehri remembers the poverty that her father was raised in when recounting his martyrdom and its impact on her decision to marry an injured war veteran: "My father was born into a poor family and at a young age became an orphan. Left with little choice, he began to work for my mother's father at a young age in our village. When he became a teenager, he started to work at a factory and married my mom" ("Vaghte hameh chez be khoda khatm meshavad," 1391, p. 24).

Coming from a small village in Mazandaran in northern Iran, Mrs. Mehri decided to marry her first husband, who was later martyred, because his commitment to religious practice was similar to her late father's. She was also aware of her immediate context as she recalls how her martyred husband allowed regular visits to her mother's home, which, during this period, was a right readily denied to married women (Abdolah, 2011). Mrs. Mehri's decision to marry her second husband, a paralyzed war veteran, was based on her dedication to her martyred father and husband. She states that her father wished for her to study

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

nursing; she believed she made her father proud by taking care of a disabled war veteran. For some Islamist women, political action was engendered by an intersection between immediate memories, experiences with class, and intergenerational connections.

Following the 1979 revolution, a Kurdish uprising began in Iran's Kurdistan between the Sunni and Shi'i Kurds, with the Shi'i supporting the newly established Islamic Republic (McDowall, 1996; Prunhuber, 2010). Kurdish militant groups continued their warfare during the Iran–Iraq war, although the conflict in Kurdistan had subsided by late 1981. For many Islamist men and women who would become involved in the Iran–Iraq war in 1981, this initial conflict was a kind of practice at warfare in an Islamic Republic.

Maryam Kazemzadeh (Raissi, 1383/2003) argues that the conversations she had with Khomeini during a visit in Paris, where she had gone to take photos of him, encouraged her to think about continuing her career as a wartime journalist in Marivan, Kurdistan, during the Kurdish uprising in 1979. Kazemzadeh remembers her desire to be a journalist even as a child but briefly states that her familial and broader societal context did not support her career choice. Only toward the end of the Iran–Iraq war did journalism become a popular career choice for Iranian women; Kazemzadeh's presence on the warfront makes her a trailblazer (Farhadpour, 2012). When she asked Khomeini about the religious permissibility of women becoming journalists, he stated: "If the regulations of hijab are abided by, there is no problem" (Raissi, 1383/2003, p. 28). The mandatory enforcement of hijab had some positive effects: Women began to enter previously male-dominated fields of work, such as photography and journalism (Farhadpour, 2012). Nevertheless, Kazemzadeh recalls that a military commander told her the following when she arrived in Marivan, Kurdistan: "The truth is that we don't believe that a Muslim woman would have the audacity to travel to this region, unless she was an anti-revolutionary who had infiltrated a news outlet" (Raissi, 1383/2003, p. 28). Kazemzadeh states the following in response:

> I waited for the commander to finish what he was saying. Once he stopped talking, I asked for permission to go to my room. I presented them with the written statement Imam Khomeini had given to me in Paris. I received this letter from Imam when I travelled to Paris from the UK. Given that I had a deep interest in photography and journalism, I wanted to know Imam Khomeini's views on female journalists; as a source of emulation (*marja-i taqlid*) and a religious leader his views were important to me … When the commander saw Imam's handwriting, he was completely convinced and apologized for his behavior. (Raissi, 1383/2003, pp. 28–29)

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

For some female supporters of Khomeini, his support for women's participation in national affairs, as well as the solidarity of other male elites, enabled them to become political activists. Kazemzadeh also describes how the support of Mostafa Chamran, a revolutionary commander in Marivan and also a US-trained scientist who was later killed in the Iran–Iraq war, influenced her sense of self:

Dr. Chamran asked about my love and interest for photography and journalism. Although the reason for this conversation was something else, we talked past our evening prayers and dinner. Dr. Chamran had a warm and calm voice. I listened to his words with my heart and soul. That night we talked about everything. He discussed the life and resistance of Dr. Ali Shariati, his death in London, and I was eagerly all ears. I had developed my religious, political, and cultural awareness through the writing of Dr. Shariati, and I had a special interest in him.

She further expands on how Chamran showed an interest in not only her intellectual development but also gender identity:

After dinner, Dr. Chamran picked up my camera and spoke about art with me. I heard that he painted. He told me about a candle he had drawn, as well as a horse. He then discussed his daughter who was about my age. He said that seeing me became a reason for him to remember his daughter, who had been living with her mother in the United States for years. The warm voice of Dr. Chamran and his spiritual awareness made me feel more secure. That night I saw him as a psychologist. A person that knew and understood me better than myself. (Raissi, 1383/2003, pp. 31–32)

Kazemzadeh's immediate interactions with men such as Khomeini and Chamran emboldened her to become the only female reporter in Iran's Kurdistan during the Kurdish uprising following the 1979 revolution. From 1980 to 1981, she reported and also worked as a medical assistant throughout the Iran–Iraq war. She traveled to the warfronts of Kermanshah with her husband, Asghar Vasaali, who was a political prisoner before the revolution and sentenced to life. (He later fought in Kurdistan and the Iran–Iraq war, becoming a martyr in 1980.) She found the solidarity that her family and community of origin refused to give her, and which she remains silent about throughout the memoir, in elite Islamist men. Where this solidarity did not exist in men – for instance, when she wanted to join her husband in the Iran–Iraq war and he initially rejected her request – she was confident enough to demand the right to participate in the war. Kazemzadeh informed her husband that if he did not allow her to go with him to Kermanshah, she would seek a divorce. Her narrative of her political development does not include an appreciative glance at women's rights struggles in the past. Instead, it reaches into up-close experiences and intergenerational exchanges with male political

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

elites to enliven her political activism. While most Iranian male soldiers and commanders in Kurdistan disapproved and reacted negatively to Kazemzadeh's presence at the warfront, she defended her right to stay and work because of the confidence she developed through interactions with Khomeini and Chamran.

2.2 Iran's Hezbollah and Remembrance of Marzieh Hadidchi Dabbaq: From Superwomen to Equal Women

Similar to the previous discussion on women's activism during the 1980–1988 period, for the younger generation of activists affiliated with Hezbollah, individual memories, experiences, and goals are prioritized over historical narratives on women's rights. Iran's Hezbollah has political roots that predate the 1979 revolution. However, in the post-1979 period this faction functioned as the coercive arm of the state by enforcing various Islamization projects onto society, including mandatory hijab (Sedghi, 2007).

This social group is significant for its close ties to the state, hence my focus on its activism. Many of the women associated with the Hezbollah faction, should they wish to stay involved in politics, will take up sensitive positions in the state's security, media, and diplomatic institutions. The newer generation of Hezbollah cultural affiliates do not remember the 1979 revolution or Iran–Iraq war. Similar to other Iranian youth, they negotiate the state's religious authority over their lives (Khosravi, 2008). As pious citizens, they are prone to collaborate with the Islamic state and oftentimes come from low-income families where reliance on the state for support is crucial to their livelihood (Khosravi, 2008). The age range for female cultural activists is anywhere from early twenties to early forties; as such, female Hezbollah activists understand the problems and issues women from different generations are facing. By participating in community outreach and grassroots activism as leaders in local mosques, the university, and state institutions such as the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, female Hezbollahi cultural activists also gain insight into the problems of noncitizens.

Following the 2009 presidential conflict, most independent women's NGOs were shut down by the state, and activism became more challenging for everyone but for women in particular (Mouri and Batmanghelichi, 2015). Moreover, feminism and women's rights activism were formally classified as threats to national security by the Revolutionary Guards (Sadeghi, 2009). The Islamic Republic invested heavily in pro-regime cultural institutes where pious youth were employed to reproduce the state through cultural and artistic work that

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

animated the ideals of the 1979 revolution (Saeidi, 2017). As such, the two themes that existed in women's activism during the 1980–1988 period – personal histories and an intergenerational learning process – exist here as well.

This section illustrates the significant influence that pro-regime Hezbollahi women's individual memories and immediate surroundings have on how they approach the predicament of women in Iranian society today. I do this through an analysis of published and rejected essays submitted for a special issue on the life of Marzieh Dabbaq edited by a Hezbollah cultural institute where I carried out extensive fieldwork from 2012 to 2014.

Marzieh Hadidchi Dabbaq was an Islamist revolutionary close to Khomeini who later served the state in various formal capacities, including as a member of parliament. In November 2016, shortly after her death, one of the Hezbollah cultural institutes that facilitated my research prepared a special issue on her life. Dabbaq is a female role model for the Hezbollah front in Iran due to her anti-Shah activism prior to the revolution, as well as her unwavering support of Khomeini after the 1979 revolution. She represents the ideal woman for the conservative right in Iran – and the Hezbollah faction. For instance, she was trained as a fighter in Lebanon prior to the revolution and served conservative interests in parliament, but she was also the mother of eight and a wife. During the last few years of her life, she informed the Supreme Leader that she would like to go to Syria (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 35), and he responded to her request by arguing that she was more needed in Iran. Her death was an opportunity for the Hezbollah front to explore how its female supporters assessed the state's current gender policies.

The augmentation of revolutionary female figures during the 1980–1988 period, such as the late Dabbaq, is central to the anti-feminist movement that the state supported after the 2009 presidential election conflict. The regime's ideal revolutionary woman, who supports men politically but also takes care of the home, was first promoted in Iranian society during the early 1980s to make distinctions between Iranian women (Farhi, 1994). The younger generation is expected to reproduce this image through their cultural activism.

Female Hezbollahi cultural activists' remembrance of religious role models such as Hazrat-e Fatemeh (daughter of Prophet Mohammad) and Hazrat-e Zeinab (his granddaughter), as well as their support of Dabbaq as a practical role model, is both grounded in the present condition of women in Iran and rooted in their own "autobiographical memory" (Isurin, 2017, p. 10). Since the Ahmadinejad presidency (2005–2013), there has been a significant production of cultural material

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on Iran and the region that focuses on the lives of female martyrs and women related to male martyrs (Basij Jamaah Zanan-e Keshvar, 1391). The public display of these national and international narratives solidifies the importance of women to Iran's 1979 revolution, the Iran–Iraq war, and regional transformations.

As I show below, in the process of consuming and promoting such cultural material, Hezbollahi women also reexamine their own lives in relation to this national and regional context. Additionally, working together in Hezbollah cultural institutes literally gives women *space* to connect with one another's gendered struggles. There is, then, an important contextual element to Hezbollahi women's assessment of an idealized past: The interpersonal knowledge that Hezbollahi women gain during interactions in cultural institutes shapes their assessment and relationship to an idealized past, even as activists have begun to critique the notion of the ideal revolutionary while working toward exemplifying her in Iranian society and in the broader international system.

In the first segments of the special issue, women and men who knew Dabbaq describe her different roles and responsibilities thus: She did her own cooking and did not waste even a grain of rice (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 39); she watered her plants on a strict schedule (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 32); she played for hours with the children of martyrs (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 33); she did not own a piece of gold (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 32); she worked for one pound a week as a maid in the United Kingdom when she left Iran prior to the revolution due to her anti-Shah activism (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 6); when she had some loans to repay from her tenure as a parliamentary representative, she became a taxi driver to make ends meet (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 8).

Dabbaq was also the first female commander of the Revolutionary Guards and is one of the theoreticians behind the special unit of the Revolutionary Guards that became known as the Quds Force (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 24). She is remembered as a woman who made hard decisions but also stood by the consequences those decisions had for her life.

The special issue appears to take its lead from the papers submitted and indicates little forethought given to a formal message on Dabbaq's life. For instance, several people who knew Dabbaq personally argued that her husband was supportive, and as such an equality is depicted within Dabbaq's marriage. However, the special issue also includes a short interview with her husband, and his silences tell a slightly different story. He focuses on the challenges of a life with Dabbaq: "what a difficult life I had with Miss Dabbaq. Unlike the norms that ruled the Pahlavi era, we saw each other for the first time on our wedding night. I had never seen her before. At 29 years old, they wed me to a

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

14-year-old. When we moved to Tehran, I found her some teachers" (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 20). In the remainder of the interview, he discusses his own prerevolutionary activism and the financial challenges he faced with eight children. He does not mention her again.

It appears that, either intentionally or unintentionally, the special issue initiated a debate on women's independence. For the younger generation of female Hezbollah affiliates, the narratives of Dabbaq's life also appear to tell a less visible story: She had much control over her decisions. This level of decision-making, at times, escapes the limits that the Islamic Republic's citizenry framework poses for women (Afary, 2001). Afary (2001) has discussed how Dabbaq left her children and husband to support Khomeini abroad and that she was involved in anti-Shah activism that placed her family in danger.

A former revolutionary activist, Agha-Mohammadi, states the following which supports Afary's (2001) claim: "when Miss Dabbaq left Iran for Syria, Lebanon and other places, Haj Hassan [her husband] had no contact with her and did not know where she was. It was not until Imam Musa Sadr stepped in and revealed where she was living that he was able to see her again" (*Banuye Enghelab*, p. 9). Her independence holds the different narratives of her life together. This did not go unnoticed by the younger generation of female Hezbollah affiliates, who, prior to 2012, were not given space in Hezbollah cultural institutes to work side by side with each other or their male counterparts (Az en Nasl Motefaker berun Nmi aayad, 1387/2008). Perhaps motivated by this marginalized narrative on Dabbaq's life that sets her above other Iranian women, the authors in the special issue call for equality between all women in post-1979 Iran.

The theme of gender equality is dominant in the published essays. One piece argues against the tendency within Hezbollah to place college-educated women and women involved in national affairs above the housewife, mother, and even women who do not identify with pro-regime activism. The hierarchy that this categorization produces denies women their right to decide who they want to be. The author, Sajdeh I., states:

> The ideal woman embodies education, marriage, motherhood, and social activism in excellence. In turn, this is what is expected of other women. Women are forced to annihilate themselves and take on a strange form to fit into this model. We wanted this ideal, even if it meant destroying her inner identity, character and capacities. Creating one model for everyone meant that we overlooked an important reality: women's abilities, capacities, and the conditions of their lives vary. Therefore, there is a problem with this

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

description. The woman that cannot become a mother feels empty. The girl that is unmarried is discouraged. The mother that did not continue her education sees herself as incomplete and useless. Very few women can actually fit into this model. We were critical of feminism because of its universal description of women. Yet unintentionally, we are taking steps in the same path. The perspective that can move us closer to our vision is one void of a stable and homogenous model of a revolutionary woman. We have to accept that the presence of all of these qualities in one woman is unlikely. Where it is possible, the presence of this woman will also entail some challenging conditions. We need a vision where Hazrat Zahra and Hazrat Zeinab are understood as ideal and complete women. We have to try to emulate them. We have to accept that the ideal woman is not human. She does not exist. The revolutionary woman is not a character. It is a spectrum. An excellent example of someone at one end of this spectrum is Miss Dabbaq. At the other end of this continuum, there are hundreds of women that fall within this range despite all the specific conditions of their lives. Being present on this scale, without any hierarchy or ranking, is praiseworthy. (1395/2016, p. 42)

Toward the end of the essay, she states the following when discussing women who do volunteer and perform community work in the post-revolutionary period:

It is possible that their hijab is not proper. But this does not lessen the value of what they are doing. With all of their limitations and merits, they are still an illustration of a revolutionary woman. Even if they cannot decipher their own identity, and do not define their activism as a form of service connected to the government, they are still revolutionary women. (p. 43)

For Sajdeh, the interplay between religion and gendered subjectivities is limited to the postrevolutionary period; little attention is given to gender and subjectivities in the prerevolutionary years. According to Sajdeh's understanding of the 1979 revolution, the revolution created myriad options for women, and all paths should be equally respected and available to her. She references the revered Shi'i female figures, Hazrat-e Zahra and Hazrat-e Zeinab, to undermine the state's hierarchy of worthy women by stating that Iranian society should see these female figures as ideals and that equality should exist between all Iranian women because ideals are not reality. This is a radical move that contrasts with how the Islamic Republic used female Shi'i figures during the 1980–1988 period to "displace, supersede, and even render impertinent Western anxieties about gender equality" (Osanloo, 2014, p. 250).

Closely related to the Islamic Republic's use of these sacred female figures for evaluating women's supposed purity, and subsequently creating a citizenry hierarchy between women, Sajdeh questions the connection between the chador and an enforcement of inequality between

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

women (Farhi, 1994, p. 264). This stems from a contextualized historical factor: Beginning in 2005, the Ahmadinejad government pursued a campaign for a "culture of modesty," and Iranian women's style of dress became a point of national conflict again as morality police arrested poorly veiled women (Sadeghi, 2009, p. 51). Additionally, Sajdeh's critical perspective is also related to the timing of the special issue. Following the 2009 presidential election conflict, the Hezbollah faction attempted to disassociate itself from the Ahmadinejad government and its policies due to his conflict with the office of the Supreme Leader and Ali Khamenei himself (Sohrabi, 2011). In the aftermath of the 2009 conflict and the various forms of opposition it engendered, space was created for critiquing the Ahmadinejad administration's gender policies, which were a conservative interpretation of the Islamic Republic's foundational approach toward the gender question (Osanloo, 2014).

Ultimately, Sajdeh suggests that even women who identify closely with the regime cannot become Dabbaq for various reasons. Instead, she finds that the ideals of the sacred figures of Hazrat-e Fatemeh and Hazrat-e Zeinab are more practical role models because they lack an embodied presence that can then be commodified. Sajdeh thus believes that female religious icons are more accessible for the majority of the population because they are difficult to pin down and package. She calls upon these sacred female figures to enliven imagination for Shi'i women and enable them to articulate their visions and make their lives visible before a reluctant Hezbollahi audience and a broader patriarchal society. For Sajdeh, the 1979 revolution is memorialized as a watershed moment that made a variety of subjectivities possible to Iranian women. From this standpoint she reimagines the relevance of Dabbaq, Hazrat-e Fatemeh Zahra, and Hazrat-e Zeinab.

The insistence that the state expand its notion of revolutionary woman to include all women in Iranian society, and on equal terms, can also be noted in another piece that was included in the special issue. This concern is significant because since the establishment of an Islamic Republic in Iran after the 1979 revolution, Islamization has not been only about individual morality but also been a matter of constructing an identity, an appearance, that stands in opposition to all things perceived as "Western" (Martin, 2007). Given the close relationship that exists between revolutionary identity, body, and being Islamic, I argue that expanding the limits on who qualifies as revolutionary can be seen as an affront to the state's narrow Islamization project, which these women are supposed to be leading (Sanadjian, 1996). Zahra D., a PhD student in philosophy, states the following:

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

It seems to me that in contemporary Iran, the image we have of an ideal woman is that of a hero who can do all things. She has higher education. She married young and has at least three successful and happy children. At the same time, she is busy in her professional career, and in this domain too, she is highly regarded. The Iranian superwoman is in hijab and very devout. She does not speak to men who are strangers (*namahram*) unless it is absolutely necessary. At the same time, she may have many male colleagues. She does her own cooking, and her home shines of cleanliness. Her kids have a great peace of mind, which is the result of her extraordinary mothering. Her husband reveres her in all ways. What does this woman look like in reality? Many educated women are getting married later, having fewer children, or delaying their entry into the workforce. In all cases, women have prioritized some of their ideals above others. But the Islamic Republic's superwoman is perfect in all domains of her life, at once … What conclusions can we draw from the distance that exists between the reality and this ideal? (1395/2016, p. 44)

Khosravi (2017) has illustrated that, in contemporary Iran, a woman who is wealthy, employed, educated, mobile, and also domestic is depicted as a first-class citizen in the national media. This is indeed an image that most Iranian women will never be able to embody; it's also a remaking of the 1980s ideal of the revolutionary woman, which Zahra seems to also have in mind as she references the media's role in promoting an unrealistic depiction of women.

Similar to Sajdeh, Zahra also calls for an equality between all women in Iran and an appreciation for the different contributions that each woman makes to society:

The state's cultural narrative should illustrate to its children that it respects various forms of the ideal woman and that they are all equally valuable. Additionally, until it is able to demonstrate the different models of the ideal woman, it should help its superwomen realize their potentials. It is ultimately women's own responsibility to materialize their dreams. In a society where women have such a complicated situation, however, any support will have significant impact. (p. 47)

This heightened and public form of reflection on the predicament of women in Iranian society can be noted in analysis developed through other methods. Based on my experience living and working with female Hezbollah affiliates over several years, Zahra's essay could easily be based on the broken hearts and spirits that she encountered in her social group and her individual goal to rectify this situation. One evening in the winter of 2013, I was invited to edit a film I had coproduced with a female Hezbollah affiliate, Sara Z. The film addressed how war martyrs' mothers think about culture and cinema. After a few full days of filming, we were excited to do our own editing. We had also developed a friendship during

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

those long days of filming and interviewing and began to enjoy one another's company. We were the only women in the building that night at the cultural institute, but the institute's supervisor was there. We both felt comfortable. Sara was a young, ambitious, and gifted undergraduate student in Tehran who was married to a fellow activist. She was also one of the leaders of the anti-feminist movement that gained momentum during the Ahmadinejad presidency. Despite her young age and lack of experience and expertise, Sara was readily invited into research institutes connected to various state organizations working on issues that relate to women's rights.

As we edited, I noted that she was stressed and anxious but preferred not to tell me what was going on. She was panicking, kept looking at the door, and had trouble focusing. I noticed that her husband was standing by the editing room and appeared agitated as he looked at us and erratically walked back and forth. Finally, around 8 p.m. with tears in her eyes, but still standing tall, she informed me that she had to leave but that she would be back tomorrow to review my editing and make any final contributions. Four years later, Sara was a women's rights activist, divorced, and a PhD candidate living alone in Tehran. Her political views had changed. She later informed me that one of the reasons for the divorce was that her husband had demanded she completely stop her education and social activism.

The authors who contributed to this special issue on Dabbaq's life write with a fluidity and insight that seems to come from experience and their individual goals and struggles. There is little analysis or comparison with women's rights struggles in even postrevolutionary Iran, much less prior to the revolution. Yet they are aware that the image of women like Dabbaq is no longer popular and that the state has moved on to promoting another image: a superwoman that also has a market in the West. This is perhaps why they spend an extended amount of time addressing the freedom they are in search of and then connect this desire to their personalized conception of Dabbaq and women like her.

Their novel interpretation of the lives of Dabbaq, Hazrat-e Zeinab, and Hazrat-e Fatemeh Zahra centering on independent women (which enhances equality between women because of their openness to scales and difference) is theoretically powerful. A consistent thread in Dabbaq's life is independence in decision-making, assessments, and activism – almost like a goddess that invoked endless ways to demonstrate the importance of the perspective she held and the power of her touch. The two authors view the lives of Dabbaq, Hazrat-e Zeinab, and Hazrat-e Fatemeh Zahra with a lens that steers away from the 1980s

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

focus on purity toward one illustrating how women can be different but equal (Farhi, 1994, p. 264).

This reinterpretation of ideal womanhood from the 1980s creates much-needed room for women to maneuver. Importantly, both writers appear to be frustrated with the state's complete dismissal of feminism; this inability of the state to gain pro-regime women's full support when it comes to gender policies has been noted elsewhere as well (Sadeghi, 2009). They mention the social benefits that a feminist movement has garnered for Western societies, as well as how feminist and Islamic ideals can become unintentionally entangled. In the most immediate sense, then, their writing reveals that they can no longer remain quiet about the experiences of women in their families, networks, and society, and perhaps even themselves. Their reading of the Islamic Republic's original ideals is directly connected to their insight regarding the lack of independence that determines many women's lives in Iran, as well as to the problems associated with the regime's solution to its long-standing gender question: promotion of the superwoman persona.

2.3 Rejected Essays and New Possibilities for Equality between Men and Women

Perhaps surprisingly, the editors rejected analyses that were disconnected from the day-to-day reality of women's lives in Iran and that refused to acknowledge the gendered tensions within Hezbollah cultural institutions. These essays "failed interestingly" (Ellis, 2015, p. 7). As rejected documents, they highlight that engaging with Iranian women's gender struggles as equality between *men and women* has become significant for at least some Hezbollah cultural activists. The unpublished essays signify a turn in the gender politics of Iran's Hezbollah faction and a refusal to romanticize approaches employed during the 1980–1988 period. Together, the rejected essays suggest that gender equality – understood as equality between men and women – *can* be pursued among the pro-regime faction today and that at least some of the key officials in the Hezbollah movement are invested in changing the everyday lives and struggles that inequality engenders for Iranian women.

The first two essays I discuss depend heavily on a conception of women's rights styled as traditional, which fully denies the importance of legal equality or even a woman's right to the public sphere. This thinking on women's rights exists within cultural institutes and also among pro-regime families dedicated to conservative readings of the Quran (Tawasil, 2015). As such, the refusal to recognize the necessity

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of women's rights is tangible in the lives of pro-regime women, and yet these essays were surprisingly rejected for the special issue on Dabbaq's life organized by a Hezbollah cultural institute.

The third essay I discuss, however, is grounded in the author's interactions and experiences with women from other countries. The author identifies conversations and friendships with women from abroad to have been instrumental in piquing her interest in women's issues, and not her life or observations in Iranian society. She offers a unique experience connected to her background as a female leader in the movement. Hezbollah cultural institutes tend to send their most valuable and dedicated activists abroad to represent the regime in the international arena, but this is a privilege that few women in the movement are granted. This essay was also rejected perhaps because it transcends the inner workings of everyday life for women in Iran today. The author outlines how she came to value equality between women and in relation to men through interactions with the "Other."

One essay that did not make it into the special issue addressed motherhood as the most important characteristic of a revolutionary woman. Yet the author, Mahnaz R., refers to women's activism in modern Iran to build her argument about the revolutionary woman:

> Our discussions of a revolutionary woman should not be limited to the Islamic Republic. In the period before the revolution, we witnessed the actions of revolutionary women. An example would be Anis al-Doleh, the favorite wife of Nasir al-Din Shah who broke the Shah's hookah during the tobacco protest led by Mirza Shirazi. In reality, a revolutionary woman supports Islamic governance, stays in touch with the political causes of her time, follows the news, and analyzes with insight. When she feels her presence is necessary, she will be on the scene. She takes on any challenges for Islam and Muslims. A revolutionary woman feels a sense of responsibility to those around her. In fact, she feels responsible for the situations that arise before her. In her mind, individualism has no meaning, and she only sees herself as part of a collective. (1395/2016, pp. 1–2)

Mahnaz remembers women's activism during the Qajar period but with the intent to expand conceptualizations of revolutionary women without acknowledging the importance of a woman's right to independence, movement, and public space. Later she not only stresses that motherhood is *the* characteristic of a revolutionary woman but also positions women's presence in the public sphere in conflict with their role as mothers:

> Motherhood and married life are a priority for a revolutionary woman because these two roles are hers exclusively. This means that for these two roles there is no one else that can replace her. In other words, a woman that is a mother and wife, and has a career, will not be missed if she is away from society. This is because

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

someone else can be found to replace her at work. However, if she does not spend time with her family, they will feel her absence. (1395/2016, p. 6)

Mahnaz's insistence on enforcing a correct formulation of life and society for women is probably one reason the piece was rejected. The published essays highlight a woman's right to determine how to balance the different domains of her life; this seems to be a notable legacy of Dabbaq's activism for both male and female Hezbollah activists. Her essay, then, simply does not fit into the collection. Additionally, she does not view the 1979 revolution as an opportunity for women to escape patriarchy or their roles as mothers. More than anyone in the special issue, Mahnaz referenced Iran's current Supreme Leader as well as Khomeini to support her argument that the revolutionary woman should stay at home for an undetermined period of time. The Hezbollah faction is understood to be closest to the Supreme Leader (Thaler et al., 2010). Yet in this instance, for the editors at least, their devotion to him did not include a dichotomy between the public and private sphere or predetermined formulations on a woman's place.

Another rejected essay also pursued a critical stance on the issue of women's independence and rights. Sahar M. explored how Persian literature in modern Iran has deciphered the revolutionary woman. After a vague and brief discussion of a few works that she finds to be feminist and therefore not organic (such as Zoya Pirzad's *I Will Turn Off the Lights*), she states the following, which relates to how Mahnaz understood women's rights demands in contemporary Iran:

Womanhood is the basis for sacrifice. Womanhood is not about asking for your share or demanding rights that you have lost. In my view, women's resistance is centered on elevating humanity. Through the upbringing of their children, women lead a struggle against oppression and human conflict. Such women are above all conceptions of gender. In my opinion, one of the reasons that our own national feminists are not interested in the revolutionary women that came to be during the Islamic Revolution, such as Dabbaq, is that the character of women like Dabbaq surpasses the stereotypical images that feminists have of the ideal woman. (1395/2016, p. 4)

Sahar also takes a critical stance with regard to women's rights struggles in contemporary Iran. Similar to Mahnaz, she elevates the conversation beyond Iran by drawing connections between all of humanity. This perspective seems to be forged through her reading of influential Persian literature and as such can be seen as a form of individual memory. While a dismissal of gender equality can be witnessed in Iranian society, state elites consider it an unreasonable policy path to take.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

During my fieldwork, I was surprised to find that even among the conservative women's rights activists, research centers, and state institutions such as the Supreme Council for Cultural Revolution, there was no uncertainty about it: At least some legal-rights structures must change within the country to establish gender equality. The reality that critical views that dismiss women's struggles for legal equality are pushed out of the political front closest to the regime's decision-makers is notable. Not only does it illustrate that the Islamic Republic imposed constraints on some anti-feminist women's agency, but a focus on revising the legal structure to the benefit of women also shows that the regime has been unable (or perhaps unwilling) to overlook the decades of activism since the 1979 revolution.

The final rejected essay departs significantly from the pieces discussed above. Marzieh P. places the woman of the Islamic revolution, and not the revolutionary woman, in relation to the global woman and man. Her individual memories that forge this conception center on trips abroad, in particular a 2007 conference on the environment that took place in Bolivia on climate change. She focuses on her own experiences at the expense of discussing men, another distinctive characteristic of her writing.

Studies have indicated that after 1979 Iranian women have contested the public/private divide through the support of Khomeini (Keddie, 2000) and his emphasis on women's political presence in the public sphere. Women have also relied upon their own innovativeness in undermining spatial constraints by moving into new fields of work after being barred from some professions shortly after the 1979 revolution (Esfandiari, 1997). I argue that for the newer generation of Hezbollahi women, entering the international arena as politicians, scholars, and activists is a high-ranking priority that builds on the legacy of women's spatial politics in post-1979 Iran. For many Hezbollahi women, this desire to move toward the international arena is also an outcome of the long-held Iranian perception that Western media misrepresents Islam, Iran, and the Shi'i in particular (Martin, 2007; Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1995).

Marzieh begins her essay by introducing readers to how she became interested in women's rights and her own particular take on the woman's question using a discussion of her trip to Bolivia:

> This was not the first or last time that I interacted with women from abroad. I have travelled to three neighboring countries for religious pilgrimages. I have been to Germany and the United Arab Emirates. I have also interacted with Americans, Europeans, and Asians that were travelling in Iran. I have spoken with women from different cultures and histories. I connected with these women and entered their lives for a short moment without the interference of the media or academic discourses. This context allowed us to develop a level of

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

intersubjectivity and to pay attention to one another's situations, statuses, and horizons. (1395/2016, p. 2)

She goes on to connect her interactions with diverse women from abroad to questions pertaining to women's rights in Iran:

The woman of the Islamic revolution is a woman that was created through the Islamic revolution. She understands herself as someone that resists superficial views that deny her humanity. She also stands against perspectives that place a woman in opposition to a man, the family, and ultimately her own womanhood. … The woman of the Islamic revolution may be the wife or mother of a martyr, and/or a socially active woman, or perhaps she identifies with none of these roles. She is a woman, however, in search of the truth and God, and in this path she will deal with whatever may come her way. The woman of the Islamic revolution can be in the most masculine context, but she will fill it with love and sincerity. Her presence decreases violence and encourages global peace. (1395/2016, pp. 4–7)

Significantly, she locates the incitement of her interest in women's rights in interactions with those abroad. This illustrates the importance of individual memories to women's rights struggles in contemporary Iran. Her essay departs from a nationalistic stance and draws out questions and theories within an international framework concerned with the human condition. Iran's self-perception has historically been intertwined with a sense of grandiosity coupled with victimhood. Marzieh is possibly influenced by this line of thought, given her close proximity to political elites during this trip (Thaler et al., 2010). She might be using these international encounters as a tactic to bypass the state's concerns with a discussion on women's rights. As such, she can build her argument without pushing against the red lines.

It appears, however, that the larger issue is that the essay centers on her agency, and perhaps this made editors within the Hezbollah cultural institute uncomfortable. Large portions address her personal experiences, which are, linguistically, given a priority while other forms of knowledge are only brought in to support her own experiences. Importantly, men as active figures are missing from her story entirely.

Marzieh's attention to her own voice excludes men's agency. For this Hezbollah cultural institute, a recognition of male and female interactions on an equal terrain seems to have been an important objective for the special issue on Dabbaq.

Additionally, she is not discussing the "revolutionary woman" but has explicitly decided to address the women of the Islamic revolution, which includes all Iranian women. Toward the end of the essay, she radically redefines the postrevolutionary woman as a woman who makes mistakes, has regrets, and perhaps has endured pain. The suggestion that the ideal

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press

woman may have "political depression" (Cvetkovich, 2012) departs from the state's optimistic description of the postrevolutionary woman.

2.4 Conclusion

Women's political involvement in the postrevolutionary period has been dependent on their immediate memories and the contextualized histories they are dealing with at the time of their participation. This chapter explored how women affiliated with political movements during the 1980–1988 period, and those active in political movements today, reflect on and assess an idealized past.

The first section of this chapter illustrated that both leftist and Islamist women were impacted by the forms of gender discrimination they experienced as young girls and that their political participation was also impacted by intergenerational relationships where they were both empowered and transformed by the older women, and at times elite men, with whom they interacted. The second half of the chapter focused on the women affiliated with the post-2009 Hezbollah movement in Iran. The section argued that the state's swift integration of women into Hezbollah cultural institutes was grounded in their pursuit of an anti-feminist movement. Although women volunteered for this opportunity, their exchanges with other women within these spaces, as well as access to the public sphere as community leaders, transformed their visions. The resources and space that cultural institutes provided brought like-minded, pious women together and enabled them to gain insights into one another's social lives.

While Hezbollahi women could previously turn the other way when Iranian women complained about the state's gender policies, they were more willing to listen to women they viewed as equally pious to themselves. Through a close reading of essays prepared for the commemoration of Marzieh Dabbaq's death, the second section demonstrated that a special issue that was to valorize the ideal revolutionary woman from the 1980s instead challenged the entire notion of a "superwoman" and advocated equality between all Iranian women – and at times even women and men. This chapter serves as a background to the importance of accounting for historical contingencies when discussing women's citizenry struggles in post-1979 Iran, and the chapters that follow delve deeper into the different forms that acts of citizenship have taken in contemporary Iran.

https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009026574.002 Published online by Cambridge University Press