

Gender equity and discrimination in Iran: An autoethnography study

by

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Abstract

Gender equity and discrimination in Iran represent a multifaceted and deeply entrenched set of challenges, shaping the lives of women across legal, social, and cultural spheres. This thesis provides an overview of the prevailing conditions, challenges, and resistance efforts within Iran's societal fabric. It focuses on the oppressive legal frameworks, individual narratives, and systemic injustices that perpetuate gender inequality. Iranian women are subjected to a complex web of discriminatory laws and societal norms that systematically deprive them of autonomy and basic freedoms, exemplified by mandated hijab laws and gender-biased legal practices. Individual narratives, explored through autoethnographic methods, reveal the profound impact of these inequities on women's lives, from defiance against oppressive regimes to experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault. Highlighting the resilience of women, this thesis examines various forms of resistance, including mass mobilization and global solidarity campaigns, showcasing the power of collective action in challenging and advocating for change.

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my family, who have blessed me with unconditional love and support. To my father, who made me a worrier but whose unexpected and early passing has been a profound loss. To my mother whose kindness and consideration have greatly enriched my life. To my eldest brother, who provided unwavering support and a broader perspective of life. To my second brother, who imparted tactfulness and tranquility. And to my younger brother, who brought joy and energy into my life. I cannot imagine life without them.

Preface

Transition and Transformation of Iranian Culture Post-1979 Revolution

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 marked a pivotal moment in Iranian history, leading to significant changes in various aspects of society, including women's rights, cultural traditions, and national symbols. The transition ushered in a new era characterized by the implementation of Islamic law and the establishment of an Islamic Republic, which profoundly impacted the cultural and social landscape of Iran.

One of the most notable changes following the Islamic Revolution was the rollback of women's rights and freedoms. Prior to 1979, Iran had made significant progress in advancing women's rights, with women gaining access to education, employment, and political participation. However, the new regime imposed strict Islamic dress codes and restrictions on women's behavior, effectively curtailing many of the rights and liberties they had previously enjoyed. Women were required to adhere to the hijab and faced limitations on their ability to work, travel, and participate in public life (Moghadam, 2018).

In addition to changes in women's rights, the Islamic Revolution also brought about shifts in national symbols and cultural traditions. The national flag and anthem were altered to reflect the new Islamic identity of the country, with the iconic lion and sun emblem (Appendix A, picture A1) replaced by Islamic symbols (Appendix A, picture A2). Similarly, traditional Iranian customs and celebrations underwent transformations to conform to Islamic principles. Nowruz, the Persian New Year, remained a significant cultural event but was reinterpreted within an Islamic framework. Other traditional festivities such as Yalda, Chaharshanbe-Soori (Fire Festival), and Sizdah-Be-Dar also underwent changes or faced suppression as the new regime sought to enforce Islamic values and discourage pre-Islamic practices (Abrahamian, 1982).

Despite these changes, many Iranians continued to maintain and celebrate their cultural traditions in private or in more subdued forms. Over time, some of these traditions have experienced a resurgence, as Iranians seek to reconnect with their cultural heritage and assert their identity in the face of political and social pressures (Paidar, 1997).

The transitional issues in Iranian history following the Islamic Revolution highlight the complexities of navigating between tradition and modernity, religious and secular values, and national identity. These changes have had profound and lasting impacts on Iranian society, shaping the lives and experiences of generations of Iranians both within the country and in the diaspora.

Biographical Statement

Childhood

I was born into a devout household, the only daughter among three brothers. In my early years, I enjoyed the same carefree adventures as my brothers, exploring the streets without worry. However, my childhood innocence was shattered when I turned nine, the age when my father, guided by Islamic teachings, decided it was time for me to wear the hijab.

Suddenly, I was separated from my brothers by this visible symbol of difference. It was confusing to adapt to this new rule of covering my hair while they remained unaffected. I couldn't help but question why the responsibility to guard men's virtue fell solely on me. This inequality bothered me, igniting my growing awareness of the gender gap deeply ingrained in our society's norms.

As I struggled to make sense of this disparity, my father tightened his grip on my freedom, limiting my interactions with the outside world, especially with boys. This restriction was justified by outdated notions of modesty and honor, confining me to the domestic sphere

while my brothers enjoyed unrestricted freedom. Despite my efforts to challenge these norms and seek equality, my pleas were ignored, trapped within the rigid confines of patriarchal traditions.

Thus, my formative years were marked by the pervasive influence of gender apartheid, justified under the guise of religious devotion. My hopes for equality were stifled, overshadowed by the entrenched belief that women should submit to male authority. As Tohidi (2016) aptly observes in her work "Feminism in Iran: Legalization of Gender Inequality?", confronting various forms of oppression, I realized that achieving gender equity in Iran goes beyond mere legal reforms; it requires a fundamental shift in deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs.

Adolescence

Over time, I dutifully adhered to my parents' religious beliefs, meticulously following their prescribed rituals. However, as I matured, my unquestioning compliance began to fade, and I found myself increasingly at odds with certain rules that seemed illogical. Despite my diminishing commitment to prayer, the mandatory hijab remained a constant, symbolizing my continued obedience.

My academic endeavors, marked by diligence, were overshadowed by the strict scrutiny of school authorities focused on enforcing rigid dress codes. Each day felt like a trial, subjected to thorough inspections aimed at eliminating any trace of femininity. Makeup, sunscreen, and even innocent accessories like mirrors, clips, jewelry, etc. were forbidden, with even the most harmless items considered contraband. Our uniforms draped us in somber colors, devoid of vibrancy, to avoid arousing male sensibilities.

The absurdity of these restrictions became apparent as I grappled with the incongruity of losing agency under the pretext of preserving virtue. This echoes Moghadam's (2003) findings

on gendered norms in the Middle East and North Africa, where women often face constraints on their autonomy in the name of cultural or religious preservation.

Why should women bear the burden of male self-restraint, relegating us to the sidelines of societal participation? The idea that our mere presence in public spaces warranted a list of prohibitions reeked of misogyny, a systemic suppression of female independence disguised as protecting virtue. Afshar (1987) highlights similar challenges faced by women globally, where patriarchal norms dictate restrictive roles and behaviors.

If men's supposed inability to exercise self-restraint required women to be segregated, then the responsibility should not lie with us to withdraw from public life. Rather, it is essential for men to confront and address the underlying causes of their perceived lack of restraint, rather than pushing women to the margins of society. This argument resonates with Kian's (1997) examination of gendered conflicts in Iran, where societal expectations perpetuate inequality and restrict women's freedoms.

In the ongoing battle against entrenched gender apartheid, the call for equity grows louder, challenging the prevailing norms that seek to confine women within patriarchal boundaries. It is a call for reform, demanding a reassessment of societal values that perpetuate the oppression of women in the name of preserving moral standards. Mahdavi's (2007) study on Iran's sexual revolution sheds light on the evolving dynamics of gender relations and the push for greater equality.

Returning to my family, I continued with my private English lessons alongside regular schooling. However, safety concerns during my commute were a constant source of worry. This aligns with Lahsaeizadeh and Yousefinejad's (2012) findings on the prevalence of sexual harassment and assault against women in Iran, where societal norms contribute to a culture of

impunity for perpetrators. Once two boys blocked my path and started saying inappropriate things. One of them tried to touch me, but I defended myself. He then pulled out a knife to threaten me. Fortunately, my dad happened to be nearby and saw what was happening, stepping in to confront them.

Witnessing such distressing incident, my father later reprimanded me, urging me to summon courage and defend myself against these harassers or risk being prohibited from attending my classes. Determined to confront my fears, I not only learned to fend off such advances but also offered support to other girls, empowering them to assert themselves. These experiences underscore the urgent need for societal change and the protection of women's rights in Iran and beyond.

Teaching

Upon completing my secondary education, I secured a teaching position at the age of 18. Throughout my 23-year tenure as an educator, I was subject to strict regulations mandating the wearing of the hijab, purportedly serving as a role model for students (Afshari, 2011). I consistently faced admonitions from principals against discussing societal norms and challenging misconceptions with my students, this situation was common for advocates of freedom (Kian, 1997). My popularity among my students was deemed crucial, as my departure could potentially result in significant financial losses for institutes due to student attrition. Regrettably, advocating for awareness was considered taboo, and addressing topics related to religious and societal norms risked jeopardizing my employment (Paidar, 1997). Nevertheless, my commitment to truth and guiding my students prompted me to subtly contest these restrictions, fostering critical thinking and exploration of diverse viewpoints. However, such endeavors were not without repercussions. Merely questioning gender equality and societal norms threatened entrenched religious beliefs,

provoking backlash from those unable to defend their positions. The very act of promoting awareness became punishable, with the looming threat of job termination stifling dissenting voices (Razavi & Jenichen, 2010). Despite the risks, I persisted in cultivating an environment of inquiry and dialogue, challenging the status quo and encouraging my students to question prevailing ideologies.

In essence, my journey epitomizes the pervasive gender apartheid and oppression faced by women within the Islamic regime of Iran. From the streets marred by harassment to the classroom stifled by censorship, women encounter numerous barriers in their pursuit of autonomy and equality (Afshari, 2011). Yet, through resilience and defiance, we persist in challenging these constraints, striving for a society where freedom of expression and gender equity are not mere ideals but tangible realities (Najmabadi, 2005).

Experiencing firsthand gender apartheid, particularly in salary differentials, has been a profoundly frustrating aspect of my life. Despite consistently outperforming male colleagues in terms of knowledge, student and family satisfaction, I found myself consistently receiving lower compensation. This stark inequality raises fundamental questions about the fairness of such practices—why should my gender dictate the value of my work? The principle of equal pay for equal work appears conveniently disregarded in these instances (Paidar, 1997). Given that global population mostly comprises men and women in equal measure, there is no justification for differential treatment based on gender.

Moreover, the entrenched belief that certain academic disciplines or higher-level teaching positions are exclusively reserved for men perpetuates harmful stereotypes. The notion that men inherently possess greater authority and knowledge is not only outdated but also dismissive of women's capabilities (Najmabadi, 2005). However, through perseverance and unwavering

commitment to challenging these prejudices, I managed to dismantle these limiting beliefs and ascend to the highest ranks of teaching. By allowing student feedback and performance metrics to speak for themselves, I debunked the fallacy that gender determines teaching proficiency (Afshari, 2011).

Yet, this issue transcends the boundaries of academia. In the Islamic regime, women are systematically marginalized from leadership roles, including the presidency, ministerial positions, and managerial positions, under the pretext of emotional inadequacy or incapacity for impartial judgment. This institutionalized discrimination is particularly pronounced in the judiciary, where women are conspicuously absent from roles as judges despite the regime's purported commitment to gender equality (Paidar, 1997). The irony is palpable in a nation where the justice system, rife with corruption, remains firmly controlled by men.

Efforts by the Islamic regime to showcase token female representatives serve as mere superficial gestures, concealing the entrenched gender inequality and male dominance that underlie the country's governance. These women are often relegated to subordinate roles, beholden to male directives and serving as mere pawns in a larger political spectacle aimed at projecting an illusion of progressiveness (Najmabadi, 2005).

Undergraduate

In Islamic regime of Iran, the persistent struggle against women's oppression and deeply rooted gender apartheid remains an ever-present reality, resonating through personal narratives like my own. Enrolling in Esfahan University—a renowned institution of academic excellence and governmental prestige—was not merely a milestone but a testament to resilience amidst systemic obstacles like gender-segregated classes, limited majors for females, etc. However, this

journey was fraught with challenges, emblematic of the pervasive scrutiny imposed upon women's lives.

As a committed student, gaining admission to Esfahan University was a triumph overshadowed by the constant scrutiny of women's appearance. Despite adhering to strict hijab regulations, my attire became a battleground for arbitrary judgments, reflecting a society deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms (Afshari, 2011). The indignity of facing interrogation at the university's entrance, subjected to scrutiny over the color of my attire, epitomized the suffocating grip of gender apartheid.

While my academic pursuits marked a departure from societal expectations, stepping into financial independence at a young age mirrored a broader societal shift. Unlike the prevailing norm of perpetual familial support, my quest for autonomy challenged conventional family structures, embodying a nascent defiance against age-old customs. Yet even this autonomy was not immune to societal scrutiny, with norms dictating my choices even in adulthood.

The dissonance between societal expectations and individual agency encapsulates the multifaceted struggle against gender apartheid in Islamic regime of Iran. The paradox of being deemed eligible for marriage at a young age, juxtaposed with the denial of sartorial autonomy in adulthood, underscores the arbitrary nature of gender norms. How can a society reconcile granting rights of adulthood while simultaneously imposing regressive constraints on personal freedoms?

In navigating the complex maze of societal expectations and personal aspirations, women in Islamic regime of Iran exemplify resilience amidst adversity. The journey towards gender equality is fraught with challenges, yet it is through collective action and unwavering determination that the shackles of oppression will ultimately be broken (Najmabadi, 2005). Each

narrative, each act of defiance against gender apartheid, serves as a rallying cry for societal introspection and transformative change.

Throughout the years, I witnessed a disheartening reality regarding the selection criteria for professors in Islamic regime of Iran. While some were undoubtedly knowledgeable and refined, it became apparent that meritocracy was not the primary consideration. Instead, connections and adherence to religious beliefs dictated employment opportunities. This system made it challenging to pursue higher education and find mentors who shared my values of diversity, equity, and women's rights (Paidar, 1997). Engaging in discussions about societal issues, particularly women's equity, was fraught with peril, as dissent was often met with hostility. Many professors who advocated for women's rights were either compelled to take early retirement or were dismissed from universities.

Furthermore, personal relationships could pose significant barriers to academic and professional advancement. My former spouse, driven by self-interest, vehemently opposed my educational pursuits and advocacy for women's rights. His resistance stemmed from a desire to maintain control and benefit from my dependence. Despite his efforts to stifle my autonomy, I resolved to defy societal norms and assert my independence. The prospect of resigning to a life of subservience stifled the courageous spirit within me, compelling me to seek avenues beyond societal confines.

In essence, the prevailing gender apartheid and oppression in Islamic regime of Iran not only impeded academic and professional growth but also hindered crucial conversations about equity and social justice. The struggle for autonomy and equality endures as individuals like me strive to challenge entrenched norms and pave the way for a more inclusive society.

Marriage

Upon graduating from university, I encountered a man at a private company where I had some classes. Initially, he presented himself as a champion of women's rights, leading me to believe that I had found my ideal partner. However, post-marriage, his facade crumbled, revealing a starkly different persona. The disillusionment and betrayal I experienced is deeply troubling. Such deception underscores the pervasive societal attitudes that pay lip service to gender equality while perpetuating deeply ingrained misogyny and control over women's lives.

The insidious belief that educated women are somehow morally compromised or akin to "prostitutes" reflects a toxic mindset steeped in misogyny and entitlement. My ex-husband's manipulative behavior, from restricting my professional opportunities to exerting control over my interactions with men, underscores the power dynamics at play within intimate relationships (Najmabadi, 2005).

In the wake of the Iran Islamic revolution in 1979, seismic shifts in societal norms stripped women of their hard-won rights virtually overnight. Prior to this upheaval, gender equality was enshrined in law, affording women legal parity with men. However, the post-revolutionary landscape ushered in a regressive era where husbands wielded absolute authority over their wives, relegating women to subordinate status (Afshari, 2011). Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi believes that although the 1979 revolution in Iran is often called an Islamic revolution, it can actually be said to be a revolution of men against women.

This legal framework effectively renders women devoid of agency, subjecting them to the whims and dictates of their husbands. Any semblance of autonomy must be painstakingly negotiated prior to marriage, as the default legal stance renders women bereft of rights or protections.

Thus, women are left to navigate a treacherous legal landscape where their freedoms hinge precariously upon prenuptial agreements. This reality underscores the precarious position of women in Iranian society, where legal safeguards are scant and patriarchal prerogatives reign supreme.

The disparity between having legal rights and actually experiencing autonomy and agency is starkly evident in my account. Despite securing the right to pursue education and employment, I found myself ensnared in a suffocating dynamic where my ex-husband's controlling behavior impeded my personal and professional growth.

His insecurity and jealousy manifested in various forms of manipulation and emotional abuse, eroding my self-confidence, and stifling my aspirations. His reluctance to contribute to household chores and constant criticism of my pursuits reflect a deeply ingrained entitlement and disregard for my well-being.

The double standard in his treatment of his sisters, where he readily supported their educational and professional endeavors, exposes the hypocrisy and gender apartheid inherent in his behavior. While espousing progressive values externally, he perpetuates archaic notions of male superiority and dominance within the confines of his marriage.

It's disheartening to witness how societal expectations and gender norms continue to dictate the dynamics of intimate relationships, perpetuating cycles of inequality and oppression. My experience serves as a poignant reminder of the urgent need to challenge these entrenched beliefs and advocate for genuine equality and respect within all facets of society.

While my ex-husband's behavior is a reflection of broader cultural attitudes prevalent in Islamic regime of Iran, it's important to acknowledge that not all men subscribe to such

regressive views. My own brothers, who support and uplift women, serve as examples of the possibility for positive change and allyship within communities.

My Father, My Hero!

Over time, my father underwent a profound transformation, shedding the shackles of his once rigid beliefs, a change that filled me with hope. One poignant instance stands out vividly: the drafting of his will, a document that defiantly rejected the discriminatory Islamic inheritance laws prevalent in our country. These laws, steeped in archaic gender apartheid, designate women as lesser inheritors, granting them a mere fraction of what their male counterparts receive. Under these rules, a daughter inherits only half of what her brother does, while a widow, bereaved of her husband, is entitled to a mere eighth of his estate if she bears children; a paltry fraction that dwindles to nothingness should she remain childless. Conversely, men are bestowed with the entirety of their spouses' assets upon their demise. According to Nayyeri (2013) Islamic inheritance law historically exhibits gender apartheid, with women receiving significantly less inheritance compared to men. Tavalla (2023) further argues that such discriminatory practices contribute to gender inequality and discrimination against Iranian women.

In a courageous departure from societal norms, my father openly dissented, asserting that the wealth accumulated during their partnership rightfully belonged to my mother. He steadfastly believed that their journey from humble beginnings rendered her the sole proprietor of their shared assets posthumously. His unwavering stance underscored a profound respect for my mother's autonomy and a rejection of the ingrained prejudice that pervades our legal system.

His progressive stance, marked by a commitment to gender equality, garnered my profound admiration. His willingness to challenge entrenched biases and embrace a more egalitarian ethos epitomized a profound commitment to justice and fairness. In his vision,

inheritance was not a matter dictated by gender, but an equitable distribution of resources among offspring, irrespective of their sex.

Through his actions, my father epitomized the power of evolving perspectives and the capacity for individuals to challenge prevailing injustices. His legacy serves as a testament to the transformative potential of critical self-reflection and a resolute commitment to principles of equity and inclusivity.

My father stood as a pillar of support throughout my educational and professional journey, instilling in me the mantra, "Never relinquish your career; it is the cornerstone of your empowerment and autonomy." Committed to his advice, I persevered in my job despite enduring harrowing circumstances precipitated by my ex-husband. Yet, in a cruel twist of fate, my father's sudden demise, succumbing to a heart attack at the tender age of 52, left me reeling in disbelief. His absence, akin to the vanishing of a towering mountain from my life, robbed me of vitality and purpose, plunging me into the depths of despair. Bereft of his guidance and unwavering support, I found myself engulfed by a suffocating darkness, consumed by grief and longing for his comforting presence.

Divorce

As I grappled with overwhelming anguish, my ex-husband's response was callous and contemptible. Instead of offering solace in my hour of need, he callously proffered drugs, callously suggesting suicide as an escape from my torment. Reflecting on this despicable behavior, I am filled with profound regret for ever having chosen such a reprehensible individual as my life partner. His disdainful actions extended beyond mere neglect, depriving me of the opportunity to pay my final respects at my father's gravesite, a privilege he reserved exclusively for himself as he dutifully visited his mother's resting place every weekend.

In a society where women are subjected to the arbitrary whims of their husbands, my autonomy was ruthlessly curtailed. Denied the basic right to visit my own family without his consent, I found myself ensnared in a web of control and manipulation. His arbitrary restrictions, devoid of any semblance of rationale, served as a catalyst for my burgeoning realization: divorce was not merely an option but a necessity for my liberation (Mir-Hosseini, 2012).

The pervasive issue extended beyond mere infidelity; rather, it entailed a systemic manifestation of gender inequality and oppression in Islamic regime of Iran. The perpetrator (my ex-husband) maintained relationships with multiple women, resorting to physical violence and verbal abuse when confronted. He justified his actions by invoking archaic interpretations of religious and legal frameworks, asserting his entitlement to take multiple wives, both permanently and temporarily, in accordance with societal norms (Nayyeri, 2013) . Furthermore, he emphasized the impunity afforded to men under prevailing laws, highlighting the patriarchal notion that fathers possess absolute authority over their offspring, including the ability to consent to their daughters' marriages and, alarmingly, to exercise lethal control over them without fear of reprisal. The reference to marrying underage girls (9 years old) underscores the normalization of exploitative practices, facilitated by Islamic legal frameworks that prioritize male authority over the well-being and autonomy of women and girls. The absence of legal protections further compounds the vulnerability of women, leaving them susceptible to systemic abuse and marginalization (Sajadi, 2021).

The relentless challenges and strain I faced led to the onset of symptoms resembling those of multiple sclerosis (MS), a shocking revelation given my longstanding support for an MS institute as a donor throughout my career. Desperate for answers, I sought the counsel of various specialists with the assistance of my students. After extensive examinations, including MRI

scans, a renowned specialist delivered a sobering verdict: my physical health was intact, and the root cause of my distress lay squarely with my ex-partner. In a candid declaration witnessed by both of us, the specialist underscored the imperative of addressing the toxic dynamics of my marriage, cautioning that persisting in such a detrimental relationship would inevitably jeopardize my well-being.

Faced with this stark reality, I resolved to take decisive action. Despite enduring nine years of legal limbo, with futile court battles yielding no resolution, I recognized the urgent need for change. Yet, my options were starkly limited by the legal constraints that disproportionately favor men in Islam, leaving women like me without recourse to divorce (Mir-Hosseini, 2012). Determined to extricate myself from this harmful situation, I embarked on a painstaking journey to persuade my husband to agree to a divorce.

Ultimately, after relinquishing all claims to my rightful marital portion and financial entitlements, I reluctantly consented to his terms, prioritizing my physical and emotional survival above all else. However, even after acquiescing to his demands, my ex-partner persisted in tormenting me through protracted legal proceedings that spanned a grueling two-year period. The arduousness of the divorce process further compounded my anguish, underscoring the systemic injustices that impede women's autonomy and perpetuate their subjugation within the Iran Islamic legal framework (Nayyeri, 2013).

Divorce Taboo

Despite a burgeoning movement among women in Iran to demand their rights and challenge injustices, divorce remains a deeply stigmatized and taboo subject. Despite facing torture and pervasive injustice, women are increasingly unwilling to endure such treatment silently. However, societal pressures continue to weigh heavily on those contemplating divorce.

Many women fear the repercussions of disclosing their marital status, including losing friends, relationships, connections, and even job opportunities (Iran Human Rights Documentation Center, 2013). Moreover, prevalent societal attitudes perpetuate the belief that divorce is solely the woman's fault, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and contributing to the enduring taboo surrounding divorce (Afary, 2009). These entrenched attitudes and social norms are deeply rooted in the legal and social framework of the Islamic regime, which systematically discriminates against women (Nayyeri, 2013). Thus, despite strides towards greater gender equality, women in Islamic regime of Iran continue to grapple with significant obstacles in asserting their autonomy and navigating the complexities of marital dissolution.

Under immense pressure, I was coerced into accepting a situation that demanded I pretend everything was fine while internally, I was shattered. My efforts, love, and aspirations for a normal life lay in ruins. Throughout those years of marriage, I endured depression and witnessed the erosion of my self-confidence at the hands of a manipulative partner who sought to strip me of my freedom and self-assurance. A battle raged within me between simmering anger and a sense of hopelessness. While one part of me had resigned to a future devoid of hope and was ready to commit suicide, another part, a defiant voice, clamored for progress, urging me to reclaim my strength and pursue the goals that had been unjustly snatched away. During this turmoil, I grappled with the dichotomy of surrendering to despair or summoning the resilience to forge ahead, determined to prove to myself that I possessed the fortitude to overcome adversity and realize my ambitions.

I've always been grateful for my family's reaction to my divorce. I deeply admire the open-mindedness displayed by my mother, brothers, and cousins when I returned home. Instead of judgment or condemnation, they welcomed me with a birthday cake, symbolizing a

celebration of my new beginning. They expressed genuine happiness at witnessing my regained health and joy, contrasting starkly with the hollow shell I had become over the preceding years of my marriage. Behind their smiles, however, I could discern the weight of sorrow and concern in my mother's eyes. In private moments, her tears betrayed the agony she felt over her daughter's divorce. She, too, grappled with the pressures of societal judgment, acutely aware of the potential backlash against her daughter. Despite these challenges, their unwavering support and understanding provided a beacon of comfort amidst the storm of societal expectations and personal struggles.

Each of my three brothers has been an unwavering pillar of support, each offering their unique brand of encouragement and strength. My eldest brother, akin to a steadfast legal advocate, stood by my side throughout the grueling court battles with my ex-husband, ensuring I was never alone in the face of adversity. His presence evoked memories of our father's protective embrace, earning my profound respect and admiration. He not only provided practical support but also urged me to document my experiences and pursue further education, empowering me to reclaim my narrative and aspirations. My second brother, possessing a serene and rational demeanor, exuded a calming presence that imbued me with a sense of hope and tranquility during turbulent times. Meanwhile, my youngest brother, my closest confidant, showered me with emotional support and tirelessly endeavored to lift my spirits, infusing my life with moments of joy and laughter amidst the darkness. Together, they formed an unbreakable bond of solidarity, embodying the essence of familial love and support in my journey towards healing and renewal.

My incredible family is like a tightly woven chain, unbreakable and steadfast in their solidarity. My mother, in particular, has been a guiding light, imparting invaluable lessons of

love and unity with boundless affection, especially towards me as her only daughter. Despite enduring suppression since childhood and throughout her own marriage, she has remained a source of strength, advocating for my freedom and individuality. Witnessing her tears of joy upon my successes fills me with profound gratitude and admiration. My family's unwavering support and belief in me have nurtured the self-confidence and determination necessary to pursue my aspirations. Their unparalleled support has emboldened me to openly discuss my divorce and embrace the newfound happiness and freedom it has brought. This contrasts sharply with the experiences of many of my peers, who lack such a supportive network. It is imperative for society to recognize that divorce, often viewed negatively in a culture where marriage is idealized but can result in the subjugation of women, can actually be a catalyst for a brighter, more liberated future. In a society where marriage is heralded as a gift but can often lead to the enslavement of women, divorce represents an opportunity for genuine happiness and freedom.

God & Religion

The prevailing regulations in Islam regarding gender roles and women's rights evoke incredulity and indignation. These regulations, purportedly sanctioned by a divine authority, grant men unchecked liberty to engage in even the most abhorrent acts, all under the guise of religious fidelity. The inherent bias within these decrees, favoring men while subjugating women, raises profound questions about the integrity and fairness of the purported divine order. It seems evident that this purported deity is, in reality, a construct fashioned by men to enforce a system that marginalizes and oppresses women, cloaked in the guise of spiritual reverence.

The dissonance between rhetoric and reality is stark: while espousing the principle of gender equality in theory, the practical application of these principles relegates women to the status of property (Mir-Hosseini, 2012) , subject to the whims and desires of men. This

disjunction constitutes a betrayal of trust, a deliberate deception perpetuated by those in power to maintain their dominance over women.

Fundamental questions regarding autonomy and identity arise in the face of such discrimination. Why should women be compelled to acquiesce to their partners' infidelity, or to relinquish their individuality in deference to archaic and oppressive societal norms? Where is the recognition of women's inherent worth and dignity in these dogmatic proclamations?

Moreover, the monopolization of divine discourse by men further exacerbates the systemic disenfranchisement of women, relegating them to a subordinate role in matters of spirituality and religious interpretation. This exclusionary practice not only perpetuates gender inequality but also undermines the credibility of the purported divine authority.

In light of these injustices, the faith in a fabricated deity or adherence to a religion that condones such oppression becomes untenable. True goodness, it is asserted, transcends the need for external threats or religious affiliation; it is simply a matter of embracing humanity and compassion without ulterior motives.

Tragically, dissent from these prescribed beliefs often incurs severe consequences, including threats to one's life—a chilling testament to the tyranny perpetuated by those who wield religion as a tool of control and coercion (Afary, 2009). Such a perversion of faith underscores the urgent need for genuine introspection and reform within religious institutions to dismantle oppressive structures and uphold the inherent dignity and equality of all individuals, regardless of gender.

The erosion of belief in religion and God amidst oppressive conditions and unanswered questions can be a deeply personal and transformative journey. My faith in religions and even in God gradually waned which deeply concerned my mother, as she understood the grave

consequences of openly expressing disbelief in Islamic regime of Iran, where dissent against the regime's mandated religion can result in fatal punishment (Meral, 2013) . She consistently urged me to refrain from discussing these matters and maintain silence.

In such environments, the mere act of questioning religious beliefs can be perceived as an act of rebellion against the state, punishable by extreme measures. Her plea for silence was rooted in a desire to protect me from the grave repercussions.

However, the burden of concealing one's beliefs can weigh heavily on the individual, stifling authentic expression and perpetuating a culture of fear and silence. It becomes a delicate balancing act between self-preservation and the desire for intellectual and spiritual freedom. It reflects the complex interplay between fear, survival, and the pursuit of truth and freedom in the face of adversity.

Navigating this complex terrain requires careful consideration of the risks involved and the potential consequences for oneself and loved ones. It may entail finding alternative channels for expression, seeking support from trusted allies, or seeking refuge in communities that prioritize freedom of belief and expression.

Nightmares & Traumas

The relentless challenges I faced, compounded by the pervasive oppression of women in Iranian society, fueled my resolve to seek refuge abroad. The brutal murder of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old girl who was killed by the morality police in 2022 for not adhering the Islamic hijab well, served as a grim turning point, igniting a wave of protests that I, alongside a friend, courageously joined. However, the authorities' violent suppression of these demonstrations only exacerbated the collective outrage among peaceful demonstrators.

Despite the existence of international protocols, such as the provision for UN intervention after 40 days of sustained protests, the reality was starkly different. The entrenched interests of various nations, benefiting from the status quo in Iran, superseded the imperative for justice and human rights (Fathollah-Nejad, 2020) . It was a bitter irony that UNICEF remained conspicuously silent in the face of the indiscriminate slaughter of Iranian youth by the draconian regime. In November, 2023, the absurdity reached new heights when the president of the United Nations Human Rights Council appointed an Iranian representative to oversee the "Social Assembly" of the Council, a move that defied all logic and morality (*Outrage as Iran Regime Chairs United Nations Human Rights Council Body despite 'Alarming' Abuses | Fox News*).

The blatant disregard for human life and dignity was further underscored by the proliferation of videos documenting the regime's savage atrocities (Rouhi, 2022). Yet, in the face of such undeniable evidence, the machinery of international diplomacy seemed paralyzed, rendering the notion of human rights a hollow shell. It seems as though principles of justice and compassion have yielded to a jungle-like law, where power and wealth dictate proceedings. In this grim reality, even wild animals demonstrate more restraint and humanity than the agents of a regime driven by greed and fanaticism. The glaring contrast between the professed ideals of human rights and the harsh realities on the ground laid bare the hypocrisy and moral bankruptcy of the international community's response to Iran's atrocities.

In my life, I have witnessed deeply disturbing scenes that have left an indelible mark on my psyche, haunting me with recurring nightmares. One such harrowing incident occurred during a demonstration where the repressive forces unleashed their brutality upon the protestors. As chaos ensued, many sought refuge in the few open houses, offering shelter to those fleeing

the violence. However, amid the chaos, I and another individual found ourselves unable to seek refuge in time, facing the encroaching threat of the oppressive forces.

In a desperate bid to evade capture, I managed to conceal myself behind the cover of a car tire, but my companion was not as fortunate. What followed was a savage display of violence perpetrated by the repressive forces. Mounted on motorcycles, armed to the teeth, they descended upon the defenseless individual with merciless ferocity. The air was thick with the sickening sound of electronic shockers and batons raining down upon their victim, rendering them a bloodied and battered figure, his clothes torn, and body broken.

Witnessing such inhumanity filled me with a potent mix of fear and rage, leaving me paralyzed with disbelief. As the assault continued unabated, with multiple assailants raining blows upon the defenseless victim, I felt compelled to intervene, to cry out against the injustice unfolding before my eyes. Yet, my protestations fell on deaf ears, met with only further aggression from the perpetrators.

In a moment of defiance, I dared to confront the assailants, condemning their actions with all the fervor of my conviction. But my bravery was met with brutal reprisal, as the leader of the pack turned his weapon upon me, unleashing a vicious assault that left me writhing in agony on the ground, the sound of my breaking ribs echoing in the tumultuous air.

In the face of such unrestrained brutality, I could only marvel at the depths of depravity to which humanity could sink. The actions of the repressive forces laid bare the entrenched misogyny and gender apartheid that pervade Iranian society, reducing individuals to mere objects of oppression and violence(Mir-Hosseini, 2012).

As I staggered away from the scene, nursing my wounds, and grappling with the trauma of what I had witnessed, I could not shake the image of the victim, left broken and bloodied at

the hands of their assailants. It serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need to confront and challenge the systemic injustices that continue to plague women in Iran, lest we consign future generations to endure the same horrors that have scarred my own soul.

In the harrowing landscape of Islamic regime of Iran, where gender apartheid and the oppression of women loom large, a distressing incident unfolded before me. Amidst the turmoil, I witnessed repressive force communicating in Arabic. Rumors swirled of external forces aiding in the suppression of dissent, adding to the sense of peril in the air.

As the perpetrators departed on motorcycles, a wave of relief washed over me, marking the end of a brutal encounter. The victim bore the scars of violence, his chest marred not by tattoos but by the cruel imprints of motorcycle tires. His weakened heartbeat served as a grim reminder of the precariousness of life under such oppressive regimes. Summoning every ounce of strength, I sought help from nearby residents, my own body a canvas of agony. The trauma inflicted upon me rendered me immobile, my once vibrant features now drained of vitality. Nightmares haunted my every moment, a relentless barrage of fear and anguish that refused to abate.

For weeks on end, sleep eluded me, the specter of violence lingering like a shadow. The option of seeking medical aid was fraught with risk, leaving me to endure the pain in silence. Even as time passed, the scars on my chest served as a constant reminder of the brutality endured at the hands of oppressive forces.

Years have passed, but the trauma remains etched into my psyche, resurfacing in the form of recurring nightmares. The specter of that fateful day continues to cast a long shadow, a testament to the enduring struggle against gender apartheid and oppression in Iran.

Shotguns Toward Faces

Yet another devastating chapter unfolded in the saga of women's oppression and gender apartheid in Iran in 2022 when the oppressive forces resorted to the use of shotguns (Khatam, 2023). These were no ordinary firearms; they unleashed a barrage of thousands of minuscule lead pellets aimed directly at our faces, leaving a trail of destruction in their wake. Tragically, my friend bore the brunt of this merciless assault, her face becoming a canvas for these lethal projectiles.

In the frantic aftermath, I scrambled to extract some of the pellets embedded superficially, knowing all too well the grave danger they posed. However, a dozen or more had penetrated deeply, posing a dire threat to her health as their toxic contents risked absorption into her body. Desperate for aid, we embarked on a perilous quest to find a skilled surgeon who could navigate the treacherous landscape of clandestine healthcare. The oppressive regime's stranglehold on the healthcare system rendered hospitals perilous ground, as each entrance became a potential trap laid by the authorities to ensnare dissenters. Despite the omnipresent threat of reprisal, a handful of courageous doctors and nurses defied the regime's dictates, offering aid to demonstrators in the shadows of anonymity, outside the bounds of official channels.

While some assistance was rendered in removing a portion of the embedded pellets, the remainder proved too deeply entrenched, necessitating access to a surgical theater that lay beyond our reach. Thus, my friend was left to bear the burden of these unwelcome intruders within her body, a grim testament to the inhumane lengths to which the regime would go to silence dissent and maintain its grip on power.

Immigration

Amidst the turmoil of ongoing oppression and gender apartheid in Iran, a glimmer of hope emerged as I secured acceptance to universities in the United States. However, even this milestone was marred by the oppressive regime's grip, as I embarked on a journey to another country for an embassy interview.

Upon my return, I found myself ensnared at the borders, singled out due to the visa label adorning my passport. Plucked from the queue, I endured a grueling interrogation that stretched on for over an hour, every aspect of my life scrutinized under the harsh glare of authority. Questions delved into my personal history, familial connections, and even my motivations for pursuing education abroad.

The absurdity of this ordeal was not lost on me, a stark reminder of the regime's pervasive reach and its willingness to wield power arbitrarily. Yet, this invasive scrutiny paled in comparison to the looming threat awaiting me upon my return to Iran. If such scrutiny befell me merely for seeking educational opportunities abroad, one could only imagine the repercussions of my involvement in activities challenging the regime's authority. This experience served as a chilling reminder of the dangers inherent in dissent and the lengths to which oppressive regimes will go to suppress it.

Upon my arrival in the United States, a new chapter of my life unfolded, marked by stark contrasts to the oppressive environment I had left behind in Iran. The educational landscape here proved to be a revelation, diverging significantly from the rigid structure I had grown accustomed to. Here, practicality reigns supreme, with professors setting high standards that compel students to delve deeper into their studies.

One notable aspect of this newfound academic freedom is the unfettered right to express oneself. Unlike the stifling environment back home, here we are encouraged to engage critically, to analyze and dissect ideas without fear of repercussion. This culture of open discourse serves as a powerful motivator, driving us to explore and question every facet of our education.

Another striking disparity lies in the sartorial choices of students. Here, individuals are free to dress as they please, without fear of censure or restriction. This stands in stark contrast to the suffocating atmosphere back home, where students face constant scrutiny over their attire, with the mandatory hijab serving as a potent symbol of control. The focus on education here supersedes concerns over appearance, a stark departure from the preoccupation with modesty and adherence to strict dress codes in Iran.

The freedom to learn and grow without the shackles of oppressive norms is a privilege I cherish dearly. Yet, I cannot shake the knowledge that back home, countless individuals face discrimination and even expulsion from education simply for daring to defy these draconian dictates.

Chapter 1-Introduction

Navigating Identity and Education in a Patriarchal Context

Personal Narrative

In embarking on this thesis, I am get inspired to reflect on the delicate tapestry of my journey as both a researcher and an individual shaped by the complexities of my cultural context. Growing up in Iran, a society steeped in patriarchal norms and systemic gender discrimination, I often felt the weight of my identity as a woman. Education, a field where one might expect to find empowerment and liberation, became a double-edged sword for me. While it opened doors to knowledge and critical thinking, it also highlighted the rigid boundaries that attempted to limit my ambitions.

My early experiences in education were characterized by an eagerness to learn, yet they were often contrasted with the harsh realities of a regime that viewed women's intellectual pursuits with suspicion. I vividly remember moments in my classrooms where discussions of literature and philosophy were prevented by an authoritarian atmosphere (Mir-Hosseini, 1999). The expectation to adhere to strict codes of behavior extended beyond physical appearance; it infiltrated our thoughts and aspirations. In this context, the hijab became more than a garment—it symbolized the limitations placed upon my ability to express myself freely.

However, despite these limitations, I found satisfaction in education as an adequate environment for exploration. My pursuit of knowledge offered a glimpse into worlds beyond the boundaries of my immediate reality. I sought out texts that challenged the status quo, resonating with my growing awareness of gender inequality (Afary, 2009). In this quest, I discovered the works of pioneering feminists and scholars who articulated the very struggles I experienced.

Their voices became my guiding light, inspiring me to envision a future where women could reclaim their narratives.

As I progressed through my academic journey, I began to understand the significance of autoethnography as a methodological approach. It became clear to me that my personal experiences were not isolated but rather reflective of a broader collective struggle (Meral, 2013). The decision to employ autoethnography in this thesis is rooted in my desire to connect my narrative to the larger context of women's rights and education in Iran. The oppressive environment I faced fueled my determination to seek a form of expression that honored both my experiences and the experiences of countless women who dared to challenge the established norms.

The turning point in my awareness occurred during the protests following the murder of Mahsa Amini, which galvanized a generation of young women and men alike (Rouhi, 2022). Witnessing the courage of my peers ignited a fire within me. It was during these moments of collective uprising that I fully grasped the power of education—not only as a means of personal advancement but as a tool for societal change. The streets became classrooms, teaching us about resilience, solidarity, and the urgent necessity for reform. In this chaotic environment, my identity as a woman and an educator became intertwined with my role as an activist, forcing me to confront the realities of my existence head-on.

The importance of women's education emerged as a crucial theme during these protests. Educated women were at the forefront, articulating their demands and challenging the status quo (Khatam, 2023). Their voices resonated with clarity, underscoring the idea that education empowers not just individuals but entire communities. It became apparent to me that education is a fundamental human right, one that is essential for the liberation of women. This realization

further solidified my commitment to advocate for educational opportunities for women, to champion their right to learn and thrive in a world that often seeks to diminish their worth.

In sharing my narrative, I aim to emphasize the intertwined nature of personal experience and scholarly inquiry. Autoethnography allows me to peel back the layers of my identity, revealing the complexities of my journey as a woman seeking education in an environment of oppression. It is a method that goes beyond individual storytelling; it serves as a powerful vehicle for amplifying the voices of those who have been marginalized. Through this lens, I hope to shed light on the significance of women's education, advocating for a future where all women can pursue their dreams without fear or limitation.

By weaving together my experiences, reflections, and aspirations, I hope to bring awareness to the collective struggle of women who have fought against the oppressive forces that seek to silence them. This thesis is not just an academic project completion; it is a testament to the resilience of women everywhere and a call to action for future generations.

Thematic Exploration

Several significant issues arise from my personal path and the greater sociopolitical landscape of Iran, notably in terms of women's education and empowerment. At the core of my narrative lies the theme of resilience—a quality that I witnessed not only in myself but also in the countless women who have navigated the oppressive structures of Iranian society. This resilience manifests in various forms, from the quiet determination to pursue education in the face of societal limitations to the outspoken resistance exhibited during protests. Each of these experiences illustrates the struggle for autonomy and agency in a system designed to suppress female voices (Mir-Hosseini, 1999).

One significant aspect of this resilience is the transformative power of education. For many women in Iran, education represents a light of hope—a means to escape the restrictions of traditional gender roles and challenge the systemic inequalities that plague their lives. I recall my own journey through the educational system, where, despite facing numerous barriers, I found empowerment in learning. This sense of empowerment is echoed in the stories of women who, against all odds, have sought knowledge as a tool for liberation (Afary, 2009). The pursuit of education becomes an act of rebellion, a declaration of one's right to exist fully in the world and to assert one's identity (Fathollahzadeh Dizaji, 2023).

Another critical theme is the role of collective action in driving change. The recent uprisings in Iran, particularly those catalyzed by the tragic murder of Mahsa Amini, illustrate the power of solidarity among women and their supporters. These protests brought forth a new narrative, one where women took center stage as leaders and advocates for change (Rouhi, 2022). The collective voices of women, demanding their rights and the right to education, resonate powerfully within the fabric of Iranian society. This theme of collective action is vital, as it underscores the idea that individual struggles are often part of a larger movement toward justice and equality. My experiences during these protests serve as a moving example of the strength found in unity and the potential for grassroots movements to challenge oppressive systems (Meral, 2013).

Additionally, I aim to examine the role of cultural narratives and historical context in shaping women's education in Iran. The historical legacy of women's movements in the country reveals a colorful pattern of resistance and resilience. From the early 20th century, when women first began advocating for educational rights, to the contemporary struggles for gender equality, these narratives offer insights into the ongoing fight for empowerment (Khatam, 2023).

Understanding this historical context not only deepens my exploration of women's education but also provides a framework for considering future possibilities for change.

Ultimately, these themes converge to create a comprehensive narrative that reflects the complexities of women's experiences in Iran. By engaging in thematic exploration, I aim to draw connections between my personal journey and the broader societal challenges faced by women. This exploration allows me to highlight the transformative power of education as a catalyst for change, to acknowledge the diverse realities of women's lives, and to underscore the importance of collective action in the ongoing struggle for rights and recognition. Through this viewpoint, I intend to contribute to the debate around women's education, fighting for a future in which all women can achieve success, free of the burden of oppression.

Critical Reflexivity

Critical reflexivity is an essential component of my research, providing a lens through which I can examine my positionality and its influence on my understanding of autoethnography and women's education. As a researcher, I am extremely conscious that my background, experiences, and identities shape not only my perspective but also the narratives I choose to explore (Ellis, 2004). Growing up in Iran, I experienced firsthand the societal expectations imposed on women, particularly regarding education and personal agency. This lived experience informs my critical analysis of the systemic barriers that many women continue to face in their pursuit of knowledge and empowerment (Moghadam, 2003).

In reflecting on my positionality, I recognize the complexities of being both an insider and an outsider. While I share cultural and gendered experiences with the women I study, my current status as a student abroad introduces a different layer of interpretation (Narayan, 1993). This duality compels me to question the authenticity of my narratives and consider how my

current context influences my understanding of women's struggles in Iran. I find myself struggling with the tension between my desire to amplify the voices of marginalized women and the potential for my own experiences to overshadow their realities. It is crucial for me to remain cautious against the risk of appropriation or misrepresentation, ensuring that my work serves as a platform for the voices of those who have been historically silenced (Lather, 2012).

Furthermore, critical reflexivity invites me to scrutinize the frameworks and theories I engage with in my research. Many academic discussions surrounding women's education are rooted in Western perspectives that may not fully capture the complexities of the Iranian context (Mohanty, 2005). As I draw upon these theories, I must critically assess their applicability and relevance to the experiences of women in Iran. This requires a careful balancing act: to engage with established scholarly discourse while simultaneously honoring the unique cultural and historical factors that shape the educational landscape for women in my country (Said, 1977). For example, while feminist theories of empowerment often focus on formal education and institutional access, they may overlook the grassroots movements that highlight the importance of informal networks and community support among women.

Additionally, my reflexive practice extends to acknowledging my emotional responses to the narratives I encounter. The stories of women fighting for education and rights often evoke profound feelings of empathy, anger, and hope (Burawoy, 1998). These emotions not only motivate my research but also challenge me to remain objective and analytical. It is essential for me to navigate these emotional landscapes without allowing them to compromise the integrity of my scholarship. By embracing this reflexive stance, I can create space for a more sophisticated understanding of the interplay between emotion and analysis in academic work. This emotional

engagement also enriches my exploration of how women articulate their struggles for education and agency, often framing their experiences in terms of resilience and resistance.

In the context of women's education, critical reflexivity also encourages me to examine my assumptions about what constitutes "empowerment". Traditional definitions may focus solely on access to educational institutions or the acquisition of formal qualifications. However, my experiences reveal that empowerment is a multifaceted concept encompassing emotional, social, and cultural dimensions (Kabeer, 1999). This understanding urges me to broaden the scope of my research, considering not only institutional barriers but also the ways in which women navigate and overcome these challenges in their everyday lives.

Moreover, the theme of resilience, which runs throughout my narrative, invites reflection on the strategies employed by women to express their agency despite systemic oppression. I am inspired by the ways in which women creatively engage with educational opportunities, often finding innovative solutions to overcome obstacles (Ahmed, 2024). This resilience is not merely a response to adversity; it is a powerful statement about the strength of women's identities and their capacity to challenge normative frameworks. By documenting these stories, I aim to contribute to a body of literature that emphasizes the challenges women face while celebrating their creative thinking and resourcefulness.

Ultimately, critical reflexivity enriches my research by allowing me to confront my biases, acknowledge my positionality, and engage deeply with the complexities of women's experiences in education. By reflecting on my own journey and the broader socio-cultural context, I aim to contribute to a much deeper understanding of autoethnography as a methodological approach. This process not only informs my scholarship but also emphasizes the importance of listening to and uplifting the voices of women whose narratives have been

marginalized (Ellis, 2004). In doing so, I aspire to create a body of work that highlights the challenges faced by women in Iran while celebrating their resilience, creativity, and enduring pursuit of empowerment through education.

Engagement with Key Figures

Engaging with key figures in the field of autoethnography and women's education has profoundly shaped my understanding and approach to research. These influential scholars provide foundational theories and methodologies while offering narratives that resonate deeply with my personal experiences and the experiences of women in my community. By weaving their insights into my own research, I can create a richer dialogue that bridges personal narrative with scholarly discourse, enhancing the overall depth of my work (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

One figure who has significantly influenced my perspective is Carolyn Ellis, a pioneer in autoethnography. Her emphasis on the importance of storytelling and emotional engagement in research speaks directly to my own experiences as a woman navigating the complexities of education in Iran. Ellis argues that autoethnography allows researchers to articulate personal stories in ways that reveal broader cultural truths (Ellis, 2004). This approach resonates with my desire to highlight the lived experiences of women in oppressive environments, showcasing how their stories reflect systemic challenges while also revealing their resilience and agency (Hesse-Biber, 2013). Moreover, Ellis's reflections on vulnerability in research challenge me to embrace my own emotional responses to the narratives I explore. This vulnerability is particularly crucial when addressing issues related to women's education, as it forces me to confront the pain and struggle inherent in these stories. By sharing my emotional journey, I can foster a deeper connection with my audience, emphasizing that the fight for education and empowerment is not just a theoretical discussion but a deeply human endeavor (Ellis, 2004).

Another key figure in my exploration of women's education is bell hooks, whose work on intersectionality and the politics of education has been instrumental in shaping my understanding of how race, gender, and class intersect to influence educational access and outcomes. Hooks emphasizes the necessity of critical pedagogy in eliminating oppressive structures within educational settings (1996). Her idea that education should be a practice of freedom resonates strongly with my belief that women's education in Iran must extend beyond mere access to formal institutions. It should also include the creation of safe spaces where women can express themselves, challenge societal norms, and cultivate their identities (2003).

Incorporating hooks' insights into my research encourages me to explore how educational spaces can become sites of resistance and empowerment for women. Her emphasis on the importance of dialogue and community in education inspires me to consider how collective efforts can foster change, especially in environments where individual voices are often silenced (1996). By reflecting on the experiences of women who have navigated these educational landscapes, I can illuminate the transformative power of education as a tool for social justice. Furthermore, I draw inspiration from feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, whose work on Black feminist thought highlights the significance of epistemology rooted in lived experience (Collins, 2022). Collins advocates for the inclusion of marginalized voices in academic discourse, underscoring the importance of understanding knowledge as situated and context dependent. This perspective reinforces my commitment to integrating personal narratives into my research, allowing the stories of women in Iran to emerge as valid sources of knowledge that challenge dominant narratives surrounding education and gender (Collins, 2022).

Engaging with these key figures has not only enriched my understanding of autoethnography and women's education but has also illuminated the ethical responsibilities that accompany this work. I am reminded of the need to approach my research with modesty, recognizing the limitations of my own perspective while attempting to appreciate the complexities of the lives I seek to represent (Ellis, 2004). This engagement necessitates a continuous reflection on how my positionality as a researcher intersects with the narratives I explore, ensuring that I remain accountable to the women whose stories inform my scholarship.

Ultimately, the engagement with key figures serves as a powerful reminder of the collective nature of knowledge production. By situating my research within the broader context of feminist scholarship and autoethnographic inquiry, I aim to contribute to an ongoing conversation that challenges oppression and advocates for the empowerment of women through education. This collaborative spirit enhances my work and underscores the significance of shared narratives in the quest for social justice and equality. As I weave these influential voices into my own narrative, I aspire to create a body of work that not only reflects my journey but also resonates with the broader struggles and triumphs of women striving for education and empowerment in the face of systemic barriers.

The Research Questions

1. How do oppressive gender-based laws and societal norms in Iran, such as mandatory hijab and restrictions on women's autonomy, impact the mental health and well-being of Iranian women, particularly in terms of their agency, identity formation, and sense of self-worth?
2. What role does international advocacy and awareness play in challenging and potentially reshaping gender norms and legal frameworks in Iran, and how might grassroots

movements and global solidarity initiatives contribute to advancing women's rights and dismantling systemic oppression in the country?

3. What is the impact of the issues developed through research questions one and two on the educational experiences of girls in the Iranian education system?

Significance of Autoethnography in my Research

Autoethnography, as a qualitative research method, holds significant potential in uncovering rich and nuanced insights into the lived experiences of individuals within various cultural contexts. Through a synthesis of personal narrative and scholarly analysis, autoethnography not only allows for the exploration of complex social phenomena but also challenges traditional research paradigms by prioritizing subjective understanding and reflexivity.

Insight into Lived Experiences—autoethnography enables researchers to delve into the intricacies of lived experiences by integrating personal narratives with scholarly analysis. This approach provides a holistic understanding of cultural phenomena from the insider's perspective, allowing for a deeper exploration of meanings, emotions, and social dynamics (Ellis et al., 2011).

Subjectivity and Reflexivity—unlike conventional research methods that strive for objectivity, autoethnography embraces subjectivity and reflexivity as inherent components of the research process. By acknowledging the researcher's role in shaping the narrative, it highlights the situated nature of knowledge production and encourages critical self-reflection (Anderson, 2006).

Empowerment and Representation—autoethnography offers a platform for marginalized voices to be heard and represented within academic discourse. Through the sharing of personal

stories, individuals from underrepresented communities can challenge dominant narratives, reclaim their agency, and advocate for social change (Chang, 2016).

Methodological Innovation—autoethnography contributes to methodological innovation within qualitative research by bridging the gap between the personal and the academic. By embracing creativity and flexibility in research design and data collection, autoethnography expands the possibilities for generating new knowledge and insights (Ellis, 2004).

Cultural Critique and Transformation—autoethnography serves as a perspective for cultural critique and transformation by interrogating taken-for-granted assumptions and power dynamics. Through reflexive engagement with personal experiences, researchers can uncover and challenge underlying ideologies, fostering dialogue, and promoting social justice (Adams et al., 2022).

Connecting Autoethnography to Women's Rights, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Autoethnography serves as a powerful mean for exploring issues related to women's rights, equity, inclusion, diversity, and belonging within the field of curriculum and instruction. By centering personal narratives and reflexivity, autoethnographic research allows individuals, particularly women, to share their lived experiences and perspectives, thereby amplifying marginalized voices and shedding light on the complexities of gendered experiences within educational contexts (Adams et al., 2022). Within the broader context of women's rights, it provides a platform for women to articulate their experiences of oppression, discrimination, and resistance, thereby contributing to ongoing advocacy efforts for gender equity and social justice. Moreover, autoethnography offers insights into the intersecting factors that shape women's experiences within education, including race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability, highlighting

the importance of intersectional approaches to promoting diversity and inclusion (Ellis, 2004). By centering personal experiences, autoethnographic research offers unique insights into the ways in which educational policies, practices, and curricula impact the lived experiences of women, particularly those at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities. This contributes to ongoing efforts to create more inclusive and equitable educational environments that honor the diverse experiences and perspectives of all learners (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Key Concepts and Terminology

In my autoethnography, it is important to note that I utilized AI technology like ChatGPT to aid in conveying my emotions and establishing the narrative ambiance (Appendix B, Texts B1 and B2). English is not my native language, so employing AI helped bridge any language barriers and ensured clarity in expression. Additionally, since the Islamic revolution of 1979, there has been a notable shift in language dynamics in our country, Arabic has gained prominence in legal and regulatory contexts supplanting Persian (our indigenous language). This linguistic shift reflects broader socio-political changes, as the regime has actively promoted Arabic at the expense of Persian, impacting cultural identity and communication within Iranian society.

Islamic Revolution

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 refers to the uprising in Iran that led to the overthrow of the Pahlavi dynasty under Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the establishment of an Islamic Republic under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The revolution significantly transformed Iranian society, politics, and culture, shaping the country's trajectory to the present day.

Arabic Language

Arabic is a Semitic language widely spoken across the Middle East and North Africa. In the context of the Iranian Revolution and its aftermath, Arabic gained prominence in Iran due to its association with Islam and the religious and political ideology of the new regime. This shift had implications for language policy, education, and cultural identity in Iran, particularly concerning the status of Persian, the country's native language.

Persian Language

Persian, also known as Farsi, is an Indo-European language spoken primarily in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan. It has a rich literary and cultural heritage, serving as the language of poetry, literature, and administration in Iran for centuries. The diminishing status of Persian in post-revolutionary Iran, as described in the text, reflects broader dynamics of language politics and cultural identity in the region.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter serves as both an introduction to my thesis and a profound foundation for understanding the complexities faced by women in Iran. My personal experiences reveal the oppressive structures that limit educational access and self-expression, while also highlighting the transformative power of education as a means of resistance and empowerment. By sharing my narrative, I honor the voices of countless women who have navigated similar struggles, reinforcing that these experiences are part of a larger collective fight for agency and rights.

Engaging with key figures in autoethnography and women's education has enriched my analysis, providing a robust theoretical framework that underscores the significance of personal narratives in academic discourse. Scholars like Carolyn Ellis and bell hooks emphasize the

importance of vulnerability and intersectionality, guiding my exploration of how educational spaces can be reimagined as sites of empowerment. This grounding invites a consideration of how educational practices can foster social justice and collective action, particularly in contexts with deeply entrenched gender norms.

As I reflect on my journey, I recognize that education transcends institutional frameworks, acting as a powerful vehicle for liberation and self-actualization (hooks, 1996). My struggles and triumphs resonate with broader systemic challenges faced by women, revealing the urgent need for educational reform that prioritizes equity and inclusivity (Hesse-Biber, 2013). My research questions direct attention to pressing issues affecting Iranian women: how oppressive gender-based laws impact mental health and identity, the role of international advocacy in reshaping gender norms, and the subsequent effects on girls' educational experiences. This positioning situates my work within a broader dialogue on gender rights and systemic oppression.

By employing autoethnography, I challenge conventional research paradigms, advocating for a methodology that embraces subjectivity and reflexivity. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of individual experiences while amplifying marginalized voices, contributing to a richer discourse surrounding women's education and empowerment. Acknowledging my positionality compels me to strive for authenticity and accountability, ensuring I do not overshadow the voices I seek to uplift (Ellis, 2004).

Ultimately, this chapter is a call to action, urging both academic and grassroots movements to recognize the intricate connections between personal experiences and broader socio-political contexts. By weaving together my journey with the collective struggles of women in Iran, I lay the groundwork for a thesis that aims to illuminate these challenges and inspire

change. My commitment to advocating for educational equity and women's rights resonates throughout, establishing a powerful narrative that champions resilience, solidarity, and the enduring quest for empowerment.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Autoethnography

Defining Autoethnography

Autoethnography, as a research method, presents a unique opportunity to intertwine the personal with the political, aiming to address contemporary challenges while envisioning a better future (Adams et al., 2022). It involves using personal experiences and combines elements of autobiography and ethnography to understand cultural phenomena and social structures. Increasingly employed as a pedagogical tool in higher education, autoethnography fosters critical reflection on social issues. Fisher (1984) and Langellier (1999) emphasize the power of personal narrative in shaping individual and collective identities. Personal narratives allow individuals to reclaim their stories and disrupt dominant narratives. Langellier (1999) further discusses how personal narratives can challenge existing power structures and provide a platform for marginalized voices.

In this study, I explore how my own lived experiences as an Iranian woman intersect with larger cultural, educational, and political dynamics. Navigating between my identity as a researcher and personal experiences, this autoethnographic approach allows me to examine broader themes through my unique positionality. This reflective process uncovers insights that may otherwise remain obscured in traditional research with purely objective analysis.

The Personal and the Political

Autoethnography not only serves as a methodological approach but also as a means for me to grapple with my personal experiences of marginalization and empowerment. As I reflect on the role of education in my own life, it becomes clear that the cultural constraints I faced are part of a much larger systemic issue. Adams and Holman Jones (2011) describe how personal

narrative can transform into a tool for social change, and I aim to utilize this study to contribute to such transformative conversations. Moreover, Ellis (2013) emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and emotional engagement in this process. Autoethnography becomes a way of navigating multiple cultural perspectives and identities (Collins, 2016).

Reflexivity and Social Justice

Central to autoethnography is reflexivity, which involves rigorous self-reflection to interrogate power dynamics and cultural beliefs (Adams et al., 2022). Autoethnographers challenge injustices and unequal power structures by crafting intersectional narratives that consider multiple aspects of identity, such as race, gender, and sexuality (Crenshaw, 2013). Engaging in this research has required ongoing reflexivity which compels me to critically assess how my experiences are shaped by various intersecting factors, including gender, nationality, and socio-political context. Through narratives, autoethnographers aim to emancipate marginalized voices and envision a more just and equitable society (Adams & Herrmann, 2020). Therefore, through this lens, I position my own narrative within the collective stories of Iranian women who have encountered similar challenges in education. Autoethnography serves as a tool for cultural critique and social activism, advocating for justice and dignity for all individuals (Diversi & Moreira, 2018). By sharing intimate narratives and challenging dominant discourses, autoethnographers aim to dismantle oppressive structures and foster empathy and understanding among diverse communities (Adams et al., 2022). This aligns with feminist perspectives on the personal as political, which emphasize the interconnectedness of personal experiences and broader social structures (hooks, 2000). By foregrounding marginalized voices and challenging dominant narratives, autoethnography empowers social change and reinforces my commitment to social justice.

Theoretical Foundations of Intersectionality: Exploring Power Dynamics

The concept of intersectionality, as introduced by Crenshaw (1991), is essential for understanding how individuals with intersecting marginalized identities experience oppression. This framework is particularly relevant in autoethnographic research, where issues of power, voice, and representation are examined through personal narratives, often from scholars in marginalized communities. Crenshaw's model highlights the compounded challenges faced by individuals navigating multiple oppressive systems, revealing the nuanced power dynamics at play. Leslie and MacNeill (1995) expand on this, discussing the complexity of identity formation within these overlapping structures of discrimination. In Iran, where women face intersecting barriers related to gender, socio-political context, and cultural expectations, intersectionality offers a powerful lens for exploring their experiences and resilience. By acknowledging these layers of marginalization, research can illuminate the unique challenges Iranian women encounter and advocate for more equitable representation and opportunities.

The Persistence of Patriarchy: Socialization and Its Impact on Women's Rights

In *Why Does Patriarchy Persist?* (2018), Carol Gilligan and Naomi Snider explore the deep-rooted psychological and social foundations of patriarchy, examining why it endures across diverse societies. They argue that patriarchy is reinforced through socialization processes, where individuals internalize norms that promote hierarchical structures and gendered roles from a young age. This conditioning not only sustains male-dominated systems but also ingrains self-limiting beliefs in women, impacting their rights and opportunities. In Iran, this dynamic is evident as societal norms often restrict women's freedoms, curtailing their access to education, employment, and public participation. By perpetuating gender-based limitations, patriarchy obstructs efforts toward equity and stifles women's personal and professional growth.

Understanding these mechanisms provides insight into the resilience of patriarchal systems and highlights the need for transformative approaches that challenge ingrained beliefs, paving the way for broader social change and empowerment for Iranian women.

Intersecting Perspectives: Moral, Psychological, and Sociocultural Influences on Gender and Identity in Women's Experiences

Carol Gilligan's (2013) concept of relational ethics highlights the significance of interconnections among individuals and the contextual factors influencing moral choices. In her work *Joining the Resistance*, she challenges conventional ethical frameworks that emphasize individualism and abstract principles. Instead, she promotes a viewpoint that prioritizes relationships, care, and empathy, particularly regarding women's identities. This perspective aligns closely with the examination of women's identities in Iran, where social, cultural, and familial relationships significantly impact their experiences. By acknowledging these relational factors, Gilligan's framework sheds light on the challenges and resilience of women navigating their identities within a complex socio-political environment.

In *What Do Women Want in a Moral Theory?* (2016), Annette Baier critiques traditional moral theories for their failure to adequately address women's experiences and needs. Conventional ethical frameworks often prioritize individualism and abstract principles, neglecting the relational and contextual dimensions of women's lives. This shortcoming is particularly evident in Iran, where societal norms and legal structures limit women's rights and freedoms, highlighting the inadequacies of these frameworks in advocating for gender equity. Baier advocates for an ethics of care, emphasizing relational ethics that recognize the interconnectedness of individuals and moral responsibility. This approach prioritizes empathy,

nurturing, and community, aligning closely with the aspirations of Iranian women striving for equity and justice.

In her influential work, Noddings (1986) presents a critical alternative to traditional moral theories by positioning relationality and care as fundamental components of ethical decision-making. Unlike conventional frameworks that prioritize abstract principles, she emphasizes the importance of personal relationships and the context of interactions in shaping moral understanding. Her insights are particularly relevant to feminist approaches to education, illustrating how caring relationships foster ethical development and personal growth. In the context of women's education, her framework highlights the transformative power of nurturing environments that prioritize empathy, connection, and collaboration. By cultivating spaces where care is central, educational settings can empower women, encouraging them to engage actively in their moral development and challenge societal norms. Noddings' emphasis on care not only enriches moral education but also advocates for a more inclusive and equitable approach to learning that supports women's rights and aspirations.

Additionally, Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* emphasizes the distinct pathways of psychological and moral development for women, highlighting how societal norms influence their identity and self-perception (1993). She argues that traditional psychological theories often overlooked or misinterpreted women's unique experiences and moral reasoning. Her perspective highlights how gender-specific socialization impacts women's self-concept and identity, particularly within restrictive cultural frameworks like those in Iran. Her theory suggests the importance of recognizing diverse perspectives and why these voices are important to educational and social equity discussions. This aligns with my focus on elevating women's

voices and experiences that how they have been marginalized within the dominant cultural and educational narratives in Islamic regime of Iran.

In the pursuit of knowledge and understanding, particularly in relation to gender equity, it is crucial to recognize the different epistemological frameworks that women employ. Clinchy (1996) identifies two modes of knowing: connected knowing, which values relational understanding and empathy, and separate knowing, which prioritizes critical reasoning and objectivity. This distinction is particularly relevant for Iranian women, who often grapple with societal norms that shape their educational experiences and identities. By recognizing the importance of both connected and separate knowing, we can better understand how these women navigate their educational journeys and advocate for their rights in a patriarchal society. Such an integrative approach not only enriches our understanding of gender dynamics but also highlights the diverse strategies women employ to assert their identities and seek equity.

Belenky (1986) highlights that women develop their sense of self and voice through unique pathways, often constrained by societal norms. This perspective resonates with the struggles of Iranian women, who navigate a sociocultural landscape marked by strict gender roles and systemic inequalities. Such constraints profoundly impact their psychological development, creating a complex interplay between identity formation and oppression. In Iran, gender-based restrictions can lead to internalized societal expectations, fostering feelings of inadequacy and diminished self-worth. Belenky et al. emphasize the importance of voice, underscoring the necessity for Iranian women to reclaim their narratives amidst these challenges. Their exploration enriches our understanding of how gender inequality influences personal identity, illustrating the resilience of women striving for empowerment and agency in the face of adversity.

In discussing the barriers faced by women in the pursuit of gender equity, it is essential to consider the interplay between gender and culture. Stack (1986) notes that the experiences of women and men of color are profoundly influenced by their cultural backgrounds, which can both constrain and empower their identities and choices. In Iran, cultural norms often dictate the roles and behaviors expected of women, creating significant obstacles to their education and personal freedoms. By acknowledging these cultural dimensions, we can develop a deeper understanding of the systemic injustices that Iranian women encounter, as well as their strategies for resistance and resilience.

Iranian Women's Experiences and Feminist Perspectives

Historical Context of Women's Education in Iran

The quest for gender equality and women's empowerment has gained significant recognition worldwide, with education emerging as a crucial factor in this struggle. In the context of Iran, where cultural and socio-political dynamics profoundly impact women's experiences, the integration of education and gender rights is particularly important. Drawing from my personal experiences growing up there, I reflect on how the education system both empowered and constrained me. While I was fortunate to access higher education, I also witnessed firsthand the ways in which societal expectations of women, imposed limitations on their academic and professional aspirations (Kian, 1997). Women in Iran have historically navigated a complex landscape of rights, often alternating between progress and regression, making the examination of their educational experiences essential for understanding their broader societal roles (*Iranian Women's Rights*, 2022). I hope my personal dimension adds depth to the theoretical discussions of women's rights and educational equity in Iran.

Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities

Education serves as a powerful vehicle for transformation, equipping women with the knowledge and skills necessary to challenge systemic inequalities and assert their rights (Buchmann & Hannum, 2001). As I reflect on the tragic murder of Mahsa Amini in 2022 and its impact on Iranian feminist movements, I am reminded of the power of education as both a site of oppression and a tool for resistance. Her death galvanized protests, where education became a symbol of resistance and highlighted the desire for freedom, autonomy, and justice among Iranian women. These movements signify a collective struggle not just for education but for broader societal change, as women in Iran continue to fight against patriarchal oppression. The journey towards educational equity in Iran has been plagued with obstacles. Despite legal reforms and increasing access to education since the early 20th century, women continue to face significant barriers, including cultural norms, economic constraints, and political repression (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2019). These obstacles are worsened by an education system that often reinforces traditional gender roles and stereotypes, limiting women's opportunities for agency and empowerment (Rezai-Rashti & Moghadam, 2011). Mahsa's murder underscores these challenges, sparking global outrage and igniting feminist movements within Iran (Amnesty International, 2023). Therefore, my experiences of witnessing gender-based restrictions in Iranian classrooms have motivated me to advocate for more inclusive educational environments, both in Iran and globally. The contemporary movements for gender equality in Iran are not just political acts; they are deeply personal struggles for freedom, autonomy, and dignity—values I have had to fight for throughout my own academic journey.

In *Darkness Now Visible: Patriarchy's Resurgence and Feminist Resistance* (2018), Gilligan and Richards explore the resurgence of patriarchal norms, highlighting contemporary

challenges to gender equity. They argue that these norms re-emerge through systemic inequalities, cultural backlash, and political movements that undermine women's rights globally. In Iran, this resurgence manifests in restrictive laws, social expectations, and an ongoing struggle for autonomy and representation. The implications for women's rights are dire, as these conditions exacerbate violence, limit access to education and healthcare, and hinder participation in public life. However, the authors also emphasize the resilience of feminist movements, which actively resist patriarchal oppression by advocating for policy changes, community organizing, and reclaiming public spaces to ensure women's rights and gender equity. This regression poses a critical threat to the progress made in gender equity and women's empowerment worldwide.

Feminist Theories and Movements- Educational Equity

The role of feminist theory in understanding women's education in Iran is crucial. Feminist scholars argue that education is not just a means to acquire knowledge but also a battleground for social justice and equality (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1996). Through critical pedagogy, feminist educators challenge existing power dynamics and advocate for curricula that reflect diverse perspectives and experiences, thereby promoting an inclusive educational environment (Freire, 1978). Additionally, Iranian feminist scholars such as Parvin Paidar and Haideh Moghissi offer localized insights into the struggles faced by Iranian women, advocating for an equitable educational system (Moghissi, 1999; Paidar, 2001).

Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* (1993) redefined moral development theories by highlighting a relational, care-centered approach often linked to women's experiences. Her insights have fueled feminist movements advocating for educational equity, stressing the importance of systems that uplift diverse voices and perspectives. This need is particularly pressing in Iran, where women's access to education is vital. By fostering environments that

embrace women's unique viewpoints and support gender-sensitive learning, educational equity can drive societal progress. Feminist movements play a key role in breaking down gender barriers in education, creating opportunities for women to lead and contribute, and building a more inclusive and equitable system.

Feminist epistemology, as articulated in *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Belenky (1986), emphasizes the significance of women's experiences in shaping knowledge and self-expression. In Iran, restrictive educational and societal structures inhibit women's intellectual and personal development, marginalizing their voices and limiting access to knowledge. These patriarchal norms perpetuate a cycle of silence and self-doubt, stifling women's potential. By applying feminist epistemology, it becomes clear that improving educational access for women in Iran requires not only increasing enrollment but also creating supportive environments that validate their experiences, fostering both self-identity and critical engagement with the world.

Gilligan and Richards (2018) also explore the complex dynamics of feminist movements as they respond to resurgent patriarchal forces. They highlight how these movements address systemic oppression while adapting to distinct cultural and legal challenges. In Iran, where patriarchal structures are deeply entrenched, feminist resistance is particularly significant. The recent uprising following Mahsa Amini's tragic death ignited widespread protests, highlighting the fight against oppressive laws and societal norms. Iranian women, fueled by collective outrage, have courageously mobilized to demand justice, equality, and an end to state-sanctioned violence, marking a pivotal moment in the country's struggle for women's rights.

Empirical Evidence

Recent data suggests that while Iranian women have made significant educational gains, gender disparities in employment and societal roles persist post-graduation (Rezai-Rashti &

Moghadam, 2011). The World Bank (2023) reports improvements in female literacy rates since the 1970s, yet challenges remain in political participation and economic opportunities.

Connecting Themes

When transitioning between sections on autoethnography and Iranian women's experiences, it is essential to explicitly connect the two. Personal narratives in autoethnography can illuminate the specific challenges faced by Iranian women, showcasing how individual stories reflect broader social structures and systemic inequalities. By employing autoethnographic methods, this research seeks to highlight the nuanced experiences of women in Iran, providing a platform for their voices and advocating for educational equity.

Synthesis of Key Themes

The socio-political climate in Iran has reignited interest in women's rights and education, particularly in the light of recent protests and movements advocating for gender equality (Amnesty International, 2023). The tragic murder of Mahsa Amini in 2022 catalyzed a wave of activism, highlighting the voices of women who demand not only educational opportunities but also broader societal changes (Hafezi, 2023). This moment serves as a testament to the resilience of Iranian women and their commitment to challenging oppressive structures, with education as a foundational element of their struggle.

This thesis employs an autoethnographic approach to explore the relationship between personal narratives and the socio-political context of women's education in Iran. By situating my experiences within feminist scholarship, I aim to illuminate the systemic barriers faced by women and the transformative potential of education as a tool for empowerment (Ellis, 2004). Through critical engagement with these themes, I aspire to advocate for a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape that supports the aspirations of women in Iran and beyond.

Trauma, Mental Health and Resilience

The narrative touches upon themes of trauma, grief, and resilience. Solomon (2001) explores the relationship between major depression, suicidal ideation, and the paradoxical nature of recovery. Additionally, (Amnesty International, 2023) discusses the process of coping with irrevocable loss through autoethnographic poesis, highlighting the capacity for resilience and endurance in the face of adversity. The discussion of trauma and post-traumatic growth provides a valuable framework for understanding the narrative dimensions of autoethnography. Similarly, the emphasis on narrative revisioning and self-growth in response to trauma aligns with broader psychological theories of resilience and coping (Batthyany & Russo-Netzer, 2014) (McAdams, 2006).

Drawing from Collins (2017) and Jago (2002), who explore personal experiences of anxiety and depression within academic contexts, establishes a foundation for understanding the emotional challenges associated with autoethnography. Collins (2017) uses autoethnography to deconstruct disruptive experiences and provide insights into mental illness, while Jago (2002) offers a deeply personal narrative of depression intersecting with academic life. This connection between autoethnography and mental health aligns with broader discussions within psychology, such as the narrative perspective on post-traumatic growth proposed by Neimeyer (2004) and the role of emotion in self-growth identified by Lilgendahl and McAdams (2011).

In *Joining the Resistance* (2013), Carol Gilligan emphasizes relational ethics, focusing on the significance of relationships in women's moral development. She critiques traditional ethical models that prioritize individualism and justice, advocating for a framework rooted in care and empathy. This perspective resonates with the study of women's mental health in Iran, where cultural and social factors significantly influence their well-being. In a society with rigid gender

roles, the relational dimensions of women's lives—such as family and community—are crucial for understanding their mental health challenges and resilience, highlighting the necessity for a more nuanced examination of their experiences.

Moreover, Gilligan (2013) highlights the critical role women's voices play in challenging patriarchal structures and advocating for social change. Her insights reveal that women's experiences, often marginalized in traditional discourse, offer unique perspectives that are vital for understanding and addressing issues of inequality. In examining the resilience of Iranian women, it is crucial to consider Gilligan's concept of resistance, which highlights the significance of women's narratives in fostering supportive communities. This aligns with the experiences of Iranian women, who navigate legal and cultural barriers while asserting their identities. She also posits that the relational aspects of women's experiences can empower individuals and mobilize collective action, which is particularly relevant in the context of gender-based discrimination in Iran. By amplifying these voices, she argues that societies can dismantle oppressive structures and foster a more equitable social framework, positioning women as essential catalysts for meaningful change in their struggle for equality.

Autoethnographic Methods for Crafting Vignettes

In Iran, women face myriad challenges and oppressions that pervade every aspect of their lives. Through a series of vignettes, I express the deep feelings of sadness and despair that accompany this pervasive oppression, as well as the profound impact it has on women's personalities, futures, decisions, and relationships. In these vignettes, the trauma that women experience as a result of their constant oppression and the restrictions they confront on their personal autonomy, dignity, and freedom can be explored. They are imprisoned not only in physical spaces but also in emotional and psychological confines. These prisons encompass

every facet of their existence, from their emotions and identities to their speech, education, and even their ability to breathe freely. These vignettes could depict the anguish of a woman who is forbidden from pursuing her dreams and aspirations due to societal expectations and restrictions. They could illuminate the struggles of women who are denied basic human rights, such as the right to education, employment, or even the right to express themselves freely and the fear and anxiety that women feel as they navigate a world where their every move is scrutinized and controlled. At the heart of these vignettes lies a profound exploration of power and powerlessness. Iranian women, imprisoned not only by external forces but also by internalized beliefs and societal norms that dictate their roles and behaviors, are often subjected to the whims of a patriarchal society that seeks to suppress their voices and limit their opportunities for advancement. Despite these challenges, the vignettes also highlight moments of resilience, strength, and defiance when women refuse to be silenced or confined, fight for their rights and assert their agency in the face of oppression. Through these stories, we can glimpse the complexity and richness of women's experiences in Iran, and the ongoing struggle for freedom, dignity, and equality.

Unveiling Authoritarianism: A Comparative Analysis of “*The Strongmen*” by Ruth Ben-Ghiat and the Islamic Regime of Iran Post-1979 Revolution

"The Strongmen" by Ruth Ben-Ghiat (2020) is a book that examines the rise and characteristics of authoritarian leaders throughout history. While the book primarily focuses on leaders from various countries and time periods, there are certain similarities between the characteristics of these strongmen and the dynamics of dictatorship in the Islamic regime of Iran after the 1979 Revolution. Both contexts are characterized by authoritarian rule, cults of

personality, repression, and human rights violations perpetrated by leaders who seek to consolidate and maintain their power at any cost.

The first similarity is that both the strongmen described in the book and the leaders of the Islamic regime in Iran cultivated a personality cult around themselves, portraying themselves as saviors and guardians of their nations. They used propaganda and state-controlled media to mythologize their leadership and suppress alternative narratives. They portrayed themselves as larger-than-life figures, projecting an image of strength, charisma, and infallibility to their followers.

Moreover, the strongmen depicted in the book and the leaders of the Islamic regime exercised authoritarian rule, concentrating power in their hands and suppressing dissent through censorship, repression, and violence. They relied on tactics of fear, intimidation, and propaganda to maintain control over their populations.

Additionally, many of the strongmen described in the book, as well as the leaders of the Islamic regime in Iran, were military figures who came to power through coups or revolutions. They often prioritized military interests and relied on the support of the armed forces to maintain their grip on power.

Furthermore, both the strongmen and the leaders of the Islamic regime employed tactics of censorship and repression to silence dissent and suppress opposition. They restricted freedom of speech, assembly, and association, and targeted journalists, activists, and political opponents who dared to challenge their authority.

Besides, the strongmen and the leaders of the Islamic regime were often characterized by corruption and cronyism, using their positions of power to enrich themselves and their inner

circles at the expense of the wider population. They exploited state resources for personal gain and rewarded loyalty with positions of privilege and influence.

Finally, the regimes of the strongmen and the leaders of the Islamic regime in Iran were marked by widespread human rights violations, including arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, and discrimination against minority groups. They disregarded the rule of law and trampled on the rights and freedoms of their citizens in pursuit of their own political agendas.

This comparison reveals disturbing parallels in the methods of power consolidation, propaganda, and repression utilized by authoritarian leaders across different contexts. Both the strongmen and the Iranian leaders have manipulated their images and suppressed dissent to maintain control, often through violent and oppressive means. This analysis underscores the pervasive nature of authoritarianism and its capacity to undermine democratic principles and human rights.

Summary

This chapter reviews the foundational literature and theoretical frameworks informing this study on women's education and resilience. Autoethnography, as outlined by Adams et al. (2022), is central to this work, blending personal narrative with cultural critique. The autoethnographic method, which integrates personal reflection with broader social analysis, situates my own experiences within the complex sociocultural landscape of Iranian education. Fisher (1984) and Langellier (1999) emphasize the transformative potential of personal storytelling, asserting that it can challenge prevailing power structures and advocate for marginalized voices. This reflective method allows a nuanced examination of Iranian women's educational experiences, underscoring how personal narratives can confront systemic oppression (Adams and Holman Jones, 2011).

The theoretical lens of intersectionality, introduced by Crenshaw (1991), reveals how overlapping identities amplify the challenges faced by Iranian women within patriarchal structures. This framework provides insight into how social expectations, political constraints, and cultural norms converge to limit educational opportunities for women (Leslie and MacNeill, 1995). Additionally, Gilligan & Snider (2018) explore how patriarchy persists through social conditioning, a critical insight for understanding the entrenched gender biases Iranian women face. These scholars suggest that societal norms influence women's self-concept and restrict their access to resources, which limits their educational and professional advancement.

Feminist perspectives further highlight the role of education in fostering equity and agency among women. Carol Gilligan's relational ethics (2013), which prioritize care and empathy, resonate deeply with the challenges and resilience of Iranian women navigating restrictive environments. This emphasis on relationality aligns with Belenky (1986) findings on women's distinct pathways to self-expression and empowerment. Through education, women develop a "voice," an essential tool for self-advocacy within patriarchal societies, where traditional narratives have historically silenced them. Iranian feminist scholars such as Paidar (2001) reinforce the importance of educational equity as a fundamental pillar for achieving social justice, advocating for systems that recognize and address gendered experiences within learning environments.

Finally, the chapter acknowledges the sociopolitical climate in Iran, marked by recent protests following Mahsa Amini's death, as a backdrop for educational activism (Amnesty International, 2023). This event underscores the power of education as both a site of resistance and empowerment, reinforcing the ongoing struggle for gender equity within Iranian society (Rezai-

Rashti & Moghadam, 2011). As discussed, the current feminist movements demonstrate the role of education in challenging patriarchal norms and advancing women's rights, both within and beyond the classroom.

Chapter 3 - Introduction to Autoethnography- Methodology

Autoethnography is a research method that blends autobiography and ethnography, focusing on the researcher's personal experiences within cultural contexts and aiming to produce insightful analyses of both individual and collective experiences. According to Ellis et al. (2011), autoethnography is "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (cited in Adams et al., 2022, p.180). This definition underscores the method's dual emphasis on personal narrative and cultural interpretation.

Similarly, Anderson (2006) describes autoethnography as "an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience." Autoethnography, therefore, involves the researcher's active engagement with their own experiences, emotions, and perspectives, while also considering how these experiences are shaped by larger cultural forces. It offers a unique lens through which to examine individual lives and social phenomena, emphasizing the interconnectedness of personal and cultural narratives.

Background on the Development and Evolution of Autoethnography

Autoethnography has emerged as a distinctive research method within the broader landscape of qualitative inquiry, characterized by its emphasis on personal experience,

reflexivity, and cultural analysis. The evolution of autoethnography can be traced through key figures, seminal works, and significant milestones that have shaped its development over time.

Key Figures

Carolyn Ellis is widely recognized as a pioneering figure in the field of autoethnography. Her influential works, including *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography* (2004), have laid the groundwork for understanding and practicing autoethnographic research. Ellis advocates for embracing personal narrative as a means of exploring cultural phenomena and challenging conventional research paradigms.

Arthur P. Bochner's contributions to autoethnography have been instrumental in advancing its theoretical and methodological underpinnings. His collaborations with Ellis, such as *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing* (1996), have explored the intersection of storytelling, reflexivity, and representation in qualitative research.

Tony E. Adams has played a significant role in promoting autoethnography as a methodological approach for understanding social and cultural issues. His co-authored book *Autoethnography: Understanding Qualitative Research* (2014) provides a comprehensive overview of autoethnographic principles and practices, contributing to its recognition within the academic community.

Stacy Holman Jones a prominent scholar, whose work underscores narrative's centrality, advocating for storytelling to convey human complexity. Emphasizing reflexivity, she urges researchers to critically examine biases. Through mentorship and writing, Jones fosters collaboration, enriching the field and advancing understanding of lived experiences. Her influential books, including *Creative Selves/Creative Cultures: Critical Autoethnography*,

Performance, and Pedagogy (2018), *Queering Autoethnography* (2018), and *Handbook of Autoethnography* (2016) showcase her contributions.

Seminal Works

Evocative Autoethnographic: Writing lives and telling stories explores the creative possibilities of autoethnography through demonstrating how storytelling can be used to convey ethnographic insights and engage readers/viewers in reflexive dialogue. "Autoethnography: An Overview" (2011) by Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner provides a comprehensive overview of autoethnography as a research method. It discusses the origins, theoretical foundations, and methodological practices of autoethnography, highlighting its potential for generating rich, contextually situated knowledge.

Milestones

Emergence of Reflexive Ethnography.

The late 20th century witnessed a shift towards reflexive approaches to ethnographic research, as scholars began to critically examine the researcher's role in shaping knowledge production. Autoethnography emerged within this context as a means of foregrounding the researcher's subjectivity and acknowledging the situated nature of knowledge.

Recognition within Academic Discourse.

Over the past few decades, autoethnography has gained recognition as a legitimate research method within academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, communication studies, and education. Its inclusion in research methods textbooks and scholarly journals reflects the growing acceptance and influence of autoethnography within the academic community.

Totally, autoethnography offers a rich and multifaceted approach to research, combining personal narratives with cultural analysis to address pressing social issues. By embracing

reflexivity and ethical considerations, autoethnographers can contribute to broader conversations about identity, power, and social justice. As a methodological framework and ontological experience, autoethnography has the potential to inspire transformative change both within academia and society at large. By synthesizing existing literature on these themes, the autoethnographer can establish a robust theoretical framework and methodological approach for conducting intersectional autoethnography.

Additionally, engaging with diverse disciplinary perspectives and methodologies enhances the depth and rigor of the autoethnographic analysis, enriching the understanding of lived experiences within complex socio-cultural contexts. The literature review should integrate research from diverse fields, including psychology, sociology, feminism, and qualitative research methodologies, intersectionality, identity, trauma, resilience, and the power of personal narrative, to provide a comprehensive understanding of autoethnography and its implications for personal, academic, and social transformation. By engaging with existing scholarship and theoretical frameworks, researchers can navigate the complexities of autoethnographic practice and contribute to ongoing discussions about knowledge production, representation, and justice within academia and beyond.

Methodology

Autoethnography also stands apart from traditional research methodologies in its emphasis on personal experience, reflexivity, and the integration of the researcher's voice into the narrative. It differs from other methodologies in five important areas:

Firstly, autoethnography foregrounds the researcher's subjectivity and self-reflexivity, acknowledging the role of personal experiences, emotions, and biases in shaping the research

process. Ellis (2004) emphasizes that autoethnographers engage in "self-conscious, self-reflective writing" that invites readers to understand the researcher's perspective.

Secondly, it embraces emotion and subjectivity as integral aspects of the research process. Denzin (2013) notes that autoethnographers often "weave emotional experience into cultural understanding," highlighting the importance of emotions in shaping individuals' lived realities.

Thirdly, it challenges the notion of objectivity in research, arguing that researchers cannot fully divorce themselves from their own subjectivities and perspectives. Richardson (2003) critiques traditional research paradigms for privileging objectivity over personal experience and argues for the value of subjective, experiential knowledge.

Fourthly, unlike more conventional research methods that prioritize objectivity and detachment, autoethnography often takes the form of narrative storytelling. Anderson (2006) describes autoethnography as "writing that reveals the self in a cultural context through story." This narrative approach allows researchers to convey the complexity and richness of their experiences.

Fifthly, it combines personal narrative with cultural analysis, allowing researchers to explore individual experiences within broader socio-cultural contexts. Chang (2016) argues that autoethnography enables researchers to "interrogate the personal and the cultural" by examining how personal narratives intersect with larger social structures.

In conducting autoethnography, I adopted a multi-method approach that combined various techniques for data collection and analysis, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of my personal experiences as an Iranian woman within the context of oppressive gender norms and societal dynamics. The following outlines my approach:

Data Collection

I engaged in regular journaling and reflective writing practices to document my thoughts, emotions, and experiences related to gender-based oppression and societal norms in Iran. This method allowed me to capture the nuances of my lived experiences, including moments of significance, emotional reactions, and reflections on identity formation and agency (Adams et al., 2014; Ellis, 2004). I also conducted an extensive literature review on Iranian women's experiences, feminist theory, intersectionality, and autoethnography to deepen my understanding of the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts shaping my experiences. This involved reading scholarly articles, books, and personal narratives that provided insights into the intersectional dynamics of gender oppression in Iran (Crenshaw, 1991; Mohanty, 1984).

Data Analysis

I employed thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insights within my autoethnography, organizing similar themes into categories and examining the relationships between different concepts which allowed me to derive insights into the impact of gender-based laws and societal norms on Iranian women's mental health, agency, identity formation, and sense of self-worth (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Additionally, I engaged in critical self-reflection throughout the data analysis process that involved examining how my personal experiences and perspectives influenced my interpretations of the data and considering alternative viewpoints to ensure reflexivity and rigor in the analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellis, 2004). Insights from the literature review are integrated into my data analysis, drawing connections between existing scholarship and my own lived realities. This allowed for a broader contextualization of my experiences within the socio-cultural landscape of Iran and enriched the interpretation of my findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Ellis, 2004).

By employing this multi-method approach to autoethnography, I aimed to uncover deeper insights into the complexities of gender-based oppression and resistance within Iranian society, while also contributing to broader theoretical discussions on feminism, intersectionality, and social justice.

Theoretical Framework

In my autoethnographic inquiry, several theoretical frameworks and concepts guided my interpretation of personal experiences by providing conceptual tools for analyzing the socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts that shape Iranian women's lives. Feminist theory served as a foundational framework for understanding power dynamics, patriarchy, and gender inequality within Iranian society. Feminist perspectives allowed me to critically examine the ways in which oppressive gender norms and laws shape women's lives, influence their agency, autonomy, and sense of self-worth (hooks, 2000; Mohanty, 1984). Postcolonial theory also provided insights into the legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and globalization in shaping gender dynamics and cultural norms in Iran. Besides, by examining the historical and geopolitical contexts of Iran's socio-political landscape, I was able to contextualize my experiences within broader discourses of resistance, cultural hybridity, and decolonization (Said, 1977; Spivak, 1988). Concepts such as subversion, resilience, and everyday acts of resistance also allowed me to explore the strategies and tactics employed by women to challenge restrictive gender norms and assert their autonomy and dignity (De Certeau & Rendall, 2004; Scott, 1985).

Narrative theory is the last one which provided a lens to understand the power of storytelling and personal narrative in shaping identity and meaning making. Recognizing the role of narrative in constructing individual and collective identities helped me critically reflect on the ways in which my own narratives of selfhood are influenced by societal discourses and power

dynamics (Bruner, 2009; Ricoeur, 1980). While there is not a direct source that prescribes a specific narrative style for autoethnography, scholars like Carolyn Ellis (2004), Arthur P. Bochner, and Tony E. Adams (2022) have explored various narrative approaches within autoethnographic research. Ellis, in particular, discusses the use of vignettes and storytelling as essential elements of autoethnography. In her book *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, she demonstrates how vignettes can be used to convey personal experiences in a compelling and evocative manner (Ellis, 2004). Bochner and Adams (Adams et al., 2022) also emphasize the importance of narrative in autoethnography, advocating for a creative and reflexive approach to storytelling. In their book *Understanding Autoethnography: Personal Reflections on Personal Experience*, they discuss the use of dialogue, nonlinear narrative structures, and other narrative techniques to engage readers and convey complex experiences (Adams et al., 2022). Similarly, I utilize vignettes to capture specific moments or experiences that are particularly illustrative of the broader themes I am exploring. These vignettes are woven together within a linear and nonlinear narrative structure that follows a chronological or thematic progression, providing coherence and continuity to the narrative. Additionally, I incorporate dialogue where relevant, allowing the voices of individuals involved in my experiences to be heard and adding depth to the storytelling. Overall, this narrative style allows for a rich exploration of my personal experiences while maintaining clarity and accessibility for the reader.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were integral to the integrity and credibility of my autoethnographic research, ensuring that confidentiality and respect for privacy were upheld while also facilitating an honest and authentic exploration of personal experiences.

Reflexivity and Sensitivity.

Ellis emphasizes the importance of reflexivity and sensitivity to ethical concerns in autoethnographic research. In her book *The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel about Autoethnography*, she discusses the ethical implications of sharing personal narratives and the need to consider the potential impact on individuals involved (2004). Throughout the writing process, I engaged in reflexivity and sensitivity to the potential impact of sharing personal narratives. I considered the ethical implications of including certain stories or details, particularly those that may be sensitive or potentially harmful to individuals involved. I aimed to strike a balance between honesty and respect for the privacy and dignity of those mentioned in the narrative.

Anonymity of Sensitive Information.

In cases where sharing certain information could potentially harm individuals or compromise their privacy, I opted for anonymity. This involved omitting specific details or altering narratives to prevent individuals from being identifiable.

Audience Awareness

As the researcher conducting this autoethnography and committed to social justice and gender equity, it is essential to acknowledge that I may have pre-existing beliefs and values that shape my interpretation of the data. As an Iranian woman, my personal experiences, cultural background, and social identities undoubtedly shape my perspectives, biases, and interpretations of the data (Adams et al., 2022). Growing up in Iran, I have firsthand experience with the gender-based laws and societal norms prevalent in the country, providing me with insights into the challenges faced by Iranian women in navigating these systems. Therefore, my identity as an

Iranian woman may lead me to prioritize certain themes or issues over others, based on my own lived experiences and cultural context (Ellis, 2004).

Furthermore, my educational background in Curriculum and Instruction may also influence my interpretation of the data. While my academic training equips me with theoretical frameworks and analytical tools, it is essential to recognize the potential impact of my disciplinary lens on the research process (Adams et al., 2022).

By drawing upon insights from these scholars and integrating various narrative techniques, these frameworks and considerations into my autoethnography, I aim to create a rich and engaging narrative that effectively communicates my personal experiences while also contributing to broader theoretical discussions on gender, culture, and social justice.

Contribution to Knowledge

Ellis demonstrates how autoethnography contributes to knowledge production by centering the voices of marginalized individuals and challenging dominant discourses (Ellis, 2004). My autoethnography contributes to existing knowledge and understanding within my field of study by offering unique insights and perspectives on the experiences of Iranian women particularly those from marginalized communities, amplifies voices that are often underrepresented in academic discourse. Through its unique insights and critical analysis, it contributes to ongoing efforts to create more equitable and inclusive societies for all individuals, regardless of gender or cultural background. Furthermore, by exploring the role of international advocacy and awareness in challenging gender norms and legal frameworks in Iran, my autoethnography prompts critical reflection on the complexities of global solidarity initiatives. This analysis highlights the importance of culturally sensitive approaches and grassroots activism in promoting women's rights and dismantling systemic oppression.

Conclusion

My autoethnography holds paramount importance within my thesis as it serves as a conduit for delving into the intricate, contextually embedded narratives of Iranian women. Through this method, I uncover profound insights into their daily realities, shedding light on their encounters with oppressive gender norms and legal frameworks in Iran.

In relation to the first research question, my autoethnography offers a deep exploration of how oppressive gender-based laws, such as mandatory hijab and restrictions on women's autonomy, impact the mental health and well-being of Iranian women. By sharing personal narratives and reflections, I shed light on the ways in which these laws influence women's agency, identity formation, and sense of self-worth.

Regarding the second research question, my autoethnography contributes to understanding the role of international advocacy and awareness in challenging gender norms and legal frameworks in Iran. By sharing stories of grassroots movements and global solidarity initiatives, I illustrate how external support can empower Iranian women and contribute to the advancement of women's rights. This autoethnographic perspective highlights the importance of transnational activism in fostering social change and dismantling systemic oppression.

In summary, my autoethnography serves as a powerful tool for illuminating the experiences of Iranian women within the broader context of gender oppression, international advocacy, and cross-cultural dialogue, and by sharing personal narratives and reflections, it enriches the scholarly discourse on women's rights and contributes to ongoing efforts to promote gender equity and social justice globally.

Chapter 4 - Vignettes

An outlook of women's conditions in Iran

Women are systematically deprived of autonomy and freedom from birth in a society where oppressive rules dictate every aspect of their lives. Mandated to wear the hijab from as young as nine years old, even in death they are bound by its presence on their tombstones, all to supposedly quell men's purported sexual arousal and to absolve women of their perceived sins. These oppressive decrees were hastily imposed by clerics in Iran following the 1979 revolution. Under these draconian laws, women are reduced to mere possessions of their fathers and husbands, devoid of the right to marry, obtain passports, pursue education, or work without male consent. Post-marriage, husbands assume ownership over their wives, relegating them to the status of legal slaves. Even basic freedoms such as staying in a hotel require permission from their husbands, showcasing the extent of their subjugation.

The legal system further devalues women's lives, equating their worth to half that of men's. Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi exemplifies the stark injustice, illustrating how a woman's life is valued less than a man's testicle in matters of compensation. (Ebadi & Moaveni, 2007) This disparity extends to inheritance, where sons inherit twice as much as daughters, perpetuating gender inequality through generations.

In matters of justice, women's testimonies carry only half the weight of men's in court, and they are systematically barred from holding prominent positions in Iran's leadership. Any semblance of female representation is merely a facade, with women in positions of power often serving to enforce patriarchal norms (Nayyeri, 2013) rather than advocate for women's rights. Education and participation in certain sports are restricted for women under the guise of preserving morality, reflecting the regime's fear of educated and empowered women. Even mundane activities like riding a bicycle or speaking in public are scrutinized and restricted to prevent any perceived deviation from societal norms.

The regime's brutality extends to barbaric practices such as raping women before execution to deny them entry into heaven and demanding "bullet money" from their families afterward. Contraception is banned, relegating women to perpetual childbearing and domestic servitude.

These oppressive regulations have driven many women to despair and suicide over the past four decades, making them victims of a system that suffocates their dreams and aspirations. The enforcement of these archaic rules (Human Rights Watch, 2024) is tantamount to murder, as they systematically rob women of their dignity, autonomy, and ultimately, their lives.

Mahsa Amini's Anniversary

Yet, in the middle of that confusion, a poignant realization dawned. For years, as young Iranians, we had wrestled with the oppressive restrictions imposed upon us – branded as enemies of the state merely for daring to articulate our grievances. But why? I, like many others, had lived a life of obedience and rectitude, devoting myself to academia and nurturing young minds. Why should dissent be equated with disobedience? Why should the mere act of bearing witness to corruption in the regime elicit threats of retribution? Even in my place of employment, I

frequently faced subtle warnings urging me to remain silent, as there was a fear that engaging in political discussions could potentially cause to lose their license and our jobs.

And then, the frightening reality of Mahsa Amini's fate – a 22-year-old life extinguished for the crime of refusing to conform to the draconian dictates of mandatory head coverings. The questions swirled incessantly within me; a severe reminder of the risks associated with dissent in a society where voicing opposition could lead to perilous consequences. However, my personal struggles seemed insignificant when compared to the systemic oppression faced by numerous women throughout Iran. Denied the most basic freedoms – the right to pursue education, engage in sports, or exercise agency over their lives – they languished under the suffocating weight of patriarchal decree. Imagine the simple joys of choosing one's path in life – pursuing one's passions, selecting attire, or even deciding whom to love – denied because of gender!

In a world where freedom was a birthright for some and an elusive dream for others, the disparity was stark. As I stood there, bearing witness to the injustices inflicted upon my fellow Iranians, the echoes of their silenced voices reverberated within me. And so, I continued to raise my voice, a solitary act of defiance against the forces of oppression. For in the heart of every protest lay the fervent hope for a future where justice would no longer be a distant ideal, but a tangible reality for all.

My autoethnographic exploration delves into the intricate landscape of women's rights in Iran and the profound ramifications on both individual lives and societal structures.

Autoethnography embodies a comprehensive examination of cultural mores, beliefs, norms, and interpersonal dynamics within a specific community (Ellis et al., 2011). It transcends mere observation, aiming instead to dissect and contextualize the complex tapestry of human experience.

Central to this endeavor is an interrogation of the multifaceted manifestations of gender inequality and discrimination entrenched within Iranian society (Moghadam, 2003). This methodological approach offers a nuanced understanding of the challenges women confront like cultural dictates, systemic oppression, and their lived experiences, navigating a landscape fraught with social, legal, and cultural barriers.

Moreover, my autoethnography serves as a tool for critical analysis, enabling a deeper exploration of the underlying power dynamics and structural inequities that perpetuate gender-based discrimination (Kian, 1997). By situating individual narratives within the broader socio-historical context, this research seeks to illuminate the complex web of factors shaping women's agency, identity, and socio-political participation.

Mahsa Amini

The tragic events surrounding Mahsa's arrest and subsequent death during a family visit to Tehran provoke serious questions about accountability and transparency within law enforcement. Despite accompanying her brother, she was arrested, forcibly separated, and subjected to violent treatment resulting in her demise (Radeck & Khodakarim, 2022). The official denial by the morality police, attributing her death to a heart attack, raises suspicions of a cover-up. This incident, which incited public outcry and catalyzed a revolution, underscores the importance of critical examination of authority's actions and demands for justice in safeguarding individual rights and societal integrity.

The demise of the individual sparked widespread indignation among human rights advocates and notable figures. However, dissenters faced swift repercussions; their freedoms curtailed through arrests, confiscation of assets, and revocation of professional privileges. As protests erupted, authorities sought to obfuscate the truth, disseminating misleading narratives.

Government security forces selectively released edited surveillance footage, ostensibly to refute claims of brutality, yet crucial evidence from within the van remained undisclosed (Virk & Ali, 2022) . This orchestrated manipulation exemplifies the abuse of power to suppress dissent and manipulate public perception, highlighting the imperative for critical scrutiny and accountability in challenging authoritarian tactics.

Mahsa's family faced coercion for an immediate burial, suggesting attempts to suppress scrutiny of her death. Testimonies from detained girls in the same van corroborated reports of her brutalization by authorities. Yet, accountability remains elusive as the perpetrators evade arrest. Instead, female reporters like Nilofar Hamed, who exposed Mahsa's ordeal with a poignant image, and Elahe Mohammadi, who documented her funeral, suffered reprisals, highlighting systemic repression (Radeck & Khodakarim, 2022) . Their arrests underscore the regime's intolerance of dissent and efforts to silence voices challenging gender oppression. This pattern of persecution exemplifies a broader pattern of authoritarian control, necessitating robust scrutiny and advocacy for justice to counteract impunity and protect fundamental rights.

During Mahsa's funeral, a mass outcry erupted with thousands chanting anti-regime slogans and demanding freedom. Some women bravely removed their headscarves, symbolizing defiance against oppressive norms, while security forces responded with violence, firing tear gas and live rounds, resulting in casualties (Kamalipour & Pavlik, 2023). Anger escalated as protesters vented their frustration by defacing images of the supreme leader, sparking widespread unrest across cities. Social media became a battleground for dissent, with the #mahsaamini hashtag swiftly gaining momentum, breaking the world record of tweets, amplifying the outcry and exposing the regime's brutality to the world (Human Rights Watch, 2024) . This spontaneous

and widespread mobilization underscores the power of collective action in challenging authoritarian regimes and rallying for justice.

Across various cities, university students bravely took to the streets, only to face arrests and fatal gunfire, highlighting the regime's ruthless suppression of dissent. Security forces stooped to despicable tactics, looting corpses to intimidate grieving families and conducting midnight raids on dormitories to apprehend protesters. The global response was one of solidarity, as influential figures worldwide emulated Iranian women's acts of defiance against compulsory hijab by cutting their hair or burning their scarves symbolizing support for their struggle. However, the regime's grip extended to social media, with numerous accounts, including those of prominent influencers and Iranian figures, mysteriously deactivated to stifle dissent. In response, artists and media professionals initiated a collective boycott of government-controlled television channels, leveraging their influence to challenge state propaganda and demand accountability for the violent crackdown on dissent. This multifaceted resistance underscores the resilience and determination of those fighting for freedom and justice (Banihashemi, 2023).

Human rights advocates advocated for the ousting of a corrupt regime, citing a litany of atrocities. The bereaved families of past victims, such as Navid Afkari, Sattar Beheshti, and Neda Agha Sultan, stood in solidarity with Mahsa's kin, underscoring the systemic oppression endured by dissenters. Reports from Netblocks revealed the government's routine disruption of internet (Human Rights Watch, 2024) services during protests, a tactic aimed at concealing domestic turmoil and quashing dissent. Furthermore, some mobile phone operators censored Mahsa Amini's name from text messages, exemplifying the regime's efforts to control the narrative and stifle public discourse. These coordinated suppressive measures highlighted the

regime's fear of transparency and its determination to cling to power at the expense of fundamental rights and democratic principles.

Hossein Ronaghi, a prominent blogger and civil activist, faced brutal aggression from security forces outside the courthouse, resulting in severe injuries and subsequent imprisonment. The regime's crackdown extended to social media platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter, which were systematically censored. In response, individuals resorted to VPNs to circumvent restrictions, utilizing Twitter as a platform to articulate grievances under the hashtag trend "For...". Singer Shervin Hajipour's anthem "Baraye" (meaning "for") (Kamalipour & Pavlik, 2023) swiftly gained traction, breaking records overnight, only for him to be promptly detained and his song removed from online platforms. Nevertheless, the song resonated deeply with the populace, becoming an anthem of resistance, sung defiantly in unison amid growing repression. This episode emphasizes the power of art and social media in galvanizing dissent against authoritarian regimes, despite concerted efforts to silence opposition voices.

Iranian diaspora staged demonstrations worldwide, including in the US, Canada, and Germany, denouncing the regime's oppression. Concurrently, Iran's president, implicated in past atrocities, propagated falsehoods about women's rights in Iran during a CBS interview, denying enforced hijab policies despite widespread dissent. Notably, he canceled an interview with CNN's Christiane Amanpour after she refused to wear a headscarf, highlighting the regime's intolerance of dissenting voices. In solidarity, school students joined the protests, defying authority by discarding their scarves, defacing images of the supreme leader, and singing the resistance anthem "Baraye". This collective defiance illustrates the resilience of Iranians against oppressive regimes, challenging state narratives and asserting their rights to freedom and self-expression.

The escalating death toll highlights the ongoing atrocities inflicted by state authorities. Testimonies from detainees paint a harrowing picture of rape, torture, and sexual violence perpetrated by morality and security officers. Reports of prison fires, resulting in protester deaths, underline the regime's brutality (Human Rights Watch, 2024) . Thousands of disappeared individuals, likely victims of extrajudicial killings, are buried anonymously, with families forbidden from mourning. Additionally, over a thousand people suffer permanent blindness from direct gunshot wounds to their faces. Despite the regime's claims of releasing prisoners (90,000), countless remain incarcerated, with daily executions reported. Recent revelations of a mass grave, housing over 8,000 bodies, expose the scale of government-sanctioned violence. Moreover, reports of chemical attacks on schoolgirls illustrate the regime's desperation to quash dissent. However, defiant acts of resistance persist, with women boldly flouting hijab laws and taking to the streets in protest, symbolizing resilience against oppressive forces, even in the face of grave danger.

Physical Assault

The echoes of pain still resonate within me, a haunting melody of abuse that projects through every part of my shattered existence. Each blow from my ex-husband's hand was a symphony of violence, orchestrated without rhyme or reason, defined by his alarming declaration of male supremacy (Nayyeri, 2013) . "Men should hit their wives," he shouted with a twisted sense of entitlement, a mantra designed to subjugate and dominate.

The scars of his brutality ran deeper than flesh and bone; they etched themselves into the very fabric of my being, staining my soul with the eternal mark of oppression. Even within the supposed sanctuary of healing, the hospital walls, the shadow of fear remained huge, silencing the cries of countless women like me who dared to defy the status quo.

I still recall the day I found myself lying in that sterile room, the acrid scent of antiseptic burning my nostrils as I struggled to regain consciousness. The memory is a blur of pain and confusion, punctuated by the cruel sting of needles piercing my skin, administered by indifferent hands that offered no solace, no relief from the violence.

Two female nurses hovered over me, their whispered words a grim confirmation of the horrors I had endured. Yet, their silence spoke volumes, a damning criticism of a society that turns a blind eye to the suffering of its most vulnerable members. In that moment, I realized that the battle for justice was not just fought in the courts or the corridors of power, but in the hearts and minds of those who witnessed the crimes committed against women.

When we returned home, a sharp pain in my index finger drew my attention, prompting a look that revealed its swollen state. The realization hit me: it was broken. As I cradled my injured hand, his mother entered the room, her eyes narrowing on my finger. With an unsettling calmness, she deduced the cause of my pain, her voice vibrated with a troubling acceptance. “Oh, it’s normal for men to hit women,” she commented ignorantly. “Sometimes they love you, and sometimes they get angry. Your cheek is sometimes kissed and sometimes slapped.” Her words were like a cold slap to my psyche, revealing the deeply rooted sexism that had shaped her perception of love and violence. In that moment, I felt an overwhelming sense of disappointment—not just for her complicity in her son’s abusive behavior, but for the societal norms that supported such beliefs.

As I went through her casual justification of violence, that profound words reverberated within me: “I freed a thousand slaves. I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves.”, this declaration shed light on the psychological difficulties that oppressed people confront, and I saw a parallel in my own battle. Many women, like the slaves she saved, are still

trapped in cycles of violence, often unable to recognize the severity of their situation and the possibility of liberation.

This heartbreaking debate highlighted a crucial truth: the normalization of domestic violence not only hurts individuals but also erodes the fabric of society. Silence and complicity become chains that bind us, while the struggle for empowerment requires us to confront and eliminate these harmful narratives. It is essential to awaken to the reality of our circumstances, to challenge the blind acceptance of violence as a facet of love, and to seek liberation from the oppressive structures that seek to control us.

In that moment of clarity, I vowed to break the cycle—to not only recognize my own chains but also to illuminate the paths to freedom for others. Just as Tubman's legacy inspires courage and resilience, I strive to contribute to a narrative that defies oppression and affirms the right to safety, dignity, and love free from violence. I vowed to never be complicit in my own oppression, to lend my voice to the chorus of rebellion that echoed across history.

I became a symbol of hope for others who were trapped in the shadows of fear and shame, offering a glimmer of light in the middle of the darkness that threatened to devour us all. But even as I stayed firm in the face of adversity, the forces of sexism and patriarchy conspired to silence me once more. The judge, a simple puppet of the system that sought to maintain the status quo, looked upon me with eyes devoid of empathy, his words a cruel reminder of my place in the world. "Men can punish their wives," he declared with a cold detachment that sent shivers down my spine, his remarks an offensive corruption of justice that exposed the structural inequities that dominate every aspect of our society (Moghissi, 2016) . In that moment, I realized that the fight for equality was far from over, that the battle for liberation would be long and difficult. But I refuse to be intimidated into obedience, to accept my fate as a toy in the hands of

those who seek authority and control. For I am a woman, a fighter, a formidable force, and I will not rest until every imprisoned soul is set free.

So let the echoes of my resistance resound through the corridors of power, let them resound in the hearts of every woman who dares to dream of a better world. For in the end, it is not the chains that bind us that define us, but the strength of our resolve, the power of our collective voice, and the unyielding belief that one day, justice will prevail.

Sexual Assault

The prevailing societal attitudes in Iran regarding sexual assault are deeply troubling, reflecting a toxic mindset perpetuated by the Islamic regime (Human Rights Watch, 2024) . Victims of sexual assault, particularly women, are met with a disturbing lack of support, a consequence of the entrenched belief system that places blame squarely on the shoulders of the victims themselves. This insidious narrative suggests that a woman's attire, behavior, and demeanor somehow invite or provoke sexual violence—a notion that is not only unfounded but also incredibly harmful.

Regardless of their attire or conduct, women of all backgrounds and appearances fall prey to sexual assault. Shockingly, even within the sanctity of their own homes, women are not immune from such atrocities. Disturbing incidents, such as the barbaric attack on a family within their own garden, where women were brutally assaulted while their male relatives were restrained, underscore the gravity of the situation. Yet, instead of addressing the systemic failures that permit such heinous crimes to occur, authorities often resort to victim-blaming and scapegoating (Aghtaie, 2017) . The example of the police department director's callous remarks exemplifies this pervasive culture of victim-blaming and the refusal to hold perpetrators accountable. By attributing the responsibility for sexual assault to women's adherence to hijab

even within the confines of their homes, he not only absolves himself of accountability but also perpetuates the cycle of oppression and victimization.

This reprehensible behavior not only underscores the profound misogyny embedded within Iranian Islamic society but also exposes the complicity of those in positions of power in perpetuating gender-based violence and discrimination (Naghavi et al., 2019) . It is imperative that such regressive attitudes be challenged and dismantled to ensure the safety, dignity, and autonomy of all individuals, regardless of gender. Recent grassroots movements, like #MeToo, have demonstrated the transformative power of collective activism in exposing the pervasive nature of sexual violence and demanding accountability from perpetrators. These movements have empowered countless individuals to share their stories, fostering a culture of solidarity and support that transcends geographic and cultural boundaries (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Hirsch & Khan, 2020).

Acid Attacks Targeting Women in Esfahan!

Upon confronting one of my students for her prolonged absence, I was met with a chilling revelation. She, along with her colleagues, had been detained by law enforcement authorities. Her occupation as a journalist for a prominent local newspaper had placed her in the crosshairs of state scrutiny. The pretext for their arrest stemmed from a published report concerning a heinous trend: the barbaric act of acid attacks targeting women. These assaults were purportedly orchestrated by zealots emboldened by the directives of a prominent religious figure in the city, who had issued threats of acid punishment against women deemed non-compliant with the rigid standards of hijab attire.

Amidst the chaos, conflicting narratives emerged. Official denials clashed with reports of recurring acid attacks, instilling a pervasive atmosphere of confusion and fear. In the shadows of

official denial, the gruesome reality persisted. Gruesome images surfaced, depicting the haunting visages of women scarred by acid, stark reminders of the terror they endured. These victims, coerced into silence under the threat of government reprisal, found themselves abandoned by the very authorities entrusted with their protection.

The plight of these women epitomizes the harrowing reality faced by countless others in Iran. The systematic oppression and violence perpetrated against women, justified under the guise of religious righteousness, lay bare the egregious violations of human rights. Their voices silenced, their suffering dismissed, these women are left to navigate a treacherous landscape where justice remains elusive, and impunity reigns supreme.

The atmosphere was suffused with terror, an ominous cloud hovering over every woman, their minds haunted by the specter of acid attacks. Some chose to retreat within the confines of their homes, a futile attempt to shield themselves from the pervasive fear gripping their communities. Yet, in the face of such indiscriminate violence, there was no solace in the illusion of safety. The orchestrator of this reign of terror was none other than a revered priest who had not only condoned but glorified these abhorrent acts. Such perpetrators, devoid of humanity, desecrate the very essence of womanhood, inflicting irreparable physical, emotional, and social scars that reverberate throughout a lifetime.

How can one claim to be human while perpetrating such atrocities? Even the most primal of creatures exhibit a sense of restraint absent in these depraved individuals. To confine women to the domestic sphere, reducing them to mere vessels for procreation and subservient to male dominance, is an affront to basic decency. The self-serving nature of such tyranny is a testament to its inherent savagery. Those entrusted with governance, complicit in this systemic oppression, stand as a disgrace to the principles of humanity.

I recall with anguish the palpable fear etched on the faces of my students and friends, their trepidation palpable at the mere sound of a passing motorcycle or the sight of unfamiliar men. The irony is bitter indeed: those who dared to sound the alarm, to advocate for the safety of women, found themselves silenced by the very authorities sworn to protect them. Meanwhile, the perpetrators roam free, shielded by the impenetrable veil of state endorsement.

In the heart of this darkness, the resilience of Iranian women shines brightly, a beacon of hope amidst the encroaching shadows of oppression. Though their voices may be stifled, their spirit remains unbroken, their courage undiminished in the face of unspeakable horrors. The pervasive presence of strict dress codes compels women to conceal their bodies under the mandatory hijab, symbolizing the pervasive control imposed upon them. This mandatory covering serves as a constant reminder of their subordinate status, relegating them to the margins of society.

This is not just a story—it is a harrowing reality that Iranians must confront. We cannot allow ourselves to become desensitized to such cruelty. We must stand in solidarity with the victims and demand justice for all those who have suffered at the hands of these heartless perpetrators. Only then can we begin to heal the wounds inflicted upon our country and reclaim our sense of security and dignity.

International Women's Day 2023

During a period of unrest in Iran, reports emerged of disturbing incidents targeting girls' schools. These attacks involved the use of chemical bombs, leaving students suffocating and some hospitalized. The sinister orchestration of these events, including the deliberate confinement of students by school principals, suggested collusion with the authoritarian

government. This suspicion was reinforced by the government's handpicked appointees, chosen for their allegiance to religious doctrines and support of the regime.

The government attempted to cover up these atrocities with a preposterous narrative, blaming students for purportedly placing orange peels on heaters to fabricate the sensation of suffocation. This blatant falsehood aimed to discredit the victims and obscure the government's culpability. However, such crude attempts at deception failed to quell the outrage brewing among that privy to the truth. Frustrated by the government's censorship, one individual resolved to expose these injustices to the world. With the internet disconnected to stifle dissent, disseminating information became an arduous task. Yet, the urgency to shed light on the atrocities unfolding in Iran spurred this individual to seek alternative means of communication.

In documenting these events, we are compelled to confront the harsh reality endured by women in Iran and to advocate for their rights and freedoms, which have been unjustly curtailed by a regime intent on silencing dissent and perpetuating its own tyranny.

On the morning of March 8th, 2023, I received an email from one of my professors, whose course centered around diversity and equity in schools. She commended my bravery for daring to compare the education systems of the U.S. and Iran, and for addressing the equity issues prevalent in the latter. In her message, she extended her congratulations, lauding not just me, but all women in Iran for being among the strongest in the world, bravely advocating for their rights despite perilous circumstances. Included in her email was a link detailing how Jill Biden, the First Lady of the U.S., awarded the Bravery Award of International Women's Day to Iranian women who had tirelessly fought for their basic human rights over the past year, rallying under the banner of "Women, Life, Freedom". I felt a surge of joy knowing that she had remembered me and acknowledged the struggles faced by women in Iran.

I endeavored to speak out in public, seeking out a venue to participate in any Women's Day ceremonies. My search led me to an event organized by the AAUW (American Association of Women in Universities), under the management and coordination of Kansas Senator Dr. Usha Reddi. Though I secured last-minute permission to attend, I had missed the registration deadline. Despite reaching out to friends to accompany me, I found myself alone due to their varied excuses. Undeterred, I braved the drizzle and ventured forth, feeling a weight on my chest, driven by the urgent need to address the plight of teenage girls in schools.

Upon arrival, I found the ceremony already underway, with four speakers from diverse backgrounds discussing women's issues. Their words resonated deeply with me, reflecting the harsh realities faced not only by women in my own country, Iran, but by women worldwide. As the event drew to a close, I seized the opportunity to raise my hand and ask if I could share insights about Iran. Despite the time constraints, Senator Reddi, acknowledging the recent women's demonstrations in Iran, graciously granted me ten minutes to speak. Grateful for the opportunity, I began speaking, acutely aware of the limited time I had to convey the chaotic reality of Iran. Overwhelmed by emotion, I found myself unable to contain my tears as I shared the dire situation faced by Iranian women, who risked their lives for basic rights. Witnessing the audience's shock and empathy, I continued speaking, my words prompting tears from many and eliciting profound sympathy for the plight of Iranian women.

Following the ceremony, Senator Reddi approached me, expressing her previous search for an Iranian panelist for the event. Despite her efforts, she had been unable to find a willing participant. While appreciative of her acknowledgment, I couldn't shake a sense of emptiness, feeling that I had only fulfilled a fraction of my duty as a messenger to the people. Subsequent meetings with the senator reinforced my conviction that more needed to be done. I expressed my

belief that reaching a larger audience and fostering greater awareness were imperative. Encouraged by the Senator, I resolved to delve academically into this topic, which had always been close to my heart.

International Women's Day 2024

Iran Flag

Two months prior to International Women's Day this year (2024), I eagerly accepted an invitation to be a panelist. My excitement was fueled by the opportunity to shed light on the myriad ways in which women are suppressed in Iran, drawing from my own experiences. Additionally, I advocated for the use of our country's original flag (Appendix A, picture A1), stressing that it symbolizes our identity and cannot be whimsically altered. I convinced the organizers that our flag embodies the enduring love of its citizens and cannot be erased.

During the event, I found myself constrained by time limitations and the audience's patience, unable to delve into the depth of issues as desired. Nonetheless, I felt a sense of accomplishment in fulfilling my duty, albeit in a small capacity. It was disheartening to realize that many attendees were unaware of the realities faced by women in Iran, highlighting a pervasive lack of global awareness.

This experience underscored the urgent need for increased dialogue and advocacy regarding women's rights in Iran and beyond. It also revealed the importance of amplifying marginalized voices and challenging misconceptions. Despite the constraints, I remain committed to continuing this crucial conversation and advocating for the rights and dignity of women everywhere.

Yalda Night

The recent decision by the Iranian regime to alter the calendar and erase significant cultural events spanning over 3000 years reflects a continued pattern of historical manipulation and cultural suppression. This regime's systematic effort to rewrite Iran's history aims to obscure its rich cultural heritage and impose a distorted narrative that serves its own agenda. By altering symbols such as the national flag and eradicating cultural milestones, the regime seeks to undermine the collective memory of Iranians and reshape their identity according to its ideological framework.

These changes are not isolated incidents but part of a broader strategy to rewrite history, casting Iran's past solely in terms of external invasions and religious impositions. The regime's narrative reduces Iran's history to a mere footnote, beginning with the Arab conquest and the imposition of Islam. Such a narrative not only distorts the reality of Iran's diverse cultural legacy but also erases the contributions of countless generations who shaped its civilization over millennia.

Despite the regime's attempts at historical revisionism, many Iranians remain steadfast in preserving their cultural identity and heritage. They refuse to acquiesce to the regime's efforts to erase their history and continue to honor their traditions, even in the face of censorship and repression. This resilience underscores the enduring strength of Iran's cultural legacy and the resilience of its people in the face of authoritarian control.

The regime's stranglehold on information and its draconian censorship apparatus extend to every aspect of Iranian life, including education and publishing. In contrast to other nations where historical truths are openly acknowledged, Iran's regime manipulates historical narratives to serve its own interests, depriving its citizens of a nuanced understanding of their heritage. By

controlling the narrative presented in history books and suppressing dissenting voices, the regime seeks to maintain its grip on power and perpetuate its distorted version of Iran's past.

The cherished cultural tradition of Yalda Night, deeply rooted in Iran's history since 502 BC, stands as a testament to the enduring cultural richness of the region. This annual celebration, marking the onset of winter and the longest night of the year, holds profound significance for Iranians, serving as a time for communal gatherings, feasting, and literary pursuits, particularly the recitation of poetry by luminaries such as Hafez and Ferdowsi.

Yalda Night is a vibrant tapestry of customs and symbols, with fruits like pomegranates, watermelons, and persimmons adorning tables, their red hues evoking the promise of dawn and the vitality of life. The tradition of wearing red garments further underscores the symbolic battle between light and darkness, with the sun's radiance seen as a harbinger of goodness and unity against the backdrop of night's shadows.

The festivities of Yalda Night are a testament to the enduring bonds of family and community, as generations come together to share in a sumptuous feast of traditional dishes, fruits, nuts, and pastries specially prepared for the occasion. Following the meal, elders regale the gathering with tales, anecdotes, and merriment, fostering a sense of joy and camaraderie that transcends generations.

However, the oppressive regime in Iran seeks to extinguish the vibrant spirit of Yalda Night and other cultural celebrations that bring happiness and unity to the Iranian people. Over the past four decades, this regime has systematically sought to erase such joyful occasions from the national consciousness, replacing them with somber commemorations glorifying the deaths of so-called "saintly" figures.

By suppressing cultural traditions like Yalda Night, the regime aims to cultivate a sense of despondency and despair among Iranians, depriving them of moments of joy and connection with their cultural heritage. Instead, the regime imposes a bleak narrative that glorifies martyrdom and mourning, seeking to stifle expressions of joy and dissent alike. Yet, despite the regime's efforts to erase cherished traditions, the resilient spirit of the Iranian people endures. Through acts of defiance and resistance, Iranians continue to uphold their cultural identity and celebrate the traditions that bind them together, refusing to succumb to the regime's attempts to erase their collective memory.

Upon receiving news of the Iranian regime's decree to shutter establishments hosting Yalda ceremonies, I was overcome with indignation. Determined to challenge this oppressive policy, I resolved to take action. A friend mentioned university committees dedicated to supporting cultural events, providing a potential avenue for resistance. Fueled by a burning passion to advocate for our cultural heritage, I embarked on a quest to rally support for our cause.

As a woman accustomed to fighting for basic rights in Iran, I felt compelled to seize this opportunity to amplify our voices and shed light on the realities of our country. My resolve intensified as I delved into preparations for a grand-scale event, driven by a long-held aspiration to showcase the authentic essence of our culture. For too long, our cultural identity has been overshadowed by the regime's relentless propagation of images depicting war and brutality, distorting the true fabric of Iranian society.

My mission extended beyond mere celebration; it was a crusade to dispel the regime's propaganda and reveal the resilience of the Iranian people in the face of oppression. I sought to awaken the populace to the stark disparity between the regime's fabricated narrative and the lived

experiences of ordinary Iranians. Despite widespread discontent with the government, the absence of viable means to challenge the regime's iron grip on power has left many feeling powerless and marginalized.

The regime's penchant for violence in quelling dissent has instilled fear and stifled dissent, rendering peaceful resistance perilous. Yet, I remained undeterred, recognizing the urgent need to confront the regime's attempts to erase our cultural heritage and silence our voices. My efforts were not merely about preserving tradition; they were a defiant assertion of our right to reclaim our identity and resist the tyranny that seeks to extinguish it. As preparations for the event unfolded, I was buoyed by a sense of solidarity and determination among fellow Iranians eager to reclaim ownership of their cultural narrative. Together, we stood as a beacon of defiance against the regime's oppressive dictates, determined to safeguard our heritage and amplify the voices of those silenced by tyranny.

The narrative of Iran's rich historical tapestry and the inherent values of its people, rooted in familial bonds, peace, and respect for diverse cultures, stands in stark contrast to the actions of the current regime. Throughout millennia, Iranian society has thrived on these principles, fostering a vast array of ethnicities and identities within its borders. However, the present regime seeks to erase this legacy, imposing its will through marginalization and oppression.

In an effort to shed light on the true sentiments of the Iranian populace, an individual like me embarked on a rigorous journey to present the reality of life under the regime to the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging committee (DEIB). After months of painstaking preparation, the appointment with the committee proved to be a tense affair, stretching well beyond its allotted time as inquiries delved deep into the heart of the matter.

Undeterred by the pressure, I articulated a compelling case, emphasizing the urgency of showcasing the authentic voice of the Iranian people on a global stage. Despite the obstacles, the goal remained clear: to secure the necessary resources to amplify the collective desire to uphold the values of family, peace, and cultural diversity that define Iranian identity.

Yet, behind this endeavor lay a sense of unease akin to a soldier awaiting orders, underscoring the gravity of the task at hand. The stakes were high, for the budget requested was not merely for an event but a platform through which the true essence of Iran could be revealed to the world.

The long-awaited email arrived, confirming the allocation of \$20500 for our event. It marked both a moment of elation and profound weightiness. With the funds secured, I keenly felt the burden of ensuring the event's success. As an association accustomed to operating without financial backing, this new reality brought a mix of novelty and anticipation. The significance transcended mere organizational logistics; it was a matter of representing the reputation of Iran. With just 40 days on the clock, the race to orchestrate every aspect commenced. From obtaining necessary certifications to coordinating performances, from promotional efforts to logistical arrangements like catering and décor, the list was exhaustive.

Balancing these tasks alongside academic commitments amplified the pressure. Sleepless nights became routine, as the stress of managing unforeseen setbacks and last-minute changes took its toll. Every cancellation necessitated swift improvisation, adding layers of complexity to an already demanding process.

Yet, amidst the chaos, there remained a sense of purpose. This event wasn't just about logistics; it was a statement—a testament to the resilience and dedication of those committed to showcasing the essence of Iranian culture. Our event served as a platform to illuminate the significance of Yalda night, promoting cross-cultural understanding and education on diversity,

inclusion, and discrimination. Yalda night symbolized unity and inclusivity, bridging students and the wider community across various backgrounds. It was a pivotal moment in fostering a more tolerant and empathetic society, where the richness of each individual's identity is revered.

The participation of esteemed guests added gravitas to the occasion, many of whom were unfamiliar with Yalda Night's traditions and were captivated by its cultural significance. The inclusion of traditional music further enriched the experience, notably featuring a female vocalist who had previously been prohibited from performing in Iran. Her newfound freedom to share her talent and showcase Persian music not only resonated with the audience but also highlighted the suppression endured by Iranian women. For decades, Iranian women have faced systematic oppression, including the denial of basic rights such as the freedom to sing. This suppression stems from religious edicts propagated by the regime, which views female voices as inherently sinful and seductive. Such archaic beliefs have stifled the voices of countless women, relegating them to silence and invisibility in the public sphere. However, through initiatives like our event, these silenced voices are beginning to be heard. By providing a platform for expression and celebration, we challenge the oppressive norms imposed by the regime and amplify the voices of women who have long been marginalized. Our event stands as a testament to the resilience of Iranian women and serves as a beacon of hope for a future where gender equality and freedom of expression prevail over antiquated dogma.

It's rather ironic how narratives of heaven and hell often revolve around the portrayal of women, underscoring the systematic effort by men to disenfranchise and suppress them in every sphere of life. These constructs seem tailored to perpetuate the marginalization of women, relegating them to the sidelines of society while prioritizing their roles solely as wives and mothers, intended to produce offspring who might serve as future soldiers in wars orchestrated

by men. Despite assertions of ensuring women's safety in times of war, the brunt of suffering invariably falls upon them as they endure the loss of loved ones—fathers, brothers, sons, or spouses. Historically, authoritarian regimes and dictators have exhibited a consistent pattern of subjugating women by confining them to familial roles and promoting a singular focus on childbearing. This oppressive attitude towards women is glaringly evident in regimes like that of Iran, where women are defined solely by their relationships to male figures—as mothers, wives, daughters, or sisters—never as autonomous individuals with inherent rights and agency. The recent celebration of Yalda Night served as a significant platform for our cultural association to showcase Iran's rich heritage and resist the erasure of our identities perpetuated by the oppressive regime. As president of the association, I spearheaded months of tireless efforts to organize the event, and the overwhelming positive response received via emails afterwards was a testament to the impact of our endeavors.

Taking the stage that night, I seized the opportunity to shed light on the plight of women in Iran, highlighting the systemic suppression they endure and the urgent need for societal change. It was a moment of personal triumph, as someone who had experienced firsthand the constraints imposed upon women in my homeland, to stand before an audience and champion our collective struggle for freedom and recognition. By featuring a female singer and showcasing diverse aspects of Iranian culture, we challenged the narrow narrative propagated by the regime, fostering a newfound appreciation for the complexities and richness of our heritage. This cultural victory represented a significant shift in perceptions, as people began to recognize and value the contributions of Iranian women beyond their prescribed roles.

Yet, amidst the celebrations, it remains crucial to acknowledge the ongoing struggle for gender equality and women's rights in Iran. The fight against entrenched patriarchal norms and

oppressive regimes is far from over, but moments like Yalda Night serve as beacons of hope, inspiring us to continue advocating for a more inclusive and equitable society where women are empowered to thrive as individuals, free from the shackles of oppression.

Understanding Trauma: An Analytical Exploration of its Impact on Personal Life and Growth

The narrative I have shared captures the harrowing reality faced by many women in Iran and other oppressive societies. Let's delve into the trauma and its effects on my life: The violence I've witnessed and experienced, including the brutal assault by repressive forces, has left me with both physical and psychological wounds. The vivid descriptions of the assault and its aftermath highlight the persistent pain and suffering I've endured. My broken rib symbolizes not only the brutality of the assault but also the enduring impact of oppressive regimes on the bodies and minds of women. The challenges people face in seeking help and accessing medical aid in repressive societies. Fear of reprisal and further violence often forces individuals to suffer in silence, compounding their trauma. The use of shotguns firing lead pellets inflicts severe physical harm, resulting in injuries that are both visible and potentially life-threatening. The description of my friend's face becoming a "canvas for these lethal projectiles" underscores the brutality of the assault and the extent of the physical damage inflicted. The urgency of the situation is emphasized by the need to extract the embedded pellets to prevent further harm, highlighting the immediate medical risks faced by my friend. The frantic efforts to find skilled medical assistance amidst the oppressive regime's control over healthcare facilities add another layer of urgency and peril to the narrative. The narrative illustrates the oppressive regime's control over healthcare, turning hospitals into dangerous territory for dissenters. The fear of reprisal and the risk of being identified by authorities create significant barriers to accessing

necessary medical treatment, exacerbating my trauma and increasing my sense of vulnerability and isolation. Witnessing such brutality has instilled a sense of helplessness and paralysis, making it difficult to move forward or find solace. Despite the challenges, there are glimpses of resilience and solidarity, with courageous doctors and nurses offering aid to demonstrators in clandestine settings.

In the case of physical assault, the judge's cold detachment and endorsement of male supremacy reinforce systemic injustices that undermine women's rights and safety. Similarly, in the case of sexual assault, authorities' victim-blaming attitudes and refusal to hold perpetrators accountable contribute to a culture of impunity and further victimization. Victim-blaming is a pervasive issue in narratives, where victims of assault are unfairly blamed for their own victimization based on factors such as attire or behavior. This harmful mindset not only absolves perpetrators of responsibility but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces oppressive power dynamics.

Women's experiences of divorce in Iran can take a significant physical and emotional toll, resulting in symptoms of depression, anxiety, and even physical health issues. The prolonged legal battles and societal pressures add to the burden, exacerbating women's distress and sense of helplessness.

The pervasive atmosphere of fear and terror is palpable throughout the narrative which highlights the systematic oppression and violence perpetrated against us in Iran, particularly in the form of acid attacks. The trauma has left me haunted by recurring nightmares and a sense of fear that permeates my daily life in constant dread of becoming victims of acid attacks.

The narrative exposes the inherent bias within religious regulations in Islam, which favor men and perpetuate the subjugation of women. This bias raises questions about the fairness and integrity of religious doctrines that sanction discrimination and oppression.

These acts of brutality are not isolated incidents but are instead part of a broader pattern of gender-based violence fueled by religious extremism and patriarchal norms. These planned acid attacks aimed to force women to stay at home, preventing them from participating in society, gaining education, and seeking employment. The attackers believed a woman's duty should solely be to mother children and raise them.

The mandatory hijab serves as a potent symbol of the control and subjugation imposed upon us in Iranian society. It represents not only the physical constraints placed upon our bodies but also the broader social and political forces that seek to marginalize and silence us. The narrative of Mahsa Amini's tragic fate highlights the brutality of her death at the hands of morality police for allegedly improper wearing of the compulsory hijab. This serves as a stark reminder of the risks associated with dissent in Iran and the grave consequences faced by those who challenge the oppressive regime.

The legal framework in Iran disproportionately favors men in matters of divorce, leaving women with limited options and often forcing them to endure harmful marriages. Social stigma surrounding divorce further compounds the challenges faced by women, contributing to their reluctance to seek divorce despite experiencing abuse and unhappiness in their marriages. My ex-husband's belief that "men should hit their wives" reflects a deeply ingrained sense of entitlement and superiority, perpetuating a cycle of abuse and oppression. In the case of physical assault, the story illustrates how violence against women is normalized and even justified within certain societal contexts. The stories illustrate how women in Iran often face control and

manipulation within marriage, where husbands wield disproportionate power and restrict women's autonomy. This can manifest in various forms, including arbitrary restrictions on visiting family members and denying basic rights to women.

The regime's decision to alter the calendar and erase significant cultural events reflects a deliberate effort to manipulate history and suppress our cultural identity. This systematic erasure aims to redefine our cultural heritage according to the regime's ideological framework, depriving us of our rich history and cultural traditions.

While religious rhetoric may espouse principles of equality and reverence for humanity, the practical application of these principles often contradicts these ideals, leading to the marginalization and oppression of certain groups, particularly women.

The monopolization of religious discourse by men further exacerbates gender inequality and undermines the credibility of religious institutions. This exclusionary practice perpetuates systemic disenfranchisement and reinforces patriarchal power structures. Dissent against religious doctrines or questioning of religious beliefs can incur severe consequences, including threats to one's life.

The erosion of belief in religion and God amidst oppressive conditions represents a deeply personal and transformative journey for individuals. It involves grappling with questions of faith, identity, and authenticity in the face of societal pressures and threats to one's safety. Navigating the complex terrain of religious oppression requires individuals to carefully balance self-preservation with the pursuit of truth and freedom. It entails finding alternative channels for expression, seeking support from trusted allies, and fostering communities that prioritize freedom of belief and expression.

My vocal protest and subsequent reflections underscore the complexities of navigating freedom and dissent, both within Iran and in the United States. The juxtaposition of oppressive restrictions in Iran with the relative freedom to voice dissent in the US highlights the stark contrast in lived experiences and the importance of safeguarding fundamental rights. The guilt of surviving while witnessing the suffering of others adds another layer of psychological distress. The inability to intervene effectively, despite my desire to do so, exacerbates feelings of moral anguish and powerlessness.

The trauma continues to exert a profound impact on my mental health, manifesting in persistent nightmares and emotional distress. The passage of time has done little to diminish the intensity of these effects. However, amidst the darkness, there is also a glimmer of resilience and determination, signaling my steadfast commitment to fighting for basic human rights and challenging the systemic injustices that plague society, even in the face of grave personal risk. This inspires others to stand in solidarity and demand an end to gender-based violence.

Despite the regime's attempts to suppress cultural traditions like Yalda Night, we demonstrate resilience and defiance by organizing events to celebrate our cultural heritage. My determination to resist the regime's oppressive policies and showcase the authenticity of Iranian culture reflects a broader commitment to preserving our cultural identity and challenging authoritarian control. Protests, social media campaigns, and acts of defiance symbolized the resilience and determination of those fighting for freedom and justice.

Family support plays a crucial role in women's resilience and ability to navigate the challenges of discrimination especially in divorce. Supportive family members can provide emotional comfort, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, help women regain their confidence and rebuild their lives after divorce. Despite the stigma surrounding divorce in

Iranian society, there is a growing recognition of the need to challenge harmful norms and empower women to seek happiness and fulfillment outside of marriage. Open discussions about divorce and support from family and peers are essential in challenging societal attitudes and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment for divorced individuals.

Mahsa Amini's death raises serious questions about accountability and transparency within law enforcement. Despite public outcry and evidence of brutality, authorities attempted to cover up the incident, denying responsibility and disseminating misleading narratives. This underscores the importance of critical examination of authority's actions and demands for justice in safeguarding individual rights and societal integrity. The regime responded to dissent with swift and brutal repression, including arrests, severe violence and atrocities, rape, torture, extrajudicial killings, and chemical attacks, confiscation of assets, and revocation of professional privileges which highlights the regime's intolerance of opposition and efforts to silence voices. Reports of prison fires, protester deaths, and mass graves expose the scale of government-sanctioned violence and the regime's desperation to quash dissent.

Conclusion

In conclusion, autoethnography offers a rich and multifaceted approach to research, combining personal narratives with cultural analysis to address pressing social issues. By embracing reflexivity and ethical considerations, autoethnographers can contribute to broader conversations about identity, power, and social justice. As a methodological framework and ontological experience, autoethnography has the potential to inspire transformative change both within academia and society at large. By synthesizing existing literature on these themes, the autoethnographer can establish a robust theoretical framework and methodological approach for conducting intersectional autoethnography.

Additionally, engaging with diverse disciplinary perspectives and methodologies enhances the depth and rigor of the autoethnographic analysis, enriching the understanding of lived experiences within complex socio-cultural contexts. The literature review should integrate research from diverse fields, including psychology, sociology, feminism, and qualitative research methodologies, intersectionality, identity, trauma, resilience, and the power of personal narrative, to provide a comprehensive understanding of autoethnography and its implications for personal, academic, and social transformation. By engaging with existing scholarship and theoretical frameworks, researchers can navigate the complexities of autoethnographic practice and contribute to ongoing discussions about knowledge production, representation, and justice within academia and beyond. By integrating existing research and theories from scholars the autoethnographic thesis can deepen our understanding of the complexities of lived experiences within marginalized communities.

Chapter 5 - Envisioning Change and Transformation in Gender Equity in Iran

This chapter offers an aspirational vision for a future where gender equity is a central value in Iran's social, legal, and educational frameworks. Drawing inspiration from themes by Dolan & Zabel (2012) in *A.D. After Disclosure*, which explores transformative change through revelation and transparency, this chapter imagines what could be possible if Iran were to embrace gender equity as a core principle. By envisioning a paradigm shift where systemic injustices are acknowledged and addressed, we can explore a roadmap to societal change that would empower Iranian women in significant and lasting ways.

The Paradigm Shift: From Secrecy to Transparency

Just as *A.D. After Disclosure* contemplates the impact of government revelations on society, a similar shift in Iran could unfold if the government openly addressed gender-based discrimination. An acknowledgment of systemic inequities—rooted in legal, economic, and cultural barriers—would create space for public dialogue and transparency. As Dolan & Zabel (2012) suggest, revelations that challenge entrenched beliefs can spark transformative societal changes. In this context, Iranian women would be free to openly share their experiences and advocate for reforms without fear of retaliation, setting the foundation for an inclusive society where equity is prioritized.

Such a paradigm shift would open pathways for women to participate in reshaping social narratives, fostering dialogue that challenges traditional gender roles. This open discourse would encourage policymakers, educators, and activists to collaborate in identifying and dismantling barriers that inhibit women's autonomy and advancement. As (Gilligan & Snider, 2018) argue, genuine change often emerges when societies collectively confront their own biases and recognize the contributions of marginalized groups.

Education as a Tool for Empowerment

A pivotal component in realizing gender equity is education. In a future where Iranian policies champion equitable access to education, girls and women would be able to pursue learning on equal terms with men, contributing to an intellectual and cultural renaissance. Dolan & Zabel (2012) emphasize the power of knowledge in reshaping perspectives; similarly, empowering women through education enables them to challenge oppressive structures and advocate effectively for their rights.

Imagine a landscape where educational institutions in Iran actively promote gender equity, integrating critical thinking into curricula that challenge traditional gender norms. Such reforms could encourage female students to aspire to leadership roles, creating a pipeline of educated women who could drive policy reforms that impact their communities. Scholars like Baier (2016) and Noddings (1986) underscore the importance of education in empowering individuals to take ownership of their narratives, fostering environments where women's voices are central to discussions of national progress.

The Role of Advocacy and Community Support

In an Iran committed to gender equity, advocacy networks and community organizations would flourish, creating a robust support system for women's rights. Just as *A.D. After Disclosure* highlights the strength of shared understanding, a collaborative framework for advocacy in Iran could unite voices, pooling resources and amplifying the reach of feminist movements across the country.

This network could serve as a vital platform for raising awareness of gender-based discrimination and fostering engagement across all sectors of society. Advocacy organizations would empower women to not only demand equitable treatment but also actively participate in shaping policies that impact their lives. Scholars such as Stack (1986) and Clinchy (1996) highlight the transformative potential of collective action, suggesting that unified voices can build momentum for sustainable change. By sharing stories and mobilizing support, advocacy groups would lay the groundwork for a culture that values gender equity and human rights.

Vision for Policy Reform

Legal reform is an essential component of achieving gender equity. In this envisioned future, Iran would revisit its legal framework, making progressive amendments to family,

inheritance, and employment laws to empower women. Such reforms would address disparities in areas like marital rights, property ownership, and workplace protections, enabling women to enjoy equal rights under the law.

A comprehensive policy model, where advocacy intersects with legal reform, could catalyze these changes, offering a framework for progressive reform. This model would encourage collaboration between legal experts, policymakers, and women's rights activists, fostering an environment where gender equity is not only a legal mandate but also a social commitment. Scholars like Moghadam (2018) and Rostami-Povey (2012) emphasize the importance of legal reforms in empowering women, reinforcing the notion that systemic change requires both structural and cultural transformation.

The Potential for International Solidarity

International solidarity movements can play a significant role in supporting the aspirations of Iranian women. Just as *A.D. After Disclosure* underscores the global implications of transformative revelations, a commitment to gender equity in Iran could inspire support from human rights organizations and women's movements worldwide. International allies could offer resources, training, and advocacy efforts to amplify the voices of Iranian women calling for change.

Organizations like Amnesty International (2023) 0/0/0000 0:00:00 AM and the work of scholars such as Ferree and Tripp (2006) highlight the impact of global solidarity on local movements, showing how international pressure can drive policy change. By joining forces with global allies, Iranian women would strengthen their ability to advocate for gender equity, creating a network of support that transcends borders and cultural differences.

Conclusion: Aspirations for a Just Future

Although Iran's current political landscape poses significant challenges to gender equity, envisioning a future grounded in inclusivity and empowerment is a vital step in advocating for change. Drawing parallels to the transformative ideas in *A.D. After Disclosure*, we recognize that societal progress often stems from the courage to confront established norms and embrace transparency.

Through education, community support, legal reforms, and international solidarity, the aspirations for gender equity in Iran can become a tangible reality. By empowering women and fostering an inclusive society, Iran can work toward a future where gender equity is not merely an ideal but a lived experience for all citizens.

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Appendix

Appendix A Photograph A.1



Appendix A Photograph A.2



Appendix B Text B.1

Here is an example of what I wrote.

The rules would consider women half of men and therefore they will get half inheritance of what their brothers get. Additionally, women will get one eighth of their husbands' property after his death if they have children otherwise nothing. But men get all of their wives' property after her death.

Appendix B Text B.2

Here is an example of what ChatGPT rephrased.

These laws, steeped in archaic gender biases, designate women as lesser inheritors, granting them a mere fraction of what their male counterparts receive. Under these rules, a daughter inherits only half of what her brother does, while a widow, bereaved of her husband, is entitled to a mere eighth of his estate if she bears children; a paltry fraction that dwindles to nothingness should she remain childless. Conversely, men are bestowed with the entirety of their spouses' assets upon their demise.