SAVING MUSLIM WOMEN IN THE ERA OF AXIS OF EVIL?: PIOUS WOMEN’S MOVEMENT ADVOCATES IN IRAN, 2001-2010

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Date of Submission: December 20, 2013.
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Abstract

This thesis aims to investigate US foreign policies in the post-9/11 world, focusing on the ways in which they affected the Iranian women’s movement after Iran was included in the Axis of Evil in January 2002. The focus of the thesis draws on the Bush Administration’s decision to use Muslim women’s human rights as moral justifications for the War on Terror. The thesis argues that, despite the US commitment to Iranian women’s human rights, Iranian women’s movement advocates have found themselves in an even more challenging environment. Both the physical and discursive spaces for women’s activism has been narrowed due to the increasing violence, deteriorating living conditions resulting from the US/Western sanctions and hardline nationalist-militaristic politics. Drawing mainly on postcolonial feminism, the thesis evaluates how artificially enacted gendered, racial and sexualised exclusions and borders contributed to this. The thesis contends that after 9/11, the Bush Administration’s identity became hypermasculinised and this effectively led to the transnationalisation of violence that often materialises itself on the bodies of Feminine Others, which in this case was the Iranian Feminine Other. What further informed the Bush Administration’s identity formation and policies was the anxious logic of orientalism. The thesis examines how this orientalist anxiety built and sustained much of the US post-9/11 (in)security imaginary. The thesis makes the argument that orientalist anxiety produced two orientalised bodies, that of the Dark Monster and the already mentioned Feminine Other. This specific framework allows us to complicate the US conceptualisation of the Self as disconnected and unrelated to the Other and how the Self justifies the Other’s disciplining and policing via this disconnectedness. The thesis calls for a political vision that engages with difference, alternatives and real life experiences and eventually recognises everyone’s right to security.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

On January 29 2002, only a little over four months after 9/11, President George W. Bush changed the nature of the War on Terror in his State of the Union Address. While the hunt for Osama bin Laden was still on, the war’s focus shifted to the Axis of Evil, which linked Iran, Iraq and North Korea to the War on Terror. The State of the Union Address in January 2002, restated the need of Americans to get justice and secure their borders again. But in essence, the War on Terror became about preventing another 9/11 from happening.

The extension of the War on Terror was justified with similar arguments that had been heard earlier in the autumn of 2001 when the Administration defended the invasion of Afghanistan. On the night of the Address, President Bush declared:

America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice and religious tolerance. America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror (Bush, G.W. 2002a).

On June 20 2009, a mobile phone video uploaded from the streets of Tehran showed us a young woman’s last moments after a governmental sniper had shot her. She had been one of the hundreds of thousands of women demonstrating against the election results that were allegedly forged by the Iranian regime. The ones, Muslim women, who the US had pledged to protect in the aftermath of 9/11, were increasingly being targeted not only in Iran but also in other countries singled out in the US War on Terror. From 2001 onwards, the moral superiority of the US in defending women’s rights across the world has been employed to justify interventionist foreign policies, which resulted in the destruction of everyday life, insecurity and a loss of hope for a better future. Afghan women have paid a high price for the American mission to protect its national security (see e.g. Farhoumand-Sims 2007; Rostami-Povey 2007b) as well as have Iraqi women (see e.g. Al-Ali 2005; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Pratt 2005). Much has been written on Iranian women and their human rights situation but this literature has mainly addressed how the state affects the contours of women’s lives.
and women’s activism in the sphere of gender relations in Iran. This thesis explores
the impact of the international on Iranian women in the post-9/11 world.

The thesis hopes to shed light on how despite the US emphasis on women’s rights in
Iran, the environment in which Iranian women activist work has become even more
challenging and even ordinary women’s living conditions have deteriorated. The
thesis argues that there is a growing need to recognise that the lives of Iranian women
are not solely shaped by cultural factors. This is extremely important in the post-9/11
period when cultural explanations have overridden political, economic and social
factors in explaining Muslim women’s human rights situations across the world.
Thus, instead of cultural explanations, this thesis scrutinises how the aggressive US
rhetoric of regime change and the economic sanctions have affected women’s
circumstances and status in Iran. Moreover, the past ten years in Iran have been
coloured with political infighting between the reformists and hardliners. This adds yet
another layer to the picture of women’s rights in Iran. However, the internal power
relations are interconnected with the events taking place at the global level. And
women have, as they have for centuries, assumed a central role in the marking of
boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Women are not only used to consolidate
boundaries but women also bore the burden that results from this type of boundary
drawing. Thus, while both sides – the US and the Iranian regime – pledge to protect
Iranian women, they both have failed miserably. This is not to argue that Iranian
women are passive victims, they have continued their work despite worsening
economic situation and increasing state violence. They have showed extreme
determination and adapted to the changing environments. This means that the
characteristics of Iranian women’s movement advocates have also changed: they do
not only call for revisions in the Iranian legal system but the advocates have
increasingly made demands for more humane international politics and they have
profiled themselves as anti-war and anti-sanction activists.

At the empirical level, the aim is to demonstrate that women’s rights are always in a
flux and are influenced by a variety of factors of which this thesis highlights the
international. At the theoretical level, the thesis has two aims. Drawing on post-
colonial feminist theory, the aim is to find a middle space for the transformation of
the fixed binaries (e.g. ‘us’ versus ‘terrorists’) and demonstrate the intimacy of the
Self and the Other in world politics. This would hopefully point the way toward more ethical foreign policy making and in a growing sense of interconnectedness of worldwide inequalities. The second theoretical aim, drawing on post-structuralist feminist critique of the autonomous liberal-humanist subject, is to explore the moral agencies of religious women’s movement activists in the post-9/11 era in Iran. The aim is to suggest that even moral discourses, which can be seen as part of political traditions, have reformative capacity in the public sphere.

2.0 Objectives of case study

I have a number of objectives that I wish to examine. The first one is to demonstrate that women’s rights are always in a flux and are influenced by a variety of factors of which this thesis highlights the international. The second objective was to gather primary data on Iranian women’s movement activists living in the post-9/11 environment, something that had been missing in the studies focusing on War on Terror and women. The third objective is to provide a deeper understanding of the everyday conditions of both activists and ordinary women living in Iran where the hardliners are trying to suppress ‘oppositional voices’ singled out by the US.

My primary theoretical framework, postcolonial feminism, deals with inclusions and exclusions that are decided on the basis of one’s gendered, racialised and sexualised body. What also informs the building up of these segregations is the anxious logic of orientalism. Considering the modern history of the US-Iran relations, for example the hostage crisis 1979-1981, I found the framework appropriate to examine the period 2002-2010 in the US-Iran relations. The mentioned hostage crisis broke off the diplomatic relations between the two countries, but despite this, or maybe because of this, Iran has been at the center of American foreign policy in the Middle East. The US-Iran relations experienced a détente in the late 1990s that lasted until the autumn of 2001. This is why it is interesting to apply this specific theoretical framework as is allows us to complicate the US conceptualisation of the Self as disconnected and unrelated to the Other and calls for a political vision that engages with difference, alternatives and real life experiences and eventually recognises everyone’s right to security. To keep the research focused, I have concentrated on Iranian women although also men have experienced the violence emanating from American foreign policy.
The thesis is divided into two parts. The first two chapters after the Introduction focus on developing my theoretical frameworks. Chapter 2 develops the primary theoretical framework of postcolonial feminism elaborated above. Chapter 3 deals with women’s agency, which I wished to address due to the one-dimensional understanding of Iranian women’s agency in contemporary Iran. This chapter offers a critique of the autonomous liberal-humanist subject in order to explore the moral agencies of religious women’s movement activists in the post-9/11 era in Iran. I draw on Saba Mahmood’s work but I also have moved my analysis from the individual/private to the public and in the thesis I explicate how women’s (public) piety is both constructed in the public sphere and how their public activism is constitutive of their piousness. Hence, I propose that women’s socio-economic and political locations increasingly inform their piety and activism. This section also offers a brief literature overview of studies on Iranian women.

The second part consists of the empirical chapters, which, in turn, are divided into two parts:

1) The first part, Chapters 4 and 5, covers Iran’s inclusion in the Axis of Evil in 2002, Iran’s nuclear crises and the country’s economic sanctions. While the focus is on the period 2002-2008, this part covers also the sanctions imposed by the Obama Administration. In this period, an internal power struggle was taking place between the reformists and hardliners in Iran. The hardliners were making their drive to power and trying to consolidate their power after years of reformist politics. In essence, the Bush Administration facilitated the hardliners return to power by providing them with the old enemy discourse. But most importantly, this part scrutinises how the Bush Administration’s hypermasculine policies, by singling out Iranian women’s human rights, invited Iranian masculinities to participate in the global game of masculinities. This materialised, in different stages, in narrowed physical and discursive activism space and even in violence on the bodies of Iranian women’s movement advocates. This part also examines the US sanctions against Iran. While aimed at disciplining the deviant masculinities, the sanctions resulted in deteriorating living conditions on the bodies of the very femininities that the US had pledged to protect.
2) The second part, Chapter 6, examines the extensiveness of the effects of the Bush Administration’s War on Terror materialised in the lives of ordinary Iranian women. While president Bush left office in January 2009, the echoes left behind by his threatened masculinity had not yet disappeared outside the American borders. Iran’s 2009 presidential elections that turned into one of the bloodiest years in the Islamic Republic’s history finalised the hardliners’ take over the body politic and extended their backlash on ordinary women. The events in Iran in this period demonstrated how the Bush Administration’s mission to get justice in the aftermath of 9/11 had indeed transnationalised insecurity and violence on the bodies of those who the US had pledged to protect.

3.0 Research methods and sources
Information for the backbone of the thesis, the Bush Administration’s foreign policy, was attained through publicly available primary sources. I studied predominantly president Bush’s official statements, State of the Union Addresses and press statements ranging from September 2001 until 2008. For the time period 2009-2010 I investigated similar documents by president Barack Obama. Both time periods also included public government and congress documents, statements and public interviews in international newspapers and magazines of the key figures of both Administrations. Also, what proved important were analyses by and interviews of the Bush Administration’s neoconservative supporters based at think tanks and other non-governmental institutions, including the Project for a New American Century (PNAC) and the RAND Corporation. For some parts of the thesis (e.g. Chapter 5) I also followed both the US news – and popular media. The news media included sources such as CNN and The New York Times; popular media included TV shows such as Homeland and top selling books focusing on Muslim women such as Betty Mahmoody’s Not Without My Daughter. Research on Iranian domestic and foreign policy responses was carried out by reading the key office holders (president, supreme leader, ministers, high ranking security officials) statements, public addresses including Friday Prayers, UN speeches, and so on. I also consulted secondary sources, read Iranian newspapers online, followed BBC Farsi, Iranian state media including the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) and the Fars News Agency that is closely affiliated with the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), and read some of the reformist and hardline newspapers through the BBC Monitoring Middle East. The
approach I employed to analyse these documents and media follows Shepherd’s understanding of discourses which considers them as ‘systems of meaning production rather than simply statements of language, encompassing narratives, texts, and images, systems that “fix” meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world.’ Moreover, as Shepherd argues, the systems of meaning making cannot be divorced from practices of power – the one who has the power to control the meaning making has also ‘the power to define and defend “reality”’ (Shepherd 2006a: 20). I paid particular attention to the ways in which gender and race were employed to construct different gendered and racial discourses of identity and security. I deepened my understanding on these analyses with interviews with European diplomats based in Tehran and with an American diplomat based in Helsinki.

Research conducted on the outcomes of the Bush and Obama Administration’s foreign policy in Iran was carried out by examining various international (Iranian, American, British and European) newspapers, online news providers and the BBC Monitoring Middle East; reports by international and non-governmental organisations (I have included human rights organisations in this category as well) that included well-known ones such as Amnesty International (AI), Human Rights Watch (HRW), Iran Human Rights Documentation Center (Iran HRDC) and smaller ones such as Zunia and Human Rights and Democracy for Iran. I also used various reports produced by the United Nation’s (UN) different organisations and missions. I also followed Iranian and non-Iranian bloggers writing on human rights issues, YouTube channels focusing on Iran’s human rights situation and various Facebook pages linked to the GM. The problem with especially with online sources coming from Iran was the increasing state organised censorship that made some of these sources short-lived. I also read individual Iranian human rights activists’ reports, analyses and opinion pieces published in the West. These resourced helped me to form a wide and multidimensional understanding of the impacts of the US foreign policy on Iranian civil society and women in particular, especially after it became hard for foreigners obtain visas to Iran. It gave at least a partial voice to those who were not heard by the Bush and Obama Administrations.
To complicate the picture more, I undertook a two-week fieldwork to Tehran in April-March 2010. I had envisioned to conduct further fieldwork but the deteriorating security situation in Iran and the regime’s tense relations with the outside world meant that my visa applications after the first trip were denied.

The reality of conducting fieldwork in Iran after the presidential elections of 2009 set certain limitations on the available research methods. When I was planning my fieldwork, I envisioned my data to derive from a number of domestic human rights institutions, the UN mission based in Tehran, NGOs and human rights activists and people involved in social and political activism in general. I had set up interviews prior to my trip but it did not take me long to realise that such a rigid methodology did not work in the streets of Tehran in the spring of 2010. Many of my interviewees never showed up or they cancelled the meeting. Thus, one of the methodological challenges I faced was how to organise data collection and conduct interviews in the post presidential election environment, which was coloured by the government’s clamp down techniques and its policy of isolation from the world outside its borders. Hence my fieldwork consisted mainly of qualitative participatory research. This approach allows one to ‘learn from, and validate the knowledge of intelligence of, ordinary people’ (Rostami-Povey n.d.). Principally the research involved 14 individual interviews with women activists and NGO workers and three group interviews of which one was a group interview at the United Nation’s Population Fund Office (UNFPA), and two others were conducted with NGO employees of a NGO specialising in health and educational services. I also had four interviews with European diplomats, which have tried to continue having a focus on the human rights situation in Iran. Finally I spent a day at an Afghan refuge school/center, which has a special focus on women and girls. Additionally I conducted observational and informal interviews with some women’s rights advocates and students who have been involved in the Green Movement demonstrations. To avoid too much attention from the authorities, I was ‘hanging out’ with them. This particular approach enabled me to ask questions in safe locations and the informal settings usually encouraged people to express their feelings and share their experiences. I conducted all my interviews either myself in English and/or in partial Farsi or with the help of an interpreter. Women activists who I met during my stay in Tehran were pious activists from the middle –
and working classes. They represented different ages, ranging from their mid-twenties to the late sixties.

Also, I am aware that the group of people who talked to me was a very special sample of Iranians and the civil society. Considering the current political atmosphere, which is shadowed by the governmental clampdown on social and political activism, the people who came forward and talked to me all have their own reasons and agendas why they decided to talk and to express certain views on the society. The reason why I chose Tehran as my principal research location is partly due to the number of human rights activists residing in Tehran but it is however mainly due to my own limitations and resources. Thus I hope the reader will keep this in mind when reading the chapter.

The deteriorating security environment in which civil society actors were pursuing their work after the 2009 presidential elections and considering the real risks that they can face after talking to foreigner, all my interviewees and organisations (with the exception of the UN) asked me not to reveal their real names. Before my trip, a more experienced scholar working on Iran advised me not to record any of my interviews and translate my interview notes/responses into Finnish in order to protect my sources until I had left the country.

4.0 Subject position

I am aware of my own limitations and biases in this research. Not only my gender (female), age (late twenties-early thirties), class (working class), worldview (secular) and nationality (Finnish), to name a few, have influenced my thinking but also my mother with her strong feminist leanings. Moreover, I agree that a researcher’s ‘positionality’ is not fixed but is shaped by the subject of the research, the wider environment in which the researcher operates and the multiple interactions between researcher, interviewees, and audience (Törrönen 2001). While I have found my research interesting and enjoyable, I have sometimes felt that because I am neither Iranian nor Muslim, I have no authority to speak about women in Iran. I am still struggling with this question. However, the status of an outsider has two sides. At times I felt that some of my interviewees shared stories and information that they would not have necessarily shared with someone coming from ‘inside’ – that in a way it was easier for them to talk to someone who was not closely connected to their
environment and to the events we talked about. Some people felt that as I was someone conducting ‘objective’ research, I should hear the ‘truth’ and make sure that the outside world would hear it as well (see also Al-Ali and Pratt 2009).
CHAPTER 2: THEORY I: POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST FRAMEWORK: (IN)SECURE HYPERMASCULINE STATE IDENTITIES, BROWN MONSTERS AND THE FEMINE OTHER

‘Either you are with us or against us.’
- George W. Bush (2001)

‘This is the world's fight. This is civilization's fight. This is the fight of all who believe in progress and pluralism, tolerance and freedom.’
- George W. Bush (2001)

1.0 Introduction
What emerges from the quotes above is a world filled with segregations, borders, disconnectedness and violence. President Bush’s question after the horrible events of 9/11, ‘Why do they hate us?’ and the American political and military response to the attacks reflect the imagined and physical boundaries that build our worlds: the inclusions and exclusions; whose security matters, whose doesn’t; who is to be protected and who is to be attacked, and so on. Said differently, the American response enacts and sustains a fixed and seemingly unbreakable boundary between the Self and the Other – a baseless fantasy of disconnectedness – and as such it obscures the violence and destruction that inheres in this type of imagining and making of boundaries. This fantasy of disconnectedness has its roots in the ways that the state is understood in contemporary world and how the politics of empire effectively shadow the ways in which different identities are constructed in order to naturalise and justify segregations, borders and violence.

The thesis draws upon postcolonial feminism to understand how the politics of empire materialise violently on the bodies of ordinary women who live in the outskirts of the empire. The current project of American neoimperialism has materialised itself in two related but asymmetrical constructions: 1) the Self manifested in the geopolitical-economic Self that disciplines any deviancy (of its ideology, material being, and so on) into the margins and 2) a cultural one that has established itself in an aggressive white hypermasculinity that efficiently denies relating to others and/or exploits the vulnerable others to further the Self’s profits (see Ling 2008). The postcolonial feminist framework deployed here offers the tools to examine how the Self has ontologically disengaged itself from the Monster who it has itself created. Such theoretical framework allows us to interrogate how boundaries – both imaginative and
physical – discipline, police and violate gendered, racialised, sexualised bodies. It is further proposed that the current martyred US (in)security seeking identity is drawing and building upon segregations that are sustained by the anxious logic of orientalism. Thus, in effect, the framework aims to complicate the US conceptualisation of the Self as disconnected and unrelated to the Other and calls for a political vision that engages with difference, alternatives and real life experiences and eventually recognises everyone’s right to security (see also Agathangelou and Ling 2004a; 2004b and 2005).

In what follows, I first discuss the crafting of state identities and (in)securities. After this, I briefly explicate how state identities are gendered; the aim is to examine the ways in which especially (hyper)masculinities and (hyper)femininities emerge and how they become central elements in the construction of state responses to different types of crises. In the second section, I turn to Said’s concept of orientalism to examine how orientalist anxiety builds and sustains much of the US (in)security imaginary. I make the argument that orientalist anxiety is also about the Self constructing itself as much as it is about dominating the Other. In this section I also draw attention to the Orientalised Body, in particular to that of the Monster and the Feminine Other, that allow the Self’s existence and its self-constructed right to discipline and police the Other via gendered, sexualised and racial violence in the name of national security. In this section it an argument is put forward suggesting that the Monster and the Feminine Other are instrumental and constitutive mechanisms for the Self’s existence and identity and how the politics of empire would not work or be sustained without them. I conclude the chapter by exploring possible ways of breaking up these crafted and constructed identities that only artificially justify and naturalise borders, and as already said, materialise in violence on the ordinary bodies. Thus, I close with an argument for collective engagement that pushes us to recognise our worlds interconnectedness which is needed in order to find more ethical ways of doing foreign policy – foreign policy that understands the importance of human security that the artificial segregations shadow (see also Agathangelou and Ling 2004a; 2004b; 2005).
2.0 Crafting identities and (in)security

State identity continues to hold a rather debated status in the literature of International Relations (IR). The classical realist understanding of the state – a rational, unitary and fixed entity – has continued to be popular both among scholars and policy makers. However, I would like to approach the state – and indeed its identity – as a continuous social and cultural process that is never fully completed or natural and, further, it is a process that does not take place in isolation from others. The state produces and reproduces its identity and borders – both physical and imaginative – in order to both maintain the nation’s identification with the state and secure and guard itself both domestically and in international politics. Thus, state identity may seem like a mere abstract symbolic attachment but I would argue that it also the condition of its possibility. I have to point out that I do not argue that the process of crafting (state) identities is an uncontested process. Identity making is always a fractured and imperfect process and it can be contested and contradicted by other actors who are involved in the process. The very nature of the crafting process opens it up for contestation and possible change. As Campbell has pointed out, ‘the drive to fix the state’s identity and contain challenges to the state’s representation cannot finally or absolutely succeed’ (Campbell 1992: 11). However, the purpose of this thesis is to explore how one particular discourse of identity became more dominant than any other, and moreover, what were the consequences of this on the bodies of ordinary people.

2.1 Identity

The scholarship on national – and state identities springs from the concern to understand the origins of these communities, their identities and how they emerge. Two competing schools exist of which the first one, the so-called ‘primordialists’, sees nations as natural extensions of prior family and kin relationships (Yuval-Davis 1997:15) and thus they are understood as inevitable and given. Arguing against this understanding, the ‘modernists’ contend that nations are modern and invented constructs. For Anderson (2006), the nation came into being through the printed word that allowed a larger number of people to ‘imagine’ their nation; for Hobsbawm (1992), it was the capitalist economic system that facilitated the emergence of nations; and finally, for Gellner (1983), nationalism and concrete identities were required in order to create homogeneity for the needs of modern technical society. I follow
Anderson’s conception of imagined nations which pushes us to recognise that state elites are required to craft recognisable, culturally and socio-historically situated and meaningful national identities and myths of sovereignty that help to consolidate, mobilise and sustain the public’s identification with the state. Particularly, in times of crises, the need to articulate and craft a solid, identifiable and hegemonic national and/or state identity becomes central to the state’s regulatory and disciplining role. Said differently, with the help of one identity that is uplifted to a hegemonic status, the state is able to counter any deviant identities (domestic or foreign) that may challenge its hegemonic status.¹

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I start with the premise that identities are crafted in relation to others and in effect we intersubjectively create our worlds (Agathangelou and Ling 2004a). The interconnectedness forces us continuously to (re)craft and perform our identities and new hybrid ones are enacted in order to adapt to the changing environment. However, not fully (or at all) knowing/understanding the difference that constitutes the Other may threaten and provoke the Self and often this materialises in the transnationalisation of insecurity (Agathangelou and Ling 2004a). But that difference of the Other is instrumental for the Self’s identity. In his eloquent work on the politics of identity, Connolly argues that identity is ‘established in relation to a series of differences that have become socially recognised. These differences are essential to its being. If they did not coexist as differences, it would not exist in its distinctness and solidity’ (Connolly 2008: 64). Thus, the narratives and frames used for the identification of the Self and the Other need to resonate both culturally and socially so that they can have a meaning to the audience who needs to confirm them for the wanted identity to be consolidated. Moreover, identity cannot be crafted in isolation but it draws its power on difference and oppositions existing outside the Self and which have been institutionalised to mark the boundary between ‘I’ and ‘you’, ‘us’ and ‘them’. Or as Campbell writes: identity is constituted in relation to difference, which, in turn, is similarly constituted in relation to identity (Campbell 1994; 1998). This, according to Campbell, leads us to notice that there are ‘no foundations that are

¹ Another school exists as well, the so-called ‘instrumentalists’. This tradition studies how state builders/politicians provide incentives for the diverse populations they wish to incorporate into their polity, while at the same time they provide disincentives for those who would rather give their loyalty to another group (see Haas 1993).
prior to, or outside of’ identity’s operation’ (Campbell 1994: 149) but that identities are performatively constructed. The fact that identities are performatively constituted means that they are spatial, historical and time-bound constructs. The performative production of identities requires that clear boundaries are inscribed to separate ‘an “inside” from an “outside”, a “self” from an “other”, a “domestic” from a “foreign”’ (Campbell 1998: 9). The never-ending (re)production of a binary world allows the state to constitute its myths of sovereignty, security, borders and eventually establish its monopoly over the instruments of coercion which in turn enables the elites to retain the power that allows them to decide the borders between the Self and the Other (see Krishna 1999:18; Agathangelou 2004) As Bigo argues, these elitist discourses ‘always structure our thought as if there existed a body – an “envelope,” or “container” – differentiating one polity from another. The state justifies itself as the only political order possible as soon as it is accepted that sovereignty, law and order, and single body are the prerequisite for peace and homogeneity. It justifies the “national” identity that the state has achieved through a territorialisation of its order, by cutting up of borders’ (Bigo 2002: 67 quoted in Agathangelou 2004: 128).

Consequently, the enactment of external, of the Other, rationalises a logic of identity, which essentially becomes necessary for the state’s existence (Campbell 1998: 12). Connolly elaborates on this:

Entrenched in this indispensable relation is second set of tendencies, themselves in need of exploration, to congeal established identities into fixed norms, thought and lived as their structure expressed the true order of things. When these pressures prevail, the maintenance of one identity (or field of identities) involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or into one of its numerous surrogates. Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty (2008: 64).

However, Connolly also argues that by understanding this relational and constructed relationship of the Self and the Other it becomes possible to imagine and practice more ethical policy making (Connolly 2008: ix). I will elaborate on this in this chapter’s Conclusion and in the final chapter so it is sufficient to say here that, if we begin the process of problematising our identifications of the Self and the Other, we should come to recognise that these are essentially artificially constructed myths that sustain binaries such as ‘us versus them’ and ‘good’ and ‘evil’, ‘masculine versus feminine’, ‘developed versus developing countries’, to name a few - but by unlocking
these myths it becomes possible to transform the often conflict infused politics that follow from these identity constructions.

2.2 Enter (in)security

In the process described above, the state identity that emerges has the power to constitute what is meant by ‘us’ and ‘them’, what we should be afraid of, what is alien to us and what we should be secured against – thus we are knowingly distanced from the Other by emphasising the representational differences between the Self and the Other. Essentially, ‘a range of differences as *intrinsically* evil, irrational, abnormal, mad, sick, primitive, monstrous, dangerous, or anarchical’ is constituted to provide an imaginary of insecurity that enables the construction and enactment of a state identity that is understood by non-elites as a physical construct capable to ‘protect [us] from the other’ (Connolly 2008: 65). The result: ‘boundaries are constructed, spaces demarcated, standards of legitimacy incorporated, interpretations of history privileged, and alternatives marginalised’ (Campbell 1990: 266). Agathangelou’s work on female migrants from less developed economies working in desire industries (e.g. domestic and sex work) in the world’s core economies examines how these boundaries are drawn. The study shows how the traffickers and the (illegal) migrants are effectively constructed ‘as major violators of the integrity of what is “inside” the state as well as a danger and threat to the homogeneity of the state, society and the polity’ while at the same time they are desired as a commodity by the very same state, elites and anyone who can profit from and exploit them (Agathangelou 2004: 129).

However, as Connolly notes, the state does this policing and disciplining in order ‘to protect the purity and certainty of a hegemonic identity’ that is essential for the state to assert its role as the protector against the Other and thus, the Other and its difference become both a necessary element of the Self’s being but also a threat to its being (Connolly 2008: ix, 67). In other words, ‘insecurity itself is the product of processes of identity construction in which the self and the other, or multiple others, are constituted’ (Weldes et al. 1999:10). However, as Agathangelou criticises, this line of reasoning (and as already noted above, Connolly would agree with Agathangelou) obscures the Self to see its interconnectedness with the Other and in the unresolved structural questions such as: why do people migrate to the core economic states; why political upheaves continues in postcolonial states; why 9/11
happened … However, it is because of this type of (in)security shaped identities that political decisions lack any meaningful basis for constructive change; as Agathangelou argues with the help of her case study of the female migrants: ‘Defining the female migrant as “third country” national as opposed to an European makes possible particular practices and the continuation of social relations of exploitation and inequality’ and renders ‘security to a select few nationally and transnationally’ (Agathangelou 2004: 131, 133). Said differently, the established and socially approved identity of ‘third country’ effectively shadows and naturalises the insecurity effects of the Self’s security.

Yet, as Campbell has argued, the danger posed by the other does not have to be an actual threat to the Self’s existence but an issue may rather become a security threat through a process of interpretation. By employing the concept of discursive economy, Campbell demonstrates that no real experience of threat needs to exist in order to laid the foundations for danger. Discursive economy allows us to understand discourse as a space in which some narratives, representations and interpretations are encouraged and privileged while others are marginalised or even denied. Consequently,

‘The mere existence of alternative mode of being, the presence of which exemplifies that different identities are possible and thus denaturalizes the claim of a particular identity to be the true identity, is sometimes enough to produce the understanding of a threat’ (Campbell 1998: 3).

Hence, in effect, a hegemonic discourse has the power to normalise violence against the Other, and as stressed several times above, this results in security seeking identities that continue enacting differences, segregations and borders and creating negative elitist, militaristic and non-democratic state identities and insecurities that eventually materialise in violence on the bodies of ordinary people – hence, mere discourses and imagined threats can and do have material effects. For instance, Shaikh’s study on Pakistan’s state identity reveals how Pakistan, struggling to find a source of unifying national identity, consciously crafted a negative identity that established India as a political and military threat to Pakistan, effectively enacting a destructive and oppositional state identity. This, according to Shaikh, resulted in the

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2 For Campbell, discourse means the constitution/representation of the ’real’ (see Campbell 1994: 161)
military emerging as the dominant state institution and the key arbiter of Pakistan’s national identity overriding other institutions and contributing to the internal and regional insecurity (Shaikh 2009, Kanwal Sheikh et al. 2012). More recently, in an effort to avoid the international community’s criticism of Pakistan’s anti-India stance and to find alternative sources for identity making, the military has launched domestic campaigns targeting ‘impure Muslims’ as internal security threat and/or has given its blessing to Sunni militant groups such as the Army of Jhangvi to freely target these marked communities. This has effectively insecurity society for Shiite minorities – especially for the Hazaras - who are experiencing a growing sense of insecurity and vulnerability (see Shaikh 2009).

When does a construction then become accepted, to have connection with the real world, and have material effect? A construction is successfully transformed into a social fact when the relationship of a particular construct to reality is defined as one of correspondence – meaning that a particular construct is transformed into a naturalised and unquestioned fact of reality which obscures the fact’s constructed nature and its origins (Shepherd and Weldes 2008: 534). Language must have an empirical point of reference here – think of racial and gendered embodiments of danger (e.g. Arab male to terrorist) – otherwise a construction does not become a recognised social fact with material effects (e.g. Arab male to terrorist to Abu Ghrad to interrogation and torture of terrorists). The imaginary that comes into being from this process is what enacts and enables real and meaningful social identities and practices, on the other hand, we have reached the boundaries of a discourse when ‘particular representations of the world seem “unintelligible”, “irrational”, “meaningless”, or “ungraspable” (Muppidi 1999: 124-125), (e.g. Arab male to women’s empowerment). Particularly, in the case of defining national security, it is paramount to reach “the moment of extreme ideological closure” (Hall quoted in Weldes et al. 1999: 17) which grants the state elites the power to define the contours of the national discourse, deny and challenge any contesting or oppositional constructs and continue exercising their

3 Weldes et al. have noted that it is useful to employ the terms construction and production to mark the distinction between non-material and material practices. According to them, ‘linguistically, discourses are the vehicle for the construction of categories (of difference, of identity, of threat, etc.). Through both linguistic and non-linguistic practices, they are the vehicle for the production of social facts (such as insecurities)’ (Weldes et al. 1999: 17) that then form actual (in)security issues on the bodies of ordinary men and women.
national political authority. Hence, the way national security – or insecurity for that matter – becomes understood is through the dissemination of information made possible by certain authored constructs that interpret the (in)security in a specific way. As Weldes et al. point out, for this to be possible, ‘anything outside of the discourse – statements expressing possible worlds or forms of life, for example – is represented as implausible, ideological or spurious and so often consigned to the realms of fiction, fantasy, or nonsense’ (Weldes et al. 1999: 17).

Thus, in essence, discourses of identity and insecurity are sites of social power (Agathangelou 2004). As will become clear in the sections below, power, and state power in particular, ‘is not neutral, but classed, sexualised and racialised’ (Agathangelou 2004: 15). Political and military elites usually have an uncontested position of privilege to craft, articulate, fix and constitute hegemonic identities and security constructions as they have the institutional power to do so; they are speaking for the state but ultimately for ‘us’ (Shepherd and Weldes 2008: 534). These constructions are projected essentially through the ‘categories of the state’ (i.e. its sovereignty and the national), which sanctions the elites’ construction of different peoples, movements and crossings of borders as dangerous to the ‘national security’ (Agathangelou 2004: 128). In the post-9/11 political milieu the US political and military elite not only employed its superior role in crafting and articulating the traumatised state identity but it also had the institutional power to project and disseminate this image not only within the US but also transnationally through globally reaching media and consumer culture (Grewal 2003). As Agathangelou and Ling carefully note, political interpretations of the world – such as threats to national security – are essentially exercised through a Gramscian methods, coercion and consent, so that the non-elites would accept the crafted and articulated identity and the possible insecurities that come with it – even when these are against the non-elites’ interests (Agathangelou and Ling 2004b: 829). Hence, the most powerful discourses become and remain dominant in part because of the power relations sustaining them (Weldes et al. 1999: 18). Especially in times of conflict, certain (state orchestrated) discourses are little resisted and their representations of insecurity become hegemonic which allows the elites to dismiss contesting discourses naïve or even as treasonous (Weldes et al. 1999: 18). Nevertheless, even hegemonic discourses may and do crumble. For instance, the traumatised US national identity that was disseminated by
the elites in the aftermath of 9/11 was embodied in the white heterosexual, nuclear family grieving identity. The voices of non-whites, lesbians, gays, and bisexuals were simply ignored in the dominant constructions of the events and even more so in aftermath that unfolds in the battlefields where these alternative voices are active participants (think of gay/lesbian/black/Latino bodies in the US Army). Moreover, as Weldes et al. argue, as discourses have the power to define and thus to constitute the world, these representations of insecurity also become important sources of power (Weldes et al. 1999: 18).

2.3 Gendered identities
Feminist theorists have noted how state identities are gendered – and especially how the discourses of nationalism, war, national security and colonialism/imperialism allow the political and military elites to craft particular gender identities that are used to frame the state’s projects and construct boundaries between different groups (national, ethnic, gendered, religious, sexual) (see among others Agathangelou and Ling 2004a; Elshtain 1987; Enloe 2001; Goldstein 2001; McClintock 1995; 1997; Ruddick 1990; Shepherd 2006a; Tickner 2002; Zalewski and Parpart 1998). And as already noted in the Introduction, the role of gender and race in the War on Terror narrative has been central for the construction of the Self and the Other; in the post-9/11 political milieu, both gender and race has been deployed to craft identities including that of a perpetrator, protector, saviour and victim. The ways in which conflicts are being gendered and framed affect the way we (non-elites) understand and come in terms with these conflicts. The gendered and racialised identities of protectors and enemies effectively allow us to ignore and normalise the (in)security implications resulting from conflicts (Shepherd 2006: 9).

As feminist scholars have argued, gender – as the culturally and socially constructed categories of masculinity and femininity – does not point to the characteristics of any particular men and women but it places masculinity and femininity on stark opposite sides emphasising that ‘the essence of being masculine is to be not feminine’ (Charlesworth and Chinkin 2002: 604). Thus gender does not exist objectively but it is a spatial and historical discursive practice ‘through which social difference [and power relations are] both invented and performed’ (McClintock 1997: 89). Consequently, in this thesis identities like gender are seen not as ‘natural’ nor
‘essential’ but as social, cultural, historical and material practice constructed to privilege a colonial, imperial, patriarchal, and heterosexist order (Agathangelou and Ling 2004). Going back to the binary representation of gender, what is essential to this specific binary is how the masculine is typically presented with characteristics and capabilities – such as power, rationality and strong physical power to ‘do’ justice, which are valued higher than the characters and capabilities of the feminine side, such as dependency, emotionality and nurturing.

For Elshtain, war has the power to call forth powerful prototypical gender identities for men and women alike. The first one she identifies, the ‘Just Warrior’, is the heroic man who ‘takes up arms reluctantly, and only if he must to prevent a greater wrong or protect the innocent’ (Elshtain 1998: 452). The innocent is, naturally, the female embodied in the ‘Beautiful Soul’ who is ‘too good for the world yet absolutely necessary to it’ (Elshtain 1987: 140) and what she naturally needs is protection provided by the Just Warrior. With the help of these gendered constructs, the realms of public, war and security, the ‘high politics’, are placed in the elite world of masculinities (Blanchard 2003: 1289) while private, peace and self-sacrifice are placed on the shoulders of the femininities (Enloe 2001:13). Thus as McClintock explains, this results in masculinised politics:

> Not only are the needs of the nation typically identified with the frustrations and aspirations of men, but the representation of male national power depends on the prior construction of gender difference. All too often in male nationalisms, gender difference between women and men serves to symbolically define the limits of national difference and power between men (McClintock 1997: 89).

The myth of protection or saving the female essentially assigns the masculine with an active agency while the feminine is constructed as a symbol of the nation in need of protection, which, in turn, allows naturalising and legitimating militaristic and aggressive politics. However, the masculinist anxiety about failing in these politics often materialises itself in violence on the bodies of the very women they are meant to

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4 It would be quite wrong to suggest that masculinities or femininities are not prone to change – even when talking about militarised or victimised masculinities and femininities. However, my intention is to show how certain forms of traditional and conservative gender roles are emphasised when societies are faced with external or internal threats. See an excellent study on changing masculinities in the US military; Melissa T. Brown, *Enlisting Masculinity: The Construction of Gender in US Recruiting Advertising during the All-Volunteer Force* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012).
protect/save (think of peace keeping forces using local women as prostitutes; see among others Agathangelou and Ling 2003; Razack 2004a).

2.3.1 Hyperformations

Hooper has argued that militarised masculinities have laid the basis for what it means to be a man in the modern era (Hooper 2001: 81) and Enloe has continued the argument by noting how militarised masculinities are now also found and prioritised outside the military institutions such as in foreign policy establishments. This has effectively naturalised masculinised and militarised foreign policy making and foreign policy decisions reflect this ‘manly culture’ which eventually helps to sustain conflict ridden and (in)security seeking policymaking (Enloe 2004: 123-125). This hierarchy that devalues femininities leaves them in the margins assigned with the silenced role of a victim or someone to be protected. And as Owens writes: ‘The hegemonic masculinity […] is made possible through a continual effort to define its sexuality relative to the sexuality of inferior others, setting it apart and protecting it’ (Owens 2010: 1042).

In times of conflict and insecurity, these identity formations have a tendency to over-perform and result in hyper-formations. Hypermasculinity, first coined by Nandy in her work on British colonialism in India, refers to a reactionary masculinity that ‘arises when agents of hegemonic masculinity feel threatened or undermined, thereby needing to inflate, exaggerate, or otherwise distort their traditional masculinity’ (Agathangelou and Ling 2004a: 519). Hypermasculinities contribute to the trans-nationalisation of militarisation and insecurity globally ‘with [their] imagery of protector/protected, inside/outside, and order/anarchy – a situation in which the security for the few is bought at the cost of insecurity of the many’ (Zalewski and Parpart 1998: 87).

\[^{5}\text{However, it is worth noting what Ruddick has argued; ‘In all war, on any side, there are men frightened and running, fighting reluctantly and eager to get home, or even courageously resisting their orders to kill’. Sara Ruddick, Maternal Thinking: Towards a Politics of Peace (Boston, Beacon Press, 1990): 218. Similarly, women are fighting, supporting wars and interventions}.\]

Hypermasculinity would not, however, work effectively without its binary and subordinated counterpart – hyperfemininity. Hyperfemininity denotes to ‘an idealized and radicalised version of traditional femininity’ under threat and this allows the patriarchal state to use it as an ideological frame via which the hypermasculinity is executed and projected (Agathangelou and Ling 2004a: 519). Hypermasculinity is dependent on its counterpart but ‘does not acknowledge this dependence and devalues it at the same time’ (Agathangelou and Ling 2009: 3). More specifically, hypermasculinity de-emphasises speculation, intellection and *caritas* as feminine, and justifies a limited cultural role for women – and femininity – by holding that the softer side of human nature is irrelevant to the public sphere. It openly sanctifies – in the name of such values competition, achievement, control, and productivity – new forms of institutionalized violence and ruthless social Darwinism (Nandy quoted in Agathangelou and Ling 2004b: 40).

Hypermasculinities invite, or provoke, other masculinities sensing threat to engage in hyperformations and together these hyperformations can lead to ‘a heterosexist hierarchical punishing system of power’ (Eisenstein 2004). These manifestations of masculinity find their expression on the vulnerable and hyperfeminised bodies that bear the violence following the masculine anxiety. An example can be drawn from South Korea where in the 1960s and 1970s the state constructed a hybrid hypermasculinist state identity of Western white masculinist capitalism and Confucian patriarchy in order to develop its economic performativity. With the help of this new hypermasculinist identity the state assigned to Korean society the characteristic of a typical Confucian womanhood: diligence, discipline and deference. Consequently the hyperfemininised society bore the burden of economic development and sacrificed its own wellbeing (e.g. long working hours and low wages) for the national good (i.e. economic development) without access to political representation or voice (unions were banned, political dissident repressed) (Han and Ling 1998).

3.0 Orientalist anxiety
As already noted in the introduction to the chapter, I argue that an anxious orientalist imaginary sustains American’s new interventionist and aggressive identity projection – materialised in the War on Terror, the Monster and the Feminine Other - in the post-
Thus, it is worth going back to Said’s work *Orientalism* (2003 [1978]) in order to continue setting the analytical framework. For Said, orientalism is a discursive regime that essentially enacts ontological and epistemological distinctions between the Self and the Other, the Occident and the Orient (Said 2003: 2). This discursive regime, by establishing ‘truths’ about these two opposites, provides the tools to reinforce inclusions and exclusions but ultimately it allows the Self to dominate, restructure and have authority over the Other (Said 2003: 3). In effect, certain ‘othered’ modalities are allowed to exist (e.g. scary Muslim/Arab man and victimised Muslim woman) while others are denied or restricted (e.g. rational Muslim/Arab man and empowered Muslim woman). The ensuing power relationship between the Self and the Other thus exceeds information production and the violence of orientalism – both discursive and material – was, and continues to be, embedded in contemporary political, social and economic practice (Ganguly 1992; Said 2003: 6). In other words, the Self occupies a *positional* superiority to the Other, which is achieved, according to Said, by the Self’s reliance on a discursive consistency of the Other which, in turn, is woven into material power of institutions and organisations. This combination of discursive and material power effectively creates the Other and assigns it with an inferior status in the imagination of the Self (Said 2003: 40, 273; emphasis in original).

What is central for my argument here is 1) how Orientalism is first and foremost a means to construct the Self through a discourse about the Other/the Monster, which, in turn, serves to construct global (and/or local/internal) hierarchies – often consolidated with violence; and 2) how the Feminine Other is harnessed in the Self’s disciplining of the Other.

* What is central to the crafting of the Other is its locking into representations of cultural practices that are both constructed and articulated by the Self for and on behalf of the Other. Put differently, the power of orientalism, and as Said refers to Foucault, emanates from its power ‘to construct the object it speaks about and from its power to produce of a regime of truth about the Other and thereby establish the

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7 As Agathangelou and Ling (2004a) have carefully noted, the Bush Administration’s early semantic shift from terrorism to terror points to the change from a political to cultural agenda.
identity and the power of the subject that speaks about it’ (Yegenoglu 1998: 90-91). Thus, the Other’s historical and spatial specificity is denied and its individuality is reduced to ‘collective self-consistency’ such as ‘the Arabs’ (Said 2003: 229). These representations eventually become naturalised ‘truths’ and are built on ‘the absolute and systematic difference between the West, which is rational, developed, humane, superior, and the Orient, which is aberrant, undeveloped, inferior’ (Said 2003: 300). However, as Bhabha has argued, the created image is more than a false image that naturalises discriminatory practices against the Other: ‘It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphoric and metonymic strategies, displacement, over-determination, guilt, aggressivity; the masking and splitting of ‘official’ and phantasmatic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse’ (Bhabha 2004: 117). And as Said writes, the Western imagination about the Orient is far more powerful in dictating the truth than the actual reality: the ‘abstractions about the Orient […] are always preferable to direct evidence drawn from modern Oriental realities’ (Said 2003: 300). This means that the Orient is conceptualised as ‘eternal, uniform, and incapable of defining itself” (Said 2003: 301) but whom is to be rescued from ‘the obscurity, alienation and strangeness’ to progress and development by the heroic West (Said 2003: 121). However, the West does not conceptualise intervention as aggressive or imposing – it is ultimately the Orient’s liberation (Said 2003: 172). Hence, the West assumes that the Orient feels threatened by the West’s superior civilizational status but instead of cooperation and dialogue the Orient is assumed to respond with the menace of jihad. And the consequence of this is: ‘a fear that Muslims will take over the world’ (Said 2003: 287). Thus, to counter the Orient’s challenge, the West must make the Orient ‘to perform, its power must be enlisted on the side of “our” values, civilization, interests, goals’ (Said 2003: 238).

However, although the central aim of an orientalist discourse is to enact both imaginative and concrete boundaries between the Self and the Other, the consolidation of the Self’s identity formation builds on this very same process. As Said argued; ‘Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is – and does not simply represent – a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with “our” world’ (Said 2003: 12). Chow has elaborated this point eloquently and it is worth quoting it at length:
What I am suggesting is a mode of understanding the native in which the native’s existence – that is, an existence before becoming ‘native’ – precedes the arrival of the colonizer. Contrary to the model of Western hegemony in which the colonizer is seen as a primary, active ‘gaze’ subjugating the native as passive ‘object’, I want to argue that it is actually the colonizer who feels looked at by the native’s gaze. This gaze, which is neither a threat nor a retaliation, makes the colonizer ‘conscious’ of himself, leading to his need to turn this gaze around and look at himself, henceforth ‘reflected’ in the native-object. It is the self-reflection of the colonizer that produces the colonizer as subject (potent gaze, source of meaning and action) and the native as his image, with all the pejorative meanings […] attached to the word ‘image’. Hegel’s story of human ‘self-consciousness’ is then not what he supposed it to be – a story about Western Man’s highest achievement – but a story about the disturbing effect of Western Man’s encounter with those others that Hegel considered primitive. Western man henceforth became ‘self-conscious’, that is, uneasy and uncomfortable, in his ‘own’ environment (Chow 2003: 342-343).

Essentially, as Connolly and Campbell already discussed above, the division that make ‘us’ look and feel distinctive from ‘them’ are essential for the Self’s construction and understanding of itself, thus, the Self ‘more often than not, glares back in the reflected image of’ the Other (Agathangelou and Ling 1997: 12). However, the above-mentioned ‘truths’, created by the Self without interaction, dialogue and engagement with the Other, prevent the Self from gaining the security it desires against the Other. In the words of Said, a discourse like orientalism ‘retards the process of enlarged and enlarging meaning through which true understanding can be attained’ (Said 2003: 254) and because of this orientalism sanctions the Self with the moral right to invade, discipline and civilise other lands and peoples. However, the spiral of anxiety embedded in orientalism threatens to circle back: ‘orientalism’s very raison d’etre rationalise[s] violence in the colonial order. What results […] is a mirror strategy of imperial politics by both colonizer and colonized. Each feels justified to do unto the Other what has been done to it in the past without regard to those who violated and sacrificed in the process’ (Agathangelou and Ling 2004b: 33, emphasis mine).

3.1 Orientalised body
In the above section, I covered some of the general gender roles that the state crafts in times of conflict and war. However, hierarchies exist within masculinities and femininities – in other words, gender is often articulated in relation to other differences and categories such as race, class and sexuality. Put differently, the politics of power, exclusion and marginalisation are intensified with these further
signifiers of differentiation and otherness. In the colonial times race marked the boundary between one’s right to citizenship and being a mere subject (Stoler 1989) but the racial anxiety has stayed with us. A concrete example is the US government’s introduction of posthumous citizenship to non-citizens (e.g. Latinos) who have died in serving in active duty in the US army. When brown bodies are needed to be sacrificed for the security of the White Self, these non-citizens have been drafted as eligible and worthy to serve in the War on Terror while at the same time their bodies are violently fenced-off from the US borders and/or coded as threats to national security.

Current racial hierarchies that employ race as a signifier of otherness allow for categorisations such as ‘different’, ‘traditional’, ‘poor’, ‘oppressed’ ‘inferior’, ‘irrational’, ‘fanatical’, ‘oppressive’, mad, ‘illogical’, and so on to be applied to outsiders – examples like the victimised Muslim woman, suicide bomber, the Taliban, and crazy mullahs are found in our everyday imagination and politics – which, in turn, naturalises the West’s image of itself as rightful to police, discipline and terrorise both within and without its borders. I will now move on to examine the Oriental Monster and the Feminine Other that the White Self needs in order to create and sustains itself.

3.2 The new Oriental Monster: Islamic fundamentalist

Studies focusing on the sexual and racial aspects of the post-9/11 political milieu have pointed to the re-emergence of the old racial Monster in foreign policy discourses after the 9/11 attacks (see for instance Grewal 2003; Ling 2004; Puar and Rai 2002;...
Rai 2004). The emergence of monsters has been connected to Western modernity and its colonisation projects and thus the numerous figures of brutality, monstrosity and horror have shadowed ‘civilization as its constitutive and abjected discontent (Rai 2004: 538). The post-9/11 Monster, the ‘Islamic fundamentalist’, – stereotypically male, often Middle Eastern and Muslim in his origin – has his roots in the racial and sexual monsters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when European colonial powers employed ‘the term monstrosity [to] mobilise a set of discursive practices that tied racial and sexual deviancy to an overall apparatus of discipline, and, later in the nineteenth century, to the emergence of biopolitics’ (Rai 2004: 539). The Monster that is produced through these discursive practices – as both instrument and target of a diffuse power – establishes the ontological difference and borders of nations, races, sexes, genders, classes and humanity (Rai 2004: 539).

As Puar and Rai have demonstrated, central to the production of the Monster is its construction ‘as a regulatory construct of modernity that imbricates not only sexuality, but also questions of culture and race’ and as such the Monster ‘is not merely an other; it is one category through which a multiform power operates’. Moreover, discourses that deploy the Monster ‘as a screen for otherness are always also involved in circuits of normalizing power as well: the monster and the person to be corrected are close cousins’ (Puar and Rai: 2002: 119). In the contemporary world, the violent civilising mission targeting the ‘natives’ has been moved on the body of the Islamic fundamentalist.

Today’s Monster has materialised himself in the Palestinian suicide bomber, the crazy Iranian mullah, the ‘Arab’, the Taliban, and in the different looking (brown) man in the street. Drawing on Foucault’s concept of ‘abnormals’, Rai has noted how the racial images of the current enemy in the War on Terror re-play the colonial

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9 Out of interest, I conducted an informal survey among my Finnish friends (15 people) earlier in 2012 – all educated in higher educational institutions, considering themselves 'liberal’, 'cosmopolitan’ or ‘well-travelled’ at least, anti-racist, and from diverse social backgrounds – and I asked them what is the first image that comes to their mind when they hear the word ‘terrorist’. All of them answered an Arab. As one of them described the image she had: ‘He is dark-skinned, maybe he also fashions a beard, has dark hair and brown eyes, you know, the stereotypical kebab-shop keeper who you find in the every corner of the city’. They all recognised how this image has been socially constructed and they were aware of its political connotations but they say that it is the first thing that automatically pops up when one hears the word ‘terrorist’.
constructs of the ‘Oriental despots’ who were presented as ‘the quintessential enemies of (Western) civilization’, as he explains:

Developed in the wake of Enlightenment critique of the ancien régime, the divine right of kings and aristocratic privilege, the discourse of Oriental despotism posited an essentially Western order as a civilizational corrective to Eastern irrationality. The representative of this moderate and reasonable West would confront (and eventually dominate) their supposed opposite. […] It was almost as if these inherent differences logically and naturally gave rise to two radically different traditions of political and economic organization. For Europe, a constitutional monarchy or republic would be the characteristic form of polity, while the capitalist mode of production its characteristic economic institution. For the East, despotism … would be the normal and distinctive form of government […] Today, the monster has re-emerged at the centre of ‘an axis of evil’, as a masculine-effeminate ‘subject’ that embodies Western civilization’s ultimate enemy: the Islamic terrorist (Rai 2004: 548; 539).

Constructing the enemy as animalistic, violent, irrational, evil and manic effectively allows the Self to deny the Monster’s right to voice its social, economic and political concerns and, at the same time, its relationship with the Self is denied, the interconnectedness of these two is washed away. Moreover, as Agathangelou and Ling careful analysis on the 9/11 Report shows, followers of leading enemy figures are usually dumped into a similar but distinct category and characterised as ‘misled, mistaken and misguided’ (Agathangelou and Ling 2005: 830), reflecting the old colonial representations of passive, enslaved and primitive barbarians. This type of dehumanisation has critical (in)security implications for those who are constructed in monstrous terms, including violent racism (think of the targeting of ‘Muslim’ looking citizens in the US after the 9/11 attacks), the denial of human rights (think of Guantanamo Bay detention camp); and the transnationalisation of militarisation (think of Afghanistan, Iraq …).

3.3 The Feminine Other

If the Oriental Monster is the source of fear in colonial – and neoimperialist projects, the Feminine Other is the object of imperial desires of protection and possession. The Feminine Other offers the Self/the West the myth of protection and saving imagined through othering, silencing and insecuring the object. The Feminine Other is of inferior status – just like the Oriental Monster – however, a minor but important difference is found in the Feminine Other – she is capable of change. Said differently,
it is possible to civilise and improve her, unlike her partner, the Monster who is eternally doomed.

3.3.1 Othering the Feminine Other
Yeğenoğlu's seminal work in 1998 challenged us to see how feminine gender and sexuality are not simply representations of the Other but are constitutive of hegemonic projects like orientalism and imperialism (Yeğenoğlu 1998). Even more than with the Monster, the tropes of modernity follow the Feminine Other. In imagining the Feminine Other, the West constructs her by emphasising certain (ostensibly) negative characteristics of the backwardness of the Orient, for instance her religiously sanctioned veiling or gender segregation, that allow for easier and clearer lines to be drawn between the modern and Enlightened West and the stagnating Orient. Thus, women have been, and continue to be, deployed as signifiers of ethnic, national and cultural-civilizational boundaries and they reinforce and structure the (neo)colonial/imperial relationship of the dominant power to the subordinated (Yeğenoğlu 1998; Yuval-Davis 1997). Moreover, the characteristics applied to women are often divorced from their localities, histories and cultural situations. Generalisations of these localities, for instance of Islam, are employed as root causes of the Feminine Other’s oppression. As Lazreg writes: ‘[T]he overall effect of this […] is to deprive [her] of self-presence, of being. Because women are subsumed under religion presented in fundamental terms, they are inevitably seen as evolving in nonhistorical time. They have virtually no history’ (Lazreg 1988: 86). The Self/West is presented as the protector of women’s human rights and its women are paraded as empowered and equal. In the eyes of the West, for the Feminine Other longs to free herself, she needs to break off from her cultural and religious background – preferably with the help of the West who is guiding her in the process. In this way, the West is connected to modernity, progress and emancipation and the East to backwardness, tradition and oppression.

Koikari’s work on American occupation of Japan in 1945-1952 offers an example how the US enlisted inferiorly represented Japanese women to its cause. Koikari shows how the civilising and transformation of Japanese women and the issue of women’s rights came to form the moral rationale for the American occupation to reform the country. The Americans presented themselves as the protectors of
Japanese women who had fallen victims of the chauvinistic Orientalist-Japanese culture while the US and its cultural background were represented as providing ‘“superior” and more “democratic” political and educational guidance’ to the Japanese women (Koikari 2002: 24); the US simply ignoring 1) the local gender relations, practices –and histories and 2) how, at the same time, American women were fighting their own feminist agendas back in the US. Throughout the US presence in Japan, the politics of occupation – the reorientation and rehabilitation of the country – were played on the bodies of Japanese women who were actively constructed as helpless oriental victims lacking agency and who, without the help of the Americans, would not have been able to free themselves from their fanatical men and oppressive culture or gain any political rights. This reframed, justified and legitimised the interventionist occupation as a mission to ‘save’ these women and consequently Americans came to see and understand ‘the occupation […] as a blessing bestowed on Japanese women’ (Koikari 1999: 319). The American logic was simple: the brutal and barbaric Japanese men oppress their helpless women; as such they must be an uncivilised and inferior race; consequently they are in need of American Enlightenment that will guide them to democratisation (Koikari 2002).

Razack has discussed the intersection of violence and race, gender, hierarchies and she shows how the process of othering takes place in a more contemporary context (see Razack 2004b; 2005; 2008). In her study on domestic violence among Muslim minorities in Norway, she shows how violence in minority (‘coloured’) communities is conceptualised as cultural but how violence in the majority (i.e. Norwegian/white) community is understood as exceptional and reflecting the actions of very few sad drop outs of the (white) society (Razack 2004b; 2012). She has called this the ‘culturalisation of violence’, and as she explains:

The body of the Muslim Woman, a body fixed in the Western imaginary as confined, mutilated, and sometimes murdered in the name of the culture, serves to reinforce the threat that the Muslim man is said to pose to the West and is used to justify the extraordinary measures of violence and surveillance required to discipline him and Muslim communities (Razack 2004b: 130).10

10 As Razack continues her argument, the idea of the woman living an autonomous life (meaning freed from communal ties) with ties only to the state has not materialised in less violence against women (Razack 2004b: 168). For instance, a study from a few years back concluded that in Finland, which has been claimed to be one of the most gender equal societies in the world, 43.5 per cent of Finnish women have become subjected to physical or sexual violence or threat of violence at least once after age fifteen. Of women currently living
Thus today, the process of contemporary othering has materialised in the Imperilled Muslim Woman and the Dangerous Muslim Man (Razack 2004b). Cooke argues that this reveals the four-stage gendered logic of empire: 1) women have inalienable rights within universal civilisation 2) civilised men recognise and respect these rights 3) uncivilised men systematically abrogate these rights, and 4) such men thus belong to an alien (Islamic) system. She explains:

Imperial logic genders and separates subject peoples so that the men are the Other and the women are civilizable. To defend our universal civilization we must rescue the women. To rescue these women we need to attack these men. These women are to be rescued not because they are more “ours” than “theirs” but rather because they will have become more “ours” through the rescue mission (Cooke 2002: 469).

As colonial and imperial histories have demonstrated, these projects not only privilege Western perspectives of gender and gender equality over local ones, but they also place ‘other’ women outside socio-economic and political relations and experiences. By placing women outside their social relations, the West denies them from practicing agency and by doing so their unique needs, opinions and desires are ignored. In effect, these protection scenarios become processes of violence, and racialisation in which everything local is rejected and devalued and everything Western is declared superior (Moallem 2005; see also Razack 2004b; 2008). This, in turn, makes not only invisible the hegemonic and interventionist politics behind the oppressed Feminine Other but also the actual and real sources of her socio-economic and human insecurity.

3.3.2 Silencing the Feminine Other

While the Self/West is promoted as the locus of agency and knowledge, the Feminine Other is effectively silenced and her maturity to act as a subject is denied. Pui-lan, referencing Spivak, has argued that the Feminine Other is not even allowed to speak but someone is always ready to represent her: ‘the subaltern woman has been written,
represented, argued about, and even legislated for, but she is allowed no discursive position from which to speak’ (Pui-lan 2002: 67). Koikari, for instance, shows how the American women attached to the occupation forces took the central role in the women’s reform movement under the American occupation – effectively allowing the occupational forces to ignore the actual needs and voices of Japanese women (Koikari 2002). The Feminine Other who emerges from the Western authored presentation of the subaltern is what Mohanty has called the singular monolithic subject who ‘leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being “third world” (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-orientated, victimised, etc.)’ (Mohanty 1988: 61, 65). When one is being represented and silenced, she is denied the opportunity to voice her alternative discourse to the discourse articulated on her behalf and her ability to construct her subjectivity is impeded. However, it needs to be noted that silence should not be always to be understood negatively - as a sign of disempowerment or lack of agency. Cheung has argued that Western feminists have had a tendency to valorise speech, which has led to reductive conclusions that silence is always signifying the Feminine Other’s lack of agency, passivity or marginality (Cheung 1993). However, what colours (neo)colonial or imperial discourses is their non-dialogical nature, which effectively via (neo)colonial violence, narrows both physical and discursive spaces for those who are articulating alternative voices and actions.

Similarly, it is also worth noting that sometimes articulation spaces were/are granted to alternative ‘native’ voices. However, these alternative voices are being policed and disciplined in ways that they will satisfy the needs – such as the intact cultural borders - of colonial and imperial projects. Foucault’s (1990a) biopolitics sheds light onto the reasons why the Other may be inclined to ‘convert’ to the Self’s – it can be understood as self-making that ensures the Other’s inclusion in the Self – reasons for the need or desire to be included in the Self may vary for example from the need for political asylum to assimilation. However, this policing and disciplining of biopolitics allows the Self to emphasise the Other’s appreciation of the Self’s lifestyles (e.g. secular vs. religious), the Other’s condemnation of their own culture and how well the Other has adapted to the Self’s world and finally to draw a clearer image of the enemy who must be resisted. With the help of these ‘alternative’ voices that support the
Self’s political agendas, the Self is granted the moral justification to act as the saviour of the Feminine Other who the Self itself has created as a subject in a need of saving.

3.3.3 Insecuring the Feminine Other
Violence has always coloured colonial and imperial fantasies and desires and as it has been already indicated, gender violence is constitutive of hegemonic projects like (neo)colonialism and imperialism. This has resulted in transnationalised militarisation and insecurity played on the body of the Feminine Other (see e.g. Abu-Lughod 2002; Agathangelou and Ling 2004a; Razack 2005). As already argued above, these fantasies and desires stem from ahistorical oriental myths of possession and protection that emphasise virile white men as agents and the “Oriental” Feminine Other as a passive victims in need of saving by white men (Spivak 1988). In effect, the Feminine Other is rendered into a commodity to be fetished; by transforming the exotic woman into a commodity, the ‘fetish’ is conquered and subjugated (Lalvani 1995). Moreover, Abu-Lughod has reminded us, saving others not only implies that one wants to save one from something but wants to save her to something – a different world and set of arrangements – and this is almost always a process subdued with violence (Abu-Lughod 2002) – both corporeal and psychological. In other words, the erasure of the Feminine Other as an agent of her own life not only constitutes epistemic violence but ‘creates the epistemological conditions for material harm (Ayotte and Husain 2005: 113; Spivak 1988).

3.3.4 Epistemic violence
The saving of the Feminine Other – a scenario that combines military intervention with modernity and progress – thus not only denies her indigenous discourses and knowledge but also sanctions someone else to speak on behalf of them. The Feminine Other and her veiling have been central in this respect. Yeğenoğlu has remarked that the veil is ‘taken as the sign of the inherently oppressive and unfree nature of the entire tradition of Islam and Oriental cultures and by extension it is used as a proof of oppression of women in these societies (Yeğenoğlu 2002: 84). By claiming authorship to the meaning of the veil, the West has established its understanding of the practice as right and irrefutable. No space for alternative discourses or understandings is granted. However, as many scholars have now argued, veiling carries a variety of meanings; for some it is a bodily means to cultivate their virtue
(Mahmood 2005a), for some it’s a means of political resistance (Mahdavi, P. 2009a); it is a religiously sanctioned form of dress that allows women freely to participate in the public sphere (Abu-Lughod 2002) and so on. The relational superiority materialising in speaking on someone’s behalf, claiming authorship to someone else’s subjectivity, her practice and creating homogenous and generalising descriptions about the Other’s social, historical and cultural practices is violence as it denies and devalues the Feminine Other’s agency and subjecthood. As Ayotte and Husain explain:

‘the overt vilification [of veiling] becomes a rhetorical technique whereby [Western] discourses inflict epistemic violence on [Muslim] women by denying the very possibility for agency through the choice of dress, ostensibly the cause at issue with these representations in the first place’ (Ayotte and Husain 2005: 119).

3.3.5 Physical and structural violence

As several academic works on American post-9/11 military interventions have recently noted, the American imagery of Muslim women as victims in need of saving – which morally legitimised and justified the War on Terror – has materialised not only in epistemic but increasingly physical –and structural violence on Muslim women’s bodies - both via the military intervention and domestic militarisation of society – (see among others Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Ayotte and Husain 2005; Rostami-Povey 2007a). And thus IR feminist –and postcolonial feminists scholars have called for wider analysis of security (see for instance Agathangelou and Ling 2004a; 2005; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Ayotte and Husain 2005; Bachetta et al. 2002; Hirschkind and Mahmood 2002; Ling 2008; Tickner 2002).

In one of the sections above, I introduced the concept of hyperfemininity that allows hypermasculinities to use it as an ideological frame via which the hypermasculinity is executed and projected. Here I would like to draw attention to the process of feminisation. Feminisation process presents a way to understand why certain individuals, groups or communities are presented as victimised, vulnerable, incapable of defending themselves but why, at the same time, their sufferings may be conceptualised as mere ‘collateral damage’. For Peterson, feminisation is a process that pervades language and culture and leads to the normalisation of ‘the devaluation
of feminised bodies, identities and activities’ (Peterson 2005: 507; emphasis in original). She clarifies:

‘feminisation of identities and practices effectively devalues them in cultural as well as economic terms. Briefly: the taken-for-granted devaluation of ‘women’s work’ is generalised from women to include feminised ‘others’: migrants, marginalised populations, ‘unskilled’ workers, the urban underclass and developing countries’ (Peterson 2005: 507-508, emphasis in original).

Thus, feminisation does not only apply to women but is also employed to devalue racially and culturally different masculinities (e.g. individuals and states). This denigration of the feminine creates local and international hierarchies (materialising for instance in the masculine/feminine/modernist/traditional dichotomies) and produces (neo)colonial and imperialist relations of power –and domination that are used as justifications for disciplining, policing, controlling, invading and ‘saving’ others (see also Mohanty 2006; Marchand and Runyan 2011), I will employ this concept later in the thesis when I examine the US sanctions against Iran.

One final point on the insecuring of the Feminine Other. In her seminal article in 2000, Hansen highlights the realms of voice and sight for the construction of security subjects (Hansen 2000). The salience of these two is even higher to the issue of gender security that forms Hansen’s main concern in the paper. Hansen notes that women’s insecurity often stays unheard both at the national and international arenas due to their structurally limited visibility and inability to speak up. Hansen remarks that in the absence of voiced concerns, what Hansen terms as ‘security as silence’, others may fail to see the real location and problems of the subject. Occasions rise when subjects are unable to voice their security concerns either because it is impossible or voicing the insecurity may aggravate her security situation. Hansen uses the example of rape in a social context where the stigma of rape may worsen the victim’s security status (Hansen 2000: 287). The imposed silence, Hansen argues, prevents women from ever fully materialising as an embodied subject and it prevents us/the outside from seeing how our construction (or lack of it) of her subjectivity effectively endangers her (Hansen 2000). Although Hansen’s paper was aimed at the gender blind Copenhagen School, her criticism is not just theoretical but it points to the more practical questions of security as she draws attention to the question ‘how do we decide what constitutes insecurity’, or, ‘how can we improve someone’s security
if out there exists a group of people who we cannot see or hear?’ I will elaborate on this particular point in the final chapter that discusses the aftermath of the 2009-presidential elections in Iran and how women’s movement advocates experienced the state repression.

3.3.6 Deviant sexuality

What often figures in the representations of the Other – be that internal or external other – is its sexuality. Sexuality, like the former signifier of otherness discussed above, reflects power relations; heterosexuality and homosexuality are hardly ever understood as equal practices or identities and the latter is often disciplined in order to be corrected. For Foucault, the two categories reflected the power of discourses in regulating normalcy – heterosexuality overriding and disciplining homosexuality (Foucault 1990a). Sexuality has also been central to the workings of colonialism/imperialism and it assumed a dominant role marking the civilizational boundaries between the colonising (heterosexual and masculine) West and the colonised (effeminate) Orient. As Stoler argues, ‘sexual control was more than a “social enactment” – much less a convenient metaphor – for colonial domination, it was; a fundamental class and racial marker implicated in a wider set of relations of power (Stoler 1989: 634). Thus, the effemination of the Other male – a means to subordinate and devalue – takes places by defining his sexuality as inferior to the Self’s sexuality. In other words, by presenting the Other as homosexual or in other ways sexually deviant and the Self as heterosexual effectively enables the Self’s right to disciplining and correcting it. Scholarly analyses of the sexual abuse and torture by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib have pointed to a heterosexist punishment/disciplining system materialising on the male bodies of the detained (see among others Eisenstein 2004; Owens 2010). The horrible events at Abu Ghraib took gendered, racial and sexualised identities to their extremes; white Western masculinised women (and men) torturing and raping brown Eastern effeminated men. To ‘protect’ the self’s hetero-normativity (or the masculine Empire), the ‘other’ is degraded as homosexuals or effeminate and who then can be disciplined and/or humiliated.
4.0 Conclusion

So why do they hate ‘us’?, as President Bush asked. Does the Self ever find an answer that fully satiates it? Already the structuring of the question reflects the impossibility of finding a lasting solution – if that solution is meant to be what it is claimed to be; spreading democracy, human rights, civility, and respect towards each other. As Connolly and Campbell have eloquently argued, the state employs the self and other distinction in order to satisfy their desire for national security but this singling out of differences eventually manifest itself in a distinct identity which continues to create inclusions, exclusions, imaginative and physical borders, good and evil. This is a process of rationalisation that culminates in the Self and the Other so that we, the non-elites, come to know and understand what we are, what makes us secure or insecure and who protects us. This last point takes us to the importance of (in)security to state identities. The Self does not only need the Other’s difference to craft a distinct identity for itself but the inability to fully know and understand the Other – the insecurity about otherness and the threat it poses – becomes a constitutive element of the Self’s identity. However, the failure to understand otherness sanctions a world of fear which manifests itself in a global game of masculinities that, in turn, transnationalises militarisation that is eventually experienced as insecurity and violence on the feminised bodies of ordinary people (Agathangelou and Ling 2004a). In effect, discourses that emphasise the distance of the Self from the Other legitimate and naturalise the use of violence against the unknown and this violence is intensified by sub-categories of otherness such as gender, race, class and sexuality.

These sub-categories of otherness play a central role in the orientalist anxiety which, I argue, is instrumental to the sustaining the US War on Terror imaginary and the US sense of self. This orientalist anxiety, which is driven more by the Self’s anxiety about itself, has manifested itself in the Monster and the Feminine Other who help the Self to continue its masculinist (in)security seeking policies of discipline (the Monster) and protection (the Feminine Other). Only that the Self does not realise that the security it is seeking is an elitist construction of security that only secures the bodies of a minority living within the white-hetero-masculine borders.

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Is there any other way than to discipline, police and humiliate the Other in order to secure the Self? Is there a way to make sure that the violent effects of hyper-performing masculinities do not get played on the bodies of innocents – like those of Iranian women? Postcolonial scholars have for a long time argued how not recognising the interconnectedness of ‘our’ lives to ‘theirs’; not hearing the other side of the story’ or not suspending judgement based on the imagined borders between us and them, prevents us, together with them, finding solutions to political, economic and social hierarchies and inequalities that both the mental and physical boundaries uphold between the Self and Other. Relating to the Other enables us, the Self, to see how to find a middle space for the transformation of the fixed binaries and hegemonic/oppressive social relations that dominate our world and global politics (Ling 1996).

Following the steps of Said, postcolonial feminists are pushing other scholars and policymakers to recognise their responsibility in the process of enacting of politically naturalised (but artificial) borders between peoples, societies, and lands. In effect, they are arguing for a more ethical and humane foreign policy making which would hopefully materialise in fewer segregations and in a growing sense of interconnectedness of worldwide inequalities. Chowdhry has deployed Said’s concept of contrapuntality to demonstrate the intimacy of the Self and the Other in world politics. Contrapuntality is a method that makes ‘visible the erasures and silences around concepts such as culture and identity, nation and memory and […] engender the articulation of exiled voices’ ignored in international relations and in the field of IR (Chowdhry 2007: 102-103). The method aims to ‘reveal the ‘wholeness’ of […] the intermeshed, overlapping, and mutually embedded histories of’ the Self and the Other (Chowdhry 2007: 105). The voice is given to a multiple agencies who are interrelated which, in turn, allows us to historise ‘texts, institutions and practices, […] [to] interrogate their sociality and materiality, [to] pay attention to the hierarchies and the power-knowledge nexus embedded in them, and [finally to] recuperate a non-coercive and non-dominant knowledge’ (Chowdhry 2007: 105).

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11 Contrapuntality was Said’s response to his critics who accused him of ignoring the colonised agency. Thus, with the help of contrapuntality, Said demonstrated ‘a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse act’ (Said quoted in Chowdhry 2007: 104).
But to do this requires a major change in the way we see, understand and theorise about the world. Agathangelou and Ling have proposed a way to start this journey. They have named it ‘Worldism’. Worldism starts with five epistemological commitments:

1 – *intersubjectivity*; defined as the institutional social structures that emerge through the labour of agents in relation to other agents and thus dissolves sovereignty by challenging the center-periphery segregation that legitimates exploitative practices as ‘natural’

2 – *reverberating agency*; dissolves hierarchies if we recognise how the dominant binaries can be broken down and together masculinities/femininities; domestic/foreign; public/private can contribute to a more integrated life

3 – *identity*; whose abstract subjectivity (e.g. notions of the Self) emerges from materiality (e.g. the body) and the social relations of production that produce it. This pushes us to recognise the intimacy of the Self with the Other.

4 – *critical syncretic engagement*; artificial boundaries can be dismantled if we engage in critical syncretic negotiation – this invites and includes agents from multiple worlds – whether marked by tradition, gender, race, culture, class, sexuality – to build communities together.

5 – *accountability*; we need to reframe the realist conception of power as providing security. This moves us to interrogate the meaning of power; ‘Whom does it benefit?’; ‘Whom does it sacrifice?’ (Agathangelou and Ling 2004b: 42-44)

With the help of Worldism, we can start seeing possible better futures. Some may call Worldism naivety, idealism, political immaturity, or not realising how the real world works. However, if one does not start thinking and pondering over new ways of understanding the world, how could we make it better? I would like to put forward an argument for collective engagement that pushes us to recognise our worlds *interconnectedness*, which is needed in order to find more ethical ways of doing foreign policy – foreign policy that understands the importance of human security that the artificial segregations built on otherness shadow. If we break down the artificially constructed segregations that materialise in insecurity and violence, we may find understanding and tolerance of the Other and eventually ‘the Self finds its definition through and with the Other, not against it (Ling 2008: 20).
CHAPTER 3: THEORY II: AGENCY: TALKING BACK – BEING PIOUS AND POLITICAL

1.0 Introduction
While I was in Iran, I attended a small brainstorming session organised by a NGO activist Nassim. She is in her early 50s and was born to Iranian-German parents in Germany but moved to Iran in her early teens. She has been involved in civil society activism all her adult life and at the time of the interview she was the director of her own NGO. In her small office Nassim, me and four other women discussed women’s general socio-economic situation in Iran and the women showed me how they had mainstreamed gender issues into various technical, health –and educational projects that they had organised in the past. We then moved on to discuss the problem of funding that has been a pressing issue for NGOs especially since the 2005 presidential election that brought president Ahmadinejad to power.12 It was then when Nassim got up and began to pace impatiently in her office and said:

Of course the lack of funding makes our work almost impossible but in a way I’m happy that I’m more independent now. Earlier I had to please people who funded us. Either I had to be secular or almost Westerner in my approach to women’s issues or I couldn’t even mention the word woman in my programs. Some of my friends in Europe say that I’m more Iranian than Iranians are in my views regarding women and some of my friends here say that I’m too Western. Well, I’m neither of those. I’m an Iranian woman and I have my belief but that doesn’t mean that I’m not progressive or modern and more importantly I’m able to help women! (Nassim, April 2010, Tehran).

The reason why I chose to start with this anecdote is because it brings up some of the themes that surfaced in many of the conversations I had in Tehran in the spring of 2010. My interlocutors identified themselves as working class or middle-class, religious, educated, modern and Iranian. What dominated my conversations with these women was their frustration with the elite classes’ secular understanding of women’s rights and socio-economic change in Iranian society. In my interlocutors’ discussions of women’s rights, which they located in egalitarian reading of Islam, questions of social –and economic justice were always present and seemed to be very central to the current understanding of women’s rights among these women. Another theme that many of my interlocutors brought up in their discussions was connected to

12 After the conservatives’ take over of the state institutions (the Majles, city councils and the presidential seat) they set out to deliberalise civil society. Fearing the authorities punitive policies, many funding bodies withdrew their financial support from NGOs.
the boundaries of modernity, civility, and otherness. These women articulated a message in which they positioned themselves not only against the Western image of its women as emancipated and free but also against the image of victimised and passive Muslim women that they could not identify with. Many of my interlocutors wanted to address the inequalities that materialised in the lack of social and economic opportunities especially among women and youth and wished to ‘talk back’ to elite women, international actors –and organisations and the Western popular imagination in order to demonstrate that Iranian women, and by extension their society, can be modern and civil. Many women found that their work in gender activism as pious agents was central to this. Similarly, they wanted to evidence that being pious does not mean that they are non-democratic or anti-reform.

Whereas the previous scholarship has kept the ‘subordination-submission’ model alive and well with regard to women’s agency in Iran, this chapter suggests that it is time to move on and explore alternative understandings of agency. The analysis draws on the post-structuralist feminist critique of the autonomous liberal-humanist subject in order to explore the moral agencies of religious women’s movement activists in the post-9/11 era in Iran. Although Saba Mahmood’s work has been influential for the discussion, I have moved my analysis from the individual/private to the public and in the thesis I explicate how women’s public piety is both constructed in the public sphere and how their public activism is constitutive of their piousness. I also propose that women’s socio-economic and political locations increasingly inform their piety and activism, thus I also pay attention to the material context that shapes their agency (see for similar findings for example Brenner 1996; Deeb 2005; 2009; Jamal 2009; Rinaldo 2010).

1.1. Why agency?

The reason why I am addressing women’s agency in my work is influenced by two different factors. The first reason is theory related and results from my experiences in the field. While I was conducting my fieldwork, I began to question the idea of agency that inheres in the current feminist literature on Iranian women. The agency that I encountered in the field did not resonate with the binary representations of agency (resistance vs. subordination, modern vs. traditional, progressive vs. religious) that have dominated the understanding and exploration of Iranian women’s agency
since the 1990s. Thus, I felt that there was first and foremost a need to investigate the idea of agency that has shaped our understanding of women’s agency and subjectivity. Second, I realised that we need to openly explore women’s alternative worldviews and attempt to give them space even if they challenge our own way of conceptualising life or refute our analytical tools.

The second reason why I find it important to address the issue of agency stems from the War on Terror milieu and its subsequent ‘Let’s Save Muslim Women’ policy narrative, which have tried to create ‘a global consensus’ on what is meant by womanhood and women’s rights (Hatem 2003/2004). This has privileged Western perspectives of gender over local ones and has demonstrated that there is an urgency to call in question the hegemonic and universalised secular conception of desire that contains within it parochial (and decidedly Western) assumption about female subjectivity (Bautista 2008). In particular women’s support or participation in ‘non-liberal’ Islamic movements continues to be understood with difficulty and this is reflected both at the individual level and that of organisations. Mahmood, whose work has been influential for my understanding of agency, has been criticised for legitimising Islamic patriarchy and denying Muslim women’s right to emancipation. However, as Mahmood writes, there seem to be no parallel critique of secular humanism and its projects that are similarly guilty of violence and destruction (Mahmood 2005a). In other words, while diversity is being celebrated it is often, at the same time, silenced if it does not fit the categories of recognition. Moreover, for some reason it is understood that only secular political traditions have the energy to transform and improve societies. This is also a point of concern for me in this chapter.

In what follows, I start with a brief note on classical theorisation of agency, which is followed by a note on liberal construction of agency. These sections will demonstrate where the idea of agency so influential shaping feminist studies has developed and how powerful it continues to be. After this, I will move on to interrogate how this particular idea of agency has materialised in the current scholarship on Iranian women and by extension how this scholarship shaped my own earlier understanding of women’s agency, autonomy and subjectivity. After this, I wish to expand explorations into Iranian women’s agency by including their ethical-moral agency into my analysis and by examining the approach offered by the poststructuralist critique of the
autonomous liberal-humanist subject that Mahmood has advanced in her study on an urban women’s pious movement in Egypt. However, as I noted above, I am aiming to move my analysis from the individual to the public and explicate how women’s moral agencies are both formed in the public and how their public activism is an integral element of their pioussness. I have found Rosi Braidotti’s conceptualisation of political agency and Charles Hirschkind’s ideas of moral publics helpful to address this move.

2.0 Classical theorisation of agency

Agency has attracted a great deal of interest in social science and agency’s relation to structure has formed a basic issue in modern social theory (Archer 1996). Questions of agency and its relations to structures have been addressed by scholars like Durkheim, who saw the social separate from individual agents, i.e. society or structure being external to individuals. If one follows the Durkheimian view, an individual is born into an already constituted society and the society/structure implies constraint over the individual whose actions then follow certain social and cultural regularity (Giddens 1979: 50-51: Rapport and Overing 2000: 1). Weber addressed the agency-structure relation differently by arguing for the primacy of agency over structures, i.e. societies are products of individual actions (Callinicos 2004: 4). Thus, the Durkheimian structural model emphasises the structures’ potential of generating and determining the very nature of individual consciousness and character, so that ‘individuals’ ‘acts’ are […] the manifestation of an institutional reality, and a set of structural relations’ (Rapport and Overing 2000: 2). The more agent-oriented Weberian model argues for the opposite by seeing the structures as abstractions, which the individuals create and which cannot define the actions of these individuals (Rapport and Overing 2000: 2-3). In this latter model one can recognise an attempt of finding individuals’ ability to act independently from structures or even going against them. Closely linked to this exercise is the coupling of agency with concepts like rationality, individual autonomy, wilful action and moral authority, which are all inherent in the humanistic notion of subject (Bilge 2010: 12, see also Davies 2000).

2.1 Liberal construction of agency

In the secular liberal understanding agency is usually understood as ‘the free exercise of self-willed behaviour’ (Mack 2003: 149) and it continues to be ‘closely linked to the transcendentental humanist subject, a rational, free-willed, choosing agent’ (Bilge
2010: 12) that Weber implied in his theorisation. However, as Meyer and Jepperson have pointed out, this is largely a Western construct of agency; ‘[I]n the Western view of social life, humans have the capacity and responsibility to modify society and to intervene in lawful nature in order to reduce discrepancies between mundane realities and transcendentally charted goals’ (Meyer and Jepperson 2000: 102). Asad has noted that the origins of conceptualising agency this way can be traced to the old Protestant doctrine of individual responsibility that influenced thinkers like Locke: ‘individuals are agents because they are responsible for their own souls’ (Asad 1996a: 271; see also Meyer and Jepperson 2000). Asad continues his argument by seeing the concept of agency tied to capitalism that invokes ‘the mutually dependent figures of the entrepreneur and the consumer, or more abstractly, the functions of initiating and choosing. Liberalism has worked these figures into its individualist theories of politics and morality’ (Asad 1996a: 271).

Social theory have been criticised for taking agency as face value around which other forms of social behaviour and organisations emerge (Meyer and Jepperson 2010: 100) while others have criticised it for the lack of discussion of the definition of agency itself and the attention is given to the process ‘how agency is produced or failed to develop or develops in the context of constraints (Mack 2003: 152), or it has been seen as being an ‘abstraction greatly underspecified, often misused, much fetishized by social scientists’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997: 37).

2.2 Liberal feminists and autonomy
The inclusion of women’s agency and their agentic capabilities is a relatively new development (Meyer and Jepperson 2000: 104) and as such agency has become a key concern for emancipatory politics especially in feminist studies, which have gone to great distances to account for women’s agency in male-dominated social theory (Bilge 2010: 12). Autonomy and free will have emerged almost as a synonym for agency in feminist studies and have influenced the focus of agency theorisation among feminist scholars. While autonomy is understood as ‘an individual matter, involving the exercise of choice, the satisfaction of individual preferences, and the capacity for rational self-government (Mack 2003: 151), a subject’s ability to act according to her best interests or resist relations of domination even in contexts when she is subject to external power is a proof of her unconstrained free will. In other
words, there is a tendency to bind women’s agency to the teleology of emancipation and as MacKinnon has suggested ‘the conviction that agency is or should be “most one’s own” is not the result of a natural essence but is a feminist belief about human fulfilment’ (MacKinnon quoted in Gardiner 1995: 13).

The model of agency that emerges from this scholarship is a liberatory one, individualised and emancipatory-orientated. However, when we are trying to address women who identify with conservative cultures or traditions and take them as ‘the real thing’ – meaning that the norms of a tradition are constitutive of the subject and something that the subject aspires to – we are left with no tools to understand and explicate these alternative subjectivities.

Furthermore, as Zine has argued, in the post 9/11 political environment it is becoming more and more challenging to Muslim women to be recognised as they are and not as something they are imagined because ‘the legitimate articulations of the category “female” have been discursively drawn and mapped in ways that privilege a particular construction of womanhood based on Western, liberal, secular notions’ (Zine 2004: 167). In the current global discourse on Muslim women, questions of Muslim women’s status have centred around two interrelated issues: the veil and the extent of women’s public participation in their societies (see for example Abu-Lughod 2006; Afshar 2008; Bilge 2010; Hoodfar 1993; Khiabany and Williamson 2008; Mookherjee 2005). The fact that these two issues are connected in the Western imagination is due, on the one hand, to the persistence of Orientalist assumptions about veiling and its power to limit women’s entry to the public sphere and, on the other hand, to the liberal feminist postulation that women’s equal standing in society is enacted through their public participation (see Abu-Lughod 2002; El Guindi 1999).

3.0 Feminist readings of agency in Iran
3.1 First wave literature
The first wave feminist studies (circa 1980-1990) that focused on Iranian women in the newly organised Islamic Republic were faced with a tricky research subject. On the one hand, Iranian women had succeeded in carving out a space to practice their agency in patriarchal society, i.e. in the 1979 Revolution, but, on the other hand, they were concurrently helping to consolidate and institutionalise the very structures of a
conservative tradition that oppressed them. Thus many secular feminists struggled to address this contradiction. Several studies relied on the ‘subordination and false consciousness’ thesis and scholars argued that women’s loyalty to the new state or participation in Islamic practices was either coerced or simply a result of a false consciousness (see for example Afshar 1981; 1982; 1984; 1985; Azari 1983a, 1983b; Ferdows 1983; Nashat 1980; 1983; Tabari 1980; 1982; 1985; 1986; Yeganeh 1982). Many scholars singled out women’s veiling as a practice that affects women’s capacity to exercise their agency. Following this, women, who did not object to the state-enforced veiling and thus did not identify with the secular-liberal feminist definition of the autonomous and empowered feminine subject, were quite often dismissed as devoid of agency.

This type of academic thinking displaced religious subjects from the realm of agency through a syllogism: agency involves free will; no woman freely chooses to submit herself to a tradition that subordinates her; thus religious women have no agency (see Badinter in Mookherjee 2005: 33). As Mookherjee notes, feminists have had a tendency to disparage Muslim values – such as female restraint, modesty and seclusion – because for them these seem to oppose the sanctity of personal autonomy (Mookherjee 2005: 33). This paints a picture in which a person’s autonomy does not depend on the choices she makes but also on the content of these choices. This, according to Mookherjee, reflects feminists’ universal concern about the risk of women’s subordination within their cultures (Mookherjee 2005: 33.).

The first-wave literature on women’s agency had a tendency to overemphasise agents who shared a similar agency – a secular liberal one with a drive for emancipation – with the researcher. This reiteration of especially pious Iranian women as the Other led to a situation where many Iranian women were forced to invest a considerable amount of time and energy in convincing researchers that they are active and equally respected actors.

3.2 Second wave literature
In the mid-1990s a more multifaceted analysis of gender and agency began to emerge and many scholars identified themselves as postcolonial feminists or expanded their concepts of agency by drawing on subaltern studies (see for example Afkhami et al.
Scholars built on women’s real experiences in Iran and began to examine the operations of women who were able to practice their agency within structures of subordination such as patriarchy and religion. Since then the focus has been on women’s strategic use of these structures and how women employ them to further their social, economic or political objectives. In the 2000s several scholars have investigated how women, and especially younger generations, have crafted space in their everyday lives to exercise both political and social agency (see for example Amir-Ebrahimi 2008; Honarbin-Holliday 2009; 2012; Mir-Hosseini and Longinotto 1998; Nooshin 2008; 2011; Osanloo 2009; Sadeghi 2008a; 2008b; Farid Shirazi 2012). Thus, instead of seeing the Islamic Republic and patriarchal society simply as mechanisms for controlling people and women in particular, feminists have examined how the Islamic Republic could offer novel possibilities for women to practice their agency.

In what follows, I trace two different ways of conceptualising Iranian women’s agency that have dominated the studies since the late 1990s and have also influenced my own thinking at the earlier stages of my research. The first one is located in the ‘everyday resistance’ approach and which, in the Iranian case, has been used for example by Pardis Mahdavi; the second example draws on the works of Elaheh Rostami-Povey and Shahla Haeri who have focused on how women’s political agency has emerged in Iran and how women’s political activism takes place within the patriarchal culture but how they are, at the same time, able to exert pressure within it. After this section, I will turn to examine an alternative way of conceptualising women’s agency by drawing on the insights of the Butlerian model of non-liberatory agent used by Mahmood, which will hopefully shed light on women’s agencies that are not located in secular-liberal contexts.

3.2.1 Agency and everyday politics in Iran

Mahdavi’s work follows Asef Bayat’s studies on ‘everyday resistance’ that Bayat introduced to the study of Iranian women in the 1990s (Mahdavi, P. 2009a; 2009b; Bayat 1996; 1997; 2007; 2010). Mahdavi has studied young Iranian women and in particular women’s agency in post-revolutionary Iran. In her eloquent anthropological
work on women’s everyday practices as forms of resistance she has given a voice to a largely ignored majority in Iran, namely the generation that was born after the revolution but is now the largest demographic group in the country. Mahdavi conducted her fieldwork among urban Tehranis whose fashions, mores and sexual practices, she contends, should be regarded as a serious form of political protest against the Islamic Republic (Mahdavi, P. 2009a).

Through her detailed ethnography on young women’s behaviour, Mahdavi proposes that in the Islamic Republic, where sexuality and its related functions such as dress code and mores are officially regulated, women use these practices as a space where they can express themselves and resist the authorities and patriarchal culture. The Islamic Republic controls peoples’ appearances and ideologies but, according to Mahdavi, young women have been able to create a subordinate discourse, which through their fashion and rebellion in sexual practices, articulates their resistance to the state. Mahdavi argues that the Islamic rituals – like dress code – that play a central role in the state’s effort to formulate proper Islamic subjects, are actually subverted by many young women ‘in an attempt to reclaim them [Islamic rituals] as well as their own agency and citizenship, vis-à-vis the state’ and as such ‘their sense of style, comportment, and outward appearance is linked to their agency, resistance, and sense of self and citizenship (Mahdavi, P. 2009a: 8, 107). Mahdavi’s examples include for instance badhejab, an incorrectly worn head cover that often shows strands of hair. Furthermore, by challenging these rituals, women feel that they have the power to change the system and ‘this power gives them a sense of agency and citizenship’ (Mahdavi, P. 2009a: 122). Said differently, Mahdavi argues that women’s body, morality and sexuality, which are officially controlled by the state and men, actually work as mediums to assert their individuality and resistance against patriarchal culture and its enforced conservative moral code. For scholars like Mahdavi, agency is located in acts of resistance that take place against relations of domination, such as patriarchy, and it can be employed even by women who do not have access to the political sphere of influence (see among others; Gerami and Lehnerer 2001; Faegheh Shirazi 2001).
3.2.2 Claiming political agency in post-revolutionary Iran

Elaheh Rostami-Povey (and her work under the pen-name Maryam Poya) and Shahla Haeri have examined women’s political agency with regard to Iran’s democratisation process and have noted that women and their agencies are integral to the project both at the state level and in civil society. Rostami-Povey has conducted fieldwork among both rural and urban women but her more recent work has focused on middle class and elite women (see Poya 1999; Rostami-Povey 2001; 2004). Haeri on her part has focused on women involved in formal politics (Haeri 2001; 2009).

Rostami-Povey, together with Haeri, contends that women’s agency and their sense of feminist consciousness have emerged as a result of certain socio-economic and political contradictions\(^\text{13}\) that have taken place within the Islamic state and its institutions (Rostami-Povey 2001, Haeri 2009). Rostami-Povey’s work has examined elite women’s agency in the indigenous democratisation project and her detailed fieldwork demonstrates how women’s agency in institutions such as religion, media, legal-sphere and politics has shaped these institutions and initiated internal reform that, in turn, has facilitated more equal gender policies and relations in Iran. Rostami-Povey proposes, and Haeri’s argument is similar, that through the involvement in the various above mentioned institutions and ‘despite the strict social rules, conventions and structural limitations’ women are social actors who are able to ‘challenge gender construction and behavioural conformity dictated by the state and other institutions’ (Rostami-Povey 2001: 44, see also Haeri 2009:127). Both scholars see women’s agency being enacted in the public and political sphere where women have been able to use the very structures, or incongruities within the structures, to exert pressure on the Islamic state, which in turn has increased women’s feminist consciousness and built their agency stronger through their involvement in the public sphere as MPs, journalists, and so on.

3.3 Not talking back?

The above mentioned works and many others with their eloquent and detailed studies about Iranian women’s agency have broaden and complicated our understanding of

\(^{13}\) Rostami-Povey singles out, for instance, the enforcement of *hejab*, sex-segregation and the war with Iraq (1980-1988) that opened doors for women’s legally sanctioned public presence and politicised many women to demand their rights from the late 1980s onwards.
the lives of women living in post-revolutionary Iran (see for example Mir-Hosseini 1993; 1996; 1998; 1999; 2007; Kian 1995; 1997; Kian-Thiébaut 2002; 2005; Moghadam 2003; 2011; Moallem 2005; Sedghi 2007; Afary 2009; Moghadam and Gheytanchi 2010). However, in the course of my own fieldwork I began to feel uncomfortable with the models of agency that I had previously deployed in my research to understand women’s agency in the Iranian women’s movement. Women who I interviewed did not talk back to the models I had in my mind. The model that emerges from the works above is one in which agency continues to be understood in terms of subordination and subversion. However, the form of agency I encountered either in the field or in my later discussions with Iranian women could not be boxed into that one model. Surely, resistance was present in some of the activities that women carried out but it was certainly not the only form of agency that these women embraced. I realised that I had been ignorant (and even arrogant!) about the theoretical frameworks and concepts through which I tried to filter women’s experiences, arguments and worldviews. This forced me to rethink my own location and position to these women and how to move forward with my own thinking about women’s different modalities. The fact that women did not talk back to my ideas how to understand their activism reflected the need to revisit the models and notions of agency that have dominated the field and that had not necessarily validated the experiences of women who I met in the field.

Yet, Mahdavi’s work has been helpful in tracing and recognising women’s actions that would not be necessarily seen carrying political messages by outsiders. Her work also makes locations other than formal avenues visible for political activism. While I am not denying the richness of women’s everyday resistance, I would contend, however, that one needs to be careful in presuming that there exists a universal need or desire among women to work against the prevailing norms or structures. Women’s participation in movements that are built on conservative ideologies continues to be, however, puzzling for both academics and non-academics. As Mahmood has eloquently argued: We should challenge

‘the normative liberal assumptions about human nature […] such as the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms and not those that uphold them.’ (Mahmood 2005: 5)
Although the current scholarship has corrected and nuanced the previous scholarship that relied on the concept of ‘false consciousness’ to explain women’s participation in conservative religious movements, the normative agency that emerges from the literature on Iranian women is tied up almost solely with resistance. Mahmood explains:

Even in instances when an explicit feminist agency is difficult to locate, there is a tendency among scholars to look for expressions and moments of resistance that may suggest a challenge to male domination. When women’s actions seem to reinscribe what appear to be ‘instruments of their own oppression,’ the social analyst can point to moments of disruption of, and articulation of points of opposition to, male authority – moments that are located either in the interstices of a woman’s consciousness (often read as a nascent feminist consciousness), or in the objective effects of women’s actions, however unintended these may be (Mahmood 2005: 8, emphasis in the original).

This reductionism produces an eviscerated notion of agency which ignores other configurations that women’s agency may take and even excludes social action involving ‘complicity with, accommodation to, or reinforcement of the status quo – sometimes all at the same time’ (Ahearn 2001: 55). For instance, Mahdavi recounts a story about a blogger who discusses hymen reconstructions, which are increasingly popular in bigger cities in Iran, and interprets this case to be one of the ways women have embraced resistance against the regime and its strict sexual code (Mahdavi, P. 2007: 18). However, what she fails to do is to consider the context in which these women are made to undertake these surgical operations. This social context in Iran continues to be very much shaped by the male control of women’s sexuality and men’s (and women’s) conservative or traditional views on women’s purity and sexual passivity prior (or in) marriage. Thus, in studies like Mahdavi’s, women’s agency is seen possible even when it takes place ‘against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles [whether individual or collective]’ (Mahmood 2005: 8). Said differently, agency may develop in a context which structures, regulates and even subjugates the subject, but the subject is, nevertheless, able to operate within and resist these power relations according to her own interests. This reminded me of Abu-Lughod’s question: are we misattributing to women we study

14 For example, in many social circles, including the more liberal middle –and upper classes, men still assume their bride to be virgin (Interview with Sarah, Tehran, April 2010).
forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience – something like a feminist consciousness or feminist politics?’ (Abu-Lughod 1990: 47). As Mahmood wants to connote, there is a need to be careful with the concept of resistance, which seems to ‘impose a teleology of progressive politics on the analytics of power’ and which leaves out many other ways of being that are not considered in the framework that focuses on the subversion of norms and structures (Mahmood 2005: 9).

I am also indebted to the works of Rostami-Povey and Haeri, which have shown how Iranian women’s agency inheres and operates in the public sphere. However, what is present in these works is the tendency to reduce agency to one’s ability to work against structures. Although both scholars have engaged with Islamic feminists, practices of piety continue to be interpreted as means to secure gains other than religious/pious/moral in the political or economic spheres. The slippery slope here is to translate women’s activism and women’s re-interpretations of Islamic texts used in gender activism as always ‘feminist’ and not recognising piety as a form of agency in and of itself. As Avishai has argued, when religion enters feminist analyses, women’s adherence to or employment of religion is often interpreted as women’s strategic use of religion to meet ‘extra-religious ends such as economic opportunities, domestic relations and political ideologies and cultural affiliation,’ which in turn, locates women’s agency ‘in the strategic use and navigation of religious traditions and practices to meet the demands of contemporary life’ (Avishai 2008: 411). However, scholars like Mahmood and Hollywood are pushing questions about women’s feminist inclinations aside and are focusing on explicating how the women in their works are enacting their piousness in their contemporary lives either in modern Egypt (Mahmood) or the Middle Ages (Hollywood) and not how these religious practices could be qualified as feminist (see Hollywood 2004; Mahmood 2005).

From the brief discussion above it becomes clear that the question of pious or moral agency has been an issue within Iranian feminist studies. Thus, pious women’s activism and their re-interpretations of Islamic texts used in gender activism are often translated into feminist politics and piouness is not recognised as a form of agency in and of itself but as a strategic use of theological language to mask women’s own agency (Hollywood 2004: 516). In short, in this type of analysis questions of piety
and religion that may have shaped and driven women’s choices are often ignored. By ignoring questions of piety, morality or religiousness and ‘translating’ women’s actions into a more comprehensible secular/rational choice language that resonates with the researcher and his/her audience, I think we are leaving at least some women’s real motivations behind. I am not denying that, for instance, the state-imposed veiling is an issue to many women in Iran nor I am not denying that there have been several cases in which wearing badhejab has carried messages of political resistance (the most recent example could be the Green Movement demonstrations where women wore green veils to show their support to the presidential candidates Mousavi and Karroubi). However, I suggest that there is a need to question our urge to turn everyone into a ‘rational-choice-orientated dissident’ and interrogate different understandings of agency, autonomy and see beyond the resistance paradigm and see that there are ‘ends other than those of emancipation’ (Hollywood 2004: 528).

4.0 Poststructuralist challenge

Within feminists, poststructuralists have questioned and dismantled the humanist notion of morally and politically autonomous subject that has dominated feminist projects. As Glegg has noted, this deconstruction of the humanist subject took place historically with the emergence of new political subjects that organised movements around gender, sexual identity, race and other oppressions (Glegg 2006: 313). Part of the deconstruction project is to call in question the validity of researchers’ hegemonic explanatory and descriptive categories that may not resonate with the ‘nonhegemonic’ subject studied. Said differently, scholars have recognised the need to hear the ‘othered’ subject’s voice and validate subjects’ experiences with concepts and categories that are meaningful to subjects themselves. But first and foremost poststructuralists have set out to dismantle the rational, self-authorising, morally autonomous and free-willed agent and have instead argued that ‘human subjectivity is constructed by ideology (Althusser), language (Lacan), or discourse (Foucault), [thus] any action performed by that subject must also be to some extent a consequence of those things’ (Ashcroft et al 2000: 8). Hence, the individual becomes part of a larger discursive structure – which may be political, religious, social or philosophical – that is constructive in subject formation.
Poststructuralist feminist view of the subject has been criticised for undermining feminist politics and projects and for almost denying or dismantling the feminist agency (see for instance Moghissi 1999a). Critics contend that poststructuralists have made it almost inconceivable that ‘anyone could criticize, resist, or act to change their society’ (Fraser 1995: 66). However, as Butler responds,

‘We may be tempted to think that to assume the subject in advance is necessary in order to safeguard the agency of the subject. But to claim that the subject is constituted is not to claim that it is determined: on the contrary, the constituted character of the subject is the very precondition of its agency’ (Butler 1995: 46).

Most pertinent for my purposes in this thesis is the way in which poststructuralism opens up a venue that will challenge one to rethink agency as pre-fixed and locked in progressive politics. The poststructuralist approach pushes one to explicate the structures and norms through which particular subjects are enacted and which, in turn, elicits different forms of modalities.

4.1 Talking back?

As has already been sketched above, Mahmood’s work on the Egyptian urban women’s piety movement has offered an alternative way to explicate women’s moral-ethical agencies and subjectivities within a conservative tradition (Mahmood 2001; 2005a). In her Politics of Piety Mahmood develops her theory of embodied agency with the help of women who participate in Egyptian mosque movements. These women are actively involved in groups that teach and debate about Islam and its teachings and Mahmood shows how these women practice religion, aspire to its teachings and by extension affect their society and political environment around them. Mahmood’s work on the women’s piety movement could be read as a case of women’s feminist intervention in a male dominated institution because women’s presence placed them in conflict with several structures of authority; however, Mahmood insists that her ethnographic account of the movement has pointed to the limitations of liberal feminist theories that have proved inadequate when applied to women whose conceptions of self are formed by non-liberal traditions (Mahmood 2005: 15). Thus, Mahmood’s ethnography of the mosque movement is also a critique of the epistemological conditions under which Muslim women have been studied in the past (see Bautista 2008). Following this, Mahmood’s work builds on
poststructural feminist studies but also departs from it and challenges us to rethink the concept of agency itself and uncouple it from progressive politics.

For Mahmood, this coupling of agency with resistance is problematic. She argues that if the ability to change the world is dependent on historical and cultural context, then the meaning of agency should not be fixed in advance. For instance, what may be described as passivity and docility by progressive feminists could actually be a form of agency by which specific discourses and structures have enacted. If understood in this way, we can broaden the concept of agency from resistance to *inhabiting* norms (Mahmood 2005a: 14-15, emphasis in the original). Hence, Mahmood is asking us to see that there are more than the two dominant ways to understand agency; i.e. women are repressed by norms/structures or they have found ways to destabilise them. According to Mahmood, norms can be something that subjects aspire to, desire to and even wish to submit to. Further, Mahmood seeks to rethink the concept of individual freedom and asks researchers to adapt their work to varying historical, social and political contexts where the distinction between ‘the subject’s own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be easily presumed, and where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for achieving the subject’s potentiality’ (Mahmood 2005a: 31).

Mahmood also argues for a rejection of feminist theory’s ‘dual character as both an analytical and a politically prescriptive project’ (Mahmood 2005a: 10, emphasis in the original). Thus feminism is offering both the *diagnosis* of women’s situation (subordination and marginalisation) and the *prescription* for altering women’s subordinate status. Mahmood is not suggesting that we should not be critical of practices, traditions or institutions that we regard unjust or oppressive but rather she is implying that we should

\[\text{‘leave open the possibility that our political and analytical certainties might be transformed in the process of exploring nonliberal movements of the kind I studied, that the lives of the women with whom I worked might have something to teach us’ (Mahmood 2005a: 39).}\]^{15}

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^{15} Several feminists have questioned the feminist value of Mahmood’s work; see for example more recent criticism Sindre Bangstad (2011). ‘Saba Mahmood and Anthropological Feminism After Virtue’, *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 28 (3): 28-54; Lene Sjørup and Hida Rømer Christensen (Eds.), ‘Pieties and Gender’ (Leiden, Brill, 2009)
Thus, instead of making particular political judgements about women participating in conservative traditions or movements, we should understand that there is a need to move beyond our own experiences and standpoints so that we can learn something new and meaningful.

4.2 Butlerian non-liberatory subject

Mahmood builds her work on Butler’s theorisation about agency, which has widened debates about agency within poststructuralist feminist circles (see for criticism Bordo 2003 (1993); Benhabib et al. 1995; and Fraser’s (1995) examination of Butler and Benhabib’s differences). Butler has developed her theory on Foucault’s works on power and subjectivication and on the Lacanian tradition in psychoanalysis. Foucault’s understanding of power as repressive and productive at the same time and the creation of agentive self through power relations, which in themselves not only enable the subject’s subordination but also enact the subject to self-authorise herself have formed the basis for Butler’s, and later Mahmood’s, theorisation (Foucault 1980; Butler 1989; Mahmood 2001; 2005). As Mahmood explains, the Foucauldian understanding of power and subject formation broadens our horizons as it ‘encourages us to conceptualise agency not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination, but as capacity for action that specific relations of subordination create and enable’ (Mahmood 2005: 18, emphasis in the original).

Butler’s argument proceeds from the Foucauldian subject formation, when she contends that the concept of agency that draws on an ‘epistemological account of identity’ should be shifted to one that locates the problematic within practices of signification (Butler 2003: 49). Butler challenges the feminist scholarship to reassess how independent we are from social norms as, according to her, our agencies are formed and enacted by them:

> Even within the theories that maintain a highly qualified or situated subject, the subject still encounters its discursively constituted environment in an oppositional epistemological frame. The culturally enmired subject negotiates its constructions, even when those constructions are the very predicates of its own identity (Butler 2003: 48)

Once Butler has located agency ‘within the meaning making process, within the possibility of variation in signification’, the question that she asks is ‘how
signification and resignification work?’ (Butler 2006: 197). Butler draws on Derrida when she replies to herself by arguing that subjects are produced and interpolated through language but for her, the subject is also constantly performative through a reiterated enactment of regulatory norms (1997a: 51).

For Butler, performativity is an intrinsic element of her theory of subject formation and as she writes:

The performative is not a singular act used by an already established subject, but one of the powerful and insidious ways in which subjects are called into social being from diffuse social quarters, inaugurated into sociality by a variety of diffuse and powerful interpellations. In this sense the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject formation, but of the ongoing political contestation and reformulation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice: it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and reformulated (Butler 1997a: 160).

Moreover, for Butler performativity ‘consists in a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’’ (Butler 1993b: 234). However, the criticism that Butler has received from her emphasis on linguistics made her address the materiality of the body (Butler 1993a: ix-x). Butler understands subjects constituted not only through speech acts but also through the subject’s bodily practices (see Butler 2006 (1990); 1993a; 1997a). When Butler moves on to discuss the materiality of the body, she draws on and critiques Bourdieu’s notion of habitus16 (Butler 1997a, see chapter 4, emphasis in the original). Butler contends that habitus is something that emerges over time (thus it is formed) and its formation sustains and enacts the subject herself and her belief in a given reality (thus it is also formative) (Butler 1997a: 152, 155). As Butler explains; ‘bodily habitus constitutes a tacit form of performativity, a citational chain lived and believed at the level of body’ (Butler 1997a: 155). Thus for Butler, for example ‘the materiality of sex is constructed through a ritualized repetition of norms’ (Butler 1993a: x).

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16 In very basic terms, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus refers to corporal dispositions and cognitive templates that together create a society’s social structure (e.g. values, norms, language, etc.), which however, is dependent on the collective history, which means that habitus is tied to time and place (see Anthony King (2000) ‘Thinking with Bourdieu Against Bourdieu: A ‘Practical’ Critique of the Habitus’, Sociological Theory, Vol. 18 (3): 417-433
With the help of psychoanalysis, Butler further explains subject formation by employing two concepts from Lacan, namely “foreclosure” and “abjection” (Butler 1993: 3). Butler contends that the subject is formed through ‘the simultaneous production of a domain of abject beings […] who form the constitutive outside to the domain of the subject’ (Butler 1993: 3). Thus, the subject repudiates and excludes certain identifications but which are, at the same time, constitutive and required for the subject’s self-hood and subject making. For Butler, foreclosure does not happen only once but needs to be repeated ‘to reconcile its power and efficacy […] and that what is reinvoked by its continued action is precisely that primary scene in which the formation of the subject is tied to the circumscribed production of the unspeakable’ (Butler 1997: 139).

Mahmood’s own work is indebted to Butler’s critique of the humanist conception of agency and subjectivity. Most importantly for Mahmood, is Butler’s departure from the ‘emancipatory model of agency’ that continues to dominate feminist politics and which Mahmood herself wishes to dehegemonise. For Butler, agency is located within power relations; as she explains: agency ‘cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility’ (Butler 2006: xxv). However, Butler also introduces temporality to the thinking of social formations of which agency is one (Butler 1997b: 13), as she clarifies:

‘No social formation can endure without becoming reinstated, and that very reinstatement puts the “structure” in question at risk, [this] suggest[s] that the possibility of its own undoing is at once the condition of possibility of structure itself’ (Butler 1997b: 14).

In other words, Butler uses performativity also in her conception of agency and argues that all social formation, including agency, are results of iteration of norms, however, these reiterated enactments of norms are fragile in ‘the very operation of their iterability’ and are hence open to their own collapse (Butler 1997b: 14). As Allen has explained: ‘[T]he very fact that it is necessary for norms to be reiterated or cited by individuals in order for them to maintain their efficacy indicates that we are never completely determined by them. […] If we were completely determined by gender norms, there would be no need for us to continually cite and reiterate them; that we are continually compelled to do so gives us good reason for thinking that we
are not so determined’ (Allen 1998: 462). Butler clarifies her position in the following quote on the forming of sex:

Construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms; sex is both produced and destabilized in the course of this reiteration. As a sedimented effect of a reiterative or ritual practice, sex acquires its naturalized effect, and, yet, it is also by virtue of this reiteration that gaps and fissures are opened up as constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm […]. This instability is the deconstituting possibility in the very process of repetition, the power that undoes the very effects by which ‘sex’ is stabilized, the possibility to put the consolidation of the norms of ‘sex’ into a potentially productive crisis (Butler 2011: xviii).

This is where Mahmood decides to depart from Butler, however, mainly because Butler’s work should be understood in its ‘performatative dimension’ specifically aimed at dismantling the ‘instruments of regulatory categories’ of gender and sexuality (Mahmood 2005: 21; Butler 2006b). One key problem in Butler’s work for Mahmood is Butler’s development of agency in context in which the emphasis is on the resignification and subversion of norms (Mahmood 2005: 21). As Mahmood explains:

‘[E]ven though Butler insists time and again that all acts of subversion are a product of the terms of violence that they seek to oppose, her analysis of agency often privileges those moments that “open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating terms”’ [Butler 1993: 122]’ (Mahmood 2005: 21).

Mahmood finds Butler’s analysis of power problematic because it remains locked in a framework in which ‘norms suppress and/or are subverted, are reiterated and/or resignified’ and as such the analysis of subject formation does not stretch beyond the registers of suppression and subversion and thus continues the resistance approach in feminist studies. Mahmood exemplifies her point by referring to Butler’s discussion of drag queens (see Butler 1993b) and how drag queens’ successful parodisation of heterosexual norms reveals the vulnerability of those imitated heterosexual norms. However, when the mosque participants in Mahmood’s study succeed in cultivating and practicing the norms/virtues – like modesty – in the required manner, their success in realising the ideal leads actually to strengthen the structure and not the opposite (see Mahmood 2005a: 164, and for more comprehensive elaboration chapter 5).
Mahmood wishes to depart from the proclivity of ‘suppressing/subverting norms’ to explore how norms are inhabited, aspired to and consummated (Mahmood 2005a: 23). This requires, Mahmood argues, that one takes seriously Butler’s argument about norms being both constraining and constituting elements of one’s subjectivity. This, in turn, pushes one to examine the relationship between ‘the immanent form a normative act takes, the model of subjectivity it presupposes and the kinds of authority upon which such an act relies’ (Mahmood 2005a: 23).

Another juncture where Mahmood wishes to modify her theory from Butler’s is the emphasis that Mahmood puts on corporeality. Mahmood does not disagree with Butler’s understanding of how subjects are produced and interpolated through language but for Mahmood’s purposes it is inadequate. The emphasis on linguistics does not, at least not for Mahmood, help one to understand that the body is not simply a sign of the self but also a means to its formation (Mahmood 2005a: 166). Said differently, whereas the women involved in Mahmood’s study employ their bodies to enact the self and moreover to cultivate and develop more virtuoso selves, for Butler the body is a sign of what language has authorised. For instance, in her discussion of female modesty and veiling Mahmood demonstrates how veiling is not merely assigning one’s Islamic identity but rather a necessary component of this particular virtue as it not only assists women to express their modesty but also to acquire and embody modesty.

Lastly, Mahmood’s understanding of the body as a medium for realising the self raises questions about how norms might be subverted if the body is at the center of analysis. In the case of Mahmood’s study, women’s observance and subversion of norms are both dependent on the body, meaning that the body has to be taught to both observe and/or resist norms. Whereas for Butler, the destabilisation of norms/structures lies in the reiterative nature of these norms, for Mahmood the simple act of resignifying of norms is not enough to reform the meaning of a tradition/practise/norm like veiling. In Mahmood’s argument, to change or reform a norm, one has to take into account how the subject has embodied the norm and how the norm is also constitutive of the self.
4.4 Moral-ethical subject formation

Mahmood explores Foucauldian ‘positive conception of ethics’ – drawing on the Aristotelian tradition of ethics and in contrast to the Kantian tradition – which enables us to think of ethics as ‘always local and particular, pertaining to a specific set of procedures, techniques, and discourses through which highly specific ethical-moral subjects come to be formed’ (Mahmood 2005a: 28). This Foucauldian approach to ethics allows one to understand agency in terms of an individual’s capacities and skills that are required to transform the subject to a particular being within a particular moral discourse. As noted above, an important dimension of Mahmood’s argument is Foucault’s view on the subject, which is not voluntaristic or autonomous, but is rather formed within historically and culturally specific disciplines – what Foucault characterises as “modes of subjectivication”’ (Mahmood 2005: 28). For Foucault, subjectivity is enacted by power that ‘applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize’ (Foucault 1982: 781). Thus, subjectivity in the Foucauldian terms is not, as Mahmood points out, ‘a private space of self-cultivation’ but as an affect of power that constitutes the individual. For Mahmood’s purpose – which is to look at agency in terms of the capacities and skills needed to embark upon moral actions – Foucault’s concept of ‘moral subjectivication’ is useful. Foucault’s ‘moral subjectivication’ denotes the models available ‘for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations that one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object (Foucault quoted in Mahmood 2005: 28).

For Foucault, these practices that the subject performs to meet the object of his moral code are essentially a way to the subject’s self-formation (Bernauer and Mahon 2005: 151). These practices or activities that subjects undertake in order to recognise themselves as ethical subjects involve both corporeal and mental exercises (Mahmood 2005: 29). As Foucault explains: ethical subject formation is the process ‘in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon
himself, to monitor, to test, improve and transform himself” (Foucault quoted in Bernauer and Mahon 2005: 152-153).

The Butlerian-Foucauldian framework that Mahmood develops in order to revisit the normative agency and subjectivity in feminist studies is an important step for feminist studies. The challenge not to think agency as something pre-fixed on the submission/subversion model pushes us to explore different modalities and how agencies are grounded in norms. Further, when we disengage agency and subjectivity from the liberatory-model we are pushed to interrogate them in their own particular context. In this way, we may notice that the capacity to shape and effect world does not take place only through resistance against norms/structures but by living, desiring and aspiring to norms. Mahmood has been criticised for ‘othering’ Muslim women with her account of agency and even endorsing patriarchal traditions. However, Mahmood does not refrain from criticising patriarchal traditions that are harmful for women; but she argues against fixing definitions in advance. I would contend that she has challenged feminists to rethink their positions to the subjects they study, and moreover, the theoretical assumptions about human nature, agency and subjectivity that underlie their works. Mahmood’s re-opening of the concept of agency allows one to explicate how women’s specific lives, experiences and locations would not be validated if we stayed locked in the resistance-subversion framework, as she explains:

[M]y suggestion is that we leave open the possibility that our political and analytical certainties might be transformed in the process of exploring nonliberal movements […] that the lives of the women with whom I worked might have something to teach us beyond what we can learn from the circumscribed social-scientific exercise of “understanding and translation” (Mahmood 2005: 39).

5.0 Piety going public: from individual to public piety and gender activism

5.1 Individual piousness

The above framework that Mahmood proposes to complicate the study of pious women activists is helpful in many aspects. The women who were involved in my study practiced religion very much like the women in Mahmood’s work. Many of the women involved in my study found that their personal faith was the source of their agency and selfhood. My interlocutors consumed religious rituals, such as prayer and veiling, to perform their individual piousness and build their moral-ethical agency in
the private sphere. They recognised their moral obligations through their relationship to God and reading the words of God. Moreover, cultivating their faith and the bodily functions of religion (such as the already mentioned veiling) were a means to reform their individual habits, desires, actions and interests until these would meet the requirements set by God. As Zahra, a teacher, explained: ‘I’m a believer and I wouldn’t be me without my religion. I practice and implement the teachings that God has given us, this is what constitutes me.’ (Zahra, Tehran, April 2010)

Many of the women emphasised that their actions, both in the private and the public, followed Islamic teachings of what is just and right. The women argued for the sanctity of the Sharia and the Quran that for them embody the justice and righteousness of their religion. These two sources formed the basis for women’s quest for equality and for their critique of the fegh that in their opinion is the source of unequal gender relations in contemporary Iranian society. However, I need to point out that many of the women did not only refer to Islam when they determined what was right or just. Personal experiences in their material environment played a central role in determining what women considered being right or just; for instance, the current socio-economic situation and how it affects gender relations in society characterised many of the conversations I had with women. This mixing implies, I suggest, that women followed not only the truth laid out by God but also their own individual moral guidelines that may have been influenced by women’s individual experiences and locations (for instance her socio-economic location) in society.

While Iranian women’s individual pious agency is something that should be explored in more detail (see for exceptions: Bucar 2010; Osanloo 2009; Torab 1996; 2007,), my fieldwork and the women who I met during the fieldwork pushed me to explore women’s public piousness. My fieldwork results suggested that women’s gender activism in the public sphere was a constitutive element of their piousness.

17 Many of them also wanted to note that they would be performing their religious duties even if there were no Islamic Republic.
5.2 Piety going public

Although Mahmood’s work has been influential for my discussion and understanding of women’s agency, I have moved my analysis from the individual to the public and I explicate how for the women I encountered religiosity and piety were public practices. Yet, as already noted, we should not forget that private piousness was central to my interlocutors’ formation of moral selves; however, as my argument goes, we need to recognise that these women’s activism in the public sphere constituted an expression of and a way of cultivating their piety as well. As one of my interviewees Maryam, a NGO teacher, explained:

‘My faith is what makes me the person I’m today and it’s the most important thing in my life. But why do I participate [in activism]? Because my duty as a good Muslim is to improve my society, I need to help people around me, I can improve their lives and futures and that’s what God teaches us too’ (Maryam, Tehran, March 2010).

Several scholars have argued that we need to problematise the relationship between secularism/religiosity and public/private. These scholars have argued that the almost taken for granted notion of secular public sphere needs to be revisited and they have pointed to the role that religious institutions have played in the development of public spheres (Asad 1993; 1999; Bracke 2008; Braidotti 2008; van der Veer 1999; 2001). I have found Hirschkind’s work useful for the discussion. Hirschkind has argued for the role of moral discourses in creating the public sphere and shaping processes, values and ideals within it (Hirschkind 2001). Hirschkind’s work on Islamic publics sheds light on how cultivation of Islamic virtues by the al-da’wa movement in contemporary Egypt has created the ethical conditions for a domain of public deliberation and argumentation that can be seen as an attempt to establish the conditions for the practice of a particular kind of politics. As Hirschkind explains: ‘Indeed, insomuch as the moral discourse that constitutes this domain is directed at the remaking of the practices and institutions of collective life in Egypt, it is fundamentally political’ (Hirschkind 2001: 5). One of the central points Hirschkind wishes to make is to push us recognise religious movements in the public sphere as more complicated than simply as renditions ‘of the normative structure of the public sphere’ (Hirschkind 2001: 26). If we fail to do this, Hirschkind argues, we may also fail to recognise the reformative capacity of political traditions other than liberal democracy:
'To focus solely on the process through which the concepts and modular institutions of modern liberal democracy have been inflected by non-Western traditions is to fail to explore the often parallel projects of renewal and reform launched from within the conceptual and practical horizons of those traditions’ (Hirschkind 2001: 27).

In my view Hirschkind’s argument explains not only the narrowness of our concepts of the public/private but it points to the paradox of modernity/tradition binary that limits our understanding of social and political change; we are leaving out movements and agendas that are not possible to analyse within such a narrow conceptualisation. By widening our conceptualisation of the public/private sphere distinction and challenging our view on what belongs to private and what to public sphere we are able to investigate forms of activism that have not traditionally been considered as having political effect.

I have found Braidotti’s conceptualisation of agency helpful to address pious women’s public moral agency and subjectivity. Braidotti draws on Butlerian subject formation like Mahmood but also on a feminist tradition that has addressed the ethical and religious dimension of women’s lives. Following the ideas of Luce Irigaray, Elizabeth Schussler and Audre Lorde, Braidotti challenges secular-liberal feminists by arguing that ‘agency, or political subjectivity, can actually be conveyed through and supported by religious piety, and may even involve significant amounts of spirituality’ (Braidotti 2008: 2). However, Braidotti’s main challenge to liberal feminist scholarship is when she contends that ‘political agency need not be critical in the negative sense of oppositional and thus may not be aimed solely or primarily at the production of countersubjectivities’ (Braidotti 2008: 2). In converse, Braidotti’s analysis of agency allows one to explore subject’s daily practices and their dialogs and negotiations with dominant norms and she re-conceptualises political agency and subjectivity in terms ‘of multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions in and on the world’ (Braidotti 2008: 16, 19).

Lastly, I would like to include Braidotti’s concept ‘affirmative ethics’ in my discussion of public piety. I also want to include an anecdote from my fieldwork here. Many of the women who I interviewed were frustrated with secular women’s
dismissive attitude towards religious women and their activism. I have included Zahra’s comment here:

‘I don’t understand why it is so difficult to understand that although I’m religious I can also be modern and progressive. Some think that being religious and modern are two different things, why? My passion is to improve women’s lives and that’s what I’m doing, despite the fact that I’m religious.’ (Zahra, Tehran, April 2010).

Braidotti’s notion of ‘affirmative ethics’ seeks to affirm otherness instead of emphasising sameness. The idea of the ethical approach is ‘to increase one’s ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others’ and thus create affirmative alternatives (Braidotti 2008: 16). Conditions for political agency in this formulation are ‘not tied to the present by negation; instead they are affirmative and geared to creating possible futures’ (Braidotti 2008: 16). Thus, instead of being biased against alternative agendas, worldviews and subjectivities, we may want to explore and affirm the possibilities that this otherness could create and offer. Consequently, otherness is not seen as an-already-failed platform for co-operation but as a means for opening up possibilities and avenues that were not visible before.

With the help of Mahmood, Hirschkind and Braidotti, one can explicate and understand pious women activists and their experiences without divorcing them from their own specific context. Even more importantly, by including the public in the analysis, it is possible to see a wider picture of their piousness. Rather than invalidating their activism, experiencing and worldviews when they are being analysed within the binaries of subversion vs. submission and public/private one can now attend to women’s alternative ways of conducting their work and in addition appreciate their maybe differing views on social –and political order and change.

5.3 Public piety as a religious duty

As already noted, for the women who were involved in my research, piety was not confined solely to the individual/private but it was practiced and expressed also in the public sphere. More specifically, their moral agency was enacted and realised through their public activism aimed at reforming gender relations in Iranian society, which they saw as patriarchal deformations of true Islam. For them their private moral self is not disconnected from the public moral self but it are closely connected and they
reinforce and complete each other. Public virtues that women regarded as something to be encouraged and aspired to included among other qualities a good sense of justice and righteousness, civility, education, communal spirit and courage to act against injustices. Practicing and cultivating these virtues was essential for activists not only at the individual level but also at the public level when they wanted to establish their credibility among the people they worked with.

If we go back to the quote from Maryam, we can see how she conceptualised her activism as a religious duty: ‘[B]ecause my duty as a good Muslim is to improve my society, I need to help people around me, I can improve their lives and futures and that’s what God teaches us too’ (Maryam, Tehran, March 2010). In her work on Shi’a women’s movement activists in Lebanon, Deeb noticed how gender activism had developed itself into a new religious norm among women activists (Deeb 2009). Deeb observed how women’s entry to the public sphere has emerged as a new social norm for pious women. The women in her study had institutionalised forms of public activism, such as volunteering, as a social norm and over time incorporated it into their normative moral system (Deeb 2005). Similar development was taking place among the women who I encountered in Tehran.

Through their activism, these women were seeking to mobilise other women to participate in the public sphere and even in politics and spread gender awareness among both women and men that would eventually incite legal, societal and political change at large. How women pursued gender activism varied. For some women gender activism was embedded into their everyday lives and in their interaction with other people, for others it built on their participation in NGOs, community work, and so on. For instance, Nassim, the director of her own NGO mentioned in the introduction, gender activism was not confined to her community work through her NGO but also demonstrated itself in her interaction with her daughter who she had tried to raise to gender awareness. For Nassim, her daughter negotiating the terms of her marriage and demanding equal pay at work were the most important achievements of her gender activism.

While the central goal of these women was the promotion of a more true and egalitarian reading of gender relations and legal reforms, the women articulated
several other goals. One of these was the already mentioned demand for *just* and *right* socio-economic justice in society. My interlocutors had a strong sense of economic justice providing women (and men) with an equal access to labour market which, in turn, would grant people more equal opportunities in life, including better education, a possibility to marry and set up a family, buy a house/apartment, to name a few. Another objective that these women had was articulated, if not against, then towards the elite women and their discourse of women’s rights. Many of the women who I interviewed had grown uncomfortable with the elite classes’ women’s campaigns and the model of womanhood and societal change that they offered to Iranian women. The secularity that dominates the elite classes’ understanding of women’s rights was one of the problems that my interlocutors often voiced and they linked it (again) to the growing social and economic inequality in Iranian society. Secularity was often seen to materialise in individualism, self-interest and disconnectedness from ordinary women’s problems. Although the women found that there were several bridges to be crossed before they could find common ground with secular women, as Braidotti has argued about ‘affirmative ethics’, many of the women who I talked to, sought for engagement with the more secular women’s movement wing and saw both sides’ ‘otherness’ as a resource or strength for gender advocacy. A related theme that emerged in the discussions was the meaning of progress/modernity. Women involved in my research wanted to demonstrate that, contrary to the ideas of many elite class women, pious women are modern, progressive, politically enlightened, educated and gender conscious. As Zahra’s quote above indicates, the women who took part in my study, saw that Islam is modern and not something that needs be modernised or changed to meet certain standards set from outside. This is not to argue that Islam is frozen in time or ahistorical but that Islam is similar to any social construct such as the West or Christianity. This can be seen as these women will to engage with the global discourse of victimised, passive and traditional Muslim woman who they could not identify with. Many of my interlocutors found that their work in gender activism was a proof that Iranians and Muslims are modern, civil and progressive and should thus be respected and heard at the global arena (see for similar findings Deeb 2009). Thus, gender advocacy for pious women was also about engaging in debates about modernity and how they relate to it in contemporary Iranian society.
6.0 Conclusion

In this chapter I touched on the issue of agency in feminist studies, and in particular in the case of Iranian women, and I proposed that there are both theoretical and empirical reasons why we should leave the old subordination and submission model behind and explore alternative formations of agency. I argued that the agencies and subjectivities of pious women activists in Iran have been partly ignored by the previous scholarship on the Iranian women’s movement. I proposed that with the help of the post-structuralist feminist critique of the autonomous liberal humanist subject, it is possible to engage with the worldviews, experiences and activism of pious women’s activists. I have drawn heavily on Mahmood’s theory of the embodied agency but I also shifted my analysis from the private to the public. To this shift, the theoretical openings of Braidotti and Hirshckind about ethical political subjectivities and moral publics were helpful.

In order to understand why pious women have largely been overwritten in the current scholarship, I briefly examined how agency has been theorised by Weber and Durkheim and how liberal-humanist conceptualisations of agency were developed later on. I noted that the inclusion of women to the theorisation of agency took place at much later stage and I also noted that in particular liberal feminists rely heavily on the liberal-humanist concept of agency as autonomous, free-willed and emancipatory orientated.

I examined the works of Pardis Mahdavi, Elaheh Rostami-Povey and Shahla Haeri, all of which have been influential for my own work and thinking of agency. I am greatly indebted to all of these scholars but I also argued that there are some key problems with their accounts of agency. First of all, they all appear to couple women’s agency with progressive politics. Said differently, all women, by virtue of being women, seem to share a desire to free themselves of practices and structures, such as patriarchy or religion, that (supposedly) subordinate women. Secondly, women’s autonomous agency is seen possible even in a context that may regulate and even structure the subject, but the subject is, nevertheless, able to operate within and resist these power relations according to her own interests. Thirdly, I argued that there has been a tendency to ignore women’s religiousness or pious acts even when scholars have engaged with Islamic feminists. Women’s employment of religion or
piety in their public life is not recognised as a form of agency in and of itself but their employment of religion has been seen as a means to secure non-religious gains (e.g. political or economic) while their aim may have been to drive for better and just Islam unclouded by power politics and patriarchal distortions as my interviewees informed me.

My suggestion was that we should also recognise alternative formations of agency, including pious and moral agencies that have been central to women’s understanding of self in the Iranian women’s movement. I proposed that this is possible with the help of Mahmood’s theorisation of moral-ethical agency that divorces women’s agency from progressive politics, which, in turn, allows us to engage with agencies other than resistance. Mahmood’s model allows one to explore alternative agencies that are not prefixed or prevalidated by our own worldviews or political positions. It also enables us to recognise that there are different ways of understanding concepts such as freedom, equality and gender. However, whereas Mahmood’s focus has been on the individual (although she has noted how these women affect change in their environment), I have moved my focus on the public and I suggested that women who were involved in my study constructed their piousness also in the public and their public activism was constitutive of their piousness. I find Braidotti’s ethical political subjectivity helpful to address this shift in my work. Most importantly her interpretation of ethical-political subjectivity and interventions in the public, which she insists do not have to be interpreted as oppositional and negative, were helpful for my work and this will be developed in the coming chapters. With the help of Mahmood and Braidotti, one is able to rethink and appreciate the lives and experiences of women who have found alternative ways to assert equality and whose agencies do not build on secular-liberal conceptions of autonomy and freedom.
CHAPTER 4: THE AXIS OF EVIL: CREATING MONSTERS AND CLEARING WOMEN FROM FORMAL POLITICS IN IRAN, 2002-2004

1.0 Introduction

On 29 January 2002, in his State of the Union Address President Bush opened a new front in the War on Terror. Three countries were included in the so-called ‘Axis of Evil.’ These three countries were Iran, Iraq and North Korea, which were now excluded from ‘us’ and named as threats to the American national security. This policy metaphor came to have far reaching consequences not only to global politics but also to ordinary people in the targeted countries. This chapter discusses how the Bush Administration’s interventionist policies rebutted Iran’s tentative diplomatic gestures aimed at improving relations between the two countries and eventually linked Iran to the War on Terror via the country’s inclusion in the Axis of Evil. The naming of Iran as one of the rogue states, campaigning for regime change, and excluding Iran from global politics hardened Iran’s foreign policy stance towards the US. As a result of the new international political environment, Iranian hardliners who had lost all the elections since the 1997 presidential elections gained more leverage in domestic politics and began to crawl back to the center of political life. The rise of this group resulted in nationalist-militaristic politics that can be seen mirroring the Bush Administration’s hypermasculinist game. By the summer 2005, the hardliners had taken over all the key political institutions including municipal councils, the Majles and the presidential seat.

In the period 2002-2004, the hardliners’ attempt to establish their control over Iran’s body politic and society materialised in the de-liberalisation of the country’s political and social life and in a gradual state-repression. It is argued that, as a result of the Bush Administration’s campaign of regime change in Iran and singling out of women’s movement advocates in the country’s reform project, the hardliners in Iran were able to frame women’s movement advocates as ‘threats to national security’ and as such Iran’s women’s movement advocates were one of the first sectors to feel the hardliners’ backlash. The women’s movement’s repression was gradual. In the period 2002-2004, the crack down targeted women in formal politics, particularly women MPs in the Majles. The clearing of high profile women’s movement supporters from formal politics was a systematic move by the hardliners in their effort to regain
control over the body politic and in determining the types of actors allowed to participate in the public sphere. For the women’s movement the clearing of their supporters from formal politics was detrimental: women’s movement advocates and women’s NGOs were left with no supporters in the higher echelons of the body politic to voice their needs and sponsor women friendly bills in the Majles. This effectively stifled the voices of women’s movement advocates and narrowed the contours of gender debate at the state level. In practice this period witnessed that, for instance, the bills that the Women’s Faction in the Majles had campaigned for never fully materialised or were increasingly blocked by political bodies overseen by the hardliners; the physical space for individual women MPs to endorse their agenda was narrowed by harassing and arresting them and finally, many high profile women’s movement advocates felt that they had no other option than to exit formal politics. As the following chapters will demonstrate, the hardliners’ crack down was later extended to civil society and even ordinary people were targeted.

The first part of the chapter discusses the tentative détente that was taking place in the US-Iran relationship prior to and right after the attacks of 9/11. This section highlights the possible venues where the two countries were taking provisional steps toward re-establishing their diplomatic relationship; however, and as the chapter shows, these provisional steps did not go far enough and eventually materialised in another missed opportunity to improve the countries’ relationship. After this section, the chapter moves on to explicate how the Bush Administration crafted the Iranian regime as another post-9/11 Monster previously incarnated in Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda. This role was strengthened in July 2002, when President Bush quite openly declared that he supported regime change in Iran. This section also highlights how Iranian women’s movement activists were interwoven into the War on Terror narrative. In the July statement, the Bush Administration stated its support to human rights activists, including women’s movement activists, whom the Administration interpreted as working against the current regime in Iran. However, the Administration only managed to given another excuse for the hardliners in Tehran to intensify its crack down on alternative voices. The third part of the chapter discusses Tehran’s response to the Axis of Evil speech and the statement that promoted regime change in Iran. The last section also examines how the Bush Administration’s decision to make Iranian women as symbols of the (possible) new order adversely
affected high profile women’s movement advocates and their work in the politically tense environment where the hardliners were fighting to consolidate their power. Many high profile women’s movement advocates were forced to exit formal politics and this left their protégées, for example the NGO community, not only without a venue to voice their concerns in the higher echelons of the body politic but also without a shield against the state repression that began to target civil society actors for the first time in the 2000s.

2.0 Tentative détente prior and after 9/11

Prior to the election of US President George W Bush, the US and Iran had gone through a short period of détente.\(^1\) The détente had resulted from gestures initiated from both sides and in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks many Iran commentators and scholars both in the US and in Iran saw a real possibility for the two countries to start a constructive engagement. However, small, but by no means unresolvable, incidents began to emerge in the autumn of 2001 that contributed to President Bush’s hasty and unnecessary decision to include Iran in the Axis of Evil.

\(^1\) In 1996 a new debate emerged within the Clinton Administration. As noted in the previous chapter, while the neoconservatives in Washington grew more critical about the Clinton Administration in the mid-1990s and the president was criticised for not recognising American security interests in the Middle East, several people inside the Administration noted how the regional interests in the Middle East were shared by both the US and Iran: both countries shared an interest in ending the continuing conflict in Afghanistan and containing Saddam Hussein. The election of president Khatami in 1997 came to assist the Clinton Administration’s provisional change of heart. The symbol of president Khatami’s first term was his ‘Dialogue of Civilisations’ that guided his effort to end the country’s international isolation. President Khatami’s surprise appearance in a televised CNN interview in 1998, in which he declared his respect for American history, ideology and values while, at the same time, he diplomatically noted the disagreements between the two countries was Iran’s opening line to the Americans (see Khatami 1998). However, it took almost two years for the US to formulate its response. In March 2000, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright articulated the Clinton Administration’s response at the American-Iranian Council where she delivered a Noruz (Iranian New Year) speech. She began by noting how it was the time to start seeing Iran through its current developments instead of viewing it through the lenses of the 1979 hostage crisis. The talk also acknowledged Iran’s pivotal role in the region’s economic and security issues, and most importantly for ordinary Iranians, Albright admitted and apologised for the US involvement in the 1953 coup that had ousted the democratically elected prime minister Mossadeq. She similarly acknowledged and regretted the American support for the repressive Pahlavi regime prior to the 1979 Revolution and for Saddam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq War. Albright officially welcomed president Khatami’s dialogue and expressed the US interest in engaging with Iran but she also noted her country’s own list of grievances and points that would be central to any negotiations to succeed (See Albright 2000).
2.1 Mutual co-operation

In September 2001, some hawkish commentators in Washington tried to link the terrorist attacks to the Iranian regime but the Bush Administration quickly established that the culprit behind the attacks was Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaida harboured by the Taliban in Afghanistan. Both the Iranian government and the media in Iran quickly condemned the attacks. President Khatami was one of the first world leaders to express his condolences to American people and he denounced the use of terrorism: ‘[T]errorism is condemned and the world public should identify its roots and its dimensions and should take fundamental steps to eliminate it’ (Iran Press Service 2001). A few days later Ayatollah Khamenei confirmed Iran’s stance on the attacks by stating that ‘[M]ass killings of human beings are catastrophic acts which are condemned […] wherever they may happen and whoever the perpetrators and the victims may be’ (BBC 2001), and hence, firmly stating that his country is not to be connected to the attacks. Ordinary Iranians were also expressing their sympathy with Americans; among other things people organised candlelight vigils to honour those who lost their lives on 9/11 and the official clergy organised a temporary suspension of the ‘Death to America’ chants at Friday prayers. In Tehran, the political establishment was firmly supervising the views that may somehow jeopardise the country’s position in America’s response to the attacks. Only two days after the attacks an editorial in the leading reformist newspaper Aftab-e Yazd called the media to refrain from ‘irresponsible’ comments that may harm the country’s relationship with the US (Aftab-e Yazd 2001).

Very quickly after the 9/11 attacks, Khatami and the reformist camp realised that the attacks could work as a springboard for the US-Iran détente. If possible, this window of opportunity was even more important for domestic reasons. Firstly, Khatami needed to improve Iran’s economy that was spiralling in deficit. Khatami understood that better relations with the Bush Administration would eventually open the US markets for Iranian trade. Secondly, the reformists who had won the Sixth Majles elections in February 2000 had been delivering much less in formal politics than their supporters had hoped for. Thus, in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the reformists saw foreign policy as a means to break free from the stalemate at home and increase their popularity in the eyes of their supporters (Ansari 2003: 231).
It soon became clear that the US and Iran had a shared interest in ousting both al-Qaeda and the Taliban from Afghanistan. Iran’s political and social issues with Afghanistan drove Iran’s motivation to engage with the Americans. In general, the relationship between Iran and Afghanistan had been tense, especially since 1998 when Iran almost invaded Afghanistan after eight of its diplomats were killed by Taliban forces in Mazar-e Sharif. Further, for Iran, the Taliban’s militant and extremist interpretation of Sunni Islam was located almost on the opposite ideological side from its own Twelver Shi’ism. Hence, Iran had supported the Northern Alliance and its leader Ahmad Massoud for years prior to the 9/11 attacks. Moreover, Iran has, and continues, to host one of the largest Afghan refugee communities. In 2000, there were over 1.4 million registered and an estimated half a million unofficial Afghan refugees in Iran (UNHCR 2013). Both the state and society increasingly viewed them as a considerable economic and social burden and were keen to see the Afghans return home. The shared border with Afghanistan has also contributed to Iran’s serious narcotics problem. Iran has one of the highest populations of heroin and opium addicts in the world, which in turn, has also increased HIV/AIDS transmissions in Iran (UNODC 2012). In addition to the health problems, the organised crime resulting from drug trafficking is a major problem, which Iran has been tackling for a long time. Thus, for Iran, a stable and conflict free Afghanistan would have solved a number of domestic and regional problems.

Therefore, in the aftermath of 9/11, both the Bush Administration and the Iranians found common ground on which cooperation could take place. In public, the Iranian regime emphasised the UN route to solve the Afghanistan question (BBC 2001). However, a series of non-official talks were organised between Iranian and American officials in Geneva after 9/11 (Crist 2012). Secretary of State Colin Powell chose the experienced ambassador Ryan Crocker to lead the talks which officially materialised in Iran’s offer to allow the US to use its airfields and ports during the operation in Afghanistan. Although the Americans turned this down, they accepted the Iranian

19 However, the co-operation between Washington and Tehran did not emerge out of the blue. The United Nations (UN) had coordinated informal meetings throughout the late 1990s up until 2001 and both the US and Iran had participated in these meetings that aimed at mapping out possible ways to start UN peace-making activities in Afghanistan. These talks became known as the ‘Six plus Two’ group including, Iran, China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and the ‘plus Two’ countries, the US and Russia.
offer to provide sanctuary for downed American pilots. The intelligence that the Iranians had about the Taliban, via their close relationship with the Northern Alliance, and which they passed on to the Americans, was also indispensable to their operation (Crist 2012).

The US-Iran cooperation continued at the Bonn conference in December 2001. Iran’s role in the conference was reported to be extremely constructive and instrumental to the conference’s successful results. Among other things, Iran made one of the largest donations to the Afghan government, amounting to $560 million. Thus it was no wonder that in January 2002, the Iranian delegation attending the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan approached the US delegation and suggested the Afghanistan talks could be extended to concern the two countries’ bilateral relations (Crist 2012). The atmosphere being as constructive and positive it had been for the past three to four months, it was rather surprising and disappointing to the Iranians that the Bush Administration did not reply to the inquiry.

2.2 Another missed opportunity

Why did it become another missed opportunity in the US-Iran relations? The January suggestion was not the first of its kind, the Iranian delegation had proposed expanding the talks already earlier in the autumn of 2001 when the Afghanistan talks had progressed well (Crist 2012). At the early stages, the State Department had given at least yellow – if not green – light for expanding the talks and it had prepared a comprehensive package aimed at easing the tension between the two countries (Crist 2012). The key issues that structured the package included the old US demands to Iran: to end the support for the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah; to stop active opposition to the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and to start respecting democratic principles of governance within Iran itself (Katzman 2013). However, it was clear that the Iranians were more than willing to sit down at the same table and discuss issues beyond Afghanistan.

In the course of the Afghanistan talks four issues emerged. The first incident was the Bush Administration’s refusal to allow President Khatami to attend Ground Zero to pay his respect to the 9/11 victims in November 2001 and the rejection of allowing President Khatami to expand his entourage to the UN’s General Assembly, which
would have allowed Iran to start the bilateral talks. The Bush Administration also grew suspicious of al-Qaida members residing inside Iran’s borders and Iran not cooperating in the way the US had hoped for. The third issue that complicated the new relationship was the Karine A incident in January 2002; and finally, the hawkish voices arguing against the old enemy being paraded as a potential partner in the War on Terror were growing louder in Washington.

While President Khatami most likely understood the Bush Administration’s decision of not to allow him to pay his respect at Ground Zero, the other incidents were a little more complicated, but again not unresolvable. In the course of the invasion of Afghanistan, the US suspected that high profile al-Qaida members and their family members, who had fled to westwards, were staying in Iran with the blessing of Iranian officials. Zalmay Khalilzad, President Bush’s special envoy to Afghanistan and a strong opponent of the US-Iran relations’ normalisation, argued that ‘[H]ard-line, unaccountable elements of the Iranian regime facilitated the movement of al-Qaida terrorists – escaping from Afghanistan’ (Khalilzad 2002). Initially Tehran denied this but changed its stance later and admitted that Iran had arrested several al-Qaida members, including Osama bin-Laden’s wife Khairiyah, of whom some were prisoned while some were under house arrest (Jones 2012 / Helsingin Sanomat 2013). The Americans requested Iran to turn them over to the US but the Iranians refused by arguing that the al-Qaida captives were important security assets for the Iranians themselves as they regarded al-Qaida as a threat to their national security (Crist 2012; Jones 2012). Iran’s unwillingness to co-operate in the way that the Americans had hoped for unfortunately allowed the hawkish voices in Washington to grow louder.

The Karine A affair was a more serious blow to the volatile relationship. The Karine A carrying fifty or more tons of arms was captured by the Israelis in early January 2002. The Israeli investigation claimed the cargo had originated from Iran and the final destination for the arms was the Palestinian National Authority. The incident was filled with contradictory information, fuelled by the strong pro-Israel-lobbying against the Palestinian and Iranian authorities and Iranian neglect to counter the accusations (Ansari 2003: 234). However, the Karine A affair worked well for the hawkish elements in the Bush Administration, letting them demonstrate that Iran would never change nor reform itself and it made absolutely no sense to negotiate
with terrorists. As a senior staff member of the Bush Administration commented: ‘[Karine A] was a sign to the president that the Iranians weren’t serious [about cooperation over Afghanistan]’ (NYT 2002).

Moreover, not everyone in Washington had been happy about the new Iran connection. And the above-mentioned incidents played into their hands. The hawks in the Bush Administration – personalities like Deputy Secretary of Defence Paul Wolfowitz, Under Secretary of State John Bolton, Special Assistant to the President Elliot Abrams, Under Secretary for Defence for Policy Douglas Feith, among others – were people who actively and aggressively became involved in the US-Iran talks and who, at the same time, campaigned for anti-Iran policy and even for regime change as early as in the autumn 2001 (see for example Crist 2012; Franklin 2009). Due to this, the more moderate voices in the Administration were pushed to the margins. Thus, the enemy picture of the post-9/11 Monster was growing stronger and stronger and the mounting domestic and international criticism about the handling of the invasion of Afghanistan was pushing the Administration to find ways to convince the American public that the War on Terror was justified. As Ansari writes, ‘what changed in Washington was not the strength of the anti-Iran lobby, but the new receptiveness with which their ideas were received and translated into actions (Ansari 2003: 233-234). At the same time in Tehran, the domestic power politics were kicking in and hampering Khatami’s efforts to engage with Washington. Thus, as in Washington, hard-line elements in Tehran were unwilling to see through the normalisation process in US-Iran relations and remained, as one observer argued, ‘too locked in their own defiance to permit any real evolution in their approach’ to the US (Maloney 2011).

All the incidents and developments recounted above could have been resolved if enough political will had existed. However, in late January 2002, American political will was running thin.

3.0 The Axis of Evil
As argued in the Chapter 2, the production of identities never stops, the process is continuous and it requires the re-production of differences, of external threats, or of the dangerous Other, that ostensibly threaten the Self’s existence. In essence, the Self needs the external difference to exist for otherwise the Self and its raison d’être ceases
(Campbell 1994; 1998). Similarly, central is also the emphasis put on the Other’s threatening deviancy – materialised often in the Other’s different material or ideological being – that allows the Self to discipline the Other. President Bush’s speech on 29 January 2002 can be seen as a continuation of the crafting process of identities and disciplining difference that had began in the aftermath of 9/11. The Axis of Evil not only opened a new front in the War on Terror by singling out three new rogue states, but it also recalled 9/11 memories of contemporary evilness and in this way allowed two opposing entities, ‘us’ and ‘them’, to be consolidated in peoples’ imaginary of the War on Terror.

In the State of the Union Address in January 2002, Bush changed the nature of the War on Terror. While the hunt for Osama bin Laden and ousting of al-Qaida fighters out of Afghanistan were still going on, the main focus of the speech was the introduction of the Axis of Evil, which linked Iran, Iraq and North Korea to the War on Terror. The speech articulated two new targets in the widening of the War on Terror: 1) rogue states harbouring and sponsoring terrorists and 2) weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of rogue states and/or terrorists. The War on Terror was no longer just about 9/11 and getting justice to the White Self, it became about preventing another 9/11 from happening.

Catching Osama bin Laden had proven to be harder than expected and the Administration’s handling of the occupation in Afghanistan was not going as smoothly as it had been visualised in Washington in the autumn of 2001. Growing criticism about the conduct of the War on Terror, both at home and abroad, pushed the Administration to open a new front in it. The search for new Monsters other than al-Qaida functioned as a proof of the Administration’s masculine character and demonstrated that it had not given up the mission to liberate the world of terror. Bush’s remarks a week after the Axis of Evil speech indicate that the Administration had, at least partly, employed the Axis of Evil to demonstrate the American public that the hunt was still on:

There's nothing like looking somebody in the eye and letting them know that when we say we're going to fight terror, we mean it. And there's nothing like people getting a sense of the determination of this government. There's a lot of folks who might have predicted that over time we would grow weary and we'd get tired and we'd kind of get faint of heart (Bush, G.W. 2002b).
Noteworthy in the Axis of Evil speech was the minimal attention given to Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida. The focus of the war shifted from the perpetrators of 9/11 to a number of other actors, dangerous others existing in the margins of global politics and ready to spread evil to the world. Thus, in this re-faming of the War on Terror, the evil was no longer solely incarnated in al-Qaida but in rogue states like Iran and organisations such as Hezbollah and Hamas supported by Iran.\(^20\) Evil was now spread by states like Iran, which (allegedly) developed or owned WMDs and could pass them on terrorist organisations. Bush declared:

> States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. By seeking weapons of mass destruction, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger. They could provide these arms to terrorists, giving them the means to match their hatred. They could attack our allies or attempt to blackmail the United States. In any of these cases, the price of indifference would be catastrophic (Bush, G.W. 2002a).

The binary world of good versus evil that was created by the Administration in the autumn of 2001 was thus now officially extended to encompass Muslim majority countries like Iran: ‘[T]he civilized world’ continues its fight against the ‘thousands of dangerous killers, schooled in the methods of murder, often supported by outlaw regimes […] spread throughout the world like ticking time bombs, set to go off without warning’ (Bush, G.W. 2002a). This only emphasised Bush’s more or less direct message that the Western civilisation was under attack by the Islamic Other, mostly because of the superiority of the former.

Interestingly, no physical proof that would have linked Iran, or any of the Axis of Evil states, to the attacks of 9/11 was being presented.\(^21\) However, in the security imaginary of ordinary people, the introduction of the Axis of Evil established its component countries as equally threatening as al-Qaida and bin Laden to the American Self. The civilising mission of targeting terrorists ‘hiding in caves’ now moved upon the Islamic Republic that needed to be corrected for it to be included in the club of civilised nations. Iran’s special role in the Axis of Evil was pivoted on its historical

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\(^{20}\) This fact was curiously emphasised over al-Qaida in the speech. Moreover, in the Address, both Hezbollah and Hamas were given much more attention than al-Qaida, which seemed to be just a small footnote in the speech.

character as an evil theocracy, its already mentioned support to Hamas and Hezbollah and on its alleged pursuit of WMDs. Bush evaluated Iran’s role in the following way: ‘[I]ran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom’ (Bush, G.W. 2002a). While the US concern about Iran’s possible acquisition of WMDs stems from Iran’s supposed ability to use such weapons against Israel and US troops in the Middle East and from the suspicion that Iran may pass WMDs to terrorist organisations that in turn may use them on American soil or against American allies in the Middle East, the second part of the argument reframed American foreign policy towards Iran. The target of the Bush Administration would also be the Iranian regime and the form of government that allows the ‘unelected few’ to rule over the Iranian people. Thus, the regime was included in the Axis of Evil not only because of the alleged support for terrorism and for acquiring WMDs, but for its despotism, repressive form of government and poor human rights record.

By naming Iran as one of the Axis of Evil countries and demonising its government, the Bush Administration created a springboard for a new aggressive foreign policy approach towards the country. By coding Iran as an official supporter and sponsor of terrorism, which 9/11 had proven to threaten the American Self’s existence and well-being, the Administration laid the basis for justification that would allow them to discipline Iran if needed:

> Our cause is just, and it continues. […] What we have found in Afghanistan confirms that, far from ending there, our war against terror is only beginning. […] [S]o long as nations harbor terrorists, freedom is at risk. […] If we stop now – leaving terror camps intact and terror states unchecked – our sense of security would be false and temporary (Bush, G.W. 2002a).

### 3.1 Promoting regime change

In the summer of 2002, the rhetoric from Washington hardened again. The Bush Administration and the neoconservatives close to it began openly to advocate regime change in Iran. The Administration’s public statements made repeated references to Iran’s regime type and its poor human rights record, which both had justified Iran’s inclusion in the Axis of Evil. The Administration’s campaign for human rights and good governance can also be found in the wider framework of American national security, which was laid out in the autumn of 2002. The first National Security
Strategy (NSS) published in September 2002, presented human rights and political openness as central tools in the Administration’s war ‘between liberty and totalitarianism’ (National Security Strategy 2002). In other words, promoting human rights abroad was seen to work pre-emptively guarantee American national security outside its physical borders.

As already noted above, the Axis of Evil speech had already hinted about this development. Bush asserted that ‘freedom, democracy and human rights are universal values’ and because

America will always stand firm for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity: the rule of law, limits on the power of the state, respect for women, private property, free speech, equal justice and religious tolerance. America will take the side of brave men and women who advocate these values around the world, including the Islamic world, because we have a greater objective than eliminating threats and containing resentment. We seek a just and peaceful world beyond the war on terror (Bush, G.W. 2002a).

The Administration was certain that ultimately, ‘[W]hen given a choice, people [of Iran] will choose freedom, human rights, and democracy (Khalilzad 2002b) and resist the ‘unelected few’ (Bush, G.W. 2002a). According to David Frum, Bush’s speechwriter, who had invented the ‘Axis of Evil’ metaphor, the January 2002 speech was a clear message to Iran:

He [president Bush] sent a message of hope to the people of Iran. He told them that he is serious in condemning their government, that he is not going to be one of those world leaders who tries to do business with and prop up their oppressors, that in fact he sees their oppressors as oppressors. That is a hopeful message to a people who are overwhelming sick of being misruled by these clerical fascists (Frum interviewed by MacIntyre, Frontline, 2002).

Signs of a regime change policy were already seen in the Administration’s interviews and speeches in the spring 2002. For instance, Defence Secretary Rumsfeld argued in April that ‘[I] suspect that during my lifetime we're going to see a change in that situation over there and that the young people and the women and the people who believe in freedom will overthrow that cleric government and it will fall in some way of its own weight’ (Rumsfeld quoted in Middle East Online 2002). Or as the above quoted Frum noted in April 2002,

[A]nd the real question is, how long can this regime survive? When this regime goes, the Iran that will emerge, I think we have good reason to hope that that will be a country that has a strong economic future ahead of it, that
will grow, that will be at peace, that will be more secular and more democratic. That is an ending to a struggle between good and evil. Struggles between good and evil do tend to end with the triumph of good, and what that means is not necessarily even a military struggle. [...] What the president did with his powerful language [in January] was to serve notice on the Iranian regime that limits on its conduct that have not been enforced for 20 years are going to be enforced now. [...] There are going to be real and important consequences [if it continues] to pursue nuclear weapons and the missiles to carry them. So he's giving the Iranians information they need to have (Frum interviewed by MacIntyre, Frontline, 2002).

However, it was Bush’s statement on 12 July 2002, which has been interpreted to mark the official US policy shift that favoured regime change in Tehran (Katzman 2003). The statement was the Administration’s response to the July student demonstrations in Tehran that had been organised to commemorate the third anniversary of the 1999 student protests. Iranian security forces arrested 200 people and whilst most of them were released after singing a written assurance not to participate in similar gatherings again, 52 demonstrators faced trial later in the year. Bush stated that the US will support those ‘people of Iran [who] want the same freedoms, human rights, and opportunities as people around the world’ and warned that the Iranian government ‘should listen to [people’s] hopes.’ He continued by adding that

[I]n the last two Iranian presidential elections and in nearly a dozen parliamentary and local elections, the vast majority of the Iranian people voted for political and economic reform. Yet their voices are not being listened to by the unelected people who are the real rulers of Iran. Uncompromising, destructive policies have persisted, and far too little has changed in the daily lives of the Iranian people. [...] The future of Iran will be decided by the people of Iran. [...] As Iran's people move towards a future defined by greater freedom, greater tolerance, they will have no better friend than the United States of America (Bush, G.W. 2002b).22

The July statement re-defined the Bush Administration’s approach to Iran. Rather than supporting President Khatami and the reformists in the Majles, who could deliver reform within the political system itself, the Bush Administration sought to back up civil society actors, including women’s movement advocates, in a possible regime change in Iran. Later in 2003, Secretary of State Colin Powell confirmed the Administration’s approach to Iran as an effort to speak directly to the Iranian people

22 Voice of America radio station broadcasted the July statement by Zalmay Khalilzad in Farsi.
‘over the heads of their leaders to let them know that [the US] agree[s] with them’ (The Washington Post 2003). Powell further weighted in when he promised that the US keeps ‘showing to the Iranian people that there is a better world out there waiting for [them]’ and ‘why it is in their benefit to demand a better political system from their religious and political leaders’ (CNN 2003). Several members in Congress also called for American efforts to promote civil society in Iran. Two resolutions (S. Res 306 and H. Res 504) were introduced in late July 2002 and called for ‘positive gestures of the United States’ toward ‘the people of Iran, and not political figures whose survival depends upon preservation of the current regime’ (S. Res 306 / U.S Congress 2002). Further, the resolutions stated that the US policy should ‘seek a genuine democratic government in Iran that will restore freedom to the Iranian people, and live in peace and security with the international community (S. Res 306 / U.S Congress 2002a).

Some of the most hawkish elements in the Administration campaigned also outside the Administration. One of the strongest proponents of regime change in Iran included President Bush’s already mentioned envoy for Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, who campaigned also outside his mission. He argued for the US to demonstrate to ordinary Iranians that, on the one hand, Americans are serious about ‘dealing with threats before they manifest themselves’ and, on the other hand, Americans are offering ‘partnership and support’ to civil society in Iran. He further elaborated:

Our policy is not about Khatami or Khameni [sic], reform or hard line; it is about supporting those who want freedom, human rights, democracy, and economic and educational opportunity for themselves and their fellow countrymen and women. President Khatami has been ineffective in challenging the regime and therefore made only marginal gains. The unelected hardliners have consistently been able to checkmate reformists and maintain hard-line rule (Khalilzad 2002b).

The Coalition for Democracy in Iran, established in 2002 to aggressively campaign for regime change in Iran within the framework of the War on Terror and supported by many in the Bush Administration, was also vocal about its agenda. One of its members, Danielle Pletka, argued that diplomatic engagement with the current regime is neither desirable nor realistic:

Any opening from the United States will only lend credibility to that government and forever dash the hopes of a population that, according to reliable polls, despises its own leadership. […] We have seen that engagement
with the current leadership of Iran would not achieve policy change; all it would do is buy an evil regime the time it needs to perfect its nuclear weapons and to build a network of terrorists to deliver them (Pletka 2004).

Later in 2004, the Rand Corporation, a think-tank that carried semi-official influence in the Bush Administration, published a document ‘The Muslim World after 9/11’ in which Iran was singled out as one of the countries that needed America’s special attention. The document stated that ‘[T]he battle for Islam will require the creation of liberal groups to retrieve Islam from the hijackers of religion. […] The initial impulse may require an external catalyst’ (RAND 2004: xxii). A year later the institution published a blueprint for the catalyst (see RAND 2005). The blueprint laid out a detailed plan how to achieve ‘civil and democratic Islam’ – two of the suggestions included the support of secular actors and the encouragement of secular civic institutions and programmes and the use of American media to broaden peoples’ ideas of the world (RAND 2005: 47-48). Later in 2005, to complement RAND’s publications, the Administration published a brochure to aimed at explaining Iran’s human rights situation to ordinary Americans. The document ‘Iran: Voices Struggling to be Heard’ paints a picture of a tyrannical regime which has not only deprived Iranians of their rights and hope for a better future but alienated itself entirely from society and as such enjoys no legitimacy. The brochure also hints that Iranian civil society does not see how democratic change could take place under the current theocratic system (Department of State 2005a).

What emerges from the Bush Administration’s campaign against the Iranian regime is the old Orientalist imaginary of the Orient as backward, uncivilised and inferior. Iran’s adherence to Islam supposedly demonstrates Islam’s incompatibility with Western-capitalist-democratic modernity and justifies and requires the West’s guidance in proper nation building and democratisation (see Ling 2004). By employing the Axis of Evil, the Bush Administration firmly consolidated the dualist world of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and set out to isolate Iran in global politics. With the ‘either you are with us, or you’re with the terrorists’ policy no middle ground was left to build alliances or cooperation with states like Iran. This lack of middle ground silenced moderate voices both in Washington and Tehran.

3.2 Saving Iranian women

Muslim women’s human rights had spread into the Bush Administration’s War on
Terror vocabulary when it had looked for moral justifications for the invasion of Afghanistan. After the Axis of Evil speech, alongside Afghan women, Iranian and Iraqi women’s human rights were continuously employed in the Bush Administration’s statements and interviews. As Hijri has pointed out, the use of women’s rights violations allowed the Administration not only to present ‘the conflict more palatable to its citizens’ but it also effectively let the Administration to avoid the question of the right to invade a sovereign country and overthrow its government (Hijri quoted in Russo 2006: 560). The employment of Muslim women’s human rights discourse also effectively assisted the Administration to build a strategic image and narrative of the enemy in the War on Terror, which, in turn, helped to promote the interventionist foreign policy making in the Middle East. However, and as others have noted in their studies on other countries targeted in the War on Terror, the Administration’s deployment of Muslim women’s rights effectively silenced women’s unique voices both locally and globally and increased violence against women (see among others Abu-Lughod 2002; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Brohi 2008; Rostami-Povey 2007a).

What the Administration emphasised in its approach to ‘saving’ and ‘liberating’ Iranian women was the conventional image of the West as the locus and champion of freedom, superiority and civilisation and of the East as traditionalism, backwardness and subjugation. This imaginary allowed to reinforce the image of the enemy as a dark Monster oppressing his women and, at the same time, the Bush Administration’s right to discipline the Iranian regime was justified. In this way, we were led to understand that Iranian women would not be able to free themselves without the help of an outsider who knows how to advance women’s rights and what these rights should be. The Administration was keen to emphasise how Iranian women were different from their oppressors and thus capable of change.

After the July statement, one of the first public efforts to include Iranian women’s human rights on the Bush Administration’s agenda were the July 2002 Congress resolutions (S. Res 306; H. Res 504) which both stated the U.S concern for ‘the continuous repression of freedoms within Iran and of individual human rights abuses, particularly with regard to women (H. Res 504 / U.S. Congress 2002b, emphasis added). Also Laura Bush, who was one of the public faces for the Muslim women’s
human rights campaign, emphasised this when Iranian women were added on the Administration’s list:

‘For a stable world we must dedicate ourselves to protecting women's rights in all countries. […] Without women the goals of democracy and peace cannot be achieved. Women's rights are human rights and the work of advancing human rights is the responsibility of all humanity’ (Bush, L. 2004b).

In her various speeches on women’s rights, Laura Bush painted a dualistic world of women’s rights. What she continuously repeats in her statements is the American woman, who has been able to assume a position in the public sphere, ‘in business, government, the arts, education and every other field’ (Bush, L. 2004c) and as such she leads a successful life, whereas in the Muslim world ‘where half of the population is left out’ (Bush, L. 2004d), women cannot participate ‘in their country’s civic and political life’ (Bush, L. 2003) and as such they need the external hand to guide them (see Bush, L. 2004a).

President Bush repeated his wife’s argument by noting the need for external help in securing women’s rights in the Muslim world. For instance in March 2004, the President stated ‘[T]he advance of freedom in the Greater Middle East has given new rights and new hopes to women. And America will do its part to continue the spread of liberty’ (Bush, G.W. 2004). In the same speech, President Bush singled out Iran and Iranian women’s rights advocates and declared:

Support for human rights is the cornerstone of American foreign policy. As a matter of national conviction, we believe that every person in every culture is meant by God to live in freedom. As a matter of national interest, we know that the spread of liberty and hope is essential to the defeat of despair and bitterness and terror. The policy of the American government is to stand for the non-negotiable demands of human dignity, the rule of law, the limits on the power of the state, free speech, freedom of worship, equal justice, respect for women, religious and ethnic tolerance, and protections for private property. That is what we believe, and we're not going to change (Bush, G.W. 2004).

The Administration was keen to strengthen the link between the repressive Iranian regime and women’s human rights violations. In May 2003, then National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice campaigned for a regime change in Iran. According to her the US wished to see a regime moving away from ‘pursuing an aggressive agenda based on terrorism and weapons of mass destruction’ and instead the Bush Administration wanted to work with a government which meets the demands of the
Iranian people for ‘a regime which protects the rights of women, which is forward looking and modern’ (AFX 2003). Further, the mixing of Muslim women from Iran, Afghanistan and Iraq in the Administration’s statements crafted an image of one single oppressed Muslim woman, the Feminine Other, which ignored these women’s different histories, different socio-cultural, ethnic and economic locations and religious differences (Sunni/Shia/religious minorities in these countries).

While the Iranian regime’s violations of women’s human rights are well documented, the linking of Iran’s regime and women’s rights violations served strategically the Bush Administration’s efforts to strengthen the image of the Monstrous Other. The presented brutality of the Iranian regime allowed the Administration to construct itself as an authoritative figure that is allowed to police and even discipline the Monster. However, at the same time, Iranian women were assigned the role Victimised Feminine Other who is passive, veiled and unable to voice her needs, aspirations and desires. Similarly, the Administration glossed over certain historical and contemporary facts about women’s rights and the women’s movement in Iran, such as the movement’s long history that can be traced back to the 1905 Constitutional Revolution, women’s participation in the 1979 Revolution and their more recent role in shaping gender-specific legislation in the Majles. Moreover, as Stabile and Kumar have argued, the Bush Administration represented women’s equality in the West as a natural part of ‘Western humanist values’ and ignored centuries of struggle for those rights (Stabile and Kumar 2005: 775).

4.0 Tehran’s response

Had the tentative détente between the US and Iran worked out, Khatami would have been able to secure a more favourable balance of power between the reformist and the hardliners in Iran. Fruitful cooperation over Afghanistan had not led to an enduring détente and the general reaction to the Axis of Evil speech and later to the July statement among the reformists in Tehran was disbelief and disappointment. Europeans shared Iran’s disbelief and called the Bush Administration’s choice of words shortsighted. Several countries voiced their concern that Iran’s efforts in Afghanistan had not been recognised and naming Iran as one of the Axis of Evil countries was undiplomatic. Critical voices recognised the Bush Administration’s hypermasculinist policy-making approach and for example a French editorial called
President Bush ‘a sheriff convinced of his right to regulate the planet and impose punishment as he sees fit’ (The NYT 2002). Ordinary Iranians had a hard time understanding how they could be grouped together with their archenemy Saddam Hussein or with the dictatorship of the North Korea.

For Khatami, the Bush Administration’s rebuttal of his dialogue efforts was frustrating and his initial comments on Bush’s speech reflected this:

[President Bush] spoke arrogantly, humiliatingly, aggressively and in an interfering way […] it is an insult to Iranian nation. […] After September 11th, we felt there was a great opportunity to mobilize the international will to fight terrorism. But unfortunately this opportunity was misused and this abuse is a treason to humanity (AP 2002).

Khatami called for national unity against American interventionism and further declared that Iran’s nation would stand together if the US decided to attack Iran. Khatami’s Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi accused the US of intervening in the country’s internal affairs and added that:

‘We condemn the American accusations and think the world no longer accepts hegemony. We think Mr. Bush would do better by providing proof of his allegations. […] He should know that the repetition of such allegations is not going to help him’ (CNN 2002).

The reformist majority in the Majles, supported by the other factions, published a public statement condemning the Axis of Evil speech:

The expansionist stands taken by the U.S. president originate in the monopolistic view of Washington, which believes it deserves to dominate the world. […] The new stances of the U.S. president added another black page to the error–filled book of American foreign policies. […] The [Iranian] nation will strengthen its iron barriers [against the U.S.] and will not allow [the U.S.] to destroy [Iran’s] independence and freedom. […] Being able to divide the dynamic and active Iranian nation is a mere dream for evil-seekers. The great Iranian nation, which has always been an advocate of peace, security and justice for all nations […] will fire a bullet at foreign enemies, which will deal with it as if it were hundreds of thousands of bullets. […] We, members of the Parliament, unanimously stand by the freedom and independence of Iran and hereby declare that the statement by the U.S. president […] is a threat to world peace and security. It is vital for all freedom–and right-seeking nations to stand against this hostile and unwise action (Tehran Times 2002).

For the reformists, the introduction of the Axis of Evil was a blow to their domestic game for two reasons. Firstly, the reformists, who had failed with their domestic reform and consequently had tried to convince their supporters about Khatami’s capability to deliver in foreign policy, were left with nothing to demonstrate their
ability to continue leading a reform process. Secondly, Khatami had now failed to deliver both at home and abroad and the failures worked as a springboard for the rise of hardliners in Tehran, which in turn, materialised in a worsened situation for the reformists’ efforts to push for reform at the state level.

4.1 Civil society’s response
Civil society activists also condemned the US interference. Ayatollah Yusef Saanei, one of the most influential religious authorities in Iran and a supporter of the reformists, saw the Bush Administration’s Axis of Evil speech and the July statement negatively affecting civil society activism in Iran:

I think a great injustice has been done to the supporters of democracy and freedom and true Islam due to Mr. Bush's speech. And what he said has put more pressure on the best men and women in this country. [...] In brief, if supporters of democracy in Iran had been under pressure [since January], they will be under more stress and pressure tomorrow. And if they were not under pressure, they will be, and Mr. Bush has caused this situation and is responsible for that, unless he corrects his statements and resolves his issues with diplomacy and takes the pressure off the freedom lovers' shoulders [in Iran] (MacIntyre’s interview with Saanei, 2002).

In August 2003, a group of high profile civil society advocates, including women’s movement advocates, published a statement in which they declared both their support for the Islamic Republic and suggested ways to improve the country’s external relations and domestic affairs. They emphasised how the Revolution’s commitment to people’s participation, freedom, human rights, democracy and republicanism needed to be cherished in order to have a strong and unified nation. The statement further stated that

the people of Iran do not need a guardian to dictate their internal affairs, they also do not need an external guardian. The bitter experience that our people have derived from the behavior of great powers [...] has demonstrated that we should never welcome superficial slogans or place the salvation of our nation in the hands of foreign powers (Iranian Cultural and Political Activists 2003).

Shirin Ebadi was one of the women’s movement activists who condemned the July statement. In her Nobel Prize speech in December 2003, she stated:

One has to say to those who have mooted the idea of a clash of civilizations, or prescribed war and military intervention for this region [the Middle East], and resorted to social, cultural, economic and political sluggishness of the South in a bid to justify their actions and opinions, that if you consider international human rights laws, including the nations' right to determine their own destinies, to be universal, and if you believe in the priority and superiority of parliamentary democracy over other political systems, then you cannot
think only of your own security and comfort, selfishly and contemptuously. A quest for new means and ideas to enable the countries of the South, too, to enjoy human rights and democracy, while maintaining their political independence and territorial integrity of their respective countries, must be given top priority. [...] The people of Iran, particularly in the recent years, have shown that they deem participation in public affairs to be their right, and that they want to be masters of their own destiny (Ebadi 2003).

The message from civil society was clear: civil society advocates would not need the US help in their fight for human rights – it would only complicate their position within Iran and endanger not only their safety but the success of their work.23

5.0 Hypermasculine game in Tehrani style

While Khatami and the reformists had faced a growing challenge from the conservatives prior to 2002, the Axis of Evil speech facilitated the hardliners’ takeover of the body politic and society at large. The first targets of the hardliners’ backlash were high profile personalities but as the coming chapter will demonstrate, in the coming years the crack down was extended to the wider civil society.

The hardliners took advantage of the Axis of Evil speech to make their drive for power. They set out to craft aggressive nationalist-militaristic politics that aimed at ending the détente with the US and clear dissident voices from the public sphere. In effect, Bush’s projection of hypermasculine identity and politics invited his counterparts in Tehran to engage in a similar exercise on their own turf. As one Iran

23 While majority of the Iranian diaspora understood the reality in which civil society advocates conduct their work inside Iran, some pro-regime change Iranians in the US endorsed the Bush Administration’s declaration of support for civil society advocates and saw the toughening US stand against Iran having positive effects in Iran. Azar Nafisi, an Iranian author and scholar whose book Reading Lolita was praised by the neoconservative circles in Washington, declared in 2003: ‘[U]nlike what many say, Mr. Bush's statement did not harm the reformists, did not add to the number of people being harassed or going to jail. In fact there were many outspoken statements after his speech, including a Feb. 4 talk by a leading reformist, Abbas Abdi, who claimed that the threat to Iran did not come from any outside force but that the main threat was the fact that almost all social and political institutions in Iran were crumbling, and that people had lost almost all confidence in the state. I can cite many more examples. I can send you the responses that came directly from Iran even after Mr. Bush's statement, via email and phone calls, as well as call-ins to Voice of America and the Iranian radio in L.A., to show how supportive Iranians were, only because of their disenchantment and frustration with the whole regime, hardliner or reformist. The regime as a whole, especially the conservatives, despite their vitriolic rhetoric against the U.S., were genuinely scared, and they have been trying to save face and polish their act’ (Wen Stephenson (2003) ‘Mutual Assured Misunderstanding?: Interview with Azar Nafisi’, Frontline, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/tehran/axis/nafisi.html, retrieved May 29, 2013).
observer writes, the Axis of Evil speech effectively halted the reformist politics:

If conservatives had painstakingly prepared [Khatami’s] coffin, Bush had unwittingly provided [the conservatives] with the final nail. […] There was little doubt that henceforth the perceived threat from the United States would cast a long shadow on the political dynamic within Iran. From now on, proponents of pluralism and reform would be cast as, at the very least, unwitting fifth columnists for a foreign power that was determined to destabilise the regime and at worst dismember the country. In language reminiscent of right-wing rhetoric elsewhere, dissent and criticism were defined as unpatriotic and harmful to the nation (Ansari 2003: 235).

Similarly, according to Shirin Ebadi the extension of the War on Terror to Iran had strengthened fundamentalism not only in Iran but also in the region in general and gave the Iranian regime a new justification ‘to keep people silent.’ She argued that ‘under slogans such as protecting national security or fighting terrorism, there’s always a reason to act against and silence human rights advocates,’ and in essence the War on Terror ‘hurt[s] the democracy process in Iran’ (Ebadi quoted in Slavin 2004).

Thus, the hardliners warmly welcomed Bush’s Axis of Evil speech and later the July statement. The naming of Iran as an official enemy in the War on Terror gave the hardliners maybe the most powerful tool in the internal power struggle against Khatami, to repudiate domestic reforms and block any initiatives for détente between Iran and the US. On the one hand, they were now able to demonstrate that there was absolutely no reason why a closer relationship should be re-established between Tehran and Washington. The ideological opposition to the Great Satan was once again proved to be the right stand to be taken in the country’s foreign policy and it gave them a powerful tool for domestic politics. On the other hand, they were able to intensify their campaign aimed at clearing the political sphere of the reformists.

Soon after the Axis of Evil speech, the hardliners launched a campaign that blackmailed reformists and forced them to withdraw from pursuing any talks with the US.24 An editorial in the ultra-conservative Kayhan newspaper outlined the campaign:

Under the present conditions the real enemy of the people and the revolution is the United States and any kind of dissent in this regard is either the work of American spies or it will end up being in America's interest. If someone does not accept the fact that the Islamic revolution is against the United States, he should not hold any

24 However, it seems that some segments inside the conservatives were secretly trying to pursue negotiations with the Bush Administration in the spring 2002 but these ultimately failed. See Ali Ansari, Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change (London, Chatmam House, 2003)
executive positions. That would be a betrayal of the ideals of our nation, which screams against the United States as the nation's real enemy (Kayhan 2002).

From the spring 2002 onwards, reformist politicians were aggressively attacked by the hardliners and accused of being the enemy’s ‘fifth column’ working towards American ‘aims and goals’ which included the overthrow of the Islamic Republic (Kayhan 2002) and as such they were accused of treason. By June 2002 President Khatami was forced to admit his defeat and reverse his policy of engagement:

> When a great power abuses a nation's feelings in response to the ugliest form of terrorism that happened there, to pursue its particular interests […] and when it addresses another nation in a martial, insulting, degrading and threatening tone, in such a situation, the slightest flexibility, let alone negotiations, signify a lack of attention to the interests and dignity of the Iranian people. I declare and believe that this is the opinion of all the Iranian people and the country's official policy, and in this situation, the slightest flexibility, let alone talks, signify a lack of attention to the interests and dignity of the Iranian people. In fact I am surprised with all the fuss made over a matter that has not yet happened. More or less all those who speak about talks with America are either opposed to them or agree that now is not the time for such talks. Why must we create the impression that this is the time for talks? I follow the political system's overall policies. Let us not do anything that will threaten the country's interests and dignity and the system's overall policies (Hayat-e No 2002).

If effect, the reformists were left with no other option than to join the hardliners’ anti-American rhetoric.

If the hardliners’ first task had been to end the détente with the US, the second task was to oust the reformists from formal politics as conclusively as possible. The Bush Administration’s July statement not only encouraged the hardliners’ repression against the reformists but increasingly also against civil society actors in the NGO community, including women’s movement advocates whom the Bush Administration had singled out. Ayatollah Khamenei responded to the statement in the following way:

> In the propaganda and the remarks by the Americans […] they talk about reform in Iran. Reform is a nice word. In the eyes of the Americans however, reform means the elimination of the Islamic Republic. […] Sometimes one hears that […] such and such opportunity was lost. What opportunity? Surrender before the bullying and greed of a world predator and an arrogant power is no honor (Khamenei quoted in Clawson, 2002).

According to the hardliners, the July statement presented the Iranian civil society clearly as ‘an American project’ (Kayhan’s editorial quoted in World Press 2002).
The clearing of reformists from formal politics was done at four levels: 1) in the Majles reformist orchestrated bills, particularly ‘women-friendly’ bills that may have consolidated the reformists’ popularity, were systematically blocked with the help of the Guardian Council and the judiciary; 2) by employing the state’s security forces, the Revolutionary Guards and the Basji, in systematic campaigns violently targeting and harassing reformists and their high profile supporters; 3) in the coming Majles and presidential elections the Guardian Council’s right to veto candidates was exercised systematically and thousands of reformist candidates were disqualified; and finally 4) at the level of civil society a gradual environment of fear was created through intimidation of civil society actors – effectively allowing the hardliners to demonstrate that the reformists were not only unable to deliver the promised reforms but also unable to protect their supporters. These factors together with the nationalist-militaristic discourse sponsored by the hardliners made the political atmosphere extremely tense in the country. These developments came to reduce both physical and discursive activism spaces for civil society actors and in particular for women’s movement advocates who had been singled out by the Bush Administration in its campaign for regime change in Iran. The following months and years saw as a period of general apathy about possible political and socio-economic change among the reformists and their supporters.

5.1 Repression in the legal sphere and parliamentary politics
Khatami and the reformist dominated Sixth Majles (2000-2004) had envisioned that they could materialise their vision of Iran via their legal work in the Majles. Several bills proposed in the Sixth Majles aimed at reducing the power of the unelected bodies such as that of the Guardian Council, setting the legal framework that would ensure civil society actors freer and safer operation in society and improve the country’s human rights situation. However, from the early 2002 onwards the Guardian Council increasingly blocked the reformists’ bills in the Majles as un-Islamic or incompatible with Islam and as such reducing the reformists’ ability to deliver their promises.

5.1.1 Women’s Faction in the Majles
In the Sixth Majles, thirteen reformist female MPs formed the so-called Women’s Faction that was supported by other reformist MPs and sometimes even by the more
conservative MPs in the Majles. The Women’s Faction placed their demands firmly within the framework of Islam and showed loyalty to the 1979 Revolution and to the Islamic Republic. However, at the same time, according to one of the Women’s Faction MPs, Elaheh Koolaee, the Faction aimed to address ‘the gap between the ideals of the Islamic Revolution and the reality of women’s status and rights’ in Iran (Koolaee 2005: 207). These women representatives saw responsibility for women’s subordinate legal status as lying within Iran’s power politics and in patriarchal interpretations of the Sharia which were controlled and interpreted by certain segments of the state, leaving no room for alternative interpretations. Thus the problem was not the religion but the interpreters of the religion (see for instance MP Fatemeh Rakei’s interview in Payvand 2004). For ordinary women and women’s movement advocates, Khatami’s election in 1997 and re-election in 2001 and the reformist dominated Sixth Majles had raised hopes about legal changes among many women and many felt that ‘under [Khatami’s] presidency women’s issues could be fought more easily’ than under a more conservative president (Rostami-Povey 2001: 49). And this was the case for the first part of the parliamentary session. The Women’s Faction secured several legal changes improving women’s legal position in Iran.

The Faction focused its efforts especially on family law, education and penal code and successfully amended several sections during the first part of the parliamentary session. In May 2002, women’s long campaign for changes in child custody was rewarded when the Majles ratified the amendment of the Article 1169 of the Civil Code which now allows divorced women to retain the custody of their children under the age of seven. Women also managed to secure a new clause to be included in the Article that allows judges to rule case-by-case who can retain children in spousal disputes over children’s custody – leaving women with more leeway in child-custody cases.25 In August 2002, the Women’s Faction campaigned for the passing of a new divorce law. The amended law granted women full divorce rights and the right for financial claims in the divorce. Prior to the law was approved in December 2002, woman could not have filed for divorce without the permission of her husband or she

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25 See an excellent study by Mir-Hosseini and Longinotto (1998) on Iranian women’s use of family courts and individual judges to further their claims in legal process prior to the legal changes in the 2000s.
had to prove that her spouse was either unable to deliver support for his family, or that he was a drug addict, impotent or insane. The Women’s Faction also worked to create guarantees that professional married couples would be able to work in the same city and at the same time keep their families intact. Similarly, the Faction campaigned to exempt women’s dowries (mahrieh) from taxation (Koolae 2005: 210). Moreover, in the sphere of family law, the legal age for marriage rose to thirteen years for girls and fifteen to boys.  

In the educational sphere, the Women’s Faction was successful opening scholarships to young women wishing to study abroad – prior to the change only men could receive these scholarships but now the Faction secured this right to women as well. They similarly pushed the right to study subjects such as mining, technical sciences, engineering and agriculture which had previously been available only to men (Koolae 2005: 209).

However, later in the year of 2002 the political environment grew tenser and this was felt in the workings of the Women’s Faction as well. The Guardian Council increasingly and repeatedly blocked women’s initiatives in the Majles (Human Rights Watch 2003). One of these legal concerns was that of stoning in the penal code. In Iran, more women than men tend to face stoning, which is prescribed for adultery while being married, and several women's NGOs had actively campaigned against stoning. The Women’s Faction wanted to remove stoning from the penal code but the Guardian Council strongly objected. As Ayatollah Gholamreza Rezvani, one of the Council’s members, argued: ‘[T]here is no replacement for stoning as a sanction because the ruling of Islam does not depend on the tastes of society’ (Hayat-e Now 2002b). The Women’s Faction failed to deliver on this issue, but in December 2002, the judiciary intervened and agreed to place a moratorium on stoning. However, several human rights organisations and women’s NGOs have reported of women being stoned around the country since the moratorium. In the same category was the

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26 It is worth noting that in reality the average age for both women and men to marry is over twenty years.

27 In 2006, a number of civil society actors led by women’s movement activists started a campaign named 'Stop Stoning Forever’ against stoning in Iran.

28 The judiciary’s decision came from the head of the judiciary, Ayatollah Shahrudi, who although conservative was also known for his ‘fair mindedness’ (see Ansari on Shahroudi as the head of the judiciary in early 2000s (Ali Ansari, Iran, Islam and Democracy: The Politics of Managing Change (London, Chatmam House, 2000)). The judiciary’s intervention also helped to evade the Guardian Council’s interference in the issue, which would have most likely kept the bill allowing stoning effective.
The Faction’s campaign for equal blood money to be paid for women. The Faction was hopeful that this would succeed after the law was changed in 2002 to apply equally to Muslims and non-Muslims but the hardline forces objected strongly and the Faction failed to reform the law (Koolaee 2005: 214).

One of the main goals of the Faction was the ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The Women’s Faction was sceptical how quickly the Convention would materialise on the domestic scene but they also saw it as a means to demonstrate that Iran was not to be stigmatised as one of those War on Terror targeted Muslim societies disrespectful of women’s right and that Iranian women should not be seen or presented as victims of Islam or the Islamic Republic (see MP Fatemeh Rakei’s interview on the issue for IRNA 2003). Or, as one of my interviewees argued, for her, the ratifying of the Convention would have signalled that Iran is a modern and civil nation state (Zahra, Tehran, April 2010). Unsurprisingly, the Guardian Council rejected the bill by claiming that ‘[O]nce Iran signs the convention, it will be obliged to accept its contents in cases that are against Islamic rulings’ and therefore, the council voted the bill as against the Sharia (Payvand 2003).

Other legal reforms that the women representatives failed to deliver due to hardline backlash in the second half of their term included the nationality status of Iranian women married to foreign men and the student quota system in the fields of medicine, dentistry, and pharmacology. In this particular case the Ministry of Health claimed that the number of female students had risen too much in these scientific disciplines in the universities and to keep the balance in the field it was necessary to have gender quotas. With the cooperation and support of the Majles’ education committee the Women’s Faction proposed a bill prohibiting the use of any gender-based quota system in university admissions, however, the bill was rejected (Koolaee 2005: 210). Also, the Faction campaigned hard to pass a law that would have secured equal pay for men and women but they failed due to the conservative forces in the Majles (Koolaee 2005: 211).

5.1.2 Seventh Majles elections
When the Seventh Majles elections were approaching in the spring of 2004 and candidates were submitting their registration to the Guardian Council, the political
environment was extremely tense and many felt that political apathy was taking over society. Moreover, the Guardian Council’s decision to disqualify more than 2,500 reformist candidates from standing in the elections took the hardliners’ backlash to another level. Since the 1979 Revolution, Iranian elections had been fairly open and transparent and although disqualifying candidates was not a new development, the sheer volume of banned candidates was a slap in the face for people who had believed in and supported the Republic. In January 2004, the Sixth Majles’ reformist MPs staged a sit-in in which they protested against the Guardian Council’s decision to vet reformist candidates from running. In a published statement, the reformists accused the Guardian Council of undermining and sacrificing the republican elements of the Islamic Republic (IRNA 2004). The manipulation of the Seventh Majles elections also stirred the reformist side when over one hundred reformist MPs decided to resign in protest.

This wave of resignations also meant that many of the Women’s Faction’s MPs decided to exit formal politics. Fatemeh Haqiqatjoo was one of them. In January 2004, she delivered her resignation speech in the Majles and it resonated with the views of many ordinary Iranian women who had supported the reformists but had also been disappointed with the little progress that they had achieved in the past seven years. Haqiqatjoo’s speech repeated her loyalty to Islam, Ayatollah Khomeini and the Islamic Republic and she stressed how it was within this framework that she had wanted to pursue her work, however, she felt that working for reform within the state was no longer possible. She then proceeded to critically analyse the current state of affairs in Iran. For her, the Islamic Republic had diverted from its democratic path in the hands of a ‘power-drunk’ few who, in order to keep themselves in power, accuse anyone who criticises the system of crimes against national security (Iran Press Service 2004). She concluded her resignation by referring to her oath that she had taken when she sworn in as a MP in 2000. The oath requires MPs ‘to remain faithful to Islam and the constitution, to defend the independence and the interests of the country, and to serve the people.’ However, Haqiqatjoo felt that:

[S]ince the possibility of keeping my oath has been taken away from me and I have been deprived of the [ability to] defend your legal rights, it is no longer a source of pride for me to stay in this house and see the deviation from the Imam’s ideal, the nation and the constitution. Therefore, by my resignation, I declare my protest at the incorrect, illegal and non-religious conduct of the
appointed bodies in recent years, which has reached its peak in the February 22 [2004] elections (Iran Press Service 2004).

For the women’s movement advocates this had far reaching consequences. Haqiqatjoo was not the only woman MP who decided to leave formal politics. Disappointed with the reform movement and the increasing state repression facilitated the exit of many women MPs from formal politics and activism. During the Sixth Majles, several individual women’s movement advocates and women’s NGOs had formed close relationships with the reformists MPs and with the Women’s Faction especially. Now, there would not be a similar close working relationship between women working in civil society and people supporting them and representing their ideas and agendas in formal politics. As one of my interviewees working for a NGO noted,

‘[T]his meant that we would have no access to the corridors of power. We were in no position to inform the Majles of the problems that women face in their everyday life or how we could improve women’s status. Because of this any progress or legal change that might have taken place was halted’ (Nasrin, Tehran April 2010).

On February 20 2004, the hardliners secured a victory with 54 per cent in the Seventh Majles (2004-2008) elections. The winners of the elections were the hardliner parties Abadgaran and Isargaran that won the majority of seats, including in Tehran. The take over of the Majles was seen as the second step in the hardliners’ attempt to regain control over the body politic. A year earlier, the above named parties had won the municipal elections, again with a low turnout. However, whilst many Iranians boycotted the Majles elections, the turnout, estimated between 47 to 52 per cent, was, according to an Iran specialist, ‘not sufficiently low to provide the reformists with a moral victory’ (PBS 2004; Ansari 2003: 265). People were not only protesting against the hardliners but also silently demonstrating against the disappointing performance of the reformists.

Twelve women were elected to the Seventh Majles but only one of them, Mehrangiz Morovati, represented the reformists. The conservative women who were elected decided to discontinue the Women’s Faction and without the support of the Faction, Morovati found it hard to push for legal reforms in favour of women (Koolaee 2012: 144). The other eleven women came from the conservative ranks of Basij (who were one of the main forces behind Ahmadinejad election a year later) and they had a different approach to women’s roles and duties in the public sphere (Koolaee 2012:
144). While women in the Sixth Majles had emphasised the importance of family life in women’s lives, they had also campaigned hard to include women as active participants in the public sphere. However, the women representatives of the Seventh Majles emphasised women’s familial roles as wives and mothers. They, for example, campaigned against the ratification of CEDAW, proposed to reduce women’s working hours so that women could spend more time at home and defended men’s right to polygamy (Koolaee 2012: 145; Kian n.d.: 17). Many felt that the hardliners who secured a majority in the Seventh Majles effectively halted debate on gender issues and stifled alternative voices.

5.1.3 Silencing high-profile women reformists

From the above section it becomes clear that the hardliners undermined, via unelected institutions, the ability of the reformists, and women reformists in particular, to deliver changes in legislation. This not only cleared women reformists from formal politics but also made it harder for women’s movement advocates to be heard in formal politics as women MPs had often been their supporters and pushed for their agendas in the Majles. To further demoralise the reformist, the hardliners had begun an intense and violent campaign against key reform figures. Informal security forces such as the Basij who were loyal to the hardliners increasingly conducted the harassment and arrests. High profile female reformists felt the crack down especially hard. Several human rights reports noted how state violence increased in the period 2002-2004. Reformist MPs and people close to them were increasingly harassed, intimidated and even jailed. Reformist newspapers were periodically closed down and their editors and key journalists were jailed. As a human rights report from 2004 reports, the hardliners managed ‘to virtually silence the political opposition within the country through the systematic use of indefinite solitary confinement of political prisoners […] and denial of basic due process rights to all those detained for the expression of dissenting views’ (HRW 2004:2). According to the same report, women MPs were among other things harassed, arbitrarily arrested, summoned to court, jailed, interrogated by security forces and banned to leave the country (HRW 2004). This, together with the undermining of the reformists in the Majles, effectively cleared high profile reformists from formal politics.
5.2 Civil society targeted
President Khatami’s election back in 1997, Iran’s first local elections in 1999 and the Sixth Majles elections in 2000, had activated many new people to participate in politics and this, in turn, had brought the issue of civil society on Iran’s political map. The reformists who dominated all the major elected political bodies between 1997-2004 encouraged civil society activism and facilitated the emergence of indigenous social, economic and cultural projects while, at the same time, they tried to shelter them from the hardliners’ attempts to restrict grass root activism. However, when Khatami’s credentials were crushed in foreign policy as well, he was no longer able to protect civil society actors. In a speech delivered on August 3 2003, he apologised for and cautioned his supporters of the slow progress of reform but also reminded that it was still attainable. Khatami admitted that not all the ‘legitimate demands’ and ‘expectations’ could be met at this point due to the ‘many obstacles and difficulties from within and without’ but he believed that they had ‘no alternative but to continue with the current path’ and if they ‘resort to prudence and patience, God willing, [they] will reach [their] destination’ (Network 1, 2003). Yet, for many Khatami’s words came too late and offered very little concrete support. Shirin Ebadi argued a few months later that ‘[P]resident Khatami has wasted all the historical changes given him, and the domestic reform movements have passed by him’ (Ebadi quoted in Amuzegar 2004: 81).

5.2.1 Women’s NGOs
Since his first election in 1997, Khatami and his Administration had encouraged citizen participation and supported particularly NGOs working with women and children (Namazi 2000: 73). President Khatami set up a Centre for Women’s Participation in the Office of the Presidency, which encouraged women to found and participate in NGOs. Post-revolutionary Iran’s NGO scene emerged in the mid-1990s when women’s issues re-emerged in the debates both at the state level and in society and as such they can be seen as an extension of Iran’s post-1979 women’s movement (Rostami-Povey 2004: 257). The number of women’s NGOs rose from 67 in 1997 to 480 in 2005 and in addition to this there were over 3,000 women’s cooperatives, which often worked together with NGOs (Amnesty International 2008; Namazi 2000: 102). Women’s NGOs work both in urban–and rural areas where the state is less present or had retreated its services. Women’s NGOs concentrated on educational,
health and population issues, income-generating activities, family and youth programs, prostitution and drugs, sustainable development and refugees. Almost all of these programs, however, mainstream gender issues into their agendas. While Iranian women’s NGOs have been criticised for being relief focused and as such reinforcing dependency and undermining self-reliance of the target groups (see e.g. Namazi 2000), Rostami-Povey’s study has shown that since the early 2000s women’s NGOs have been challenging several different types of institutional power including the state, family and community and as such they have created a space of their own in which women have been able to improve their life by learning how to earn their own income, and develop organisational, leadership and negotiation skills, to name a few (Rostami-Povey 2004). In addition to this, women’s NGOs have proved to be instrumental in shaping gender-specific legislation at the state level (Nazir, Tehran April 2010).

However, the flourishing women’s NGO scene in Iran began to suffer in 2004. As argued above, several human rights organisations have noted how the hardliners’ victory in the Seventh Majles election marked a watershed in the country’s political regression. However, this soon materialised also in restrictions on civil society activism (see among others Freedom House 2005; Human Rights Watch 2004; Human Rights & Democracy for Iran 2004). A report from November 2004 documents that in September 2004 a new development emerged in which the regime is attacking mid-level activists in the NGO community for the first time. The report states that these activists were targeted as the hardliners’ attempt ‘to purge critics from society’ and the activists detained in the autumn of 2004 were accused by Jamal Karimi Rad, the Judiciary’s spokesman, of ‘propaganda against the regime, endangering national security, inciting public unrest, and insulting sacred belief’ (Human Rights & Democracy for Iran 2004). According to my interviewees, several NGO activists were arbitrarily arrested, harassed by the security forces and banned to travel abroad. Since the elections that brought the hardliners to power, many NGO workers felt that they spent more time fighting against structural obstacles limiting their work than making any real ‘hands-on’ work (interview with Nazir, Tehran April 2010; see also Human Rights Watch 2004). They also reported of increasing mistrust between different NGOs and individual sponsors halting their funding due to the authorities’ increasing surveillance and targeting of sponsors as ‘counter-
revolutionary’. Moreover, links to foreign NGOs and sponsors were being severed due to the increasing surveillance. This information is supported by documents from human rights organisations.

This was an unfortunate development as in the early 2000s the working environment for NGOs had improved quite dramatically. While Khatami Administration had supported citizen participation, the working environment had not been easy for NGOs due to the overcomplicated and uncoordinated but necessary registration process, which often arbitrarily accepted or denied NGO licenses. In late 2002, a group of women’s NGOs gathered together and drafted a letter to Khatami. The letter included an update on the political milieu in which Iranian NGOs were working and a detailed plan how to improve the situation (interview with Nazir, April 2010, Tehran). This materialised in the Ministry of Interior’s new guidelines and in a new NGO law later in 2003, which improved NGOs working environment in several fields.\footnote{The new law included the introduction of a supervisory committee to oversee the activities of local NGOs operating in the provinces; additional resources, including financial aid and assistance from government organisations which were made available to NGOs; the law also improved current procedures for appealing decisions regarding NGOs licenses; and maybe most importantly the new law granted NGOs to pursue legal remedies on behalf of the public interest (see an excellent review of Iran’s NGO laws: Negar Katirai (2005), ‘NGO Regulations in Iran’, The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law, Vol. 7 (4); On NGOs general problems in Iran see Ali Akbar Bromideh (2011), ‘The Widespread Challenges of NGOs in Developing Countries: Case Studies from Iran’, International NGO Journal, Vol. 6 (9): 197-202.} This positive trend was however reversed when the hardliners’ crackdown intensified. Many NGO activists felt that they were let down by the reformists while at the same time they were bearing the burden of factional political fighting in which none stood up for them:

I personally feel that Khatami let us down. Words never protect you. Someone needs to act in order to protect you. It’s been terrible to see your friends being harassed, arrested. We paid for Khatami’s inaction. Maybe he lost his vision for reform? It was like our movement meant nothing when something bigger was on the table (Zahra, Tehran, April, 2010).

The crack down on the NGO community, a community that had worked besides the state and assisted it to provide basic services, effectively created an atmosphere of fear among NGO activists and made the state violence to be felt on the backs of ordinary people working for NGOs. And this time around, there was no reformist leadership to shield the activists from the repression.
6.0 Conclusion

In January 2002, the Bush Administration opened a new front in the War on Terror. With the introduction of the new policy metaphor, the Axis of Evil, Iran and the Iranian regime were placed on the opposite side from ‘us’, on the dark side. This change of heart of the Bush Administration washed away the tentative détente between Iran and the US that had promisingly started in the aftermath of 9/11 and which was, over the cooperation in Afghanistan, achieving some concrete results. Iranians, and the reformists in particular, had a hard time to understand why Iran had suddenly qualified as a member of the Axis.

This chapter argued that Iran’s naming as one of the enemy countries resulted partly from President Bush’s needs to flex its hypermasculine identity. For domestic reasons the Administration needed to demonstrate that it was ‘doing something’ and that the War on Terror’s continuation was justified. In essence, the introduction of the Axis allowed the Administration to exercise positional superiority, which made it possible to reinforce the simplistic division of the world into good and evil and simplifying the conflict into one in which the Other’s agency, history, voice and concerns are silenced and/or denied. However, the Administration’s persistence in producing and crafting of external threats, or of Monsters, was not only driven by its need to secure its distinctive identity but also by its need to discipline and police borders between the Self and the Other that creates a sense of security to the Self. The Self’s existence relies and builds on the violent production of borders and segregations which reflect the ‘insecurity about the Other becoming an actor rather than object’ in international politics (Nayak 2006: 45, emphasis in original). The orientalist anxiety about the Other exercising its individual and even equal subjectivity (to the Self), seen in the violent response to the attacks of 9/11, was only intensified with the introduction of the Axis of Evil. While the Bush Administration needed Iran to exist as the Monster in order to secure it own distinctive role in the post-9/11 world, there was anxiety about Iran establishing itself as a respected member in the global community, in particular via Iran’s constructive role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

The Bush Administration justified Iran’s inclusion in the Axis of Evil by its type of government, the regime’s support for anti-Israeli Palestinian groups and its poor record of human rights and women’s rights in particular. With the help of these, the
Administration created a strategic image of the Iranian regime that allowed the Administration to police and discipline this yet another Monster. The Iranian regime’s deviance from Western civilisation was manifested in its fundamental Islamic ideology, repression of human rights and its treatment of women. This demonisation of the Iranian regime via old Orientalist words and imaginaries of Muslims as enemies of the West effectively lent support to the Bush Administration’s vision of war as a solution to the post-9/11 milieu.

As a consequence of the labelling Iran as one of the Axis of Evil countries, Iran’s foreign policy hardened and the door that had been ajar for diplomatic détente was shut again. The hardliners in Tehran used this new political environment as a license for their re-take over politics and their drive for power can be seen mirroring President Bush’s hypermasculinist policies. While calling for national unity and return to the Republic’s ideological foundation, the hardliners lashed out on reformist politicians, including supporters of the women’s movement, and the NGO sector. The Axis of Evil speech and the Bush Administration’s statement in July 2002 that declared the Administration’s support for Iranian civil society in its supposed attempt to overthrow the regime had far reaching consequences for those who the Administration pledged to support and protect, civil society advocates and women’s movement advocates in particular. The Bush Administration’s already started campaign to save and liberate Muslim women was now extended to include Iranian women. The Administration framed Iranian women and the women’s movement not only as different from the regime but also supportive of regime change which allowed the Iranian regime to name women’s movement advocates as westernised, immoral, anti-Islamic and assisting the West in regime change. The hardliners set out to purge women’s movement supporters from the high echelons of the body politic and most of the high profile women’s movement supporters had exited formal politics by the end of 2004. This meant two things to the women’s movement and its advocates in Iran: First, the women’s movement had no lobbying access to the Majles where legislation takes place and where female reformist MPs had previously sponsored women friendly bills. Second, by clearing reformist from formal politics, women’s movement advocates had no protection against the increasing state repression that began to target civil society after the high profile reformists were forced to exit formal politics. Women’s movement advocates, those who the Administration had pledged to support
since the autumn of 2001, saw the detrimental consequences of the American campaign for their rights their everyday work and life. As Mahboubeh Abbasgholizadeh, one of the most known woman’s movement advocates in Iran, declared in 2004 that

[W]omen are the real victims of fundamentalism, be it Islamic or American. […] The women’s movement in Iran, although diversified and varied is nonetheless extremely alive owing to challenges in obtaining women’s human rights and achieving gender equity and equality. The women’s movement in Iran is confronted by two types of the “others” in order to obtain their independent identity, “internal” and “external”, the former being Islamic fundamentalism and the latter being western fundamentalism (Abbasgholizadeh 2004).

The Self’s security seeking foreign policies have the power to conceal the ways in which different identities, like that of the Monster and the Feminine Other, are constructed in order to naturalise and justify the Other’s disciplining and policing in the name of national security. These identities also conceal the ways in which the Self’s endeavours to secure itself materialise in violence outside the Self’s borders – often on the bodies of ordinary people. In essence, the Self’s need to secure itself and to construct and craft its identity via the Other’s difference obscures the violence and destruction that inheres in this type of imagining and making of world politics.
CHAPTER 5: THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND FAILING TO SECURE FEMINITIES, 2005-2008

1.0 Introduction
By 2005, the Bush Administration’s liberation wars had turned into years of occupation and materialised in deteriorating security conditions to people in Afghanistan and Iraq. The Administration was increasingly challenged not only over its decision to waste tax payers’ money on wars that seemed to have no ends to them, but also by civil society actors and international organisations working in Afghanistan and Iraq that were criticising the Administration over its failure to stabilise the two countries and provide security to those it had pledged to protect. This chapter examines how the challenge to the Bush Administration’s post-9/11 identity as a morally and militarily superior actor pushed the Administration to further inflate its masculine identity in global politics. It is argued that the growing criticisms over the US role in contributing to the increasing insecurity in both Afghanistan and Iraq made the Bush Administration look for ways to re-establish itself as the virtuous Self against the Dark Monster and that Iran assumed a central role in this. This search took place at the same time with two other developments: 1) Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a populist hardliner and regime ideologist, won the presidential elections in Iran in June 2005; and 2) the nuclear negotiations between Iran and the Europeans reached a deadlock in the spring 2005. Not only did the new Iranian President Ahmadinejad incarnate the Dark Other with his deeply fundamentalist worldview, seemingly irrational personality and opposing ideology, but he presented the Bush Administration with an opportunity to reclaim its role as the western world’s saviour if it succeeded in closing down the nuclear program and toppling the Islamic regime that repressed its people and its women in particular.

From 2005 onwards, the Bush Administration employed a new disciplining technique against Tehran: economic sanctions that have continued to date. However, the Bush Administration’s disciplining policies gave yet another excuse to the hardliners to extend their domestic crack down. From the summer of 2005 onwards we can witness how the hardliners began to execute the second stage of their plan of taking over the body politic. The hardliners had now all the elected institutions in their hands – the municipal councils, the Majles and the presidential seat – and this allowed them to extend their crack down against the Iranian civil society, the women’s movement
included. In this period we see an increasingly conservative gender ideology crafted at the level of the state and the state repression of the women’s movement expanding to target increasingly ordinary advocates and their activism.

The Bush Administration had been criticised for the lack of support for its invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq inside these countries. To avoid this and to counter some of the criticism that the economic sanctions were most likely to cause, the Administration introduced the Iran Democracy Fund in 2006. The Fund was aimed at creating an internal support base for regime change within Iranian civil society. However, the sanctions and the Fund exacerbated trends that contributed to the increasing hardliner-organised repression and violence against women’s movement advocates. Moreover, these trends began gradually to materialise also in the lives of ordinary women not involved the women’s movement. Social conservatism sponsored by the hardliners materialised for example in the educational sphere and in campaigns targeting public morality.

First, the chapter looks at the ways in which the Bush Administration’s masculine identity was undermined by the developments in Afghanistan and Iraq and how this led the Administration to look for alternative ways to inflate its masculinity and justify its interventionist foreign policy. At the same time in Tehran, the newly elected President Ahmadinejad was preparing his own hypermasculine game by reinforcing the hardliners’ positions in the body politic. One of the most visible developments was the entry of military and paramilitary officers into the country’s political life, which effectively militarised the state-society relationship. The second section of the chapter turns to look at Iran’s nuclear issue. With the election of Ahmadinejad, the US focus shifted to Iran’s nuclear program. The Bush Administration employed economic sanctions to discipline Tehran’s hardliners. The sanctions, however, failed to achieve the desired policy changes in Iran’s behaviour and actually resulted in growing humanitarian costs bore by ordinary Iranians and Iranian women in particular. Therefore, the second section of the chapter also examines the impact of US/Western sanctions on Iranian women. After the introduction of the Axis of Evil, the Bush Administration had pledged to protect Iranian women but both the Bush Administration and the Obama Administration, which has only intensified the sanctions, effectively feminised Iranian women to bear the burden of sanctions ‘for
the greater good’. The final section of the chapter looks at the Iran Democracy Fund (2006-2009). The Fund came to mark another failure by the Bush Administration to secure femininities it had promised to protect. This section of the chapter sheds light on how the Fund facilitated the hardliners’ nationalist-conservative gender ideology and intensified the crackdown on civil society activists. Compared to the period 2002-2004, the state repression was widened to target not only high profile women’s movement actors but also low profile women’s movement actors and ordinary women.

The chapter argues that despite the Bush Administration emphasis on democratisation and Muslim women’s human rights, Iranian women’s movement advocates have been violently pushed to the margins and the space – both physical and discursive – for their activism has been narrowed as the hardliners have interpreted them to embody the enemy. Moreover, when compared to the 2002-2004 period when high profile activists were targeted, in the period 2005-2009 more and more ordinary Iranian women became victims of state repression. In essence, fundamentalist worldviews – both American/Western secularism and hardline Islamism – have materialised not only as outright violence against women but also as deteriorating living conditions under the economic sanctions.

2.0 The Bush Administration’s de-masculinisation

The Americans re-elected President Bush in 2004 but like in 2000, the 2004 presidential elections were decided by one state. Ohio’s twenty electoral votes gave Bush his margin of victory over the democratic candidate Sen. John Kerry. Both candidates’ campaigning focused heavily on foreign policy. Bush emphasised questions of national security and the on-going War on Terror and cast himself as a leader who would lead ‘with strength and confidence’ and declared that ‘[I]f America shows weakness and uncertainty, the world will drift toward tragedy. That will not happen on my watch’ (Bush quoted in The Washington Post 2004a). However, in the campaign period Bush was continuously challenged over his decision to invade Iraq and polling rates for supporting the war in Iraq were souring dramatically.30 The fact

30 Whereas in 2003, seventy-six per cent of Americans initially supported the Iraq war, in April 2004 only forty-seven per cent of Americans thought that the US had done the right thing by invading Iraq. Moreover, fifty-eight per cent of Americans did not see the war in Iraq
that no WMDs were found in Iraq, humanitarian costs in the post-invasions societies were becoming more and more visible, the US forces were being increasingly targeted by insurgents both in Afghanistan and Iraq, two foreign invasions eating tax-payers money and an increasing number of American soldiers being stationed abroad and coming home in coffins were damaging the Administration’s claims about the character of the Monster and evaporating American public’s enthusiasm for the War on Terror which was becoming harder and harder to rationalise. With the marginal victory over Kerry, Bush needed to prove that the way he had imagined and created the American Self and its disciplining relationship with the Dark Other were justified in his War on Terror.

2.1 Failing to secure and protect

Bush’s mission to liberate the world from terror and tyranny was not only challenged and criticised by his domestic constituency but also increasingly by the international actors and the very people who Bush had pledged to save. By 2005, the ‘illusory guise of “protection” and “security”, “democracy” and “freedom”’ (Russo 2006: 559) was dissolving report-by-report coming from Afghanistan and Iraq. Insurgency was on the rise in both countries and human rights advocates and organisations from both countries were reporting on worsening human rights situations of civilians and women and children in particular.

For instance, the Afghanistan Human Development Report from 2007 reported that violence against women in Afghanistan had reached ‘epidemic proportions’ (UNDP 2007: 26). The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences challenged the Bush Administration’s cultural explanations of Afghan women’s human rights violations and argued that there was an urgent need to recognise the ways in which the US invasion and the post-conflict situation in Afghanistan had accelerated violence against Afghan women. The Rapporteur singled out four factors: 1) the traditional patriarchal gender order had been strengthened due worth the loss of American lives and other costs. As one of the people who had been interviewed for the poll argued: ‘[I]n going to war with Iraq Mr. Bush took that fight in the wrong direction. I believe we've gotten sidetracked from finding Al Qaeda’ (An interviewee quoted in the New York Times/CBS News Poll 2004).
to the invasion which had threatened local masculinities;\textsuperscript{31} 2) the erosion of protective social mechanisms;\textsuperscript{32} 3) the lack of the rule of law in war situation/post-war situation which reflects the West’s failure to provide security and unify the ethnically diverse country;\textsuperscript{33} and finally 4) poverty and insecurity that had only worsened after the US invasion\textsuperscript{34} (UN Economic and Social Council 2006). As one analyst summed up women’s situation in Afghanistan:

‘[T]he war on terror did not present Afghan women with an immediate change in status, rights or opportunity. In fact, the deteriorating security situation has severely negatively affected women’s ability to enjoy the rights and opportunities promised them by the international community’ (Farhoumand-Sims 2007; see also Rostami-Povey 2007).

A very similar situation was taking place in Iraq. By 2005, several Iraqi NGOs, women’s rights activists, scholars and international organisations were pointing to the occupation’s failure to improve Iraqi women’s situation in the country and to the ways in which, like in Afghanistan, it had rather eroded women’s rights situation and security in the country (see among others Amnesty International 2005; Human Rights

\textsuperscript{31} For instance, it has been noticed that domestic violence has increased in the post-invasion Afghanistan due to the experienced trauma, frustration and inability to access economic possibilities by masculinities. See Lina Abirafeh, Freedom is Only Won From the Inside: Domestic Violence in Post-Conflict Afghanistan (The Peaceful Families Project 2006).

\textsuperscript{32} In 2001-2002, the US invasion displaced at least 2.2 million people internally and thousands of civilians were killed in the coming years and it is estimated that by 2013 over 30,000 civilians have died in the post-invasion situation in Afghanistan. A UNAMA report from 2013 found that deaths and injuries to women and children in particular, and whom the coalition forces pledged to protect, have disturbingly increased year by year (UNAMA 2013). Moreover, deaths in family, migration and/or growing refugee numbers have broken up families and larger social communities and left particularly women vulnerable.

\textsuperscript{33} In the post-invasion period, Afghan women’s physical insecurity materialised for instance in increasing numbers of rape, kidnapping and trafficking. See for example Elaheh Rostami-Povey, Afghan Women: Identity and Invasion (London, Zed Books, 2007). And as the Rapporteur argued in the report, it is the rule of power rather than the rule of law that has become the norm in Afghanistan.

\textsuperscript{34} The report noted how the invasion contributed to the transformation of the country’s economy away from subsistence agriculture and pastoralism to a war economy based on drugs. In 2011, the director of operations of the International Committee of the Red Cross reported that after twelve years after the US invasion, insecurity is at a critical level for civilians in Afghanistan and further noted that ‘Afghans today are living in an environment where increasing numbers of people openly carry weapons and armed groups proliferate. […] Besides uniformed forces, a multitude of opposition and pro-government armed groups are actively engaged in fighting. […] Afghans living in villages where conflict is rife are having to take an impossible decision: choose sides or leave home. This is the reality of Afghanistan today’ (ICRC 2011). Together worsening poverty –and insecurity levels have materialised in people’s lack of access to employment, education and health-care among other things. In Afghanistan, women’s access to these services is even lower than men’s (UNDP 2007).

2.2 *Emasculated superiority*

The Iraq occupation slapped the Bush Administration in its face yet in another way in April 2004, when photographs of the torture of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib spread.\(^{35}\)

The images angered people around the world and crushed the Administration’s claims about America’s moral superiority and exceptionalism and made many of the US allies unsettled. While Bush declared that the sexual abuse of prisoners ‘does not reflect the nature of American people’ (The NYT 2004a), Puar noted that the torture of Iraqi prisoners effectively narrowed ‘the gap between us and them – between the patriot and the terrorist’ as the acts not only involved the same site but also the same people being tortured (Puar 2004: 523). Bush’s declaration that the torture was practiced only by a few perverted individuals and that the rest of the America could never perform such acts (The Washington Post 2004b), aimed to salvage both the white hetero-normative discourse and America’s superior moral authority position against the Dark Monster that had been instrumental to the post-9/11 political environment.

Interestingly, the Administration directed the blame also on the victims. Apparently, had the US personnel known how degrading homosexual acts are to Muslim men, they would not have resorted to these humiliating methods (Hersh 2004).\(^{36}\) By presenting homosexual acts as taboos to Muslim men, the Administration employed the centuries old Orientalist imaginary of the Middle Eastern sexuality: repressed on the surface but perversity bubbling underneath (Puar 2004: 525). However, the torture at Abu Ghraib exposed that the US had failed to be superior to one of the Dark

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\(^{35}\) These pictures are so well known that I do not describe them. They can be found online for example at [http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=8560](http://www.antiwar.com/news/?articleid=8560), retrieved November 6, 2013.

\(^{36}\) According to Seymour Hersh, the Administration was well aware of ‘Arab’s/Muslims’ views on sexuality. Apparently the neoconservatives in Washington were circulating the book ‘The Arab Mind’, a book on Arab psyche and culture, written by a cultural anthropologist Raphael Patai who died in 1996. The book includes a twenty-five-page chapter on Arabs and sex and the book depicted sex as a taboo vested with shame and repression in Arab cultures. The Patai book, an academic told Hersh, was “the bible of the neocons on Arab behavior.” In their discussions, the academic said, two themes emerged—‘one, that Arabs only understand force and, two, that the biggest weakness of Arabs is shame and humiliation’ (Seymour M. Hers, ‘The Grey Zone’, *The New Yorker*, May 24, 2004).
Monsters, Saddam Hussein, and it did not matter how hard the Administration tried to explain the situation, they had lost the moral standing in the Iraq occupation and the Self’s hypermasculinity was crumbling.

It can be argued that from 2005 onwards, the Bush Administration’s hypermasculine hegemony was under attack. The Administration’s superior moral authority was being questioned when it failed to protect Feminine Others whom it had pledged to liberate from Dark Monsters. It had effectively transnationalised insecurity and violence, which, in turn, materialised on the bodies of ordinary women. Moreover, the Administration had not only failed to stabilise the region that it claimed to be the number one threat to America’s national security and but had also failed to demonstrate how different the White Self was from the Dark Monster as the Abu Ghraib torture case demonstrated.

3.0 Enter Ahmadinejad
In the spring of 2005 Iran was preparing for its ninth presidential elections. The elections were allowed to take place in a somewhat more relaxed atmosphere. The run-up to the June elections was coloured with vigorous and dynamic debates over the country’s foreign policy, economics and the future of reform started by the reformists. In the spring over 1,000 candidates registered for the presidential election. The Guardian Council handpicked six candidates who were allowed to run in the election.37 Interestingly, all the candidates projected themselves more or less as pragmatists to appeal to the wider electorate. In the campaigning period, it became clear that the reformists’ concept of mardum salari, or the rule of the people, had been slowly changing Iran’s political discourse since the late 1990s as all the candidates framed their campaigns to reflect what inhered in the concept: greater openness of political process, social and economic justice, ending governmental corruption and hearing peoples’ voices (see Ehteshami and Zweiri 2007).

37 The candidates included the former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who ran on moderate-reformist platform; Muhammad Bagher Qalibaf, a conservative candidate and former national police chief; Mustafa Moin, a reformist candidate and President Khatami’s Minister of Higher Education; Mehdi Karroubi, a reformist candidate and former speaker of the Majles; Ali Larijani, a conservative candidate who has served as deputy minister several times and is one of the most experienced and high ranking politicians in the country; and finally Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Tehran’s mayor and the least known candidate in the race.
On the Election Day June 17, observers both in Iran and abroad were caught by surprise. Many had predicted the former President Rafsanjani would if not win the first round, then, at least, enter a second round with one of the reformist candidates. However, the surprise was great when the elections’ black horse, Tehran’s hardline mayor Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who had hardly been noticed in the polls, secured a place in the second runoff. Rafsanjani who had entered the race with self-confidence had to enter the second round with not so confidence-boosting voting rates that put him at 21.1 per cent and Ahmadinejad at 19.4 per cent, leaving the other candidates far behind (Iran Election Watch 2005).

There are several reasons why the first round of the elections went as it did. Two of the reformist candidates, Mustafa Moin and Mehdi Karroubi (the latter would become internationally known in the 2009 presidential elections), alleged that the Revolutionary Guards had rigged the results but the recount ordered by the Guardian Council, which is controlled by the conservatives and regime hardliners, concluded that there had been no irregularities and no further investigation was carried out. Moreover, the political environment in which the elections took place was far from free. As argued in the previous chapter, the hardliners’ clampdown on the reformists, which was partly the regime’s response to the Bush Administration’s bullying foreign policy, had weakened the reformists on several fronts. The lost municipal and Majles elections, in 2003 and 2004 respectively, had eroded not only the reformists’ ability to perform in formal politics but also their credibility in the eyes of their supporters had suffered. Many who had previously voted reformist candidates now either decided not to vote in protest or casted their vote to a non-reformist candidate and especially Ahmadinejad’s promise of ‘bringing oil money to the tables of the people’ attracted voters (Alfoneh 2008a). Further, the clampdown that had targeted many individual high profile reformists and civil society activists had forced them to exit formal politics and pushed many to work in the margins of organised activism. Thus, in the spring of 2005, the reformist leadership was in effect paralysed and they failed to.

Turnout in the first round stood at 62.8 per cent, considerably lower than in 1997 when Khatami was elected by 80 per cent of the eligible voters (Iran Election Watch 2005). Many have noted how the total votes of all the conservative candidates combined amounted to 11 million votes, while the total votes for the reformist candidates came to 17 million votes. Thus, the reformists received six million more votes than the conservatives, despite the allegations of fraud. Moreover, over 20 million voters decided not to cast their vote, believing that the election was not going to be free and fair (see Haghighatjoo 2006).
activate their former supporters who felt frustrated and disappointed with the little concrete reform that the reformists had been able to deliver and the leadership’s inability to stand up and protect their supporters.

3.1 Militarisation of political life
While Ahmadinejad may have been the least noticed candidate in the presidential race, at least internationally, he was brought to power by one of the most powerful conservative parties in Iran. The Islamic Developers Council, or Abadgaran, was the force behind Ahmadinejad’s campaign. As noted in the previous chapter, the Abadgaran was in the right-wing coalition that did well in the 2003 municipal elections, winning the majority of seats in Tehran and other large cities. After the elections, the party secured Ahmadinejad’s appointment as Tehran’s mayor in May 2003. Later in 2004, the party did well in the Majles elections, winning again the majority of seats in Tehran. 39

What is interesting about the Abadgaran is the nature of its membership. Most of the members have backgrounds in military or paramilitary organisations such as the Pasdaran 40, Iran’s Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), and the Basij-e Mostazafin 41.

40 Ayatollah Khomeini established the IRGC soon after the 1979 Revolution to guard the new regime from domestic and external challenges – both ideological and physical. However, since the 1990s the Guards have not only been a military force they have increasingly been involved in suppressing and silencing internal oppositional voices rather than external opponents.
41 The Basij force is an ideological voluntary-ran paramilitary group and its members are often from the lower classes. The group was formed soon after the Guards in November 1979 and it provided the new regime with protection against leftist and royalist oppositional groups. The role that basij volunteers had in the Iran-Iraq war granted them a special status in the state’s military apparatus. Today, their role is to assist the regime in confronting political and cultural threats against the regime, enforcing the principle amr-e be ma’ruf va nahi-y-e az monkar (commanding what is just and forbidding what is wrong), combating the ‘Western cultural onslaught’ and assisting other security forces in internal security. The basij have an estimated 14 million members and they are present in practically all sectors of Iran’s social life: basij units are found in universities and schools, unions and factories, tribes, and in
the Mobilisation of the Oppressed. Ahmadinejad served in both organisations in the 1980s and 1990s and his key supporters came from the ranks of these two organisations. As such, Ahmadinejad’s election has led many observers to argue that a gradual militarisation of Iran’s socio-cultural, political and economic life was taking place (see among others International Crises Group 2005; Ehteshami and Zweiri 2007; Kamal and Pakravan 2009; RAND 2009). While the country’s various military and paramilitary organisations have always been central in Iran’s power structure, their original role was to support the regime and their presence in politics and other areas of social life was restricted. However, this changed in the mid-2000s. Ayatollah Khamenei, together with Ahmadinejad, facilitated the expansion of the two above named organisations into the country’s political, socio-cultural, educational and business life and many observers have argued that the military elites ascendancy can be seen as the hardliners’ attempt to counterbalance the reformists and other oppositional voices in society and stop the détente with the US. Ali Alfoneh, an expert on the Guards, has argued that the increase of the military elite in top political posts was a tactical move by Khamenei and his allies to counter pressures at home and abroad; Khamenei ‘must have considered former members of the Revolutionary Guards better at crisis management at home […] but also better [suited] to counter external pressure[s]’ (Alfoneh quoted in Bruno, Bajoria, and Masters 2013).

While the presence of the Guards and basij forces in governmental posts is not an entirely new phenomenon, following the 2005 elections, the number of military private institutions/companies, to name a few. Membership in the Basij is often necessary for certain social benefits and for societal mobility for lower classes in Iran. Benefits include among other things: welfare subsidies, inclusion in an entrance quota to universities, university scholarships and loans.

42 The Guards have used the Basij to create a surveillance system that has reached into people’s private lives and together the organisations have come to symbolise the state’s violent repression after the Iran-Iraq War. The organisations formally merged in 2007. The IRGC Commander in Chief General Mohammad Ali Jafari’s praised the merge as a means to concentrate the organisation’s all efforts to counter ‘internal threats to the Islamic Republic’, which reflects the organisation’s expanding role in suppressing civil society activism (Mehr News Agency 2007).

personnel in governmental posts rose significantly which allowed the ideological security apparatus to infiltrate the government and which, in turn, has shaped the relationship between the state and civil society. During Ahmadinejad’s first term (2005-2009), out of his twenty-one ministry portfolios, twenty were in the hands of former military officers or people who had a background in the IRGC and/or in other branches of the state’s security apparatus (see Iran Focus 2005). Most importantly, three key ministries – Intelligence, Interior and Culture and Islamic Guidance – were placed in the hands of Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei (Intelligence), Mostafa Pour Mohammadi (Interior) and Mohammad Hossein Saffar Harandi (Culture and Islamic Guidance) who all had served in the Guards. As Farhi has noted, the transformation that these ministries went through under Ahmadinejad was striking when compared to the Khatami period when a great effort was made to render them less intrusive in Iranian life (Farhi 2007). After Ahmadinejad’s nominations, these three ministries were arguing in chorus that while the US had decided not to engage in direct military conflict with the country, the Americans were fighting a soft war with the help of the Iranian civil society, including the women’s movement, to overthrow the Iranian regime. As such the regime was allowed to use any means to counter this (see IRNA 2007, Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 2 2007; Farhi 2007).

The worldview of this new political elite brought in by Ahmadinejad unsettled many civil society actors. The Abadgaran and the military elite that came to power with it took pride in presenting themselves as the true keepers of Ayatollah Khomeini’s legacy and the Revolution and honoured Khomeini’s cultural and political vision of the Islamic Republic. They argue that society’s current problems are caused by people’s eroding values and insufficient internationalisation of revolutionary ideals and Islamic principles (Hen-Tov 2006/2007: 167). The West, and the US in particular, is seen as the source of impure lifestyles and ideologies. To compensate for people’s lack of piety and belief in the system, they promote ultraconservative and patriarchal views on social –and cultural issues. When it comes to the women’s rights advocates, the agenda of the movement has been interpreted as counter-revolutionary, threatening

44 Ahmadinejad also replaced previous provincial governors, deputy governors and bank managers with officers from the IRGC and the Basij. Similarly, Iran’s embassies were re-organised. In November 2005, 40 senior ambassadors were recalled home and replaced with less qualified and experienced personnel but who can be identified as supporters of the hardliners (BBC 2005).
the country’s ideological cohesion and opening the country to foreign forces. In 2006, the Guard’s 2006 National Security Report classified women’s movement advocates as the main threats to the national security of the country (report quoted in Sadeghi 2009). Further, in 2007, the Minister of Intelligence declared that women’s rights advocates are part of an attempt by outside enemies to bring about a soft revolution of the Iranian regime (Iran HRDC 2010: 9). This, according to one of my interviewees, sanctioned the hardliners’ supporters to attack individual women activists and women’s NGOs (Leili, Tehran, April 2010).

While Ahmadinejad’s Administration and the military elite close to it were arguing that civil society actors such as the women’s movement are posing a threat not only to national security but also to its ideological identity and unity, they were increasingly promoting a militarist ideology instead of a religious one. As Hoodfar and Sadr (2009) argue:

Under Ahmadinejad’s […] government [2005-2009], Islam and Sharia have actually taken a backseat as the state pushes legislation that promotes a patriarchal, conservative reading of gender roles. […] This illustrates the government’s determination to force women to comply with an extremely narrow, limited version of ‘Islamic’ society (Hoodfar and Sadr 2009: 2009: 13).

What it comes to the new elite’s views on the country’s external relations, they have campaigned for a more isolationist foreign policy particularly in the areas of Iran’s nuclear talks with Europe and Iran’s bilateral relations with the US. Ahmad Tavakoli, the leader of Abadgaran, has argued that ‘[R]elations with the U.S. are not as important as our prayers, nor as sinful as alcohol. […] For more than half a century, the American government has been oppressing us, so, unless they change their attitude, there’s no basis for rapprochement’ (Tavakoli quoted in Time 2004). Ahmadinejad hardly touched upon foreign policy in his campaign. When he did, he asserted that relations with the US were ‘not high among his priorities’ or the Iranian team was not ‘tough enough’ in the nuclear negotiations with the Europeans. He also employed revolutionary language from the 1980s by promising to resist ‘Western decadency’ and to build a ‘powerful Islamic Iran’. He touched upon Iran’s oil resources by arguing that in his opinion Iranian natural resources should be exploited by Iranians not by foreign companies (Saikal 2005; Bakhash 2005). The vision of Iran as an equal and respected actor in world politics and as a country that takes pride in its
Islamic and revolutionary values in the socio-economic, cultural and political fields was an attractive message to many of Ahmadinejad’s voters who had seen what had happened in Iraq and its experiment with ‘western democracy.’

4.0 Dark Monsters and nuclear weapons

For the hawks in Washington Ahmadinejad was ‘godsend’ as one of the neoconservatives’ main commentators declared (Gerecht 2006a). Even before the Iranians went to the polls, the Bush Administration declared the process rigged and undemocratic and President Bush pledged that the United States and its people will stand with the Iranians as they struggle for freedom – language that reminded not only the Iranian regime but many ordinary Iranians of the pre-war talk on Iraq in 2003 (Bush G.W. 2005b). If Ahmadinejad incarnated the Dark Other – fundamentalism, irrational personality, opposing worldview – then, according to the hawks, because of this, the normal logic of deterrence would no longer apply to Iran (Carpenter T. 2012). The war/regime change advocates in Washington constantly pointed to Ahmadinejad’s belief in the return of the Shia’s 12th Hidden Imam, the Mahdi, an event in Shia Islam that is to be accompanied by an apocalypse. Clifford May, the head of the neoconservative Foundation for the Defence of Democracies, declared that ‘more than a few of Iran’s rulers hold the theological conviction that the return of the Mahdi, the saviour, can be brought about only by an apocalypse.’ He then cited the neoconservatives’ favourite Middle East scholar Bernad Lewis, who argues that for those who share Ahmadinejad’s vision, ‘mutually assured destruction is not a deterrent. It’s an inducement’ (quoted in Carpenter T. 2012).

Ahmadinejad’s election coincided with three significant incidents: 1) Iran’s nuclear negotiations with Germany, Britain and France, or the so-called EU-3, had stalled and the stalemate was effectively pushing the US to get involved in the process; 2) the Bush Administration was desperate to find a way to re-enact clear lines between ‘us’ and ‘them’ to justify its on-going War on Terror; and 3) after the presidential election, Iran’s key political institutions were now securely in the hands of the hardliners who had found additional confidence in the US failure to stabilise Iraq, which materialised in an even more confrontational foreign policy toward the West (on the final point see Ansari 2006b: 217). Thus, Iran’s nuclear program became the new front in the Bush Administration’s War on Terror.
4.1 Iran’s nuclear program and a global game of masculinities

Iran’s nuclear program was revealed as early as in August 2002 when the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), a group that takes pride in presenting itself as the official opposition to the Islamic Republic, informed the international community of Iran’s two unknown nuclear sites, a heavy water production plant in Arak and an uranium enrichment plant and research lab in Natanz, which had been developed outside its official nuclear program at the Bushehr and Isfahan plants (Iran Watch 2002). In February 2003, Khatami denied the accusations of a nuclear weapons program that emerged after the revelations but acknowledged the existence of the two sites and committed his country to negotiations with the international community. Since the two new sites became known, Iranians have argued that the two plants, Natanz built in 1996 and Arak in 2000, are instrumental for Iran’s medical and energy needs given the Bushehr plant’s disastrous development by the Russians and the country’s limited oil and gas resources. In the years that have followed the revelations, a large majority of Iranians have come strongly to believe that Iran has the same right as other nations to develop nuclear energy, including the construction and operation of nuclear enrichment facilities. When I was in Iran in 2010, many of the Iranians I encountered took pride in the nuclear program and argued that it

45 The organisation is linked to the Mujahideen-Khalq (MEK), which is an organisation that both the US and the European Union (EU) have previously listed as a terrorist organisation and Iranians themselves do not sympathise with the group. See Ervand Abrahamian, Radical Islam: The Iranian Mojahideen (London, I.B. Tauris, 1988) on the organisation’s history.
46 However, as one Iran analyst has pointed out, rather than revealing a secret program hidden from the international community and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the findings revealed that the country was further ahead in its nuclear research than had been known. It should also be noted that the US was well aware of Iran’s nuclear program. The Bush Administration’s hawks, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld and Deputy Secretary of Defense Wolfowitz had held senior posts in the Ford Administration. In April 1976, President Ford issued National Security Decision Memorandum 324 supporting the shah’s ambitions and helping Iran formulate a plan to build 23 nuclear power reactors and the policy was continued under the Carter Administration. Moreover, President Bush’s advisor on Afghanistan, Zalmay Khalilzad, who has strongly campaigned for regime change in Iran, had written his PhD on nuclear proliferation and used Iran as his case study (see Ali Ansari Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Roots of Mistrust (London, C. Hurst & Co Publishers, 2006): 199-200; and Semira N. Nikou, ‘Timeline of Iran’s Nuclear Activities’, The Iran Primer (2010).
47 As Farhi’s work demonstrates, from the very beginning, when the Iranian public learnt about the secret programs, the government never referred to the nuclear program as a solution to Iran’s security needs. In fact, governmental officials repeatedly argued that pursuing nuclear weapons would insecure the country. See Farideh Farhi, “‘Atomic Energy Is Our Assured Right’: Nuclear Policy and the Shaping of Iranian Public Opinion” in Judith S. Yaphe (Ed.), Nuclear Politics in Iran (Washington D.C., National Defense University Press/Institute for National Strategic Studies): 3-18
showed to the world how advanced and modern the Iranian nation is. And as a RAND report has concluded, if Iran’s nuclear facilities were to be bombed by the West, public support for any retaliation its government – without regard to what faction is in power – took would likely be widespread (RAND 2008: xvii).

Several rounds of negotiations followed the revelations and at first the Bush Administration left the nuclear issue to the EU-3, which negotiated with Iran’s reformist government. These negotiations have been studied in detail elsewhere and I move on to examine the time period when the US began to invest in the process. However, it is necessary to offer a brief background where the negotiations stood in 2005.

4.1.2 Iran’s nuclear negotiations in a deadlock
Just prior to Ahmadinejad’s election, the nuclear negotiations were in a deadlock. The Europeans who had been in charge of the negotiations were now balancing between the Bush Administration, which insisted on Iran ending uranium enrichment entirely as for them Iran’s enrichment activities were enough to confirm the country’s nuclear weapons program, and the Iranian negotiation team’s equally intractable position which insisted that it would not give up its national right to pursue activities that other countries were allowed to pursue (Farhi 2010: 10). In the spring of 2005, Tehran had prepared a package that proposed limited enrichment activities for a period of time.\footnote{According to the details published by an Iranian reformist newspaper later in August 2005, Iran offered to produce only low-enriched uranium; to limit the amount of uranium enriched; to convert all low enriched uranium to fuel rods for use in reactors; to limit the number of centrifuges in Natanz; to refrain from reprocessing spent reactor fuel and hence keep open}


\footnote{Since the NCRI’s initial revelations about Iran’s unknown nuclear programs, the Bush Administration’s stance was that the regime’s decision to build an undeclared uranium enrichment plant in Natanz was a proof of the country’s intention to acquire nuclear weapons, and therefore Tehran was in breach of its obligations laid out in the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The argument that the Bush Administration put forward was that due to this violation, Iran was no longer entitled to exercise its right under the Article IV to develop nuclear technology. Consequently, the Administration’s policy was to demand Iran to halt its nuclear enrichment entirely.}
however, the EU-3, anxious to know how the upcoming presidential election would shape the country’s political landscape, decided not to respond to the proposal. The EU-3 had hoped to see Rafsanjani to return to power but when Ahmadinejad assumed power in August, the Europeans drafted their own counter proposal that not only ignored the Iranian offer earlier from the spring but simply restated proposals that Tehran had already rejected (Farhi 2010). In short, in August 2005, the EU-3, with the US behind the scenes, insisted on at least temporary suspension on uranium enrichment and Iran on its part insisted on its national right under the NPT to continue enrichment. The insistence of the US on the suspension on uranium enrichment and the EU-3’s failure to offer anything new to the negotiation table strengthened Tehran’s hardliners who had been arguing for a some time now that negotiations were a waste of time.

4.2 Masculinity game in Tehrani style

When Ahmadinejad came to power in August, he was determined to do things his way. With Ahmadinejad a change took place in the nature of the nuclear negotiations and effectively in the country’s foreign relations at large. Instead of seeking a deal with the West, the negotiations were aimed at creating and sustaining a crisis in the country’s international relations (Ansari 2006b). One of the first decisions that Ahmadinejad made was the replacement of Hassan Rouhani, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, who had been considered as a moderate by the international community, with Ali Larijani, a well-known hardliner, who came to mark the rise of Iran’s confrontational foreign policy. As soon as Larijani was nominated, he publicly denounced the competence of Rouhani’s team in the negotiations between Iran and the EU-3 and sought a radically different route to solve the situation (see for instance Sharq 2005). With Larijani’s team in charge, the EU-3 August proposal was rejected, an expected move but which was strengthened with the publication of a letter that

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[51] The proposal was a reworded version of the November 2004 package. The November 2004 agreement was basically a reworded version of the 2003 Tehran agreement in which Iran agreed to suspend uranium enrichment and processing activities and to open nuclear sites to unannounced inspections by the IAEA. It also agreed to sign the Additional Protocol, which would allow more extensive IAEA inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities. However, under the original safeguard agreements of the NPT, Iran was not required to declare new nuclear facilities unless Iran decided to start processing new nuclear material in those very facilities.
demanded a public apology from the EU-3 for the insult they had made to the Iranian nation. At the same time with the letter, Ahmadinejad let the international community know that Iran had resumed uranium enrichment at the Isfahan plant by declaring that ‘[T]he opponents of Iran's nuclear program should revise their viewpoints and recognize our rights. They should not be under the illusion that they enjoy more rights than other nations’ (Ahmadinejad quoted in IRNA 2005c). Later at the UN General Assembly in September, Ahmadinejad accused the US of subjecting Iran to ‘nuclear apartheid’ by declaring certain nuclear technologies off-limits to Iran. He further added that ‘[I]f some try to impose their will on the Iranian people through resorting to the language of force and threats […] we will reconsider our entire approach to the nuclear issue’ (IRNA 2005d). Ahmadinejad was increasingly taking part in the global game of masculinities, which further increased tensions between Iran and the US. One of the (in)famous comments came in October 2005, when Ahmadinejad declared that Israel must be ‘wiped off the map’ in order to end the hegemonic powers’ meddling in the region’s affairs (The NYT 2005c). As the White House’s spokesman commented, for the Bush Administration Ahmadinejad’s speech simply ‘reconfirm[ed] what we’ve been saying about the regime in Iran. […] It underscores the concerns [the US has] about Iran’s nuclear intentions’ (The NYT 2005c).

4.3 Masculinity game in Washington style

Secretary of State Rice outlined the Bush Administration’s policy on Iran’s nuclear issue in the autumn of 2005. By September, the Bush Administration had grown impatient and was prepared to discipline Tehran with a referral to the UN Security Council (UNSC). Moreover, the Administration now had the Europeans – who had promised the Bush Administration that they would join the US in its efforts to refer Iran to the UNSC if the newly elected president rejected the August proposal – on its

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52 It should be noted that Iran had voluntarily agreed to suspend its nuclear program when the negotiations started in 2003.
53 It is worth noting that while Iran resumed its nuclear program in August 2005, it also continued to respect its previous comments under the NPT and its activities continued to be supervised by the IAEA. Moreover, what has not been truly acknowledged by the international community was Ayatollah Khamenei’s pronouncement on the very same day with Ahmadinejad’s statement. Khamenei declared the production, stockpiling and use of nuclear weapons as un-Islamic.
Rice’s mocking comments on Ahmadinejad’s speech at the UN reflect the Administration’s confrontational approach to Iran:

Maybe the whole world is wrong and we should all trust them but nobody does. And so their problem is they can argue all they want about what their rights are. The problem is they’ve gotten into a situation in which nobody believes it is safe for them to exercise those rights — if indeed they have those rights. I think their problem is not just coming into compliance but it is beginning to repair the sense that Iran is a threat to the international system because ultimately, if they keep doing what they’ve done here, people are going to be even more suspicious of what they’re doing (Rice’s interview with Time 2005).

A few months later, in February 2006, the US referred Iran’s nuclear case to the UNSC. Secretary of Defence Rumsfeld linked the referral to the War on Terror by warning that the War on Terror was by no means over and appealed to the US allies to show unity and increase their military spending to defeat the threat of a ‘global extremist Islamic empire’ (Rumsfeld quoted in CBS 2006).

Ahmadinejad’s response to the referral was to start ‘immediately’ full-scale uranium enrichment. In his statement he further argued that ‘[A]ll of Iran's peaceful nuclear activities will continue within the framework of the IAEA and based on the NPT and the agency's safeguards.’ However he also added that ‘from Feb. 5, Iran will suspend its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol and its other cooperation beyond it’ (The Washington Post 2006a). Ahmadinejad referred to the 2003 Tehran agreement that had included an Additional Protocol, which had allowed more extensive IAEA inspections of Iran’s nuclear facilities.

The Bush Administration had taken a preliminary step to get involved in the nuclear talks back in March 2005 when President Bush agreed with the Europeans that Iran needed some incentives to end its uranium enrichment. (The Administration was not however unified. Vice President Cheney and Defence Secretary Rumsfeld opposed the concession and argued that only regime change would remove the threat that the current regime posed to the region (Gawenda/The Age 2005).) The American incentives — spare parts for Iran’s civilian airliners and allowing Iran to start entry negotiations with the World Trade Organization (WTO) — were however too little and too late and the Iranians rejected the EU-3 prepared November 2004 agreement in which the incentives were included. However, in return for these economic incentives, the Bush Administration had extracted a pledge from the Europeans to support Iran’s referral to the UNSC if the talks failed (see Peter Symonds, ‘US And European Allies Provoke Confrontation with Iran’, World Socialist Website, August 11, 2005. https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2005/08/iran-a11.html, retrieved August 12, 2013).

Interestingly, a presidential commission report from March 2005 had concluded that ‘American intelligence on Iran as inadequate to allow firm judgments about Iran's weapons programs’ (The NYT 2005a).
The consequences of the referral were felt in Iran at large as Farhi has argued:

The referral of Iran’s case to the UN Security Council in February 2006 [meant] that the nationalist discourse that had from the beginning been part of Iran’s case for pursuing its nuclear program for all practical purposes became the whole of the case. In the process, arguments that proposed acceptance of the temporary suspension of enrichment-related activities were viewed as a reflection of “meekness” or “complacency” and therefore unsustainable (Farhi 2010: 5; emphasis in original).

In essence, the nuclear issue and the failure of the reformists and the EU-3 to find a solution that would have satisfied both sides ‘opened the path for the full-fledged ascendancy of the hard-line nationalist discourse that identifies stridence and standing firm as the only way to counteract tough external stances (or in Iranian parlance “Western bullying”)’ (Farhi 2010: 6). Moreover, the confrontation strengthened the hardliners’ domestic standing vis-à-vis the reformists and gave them yet another tool to denounce internal opposition.

With the help of Ahmadinejad, the Bush Administration was able to maintain its policy of confrontation and disciplining of the Monster. As one observer argued: ‘[the election of Ahmadinejad] will feed the arguments of those in the Bush Administration who think the only option is to come down hard because they can expect the Iranians will take a harder line, too’ (Kenneth Pollack quoted in the NYT 2005b). What underlined the Bush Administration’s crafting of the Iranian nuclear issue was the old orientalist clichés of Islam as a threat and of Muslims as dangerous beings to the existence of the White Self. The Dark Other is portrayed as untruthful and therefore not worth the West’s trust (see Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007). Rice was not alone with her above comments (‘nobody trusts them’). U.S. Ambassador Greg Schulte commented on Iran’s referral to the UNSC: ‘[T]he authorities in Tehran, rather than threatening the world, should listen to the world and take the steps necessary to start regaining its confidence’ (Schulte quoted in The Washington Post 2006a, emphasis mine). What emerges from the arguments is not necessarily the threat of nuclear weapons to the world but a threat of the current Iranian regime – of its nature and its challenge to the security of the White Self (see also Izadi and Saghaye-Biria 2007). As Agathangelou and Ling have argued, hypermasculinities invite rival camps of hypermasculinity to engage in similar exercises of hypermasculinity and this often
locks the two oppose sides into cycles of conflict, retaliation and even annihilation (Agathangelou and Ling 2005: 827).

5.0 Disciplining the Dark Monster

After the referral to the UNSC, the Bush Administration was stressing that it had not decided how to respond to Iran’s nuclear threat. For instance, in the NSS of 2006, the Administration stated that the US ‘has joined with our EU partners and Russia to pressure Iran to meet its international obligations and provide objective guarantees that its nuclear program is only for peaceful purposes. This diplomatic effort must succeed if confrontation is to be avoided’ (The NSS 2006: 20). However, while the NSS emphasised diplomatic solution, Bush declared several times that ‘all options are on the table, including military force, to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons’ (BBC 2006). In March 2006, the message was echoed by Vice-President Cheney who stated with a rather hawkish choice of words that ‘[W]e will not allow Iran to have a nuclear weapon’ and the Iranian regime is to expect ‘meaningful consequences’ for its failure to end its dangerous nuclear activities (The Economist 2006).

56 However, two foreign invasions were eating American resources and the

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56 And indeed, it seems that the Administration was preparing for a heavier response. Leaks from the Administration revealed that in 2006, Turkey was approached for possible use of its air bases, which would have allowed the US to conduct B-52 bomber attacks into Iran (Dunn 2007: 20). In the spring of 2006, it was revealed that the Bush Administration had made actual plans for bombing Iran’s nuclear sites – even the use of a tactical nuclear weapon had been mentioned – before leaving the office, the estimate for a possible attack was 2008 (The Sunday Times 2006a, 2006b). Similarly, in December 2006 when the UNSC was debating on Iran sanctions, the US, together with Britain, moved additional mine sweeper vessels and a strike aircraft to the Persian Gulf in preparation for possible Iranian retaliation against international shipping (Dunn 2007, The NYT 2006). Many analysts also noted President Bush’s determination to solve the Iran question before leaving the office in 2009 (Pinto-Dushinsky 2006). Apparently the Administration did not want to see the enemy go unchecked as had happened with Clinton and al-Qaida. According to the hawks in Washington, ‘a nuclear-armed Iran is too dangerous to be left to a potential Democrat president’ (The Sunday Times 2006b; see also Dunn 2007). Hawks in Washington were actively pushing the Administration to take the necessary steps to ensure American’s national security. Reuel Marc Gerecht, a fellow at the neoconservative-ran American Enterprise Institute, argued that diplomacy with Iran was bound to fail and if the Administration did not prevent the Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons, ‘it would, of course, empower its worst enemies in Tehran and spiritually invigorate all Muslim radicals who live on American weakness’ (Reuel Marc Gerecht, Cognitive Dissonance: The State of America’s Iran Policy’, July 9, 2006. http://www.cato-unbound.org/2006/07/09/reuel-marc-gerecht/cognitive-dissonance-state-americas-iran-policy, retrieved August 10, 2013). However, at the same time, the Administration was apparently ignoring reports, including a CIA report from 2006 that had concluded that Iran was not developing nuclear weapons (Seymour M. Hersh, ‘The Next Act’, The New Yorker, November 27, 2006.
Bush Administration sought a middle way to discipline Tehran. Disciplining took the form of sanctions.

It is generally assumed that economic sanctions put political pressure on the target country’s political elites by affecting internal power relations (for example by strengthening oppositional forces) and as such giving impetus to the target regime to cooperate with the sender countries’ demands. \(^{57}\) And apparently the Bush Administration was hoping that the sanctions would facilitate a ‘democratic breakthrough’ by weakening the hardliners in Iran (Maloney 2010: 132).

After the referral to the UNSC, three rounds of UN sanctions were introduced. The UN Resolution 1737 (December 2006), 1747 (March 2007) and 1803 (March 2008) imposed an arms embargo, banned the transfer of all nuclear-related technology and materials, imposed travel bans on Iranians involved in the country’s nuclear industry

and froze assets on designated persons and organisations. The Bush Administration’s own sanctions on Iran included the Executive Order 13382 (2005) and a vast array of financial sanctions that were increased year-by-year and which aimed at the Iranian banking regime and high profile persons in the regime and in its close circle. At the state level, in 2007, Florida passed the Protecting Florida’s Investment Act (PFIA) which required investments to be withdrawn from Iran’s oil sector; in the same year the Californian lawmakers passed the California Public Divest From Iran Act which prohibited state pension funds to be invested in Iran’s energy, defence and nuclear business. The first Obama Administration’s (2009-2012) sanctions have included the Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountability and Divestment Act (CISADA) in July 2010 and the Executive Order 13590 in 2011.

The piling up of sanctions that have only been toughened by the Obama Administrations have materialised in an emerging humanitarian crisis on the bodies of ordinary Iranians and women in particular. Over the course of sanctions, it has become clear that the US and other sanctioning bodies have feminised ordinary Iranians to bear the burden of economic sanctions for the ‘greater good’: the White Self’s security. Both the Bush and Obama Administrations have used the process of feminisation in their efforts to naturalise the dominant post-9/11 discourse of security. Feminisation leads to a situation where the experiences of ordinary Iranians under the sanctions are being devalued. In effect, when the experiences of ordinary Iranians are being feminised, the responsibility of sanctions is assigned solely to the Dark Other/Monster: the Monster (alone) needs to correct its behaviour in order to alleviate the circumstances of ordinary Iranians.

5.1 Women and sanctions
Gender has been missing in sanctions literature at large but the few studies that have focused on the gender-specific impacts of sanctions are available on Iraq, the former Yugoslavia, Haiti and Burma and the empirical evidence from these studies shows that sanctions are detrimental to target countries populations and especially to women (Al-Ali 2005; 2007; Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Buck et al. 1998; Devin and Dashti-Gibson 1997; Gibbons 1999; Gibbons and Garfield 1999; Pratt 2005; Seekins 2005). The gender specific studies have noted how target states’ declining economic productivity that often leads to economic hardship among population is not equally
distributed across society and women tend to pay a higher price of these costs due to their differing location in the economic domain. It has also been noted that in times of economic sanctions, women’s economic status may be additionally weakened by societal attitudes towards women’s roles in the formal economy. The social belief that men are the main providers for their families becomes more popular when societies are undergoing times of economic hardship (see Nelson 2008). This ‘masculine bias’ materialises in women’s less secure position in the labour market (e.g. lower pay and lower positions) and often shifts women’s economic productivity to the informal sector or forces women to leave economic activity altogether (see e.g. Devin and Dashit-Gibson 1997; Drury and Peksen 2012). Moreover, the available studies demonstrate how economic sanctions stand in uncomfortable juxtaposition with the West’s emphasis on the promotion of women’s equal rights: economic sanctions decrease the target state’s economic performance which, in turn, affects the state’s ability to provide different welfare services of which women are often the main beneficiaries (Al-Ali 2005: 747; Pratt 2005); studies have also pointed to the increasing societal and political violence under sanctions and violence often has a gendered dimension (Al-Ali 2005; 2007; Ali-Ali and Pratt 2009; Buck et al. 1998; Gibbons 1999; Weiss et al. 1997); and finally, sanctions have also been seen as contributing factors to the strengthening of certain societal masculinities and femininities and in some cases these have, in turn, materialised themselves in conservatism/traditionalism towards women and their societal roles (see e.g. Al Ali and Pratt 2009; Kabeer 2007; Pratt 2005).

After the Iraq sanctions in 1990-2003, the Iran sanctions have been the most crippling sanctions ever imposed on any country. Scattered reports and anecdotal evidence from Iran reveal the disproportionate impact of the sanctions on the lives of ordinary people, and in particular, on women’s lives. Women have been hit especially hard by...
the deteriorating economic climate, increasing poverty, lack of medicines and repressing political climate.

5.2 Impact on economic performance

The minimal trade that the US had allowed with Iran meant that the Bush Administration had to venture outside its own borders in order to maximise the impact of the sanctions. In 2006, the Administration began a campaign that targeted other governments and actors in the international private sector. The Department of Treasury was put in charge of building pressure outside the UN and given the responsibility to focus on Iran’s ‘dirty business’ – its WMDs, support for terrorism and deceptive financial practices. In the course of 2006, US officials met with governmental representatives from ‘tens of countries’ and with more than 40 foreign banks. In these meetings Treasury outlined the range of Iran’s illicit financial activities and argued that Iran’s use of front companies makes it difficult ‘to know your customers’ (Jacobson 2008: 72). Treasury targeted especially Iran’s energy partners and they were informed how their business with Iran’s oil and gas sector could undermine the international community’s efforts to resolve Iran’s nuclear issue and what were the potential implications under the US law (Burns 2007; Jacobson 2008). In 2007, several European and Japanese banks, including HSBC, Standard Chartered and Deutsche Bank, ran down their operations in Iran or continued their presence with reduced services (The Telegraph 2007; The Guardian 2007: Jacobson 2008) and other foreign banks have followed the example after 2007. Perhaps most importantly, Iran’s largest trading partner, China, joined the financial embargo and several Chinese financial institutions tightened their trade credit in the autumn of 2007 (The FT 2007b). Even some of the Gulf States, including the United Arab Emirates, began to implement some of the US demands of trade embargo (Takeyh and Maloney 2011: 1304; The FT 2007a). In the period 2007-2008, the number of

59 After 9/11, Congress had set up a unit within Treasure called the Office of Terrorism and Financial Intelligence. The office was given a national security mandate and an innovative set of powers. An example of this is the Executive order 13224, which gave Treasury the authority to freeze the assets of individuals and entities controlled by, or supporting, terrorist organisations (see Bay Fang, ‘Treasury Wields Financial Sanctions’, Chicago Tribune News, April 23, 2007).

60 The FT article points out that the Chinese have ignored the embargo with Iranians who import goods to Iran through Dubai. Moreover, the tightening of financial relations has had no impact on Iran’s oil, petrochemical or mineral exports to China.
foreign banks operating in Iran had dropped from 46 to 20 (Jacobson 2008: 76) and by 2010, the Bush Administration had persuaded over 80 international banks to cease processing transactions with the Iranian authorities (Katzman 2013: 24).

In the US sanctions, Treasury employed so-called smart actions to target specific individuals and entities, particularly those operated by the IRGC, in Iran’s nuclear program that had been singled out in the President Bush’s Executive Order 13328 of June 2005.61 At the same time, the Administration tried to assure the international community that ‘our sanctions are now being targeted at specific actors on the basis of certain conduct - not conduct that the U.S. doesn't like politically but conduct that's contrary to international law or international standards and norms’ (quoted in Fang 2007; see also Jacobson 2008). One of the organisations targeted by Treasury was the state-owned Bank Sepah, which according to Treasury ‘is the financial linchpin of Iran's missile procurement network and has actively assisted Iran's pursuit of missiles capable of carrying weapons of mass destruction’ (U.S Department of Treasury 2007). A month later a privately owned bank, Bank Sedarat, was cut off from all access to US financial system on the grounds that it had facilitated money transfers to terrorist organisations (Jacobson 2008: 71).

For the Iranian economy that is largely dependent on oil revenues, the steps taken by the US and international financial institutions were severe. For instance, as a result of the financial institutions withdrawal from Iran, the country now experiences extreme difficulty processing significant transactions, especially oil transactions customarily conducted in euros or dollars. There are reports that Iran’s main trading partners like India, South Korea and China all owe Iran billions for past oil sales, but cannot pay their debts due to banking complications (Harper 2011). As foreign investors have used global financial institutions to conduct business in Iran, foreign investments have declined to almost minimum after foreign banks have withdrawn from the country. Moreover, the Iranian private sector had not only seen their import costs rise by 20 or

61 As a response to sanctions that failed to deliver their set policy objectives in the 1990s, there has been a move towards ‘smart sanctions’. Smart sanctions are applied to individuals and/or groups who are held responsible for target country’s transgressions. It is claimed that smart sanctions target political elites and their resources and needs while population is hoped to suffer only marginally. Smart sanctions have included freezing assets, withholding credits and loans, prohibiting investments, and restricting travel, commerce, and communications, to name a few (See Weiss 1999: 503).
30 per cent because they have to employ middlemen to evade financial restrictions but also because foreign currency is less available now and therefore companies’ ability to buy essential imports and raw materials has been steadily eroded (The Telegraph 2007/The WSJ 2010). The sanctions have also been highly effective in discouraging much-needed investment particularly in Iran's aging oil and gas infrastructure. For ordinary people, the deteriorating economic climate has materialised in increasing unemployment rates, high inflation rates, poverty, skyrocketing prices and mounting shortages of basic goods. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), whereas in 2007 Iran’s economy grew by 7.8%, in 2008 the rate had plummeted to 1% (The WSJ 2010).

5.3 Women and employment under sanctions
The effects of the above-described measures have trickled down to the level of society and affected the lives of ordinary Iranians. This section sheds light on the sanctions’ impact on women’s employment in Iran.

Women’s participation in the formal economy has been rather low in Iran but they have been the main targets of the layoffs after the sanctions were imposed on the country. While the public sector has tried to avoid layoffs, the government has had difficulties to pay their employees: Iranian news agencies have reported of wages not been paid as long as for six months (see e.g. Mehr 2010). Women have staffed both the public and private sectors. The hardest hit public sectors have been the teachers and nurses and the government owned factories – the largest employers of the female labour force in Iran. In the past ten years Asian companies, which have discovered the Iranian markets, have increasingly employed Iranian women. However, global companies have found it hard to conduct business in Iran due to the difficulties in money transactions and Iranians declining purchasing power and layoffs have become usual – and again, women have been the first targets of these. According to the UN statistics, the female labour force participation dropped from 19.4% in 2005 to 16.1% in 2010 (UN 2012), which directly affects women’s economic security. However, the worsening male unemployment rate, which, according to the most recent statistics from 2011 is at 11.5% (UN Date 2012), also affects women’s economic security, especially in a country like Iran where the female employment rate outside home is low.
It has also been reported that monthly salaries in the public sector have dropped considerably and the spiralling inflation rate (officially hovering around 25% but some have estimated it to be as high as 50%) is making it almost impossible to afford basic goods. Also, the national minimum wage has gone down in real terms. The statistics go back to 2010 when the minimum wage was just over 300 million rials ($275) a month. In 2013 the high levels of inflation mean the minimum wage is now 487 million rials a month, however, it is only worth $134 (BBC 2013a).

One of the Ahmadinejad Administration’s strategies to fight unemployment and labour costs has been to implement laws that discourage women’s participation in the labour force. One of these measures has been the revival of the Law for Part-Time Services for Ladies (1983). The law encourages women to half their working hours, which of course means also halving their wages and benefits (FIDH 2013: 24). Other studies on gender and sanctions have also noted how deteriorating economic conditions caused by sanctions may lead to social conservatisms about gender roles – i.e. encouraging women to leave paid work and assume more familial roles (see e.g. Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Pratt 2005).

While there are no official statistics on Iranian women’s participation in the informal sector, the informal sector, which is often the first ‘economic refuge’ when people are laid off, has also suffered due to the sanctions.\footnote{According to a survey from 2001, the informal labor force – both men and women – may account up to 50% of Iran’s active labor force (Rohani 2001 quoted in Moghadam F. 2004).} Prior to the sanctions, Iranian women from lower classes were actively engaged in the informal sector in areas such as cleaning, childcare, homecare, beauty, homecare and in light manufacturing such as assembly and packing (Moghadam, F. 2004). However, after the sanctions were imposed in 2006, two developments have taken place in the informal sector: 1) women who have not been previously in the labour force/or employed in the informal sector are now entering the informal economy and; 2) there is less work available in the informal sector. When I was in Iran in the spring of 2010, my interviewees reported of women even from the middle and upper classes entering informal economy in order to help their families with the increasing expenses resulting from high prices and inflation. These women offered academic tutoring classes, music

\textsuperscript{62} According to a survey from 2001, the informal labor force – both men and women – may account up to 50% of Iran’s active labor force (Rohani 2001 quoted in Moghadam F. 2004).
classes, childcare and household help. Some women had to work on two or three different jobs to be able to bring something home.

The informal sector is even more volatile and insecure than the formal sector and the tightening economic situation via decreasing purchasing power is also affecting Iran’s informal sector. This trend has materialised in lesser employment opportunities, as employers can no longer afford extra help at home, and in lower wages (see for example CNN 2012). Therefore, women in informal sector are paid less, left with no work or forced to work on more than one job. Women’s declining incomes materialise in reduced household expenditures: the quality and quantity of food declines; the time spent on finding work and/or travelling from one job to another reduces women’s time for other activities (e.g. childcare, their own well-being, and so on) (see Gibbons and Garfield 1999). Moreover, the informal sector is even more volatile and insecure than the formal sector and women face the danger to become even more invisible.

One of the bleakest developments in the informal economy has been the increasing prostitution activity. There have been reports of women from all economic classes being pushed into prostitution as a means to survive (see for example BBC 2012; Geobeats 2013; Khanlarzadeh 2009; Persson 2004; The Washington Times 2012). Students, divorced women, widowers and married women alike are increasingly seeking income in prostitution. In some cases prostitution can pay more than the formal sector where wages have been cut down. Bozorgmehr has argued that prostitution in Iran has become a means of survival when economic downturn is affecting employment rates, which, in turn, materialise in declining marriages that have traditionally given economic security to women in a country where female employment rate has been customarily low (Bozorgmehr 2011). There has also been an increase in the number of teenagers entering prostitution. According to some estimates there are 35,000 to 50,000 children under the age of 18 working in the streets in Tehran alone. Children’s work is either prostitution and/or sweatshop work and a trend is that parents are forcing them to contribute to the household expenditure in this way (Trafficking in Persons Report / US State Department 2013).
In the past, the Iranian authorities have denied the existence of prostitution in Iran, which is a crime under Iran’s law, but lately they have acknowledged that it is a social and economic problem that needs to be addressed (BBC 2012). One of steps taken by the government has been the promotion of *sigheh*, or temporary marriage, to tackle the mounting social problems that women face. Iran’s Interior Minister, Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, has argued that marriage is a human need and it assists women financially (BBC 2007).  

5.4 Women and the cost of everyday life under sanctions

While the inflation of rial had plummeted prior the sanctions, the sanctions have exacerbated the rates. The prices of stable foods like beef, bread, oil and rice have more than doubled between 2007 and 2010 (Statistical Center of Iran 2011). It is reported that due to the high prices, people’s diets have suffered and there are first signs of malnutrition in urban areas where about half of the population lives under the poverty line (see for example CNN 2012; The Guardian 2010; Lafayette 2011; Saghri 2012; Salehzadeh 2013).

The Obama Administration intensified the sanctions with the CISADA in July 2010 and in 2011 several new sanctions targeting Iran’s financial institutions and oil and gas sectors were introduced. The new rounds of sanctions limited and partly ended both Iran’s oil and gas exports and refined gasoline imports. (ICAN 2012). To counter some of the new sanctions impacts, the government initiated a number of changes in the country’s subsidy policies and in the autumn of 2010 the government introduced the ‘Targeted Subsidy Reform Act’. The Act cut subsidies for gasoline, gas, bread, and other staple foods. As a result, the prise of petrol rose fourfold, gas more than fivefold and bread more than doubled (see The Guardian 2010). The Act made Iran the first major oil-exporting country to reduce substantially energy subsidies (Guillaume et al. 2011). The government re-organised the distribution of subsidies and they were turned into cash handouts. While everyone was allowed to apply for the new compensation, households in the upper income groups were asked to refrain from doing so (Guillaume et al. 2011: 14). However, due to the tightening economic situation even households in the upper income groups have been forced to use these.

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63 The government’s promotion of *sigheh* was rather controversial as many regard *sigheh* as a cover for prostitution.
According to the IMF, the new legislation was planned to save the government about $100 billion a year (Iran Daily 2010). As the economic hardship increases in daily life, economic class and societal divisions have also being exacerbated (ICAN 2012). Women at the lower end of income suffer the most from the increases in basic goods and they are often the ones who first let their families eat before they have their own meal.

5.5 Impact on gender relations

Iran’s economic sanctions have also affected gender relations and family patterns. Feminist scholars have for a long time argued that the public affects the private (and the other way round as well). In the case of Iran, the trickling effects of economic hardship have affected both public – and private gender relations at the level of the state, family, couples and individuals.

In its briefing paper on Iran’s sanctions, the International Civil Action Network (ICAN) pointed to the similar socio-economic patterns emerging similar to those in Iraq during the 1990s. For instance, the report found that women and girls were more likely to be withdrawn from school in order to help support their families, or to be married off young in order to remove the burden of feeding them (ICAN 2012). Al-Ali has noted in her study on the Iraq sanctions that the number of women marrying expatriates and older men for economic reasons increased under the sanctions (e.g. to support their families or to settle a family debt) (Al-Ali 2005: 750). According to Khanlarzadeh’s observations, a similar development has emerged in Iran due to the worsening financial crisis to which the economic sanctions have contributed. Women from all walks of life are increasingly looking for a marriage that would provide a financially secure future. According to Khanlarzadeh, ‘[T]he marriage values have changed from education, love, and social class to financial stability entirely’ (Khanlarzadeh 2009). Moreover, Khanlarzadeh reports of a growing number of women agreeing to become the second wife for economic reasons (Khanlarzadeh 2009). Additionally, the high cost of living materialising in high food prices and high rents, worsened with high inflation and salaries that no longer keep up with daily living costs, have an impact on peoples’ relationships. Young people find it hard to marry and set up families due to the economic hardship that forces young people to live at home with their parents.
It has also been observed that domestic violence has been on the rise in Iran. Several studies on sanctions have noted how certain forms of societal masculinity and femininity are being reinforced when societies undergo economic hardship. Men are assumed to be the main providers and protectors of their women and families, and in converse women are expected to be protected and embrace their responsibilities as mothers and homemakers. However, under economic sanctions that affect target countries’ economic performance the male breadwinner ideology is being threatened when even men are faced by stagnating employment opportunities (see Kabeer 2007; Pratt 2005). Scholars have noted how sanctions and the ensuing economic hardship have contributed to men’s feeling of lost masculinity through the incapability to fulfil their role as the main provider and this has materialised in gender relations as increasing domestic violence, divorces or other distressing behaviour affecting women (see Al-Ali and Pratt 2009; Gibbons 1999; Kabeer 2007). Khanlarzadeh study has observed similar developments in Iran. She argues that the formal sector’s layoffs have forced men to work in the unreliable informal sector which has cut down their salaries and ability to provide for their families. According to Khanlarzadeh’, the resulting financial frustration and humiliation is materialising in men’s relationships with their women (Khanlarzadeh 2009).

The above mentioned ICAN report also notes that the sanctions have allowed the hardliners to further their patriarchal gender policies that aim to clear women from the public sphere (ICAN 2012). Policies and programs aiming to reduce women’s visibility and activities in the public sphere have included a governmental directive limiting women’s work outside home to daylight hours. Moreover, the state concerted social conservatism has been echoed by men who have lost their jobs or who no longer can afford studying and are forced to look for low paid part time jobs. Their attitudes towards women working outside home have changed and become less supportive (Interview with Ali, Tehran, April 2010).

5.6 Impact on health services
Another area that the economic sanctions have affected is Iran’s healthcare. While neither the UN nor US sanctions have banned the export of drugs to Iran, the sanctions imposed on the country’s financial institutions have severely disrupted the
purchase and availability of medical goods. The exclusion of Iran from the global financial system has meant that Iranian medical companies are now using the old system of *hawala* (money transfer) to process its transaction, which, in turn, has meant that the process takes longer and is more expensive (Khanlarzadeh 2013). The financial embargo and spiralling inflation have contributed to ‘the inability of pharmaceutical companies to purchase and import basic life saving medicines, ranging from Tylenol to cancer medicine and even prenatal vitamins’ (Ghandehari and Shahshahani 2013). The Obama Administration’s additional sanctions on Iran’s insurance and shipping sectors in July 2010 further disrupted the import of medical supplies (ICAN 2012). According to Khanlarzadeh, the imports of antibiotics have been decreased by 20.7 per cent and the prices have been increased by 308 percept as of 2013 (Khanlarzadeh 2013). Medicines for diabetes, haemophilia, cancer and post-stroke treatment are hardly available anymore. Chemical weapon survivors (from the Iran-Iraq war) alike are suffering from a shortage of medicine and equipment. The medicines used to treat above mentioned conditions are either not produced in Iran, or if they are, they are not as effective as those imported from the US or Europe (Bajoghli 2013: Khanlarzadeh 2013).

Women specific medicines have been hit particularly hard. According to a human rights activist, medicines specifically for women have disappeared from Iran due to the sanctions. Women suffering from yeast infections, urinary tract infections, and so on, have no medicines available (Bajoghli 2013). Similarly, women wishing to undergo IVF treatment have no access to the drugs needed for the treatments (Bajoghli 2013). The shortage of birth control pills has led the Iranian pharmaceutical companies to purchase the only available foreign brands, Yaz and Yasmin, brands that are currently facing major lawsuits in the US because they have been established to cause heart attacks, strokes and blood cuts among other things in women (Bajoghli 2013).

The shortage of foreign medicine has boosted the black market. This has strengthened informal power structures such as the IRGC that is one of the main actors in the Iranian black market. But maybe most importantly, black market medicines can be dangerous and are extremely expensive. The sanctions have effectively also blocked medical parcels from relatives and friends in the US as the United States Postal
Service and other postal carriers have interpreted this as banned by the sanctions (Ghandehari and Shahshahani 2013).

The US sanctions have also affected the country’s trade in medical technologies. Advanced technologies such as Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machines and other nuclear medical devices are on the list of banned export to Iran (see among others Ganji 2013b; Khanlarzadeh 2013; Saghri 2012; Salehzadeh 2013). This means that in some hospitals cancer patients have gone without radiology treatment (Saghri 2012). It has also meant that the price for the material and equipment used by doctors and hospitals has spiralled and since 2006 the prices have become seven or eight-folded. In an interview conducted by Khanlarzadeh, a twenty-seven year old university student describes the situation in the following way:

No one dares go to dentists anymore. I had a root-canal seven years ago for fifteen Toman, but it now costs three hundred thousand Toman. The famous dentists in the city charge one million Toman. Those who care for a sick person in their home have it even harder than the rest of us. The medical equipment costs have skyrocketed. Medicine and medical equipment have declined in quality. Aluminium is no longer imported to Iran and as a result, wheelchairs, walkers, and canes have become much more expensive (Khanlarzadeh 2013).

The shortages both in medicines and equipment have led to increase in healthcare costs (Salehzadeh 2013). As a result, health care has become a privilege almost inaccessible to the working – and middle classes (Khanlarzadeh 2013).

In her study on Iraq’s sanctions, Al-Ali has noted that the disruption of welfare policies – including healthcare – is detrimental especially to women as they are often its main beneficiaries (Al-Ali 2005: 747). When the state is no longer capable of providing services due to the deteriorating economic performance, the responsibility of welfare policies is often shifted onto the shoulders of non-state actors such as churches, NGOs, and other private institutions (Hoskins and Nutt 1997). This means that welfare services are more scattered and often have less capability to provide the needed services. However, in Iran’s increasingly tightened economic situation, even the NGOs and other private actors are struggling to provide these services (Maha, Tehran, March 2010).
Iranians both inside and outside the country have tried to raise awareness of the critical shortage of many essential drugs. One organisation that has campaigned against the ‘medical embargo’ is the ‘Iranian Mothers for Peace’ Organisation which published an open letter in January 2013 to Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary General, and Margaret Chan, the Director General of the World Health Organisation (WHO), in which they demanded the sanctioning bodies ‘to urgently create the necessary mechanism for opening financial transactions and letters of credit to facilitate the purchase of medicine for Iranian patients’ (Payvand 2013a).

5.7 Impact on women’s civil society activism

The international community justifies economic sanctions by arguing that they result in the politicisation of the target country’s population/opposition forces that in turn initiates change in the behaviour of the target country’s government, which is then assumed to be more willing to negotiate with the sanctioning bodies. However, several studies have pointed to the increasing societal and political violence under sanctions (Al-Ali 2005; 2007; Ali-Ali and Pratt; Buck et al. 1998; Gibbons 1999; Weiss et al. 1997) and to the failure of sanctions to undermine the coercive capacity of the target regime if the target regime is autocratic (Allen 2008). Furthermore, it is noted that in autocratic societies, the public is less likely to voice their discontent due to the political cost that would follow from oppositional activities. Hence, it is argued that autocratic regimes are more likely to benefit from the sanctions and in most case leaders are able to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the population (Allen 2008; Peksen 2009). Consequently, the cost of sanctions is often placed on the shoulders of the target country’s population.

The sanctions against the Iranian regime have allowed it to posit itself as a morally superior ‘anti-imperialist entity, resisting the unjust global relations’ (Khanlazarzadeh 2013). As a quote from Ahmadinejad’s comments on the US sanctions in July 2012 exemplifies:

A heavy battle has begun by [...] enemies against the Iranian nation. [...] A big part of the government is working round the clock, working every moment [...] to stand up to them. The government will not retreat one iota from their rights, values and principles against weakening materialistic powers. This fight is going on incessantly. [...] If we stay loyal to our principles, then we will always be fighting the arrogant powers, whose embodiment today is America (Vision of the Islamic Republic of Iran Network 2, 2012).
Thus, while sanctions have assisted the government to craft a discourse of national unity, at the same time, the discourse of unity allows them to push dissident voices to the margins. The sanctions have, in effect, allowed the regime to strengthen its old enemy discourse of the Western powers. While the regime denies the impact of sanctions when talking to the sanctioning bodies, domestically they have real-life evidence to prove the validity of the enemy discourse (Khanlarzadeh 2009). The enemy behind the sanctions has allowed the regime to enact a more distinctive Iranian identity from the enemy, which in turn has allowed the regime to further consolidate the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ divide. This has materialised in the state’s tighter control of society, in ‘a selective backlash to ideas of concepts considered “western”’ such as the women’s movement, in the empowerment of hardliner actors in politics (‘who stand up to foreign powers/enemies’) and in the militarisation of society (Khanlarzadeh 2009; Raha Iranian Feminist Collective 2012).

The sanctions combined with the discourse of enemy have made it harder to continue civil society activism that can be singled out as ‘dissident’ by the regime. The sanctions have closed down the little space that activists have had to articulate their agendas. As one of the interviewees explained:

The sanctions and US threats about regime change have changed our agenda. While we are still trying to affect legal change, we are scared of the economic situation and possible war. We all remember the Iran-Iraq war and how it destroys life and everything that matters. A war with the US would destroy everything we have achieved. Sanctions are already undoing our work (Hoda, Tehran, March 2010).

Or as Maryam, a 24-year old NGO worker, argued:

‘Sanctions discipline our voices. They make us unheard. Sanctions make people depend on the authorities. They can humiliate us because we need to survive. When you need to survive you don’t have the strength to do anything else and that means that we won’t be able to push for reform’ (Maryam, Tehran, April 2010).

64 For instance, Khamenei has denied that the sanctions are having any effect on the country’s economic performance. For Khamenei, the sanctions simply show how Iranians are morally stronger than anyone else and he has invented a term, ‘resistance economy’, to describe Iran’s stance to the sanctions. In 2012 when the Obama Administration introduced a new round of sanctions, Khamenei declared that Iran is at a historical juncture, and argued that, ‘[T]he problems and difficulties are minuscule compared with the determination and ideals of this nation. [...] The resistance economy is not a slogan. It is a fact that can be materialized’ (Khamenei quoted in Sahimi 2012).
Or as Leili, a fifty-year old women’s movement activist explained her views:

The West’s focus on the nuclear issue and the ways [sanctions] to deal with it have contributed to women’s deteriorating economic and societal situation in Iran. Ahmadinejad is also to blame for the economic situation but the West is not being ethical in its approach. The tense relationship with the US has allowed the regime to employ repressive policies that target especially women and their work in society, the results are already visible (Leili, Tehran, April 2010).

As Khanlarzadeh has argued, because of the sanctions, the regime has no interest in having a working relationship with civil society actors: ‘[R]ather, it needs only to refer to the imposed economic sanctions and threats of war to solidify its discourse of national reconciliation and the necessity for the political activists to postpone their criticism of domestic affairs’ (Khanlarzadeh 2013).

The sanctions have had an impact on women advocates’ work on the ground and consequently deterred improvements in women’s status. While the state has been scaling back from certain services such as health care, NGOs have been trying to fill the gaps in the system. However, as I have already argued, in the post-9/11 environment, Iranian NGOs have been increasingly targeted by the regime as ‘counter revolutionary’, their employees have been arrested, many of their private funders have withdrawn due to the declining economy and fear of retribution on the part of the regime, and several NGOs have also lost many of their volunteers because these have been forced to find paid jobs. As Noushin who is a co-director of a women’s NGO that offers adult classes and free meals in southern Tehran, argues:

‘The sanctions have squeezed our finances. We are not able to conduct our work. Women who have been helped and supported by us are not getting that help anymore. Our achievements have been destroyed’ (Noushin, Tehran, April 2010).

Or as Mona, a thirty-year old teacher and women’s movement advocate said:

The sanctions have destroyed our lives through increasing unemployment, inflation, poverty, and general anxiety about the uncertain future. Sanctions have narrowed the space we have to voice our demands; we have been working for so long to implement our work and now it’s undone. Sanctions have added an extra layer to our work (Mona, Tehran, March 2010).

In effect, the sanctions and the regime’s powerful message of the outside enemy have
narrowed the political environment where women can participate freely and consequently silenced many or made them postpone or halt their agendas and/or activities. The threat of arbitrary arrests and harassment by the security forces that have been on the rise has been powerful. Several studies on the loss of security in sanctioned countries have noted how sanctions contribute to women’s loss of security and how as a result women’s participation in society declines (see for example Buck et al. 1998; Gibbons 1999). This loss of personal security, according to Al-Ali, has had a distinct and debilitating impact on women’s everyday life in contemporary Iraq. Violence has not only narrowed the sphere where women can safely live their everyday lives but it has prevented women from participating in the public sphere (e.g. civil society activism, labour force, politics, reconstruction process) (Al-Ali 2005: 755, 756) and a very similar development is taking place in contemporary Iran.

5.8 Feminising Iran’s society
Here I would like to draw attention to the process of feminisation in which both the Bush and Obama Administrations have been engaged in. As argued in the Chapter 2, feminisation process presents certain individuals or groups as victimised, vulnerable and incapable of defending themselves but, at the same time, their sufferings may be conceptualised as mere ‘collateral damage’. For Peterson, feminisation is a process that leads to the normalisation of ‘the devaluation of feminised bodies, identities and activities’ (Peterson 2005: 507; emphasis in original). This denigration of the feminine creates local and international hierarchies and produces (neo)colonial and imperialist relations of power –and domination. These hierarchies, in turn, can be used as justifications for disciplining, policing, controlling, invading and ‘saving’ others (see also Mohanty 2006; Marchand and Runyan 2011).

Both the Bush –and Obama Administrations have effectively feminised Iranians –and women in particular – under the sanctions. For example Obama’s Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who has also heavily campaigned for Muslim women’s human rights, stated in October 2011, ‘[I] am aware that, from time to time, certain sanctions can be difficult for totally innocent people going about their daily lives’ but continued by adding that

[I]f you do not want to have a conflict, if you do not want to just give way to behavior that is very reckless, […] potentially dangerous, sanctions is the tool
that we have at our disposal to use. The whole goal is to change behavior, and anything that can be done from within Iran to send a message to the regime that this is important to change behavior because of the concerns that the people have and because of the better potential for a better relationship with the rest of the world (Clinton 2011).

This way of thinking has been echoed in the Congress as well. Senator Mark Kirk (R-IL), one of the Bush Administration’s hawkish supporters, has argued that ‘[I]t is okay to take food from the mouth of innocent Iranians’ if the US wanted to see regime change in Iran (quoted in Gharib 2011). Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC), another hawk, expressed a similar view when he stated that sanctions were necessary and ‘[T]he Iranian people should be willing to suffer now for a better future’ (The Guardian 2012). Moreover, testifying before the Senate in April 2013, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper, acknowledged the damage that the sanctions have had on Iran’s economy and how they have resulted in increased ‘inflation, unemployment and the unavailability of commodities for Iranian people’ (Clapper 2013).

The quotes demonstrate that US officials are acknowledging the difficulties that the sanctions have had on Iran’s population; however, the quotes also expose the US intention, which is not solving Iran’s nuclear issue but regime change. Clinton’s quote in particular demonstrates how the suffering of ordinary Iranians is ‘collateral damage’ to make sure that the White Self is safe and secured. It thus seems that the lives of people included in the White Self are understood more valuable than the lives of those who reside outside the White Self. A comparison emerges: American vs. Iranian wellbeing and security.
To counter some of the criticism that the Iran sanctions were causing, the Bush Administration tried to draw attention to the human rights abuses in Iran. As argued in the previous chapter, the Administration justified Iran’s inclusion in the Axis of Evil, at least partly, by the regime’s poor human rights record. However, it was after Ahmadinejad’s election and the sanctions that the promotion of human rights and regime change geared up. In 2006, the Administration began to seek internal support for its plans from Iran’s civil society actors, including women’s movement advocates. However, as will be shown, this only gave yet another excuse for the Iranian regime to frame civil society activists as counter-revolutionaries and increase violence against them. As one human rights advocate reflected on the Bush Administration’s strategy in 2010:

‘Unfortunately, the policies of the United States […] fanned the flames of Islamic fundamentalism in the Middle East, particularly during the Bush administration. […] The belligerent rhetoric of Bush didn’t help us [the Iranian democracy movement], it actually harmed us during that period’ (Akbar Ganji interviewed by Matt Duss, Think Progress, 2010).

The Administration’s focus on Iran’s human rights record can be seen as part of the larger ‘Freedom Agenda’ that the Administration was promoting in the wider Middle East. This agenda consisted of several training and educational programs including the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA)\(^{66}\), the Middle East

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\(^{65}\) Democracy promotion in Iran was a public initiative to erode the Iranian regime by the Bush Administration. However, it is claimed that the Administration was meddling in Iran’s political future in ways that were less public. A report revealed that in 2007, the Congress agreed a presidential request to fund with $400 million covert operations against Tehran (see Seymour M. Hersh, Preparing the Battlefield’, The New Yorker, July 7, 2008 2008). These operations, which were enclosed in a classified Presidential Finding, were ‘designed to destabilize [Iran’s] religious leadership’ and ‘undermine Iran’s nuclear ambitions’ with the help of opposition groups and passing money’ (Hersh, ‘Preparing the Battlefield’.). The Administration sought to assist and finance ethnic groups such as Ahwazi Arab and Baluchi groups in southern Iran in order to foment separatist feelings and activities against the government. In 2007, to counter Iran’s growing influence in Iraq, the Bush Administration agreed on Special Operations Force operations which were conducted into Iran from southern Iraq (Ibid). Dissident groups outside Iran’s borders receiving governmental assistance from the US included the already mentioned MEK, which is an organisation that both the US and the European Union (EU) have previously listed as a terrorist organisation, and Jundallah, which is a militant Baluchi group.

\(^{66}\) BMENA was launched two years after the MEPI initiative and it was a co-project organised by G8 and European governments to ‘strengthen freedom, democracy and prosperity for all.’ See [http://bmena.state](http://bmena.state) for more information.
Partnership Initiative (MEPI)\textsuperscript{67}, the National Endowment for Democracy (NED)\textsuperscript{68} and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).\textsuperscript{69} While all these programs emphasised and aimed at the building of stronger civil society in the greater Middle East, they were instrumental in the Administration’s efforts to safeguard the balance of power in the Middle East and to ensure America’s national security. As Bush’s statement at the 20\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary National Endowment for Democracy demonstrates:

Sixty years of Western nations excusing and accommodating the lack of freedom in the Middle East did nothing to make us safe – because in the long run, stability cannot be purchased at the expense of liberty. As long as the Middle East remains a place where freedom does not flourish, it will remain a place of stagnation, resentment, and violence ready for export. And with the spread of weapons that can bring catastrophic harm to our country and to our friends, it would be reckless to accept the status quo (Bush, G.W. 2003).

Secretary of State Rice gave her face to Iran’s human rights project. On February 15 2006, she asked the Congress to fund a new initiative to promote democracy and human rights work inside Iran. Rice’s request of a budget of $85 million was an increase of $75 million to the State Department’s Iran democracy budget from the year before when the State Department had begun to fund TV satellite channels and radio stations broadcasting into Iran with $10 million.\textsuperscript{70} The budget increase was reasoned by the project’s aim of engaging directly with the Iranian people. The program that the State Department was initiating would lift the old US restrictions to allow federal funding for Iranian women’s groups, trade unions, political oppositional groups, NGOs working in the fields of human rights, and individual human rights activists

\textsuperscript{67} MEPI was launched in 2002 to initiate and facilitate political and economic reform in Middle Eastern countries. See \url{http://mepi.state.gov} for the participant countries and more information.
\textsuperscript{68} NED is a private owned non-profit organisation but is funded by the Congress. Its work focuses on promoting good governance via supporting NGOs working in the fields of democracy promotion and human rights. See \url{http://www.ned.org/} for more information.
\textsuperscript{69} USAID provides assistance in the fields of economy, education, environment, governance and additionally in humanitarian crises across the world. See \url{http://www.usaid.gov/} for more information.
\textsuperscript{70} Radio stations, which received state funding from this budget, included the Voice of America (VOA), Radio Farda. The independent American-Iranian TV channels, like Azadi TV, have publicly denied receiving any funding from the Congress but their deteriorating financial situation (declining revenue from advertising and donations) has made many to question their independence from the US funding (see for example ABC News 2004; BBC 2003).
working inside Iran.\textsuperscript{71} The Congress approved the increase of funds and allocated $85 million dollars to the new Iran Democracy Fund. Of the first budget, the majority of the funds, $50 million was granted to the Broadcasting Board of Governors. This basically involved extra funding for the Voice of America’s (VOA) Persian service and Radio Farda broadcasting into Iran.\textsuperscript{72} The rest of the $85 million was distributed by the State Department to different organisations and programs: $5 million to the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs for Iranian student exchanges, another $5 million to International Information Programs to develop new State Department Farsi-language websites, $15 million to the Bureau of Near East Affairs (NEA), working together with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) which were then to distribute the money to different organisations both in Iran and the US; the final $5 million was allocated to public diplomacy (Rice 2006b). The budget was renewed in 2007, when the State Department requested another $75 million to continue the Fund and the Congress approved slightly amended budget of $66 million due in large part to the strong regime change lobbying organised by Senator Joseph Lieberman, who has been very open about his anti-Iran views and has campaigned vocally for bombing of Iran.

\textsuperscript{71} However, lifting the restriction was not as straightforward as was first planned. For instance, the Treasury’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) had to revise the rules that would permit U.S. NGOs to work inside Iran. In addition, an interagency process to vet NGOs took months to develop and then proved highly unpopular with the Fund’s key recipients. NGOs refused to share the personal data of their Iranian beneficiaries with the US government, as it was seen as fundamentally inimical to the success of their work and to the security of their counterparts in Iran (see J. Scott (2009), ‘After the Crackdown: The Iran Democracy Fund,’ \textit{The Washington Institute}, PolicyWatch 1576, September 8, 2009. \url{http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/after-the-crackdown-the-iran-democracy-fund}, retrieved June 7, 2012.

\textsuperscript{72} The extra federal funding for the radio stations ended up being a blow to the station’s independent programs. In 2006, the National Security Council ordered an internal report on Persian language programs funded by the Fund. The so-called ‘Archin report’ concluded that the current programs were essentially ‘waste of money’ and particularly VOA was too one-sided and giving too much air time for ‘the Islamic Republic’s version of issues’. The report also singled out individual reporters who had been criticising American foreign policy towards Iran. Several individuals in the Congress, including Senator Tom Coburn, who held strong anti-Iran views and pressed VOA to be harder on the Islamic Republic, echoed the report and its findings. Following the report, VOA made an U-turn and their future reporting and interviews focused on oppositional groups residing outside Iran’s borders and on individuals such as the Reza Pahlavi who propagated revolution via VOA (See Negar Azimi, ‘Hard Realities of Soft Power’, \textit{The New York Times}, June 24, 2007, \url{http://www.nytimes.com/2007/06/24/magazine/24ngo-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=1&}, retrieved July 12, 2013).
Rice wove the Fund into the War on Terror discourse of emancipating the world from Dark Monsters and saving Iranian ‘women who long for liberty’ (Rice 2006a). She also made the Fund to be part of the American war arsenal by stating in her introduction to the project that

[W]e have been engaged in a war on a group of terrorists who show no regard for innocent life, who spawn an ideology of hatred so great that they take innocent life without even thinking. […] They take innocent life not as collateral to their efforts but as the target of their efforts, and I think that we need to understand that this is a different kind of war. […] As a part of that war, or rather to make certain that any peace that we achieve in that war will be a permanent one, the President has noted the importance of the spread of liberty and democracy as antidotes to the ideology of hatred that we are experiencing in the world (Rice 2006a).

Following the launch of the Fund, the Administration presented Iranian civil society actors, including women’s movement advocates – who they understood as opposing the current state and the regime – as the faces of the future Iran. As President Bush stated his support for the Fund after it was launched, the US is trying

...to support the Iranian people's efforts to win their own freedom, [and the] administration is requesting $75 million in emergency funds to support democracy in Iran. […] These new funds […] will support reformers and dissidents and human rights activists and civil society organisers in Iran, so Iranians can organise and challenge the repressive policies of the clerical regime.

And he further added that:

My message to the women of Iran is that the women of America share your deep desire for children to grow up in a hopeful society and to live in peace. […] I think the people of Iran are going to have to come to the conclusion that a free country is in their interest. We, of course, support freedom movements all around the world (Bush G. W. 2008).

Many saw the statement confirming the Administration’s mission of regime change in Iran – only softened with rhetoric about working with civil society actors towards new Iran. Hillary Mann Leverett, who was Director for Iran and Persian Gulf affairs at the National Security Council in 2001-2003, saw the Fund as a concession to those who were keen on regime change but, for timing reasons —the Iraq war — couldn’t have their way right then:

There was a strong push for policy toward U.S.-style democracy from the White House and the National Security Council. […] They were looking to undermine the Iranian government any way they could, from military strikes and sanctions to funding U.S.-style democracy activists. The compromise was
among the regime-change advocates; some of them believed that all they could have gotten then was the democracy funding. But at least it would set the U.S. government on a course for regime change (Leverett quoted in Azimi, The NYT 2007).

Initially, the project’s idea was to grant funds to organisations and individuals working inside Iran. The aim was to facilitate pro-American sentiments through education in human rights work, NGO network building, democracy and training in transparent political process (U.S. Department of State 2007). However, essentially, participants were to be educated in (Western type of) civil society activism, (Western type of) democratisation, (Western type of) and political process, and if they learnt all this, they may eventually be lifted on the same level with Western civilisation. The Americans would lead the way with their superior moral and intellectual skills (see Agathangelou and Ling 2005).

The Fund was obviously not well received by the Iranian regime. The regime saw it, quite rightly, as one of the many tools that the Bush Administration had in its regime change toolbox. President Ahmadinejad denounced the project in March 2006 by stating that ‘[N]o enemy can defeat the Iranian nation by imposing pressure from outside the country and, for this reason, they are eyeing certain internal agents and resort to political tactics.’ He went on stressing ‘the importance of reinforcing unity and convergence as the best defence’, and further argued that ‘a friendly and united nation would disappoint the enemies’ (IRNA 2006a). The Ministry of Intelligence published a statement that cautioned civil society actors of working with foreign contacts as any interaction with foreign actors were suspect unless proven otherwise. Minister of Intelligence Ejeii himself warned ‘domestic agents, infiltrators and the enemy’s’ fifth column’ that their activities and cooperation with the outside in order to create ‘psychological war’ were not hidden from the Ministry (Ejeii quoted in Farhi 2007).

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73 It is worth noting that one of the people who helped launch the Initiative was Elizabeth Cheney, the daughter of Vice President Dick Cheney. Elizabeth Cheney worked also headed the Iran-Syria Policy and Operations Group which, with the financial help of a prominent Republican foundation, the International Republican Institute, financed Iranian and Syrian exiles to promote regime change in their home countries.
While the Fund gave yet another excuse to the Iranian regime to discipline voices that they could interpret as oppositional, the Fund was also criticised by Iranian civil society advocates. In October 2007, more than two dozens of Iranian-American and Iranian human rights groups, including women’s rights advocates, published an open letter in which they appealed to the Congress to withdraw the program and stop funding any democracy – and human rights promotion projects inside Iran. They stated that ‘the Iranian government sees the U.S. funding program as a tool to exact regime change through Iranian civil society and has used this perceived threat as a pretext to crackdown on the Iranian population at large.’ They continued by arguing that rather than promoting reform and democracy, ‘the funding has narrowed the space for the pro-democracy movement to operate’ (NIAC 2007).

The Fund was being questioned in the US as well. When the second round of funding was approved in 2007 and no signs of the Fund’s success were being seen, many Iran observers were wondering where the project was heading. When asked about details of these promotion programs, the State Department did not reveal any specifics and referred to the classified nature of the Fund’s recipients whom it wished to protect against state repression in Iran (Leopold 2008). Carah Ong, an Iran Policy Analyst at the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, said in an interview that because the State Department operates the program under a veil of secrecy ‘we don’t know where the money is going’ and continued by adding that ‘there is no reporting requirement to Congress. There’s absolutely no accountability at all with this money’ (quoted in Leopold 2008). It seems that soon after the Congress had approved the second round of funds, it had become clear that it was rather challenging to channel funds to groups and individuals inside Iran due to the security situation that did not allow Iranian recipients to accept any US grants. And as such, in 2007, only a year after the Fund was launched, the State Department admitted that most of the program’s funds had never left the US and most of the money had been granted to American based think tanks and institutions such as Freedom House and Eurasia Foundation which had announced new ‘Iran desks’ after the Initiative was made public (Azimi, The NYT 2007, Leopold 2008). Not even everyone in the Administration agreed with the Fund and its mission. For instance, Suzanne Maloney, and Iran expert and who was on the policy-planning staff at the State Department, reflected on the Fund in the following way:
I was worried about the safety of those on the receiving end of the funds. But I also just wondered if this was feasible. I don’t see how a U.S. government that has been absent from Tehran for 30 years is capable of formulating a program that will have a positive effect. [...] You had to wonder where this money was going to go and what’s going to happen when you don’t have the time to sit down and sift through the more questionable proposals. There’s just not enough oversight. Of the 100 or more preliminary proposals I saw under the first call, it was an enormous challenge to find anything viable. This may have been a very high profile, sexy project, but the likelihood of real impact was minimal (Maloney quoted in Azimi, The NYT 2007).

To counter some of the criticism and justify the continuation of funding the project, President Bush continued to depict the Iranian regime as Dark Monsters who need to be defeated. As his comment exemplifies:

We're taking the fight to those who share their murderous vision for future attacks. We will take this fight to the enemy without wavering, and we will prevail. [...] The enemy we face is brutal and determined. [...] They share a hateful vision that rejects tolerance and crushes all dissent. They seek a world where women are oppressed, where children are indoctrinated, and those who reject their ideology of violence and extremism are threatened and often murdered (Bush G. 2006b).

6.1 Failing to secure femininities
Many scholars on Iran’s women’s movement have reported that the regime’s gender ideology changed after Ahmadinejad took office in 2005 (Mir-Hosseini 2006b; Moghissi 2008; Koolaee 2009; Hoodfar and Sadr 2010; Moghadam and Gheytanchi 2010). The change in the gender ideology can be linked to the events in Iran’s external affairs. Women’s rights and women in general were, once again, linked to the hardliners’ effort to tackle what they saw as society’s westernisation and ‘creeping secularisation’ (Hoodfar and Sadr 2009). While under Khatami women’s socio-political activism had been encouraged and the reformists had facilitated women’s entry to the public sphere, after 2005 the hardliners tried to discourage women as socio-political participants and contributors in the public sphere. Women’s familial roles as dutiful mothers, wives and daughters taking care of family needs and ensuring familial well-being and stability in the private sphere were emphasised while their presence in social, political and economic activism was being restricted. This was the second step in the regime’s attempt to regain control over society and dictate the content of socio-cultural, political and legal debates that had been flourishing since the late 1990s (interview with Zahra, Tehran, April 2010).
6.2 NGOs and the Center for Women and Family Affairs: campaigning for women’s familial roles

One of the first changes in the sphere of gender relations was Ahmadinejad’s decision to place the Centre for Women’s Participation Affairs under a new director and rename it as the Center for Women and Family Affairs. As shown in the previous chapter, the Center has been one of the key actors in organising women’s NGOs and their activities in Iran. Many of the activists who I interviewed interpreted the renaming to reflect the change in the new Administration’s stance on women’s issues and women’s activism in the public sphere. As one of them explained:

When the leadership of the Center was replaced we lost a friend. Doors were shut to this organisation. We had no mutual understanding of what was important for NGO community, to women and how to improve women’s position in society. Our ideas or agendas were almost unworthy to them. The new leadership wouldn’t listen to us; they wouldn’t talk to us (Nazir, Tehran, April 2010).

When Khatami had opened the Centre, its mission was to facilitate women’s entry to and participation in the public sphere and encourage them as independent and equal actors in the country’s affairs. However, now the Center’s mission was dramatically reframed and according to its website the Center’s agenda is to promote women’s essential role as nurtures of morality in society and stability of families (The Center for Women and Family Affairs 2013). One of the first projects that the Center was given was the development of Ahmadinejad’s ‘Plan of Mercy’ introduced in 2006. The ‘Plan of Mercy’ was a 10 million-rial program aimed at promoting early marriage, domesticity and family values (Vakil 2011: 190). Ahmadinejad relied on his support network in the Basij forces whose female members were tasked to spread the message via mosques and schools (Vakil 2011: 190). Moreover, the second director under Ahmadinejad, Zohreh Tabibzadeh Nouri, declared to the disappointment of many women’s movement advocates, that she would not support the ratifying of CEDAW or any other international treaty promoting Western values as long as she was heading the Center (Mir-Hosseini 2006b).

In 2006, the regime also began to fund a number of organisations that were ordered to fight feminism and spread the culture of modesty. These organisations were required to produce research that was then used by the regime to counter women’s movement advocates’ demands for reform (see Sadeghi 2009: 53-54). One of the organisations
behind the project was the re-organised Center. The Center replaced its previous publications on women’s rights with new materials that promoted early marriage, women’s domestic duties and offered scientific explanations for women’s role in the private sphere. Another organisation was the Strategic Research Center, which is closely affiliated with the Office of the President. In 2006, the head of the Center, Alireza Zaker Esfahani, argued that the Iranian women’s movement had originated and organised to further the American agenda in fuelling anti-Islamic and anti-government activism in Iran (Zaker Esfahani quoted in Farhi 2007). At the same time, several organisations and institutes formed during the Khatami period were closed down. One of these was Shirin Ebadi’s Center for Human Rights Defenders that was raided and closed in 2008. Others’ activities were restricted by cutting their budgets or by harassing their staff or by limiting their licenses while pro-Ahmadinejad/conservative institutions were granted more funds (see Khatam 2009).

Some could argue that the pious women who I interviewed would have seen these changes in Iran’s NGO life as positive. In essence, the Center was now re-framing the agenda to be more ‘Islamic’ and promoted values and ideals that are often linked to pious lifestyle. However, for them the reframing of NGO community’s mission and agenda via the re-named Center meant that a very limited vision of women’s rights, well-being, values and aspirations was being imposed on them. When this was combined with the Ministry of Culture and Guidance’s campaign against women’s NGOs, which consisted of revoking NGOs licences whose missions were contradictory to the new guidelines provided by the Center and accusing NGOs of spreading the ‘unrealistic picture’ of women’s treatment to the outside world and working with outside powers to prepare the ground for a velvet revolution, many women felt that both their discursive and physical space for activism was reduced. As one of my interviewees, Nassim, who directs her own NGO in Tehran and identifies herself as a pious woman activist, commented on the changes that took place in 2005:

The changes that were introduced in the mission and reorganisation of the Centre for Women’s Participation Affairs had far reaching consequences for us involved in the NGO community. First, the space for activism was reduced. The close links with the Center and the new authorities were obvious. Many of my colleagues were forced to close down their offices when the authorities raided their premises. They were told their licenses had expired and they were required to apply for new ones, when they did, their licenses were denied. NGO workers were also increasingly harassed by the security forces, many of
my colleagues were arbitrarily arrested and were later too scared to continue their work so they ‘voluntarily’ closed down. Also, this sense of insecurity affected our relationships with each other – it became hard to work with other NGOs … who could we trust? Second, the new Center and the new directorship limited the space for discussion. I mean, what we mean by progress and reform. I’m religious and I don’t call myself feminist so you would think that I agreed with the new director. No, she had a very narrow view on religion and rights. She had no sense of what women are going through in their everyday lives in these days. But we were given no space to debate this (Nassim, Tehran, April 2010).

Several human rights organisations have also reported how the ascendancy of the hardliners increased state violence against women’s NGOs and their workers and activists. As Amnesty International reported in 2008: ‘[T]he security forces, led by the Ministry of Intelligence and the Judiciary have engaged in a concerted attack on the women’s movement. […] This has involved official vilification, harassment and arrests of women’s rights defenders.’ Moreover, the report continues, in April 2007 Minister of Intelligence Ejei publicly accused the women’s movement ‘of being part an enemy conspiracy to bring about a “soft subversion” of the Islamic Republic’ and since then women’s NGOs have been closed down and their employees have been questioned by the security authorities about their work and finances (AI 2008b).

The new more conservative-traditionalist discourse on women’s roles in society and the re-organisation of NGO community demonstrated how suspicious the new government and hardliners in general had become of civil society. The flourishing civil society and a variety of actors and debates within society were interpreted as a challenge to the prevailing order. At the same time, women, once again, assumed the centuries old role as symbols of a nation’s distinctive character against the foreign enemy.

6.3 The Majles
As already mentioned briefly in the previous chapter, in the Seventh Majles women’s issues were increasingly pushed to the margins. The hardliners, who won the Seventh Majles elections back in 2004, renewed their seats in March 2008. Like in the 2004 elections, in January 2008, the Guardian Council vetted nearly 3,000 reformist candidates, including the reformist MP Mehrangiz Morovati, serving in the Seventh Majles. The Revolutionary Guards, who won 31.5 per cent of the seats, were heavily
represented in the Eight Majles (2008-2012) (The Brookings Institute 2008). Khamenei himself announced his preference for candidates who ‘separate their line unequivocally from the enemy [the United States]’ (Khamenei quoted in Nafisi 2008). As a result, there were only eight women in the Eight Majles and they were all from hardline parties.74

The hardliners in the Eight Majles regularly accused women’s movement advocates and NGOs of harbouring Western ideas (Koolaee 2009). The Eight Majles’ stand on gender relations and women’s issues were embodied in the debated law proposal of layehe hemayat-e az khanevade, or the Family Protection Act. The Act was aimed at revising Iran’s Family Court Law that has been in place since 1998 (Mir-Hosseini 2000). Ahmadinejad’s Administration had introduced the Act to the Seventh Majles in July 2007 (Iran HRDC 2011) and the revisions suggested by the Legal and Juridical Commissions were sent to the Eight Majles where the final content of the Act was being debated. In particular the revision of three articles – the Articles 22, 23 and 25 – resulted in heated debate among women’s movement advocates. These three articles aimed at revising registration of temporary marriage (Article 22), polygamy (Article 23) and mehrieh, or dower (Article 25). The revision of Article 22 would have meant that the registration of temporary marriages is obligatory only in certain cases such as pregnancy (Payvand 2012). The revision of Article 23 proposed to allow men to marry a second wife without the consent of the first wife and with no proof of financial means to support more than one wife. And finally, the revision of Article 25 sought to tax excessive mehrieh at the time of registering the mehrieh (see Iran HRDC 2011). In September 2007, Ahmadinejad argued that there had been organised attempts to tear down the institution of family and to reduce the status of women. Family is the most sacred and valuable human institution. [...] Today we are witnessing an organized invasion by the enemies of humanity and plunderers to tear down this genuine institution. They target this noble institution by promoting lewdness, violence and breaking the boundaries of chastity and decency. The precious existence of women as the expression of divine beauty and peak of kindness, affection and purity has been the target of heavy exploitation over the past recent decades by the holders of powers and owners of media and wealth. In some societies, this beloved creature has been reduced to mere instruments of publicity and all boundaries and protective shields of chastity, purity and beauty have been trampled (Ahmadinejad 2007).

74 This was the lowest number of female MPs since the Third Majles (1988-1992)
The Act was not well received by the women’s movement advocates and both pious and secular advocates have harshly criticised it. Zahra Rahnavard, one of the leading reformist and pious women’s movement advocates in Iran and now internationally known after being one of the leading figures in the Green Movement, called for the proposal’s removal from the Majles’ agenda and argued that the Family Protection Act ‘launches the destruction of the families in this nation’ and it ‘gives more power to men to have polygamy without the wife’s consent and harshly discriminates against the women even further than […] the women are suffering today in Iranian society according to the current laws’ (Rahnavard 2010). In the early autumn of 2008, a group of both pious and secular women’s movement advocates published a statement against the Act in which they argued that the government was seeking to restrict women’s roles to that of procreation and they further stated that: ‘[T]o limit the part played by women to the traditional roles and stereotypes, to describe women’s participation in social and political activities as superfluous and to place restrictions on the actions of women’s rights activists, while halting plans for the development of women can only perpetuate the vision of a “secondary sex”’ (quoted in Kian n.d: 18). The women managed to spark society wide debate over the content of the Act and it was sent back to the Legal and Judicial Commission for review later in the autumn of 2008. In 2010, a revised Act was introduced in the Majles with revised Articles 22-24, which dealt with mehrieh, polygamy and sigheh (Kian n.d:18). However, the debate of the final content of the Act has continued and the last revisions were made in 2012.

6.4 Higher education

Another area where the hardliners enforced their gender ideology was that of higher education. This allowed the hardliners to extend their reach to ordinary women as well. Since the early 2000s, more than 60 per cent of Iran’s university students have been female but after 2005 Ahmadinejad’s government began to curb women’s education in higher institutions. They introduced 30 per cent quotas for female students in different degree courses including engineering, nuclear physics, business, computer science and English literature. While no legislation was passed in the Majles, in February 2008 the Sazman-e Sanjesh-e Amouzesh-e Keshvar (Organisation for Evaluation of National Education) admitted that it had been enforcing female quotas and promoting a male priority acceptance policy since 2006 (Vakil 2011: 189).
By 2013, almost 80 different courses had restrictions for female students (Tohidi 2013). Moreover, in early 2009, female students were required to get parental permission to study at universities outside their own cities, which in effect restricts their freedom of study (Vakil 2011: 189). While some courses had quotas for male students as well, Ahmadinejad argued that the female quotas were necessary to ensure ‘gender equilibrium’ in the labour market and at home and that women’s high representation in universities was shifting gender relations ‘in an un-Islamic direction’ (Hoodfar and Sadr 2009: 13; Hoodfar and Sadr 2010: 896).

Also, the government revised a more gender appropriate school curriculum for female students in primary and secondary schools. According to the hardliners, the religious curriculum introduced after the Revolution was not extensive enough and did not produce the desired effect in society. The revised curriculum and textbooks promoted women’s conservative-traditionalist domestic and familial roles. The hardline voices were also calling for reducing the years of schooling for girls so that they can graduate at the age of 15 or 16 and consequently they could marry earlier and start families (Zarabadi 2008 quoted in Hoodfar and Sadr 2009: 13; see also Paivandi 2008).

Moreover, after Ahmadinejad’s election, it was noticed that the Revolutionary Guards were interfering with universities’ hiring and administration practices. Tehran University, Allameh Tabataba’i University and the Teachers’ Training University offered early retirement plans or simply suspended academics that were categorised as ‘anti-government’ in their teaching. These vacant posts were filled with basij officials who have via their Lecturers’ Basij Organisation (LBO) introduced new curriculums that emphasise non-secular subjects (RAND 2009: 39). In addition to the LBO, the number of student basij at university campuses increased after the election of Ahmadinejad. To counter the relatively free environment in which universities were operating under Khatami, the hardliners have employed student basij to install ideological conformity at universities and identify dissident academics and students and other student organisations such as the Office of Consolidating Unity and the Islamic Association of Students (Golkar 2010).
6.5 Commanding what is just and forbidding what is wrong: crack down on public morality

One of the campaign promises that Ahmadinejad had made was to bring back farhang-e effaf, or the ‘culture of modesty’, that would reverse Khatami’s more relaxed social and cultural policies. After Khatami’s election in 1997, both sexes had been engaging in a more relaxed socio-moral code especially in urban centers such as Tehran, Shiraz and Mashhad (Mahdavi, P. 2009a: 4). Women and men mixed more freely in public, women wore more colourful and tighter styles of hejab, used more make up in public and dyed their hair while men fashioned western-style clothes and haircuts. Some have even argued that in certain segments of the urban middle – and upper classes young women were staging a sexual revolution against the regime by engaging in bold social and sexual relationships denied by the regime (Mahdavi, P. 2009a; 2009b). The hardliners stated that the more relaxed socio-moral behaviour of urban women polluted Iranian society and condemned it as a US effort to weaken Iran by spreading immorality: the authenticity and purity of the Iranian nation was in the hands of women who needed to be protected from outside powers (Jomhuri-ye Eslami 2006).

The campaign was executed with the help of basij and a new civil defence militia established to assist in the campaign. In the spring of 2004, after the Majles elections, which ousted the reformists from formal politics, the judiciary had established the Department for Social Prevention and Protection. The new department set up units in the provinces to assist the judiciary in ‘crime-fighting, intelligence gathering and providing religious guidance’ (Moaveni 2004). In effect, it was an extra branch of the regime that not only provided the regime with information about its citizens but also stretched the regime’s control over society. The units became enforcers of social and moral regulations similar to the basij and they targeted women and youth in particular (Moaveni 2004). The groups became operational when Ahmadinejad took office in August 2005.

After Ahmadinejad assumed power, the campaign against immoral behaviour in public began to intensify. While the regime has periodically targeted women’s attire and behaviour in public, especially when summer arrives, the campaign that started after the hardliners consolidated their power in 2005 went on for years. The language
of *amr-e be ma’ruf va nahy-e az monkar* (commanding what is just and forbidding what is wrong) was employed to tackle un-Islamic behaviour which was seen as a result of cultural invasion of foreign enemies and women’s role was to defend the Islamic Republic against this invasion (see among others Khamenei’s speech on Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran 2005; or Khamenei on IRNA 2006). The authorities blamed Western ideas of women’s rights and lax moral standards for messing up women’s heads and claimed that women’s behaviour was destroying ‘society’s sanctity’ as one of the senior Ayatollahs, Seyyed Ahmad Khatami, argued (BBC Monitoring Middle East 2006). In the autumn of 2005, the regime ran TV and radio commercials and shows that promoted the campaign. Later in January 2006, the Supreme Council began to implement the Development Plan for Hejab and Chastity. It was a ruling requiring all ministries, governmental agencies and NGOs to promote the culture of modesty, which mainly targeted women, their attires and behaviour at workplace. The ruling also ordered the female Basij forces to enforce the ruling on the streets and with force if needed (Sadeghi 2009: 54). By the spring of 2006, the Basij had assumed a strong presence on the streets and were threatening and arresting women for their attire and behaviour in the public and intimidating and fining shopkeepers for selling ‘inappropriate’ clothing (Khatam 2009). In the summer of 2006, the government, with Iran’s police force, began to sponsor fashions shows that promoted proper modest *hejab*; according to the Hamid Reza Moniri, the show’s executive secretary, the shows were aimed at ‘stemming a cultural invasion from the West’ (*The Guardian* 2006). The government also granted extra funds for film projects that would promote women’s role as a developer and consolidator of family life (*Kayhan* 2006). Two years later in May 2008, Ahmadinejad’s Administration introduced the so-called ‘sustainable security’ plan that ordered Basij forces to patrol streets in urban areas from sunrise to sunset (AFP 2008). The Basij began patrolling in the autumn of 2008 and they targeted particularly women’s public behaviour and attire.

The campaign was of course aimed mostly at the urban upper middle class women living in the northern Tehran known for its ‘Western lifestyle’ and where people live a vastly different life compared to the lower classes in southern parts of the city. But the campaign was effective and the hardliners succeeded in their effort to make their power felt even within the walled compounds of the northern Tehranis. As one of my
interviewees, Farah told me:

‘This was clearly the state’s attempt to scare us, to remind us of who has the power. And it worked. I began to pay more attention to the way I dressed, I hated when they [basijs] came to so close and threatened us. It was awful.’ (Farah, March 2010, Tehran).

6.6 Female media

Women’s magazines and journals have been instrumental for the Iranian women’s movement and the pioneering publications including Zanan, Farzaneh and Jens-e Dovvom have disseminated and expanded gender debate within Iranians. After Ahmadinejad’s election, the hardliners began more forcibly monitoring the female- ran media, which was accused of engaging in ‘media war’ to weaken the Islamic Republic and its religious and cultural ideals and values. The IRGC and basijs were heavily involved in the censoring of the media. For example, in 2007, the IRGC commander Jafari warned the media community by stating that ‘mass media […] should embark on fulfilling their important role to promote and spread [the] Islamic Revolutionary ideals and aspirations across the society’ (Fars News Agency 2007).

Maybe the most infamous incident was the closure of Iran’s most well-known women’s magazine Zanan in January 2008. Zanan had been published for 16 years and had become an influential journal that not only introduced new female interpretations of Islam to ordinary women and men but it also advised its readers on everyday issues in social, economic and legal concerns. It also brought together Iran’s religious and secular women’s movement advocates and invited both sides to take part in the debate. The authorities commented on Zanan’s closure by stating that the magazine had been ‘painting a gloomy picture of Iran’ and that it ‘compromises its readers’ mental health’ by ‘publishing morally questionable information’ (RFERL 2008a). Most importantly, according to the authorities, the magazine had promoted ‘insecurity in society, disturbed public rights, weakened military and revolutionary institutions’ and had painted a picture of Iran as ‘unsafe for women’ (Le Monde Diplomatique). The revoking of the magazine’s license came three days after an IAEA report on Iran’s nuclear program that the US interpreted as strengthening their argument for a new round of sanctions against Iran. It also came just a month prior to the Eighth Majles elections that had already witnessed a clampdown on civil society and reformist politicians and the closure of the magazine suggests that the campaign
of repression directed at civil society actors who the regime could interpret as ‘oppositional’ was ongoing (Hendelman-Baavur 2008).

Following the crackdown on women’s media, many publications that had previously appeared in print moved their publications online. Because of the clampdown on traditional media, the Internet and Iranian blogs politicised themselves very quickly. Particularly Iranian women embraced the Internet and blogs at a very early stage. According to Shirazi, Iranian women have used these mediums not only as a means of accessing and disseminating information but also as a means to voice their individual views on gender issues and participate in debates (Shirazi 2012). Blogging has attracted both professional women’s movement advocates including editors, journalists, human rights advocates, and non-professional women’s movement advocates. Their blogs have ranged from secular to religious, offering analysis, opinions and commentaries about women’s issues in Iran. This has allowed a wider audience to become familiar with the women’s movement’s wide and rich agenda. Khiabany and Sreberny have noted how Iranian blogs matured, in a matter of a few years, from individualistic blogs into collective blogs inciting socio-cultural and political debate and change (Khiabany and Sreberny 2007: 572-573). One of these collective blogs was womeniniran.net that worked as a platform for women’s issues in the Iranian blogistan. It brought together individual blogs and covered a wide range of women’s issues voiced by ‘individual and independent voices’ (Khianaby and Sreberny 2007: 573).

The Guards’ censorship extended also to the Internet. In Iran, the use of the Internet grew rapidly in the early 2000s and it was hardly controlled by the authorities prior to 2005. However after 2005, the IRGC has assumed a central role in the monitoring of the Internet and they have increasingly filtered and banned its content as they interpret it to be one of the tools in the West’s regime change toolbox (see RAND 2009; Sreberny and Khiabany 2007). Prior and after the closure of Zanan, many female bloggers writing on women’s issues were arbitrarily arrested and several of them were charged with ‘activity against national security’ and sent to serve long prison sentences (see e.g. AI 2008b). One of the banned websites was a very popular site called Zanestan that was shut down in November 2007. The website was run by a
NGO called the Women’s Cultural Center that focused on women’s health and legal issues.

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Thus, a nationalist/conservative/traditionalist gender discourse was imposed on society by the hardliners. While its purpose was to consolidate and mark the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by singling out women as symbols of the nation’s purity and resistance against Western interference, what was new to it, when compared to previous state orchestrated gender discourses in the Islamic Republic, was the absence of religious justifications. As Hoodfar and Sadr have argued

[Instead they simply state what, in their view, are ‘appropriate gender roles’ with regards to family stability and societal well-being. Furthermore, this view assumes that a patriarchal family structure is the only model for an Islamic society, regardless of time or context. This line of argument effectively eliminates the possibility for new interpretations of Shari’a, through which Islamist women have been advocating a legal improvement of women’s rights in Iran (Hoodfar and Sard 2009: 13).

However, in essence, both sides, the US and the hardliners in Iran, affected the contours of women’s activism. The declaration of support from the Bush Administration endangered women activists’ physical security and the hardliners narrowed not only the physical contours of women’s activism but also the discursive space by dictating what is the legitimate gender ideology.](

7.0 Conclusion

While the Bush Administration has ostensibly shown an interest in advancing women’s rights in the wider Middle East, including Iran, it failed to protect those it had pledged to liberate and save. In the period 2005-2008, rather than inciting reform in the field of women’s human rights, the Bush Administration facilitated the hardliners’ crack down on the women’s movement, which reversed the years of work and progress achieved by women’s movement advocates. The singling out of Iranian women’s movement advocates was, in essence, the Bush Administration’s attempt to find new justifications for the ongoing War on Terror against Dark Monsters, a war that had become harder and harder to explain to American people. Thus, in effect, Iranian women were employed to demonstrate that the Dark Monster is still well and alive and it needs to be disciplined.
The disciplining of the Dark Monster, however, materialised on the bodies of Iranian women. The Bush Administration, and later the Obama Administration, feminised Iranian women to bear the burden for the ‘greater good’, but which is, actually, the White Self’s security. The Feminine Other – which in this case refers to the Iranian women – is never granted similar security like the one that the White Self enjoys. As her security is less valued. The economic sanctions levelled against the Iranian regime have been in stark contrast with the US emphasis on Muslim women’s rights and in general the West’s insistence to include women as active participants in the world outside the home. The economic sanctions have undermined Iranian women’s access to income, work, education, and health services and pushed them to the margins of social, economic and political life.

For the hardliners in power, the women’s movement – allegedly supported by the old enemy – came to represent a possible post-Islamic Republic order. To prevent another Iraq from happening, the Iranian regime has increasingly become hypermasculinised. At the domestic level, this has materialised in the increasing involvement of military – and paramilitary organisations in Iran’s political and social life. The militarisation of political and social life has impacted both women’s civil society activism and everyday life. To counter external attempts to undermine not only the current regime but also the Islamic order, the hardliners are attacking those who have been picked by the US to represent the post-Islamic era. The state violence against women’s movement advocates and the state sponsored nationalist-conservative-traditionalist discourse on gender relations has narrowed both physical and discursive activism spaces of the women’s movement. Thus, compared to the period 2002-2004 when the regime targeted mainly high profile women’s movement supporters in formal politics, we see in the period 2005-2008/9 how the crack down was extended to the wider society. It is evident that the hardliners in Tehran extended the violent crack down on the wider civil society after the Bush Administration began to emphasis the importance of ordinary Iranian women’s movement advocates for internal reform.

In essence the chapter wanted to draw attention to the fact that the US, and other policy makers, for that matter, need to recognise the damage that the interweaving of women’s rights with interventionist policies causes not only to the physical security of women but to their work on the ground. While the period 2005-2008 witnessed
intensified security consciousness on the part of the Iranian regime, there were hundreds and thousands of women who continued their everyday activism and work. While the government’s changing gender ideology and violent crack down meant that the women’s movement lost avenues at the higher level to push for reform and that the risks of activism grew higher and women activists were pushed to ‘a relatively low-key period of activity, characterised by less political overtones and concentration on grassroots involvement,’ as one women’s NGO explained in an interview (Payvand 2008); the work, however, continued and it should be by no means belittled.
CHAPTER 6: IRAN’S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, 2009: A YEAR AFTER NEDA: THE OBJECTIVE OF KILLING IS TO MAKE ONE INVISIBLE

1.0 Introduction

The main title of this chapter refers to a young Iranian woman Neda Agha-Soltan, who was killed by a basij sniper during the post election demonstrations in June 2009 and who came to symbolise the Green Movement (GM) – a diverse and fluid group of ordinary people and social and political activists. The subtitle refers to the governmental sniper bullets fired during the various demonstrations in 2009 and which I see having a collective end: to silence the Iranian civil society and women in particular, symbolised in Neda. The bullets and other clamp down techniques employed by the government did not only silence individuals like Neda but also created a climate of fear that consequently paralysed organised civil society in the country.

In the spring 2009, Iran was preparing for its tenth presidential elections. Both Iranians themselves and the international community had prepared to see Ahmadinejad continue for another four years. However, the run up to the elections activated not only various networks of activists but ordinary people who shook off years of political apathy and joined campaign rallies, street debates and enthusiastically campaigned for their own candidate. In the campaigning period that started well before the Guardian Council approved the candidates in May, we began to see more and more of the colour green. The colour green was the campaigning colour of the reformist candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi and which was later deployed by the movement, which challenged the election results that many regarded as fraudulent. On the Election Day, 85 per cent of the electorate cast their vote and many hoped to see a reformist candidate to enter the second runoff with Ahmadinejad. Hardly anyone expected Mousavi or Mehdi Karroubi, the other reformist candidate, to win in the first runoff.

75 For Neda documentary, http://www.thisisforneda.com/, last accessed 8/10/2010
76 Hardly anyone expected Mousavi or Mehdi Karroubi, the other reformist candidate, to win in the first runoff.
somewhat relaxed political atmosphere and how they challenged the candidates on issues such as the country’s ailing economy, state-society relations and foreign policy.

The second section of the chapter moves on to examine how the hardline regime dealt with the largest street protests in Iran since 1979 and what was the US reaction to this. According to some estimates, millions of Iranians took to the streets to show their disbelief in the election results. While the demonstrations were sparked by elections results that many found rigged, the roots of the unrest can be found in people’s growing discontent with the already mentioned governmental economic mismanagement, aggressive foreign policy behaviour and the regime’s clamp down on civil rights which had intensified since the hardliners began to crawl back to the center of Iran’s political life. Although it appeared, at least for a while, that the demonstrations could bring the regime to its knees, a day after the first street demonstrations the regime began systematically to clear streets and the most violent months since the 1980s political purges started against ordinary Iranians and civil society actors. It was during these street demonstrations when a basij sniper killed Neda Agha-Soltan. Killing Neda was the regime’s collective message to ordinary people and civil society actors and women in particular. As this section shows, increasing violence against civil society actors that forced them to exit activism or leave the country strengthened this message. In short, killing one is to make him/her invisible and unheard. The stakes to be visible and have a voice were made so high that civil society actors ‘voluntarily’ made themselves invisible.

Mousavi’s victory in the presidential elections would have undone the hardliners’ take over of the body politic. While the US rhetoric about the regime had changed with President Barack Obama’s new approach to the US-Iran relations, the hardliners’ reaction to the GM needs to be placed within the War on Terror framework that pushed masculinities to engage in hypermasculine games. I argue that the ones that the US had pledged to support were the ones who paid the prize for the White Self’s desire for security but which materialises itself in transnational violence and insecurity. In the spring 2010, women’s advocacy was paralysed and their NGO work had suffered due to the increasing state violence. At the same time, these women activists were increasingly trying to work hard to realise their views of women’s rights. This was, however, increasingly hard due to the intensified state repression.
Also, while many of the women’s movement advocates who I interviewed had agreed with the agenda and goals of the GM, they were disappointed with the movement’s little focus on economic issues.

2.0 Iran’s tenth presidential elections

When Iran’s tenth presidential elections were approaching, many Iran observers expected them to be a small and insignificant political performance to confirm the re-election of Ahmadinejad. Ahmadinejad had everything that he needed to win the election at his disposal. Firstly, critical voices were rather well controlled thanks to the hardliners’ repression of civil society. Moreover, the political apathy of the reformists and ordinary people, which had settled in around the mid-2000s, was assumed to keep people at home on the Election Day. Secondly, whilst Ahmadinejad did not have Khamenei’s public support for his candidacy, the key ministries overseeing the elections were in the hands of Ahmadinejad’s loyal men.77 Similarly, his foot soldiers from the IRGC and basij forces were campaigning vigorously for his re-election. Fourthly, Ahmadinejad’s supporters controlled the state-owned media and oversaw other media outlets, which meant that other candidates had a hard time to get airtime on state TV and radio. And finally, as in the 2005 presidential elections, the Guardian Council, staffed by hardliners, exercised a rigid vetting process. On 20 May 2009, the Council approved only four out of 500 candidates. These included the incumbent President Ahmadinejad, reformist candidates Mir-Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi and a conservative candidate and former Chief Commander of the IRGC Mohsen Rezai.

2.1 Enter Mir-Hossein Mousavi

By the time when the Guardian Council confirmed its approval of presidential candidates, Mousavi had already rolled out his election machinery and emerged as the leading candidate against Ahmadinejad. Mousavi’s revolutionary credentials far surpass those of Ahmadinejad. Mousavi was active in the 1979 Revolution, a close

77 On March 21 2009, Ayatollah Khamenei publicly declined to announce his preferences between the two conservative candidates, Ahmadinejad and Mohsen Rezai. He stated that “[T]here were some rumors that I support a special candidate for the presidential elections. But I have one vote, and I would not determine a certain candidate because the people themselves should choose their candidates based on their own knowledge” (The Guardian 2009a).
protégée of Ayatollah Khomeini and he served as Prime Minister until 1988. In the 1980s, he was seen as one of the hardliners and he gained a reputation as a man who did not stand for dissent (BBC 2009d). However, it was due to his economic policies that the country survived the Iran-Iraq war. In the 2009 elections, many recalled how Ayatollah Khomeini had unequivocally backed up Mousavi against then-president Ali Khamenei who did not agree with Mousavi’s reconstruction policies (Ehsani et al. 2009). After President Rafsanjani excluded Mousavi from his cabinet in the early 1990s, Mousavi retreated from politics for 20 years and focused on teaching Islamic architecture and finding his passion in arts.

When Mousavi re-emerged in the 2009 elections, he had a new message to the Iranian people promulgated via his green coalition, as his campaign was named. Whilst the international media, which paid close attention to Mousavi, branded him as a modern ‘western’ type of reformist, Mousavi has a deeply religious background and has always emphasised his firm belief in the 1979 Revolution and the Islamic Republic. In the election campaign Mousavi emphasised a combination of social justice and healthy economic management, as well as the need for politico-legal reforms and opening talks with the Obama Administration if President Obama’s ‘actions are keeping with his words’ (Mousavi quoted in Iran Chamber 2009). It needs to be noted that Mousavi’s concept of social justice was different from that of Ahmadinejad’s. Whereas Ahmadinejad had relied on lavish justice shares to the lower classes, Mousavi understood social justice as an institutionalised state practice that incites economic reforms, creates employment opportunities and boosts both the public and private sectors’ performance and which, in turn, materialises on the tables of ordinary people. Thus, for Mousavi, social justice was a return to the revolution’s original promises and it aimed at improving society at large and in an economically sustainable way. Mousavi’s campaign also called for the rule of law and greater individual rights. One example of this was Mousavi’s promise to discontinue the enforcement of ‘culture of modesty’, which according to him was a political tool used by the elite to suppress difference in society (Ehsani et al. 2009). Hence, while Mousavi’s concept of social justice appealed to people who struggled in their everyday life, his call for greater individual freedoms appealed to the middle classes.
However, for women’s movement advocates and ordinary women, it was Mousavi’s wife, Zahra Rahnavard, who made Mousavi an interesting presidential candidate. Rahnavard is a well-established artist and she held a PhD in political science. She had published widely on women, politics and religion, had a long history of political activism in leftist-Islamist organisations from the 1960s and 70s onwards and in the 1979 Revolution she joined, along with her husband, Khomeini’s supporters. After the Revolution, Rahnavard sought to participate in the newly organised body politic and she was one of the founders of the Women’s Society of the Islamic Republic (WSIR). She was also an editor of *Rah-e Zainab* (Path of Zainab), which under a different title had been Iran’s leading women’s magazines in the Pahlavi era (Afary 2009: 313). However, after Rahnavard began to criticise the regime’s forced Islamisation of society, and in particular women’s compulsory *hejab*, she fell out of the regime’s favour and was forced into a period of low activity (Afary 2009: 314).

Since the early 1990s, Rahnavard had worked with the reformists and pushed for reforms in the fields of women’s employment, domestic violence and child custody, to name a few. In an interview with the *Zanan*, which the hardliners closed down in 2008, Rahnavard argued by referencing Simone de Beauvoir that Iranian women are treated as the ‘second sex’ (Afary 2009: 315). Under Khatami, Rahnavard worked as a presidential advisor and in 1999, Khatami appointed her as the chancellor of the prestigious *al-Zahra* Women’s University in Tehran. However in the mid-2000s, when the hardliners purged universities, Rahnavard was forced to leave her post.

In the run-up to the elections, Rahnavard not only attended campaign events alongside her husband but also influenced Mousavi’s campaign agenda which came to address women and their rights. She also organised her own events and published extensively her own ideas prior to the elections. In one of her articles published before the elections, she argued that ‘the [...] experience from past elections shows that during the election excitement and [...] [attempts] to gain women’s votes, women are considered first-class citizens and half of the populations. But as soon as the election is over women are downgraded to second- and third-class citizens and they're being forgotten.’ She further added that Iran should review its laws in order to end the discrimination against women and that the Islamic Republic should join international conventions that safeguard women's rights, especially within the workplace’ (Payvand 2009a). Her gender vision aimed at expanding the familial roles that the
hardliners’ gender ideology had tried to impose on society. A day after Mousavi’s candidacy had been approved, Rahnavard argued that

[W]hen participating in social activities, our women must feel both secure and liberated. In other words, they must be allowed to freely choose their career, work environment, and clothing [in compliance with Islamic dress code]. […] The democracy we seek is a religious democracy, which would allow young women of our time to thrive and flourish by providing them with security, freedom, and employment (Payvand 2009b).

Rahnavard was able to bring the woman question back on the state level and pushed to counter the hardliners’ gender ideology that was aimed at driving women back to the sphere of the family home. While the women’s movement advocates did not officially support any of the candidates, Rahnavard was able to unite both pious and secular minded women behind her husband’s candidacy.

2.2 The run-up to the elections

During the last six weeks of the election campaigning both the regime and the presidential candidates introduced new dynamics into the campaigning and people keenly responded to these. The regime also relaxed its crackdown on society, for example by letting the social media flourish in the Internet, and in this way gave a breathing space for the civil society and the campaigning organisations. Consequently, political apathy quickly disappeared and within a few weeks the public’s enthusiasm grew so large that it made Mehrangiz Kar, a prominent women’s rights advocate, described it as ‘election hyper energy’. She noted, ‘[W]e are seeing much more freshness in the campaigns than we ever expected. Watching and hearing all that is happening, one cannot remain silent to what is going on’ (Kar interviewed by Shiriin Jaafari 2009).

However, while the public was allowed to participate in campaign rallies and debates, at the same, according to an Amnesty International report, state repression significantly increased against civil society advocates, among those particularly targeted were women’s rights activists, student leaders, lawyers, and advocates for Iran’s ethnic and religious minorities (AI 2009: 15). Some external actors in the country saw this reflecting the regime’s awareness of the real reformist challenge to the incumbent (Interviews with several European diplomats, Tehran, March-April 2010).
2.2.1 Public debates

One of the most exciting openings of the public space was the televised live debates between Ahmadinejad and the other candidates: an entirely new development in Iran. Ahmadinejad faced each of his opponents individually debating for one and a half hours at the time. The airing of the debates took place between 2-8 June and prior to the televised debates the candidates were given airtime on state TV for their own 45-minutes long campaign videos (BBC 2009a). These live debates provided a public and relatively sheltered forum for the reformist candidates to voice their agendas and challenge Ahmadinejad’s policies from the last four years. The critical dialogue coming from Ahmadinejad’s opponents can be seen as a joint reformist-pragmatist initiative, which aimed at crafting a sustainable economic-political strategy with clear domestic and foreign policy objectives in areas of concern such as economic reforms, civil freedoms and better relations with the West. This coalition of reformists and pragmatists had been in making for some time now - mostly due to Ahmadinejad’s unorthodox economic policies and problematic foreign policy approach, which together were derailing the Islamic Republic’s popularity in the eyes of Iranians and isolating the country in global affairs.

Mousavi tried to engage with Ahmadinejad on these issues on June 3, when it was his turn to appear on TV. Mousavi argued that Ahmadinejad’s government ‘has undermined the dignity of our nation and of our country. [...] It has inflicted heavy damages on us and created tension with other countries. It has left us with not a single friend in the region’ (TheRealNews 2009). On economics, Mousavi roared at Ahmadinejad’s ‘charity based economy’ and argued that

‘one of our problems is that we are facing […] someone who can stare at the camera, look you in the eyes, and claim […] that black is white, that two times two is not four, but ten, and state it so emphatically that some of you swayed! Nothing is worse than when the government lies to the people!’ (Mousavi quoted in Ehsani et al. 2009).

Ahmadinejad’s performance was rather poor at every debate and he resorted not only to blackmailing of his opponents and their family members but also showed very little understanding of the country’s economic situation by quoting suspicious if not forged data and blaming the previous administrations for Iran’s economic problems.
2.2.2 Shaking off political apathy

As the candidates showed their eagerness to participate in constructive debates, the wider society was also electrified and found its way to the public space to express and voice their opinions. In the run-up to the elections, many saw the June ballot box standing at a delicate crossroad of the country’s future. The person who would be elected would decide the direction of the country’s democratisation, its economic situation and relations with the outside world.

Ordinary people saw the campaigning period opening a breathing space after the political and social crackdown of the past four years under the Ahmadinejad Administration and they were quick to seize this opportunity. Many new people, particularly young people who were born after the Revolution, found, for the first time, interest in the country’s political future (Farah, Tehran, April 2010). At nights young people began taking over streets in Tehran and other major cities and they said that they sensed that ‘transformation was in making’, but no one could pin it down properly, they only felt ‘we are part of something bigger’ (personal communication with the author, June 2009). For the first time since the Khatami era people felt interested enough to voice their opinions about the country’s economic downturn, corruption, inflation and human rights violations. People enthusiastically showed their support to their chosen candidates and the last weeks of the campaigning period witnessed a growing number of both spontaneous and organised political rallies of thousands of people attending not only in the capital but also in other larger cities around the country.

What began to be a prominent theme in these rallies was the colour of green. We began to see women wearing green headscarves, younger population fashioning green wristbands, and men wearing green t-shirts and headbands, the signature colour of Mousavi’s campaign. The soon famous Green Movement (GM) was in the making. Mousavi’s campaign slogan, har shahrvand, yek setaad, for each citizen, one camp, (Ganji 2009) brought together people across class, gender, ethnic, pious/secular divisions and the movement and its energy that grew behind Mousavi’s candidacy was unseen in the Islamic Republic’s history.78

78 It needs to be noted that the GM was very much an urban-based movement.
However, while especially the foreign media was drumming on about the new emerging social and political movement, people inside the country were more realistic and careful about the movement and its future. A Nordic diplomat from Tehran remembered the atmosphere in late May 2009:

The Vali Asr Street [of Tehran] was packed with young people and I was walking around looking for my friends. The atmosphere was energetic and people were almost euphoric. I finally found my friends and asked them what was happening. They said people were here to show support to Mousavi. We then started discussing about Mousavi and I asked again ‘what it is about this Mousavi that makes you to vote for him?’ One of them replied; ‘I don’t really know, I just want to get rid of Ahmadinejad, I hope someone could replace him’. The others were nodding in agreement but none of them could really specify what made Mousavi such an appealing choice, especially when knowing his background as a regime loyalist conservative in the 80s (Interview with a Nordic diplomat, Tehran, April 2010).

Many have noted that prior to the elections, when the GM was still finding its form, one of the unifying forces was, in fact, people’s desire to get rid of Ahmadinejad. Afshari and Underwood have even argued that the diversity of the people who identified with the movement made it hard to define the specific goals and reform ideas of the movement (Afshari and Underwood 2009: 8). My interviewees shared similar views on the pre-election period. Many of them had had the same feeling that most of the people in the streets did not care so much about the candidates’ and their agendas and people believed Ahmadinejad to simply symbolise everything that had gone wrong in society and that it was time to correct this. The problem seemed to be that people, especially the younger segment of the society which compromises 70 per cent of the population, did not know what or who could be the replacement for the current one.

However, more important in the long run was the fact that the run-up to the elections activated ordinary people to participate in civil society activism and take part in debates and in essence people made their voices heard, which the regime had tried to stifle since the mid-2000s.

2.3 Women’s movement advocates in the elections

Women’s movement advocates saw a window of opportunity to open in the run-up to the elections and a number of pious and secular women’s groups, individual human rights advocates, NGOs, political activists and trade unions formed a broad coalition
under one banner called the ‘Women’s Convergence’. The coalition decided not to throw its support behind any of the candidates but asked for their individual responses to the following questions: first, what was the candidates’ position to the signing of CEDAW, and second, if they were willing to revise all local discriminatory laws against women in the constitution. At the same time, the aim was to reverse and challenge the hardliners’ gender discourse that emphasised women’s roles outside the public sphere.

The campaign managed to bring gender questions back in the public sphere and demonstrate that within Islam there can be a number of ways to interpret gender relations and norms. The coalition also raised awareness among ordinary people and re-energised the women’s movement after a period of low-profile work. Women working for the coalition published newsletters and made appearances in the media, they attended street rallies, organised press conferences and interviews with the candidates (Tohidi 2009). The candidates found it almost impossible not to address gender questions in their campaigns, Ahmadinejad being the only one who evaded to comment. In the end, both Mousavi and Karroubi made women’s rights integral to their campaign agendas. As already noted above, the role of Mousavi’s wife Rahnavaard was important in this matter. Karroubi on his part made a strong statement just before his candidacy was approved by stating that ‘[E]nsuring equality between men and women was one of the aims of the Islamic Revolution, and this desire was reiterated many times by the founder of the Islamic Revolution, Imam Khomeini.’ He further added that the Islamic Republic needs to be reformed and ‘this change cannot be realized except with the restoration of the greatness and the rightful status of women’ (Press TV 2009a). Karroubi, who had Jamila Kadivar, a prominent women’s movement advocate, as his spokesperson, also promised to have women in his cabinet should he be elected. Addressing women’s rights, the conservative candidate Rezai made a promise of putting housewives on the payroll if elected president (Press TV 2009b). While this supported women’s familial roles, in a country where women’s presence in the paid labour is low, Rezai’s promise was attractive to many women staying home. Rezai also made promises of improving women’s rights in the fields of education, economics and health – leaving questions of the family law and political rights untouched. However, perhaps most importantly, the coalition managed to incite
debate among ordinary people. As a NGO worker described the pre-election atmosphere a year later:

Even in my own family I argued about gender relations and roles with my father. I think this is an important step to take and it could initiate change in society. When certain customs are being debated, discussed, or questioned, it might be possible to change them. In the long run this might contribute to changes in laws. Any change must come from inside, not from above or outside. If the push for change comes from inside it is harder for the government to ignore it (Niaz, Tehran, April 2010).

2.4 The elections

The week before the elections was coloured by nightly rallies in the main streets of Tehran. Mousavi’s rallies gathered together thousands of people and were the largest since the student demonstrations in 1999. Mousavi’s mass rallies made some Iran analysts believe that the incumbent’s chances to be re-elected were dwindling and many of his former supporters were leaning towards Mousavi. Reasons behind this shift included Iran’s soaring inflation rate, high unemployment and the West’s economic sanctions that were materialising on the backs of ordinary people (see Cohen 2009; The Washington Post 2009). The hardliners began to feel unsettled by the nightly rallies and for instance on June 5, a week before the elections, Khamenei warned people participating in the rallies and campaigns to be careful in order to avoid sparking ‘frictions, revolt, and enmity’ (BBC Monitoring Trans Caucus Unit 2009).

On June 12, Iranians went to the polls and early reports expected the turnout to be high and the Ministry of Interior ordered the voting stations to remain open for four hours past the scheduled closing (The NYT 2009a). Before the preliminary results were announced Mousavi organised a press conference where he claimed his victory and charged that there had been serious voting irregularities. He called Khamenei to intervene and investigate the irregularities that included a lack of ballot boxes in many areas, some of Mousavi’s campaign offices being attacked, his web site being shut down and on the day of voting text-messaging services were slowed down in order to disturb the opposition’s ability to communicate during the voting process. However, just two hours after the polls had been closed, Iran’s state owned media claimed the incumbent President Ahmadinejad had won in a landslide (ISNA 2009a). The reformists were confounded by the news. They had been confident about their
chances to win this time, not necessarily in the first round, but definitely in the second runoff. Polling had also supported the reformist hopes about getting re-elected after years of conservative power. For example, a poll conducted in Iran’s ten major cities in late May found that Mousavi was leading Ahmadinejad with 4 per cent (Press TV 2009c).

Since no independent election observers were present in Iran, it has been hard to conclude if fraud took place, yet, irregularities were reported by several Iran observers and human rights organisations. However, some have argued that Ahmadinejad’s election was indeed a result of people’s will and there was ‘no solid evidence of fraud’ (Walter Mebane’s study on the 2009 elections quoted in Afrasiabi 2009). However, the regime’s mishandling of the aftermath of the elections only added to the perception that the elections had been fraudulent (Abootalebi 2009: 8).

3.0 From ballots to bullets: the green protests

On June 13, the streets of Tehran and other major Iranian cities had been fuming since the early hours. Supporters of Mousavi and Karroubi flooded the streets in numbers that surprised even the old generation of student demonstrators from the late 1990s. The green wave, now branded as the Green Movement, took over the streets.

The updated elections results published by the Interior Ministry at 8 a.m. only fuelled the agitation in the streets. The new results, with 77 per cent of the votes counted, put the turnout at 85 per cent and re-announced Ahmadinejad being re-elected with 65 per cent, followed by Mousavi with 32 per cent, which IRNA translated into 18 million votes and 9 million votes respectively (IRNA 2009). Following this, both Mousavi

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79 See a report by Ali Ansari, Daniel Berman and Tom Rintoul, "Preliminary Analysis of the Voting Figures in Iran’s 2009 Presidential Elections", published by Chatham House and the Iranian Institute, University of St Andrews, June 21, 2009. Available at http://www.chathamhouse.org.uk/publications/papers/view/-/id/755/, retrieved 12.02.2011. The report shows, for example, how in two conservative provinces, Mazandaran and Yazd, a turnout of more than 100% was recorded. Furthermore, in a third of all provinces, the official results would have required that Ahmadinejad had taken not only all former conservative voters, all former centrist voters, and all new voters, but also up to 44% of former reformist voters, despite a decade of conflict between these groups. See the report for details.

80 The final official election results gave Ahmadinejad 63.62 percent of the vote, followed by Mousavi’s 33.75 percent, Rezai’s 1.73 percent and Karroubi’s .85 percent (’Iran Annouces Final Poll Results: Ahmadinezhad Wins, Vision of the Islamic Republic, Network 1, June 13, 2009. BBC Monitoring).
and Karroubi published statements in which they rejected the election results and called their supporters and the clerical establishment to challenge the outcome of the elections. Only a few hours later Khamenei dismissed the appeal and issued a statement on state television congratulating Ahmadinejad on his victory, calling it as a ‘blessing from God’, and pointedly urged the other candidates to support him.

Continuous demonstrations that began on Saturday 13 June lasted until late June and hundreds of thousands, even millions, Iranians attended daily demonstrations. One of the most famous demonstrations was the symbolic silent march on Monday 15 June. An estimated three million people walked in silence, their mouths taped, from the Enghelab (Revolution) Square to the Azadi (Freedom) Square. After the first weeks, the demonstrations grew more sporadic and attracted less people due to the heavy state organised violence against people in the streets.

The authorities’ first response to the demonstrations was the denying of permits needed for public gatherings and dismissing the protestors as ‘dust and pebbles’ who would find no place to ‘shine’ in the ‘transparent nation of Iran’, as Ahmadinejad declared on Sunday June 14 (Press TV 2009d). However, the regime was quick to activate the IRGC, riot police and basij militias, which systematically forced people to retreat from the streets. While the riot police and basij entered the streets and broke up demonstrations, the Guards were concentrating on paramilitary and intelligence operations and mostly targeting the leaders and organisers of the GM. Interior Minister Mahsouli justified the extensive crack down on the protestors by claiming that the demonstrations were illegal without the required permits and thereby the arrest and prosecution of protestors was reasonable (ISNA 2009b). Another target were the opposition’s tools of communication. The authorities blocked mobile phone transmissions, websites, blogs and social media sites such as Facebook. Especially the young had widely used text messages and blogs to disseminate information about

81 People abroad were able to follow the demonstrations almost interactively when images and videos were uploaded from the streets to social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube. Outside the country, the June demonstrations were named as the Twitter Revolution - echoing the anti-government demonstrations in Moldova earlier in April 2009. Although social media did play a role in the demonstrations and in people’s communication, it seems that western observers exaggerated its role. See for example, Golnaz Esfandiari, 'The Twitter Devolution’, Foreign Policy, June 7, 2010. http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/06/07/the_twitter_revolution_that_wasnt?sms_ss =email&at_xt=4d6f6f50030d9b8c%2C0, retrieved February 12, 2011.
demonstrations and warnings about the security forces.

A partial concession to the demonstrators came on June 15, when Khamenei responded to the demonstrators and assumed a public role in the crisis, something that he has hardly ever seen to seek. Khamenei called for the Guardian Council to conduct a limited re-count of 10 per cent of votes that Mousavi’s campaign office had singled out as questionable. A similar re-count had taken place after the first round of the 2005 presidential elections, which resulted in a run-off between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani. In 2005, the recount was carried out behind closed doors and it was announced that the elections had been clean but the council never published its findings. This time, however, the situation was quite different. The public pressure from the streets and even some regime hardliners, including Speaker of the Majles Ali Larijani, questioning the results meant that Khamenei and his hardline allies faced a dilemma: by admitting that voting irregularities had taken place, they would have also admitted that they had not been true to the pure image of Islamic Republic they had attempted to project. Were they to deny any of the accusations, street protests would only accelerate and play into the hands of Mousavi and Karroubi. Maybe Khamenei decided that he would deal with loyalty questions and dissident opinions later because the re-counted votes confirmed the re-election of Ahmadinejad on June 29 (Press TV 2009g).

On Wednesday 17 June, Mousavi and the former President Khatami sent a public letter to the Judiciary asking judges to use their powers to reduce violence in the streets and release protesters who had been arrested. The letter stated that ‘the use of violence against ordinary people, raiding people's residences just because they chant the sacred phrase of Allh-o-akbar, beating up women and men’ is not in line with the standards of the Islamic Republic (CNN 2009a). The hardliners’ response was not surprising. It was not only a warning to the demonstrators but also linked them to external powers. Mohammad Reza Habibi, a senior prosecutor from Esfahan, declared that ‘[W]e warn the few elements controlled by foreigners who try to disrupt domestic security by inciting individuals to destroy and to commit arson that the Islamic penal code for such individuals waging war against God is execution’ (quoted in the NYT 2009b). The Supreme National Security Council responded to Mousavi’s criticism by not only placing the responsibility of protestors’ injuries and deaths on the shoulders
of Mousavi but also accused external actors:

It is your duty not to incite and invite the public to illegal gatherings; otherwise, you will be responsible for its consequences. [...] It is your responsibility to prevent the public from attending such rallies instead of making accusations against the law enforcement. [...] We believe this is an organized network which is most probably affiliated to foreign-related groups and deliberately disturbs the peace and security of the public (Press TV 2009e).

The dismissal of demonstrations as ‘conspiracy’ by foreign powers only further angered protestors as they felt that their demands went unheard by the authorities. However, it was Khamenei’s Friday Sermon on June 19, at University of Tehran that formulated the regime’s official response. Khamenei reiterated his support for Ahmadinejad and denied claims that the last week’s elections had been rigged. Khamenei stated that

[I]f the nation feels that in the remarks made by certain officials there lies an issue of enmity with the Islamic system and certain hands are at work to help a movement that seeks to deliver a blow to the establishment, they [the nation] will distance themselves [from those officials], even if such officials pursue a slogan that has arisen from the nation (Press TV 2009f).

He also added that ‘foreign enemies were behind the street unrest’ destroying Iranians’ trust in their political leaders’ and pushing to stage a ‘velvet revolution’ (The NYT 2009d/The Guardian 2009b). Khamenei also warned the protestors of even tougher governmental repression if the demonstrations were to continue (The Times 2009). Many interpreted this as Khamenei giving green light to any approach that security forces would find necessary in order to silence the protestors.

And indeed, the next day, the IRGC and other militia groups intensified the use of their machineries and a violent crack down began in the streets of major Iranian cities and society at large (BBC Farsi 2009). The state’s security presence stayed stationed in the streets and public places for months. Security forces had permission to shoot protestors and according to the official reports from Iranian authorities the death toll by mid July was 30, however, human rights activists’ anecdotal evidence put the figure at hundreds (The Guardian 2009c; The Guardian 2009d). Alongside the street protestors, one of the first targets was the media. The Ministry of Interior revoked both domestic and foreign journalists’ press credentials and foreign journalists were asked to leave the country. This meant that information about what was taking place
inside the country was restricted to the haphazard grass root journalism on social media such as YouTube and Facebook but which could not be verified. This, of course suited the regime.

Starting also on June 20, the security forces systematically cleared the streets by placing snipers in the main streets and squares, using tear gas and randomly beating protestors. Universities were also attacked with a heavy hand and some institutions decided to close early for the summer holidays. 120 academics at the Tehran University resigned after five students were reported to been killed in a basij raid. On June 20, Tehran’s medical authorities confirmed that at least 47 people had died, many from gunshots wounds (The Guardian 2009d).

3.1 Neda Agha-Soltan

Also, on June 20 took place an iconic event. A young woman called Neda Agha-Soltan, aged 26, was shot dead by a governmental sniper in one of the street demonstrations. Bystanders recorded Neda’s last moments on their mobile phones and the footage was quickly uploaded and circulated on YouTube and within hours she became the most well known symbol of the post-election repression in Iran. Neda’s death unsettled many who had participated in the GM. The past week had already demonstrated how hundreds of thousands of women had claimed their presence not only in the demonstrations. Moreover, as Tahmasebi-Birgani’s works has shown, women were also participating in the inner circle of the emerging social movement and shaping the movement’s direction, content and philosophy (Tahmasebi-Birgani 2010).

Neda’s death was not the only violent attack against women: human rights reports and video footages from Iran has showed that basijs and riot police were increasingly targeting women in the streets and the systematic clearing of women from the ranks of the movement were effectively creating a climate of fear inside the country (Negar, Tehran, April 2010). While the regime denied that state security forces had been involved in Neda’s death and blamed either other protestors or foreign governments
of killing her,\textsuperscript{82} the violent act was an efficient way to transfer the environment in which the Green Movement was taking shape and to stage an ideological message before the demonstrators.

Thus, I argue, that the governmental sniper bullet that killed Neda was aimed at silencing not just this particular individual woman but also symbolically Iranian civil society and female actors within it as a collective. Neda symbolised several socio-economic and political issues that the hardliners had tried to suppress for years now. First, her gender was maybe the most important of all. In 2009, women had shown, once again, that they were one of the most vocal groups working in civil society. In 2009, they had not only actively participated in the run up to the elections but were also found in large numbers in the street demonstrations. This made women one of the main targets of the hardliners and security forces. And as will be shown, the hardliners’ stance on the women’s movement only hardened in the coming months.

Second, Neda’s young age draws attention to Iran’s demographics (Tohidi 2009). 70 per cent of Iran’s population are below age 30 and they have grown increasingly frustrated with the repressive socio-political environment that does not allow them to be heard. Thirdly, her middle-class background told a story about the Green Movement and Iranian women in general. While the middle classes did indeed form an important support group within the movement, it is worth examining briefly what it means to be from the middle classes in today’s Iran and what it meant for the Green Movement. As Dabashi has asked, can we really use the term ‘middle-class’ to describe people who are jobless twenty-something-year-olds who still live with their parents, who cannot afford their own apartment, marry and/or start a family in a principally oil-based economy? (Dabashi 2011: 111). Moreover, of these, women represent a disproportionately high number compared to men (Dabashi 2011:111). Thus, Neda, with her young age and middle class background, gave her face to the many frustrated young women (and men) who were trying to make their voices heard.

However, the governmental bullet that killed Neda, did not only silence individuals

like Neda but, as already hinted above, created a climate of fear that consequently paralysed and silenced the organised civil society in the country (Leili, Tehran, April 2010). One of my Iranian friends explained how she had felt about the random killings in the demonstrations: ‘[I] felt that fear penetrated all of us. You could only feel this cold lump in your stomach – it paralysed me and I stopped going to the demonstrations’ (Sara, Tehran, April 2010). Many of the women who I talked to saw Neda’s death connected to women’s roles in civil society activism. They felt that it was almost as if the authorities were showing women their place in society again.

3.2 Dwindling demonstrations
The fact that there were no restrictions on the use of violence from the side of the security forces effectively cleared the public demonstrations in Tehran and in other major cities by the end of July. Later in the early autumn demonstrations were organised on a smaller scale to commemorate those who had lost their lives in the streets. The last large clashes between the regime and protestors took place on December 27, 2009. On that day people gathered together to celebrate the Ashura mourning ceremony – commemorating the killing of Imam Hussein – but it turned into one of the bloodiest days for the GM. More than 300 people were arrested, hundreds were injured and ten were reportedly killed by the security forces in Tehran and Tabriz (The Guardian 2009e). One of the last attempts for organised protests was Mousavi’s call for peaceful demonstrations on February 11 2010, to celebrate the Revolution’s anniversary. However, the regime warned civil society in advance and many were too frightened to participate. National Chief Police, Ismail Ahmadi Moghaddam, issued his warning in January by declaring that the era of ‘mercy’ was over and he further added that ‘[A]fter […] Ashura, our tolerance has come to an end, and both the police force and the judiciary will be confronting them [protestors] with full force’ (The NYT 2010a). The statement was followed by several rounds of executions of political prisoners in early February (The NYT 2010b). After this, public demonstrations were basically over. After the direct violence employed in the streets, the hardliners moved on to ensure that the civil society had lost its voice. A NGO worker, who I interviewed in 2010, described the situation as the ‘militarisation of society’ (Negin, Tehran, April 2010).
3.3 Paralysing civil society: longstanding methods of violence

In order to silence the more organised civil society, the security forces used arbitrary arrests to target both high and mid-level profile reformists, women’s rights advocates, other human rights activists, NGO workers, artists, academics, journalists and students (see for example AI 2009; Iran HRDC 2010). The hardliners targeted both low-and high profile women’s movement advocates and according to a human rights advocate, 300 women’s movement advocates were arbitrarily arrested in the aftermath of the elections (Abbasgholizadeh 2011). Many women activists had their offices and homes raided. By September 2009 the number of arrested people had reached 4,000 people (AI 2009). A widely used practice was to keep the arrested without access to lawyers or families, and without charge for varying lengths of time, often in conditions amounting to enforced disappearance (AI 2009: 25). Many families had no information available until the arrested showed up at home or until his/her body was released by the authorities.83

Another way to silence civil society activists was to put them under house arrest and keep them away from their supporters and venues of participation and influence. Some people found it safer to leave the country and the number of Iranian exiles in the west went up again. However, also this played into the hands of the regime – the activists were no longer stirring the situation inside the country. A new technique deployed by the regime was the targeting of family members – especially of children – instead of the activist him/herself. This long-standing method of violence was widely used in the immediate aftermath of the elections but it continued subsequently. For example, Faezeh Hashemi Rafsanjani, a women’s rights advocate and the daughter of the former President Rafsanjani who had joined the GM, was arrested several times. Mousavi’s son and brother-in-law were also under arrest for a long time, and the list goes on and it includes children of less known activists as well (see AI 2009: 29-30).

After the first days of demonstrations, the regime began to accuse the US and other foreign countries of working behind the scenes to bring about a soft revolution to

83 The number of arrested who died in prisons due to the torture used by the authorities had not been confirmed but human rights advocates inside Iran and international human rights organisations have reported that the number could be as high as hundreds.
overthrow the current government. This accusation increased the arrests of people who had links to foreign countries. The arrests of dual-nationals, for instance of the French-Iranian embassy worker Nazok Afshar who ended up appearing in the show-trials later in the year, were widely condemned by the global community. However, also women’s movement advocates, NGO workers and journalists were accused of having ties to external actors and they were in increasing numbers arbitrarily arrested and imprisoned (*Siyasat-e Ruz* 2009).

In July, the first allegations of the use of rape in detention centers and prisons emerged. Rape as a method of torture was used in Iran before the 2009 arrests, but very few men have previously admitted in public that they have been rape victims. There was also evidence that the rapes were carried out systematically by the authorities who not only ordered/allowed the prison personnel to carry out these acts out but they also employed sentenced criminals to rape people arrested in the demonstrations (*The Guardian* 2011). According to human rights organisations and the GM leaders, more than 100 people were raped (AI 2009; Iran HRDC 2010). In 2009, the government seemed to be denying sexual honour from those demanding political rights (Mir-Hosseini 2009). Potkin Azarmehr, an Iranian-British blogger, commented on this arguing ‘[B]y killing protesters, the government makes martyrs of them, but by raping them and allowing them to live, it makes them shunned in society’ (Azarmehr 2009). Or as UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Manfred Nowak, has argued: ‘[W]hen Government officials use rape, the suffering inflicted might go beyond the suffering caused by classic torture, partly because of the intended and often resulting isolation of the survivor. In some cultures a rape victim may be rejected or formally banished from her community or family’ (AI 2009: 48). According to an Amnesty International report, several of the summer 2009 rape victims fled the country because of the humiliation. This again served the regime, as there were less oppositional voices to be heard.

Mehdi Karroubi, however, openly challenged the stigma of the act in August 2009 by demanding the government to investigate the allegations. Karroubi, together with Mousavi, set up the *Committee for the Follow up of the Injured and Detained in Recent Events* to support the rape victims and help them with their legal cases. The committee has not only recorded the various forms of ill treatment that were practiced
in detention centers and prisons but has also helped to break the taboo subject in the country. After Karroubi had made the allegations public, the regime denied the accusations. Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami, a senior hardline cleric who had already denounced the street demonstrations as un-Islamic, called Karroubi’s allegations a ‘total slander against the Islamic system’ (Press TV 2009h).

The arrests and ill treatment and torture in detention usually resulted in forced confession and in early August 2009, the regime organised a series of show trials in which some of the detained, both ordinary protestors and high profile reformists, human rights activists and journalists, were put on trial. The first trial on August 1, at the Revolutionary Court building involved 100 detainees who were collectively accused of having ‘participated in riots, acting against national security, disturbing public order, vandalizing public property and having ties with counter-revolutionary groups’ (AI 2009: 54). The first trial was followed by four other and each of them had a further 50 defendants (AI 2009: 54). During the first day of court, prosecutors read out one of the indictments that was based on one of the detainees’ confession and which, according to the authorities, confirmed that the detainees had planned a ‘velvet coup’ with the help of the women’s movement, ethnic groups, human rights groups, the labour movement, NGOs and students, who, in turn, had been supported in their efforts by the US (HRW 2009). The indictment publicly singled out women’s movement advocates who were not even present, including Shirin Ebadi, Shadi Sadr, Parvin Ardalan and Noushin Khorasani (AI 2009: 55).

The purpose of the show trials was to propagate the hardliners’ account of the aftermath of the elections; for instance, the only media allowed to cover the trials was the Fars News Agency that has close ties to the IRGC (HRW 2009). The trials, parading prisoners in pyjamas and signs of torture, sent also a strong message of what are the consequences to those opposing the authorities and initiating unrest in society. A day after the first trial, the Chief Prosecutor of Tehran, Said Mortazavi, issued a warning that anyone criticising the trials would risk prosecution (AI 2009: 55). The effects of the trials were felt for months as the verdicts were read months later. Some were sentenced to years in prison and some were issued death sentences.

To keep ordinary people on they tiptoes, the IRGC and basijs further infiltrated
society. One of the examples was given by one of my interviewees. The Guards published periodic public lists of demonstrators who the authorities had not been able to identify. One of the first lists was published in June when the Guards’ website ‘Cyber Defence Command’ published a list of 26 pictures of street protestors and demanded the public to identify the protestors. Many interpreted this as a warning against grassroots journalism that was the only way to get information to the outside world after the foreign correspondents had left the country. Also, long after the demonstrations had subdued, the Guards organised volunteers outside the popular supermarkets, including the Refah and Shahrvand chains, to hand out leaflets in which they had circled faces of protestors who had not yet been identified. People were forced to take the leaflets and instructed to call a governmental hotline number set up for this purpose if they could recognise any of the people listed. Other techniques to catch activists and ordinary people who had participated in the demonstrations included offers of governmental compensation to shop keepers whose property had been damaged during the demonstrations and who agreed to file written complaints against unidentified protestors. The same tactic was apparently used in hospitals where people injured in street protests were threatened with prison if they did not lodge a written complaint against unspecified protestors. In addition, the security apparatus penetrated Iranians private lives by the introduction of 6,000 basij units that recruited in primary schools which effectively allowed the security forces to penetrate families and scrutinise people’s private beliefs and spread their basij culture (Payvand 2010). Moreover, thousands of basijs were trained in blogging after the summer demonstrations. This, according to Student Basij Commander Mohammad Saleh Jokar, was aimed at to encourage ‘effective use of using cyberspace to promote the values of the Islamic Revolution’ and most significantly, to counter ‘soft threats’ (Jokar quoted in Payvand 2010).

The long-standing methods worked as reminders of the authorities capability to bring society on its knees. A comment made by one of my interviewees in the spring 2010 summarised the situation in the aftermath of the state repression:

The regime succeeded in what they set out to do in June. The organised civil society has now disappeared, unless you count the very few who are still courageous enough – or who have nothing to lose – to continue their work. But people in general are silenced. People are far too scared to attend
demonstrations, especially after the Ashura demonstrations in December [2009]. People are scared to show or voice their demands for reform. The fact that you have no idea what happened to your friends or family members, the rapes, the show trials … the regime has is in its hands an extremely strong and efficient tool, the security forces. And we don’t really know who we are fighting for if we decided to go out and protest. Who will defend me? Mousavi? You in the West? I don’t think so (Negin, Tehran, April 2010).

4.0 Green goals & ideology

While the hardliners saw the GM as a challenge to the Islamic Republic itself, this was not the case.

We need to briefly go back to Mousavi’s campaigning colour, the colour green. Green is the colour that is associated with Islam. The colour was strategically applied to frame the movement. The colour can be seen emphasising a central cultural element (Shia Islam) that is the foundation of the political system in the country. Consequently, the protest was not about challenging the political system but giving its support to this element. Similarly, the slogan seen in the demonstrations ‘Where is my vote?’, referred to the country’s republican side and demanded the regime to honour also this foundational element. The message was emphasised by employing familiar and historical civil society slogans drawing on the country’s Islamico-philosophical heritage and it was in this way that people broadened the street demonstrations into a political movement. For example at nights people chanted ‘Allahu Akbar’, God is Great, from their rooftops, and in the daylight demonstrations ‘marg bar diktator’, death to the dictator, Ya Hossein, Mir Hossein (referring to the third Shia Imam and via him to Mousavi) were heard widely. These are popular chants from the 1979 Revolution when they were used against the Pahlavis. Thus, the demonstrators challenged the regime on its own terrain and showed how the regime has drifted away from its revolutionary ideals. The demonstrations between the protestors and governmental forces has been rightly seen as turning into a struggle between democratic forces – both religious and secular – and the oppressive regime, which wanting to hold onto its power was alienating sizeable portion of its population. In essence, the protestors were trying to argue that they are worthy, united and committed to their cause and that they should be recognised as valid political actors (Tilly 2005).
In the course of weeks and months, the goals were articulated more specifically. It all centred on the democratisation of the country’s political life. As the movement has emphasised, this should not be misunderstood as an ‘offshoot’ of Western liberal democratic projects (Tahmasebi-Birgani 2010: 79). Particularly the women involved in the movement have been keen to emphasise the long history of Iranian politico-religious philosophy and civil activism that goes back to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and how the movement should be seen as an extension of these traditions (The Feminist School 2009). The Green Movement anchored itself in basic rights and freedoms such as civil and political rights, including the right to assemble, the right to rational governance and the right to participate freely and equally in the political process.

In the summer of 2010, Mousavi outlined the movement’s objectives when he published a new charter that called for reforms while, at the same time, stressed the movement’s commitment to the 1979 Revolution’s principles. In his statement, Mousavi accused the current regime of ‘institutionalized corruption’ and standing behind the ‘hypocritical “holy” veil’ and destroying the revolutionary ideals for the sake of power (Khordaad88 2009). He placed the GM to the forefront in the nation’s efforts to reform the political system, thus stating firmly that it was not its intention to undermine any of its premises. The statement declared: ‘[T]he Green Movement reaffirms its commitment to human, moral, religious and Iranian principles and values and feels obliged to refine and reform the behaviours of the Islamic Republic of Iran’ (Khordaad88 2009) which would eventually lead to the strengthening [of] civil society, expanding the space available for social dialogue, increasing awareness, [facilitating] the free circulation [of] information, [encouraging] the active participation of [various] parties and associations, and generating a [liberal environment] for intellectuals as well as social and political activists who are loyal to national interests (Khordaad88 2009).

5.0 The Obama Administration’s reaction

When President Barack Obama was sworn to power in January 2009, many expected to see a change in the US-Iran relations. And indeed, Obama articulated his policy change in March 2009 when he delivered a Nowruz video speech to mark the Iranian New Year. While the Obama Administration had declared that one of its foreign
policy goals was a nuclear weapon free Iran, President Obama set out to crumble the
Dark Monster and treat the Iranian regime in a vastly different way compared to his
predecessor. His Nowruz speech removed the Bush Administration’s regime change
policy from the table and Obama emphasised that he was willing and keen to ‘speak
directly to the people and leaders of the Islamic Republic’ (Obama 2009a, emphasis
mine). The speech, however, was almost entirely an address to the leaders. Obama
declared that:

> My administration is now committed to diplomacy that addresses the full
range of issues before us, and to pursuing constructive ties among the United
States, Iran and the international community. This process will not be
advanced by threats. We seek instead engagement that is honest and grounded
in mutual respect. […] The United States wants the Islamic Republic of Iran to
take its rightful place in the community of nations. You have that right -- but it
comes with real responsibilities, and that place cannot be reached through
terror or arms, but rather through peaceful actions that demonstrate the true
greatness of the Iranian people and civilization. And the measure of that
greatness is not the capacity to destroy, it is your demonstrated ability to build
and create (Obama 2009a).

However, Obama’s approach was criticised in the summer 2009. The Obama
Administration was reluctant to escalate the events inside and the Administration’s
statements on the elections and the demonstrations were careful and reflected the shift
that had taken place in the US foreign policy approach to Iran. One of the first
comments came on June 15, when Obama argued that it should be clear ‘it is up to
Iranians to make decisions about who Iran's leaders will be; that we respect Iranian
sovereignty’. However, he added that he was also ‘deeply troubled by the violence’ in
the streets and that ‘the democratic process -- free speech, the ability of people to
peacefully dissent -- all those are universal values and need to be respected’ (Obama
2009c). On June 17, Obama’s Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said that Iranians
deserve to have their votes counted and voices heard, and reiterated the
Administration’s position that it is for the people of Iran to determine the outcome of
the elections. She also stressed that the new foreign policy stand towards Iran will not
change based on the outcome of the elections (Fox News 2009).

The Administration’s balancing between its commitment to diplomacy and ordinary
Iranians in the streets was criticised not only by the hawks in Washington but by some
within the Iranian diaspora and other people who sympathised with the people
demonstrating in Iran. Of the hawks, Sen. Lindsey Graham declared that ‘the President of the United States is supposed to lead the free world, not follow it’ (Daily News 2009). Conservative commentator Judith Miller called for ‘external help’ to secure the Green Movements demands (Fox News 2009b). On June 16, Obama’s interview comment drew particular criticism from Iran observers after he stated that from an American national security perspective, there was not much difference between President Ahmadinejad and his contestant Mousavi (The NYT 2009c). Many criticised the statement by arguing that Obama was viewing the events solely through the lens of Iran’s nuclear crisis (Addis 2009). However, many others saw the new stand to reflect the Obama Administration’s respect to the Iranian government and how this new position would actually help the long-term goals of the US. As Kenneth Walsh aptly argued:

The Obama administration doesn't want to totally alienate Ahmadinejad because the West will have to continue dealing with him over very sensitive and explosive issues, including Iran’s nuclear program, the status of Israel, and the overall peace process in the Middle East. In addition, administration officials don't want to be too critical of Ahmadinejad's victory because that might make the anti-Ahmadinejad reformers seem like puppets of the United States and weaken their position internally (Walsh 2009).

To counter some of the criticism, Obama instructed the State Department to contact Twitter\(^{84}\) – a type of social media used by some of the Iranians as a tool to organise their protests – and ask the company to delay its planned network upgrade in order to ensure maximum access to Iranian users. To which Twitter agreed and the upgrade took place at 2 p.m. P.T – or 1.30 a.m. Tehran time when the number of Iranians using Twitter was at its lowest (Time 2009).

Another noteworthy change in the Administration policy towards Iran was Obama’s decision to discontinue the Iran Democracy Fund in October 2009. The hawks in Washington attacked Obama’s decision harshly, criticising him of seeing the Green protestors ‘as obstacles for statecraft’ (WSJ 2009). Kenneth Katzman’s report for Congress however stated that the Fund was considered as ‘inconsistent’ in the

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\(^{84}\) Twitter was developed in 2006 and is a micro-blogging platform, which allows its users to post short messages of 140 characters in length. Messages are often used to update personal statuses, forward news comments or messages posted by other users. Its main focus is on news and has showed its importance in reporting real-time events such as the aftermath of the Presidential elections in Iran in 2009, the demonstrations in Egypt in January-February 2010, or Californian forest fires in 2007, to name a few.
Administration’s efforts to have a dialogue with Iran (Katzman 2009: 83). Moreover, Iranian civil society actors welcomed the dismantling of the Fund (BBC 2009c). As Akbar Ganji, human rights advocate, stated:

‘The US democracy fund was severely counterproductive. None of the human right activists and members of opposition in Iran had any interest in using such funds, but we were all accused by Iran's government of being American spies because a few groups in America used these funds’ (BBC 2009c).

The Obama Administration’s approach to Iran and to the War on Terror in general changed dramatically the hypermasculinity driven foreign policy of the US. Instead of disciplining difference, there was an effort to understand and engage with difference. As Obama declared on June 4 2009, when he addressed the Muslim world in Cairo: ‘[S]o long as our relationship is defined by our differences, we will empower those who sow hatred rather than peace, those who promote conflict rather than the cooperation that can help all of our people achieve justice and prosperity. And this cycle of suspicion and discord must end’ (Obama 2009b).

6.0 A year after Neda

As already noted, types of collective action such as large rallies and campaigns that one saw a year earlier had disappeared by spring 2010. However, while many civil society actors had to exit the public sphere after the state repression, we have seen some larger communities continue their work, like the group Madaran-e Azadar, the Mourning Mothers. These are women who lost their children – either through state-organised kidnappings, killings or imprisonment – and who formed an awareness-raising group, which met once a week in Tehran’s Laleh Park. They claimed that they would continue the meetings until all the children have been released or recovered. The state-security forces continuously harassed and arrested these women but they have continued their sit-ins to the present. Another example of women’s continued public activism was the letters that wives and daughters sent to male political prisoners. Mousavi’s Facebook page and women’s groups published these letters online and they were made public so that everyone could read them. They were letters that showed women’s love and physical longing of their husbands but they also discussed questions of freedom and justice in the society – questions that were also directed towards the regime. An example could be a letter from the reformist intellectual activist Saeed Hajarian’s wife. In 2009 she wrote:
‘They were able to target your voice and hand with hatred and revulsion but your idea and your conviction will always be green. Today is the birthday of the king of compassion and justice. They have imprisoned your ailing body but know that your green idea will always remain in our hearts’ (Mousavi’s Facebook page 2009).

Many of the women involved in the above-mentioned activism were new to civil society activism. This was one of the characteristics of the GM; it invited many new social activists who had not previously been active in the public sphere/in civil society. In demonstrations we witnessed participants across generations and economic classes. However, the violent crackdown scared many who had not previously experienced it. While I was in Iran, I interviewed a young woman called Maryam who had participated for the first time in civil society activism in the summer of 2009. She is a graduate with a degree in psychology and at the time, she was a teacher at a NGO organised school that offered classes to women and children. Of the people who I came across during my trip, Maryam was the most vocal about her aspirations, ideas and hopes. She had been active in the aftermath of the elections and was very passionate about how she wanted to see her country change. Maryam told me that most of her friends and fellow students from the university had left the country after the elections and were trying to convince her to do the same. She strongly disapproved of this:

They are sending me emails and every, every, time the message is the same. “Come and live here, you will have everything here! It is so easy here, come and join us!” Well, I don’t want that. I want to go and study, to do a Master’s degree abroad, but I want to come back. We need to change so many things in our society, how could I do that while I’m abroad! It’s an easy option to leave the country and live abroad having all those things. That will only change it for you. But what about these children who I’m working with? Who will change it for them?! They need me. The country needs the others and me! I love my country and I only want to make it better. It’s my home country, how could I ever leave it! I want to make it better, I want to help people, how could I help them from outside! Can you see these children here! They are the poorest of the poorest and someone needs to help them! (Maryam, Tehran, March 2010).

While I also understand why people, especially those with means to leave and re-start their lives abroad, left Iran in the aftermath of the state-orchestrated repression against society at large, I also sensed Maryam’s true belief in the system and better future.

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6.1 Women’s NGOs in the aftermath of the crackdown

As already noted above, in the aftermath of the demonstrations, the regime began yet another campaign against NGOs and their workers, which ‘paralysed civil society’ (Leili, Tehran, April 2010). The linking of NGOs, including women’s NGOs that were particularly singled out, to the GM began in the show trials in August 2009. They were accused of ‘organizing and directing illegal gatherings before and after the elections’ (Iran HRDC 2010: 79). Just prior to the Ashura demonstrations in December 2009, Minister of Intelligence Moslehi singled out women’s NGOs in his report of NGOs that are working towards regime change and declared that ‘we are carefully monitoring the comings and goings of the perpetrators of sedition’ (Siyasat-e Ruz 2009). In 2010, Deputy Interior Minister for Cultural and Social Affairs Alireza Afshar warned that ‘NGOs should not get involved in political activities’ and they ‘should be careful not to fall into the trap of the enemies, especially in their relations with foreign organizations’ (Mehr 2010). NGOs were not even allowed to work with ‘government-approved’ foreign organisations such as the UNFPA that has an office in Tehran. UNFPA’s support in training, funding and co-operating projects with women’s NGOs has been remarkable but according to one of its managers, their policy in the spring of 2010 was ‘not to awaken the sleeping dogs’ (interview with the author, Tehran, April 2010). NGOs were also accused of funding Mousavi and Karroubi in the aftermath of the 2009 elections and for allowing political parties that were dissolved in the crackdown to continue their work with the help of NGOs (Aftab-e Yazd 2010; Javan 2010). In the months following the 2009 elections, hundreds of NGOs were banned and their licences were revoked (CDI-Iran 2013).

My interviewees who were involved in the NGO community also reported challenging circumstances after the 2009 elections. Firstly, in the months following the elections, hundreds of NGOs were banned and their licences were revoked and NGO workers were arbitrarily arrested and as such their work was disrupted (Mahtab, Tehran, April 2010; see also CDI-Iran 2013). Secondly, due to the increased state of surveillance, many still operational NGOs severed their ties to other NGOs. This not only refers to the question of trust but also to the question of protection. While reporting of fellow NGO colleagues to the authorities could have been an issue, most importantly, distancing oneself from others working in the field was a means to protect colleagues (Nassim, Tehran, April 2010). Thirdly, after the elections, the
funding available to NGOs was dwindling. This had previously been a problem with foreign sponsors who, after the 2005 presidential elections, had begun to withdraw their money to protect the receivers. However, in the aftermath of the 2009 elections, many Iranian funders were forced to end their sponsorship if they did not want to be identified as ‘counter revolutionary’ and face charges (Negar, Tehran, March 2010). The stakes to continue work were made extremely high and this meant that, at least according to my interviewees, many were forced to keep quiet and discontinue their work. As one of my interviewees, Ladan who is employed by a NGO that provides health and educational services to women living in one of the informal housing communities in the north-west Tehran,\textsuperscript{85} 

\textit{[A]fter the elections, we have made sure that our programs do not mention the word woman or gender. We are a strictly educational health organisation that assists the government to fill the gaps that it [the government] can no longer afford. We provide health services to women, children and men. We offer primary level classes to children and adult programs to both women and men. We keep our heads down. It’s the only way to survive now. But we’re also running out of money. When we started our work in the early 2000s our work was rudimentary. Over the years we improved our activities and we moved towards fostering social and economic development of women. We helped them to acquire skills in different areas that would help them to find jobs and empower themselves. However, now when the funding is scarce, we can only afford minimal help. We have problems to pay our teachers. It’s also expensive to run our little clinic (Ladan, Tehran, March 2010).}

Or as another NGO worker, Mahtab who works at a center which also offers adult lessons and health care but also legal advice to women, argued:

\textit{Through these activities we have tried to include women in the wider social discourse of rights and representation. The fact that women are now [after the elections] both harassed and ignored by the Iranian state, has only excluded them even more from the political and social sphere where they would be able to represent themselves. This exclusion is partly our fault because we are too scared to continue our work. Two or our employees were arrested in the autumn (Mahtab, Tehran, March 2010).}

\subsection*{6.2 Economic justice and women’s rights}

While the leaders of the GM had emphasised that hearing the voices of all Iranians – across gender, religious, economic and age divisions – was one of their promises, the women who I talked to in spring 2010 felt that their voices had been stifled in the aftermath of the elections and that they had not benefited from supporting the

\textsuperscript{85} These informal housing communities are a result from the migration flows from countryside to cities that have been taking place since the 1980s.
movement. As I tried to stress before, the women who I encountered were pious women’s movement activists whose activism was informed not only by their religious beliefs but also by their socio-economic locations. In 2010, there were two problems, which were interrelated. Firstly, they felt that while they had sympathised with and supported the goals and agendas of the GM, which are firmly placed within the principles of Islam and the 1979 Revolution, it had further facilitated the regime’s branding of women activists, even pious women, as ‘counter-revolutionary’ and narrowed their activism space in civil society. Secondly, eventually the GM facilitated the voices of elite women, which was, for the women who I interviewed, an unfortunate development. As already said, while the GM respected the ideals of Islam and the revolution and encouraged the participation of non-elites, non-elite views about gender roles and rights that are aimed at the Islamic Republic were stifled by the hardliners’ crackdown.

As has been discussed earlier, what informed the activism of the women involved in my study were their socio-economic and political locations as well as their piety. Considering the economic situation and the increasing social problems (see Chapter 5) in contemporary Iran, many of the women who I interviewed emphasised growing social and economic inequality in Iranian society, which materialised even in worse conditions for women than men. Unlike the hardliners’ gender discourse that stressed women’s familial roles (which were also important to the women who I talked to), for these women, their subject formation took place also in the public sphere and according to them women should be allowed and encouraged to participate in the public sphere. However, according to them, women’s access to the public sphere depends on her socio-economic location, which in the contemporary Iranian society restricts many women from participating in public. Moreover, for them, practicing agency in public is to foster and advance a just Islamic society, which, in turn, is a duty to both women and men. Thus, it should be noted that this does not mean that their agency was solely aimed at re-signifying religious teachings and norms but to improve their own piousness and society at large.

When I talked to my interviewees about the GM and its goals, most of them argued that the movement had actually hampered their agenda toward social and economic justice. One of them, argued that what the movement represented for many women
was a class struggle, an issue that the leaders of the GM had avoided addressing (Maryam, Tehran, March 2010). The demonstrations attracted people from across socio-economic classes, however, the core group came from the middle classes that have become extremely frustrated, which I addressed above. The movement drew together people in their mid to late twenties who, while from the middle class, do not have the opportunities – such as a good job, apartment, marriage, family – that are usually seen to materialise easily for people coming from this economic class. And as already noted earlier, of these people, women represent a disproportionately high number compared to men in Iran (Dabashi 2011:111). Moreover, in Iran’s current economic situation, the living standards of the working –and lower classes are even more challenging. However, the leadership stayed rather quiet about economic justice although it had been one of Mousavi’s campaign themes. Negar, a middle-aged woman, who has previously worked in the NGO community but has now withdrawn from activism yet identified herself as a pious gender activist, explained her views:

Last spring I thought that the movement had a chance to achieve something real. Our work and ideology has sometimes been overshadowed by the flashy campaigns [i.e. the one million signatures campaign], but this time I saw ordinary people participating and being interested in things that we have tried to make better. And it even seemed that those women who had not worked with us before were trying to open their eyes and connect with us. But later I changed my mind. I don’t think these women really understood what gender reform really means to us.

I asked Negar what she meant by ‘us’ and she elaborated:

Us. You know, ordinary women. Do they know what marginalised women want? Can we have social justice without Islam? No, I don’t think so. Our fight for reform is not just about having political rights. Like running for presidency or other political posts. Yes, that's important too but it’s our duty to make sure that we have not only rights but also justice. I don’t think these women in the campaign had any sense of social piety (Negar, Tehran, April 2010).

While these women saw co-operation with women from all walks of life instrumental for the future of gender reform in Iran, they felt that the GM’s discourse was too elitist and divorced from the realities of ordinary women’s everyday life. As Nazanin, a thirty-year old pious woman working for a NGO specialising in health and educational work, explained her views. In her view a group that could initiate reforms and change in the field of gender relations could not be a group from the top:
It will be the people, normal people who will bring change. Young people and women who are economically and socially marginalised, who are the real victims in Iran. If they feel enough or are frustrated enough or they have the courage needed, the change we need might get the push it badly requires, but too few feels this way at the moment (Nazanin, Tehran, April 2010).

Another woman shared a similar opinion:

The upper classes are not connected with the majority of people: their lifestyles are different, their ideology is different, their economic resources are different, and they are socially different. They have a privileged position in society. This makes me ask: why would they want to change the prevailing situation? Would a revolution make their position stronger or better? Revolutions do hardly any good to privileged people. Change would not necessarily mean good things happening to these people, not in the current economic situation that frustrates so many people from the lower classes’ (Afsar, Tehran, April 2010).

And another woman criticised the ways in which the elite women conducted their work:

You know this ‘One Million Signatures Campaign’. It has attracted so much attention abroad, but an ordinary woman in Iran doesn't have a clue about it. Ordinary people need something practical. Yes, raising awareness is also good, but when a woman struggles to make her ends meet or wants the custody of her children after divorce, she needs practical help and practical advice. At the moment, we need to address these gaps in women’s lives. After this we can move on (Zahra, Tehran, April 2010).

The message from these women was that the question of social and economic inequality between different women (class, age, ethnicity, family background, etc.) in Iran was a topic hardly ever discussed and it needed to be addressed before anything else. However, they felt that the GM had further postponed debate on this.

A good point was made also by Ziba P., a middle-aged Iranian woman who lives in Finland with her Finnish husband but who helps her sister’s women’s health NGO in Iran. She noted in one of our conversations how it has become almost impossible for ordinary pious activists to get their voices heard outside their own cultural or political boundaries and that this has been a problem with the GM as well. The global audience that followed the emergence of the GM interpreted it mostly as secular-orientated and aiming at toppling down the current regime. This has meant that ‘alternative’ voices about Iran’s future go unheard and especially the voices of non-secular civil activists have been stifled. This, in turn, has complicated foreigners understanding about
Iranians’ views on the direction and content of reform. This, according to her, is a result from the lack of space given to dialogue:

Extremist voices, both secular and religious, are given so much coverage in the media here [in the West]. This is a problem for ordinary activists who are trying to initiate change from within. Initiate change with their beliefs, with their views about the future of their own societies, with their experience of social change. But here the voice is given to those whose views are easily understood by the audience. You hear the voices that can be easily understood, voices you can support with your own experience about life, or voices you can judge as wrong. The reason for this is a lack of dialogue, there is no arena for you and people who share a different worldview to meet and discuss. The West gives a monopoly to voices that they can recognise and comprehend (Ziba P., Vaasa, Finland 2012).

7.0 Conclusion
It is important to see the presidential elections of 2009 within the wider framework of the War on Terror. The handling of the elections, i.e. the (alleged) fraud, and the violent aftermath of the elections can be seen as the hardliners’ exercise of hypermasculinity, which reflected the hardliners’ positional insecurity both domestically and internationally. Although the Obama Administration had demonstrated willingness to engage with the hardline regime, a dialogue had not yet taken place between Washington and Tehran. Moreover, the election of Mousavi would have undone the hardliners’ take over of the body politic.

Thus, the War on Terror and its interventionist policies started by the Bush Administration continued to have echoes in the post-Bush world politics. The most alarming development was the extension of the transnationalised violence on the bodies of ordinary women and men in Iran. In 2009-2010, the Iranian regime extended its crack down from high profile and mid-level civil society activists to ordinary citizens. It can be argued that the hardliners finalised their drive to power on the bodies of these ordinary people. By targeting people like Neda Agha-Soltan, the hardliners demonstrated what are the consequences to civil society at large if some courageous enough were planning to voice their views.

The second alarming trend was that killing indeed made one invisible and essentially unable to voice her/his concerns (see Hansen 2000). The militarisation of society that
began from the streets of major Iranian cities and which was extended to the private lives of Iranians had an enormous impact on the work carried out by women’s movement activists and their organisations. The climate of fear effectively pushed women to exit activism and and/or created obstacles for women’s work.

However, despite the bleak picture of the Iranian civil society in the period of 2009-2010, many women continued their work by adapting to the new environment. However, this chapter aimed at drawing attention to the ways in which women often lose more ground in political conflicts, which are dominated by masculinities.
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

1.0 Introduction

In this thesis I have investigated the imagined borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and how one’s unwillingness and failure to understand otherness can enact a world of fear and insecurities. This often manifests in destruction and violence that is in turn eventually experienced on the bodies of ordinary people. I used the US-Iran relations in the post-9/11 period (2001-2010) to demonstrate how the crafting and enactment of difference between the Self and the Other legitimates and naturalises the use of violence against the Other and how this violence is further intensified by sub-categories of otherness including gender, race and sexuality. Thus, the thesis offered an alternative exploration of the War on Terror and the ‘us versus you’ world that the conventional IR, global leaders and the media have created in the post-9/11 era.

At the theoretical level, the aim was to find a way to understand why and how Iran was conceptualised as one of the Dark Monsters in the post-9/11 world. This was a relevant question considering the détente that had begun in the US-Iran relations in the late 1990s and which was suddenly reversed. Drawing primarily on postcolonial feminism and complemented with studies from feminist IR, critical social constructivism and security studies, the framework helped to conceptualise especially the Bush Administration’s (in)security seeking foreign policy and its impact on Iran in the period 2001-2010. The proposition was that the Bush Administration’s masculine identity ‘hypered’ itself and resulted in a hypermasculine identity that relies on artificially enacted inclusions, exclusions and mental and physical borders (Agathangelou and Ling 2004a). The process of enacting differences and boundaries is natural and takes place in all social relations. However, the imagined identity of the Other, which the Self crafts and enacts from outside without a dialogue with the Other, often leads to the Self’s inability to fully know and understand the Other. Not understanding the Other causes insecurity about otherness and the threat it poses becomes a constitutive element of the Self’s identity and its relations with others. It was argued that what further informed the Bush Administration’s identity formation and its relationship with the Other was orientalist anxiety. This materialised itself in the constructions of the Dark Monster and the Feminine Other. My methodology used here was to identify the crafted and imagined gendered, racial and sexualised
inclusions and exclusions that resulted in real material consequences, often violent. The aim was to demonstrate how, with the help of the Dark Monster and the Feminine Other, the Self can create a baseless fantasy of disconnectedness which helps to obscure the violence and destruction that inheres in this type of imagining of and making of boundaries between the Self and the Other.

The thesis had another theoretical aim as well. Namely, to draw attention to the pious/moral agencies of women’s movement advocates working within religious frameworks. It was argued that there is a need to move beyond the old binary of ‘subversion and submission’ model and to investigate the pious agencies of women’s movement activists in Iran. I found this important for two reasons. The first reason was a consequence of the so-called ‘post-secular’ turn that took place in feminist literature in the 2000s. Feminist studies on Iranian women had hardly employed this new trend and my experience in the field demanded me to find a new approach to understand my interlocutors and their work in the field of women’s rights and thus the studies in the ‘post-secular’ field felt accurate. The second reason relates to the post-9/11 political environment that has narrowed the space for our understanding of difference and via association of different understandings of womanhood, women’s agency and subjectivities and human rights.

I drew on Mahmood’s theorisation of embodied agency but I moved my analysis to explicate how women’s piousness is both constructed in the public sphere and how their public activism is constitutive of their piousness, i.e. how the public assists them to enact their pious agency. I had at least two objectives with this theoretical move. One was to challenge myself to think and rethink how ‘free’ we are from structures: 1) how well we understand that our actions are guided by certain structures; 2) how we have internalised these structures even without our knowing; and 3) how challenging life would be if we were continuously trying to subvert norms that uphold the order/life that has been enacted around us? Second aim was to understand why we see different structures valued differently, e.g. secularism vs. religion. As Mahmood has argued, there is a need to question the humanity and ethics of secular politics and movements as well (Mahmood 2005a). The violence and destruction of which many Islamic fundamentalist movements have been accused in the post-9/11 era is very much present in secular politics as well, as Afghanistan and Iraq have harshly
demonstrated. Diversity is being endorsed and celebrated in the speeches of our world leaders but often only when we can recognize and concur with it. It is often seen that only secular politics can transform and improve societies. With this thesis I wished to demonstrate that the women who I encountered in the field did not employ Islam to feminist ends but to enact an enhanced Islamic society, true to its just and high values and free from the current distorted interpretations, which are currently coloured with patriarchalism and power politics. They worked towards an ethical society: society that embraces everyone and respects its citizens in the law.

After this the thesis moved on to the empirical findings. The empirical chapters wished to demonstrate that Iranian women’s lives are shaped by a number of factors and as such trying to demonstrate that the cultural explanations, which have assumed a central place in the post 9/11 discourses on Muslim women’s rights are too narrow. Like elsewhere in the world, and as the thesis has demonstrated, the lives of Iranian women and the agendas of women’s movement advocates are shaped by social, economic, cultural, and domestic and international politics. In the case of Iranian women, others have usually focused their research on the role of the state and religion in shaping women’s lives but this thesis focused on the post-9/11 period and examined the impact of the international.

2.0 The Axis of Evil
The aim of this work was to develop a better understanding of the War on Terror. By engaging with three different levels – the international, domestic, and grassroots – I investigated the ways in which elitist, militaristic and masculine discourses and politics impact people’s everyday life and have real material consequences, something that more conventional IR literature may have ignored. The introduction of the Axis of Evil in January 2002 changed not only the US-Iran relations but also the War on Terror in general. It enacted new discursive inclusions and exclusions and further consolidated the civilizational divide between the Christian West and the Muslim East. The hypermasculine politics of the Bush Administration threatened and eventually invited Iranian hardliners to engage in similar politics. This had consequences not only at the global level where the War on Terror intensified but also at the local level where the global inclusions and exclusions materialised in the lives of ordinary Iranians: deteriorating political system, worsening security environment
that affects not only civil society activists but also ordinary people and women in particular, dwindling economic situation, human rights abuses, and the list goes on. While the western audience – both academic and non-academic – is aware of the political tensions colouring the country’s internal affairs, they are less informed of the socio-economic/insecurity crisis that has worsened after Iran was made one of the culprits in the War on Terror. The paradox is that the crisis is affecting particularly Iranian women, those who the US pledged to protect.

In the case of the US and Iran, President Bush’s Axis of Evil speech ended the détente that had emerged in the late 1990s and had continued until the late autumn of 2001. The thesis argued that the reason for the Bush Administration’s decision to include the Iranian regime in the Axis was the Administration’s de-masculinised identity. Both domestic and global actors increasingly criticised the Bush Administration over its interventionist foreign policies and failures to secure those whom it had vowed to protect. This forced President Bush to seek ways to prove that the Administration was, indeed, the superior White Self. However, as was demonstrated, the inclusion in the Axis of Evil invited the Iranian side to engage in a similar exercise and soon both sides were involved in a global game of masculinities that often materialise in violence on the bodies of those who are the most vulnerable.

In the period 2002-2004, the Bush Administration’s interventionist politics facilitated both the demise of the reformists and the rise of the hardliners inside Iran. The hardliners were able to use the Bush Administration’s hardening stance against Iran as their springboard for more confrontational domestic politics. Eventually, the hardliners secured majorities both in the municipal elections (2003) and in the Seventh Majles elections (2004). Reformists were cleared from formal politics and voices that could be interpreted as dissident and counter-revolutionary were particularly targeted. In 2005, the hardliners consolidated their power over the body politic when their candidate Mahmoud Ahmadinejad won the presidential elections. The election of Ahmadinejad changed the state-society relations at large. The hardline party Abadgaran behind Ahmadinejad’s election needed to be rewarded for its support. This new political elite came largely from the ranks of the IRGC and the Basij. This effectively militarised the already tense state-society relations.
President Bush had justified Iran’s membership in the Axis of Evil partly by the regime’s human rights violations, and especially women’s human rights were singled out. In the January 2002 speech and in its later statements, the Bush Administration linked women’s movement advocates to the Administration’s regime change campaign. This made the Iranian women’s movement advocates to be one of the first groups targeted in the hardliner’s violent drive for power. In order to dominate, no alternative voices (or voices that could be interpreted alternative) were allowed. In the period 2002-2004, the hardliners in the Majles and the non-elected hardline institutions overseeing the Majles were blocking many of the ‘women-friendly’ bills as un-Islamic and western influenced. The strategy was to clear women’s movement advocates and their high profile supporters from formal politics. Women MPs, high profile activists and journalists among others were increasingly targeted as ‘counter-revolutionary’ and many exited formal politics in early 2004 when the Seventh Majles elections were scheduled to take place. This time period was detrimental to many women’s movement advocates and NGOs as they lost their supporters in the higher echelons of the body politic and they were no longer in a position to lobby for gender reforms at the level of legislation.

In the period 2005-2008, the hardliners’ crackdown was extended and they began more systematically to control and discipline women’s voices in civil society. While President Khatami had encouraged women to participate in the public sphere and anchor themselves in it, the Ahmadinejad Administration changed the gender discourse at the state level. Women’s familial roles were emphasised and propagated at the various levels of the state, ranging from their role in civil society activism to dress code and higher education. The hardline Majles attacked women also in the legal sphere when the controversial Family Protection Bill was debated and many women were afraid that the Bill would reverse years of hard work. At the same time, the regime began to expel mid-level women’s movement advocates from civil society activism by revoking NGO licenses and closing down women’s media outlets. Both discursive and physical space for women’s activism was shrinking.

The 2009 presidential elections demonstrated how determined the hardliners were in sending a collective message to society at large. The hardliners’ reaction to the demonstrations and particularly the killing of Neda Agha-Soltan in June 2009,
showed society how high the stakes could get not only for women’s movement advocates but also for ordinary people. The thesis argued that killing makes one invisible. The violent state repression that employed both short and long-term tactics not only silenced Iranian civil society, including women’s movement advocates but also made it invisible to the outside world as many were too afraid to voice their concerns. Many felt that it was smarter to ‘keep their heads down’ and defer from activism until the environment was safer.

For the Bush Administration, President Ahmadinejad incarnated the Dark Monster and having the Dark Monster sitting at the presidential seat, made it easier for the Bush Administration (and later for the Obama Administration) to justify its new disciplining policies in the mid-2000s: economic sanctions. After Iran’s referral to the UNSC, Iran faced several rounds of economic sanctions. While it was claimed that these were so-called smart-sanctions targeting individuals and entities involved in the country’s nuclear program, the effects of sanctions trickled down to the level of society and affected the lives of ordinary Iranians and women in particular. As Chapter 5 demonstrated, the effects of the sanctions reached several different realms ranging from women’s employment to health care and from gender relations to civil society activism. The bleak story of the impact of the sanctions on Iranian women’s lives demonstrates how the economic sanctions are in stark contrast with the US emphasis on Muslim women’s rights and in general the West’s insistence to include women as active participants in the world outside the home.

In the above sections we see that while the Bush Administration emphasised Muslim women’s human rights in its post-9/11 policy approach, the hypermasculine identity that informed the Administration’s politics in the same time period effectively invited competing masculinities to exercise similar politics and this in turn transnationalised violence on the very bodies that President Bush had pledged to protect. However, as the thesis has demonstrated, the Self did not see how it had contributed to the transnationalisation of violence but it enacted a border that allowed it to blame the Other of the violence and destruction.
3.0 Strengths and limitations of the research

Iran offers an interesting insight into the War on Terror studies. While post-invasion Afghanistan and Iraq have been studied quite well by both IR and feminist IR scholars in the 2000s, Iran has been left out. This is most likely due to the fact that the Bush Administration never physically invaded Iran and as a case study it has not appeared as urgent as Afghanistan and Iraq. However, while the US has not shared diplomatic relations with Iran since the hostage crisis (1979-1981), the country continues to be one of the key concerns in America’s foreign policy.

The thesis aimed at developing a better understanding of the War on Terror and it succeeded putting forward a conceptual framework substantiated by empirical evidence that demonstrates how discourses have impact on foreign policy making and how they have real material consequences. The thesis shed light on these consequences: state violence, human rights abuses, malfunctioning political system, insecurity manifested in the loss of economic income, personal security, and so on. This is why it was important to examine what happened to the US-Iran relations after 9/11. What made this particularly interesting was that the two countries had experienced tentative détente just prior to 9/11 and it now suddenly melted away and Iran, once again, incarnated evilness.

Thus, instead of taking Iran’s evilness and the US claim to be protector of the world as facts, I moved the analysis to examine how the post-9/11 world and its divisions into ‘us’ and ‘them’ came about. By developing the framework that drew on postcolonial feminist explorations, the thesis contributed to our understanding why someone or certain groups are being excluded from politics/privileges/right to security/well-being/better futures while others are included in it. It also aimed to examine how these inclusions, exclusions and different boundaries were made to appear neutral, fair and normal. By examining the three levels – international politics, domestic politics and ordinary lives – the thesis opened up a set of insights that may expand current literature on the topic:

1 – A reconsideration of borders is needed both in IR and international relations as human practice. Here I refer to intersubjectivity. The borders we build and enact are artificial and have emerged through different socio-historical and cultural discourses
and institutions. They function to create a distinct identity that makes us to be part of ‘us’. This was extremely important for the Bush Administration in the aftermath of 9/11 when the nation was traumatised. However, these borders can be used to neutralise and naturalise even violent and exploitative policies (see Agathangelou and Ling 2004b). By looking at the US-Iran relations in the post-9/11 world through the thesis’ framework, one can see how the division of the world into ‘us’ and them’ and how the crafting of Monsters and Feminine Others was effective and naturalised militarised foreign policy making. However, at the same time, the research finding also showed to what extent human crafted and manipulated discourses have real material effects.

2 – A reconsideration of agency. Here the thesis refers to reverberating agency, to the closeness of the Self to the Other: their histories and contemporary lives (see Agathangelou and Ling 2004b). While borders such as West vs. East, ‘us vs. them’ and different binaries including masculinity/femininity, public/private; foreign/domestic emerge in every social relationship, the thesis has hopefully demonstrated that if we are able to break down those imagined borders and binaries and it becomes possible to engage more productively with the Other. Fewer segregations allow us to imagine a different world: a world where we are in a more intimate relationship with the Other than we have been able to see through all the artificial boundaries and segregations. We are able to recognise the shared history, the mutual need for each other and have a more integrated life (see Agathangelou and Ling 2004b; Grewal 2003). The thesis has demonstrated that the lack of understanding of the closeness of the US to the Other led to a violent and (in)security seeking foreign policy in the post-9/11 world. Not knowing and/or understanding the interconnectedness of ‘our’ lives to ‘theirs’; not hearing the other side of the story; and/or not suspending judgement based on the imagined borders between us and them, prevents us, together with them, finding solutions to political, economic and social hierarchies and inequalities that both the mental and physical boundaries uphold between the Self and Other. The problem in the US-Iran relations is not only the long history of unfortunate political incidents (the 1953 coup, the 1979-1981

86 I was not able to fully explain this within the confines of this thesis. The original thesis had a chapter that examined domestic identity formation in the post-9/11 US. See below in ‘the limitations section’.

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hostage crisis, 9/11) that have caused problems in the relationship but the imagined constructions of the other side that impede détente between the two governments. As the thesis demonstrated, the consequences of this are often violent and destructive, particularly to those who are the most vulnerable.

3 – Following the above point, a reconsideration of concepts such as power, security and borders, among others is needed (see Agathangelou and Ling 2004b). There is a great deal of violence that inheres in the above concepts when understood in the conventional way. This thesis has challenged ‘natural’ explanations of the War on Terror and demonstrated how interventions, imported democratization reforms and liberation projects claiming to restore people’s human rights, and which are presented as fair, neutral and global, are actually often reinforcing parochial and elitist interpretations of world order. The discourse that is embedded in the conventional IR conception of power is inscribed with violence and terror. We need to ask a set of questions: ‘Does power provide security?’; ‘Who benefits from it?’; and ‘Whom does it sacrifice?’ (Agathangelou and Ling 2004b). For example, in the American case, we can ask if the War on Terror made Americans safer? In the Iranian case we can ask if the Iranian women, whom the Bush Administration pledged to protect, were indeed being protected?

4 – The above point leads to the final insight. If we truly want to understand and engage with the lives and experiences of ‘other’ women, we need to expand our definitions of concepts such as agency and subjectivity. While many feminist IR scholars have examined how gender, race, ethnicity and sexuality shape one’s experiences of life, peace, conflict, human rights, to name a few, the recognition of women’s agency and subjectivity continues to be bounded by a static understanding what it means to be a woman. The thesis wished to demonstrate that recognition of the other and her world is more important than searching for sameness. As Abu-Lughod warned in 2002, saving others is a process that always entails violence (Abu-Lughod 2002). Not only physical violence that we have witnessed in the War on Terror but it can also be violence that destroys different experiences, worldviews, ideas, laws, rules, aspirations and desires that someone employs as building blocks to construct her life. If we have the courage to engage with difference, and in a way that does not condemn it, we have opened our minds for exchange that may lead to new
possibilities and futures that were not visible before. This would be one way to invite
and include agents from multiple worlds – whether marked by tradition, gender, race,
culture, class, and sexuality – to build communities together and reduce conflicts.

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One of the criticisms that postcolonial works have encountered is the lack of attention
given to material concerns (Ahmad 1994). I concur that emphasis on discourses may
distraction us from seeing and examining the material ways in which colonial power
relations persist in contemporary world (McEwan 2001). However, some postcolonial
feminists have written on this for example in their explorations of capitalist relations
in contemporary world (see among others Agathangelou 2004; Agathangelou and
Ling 1997; 2003). I tried to address this criticism by conducting fieldwork and
engaging with women’s material worlds and link it to the two other levels of analysis.
None the less, I argue that at the same time, we should also see the constructiveness
that discourses have to offer. Postcolonial studies, and especially postcolonial
feminists, have been criticised of not offering building blocks for change on the
ground or affecting the power relations between North and South (McEwan 2001).
However, discourses can work in ‘affirmative’ ways as well and provide meditation,
solutions, understanding and closeness (see Adib-Moghaddam 2009).

Due to the word limit, one of the limitations that the research experienced was the
thesis’ inability to show how discourses may change from affirmative to
militaristic/aggressive. In the end I had to remove two chapters but I have included
one of them, the history chapter, in the Appendix I. Let me first, however, discuss the
chapter that was not included in the thesis. This chapter was meant to be the first one
of the empirical chapters and shed light on the reasons why and how after the 9/11
attacks the US washed away an affirmative discourse in its relations with the Muslim
East and even with ‘American Others’. The way that the world had been presented
and understood in the US prior to 9/11 – global conflicts disconnected from the US
mainland, the world’s vulnerable needing and appreciating the American benevolence
and sacrifice in ousting dictators and spreading the word of democracy and the world
benefiting of US generosity through development and investments – partly explains
why 9/11 was such a traumatising experience and why it was met by disbelief, denial,
anger, and blame. The American disconnectedness – physically made possible by two
oceans – from the rest of the world had allowed for a strong sense of physical (national) security to be formed (Naveh 2002: 453). As Naveh notes, any challenge to US agency had taken place far away from its physical borders – in Somalia, Iraq, Yugoslavia – America’s war front had been elsewhere (Naveh 2002: 453). The fact that non-state actors, terrorists from the caves of Afghanistan (as President Bush kept emphasizing), organized an attack with non-traditional weaponry that brought the world’s politico-economic and military superpower on its knees – even if only for a few days or week – challenged what an individual understands by homeland or national security, sovereignty of borders, military and economic might (see Agathangelou and Ling 2004a). This allowed the Bush Administration to create, rather easily, an ontological difference between the Self and the enemy. President Bush effectively disconnected America from the historical and political reasons that made for example those nineteen people on September 11, 2001 board and hijack four aircrafts. With a discourse of difference, the American Self denied subjectivity, agency and voice from the Other and in this way washed away a discourse of meditation. In this missing chapter, I also examined how racial, gendered and sexualised markers and exclusions strengthened this difference. As several other studies have also demonstrated, this was not constrained only to people without the US borders but also people within the US borders were also being subject disciplining and policing because of their race, sexuality and gender. In short, the Bush Administration enacted a discourse of white-heterosexual national identity and it policed and disciplined deviancy that was manifested in different sexuality, race and gender (see among others Alexander 2006; Alsultany 2008; Grewal 2003; Karim 2002). In the chapter I drew attention to the ways in which this discourse was strengthened via news media and popular media and how this disseminated the militaristic solution to the conflict and increased racial discrimination not only in the US but also in Europe (see also Razack 2012). The image of the Other, now more often than not, had the face of the barbaric and irrational Muslim. Even newspapers like The Washington Post and The New York Times contributed to the racist image of the enemy in the War on Terror by referring to leaders in the Middle East as ‘mad mullahs’ or their political systems as ‘the Islamofascist mullahocracy’. TV series or computer games such as Homeland or Battlefield 3 singled out Muslims as targets and

87 In the past 136 years the US had only been attacked once on its home soil, in 1941.
as such emphasised their ‘enemy nature’. A new trend emerged in the popular literature as well. Certain ‘authentic’ Muslim female voices were promoted via memoirs that supposedly presented women in their own terms but which actually confirmed Muslim women as victims of their religion and culture. Thus, these ‘native’ stories, which of course should not be belittled as they are individual’s real experiences, were used to back up the Bush Administration’s aggressive foreign policy agenda and stir anti-Muslim/War on Terror sentiments in the US. Azar Nafisi’s *Reading Lolita*, Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*, and Azadeh Moaveni’s *Lipstick Jihad*, among others, are some of the works that were hugely popular both in the US and Europe after the War on Terror was declared. These works were sold as guides for Muslim women’s human rights violations and effectively reinforced and supported the American mission of liberating Muslim women across the world. Essentially, as this missing chapter wished to argue, the Bush Administration’s American Self’s existence relied and built on the violent production of borders and segregations which reflected the ‘insecurity about the Other becoming an actor rather than object’ in international politics (Nayak 2006: 45, emphasis in original).

Appendix I sheds light on the historic development of the women’s movement in Iran and it challenges the view that tradition is something that bounds women to the sphere of domesticity and that women’s entry to the public sphere and participation in public debates and discourses is solely a development of modern Western political structures. The section also demonstrates that concepts such as emancipation, gender equality and progress cannot be simply put into the same box with the word modernity. In short, the aim was to illustrate how Iranian women – both secular and pious – have been active participants in debates shaping gender relationships in modern Iran and how current gender ideologies are shaped by (and have shaped) political, economic and social structures and policies. Thus, in a way, the section aimed at challenging some of the criticism that has accused postcolonial feminists and particularly those who have employed the ‘post-secular’ turn’ of impeding feminist agenda outside the West.

4.0 Dialogical future?
In the summer 2013, Iran observers were stunned once again. Hassan Rouhani, a moderate, won Iran’s eleventh presidential elections. His campaign promises of the
rule of law, respect for human rights and improved relations with the West appealed to the Iranians who had been disappointed in the 2009 elections. While we are still waiting to see if President Rouhani, who was sworn to power as recently as in August 2013, is indeed able to reverse the hardliners’ state-society relations, he has showed his eagerness to improve Iran’s external relations. However, President Rouhani has already set out to address the extensive role of the Revolutionary Guards in society. In December, he began to place restrictions on companies owned by the Guards (Bloomberg Businessweek 2013). Similarly, Rouhani has also targeted the Basij when he cut the organisations’ funding in the same month (Bloomberg Businessweek 2013). The IRGC Commander in Chief General Mohammad Ali Jafari has already warned Rouhani by stating that the Guards ‘cannot sit quietly’ when developments like these are taking place (Bloomberg Businessweek 2013). However, while Rouhani has emphasised women’s rights in several statements, he has not yet addressed this at the practical level, and the pressure from civil society actors is growing. While a few political prisoners were released earlier in the autumn and some banned university teachers were allowed to return to work, Rouhani has not managed to reverse the post-2009 election violence and for example the house arrests of the GM leaders are still in place (Payvand 2013b).

However, as already noted above, Rouhani has initiated closer relations with the West and the US in particular. After his inauguration in August he stressed his willingness to re-open talks with the US and European countries over Iran’s nuclear program and to engage ‘in time-bound and result-oriented talks to build mutual confidence and removal of mutual uncertainties with full transparency’ (BBC 2013b). The international community was guarded in its response but saw Rouhani’s opening as a positive step taken by the country. And soon as in October 2013, the nuclear talks were re-opened. Iran sat down at the same table with the representatives of the so-called P5+1, - the US, Britain, France, China, Russia and the plus one, Germany. In late November, the talks reached an interim deal in which Iran agreed to curb some of its nuclear activities in return for $7 billion in sanctions relief. The deal expires in May 2014 but in the meantime the talks will continue and a permanent agreement is being sought by the parties involved (BBC 2013c).
What made this possible? I argue that it resulted from the both sides’ efforts to understand and engage with difference and actively look for an alternative discourse to shape their relationship. An example of this is the exchange of letters between Presidents Obama and Rouhani in the autumn 2013 – a dramatic change to the hypermasculine politics of the neoconservatives in Washington and the hardliners in Tehran. When the Obama Administration changed the aggressive and non-dialogical question ‘Why do they hate us’ into a dialogical approach (his opening can be traced back to March 2009 and his Nowruz message) that has the power to create, instead of aggression and belligerence, a platform for equality, Obama and Rouhani were provided with a possibility to dissolve exclusions and imaginative and physical borders that prevent the two sides from understanding difference. As the thesis has demonstrated, not engaging with the Other and clinging onto the imagined borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’, prevents us, together with them, finding solutions to political, economic and social hierarchies and inequalities. However, relating to the Other, opening a dialogue with the Other and affirming difference (instead of emphasising sameness) enables us together to see how to find a middle space for the transformation of the fixed binaries. This, in turn, may result in a form of collective engagement that hopefully materialises in a growing sense of interconnectedness of different actors and eventually in a more ethical and humane foreign policy making.
APPENDIX I
IRANIAN WOMEN’S MOVEMENT: ROOTS AND AGENDAS

1.0 Introduction
Throughout the 20th century, and up to the date, Iranian women have been central to Iran’s body politic. They have not only been active participants in the shaping of the three modern states – the Qajar state, the Pahlavi state and finally the Islamic Republic – but they and their bodies have been employed to represent the ills and virtues of all these body politics. This section in the Appendix I aims to provide a brief historical context for the Iranian women’s movement and examines how women have been involved in civil society advocacy and formal politics in Iran since the early 20th century. Thus, and firstly, the purpose is to challenge the view that tradition is something that bounds women to the sphere of domesticity and that women’s entry to the public sphere and participation in public debates and discourses is solely a development of modern Western political structures. Secondly, I also wish to demonstrate that concepts such as emancipation, gender equality and progress cannot be simply put into the same box with the word modernity. In short, the aim is to illustrate how Iranian women have been active participants in debates shaping gender relationships in modern Iran and how current gender ideologies are shaped by (and have shaped) political, economic and social structures and policies.

I begin with a description of the early women’s movement activists who participated in the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11, which many have interpreted as the beginning of women’s civil society activism in Iran. After this, I move on to discuss how the state co-opted the woman question under the Pahlavis and what gender specific reforms emerged from that period. While under Reza Shah women were rather content to have the state as the sponsor of gender reforms, under the second Pahlavi Shah, Mohammed Reza Shah, the woman question became firmly located in the person of the Shah who dictated the outlook and content of the gender reforms. The Pahlavis’ gender reforms in the 1960s and 70s drew heavily on the models coming from their Western allies and to counter this, some women’s movement activists sought to establish a more independent agenda and joined leftist parties and underground societies, which eventually led to women’s strong involvement in the 1979 Revolution. This partly explains why for some the woman question was, and
continues to be, a question of identity that draws on the strict separation of the West and indigenous practice. The last sections will shed light on women’s participation in the 1979 revolution, their position in the Iran-Iraq war and women’s adaption to the new body politic since the 1980s. By tracing back the history of the women’s movement, the aim is to shed light on the changing political, economic and societal circumstances (instead of solely cultural ones) that have shaped women’s lives and the various agendas of the women’s movement in Iran.

2.0 The Constitutional Revolution: mothers of the nation

The origins of the Iranian women’s movement can be traced back to the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11) when Iranian women emerged as independent political and social actors within the body politic. Women joined the Constitutional movement – a coalition led by the ulama, bazaaris, and secular intelligentsia – and organised themselves behind the nationalist goals in the run up to the Revolution (see for instance Shuster 1912). The constitutionalists were inspired by ideas flowing from the West and Iran’s Arab and Caucasian neighbours but the Iranian intelligentsia – both its religious and secular elements – developed its own distinctive understanding of modernity and progress. The movement’s political goals included the end of the arbitrary rule of the Qajar shahs, establishing a Majles (parliament), promoting civil rights and containing the growing foreign political and economic influence in the country’s internal affairs. The revolution marked a watershed for women at least in two ways. On the one hand, it facilitated women’s entry to political activism as independent actors, and on the other, it presented a space where women’s status and political rights were debated for the first time at the national level. However, like elsewhere in the region, the woman question was discussed within the nationalist-modernist framework and the re-definition of Iranian women and womanhood stayed within the limits set by the state and male intelligentsia.

In the early stages of the revolution women participated alongside their male-compatriots and it was only later, after the enactment of the Electoral Law in 1906 that excluded women from the electorate, that women began to campaign for specific women’s issues independent from the constitutional programme. The first generation of women who were active in both the Revolution and later in women advocacy were either related to the constitutionalists or from the upper classes. Women turned their
traditional social and religious meetings into their own *anjumans* (associations) and as such expanded the boundaries of social and political debates. The first women’s *anjuman*, ‘Women’s Freedom Society’ (*Anjuman-e Azadi-ye Zanan*), was set up by Tehran upper-class women in 1907 (Bamdad 1977: 30). The membership included one of the most famous women activists, Sadiqeh Dawlatabadi, and two of the Qajar Shah Naser al-Din’s daughters, one of which, Taj al-Saltana, later claimed her place as a feminist and socialist thinker (see Amanat 1993). The growing number of *anjumans* and women’s press, which started off with the paper called *Danesh* ‘Knowledge’, in 1910, circulated upper-class women’s ideas of healthcare, hygiene, household work and veiling to other women. Women’s activism extended to charity and the educational sphere of which the ulema and a few foreign missionary schools had dominated the latter. For instance, the Ladies of the Homeland (*Anjuman-e Mukhaddarat-e Vatan*), set up orphanages, organised adult education lessons and was associated with the establishment of girls’ schools.

It was in this period when women also established themselves as intellectuals of their own right. Women brought with them their own experience of modernity and through that they contributed to the constitutional movement’s ideology and various socio-economic and political debates. However, and maybe most importantly, these women came to challenge the male articulated narrative of modernity of the constitutional period and helped later generations of women to claim their place in political and socio-economic debates and discourses. Whereas the male intelligentsia assigned women with the responsibility to represent the nation’s political integrity and educate the modern nation as enlightened mothers, women wanted to expand the parameters of these roles. Moreover, the Iranian women expatriates in Turkey and especially in Central Asia, where socialist ideas were growing strong, formed their own *anjumans* and spread ideas and materials to Iran (Afary 1992: 107). In this way, they also contributed to a specific political discourse and form of activism emerging in Iran.

However, like elsewhere in the region, Iranian women and the re-articulation of their womanhood became closely connected to the transformations in political and socio-
economic realms. The primary concern for the political and intellectual elites in Iran was the transformation of a traditional and backward tribal society into a modern and independent nation state. In this effort, women became responsible for the physical, moral and intellectual development of children and, via association, of the new nation imagined in the various nationalist and political discourses. In order to be fit to raise a new nationalist generation women were required to possess both public (e.g. education) and private virtues (e.g. chastity). Thus, the modernisation of the body politic began from the family home and Iranian women and gender relations at large came to offer a framework through which the (male) modernist-nationalist intelligentsia imagined, articulated and debated concepts such as the modern Iranian nation, nationalism and later citizenship rights (see Najmabadi 1993a; 1993b; 1997; 1998b). The new Majles and the constitutional movement eventually failed to extend women’s agency in ways that it would go beyond the perimeters of home and family (e.g. by denying women’s suffrage in the Electoral Law of 1906) – although women were now seen – with the help of modern educational regimes - physically, morally and intellectually more capable of carrying out their nationalist and domestic responsibilities. And as Najmabadi has argued, although the period introduced some emancipatory impulses for women, the very same emancipatory impulses also included regulatory implications. For instance, in her study of educated housewives Najmabadi shows that while the ‘discourse of domesticity’ opened the doors to the male domain of modern education and while women’s education was aimed at producing learned managers and heads of households and while education also facilitated women’s entry to the public sphere and gained them national recognition, it

also defined the acceptable social space for women’s activities (family educator/professional housewife) that were not to be defied (Najmabadi 1998b).

Some scholars have argued that the constitutional period was not very formative for the women’s movement in Iran (see e.g. S. Mahdavi. 2003). However, others have demonstrated how women asserted themselves as independent social and political actors through a variety of civil society activisms and how they opened the doors for political and socio-economic debates – including issues such as universal suffrage, social services and preservation of national industries – that would have been overlooked by the male intelligentsia (see e.g. Afary 1989; 1992; 1996; 2009; Kashani-Sabet 2005; Najmabadi 1993a; Paidar 1995; Sanasarian 1985). Yet, women advocates were drawn largely from the upper classes and hence it is important to remember that women living in the early 20th century Iran did not form any homogenous group. As Paidar has rightly noted, the diversity of Iranian women, which materialised itself in different ethnical, religious, geographical and economic locations not only obscured women’s different needs but also how they related to the new discourses and practices (Paidar 1995: 30).

3.0 The Pahlavis 1925-1979: state feminism and challenge from below

3.1 First Pahlavi state, 1925-1941

The years that followed the Constitutional Revolution were coloured with internal chaos, foreign interventions, weak central government and sporadic and regional movements (Keddie 2006a). Hence, Iran’s political elites welcomed Reza Khan, who embodied their vision of a strong statesman capable of instituting a strong centralised state and initiating badly needed socio-economic and political reforms. The years

89 An example of women’s activism in preserving Iran’s indigenous industries is their campaign to support local handicraft industries in Isfahan, Shiraz, Kashan and Yazd. The nineteenth century had witnessed a sharp rise of in textile imports, particularly in cotton goods, which had already by 1850s counted for some two-thirds of the total imports. The impact of the imported machine-made textiles on Iranian handicrafts was devastating and these imports in turn had led to changes in taste and fashion, which made many consumers prefer foreign styles to native. To protect local industries against the competition of European machine-made goods, women organised campaigns which encouraged school children to wear native garments and women pleaded people ‘to wear their old clothes for some time’, hoping that the exporting foreign textiles could soon be stopped (Afary 1996: 179). See Charles Issawi, ‘European Economic Penetration, 1872-1921’ in Peter Avery, Gavin Hambly, and Charles Melville (Eds.), Cambridge History of Iran, Volume 7: From Nadir Shah to the Islamic Republic (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991).
after Reza Shah’s coronation in 1925 saw a far less direct Western influence in the country, centralisation of power, state initiated modernisation and secularisation, personalisation of power and co-optation of independent localist and social movements such as the emerging women’s movement (Keddie 2006a). In this period, Iranian women and the woman question need to be situated within the larger state-building project and its discourse of secular nationalism (Kashani-Sabet 2005). As Najmabadi has argued, the state-organised journey into modernity was symbolised in the education and unveiling of the traditional Iranian woman who was urged to participate in the nationalist cause (Najmabadi 1991: 51). The social map grew more diverse as a new middle class emerged from the reforms that the first Pahlavi state introduced in the next fifteen years. However, as Keddie has argued, this eventually materialised itself in the situation of ‘two cultures’ where the upper and middle classes were culturally, economically and socially separated from the more pious lower classes; the resulting economic and social dislocations and tensions became visible during the second Pahlavi state in the 1960s (Keddie 1981: 111). Moreover, over the years, the intimate relationship between the Pahlavi state and the woman question cultivated resentment to gender reforms among lower classes and the ulema (Kashani-Sabet 2005: 41).

The primary concern of the first Pahlavi state was to finally start the transformation of Iran into a modern and independent nation state. In this period, the state introduced reforms in several fields – including healthcare, education and law – that centralised the country’s modernisation drive in the government. Like at the turn of the century, women and their bodies continued to have a central place in the male intelligentsia’s vision of the new body politic and the woman question was often used to rebuke the old, traditional and backward Qajar Iran. However, the era of Reza Shah has often been labelled as an era of state-feminism where gender discourses were state imposed and very little independent debate existed (see Amin 2005). As a response to the traditional image of Iran, the state set out to construct a particular image of the modern Iranian woman. This modern womanhood was modelled on the European example of an emancipated women and the traditional Iranian woman was cast denigrated as uneducated and backward (see for example Regan (1985) on Kasravi’s ideas of Iranian womanhood in the 1940s). Kashani-Sabet has argued that during the first Pahlavi state, the state and the nationalist-modernist discourse of the male
intelligentsia remodelled women’s role in Iranian society from patriotic motherhood to patriotic womanhood that emphasised women’s roles also outside the domestic realm, in the civic community, where women were now required to contribute to the building of a modern nation state (Kashani-Sabet 2005). On the one hand, the state required Iranian women to be good companions to their husbands and exceptional mothers to their children. On the other, however, they were asked to educate themselves and be well-trained professional working outside home in order to fulfil their civil responsibilities as active participants in national affairs (Amin 2005). Several scholars have noted the limits of this state-defined female empowerment project. Najmabadi, for example, has argued the project failed due to the limited state interest in developing a market economy that would have facilitated the entry of lower class women into the labour force and as such the state-led women’s emancipation stayed limited to certain sectors of urban upper and middle class women (Najmabadi 1991: 54).

While the reach of the project was limited, the state assisted women though a host of policy openings that helped women to fulfil and embrace their new roles. The state set up the Ministry of Health which was put in charge of national healthcare, the Organisation for the Care of Mothers and Children was established and women’s own societies were also encouraged to participate in educating women on health and hygiene issues (Afary 2009: 149). Women had been allowed to public schools in 1918 and alongside the expansion of the state funded schools, the number of private schools for girls was also increasing (Paidar 1995: 108). Further, in 1936, women entered higher education when the state opened the universities to women. Reforms in the jurisprudence included the codification of laws and the introduction of the more secular Civil Code in 1931. The Civil Code revised laws on marriage and divorce, custody, guardianship, child maintenance and inheritance, however, although secular judges now handled almost all other areas of law, the family remained in the preserve of the ulema (Paidar 1995). The revised family laws raised the legal age of marriage for girls from nine to fifteen years; gave an eighteen-year old woman a right to petition a marriage bureau if her vali (guardian) did not agree with her choice of spouse; marriage contracts had to be officially registered in civil bureaus which allowed at least urban women to stipulate contractually the right to divorce if the
husband decided to take a second wife; a husband who did not provide for his wife’s maintenance could also be arrested under the new law (Afary 2009: 153-154).

Perhaps one of the most significant developments for future of the woman question was the reshaping of the relationship between the state and the Shi’i ulema. The state’s intervention in the legal and educational spheres, which had been exclusive domains of the ulema, marginalised their cultural and political influence and made them critical of the Pahlavi state. However, Reza Shah allowed the ulema maintain their control over the realm of family when he decided to leave the family law grounded in the Sharia. On the one hand, Reza Shah understood the importance of the ulema’s societal legitimacy among the more conservative and/or poor sectors of society and he also needed the ulema’s political support for some of his projects. However, on the other hand, in the eyes of the state and the intelligentsia there was nothing contradictory about leaving the realm of family in the hands of the clergy since, for them, the secular notion of public/private divide justified the ulema presence in the private sphere. This was reflected in the legal construction of women as civic participants, educated mothers and obedient housewives (Yeganeh 1993: 5).

One of the most controversial modernisation impulses that played on the bodies of women was the decree prohibiting veiling in public in 1936. The veil had attracted criticism already among the secular-nationalist intelligentsia of the constitutional movement. Mirza Aqa Khan Kermani and Malkam Khan had attacked women’s veiling by claiming that it was the root cause of women’s lower status in society and an impediment for national progress. Although the intellectuals and urban upper classes saw the forced unveiling as an emancipatory push for women, the measure was not well received among the lower classes. Many pious or lower class women refused to leave their houses unveiled and gave up their activities in the public sphere – including social life, shopping and conducting business – and hence the law that had aimed at ‘liberating’ women ended up enforcing their seclusion, at least in certain segments of society. Unveiling formed part of the state’s larger agenda to desegregate Iranian society – the state saw society’s homosociability to reflect the nation’s traditionalism and singled it out as one of the reasons for stagnating national progress. The Western way of mixing of sexes in the public sphere was seen as a remedy for
this. Other steps in the process included the introduction of mixed classes in elementary schools (Chehabi 1993).

In the period between the Constitutional Revolution and the establishment of the Pahlavi state, Iranian women had sought to form a separate movement that had an independent platform from the nationalist movement. However, women’s participation continued to be rather limited to the urban upper classes. Moreover, when Reza Shah assumed power, the women’s movement like other social movements were co-opted by the state. If women’s organisations were not closed down they were brought under the official umbrella organisation that was set up in 1935. However, it should also be noted that at the time nationalism, as a contemporary social phenomenon, both enabled and shaped social movements, and among them the women’s movement (Kashani-Sabet 2005). The Pahlavi state’s nationalist-modernist policies linked gender policies to a formal agenda and for the first time women became an integral part of state policy (Paidar 1995: 103). Also, it is important to stress that women continued to be significant in the shaping of the state’s gender reforms and discourses via the women’s press and of course via women’s voices in the state orchestrated organisations. In this period, women’s organisations proved to be instrumental in offering adult vocational classes and raising women’s political and societal consciousness (Hoodfar 1999).

As Paidar has argued, the first Pahlavi state implemented modernisation that defined women’s emancipation as a wider political project and linked it to the notion of the modern nation state in Iran (Paidar 1995). The new health-care, educational, legal and employment agendas raised women’s living standards at least in some segments of society. However, the state’s promotion and co-optation of women’s emancipation choked alternative voices and narrowed the scope of independent activism. In the coming years, the personalisation of state power and increasing involvement of foreign powers in the country’s domestic affairs resulted in a growing resentment against the Pahlavi state and by the 1940s both secular and religious intelligentsia felt alienated from the state and had started campaigning for constitutional rule (Keddie 2006a).
3.2 Second Pahlavi period, 1941-1979

3.2.1 Civil society liberalisation 1941-1953

In 1941, the Soviet and British governments accused Reza Shah of German sympathies and forced him to abdicate in favour of his son, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. The next few years witnessed a degree of civil society liberalisation and several political and other civil society groups sought to distance themselves from the central government. A similar trend took place among women’s groups and they gained back some of the independence they had lost in the past two decades. Women entered political parties and began to articulate specific feminist demands centring around women’s political rights, marriage and family laws (Hoodfar 1999; Paidar 1995: 123).

Women’s independent activism included a renewed interest in women’s organisation and in the period between 1941-1953 dozens of women’s organisations were formed (Amin 2008: 8). Women also found their way into party politics that coloured the period 1941-1953. Women set up their own branches in parties like the Tudeh and the National Front and they called for social justice, women’s equal working opportunities, better working conditions, equal pay, childcare centres and vacation time (Afary 2009: 176). However, in this period the main political issue that women campaigned for was the extension of suffrage to women. The Tudeh Party briefly campaigned for female suffrage in the Majles in 1944 but the conservatives effectively blocked the campaign (Hoodfar 1999). Mohammad Mosaddeq, the leader of the National Front, also supported women’s campaign by proposing that the electoral law needed to be revised and called for female suffrage in 1949. However, the conservative forces – both secular and religious – in the Majles continued their opposition and women were left outside formal political participation (Paidar 1995: 132; Afary 2009: 192-195).

Women began to grow disillusioned with party politics and the failure of reform projects in the Majles. The most significant legal reform in the 1940-1950 period was the new labour law that granted women twelve weeks of maternity leave with full pay (Keddie 1981: 121). After the unfruitful experiment with the Left, women began actively and independently to campaign for their suffrage. The campaign was directed by three organisations, The New Path League, the League of Women’s Supporters of the Declaration of Human Rights and the Association of Women Lawyers (Bamdad
1977: 110; Paidar 1995: 137). By 1960, the campaign had been so successful that the political establishment could no longer ignore women’s demands for equal political rights and women’s suffrage was one of the Shah’s White Revolution reforms (see below).

The relatively liberalised political environment facilitated a growing number of women entering higher education and the labour market in the 1940s and 1950s. Women began to enter professions such as medicine and law that had traditionally been considered as the male domain. Women’s political standings broadened in this period as well and women’s journals covered a range of positions from pro-monarchy to socialist views. However, women’s movement advocates faced two problems in this period. Women’s own women-specific agendas in political parties often failed as these were often seen secondary to nationalist issues by the male leadership. The second problem manifested itself in the strict separation of politico-economic rights and personal rights. Several parties and actors recognised women’s demand for equal political and economic rights but would not extend the reforms into the more personal sphere that included for example the reform of the family law (Afary 2009: 177-178). Some scholars have also noted how women’s organisations continued to ignore the ethnic, class and religious diversity of Iranian women which would have been important in order to localise and acknowledge women’s specific needs (Amin 2008: 26).

3.2.2. De-liberalisation of civil society, 1953-1979

In 1953, American and British forces organised a coup that overthrew the popular Prime Minister Mossadeq who had nationalised Iranian oil to the irritation of the British\textsuperscript{90}. The post-Mossadeq era witnessed the growth of the Shah’s personal power, increasing political repression, pro-Western/American foreign policy, rigged elections, constitutional changes, and co-opting and harbouring of reforms and social movements under the state’s supervision. Dissident voices were effectively silenced when independent political organisations were closed down and civil society was put

\textsuperscript{90} In August 2013, the National Security Archive released declassified CIA documents on the United States’ role in the controversial operation. While American and British involvement in Mosaddeq’s ouster had long been public knowledge, the declassified documents were interpreted to be the CIA’s first formal acknowledgement that the agency helped to plan and execute the coup.
under the surveillance of the SAVAK in the aftermath of the 1953 coup. However, religion was one of the sectors that stayed independent from the state and religious scholars, seminars and mosques gradually attracted political dissidents and Islamic politics emerged as a new political paradigm in Iran (Afary 2009: 237; Najmabadi 1991: 60). Similarly, the leftist movements that were now underground began to attract more and more followers. In the coming years an unusual relationship was forged between the religious and leftist forces that prepared the country for the coming revolution.

In this period, the US articulated a new policy towards American allies in the Middle East. To counter the Soviet threat in the region, the US allowed Middle Eastern states to build up their militaries with American military technologies but demanded societies’ democratisation in return (Afary 2009: 202; Warne 2013). In the case of Iran, the Americans seemed to have forgotten their participation in the 1953 coup that had overthrown a democratically elected government. The Kennedy Administration grew rather critical of the Shah’s domestic policies and demands for respecting parliamentary power were apparently made to the Shah (Warne 2013). Even though reports of the Shah’s repressive domestic politics was being published, the close relationship between the Shah and different US Administrations did not change dramatically. At the same time, within the country, the growing middle – and professional classes and critical student organisations began to voice their discontent and the state had to react in order to counter a possible revolution from below (Ansari 2001). Mohammad Reza Shah’s response to the external and domestic demands of political and social reform came with his announcement of the White Revolution in 1963. However, as one historian has argued, the White Revolution was the elite’s political programme that allowed them ‘to sustain as much of the established relations of domination as realistically possible’ (Ansari 2001: 2, emphasis in original). The White Revolution concentrated the state modernisation drive even more on the person of the Shah and in effect closed down the discursive and physical spaces for civil society activism.

Although a debated programme, the White Revolution improved Iran’s healthcare, education – and welfare policies and women were one of the groups that benefited the most from these policies. In addition, when the Shah had suppressed the socially or
gender conservative nationalist opposition politics that had coloured the politics in the 1950s and early 1960s, he extended suffrage to women in 1963, which for him, consolidated his modernisation project domestically and profiled him as a support of women’s rights abroad.

When women had secured their political rights they turned to campaign for the family law reform. The Family Protection Law (FPL) came to an effect in 1967 (amended in 1975) and many women welcomed it as the most important legal change in women’s status in modern Iran. The FPL interfered with the only sphere of influence that had stayed in the hands of the ulema: the family. The law secularised the sphere of family and transferred it from the sphere of religion to that of the state. The law granted women a right to initiate divorce, men could no longer unilaterally divorce women, and child custody was no longer the sole prerogative of men. However, as Yeganeh has argued, the results of gender reforms that the Pahlavi state introduced were not as progressive as many believed: ‘Pahlavi gender policy did not aim to remove patriarchal relations, simply to modernise’ them (Yeganeh 1993: 6). One instance where this is evident was the new FPL, which, while reformed certain aspects of gender relations, effectively continued to understand women as male property (Paidar 1995).

Women’s organisations that were operational under the state mushroomed in this period. By 1977, the now renamed state umbrella organisation for women, the Women’s Organisation of Iran, hosted 400 branches in the provinces and had a membership base of 70,000 (Hoodfar 1999). While public debates about women’s rights and gender relations were carefully controlled by the state, the state initiated and launched women specific programs such as family welfare centres, literacy corps, legal counselling and vocational training (Hoodfar 1999). Although the Shah monopolised the woman question to an extent that women’s rights became almost ‘royal grants’ (Najmabadi 1991: 60), the women’s movement itself slowly democratised itself when middle – and working class women joined the ranks in the 1960s. Moreover, women’s higher education facilitated women’s entry to the labour market as teachers and public sector employees, which in turn, shaped women’s political and socio-economic consciousness. Child-care and maternity benefits were the state’s attempt to ensure that women would enter and stay in the labour force. In
the 1960s, women increasingly joined professional associations that have been central forces in shaping Iranian politics (Hoodfar 1999). By 1976, women’s participation in formal economy had reached 8.9 per cent of total labour force (Moghadam 2002a: 50).91

From the 1950s onwards the resentment against the Pahlavi state had begun to grow and materialised in anti-monarchist political activism. Women were involved in radical underground leftist parties, supported religious thinkers and activists such as Ali Shariati and joined the ranks of Ayatollah Khomeini’s followers. The leftist women found their way into organisations like People’s Fedayeen and People’s Mojahedeen that were influenced by the old members of the Tudeh Party and the National Front (see Chehabi 1990). Whereas the middle classes, students and young professionals found their way to leftist organisations, the more pious segments of the lower classes and bazaaris aligned themselves with the more religious opposition (Afary 2009, see chapter 8). The leftist organisations included women’s emancipation on their agendas and at large supported women’s equal political and labour rights. However, many of the organisations were highly hierarchical and only a few women gained leadership positions (see e.g. Moghissi 1996). Similarly, as one of my interviewees recalled, the middle class background of many activists often obstructed them from relating to the everyday problems of ordinary women (Interview with Nazir, Tehran, March 2010). Partly because of this, the religious opposition to the Pahlavi state began to attract a growing number of individual women and women’s groups who placed their demands for equal rights within Islam. Within the reorganisation of political opposition, a new discourse with regard the woman question was slowly being remodelled and it now drew more heavily on Islam (Najmabadi 1991: 60)

During the Pahlavi state Iranian women were promoted as the symbols of the nation’s progress and future, both domestically and abroad. Yet, although the state was the main architect of gender reforms, the legal and socio-economic changes of the Pahlavi

period would not have been possible without the continuous campaigning, lobbying and support of women’s advocates. Their work on the ground through educational and technical projects laid the basis for future women’s advocates. The legal changes of the Pahlavi era were, however, rather limited and only segments of society had means to access the information and/or the social and economic support necessary to take advantage of the reforms (Hoodfar 1999). Most women’s lives continued to be shaped by familial and other social identities –and relations. In many cases women were caught between the emancipatory impulses offered by the state and the more communal roles that women expected to be fulfilled in their local communities. The women’s movement stayed in the hands of upper and middle class women, although women’s political awareness grew in the working classes as well. However, the discourse of emancipation that had stayed at large within the secular elites was slowly being challenged by Islamic voices and a growing number of women began to voice their demands for gender equality within Islamic framework.

4.0 Revolutionary years and consolidation of the Islamic Republic
4.1 The 1979 Revolution and women

Over the years the Pahlavi state grew more and more isolated from society. The Shah was able to run the state independently from the public opinion with the help of oil revenue, centralisation of power and political repression. In the 1970s, the most critical voices against the Pahlavi state were articulated by different clerical establishments, radical leftist groups and the middle classes who were becoming frustrated with modernisation projected from above (Abrahamian 1982). Even middle class women who had benefited from the Pahlavi reforms began to criticise and feel uncomfortable with the model of womanhood that was promoted by the state. The process culminated in mass demonstrations and strikes that paralysed the country in 1978-1979. The events brought together various segments of society ranging from the secular and religious intelligentsia to working classes. The Shah lost his legitimacy and was forced to leave the country in mid-January 1979. A few weeks later, Ayatollah Khomeini, who had emerged as the opposition’s religious and political leader, returned to Iran from France where he had been exiled.

Women’s participation in the revolutionary activities can be traced back to their involvement in both religious and leftist organisations in the 1960s and 1970s.
However, the agendas that women campaigned for in the run-up to the revolution did not include any specific demands for gender equality (Hoodfar 1999). One of the largest women’s organisations in this period was the leftist National Union of Women, which like other similar organisations, did volunteering, organised adult literacy and vocational classes but did not engage with specific women issues (Afary 2009: 250-251). Women’s participation in street demonstrations – particularly veiled women’s participation – was celebrated by many in the West but several Iranian-born secular-liberal feminists were taken aback by the images that pictured women in black chadors protesting against a modern, secular and progressive Western modelled regime (see for instance Tabari and Yeganeh 1982; Afsar 1982; 1984; 1985). To acknowledge women’s support for the revolution, Ayatollah Khomeini made several statements reassuring that the Islamic state would respect women’s political rights and restore their dignity and social worth. For instance, in early 1979 Khomeini stated:

‘Islam made women equal with men; in fact, it shows a concern for women that it does not show for men. [...] In our revolutionary moment, women have likewise earned more credit than men, for it was the women who not only displayed courage themselves, but also had reared men of courage’ (quoted in Moghadam 1988: 224).

The consolidation of Islam as the basis of the new body politic was partly a response to Iran’s failed experiments with Western imported ideologies like nationalism, socialism and modernisation (Najmabadi 1991). As Ansari has argued, the 1979 Revolution ‘was as much an intellectual renaissance and challenge to the “West” and its overriding philosophy of materialism, as it was a political struggle. The concept of “independence” was at least as much an ideological project as a political and economic goal’ (Ansari 2006b: 67).

The state that was born out of the revolution came to power in the name of the dispossessed and with Khomeini’s promise of social and economic justice. This view was embodied in the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran drafted in 1979 (amended 1989). The Constitution enshrines individuals’ social, cultural, political and economic rights ranging from the freedom of religion to social welfare. Twelver Shi’ism was confirmed as the official state religion and all laws were reformed in order to be compatible with the Sharia. The Constitution was modelled on the constitution of the French Fifth Republic and the separation of powers between the executive, judiciary and the Majles was protected in the Constitution (Ansari 2003:
This was, however, completed with the inclusion of the mandate of the *velayat-e faqih*, which assigned the highest authority to Khomeini (and his successors) to interpret Islam and ensure that the law was compatible with Islamic principles (Ansari 2003: 222). Khomeini also installed an Assembly of Experts that consists of 86 elected members and has the power to appoint and dismiss the supreme leader. Moreover, to make sure that legislation going through the *Majles* would be in accordance with the *Sharia*, the second article of the Constitution set up a Council of Guardians that consists of six religious leaders appointed by the Supreme Leader and six by the *Majles* (Afshar 2006: 7). The Council has the power to review election candidates in all of Iran’s elections. Hence, some have interpreted Iran to represent a theo-democracy (see e.g. Afshar 2006). In order to consolidate and legitimise the new system, the regime employed a language that placed the ‘Islam’ and ‘West’ on stark opposite sides and this eventually rendered liberal constructions of rights and equality not only ineffectual but also traitorous, as the regime claimed to make a break from the Pahlavi era’s strong westernisation policies (Osanloo 2009: 30). However, as Ansari has pointed out, Khomeini’s decision to use ‘Islamic Republic’ displays a contradiction in the state. The regime needs Islam to legitimise itself but it is sometimes in a conflict with the republican side that echoes ideas of equality before the law and the protection of fundamental rights (see Ansari 2003: 221). In practice this has been reflected in the increasing conflict between elected bodies (such as the *Majles*) and non-elected authorities (such as the Guardian Council) of whom the latter is being legitimised by their role as the defenders of the *Sharia*. The most famous case is perhaps the reformist dominated Sixth *Majles* (2000-2004) when the Guardian Council (dominated by hardliners) vetted most of the reformist-concerted bills on the basis that they did not meet the Islamic criteria laid out in the Constitution.

Women and women’s role in society were already addressed and re-imagined in the revolutionary ideologies articulated against the Pahlavi state. One of the reasons why Iranian women became, once again, central to the revolutionary imaginary was their previous role in the Pahlavi state’s construction of modernity. The Pahlavis had made the woman question central to their desire of modernising the country – both in the eyes of the domestic and foreign audiences – and as such many coupled women strongly with the Pahlavi autocracy and forced westernisation. Moreover, for many the Western influence in Iranian domestic affairs did not only materialise in the
country’s politico-economic sphere but also in the cultural sphere. Najmabadi has pointed out how, among both secular and religious segments of the revolutionary forces, there was a shared consensus of the importance of individual morality to the health of the body politic, which, in turn, was played on the bodies of Iranian women (Najmabadi 1991: 65). The Western economic and political power was thus resisted with the help of ‘authenticity’, which drew on indigenous and pre-colonial past and which was seen to help countering the West’s political and economic exploitation (Moghissi 1994: 60).

The new regime quickly initiated a new official discourse on women that addressed the desirable role and position of women in the newly organised Iranian body politic. Perhaps one of the most famous aspects of the new discourse was the employment of Jalal Al-Ahmad’s notion of ‘westoxication’, or gharbzadegi. Thinkers like Ali Shariati used the concept to describe upper–and middle class women, who, in the eyes of the new regime, symbolised the loss of Islamic culture, lack of morality and intrusion of Western powers of the Pahlavi era. For Shariati, Western capitalism was depriving the East because it empties people out of their ‘selves’, however, western modernisation, according to him, was inevitable and it could be adapted to Iran with the relevant value system (Yeganeh 1982: 48-49). Shariati’s remedy to this was the creation of a subversive figure that materialised in the modern Iranian woman. According to Shariati, Iranian women’s lower status in society was not only a result of gharbzadegi but also a result from corrupted religion in the hands of the ulema, which had taken away the very rights that Islam gives her (Yeganeh 1982: 50). The New Woman was expected to embrace modernity and ‘make’ herself through civic responsibilities and activism that would improve and protect the new Islamic society, however, in ways that would not compete with her responsibilities within the family home as a wife, as a mother and/or as a daughter (Yeganeh 1982: 51). Shariati picked Fatimah, the youngest daughter of Muhammad, the wife of Ali and mother of Hussein, as the role model for Iranian women. For Shariati, Fatimah’s devotion and support for her society and men in her life crystallised the role that Iranian women were expected to fulfil (Afary 2009: 241). The new discourse on women aimed at establishing a coherent indigenous culturo-political framework within which women would find their re-defined roles as dutiful citizens, mothers, wives and daughters. Pious women activists in particular have found Shariati’s arguments foundational for
their agency formation in the post-revolutionary Iran. Shariati’s teachings not only justified and required women to participate in and improve the new polity and society at large, but they also encouraged pious women (who had been ignored and pushed into the margins by the elites) to constitute their own agencies in the public sphere that had not been open to them previously. In short, the new discourse enabled pious women’s agency formation, gave them a sense of choice and duty to constitute and realise their own modalities through public activism aimed at reforming and improving the newly organised society.

In order to consolidate the new gender discourse, the state carried out a series of political and legal reforms. One of the first legal changes was the abolition of the FPL that had granted women new rights in matters of family and marriage. The abolition of the FPL was more an ideological motion than anything else and several segments of the law were later reintroduced into the Islamic Republic’s law. The state also set out to re-segregate society by introducing compulsory veiling, segregating education, work places, sports and certain public spaces. In addition, in the early years of the post-revolutionary era, the state tried to restrict women’s participation in the public sphere and as a consequence many secular urban elite and middle class women lost their jobs. The most affected sector was the legal sphere where women were banned serving as judges and women lawyers were discouraged from practicing. Women were discouraged to work outside home by the implementation of several policies including the closing down of childcare centres, the introduction of early-retirement packages to female employees, and offering married couples the woman’s full salary if she decided to stay home (Moghadam 1988: 226).

Many Western feminists saw the Islamic Republic’s new gender policies as drastic reversals in women’s rights; however, as Moghadam has rightly argued, the new regime’s gender policies targeted mainly the westernised elite—and middle class women. To the contrary, lower class women seemed to claim their place in the economic and social spheres of the newly organised society. Veiling sanctioned women’s presence in the public sphere by redefining their place from seclusion to segregation and in this way the Islamic state legitimised women’s entry to labour force, higher education and so on (Sadeghi 2008). Also, contrary to the predictions of many feminists, by the late 1980s it was noticed that the regime’s rhetoric and
policies did not meet in everyday life. For instance, female employment had not been as negatively affected as had been speculated. Moghadam’s study from 1988 demonstrated that although a large number of elite women had disappeared from the labour market, the number of lower class women had increased and for example the governmental sector employed now more women than prior to the revolution (Moghadam 1988).

In the course of 1979 and 1980 several small women’s organisation emerged to voice their programs and gender demands to the new state. There was also an attempt to establish a larger organisation, the Women’s Solidarity Committee, that would have represented women and their agenda at large but this failed due to women’s diverse political backgrounds (Hoodfar 1999). One of the issues that joined together both religious and secular women was the question of compulsory veiling; while secular women saw it as restricting their agency, many religious women saw it as a question of personal piety that should not be enforced from above. The first signs of compulsory veiling were seen in February 1979 when Khomeini stated that women were allowed to work in public if they covered themselves. This stirred individual women and women groups to campaign against compulsory veiling and the state backed down on the issue. However, veiling became later compulsory with Khomeini’s decree in 1981.

The new state did not interfere with women’s political rights. Women were allowed to participate in formal politics and they began to run for parliament. In the first parliament convened in 1980, four women won seats and thus women’s voices were secured within the formal establishment (Moghadam 2002n: 1139). However, the early years of the new state were coloured with state repression and leftist and other social movements were harshly crushed. During these political purges that cleared Khomeini’s political adversaries and dissident voices off the political map, women advocates were also arrested, imprisoned and many withdrew from activism altogether. Some activists left the country and the Iranian diaspora has been an important source of women’s rights activism outside the country. However, small informal women’s groups began to re-emerge in the mid –and late 1980s. They

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92 However, women are not allowed to run for presidency.
focused mainly on awareness raising and offering literacy classes and vocational training but they laid the ground for Iran’s NGO movement that took off in the 1990s (Hoodfar 1999).

4.2 The Iran-Iraq War

In September 1980 Saddam Hussein, with the later help of the US, attacked Iran. The war was disastrous to both sides. Huge human and infrastructural losses were suffered. Human losses on the Iranian side have been estimated at 1 million and 250,000 – 500,000 for the Iraqi side. In Iran, this was the time when the new regime was consolidating and rationalising the new state. Although the war was catastrophic to both sides, when it ended the new Iranian state was stronger than it had been before the war. And Ansari has argued, Iranians entered the war as obedient subjects, but they emerged from it as citizens who had a stronger sense of their relationship to the state (Ansari 2003: 239).

During the war, the state continued to implement its new discourse on women and the state rhetoric and policies regarding women and gender relations became more conservative, however, and as noted above, the realities of war made the regime accept compromises. Given the mass mobilisation of men and the death of so many in the war, women were needed in the public sphere where they filled the ranks of the expanding public sector and state bureaucracy. Women’s lives in the private sphere were also affected. Many lost their fathers or husbands and thus women had to assume the triple role as a mother/father – breadwinner – head of household.

In addition to the war that terrorised society, the state actively sought to militarise the public sphere both through surveillance of society and also by promoting militarised citizenship. The militarisation of society also facilitated certain forms of masculinities and femininities to emerge. The mobilisation of the nation in the war effort was helped by the production and promotion of a culture of martyrdom. Martyrdom became a central symbol of the new invented masculinity that drew on Shi’i Islam’s cosmology (Varzi 2008) but its meaning and definition were controlled.

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93 The militarisation of Iranian society is maybe most concretely exemplified in the establishment of the Revolutionary Guards and basij forces soon after the Revolution.
and defined by the state.\textsuperscript{94} Strong, sacrificing and honourable masculinities were thus promoted in the new body politic.\textsuperscript{95} Men who volunteered in the war were praised and promised eternal paradise and financial state support for their families should they die in war.\textsuperscript{96} Thus, martyrdom became a symbolic site for agency and re-masculinisation in the post-Pahlavi era (Moallem 2005: 107).

A complementary role was assigned to women. In addition to women’s responsibilities as the New Woman articulated by the religious intelligentsia, women were now also expected to give birth to and nurture the next generation of warriors/martyrs and contribute to the war effort at home. The official slogan for women during the war years read: ‘My sister, your hijab is your martyrdom’ (Gerami 2003: 268). The highest status that women could receive during the war years was that of a mourning mother who had lost her son in war. Through martyrdom – that propagated heroic, political, and violent masculinities – and mourning mothers – that in turn constructed nurturing, caring and responsible femininities – the state indirectly articulated its views on men and women’s public and private roles. Men as warriors/martyrs were firmly located in the public sphere and women were domesticated and positioned in the private sphere. As Moallem has argued, the reason why the regime employed gendered notions of martyrdom and glorified motherhood/sisterhood was two folded: ‘Locally, these symbols transcended all differences of class, religion, and ethno-national origin; globally, they created a transnational Muslim femininity and

\textsuperscript{94} There are two state organisations that manage the affairs of martyrs. The first one is the Revolutionary Guards who turned the basij volunteers into soldiers during the war. The second organisation is the Shahid foundation that oversees the state compensation paid to martyrs’ families and looks after the war veterans (Gerami 2003).

\textsuperscript{95} Although the focus has been on how the Revolution reshaped Iranian womanhood, masculinities underwent major changes as well. As Gerami has argued, the new regime discredited pre-revolutionary masculinities such as military officers, artists and some professionals. As these groups were either purged or demoted, their socio-economic and political standings declined. The masculinities that were praised and promoted by the Islamic republic were that of mullahs and martyrs (Gerami 2003).

\textsuperscript{96} Varzi has noted that it is important to notice that there existed a marked difference politically between those who volunteered and were martyred and those who were drafted and died. There is a different discourse of mourning for the families who did not believe in religious martyrdom and for those who believed in it. The state, however, did not differentiate between these two standpoints but recognised everyone who died as martyrs (Roxanne Varzi, (2008), ‘Iran’s Pieta: Motherhood, Sacrifice and Film in the Aftermath of the Iran-Iraq War’, Feminist Review, No. 88, pp. 86-98).
masculinity that stood in opposition to the West through their complicity with the ummat in a cultural war of representation’ (Moallem: 2005: 108)

However, as noted above, due to the realities of war women’s presence was also required in the public sphere. After the war, many women felt that they had fulfilled their civic responsibilities and as such they could now demand something back from the state. The war years had allowed women to venture outside the conventional roles as mourning mothers and dutiful daughters and wives – and as a consequence the women’s movement began to find its new shape in the course of the 1990s.

The economic situation in Iran had been in decline prior to the Iran-Iraq war. The uncontrolled spending and improper planning of the previous regime was followed by the new state’s transition period during which the economic growth was not rapid enough to balance the economy (Alnasrawi 1986: 870). In addition, the US decision to freeze Iranian assets abroad and the Carter Administration’s initiated sanctions after the American hostage crisis in 1979-1980 complicated the new regime’s efforts to stabilise the economy. However, the Iranian war economy was effectively overseen by Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi – especially when compared to the Iraqi economy that emerged in ruins after the war – but the destruction of industries, cities, high unemployment and general economic stagnation pushed ordinary citizens, and women in particular, to find new ways to survive.

It can be argued that the 1979 Revolution brought women back as independent social and political actors. Although some may see the new discourses and policies of womanhood as restricting and devaluing women’s agency, they also enabled new forms of agency and activism. The Islamic Republic welcomed women from pious lower classes to participate in social, cultural, economic and political life. Women were instrumental for the creation of the state’s distinctive identity and thus they were needed in the state’s material production as well; the New Woman marked the authenticity of the new Islamic Republic.

4.3 Civil society revitalisation, 1990-2000

Ayatollah Khomeini died in 1989 and the Islamic Republic entered the new decade in the hands of Khomeini’s successor, the new Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei
and President Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani steered the country away from isolationism towards tentative (economic) engagement with the West. Rafsanjani’s policies needed a more diverse socio-economic environment and hence the 1990s’ witnessed a more relaxed political and socio-cultural atmosphere that facilitated also women’s social and political claims on the state. While Iranian economic and political life and civil society were cautiously liberalised, the country’s demographic change had been enormous in the 1980s and the population had doubled in its size and the new post-revolutionary generation of young people had increased dramatically, 70 per cent being under the age of 30. At the same time, more and more people were migrating to cities. The 1990s saw also the re-opening of the country’s physical and mental borders to the outside world; the spread of satellite dishes and the Internet allowed the world to engage with Iran and Iran with the world. While the Rafsanjani period was not a dramatically different break with the past, it nevertheless managed to introduce limited changes to the body politic by presenting new ways of making and imagining the Islamic Republic (Gheissari and Nasr 2006: 107). These new ways of making and imagining politics emerged in the late 1990s and culminated in the election of the reformist president Khatami.

In the 1990s a new development emerged among women. Women began to respond to the state’s Islamic gender discourse with the same tools and women located their demands for gender equality within Islam. The emergence of Islamic feminists and pious women activists diversified the social activism map in Iran. In the 1990s, they articulated a critique of women’s rights against the government but placed themselves firmly within the religion – for them it was the patriarchal social order that had misinterpreted the right and just word of the religion (see e.g. Mir-Hosseini 2006a). In the early 1990s, after contributing to the war effort and serving in the public sphere, women working within Islam were more confident in voicing their demands to the state and the government was forced to respond with a series of reforms. For instance, in 1992, an official policy was launched that aimed at integrating women into the formal labour force; government-sponsored vocational courses were arranged in the rural areas, women’s participation in fields of medicine, midwifery, chemistry and so on was encouraged; and women’s access to higher education increased steadily (Moghadam 2002b: 1140). Women also continued to be represented in formal
politics. In addition to their representation in the Majles, the government also introduced women’s affairs offices in ministries and governmental offices.

The re-vitalisation of civil society took place on several fronts. In the early 1990s, a new religious intelligentsia critical of the regime began to emerge. Led by the philosopher Abdolkarim Soroush this new intelligentsia laid the foundations for new politico-religious change and debate in the country.97 Also, due to Rafsanjani’s economic and social reforms, in the 1990s, the middle classes revived themselves and began to participate more actively in the social – and cultural spheres. The country’s film, music, modern art, literary and other socio-cultural activities began to re-emerge partly due to this revitalisation of the middle classes.

Both religious and secular women found their way to civil society activism. Women have embraced women’s media, including women-owned publishing houses, women-run journals, magazines, and later blogs and other Internet publications, in their social activism. Women have been one of the leading forces participating in and contributing to political, legal, socio-economic and cultural debates in the country. The number of women-run and women’s issue non-governmental organisations (NGOs) grew rapidly in the 1990s and by 1999 there were 4000 NGOs of which 137 women specific NGOs (Rostami Povey 2004: 257). These organisations have been central challenging institutional power, especially gender-specific access and influence, and have contributed to social change (Rostami Povey 2004: 254-255). Women’s NGOs have been instrumental in several fields including healthcare, technical projects, law, literacy, arts, environmental, income-generating programs, (Afghan) refugees, drug abuse and prostitution.

The gradual political and cultural openings that had led to the re-vitalisation of civil society culminated in the so-called Reformists who slowly emerged and as a socio-political movement took its shape in the mid-1990s. The movement advocated for

civil liberties, rule of law, women’s rights, and relaxation of political, cultural and social regimes, it also offered a critique of Rafsanjani’s economic and political programs (see Ansari 2007). The people involved in the reformist camp engaged in both secular and religious discourses and they contended that the human understanding of Islam is flexible, that Islam’s tenets are open to re-interpretation that can support both pluralism and democracy, and that Islam is not ahistorical religion and as such it can change in the face of time, space and experience (Mir-Hosseini 2006: 637). The movement had its momentum in the presidential elections of 1997 when the reformist candidate Khatami was elected. It is claimed that he secured his landslide victory with the help of women who rallied around his agenda of more modern interpretation of Islam. Later in 2000, the reformist also secured a majority in the Majles. President Khatami and the movement behind him was seen challenging not only the state’s authority as the sole interpreter of Islam but challenging ordinary people to think and evaluate their beliefs and relation to the Islam propagated by the authorities.

Khatami’s first term (1997-2001) succeeded in empowering the middle classes, the institutions associated with middle classes in the private sector and civil society (Gheissari and Nasr 2006:133). Civil society flourished after Khatami’s election and the greater social and political freedom promoted by Khatami facilitated people’s interest in journalism, arts, sports and so on. Khatami was well received abroad and with his ‘dialogue among civilizations’ he changed the post-revolutionary image of the Islamic Republic abroad. However, after Khatami’s re-election in 2001, the factional fighting between different political actors intensified and several sectors of Khatami’s supporters grew disappointed with him when he failed to consolidate his reforms

5.0 Conclusion
This Appendix section traced the historical development of the Iranian women’s movement starting from the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11 to the emergence of the Reformist movement in the late 1990s. Throughout Iran’s modern history, women have been active political and social actors in almost all aspects of society. They have actively participated in contemporary debates about the shape and future of gender relations as well as of the body politic. Rather than religion, changing political
players, economic situations, wars and state-building projects have shaped the contours of women’s lives. Iranian women have challenged the image of passive Muslim women tied in the sphere of domesticity and demonstrated that women’s participation in the public sphere cannot be seen solely as a development of modern Western political structures. Also, I wished to demonstrate that concepts such as emancipation, gender equality and progress should not be simply put into the same box with the word modernity. The legacies of both the Pahlavi state and the Islamic Republic clearly demonstrate this. Many women have found that they are more empowered in the Islamic Republic that they were in the Pahlavi times. The current agenda of women’s advocates centers around issues of economic and social justice and the family law. However, as demonstrated these are issues were already debated during the constitutional period and within the ‘modernist’ Pahlavi state and they continue be debated now within the Islamic Republic. As the section has demonstrated, Iranian women have found their ways to engage with these questions and especially pious women are effecting change – especially within civil society.
Date: 24.04.2010
Name: Paola Raunio

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<td>Saving Muslim Women in the Era of 'Axis of Evil'?: Universal versus Local Understanding of Women's Rights in Iran</td>
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<td>Researchers Name(s):</td>
<td>Paola Raunio</td>
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<td>Supervisor(s):</td>
<td>Professor Ray Hinnebusch</td>
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Thank you for submitting your application, which was considered at the IR School Ethics Committee meeting on the 24 March 2010. The following documents were reviewed:

1. Ethical Application Form  date 19.03.2010
2. Participant Information Sheet  date 19.03.2010

Comments and/or Conditions:

The University Teaching and Research Ethics Committee (UTREC) approves this study from an ethical point of view. Please note that where approval is given by a School Ethics Committee that committee is part of UTREC and is delegated to act for UTREC. Approval is given for three years. Projects, which have not commenced within two years of original approval, must be re-submitted to your School Ethics Committee.

You must inform your School Ethics Committee when the research has been completed. If you are unable to complete your research within the 3 three year validation period, you will be required to write to your School Ethics Committee and to UTREC (where approval was given by UTREC) to request an extension or you will need to re-apply.

Any serious adverse events or significant change which occurs in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration, must be reported immediately to the School Ethics Committee, and an Ethical Amendment Form submitted where appropriate.

Approval is given on the understanding that the ‘Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice’ [http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/utrec/guidelines/] are adhered to.

Yours sincerely

Dr. J.S. Murer
Convenor of the School Ethics Committee
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