

THE STRUGGLE FOR GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN AN IRANIAN ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK:

THE CASE OF ONE MILLION SIGNATURES CAMPAIGN

By
Gilda Seddighi



(Photo: Ghasemi, <http://www.payvand.com/news/06/mar/1080.html>)

Submitted to the Faculty of Psychology in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of
Master of Philosophy in Gender and Development
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Dedicated to Alan Khaderi with Love

Preface

This thesis examines the complexity of relations between the context, the actions and the created discourse of gender equality in the collective action of One Million Signatures Campaign. Focus is on revealing the struggle for legislative changes among Iranian men and women. Chapter 1 introduces the context of the study and my intentions. Chapter 2 describes the methods used to conduct the investigation, and the problems faced. Chapter 3 draws a picture of Iranian women's movement on the background of Iranian modern history. Chapter 4 opens up theoretical discussion in order to understand the purpose of this study. Chapter 5, 6 and 7 describe and discuss the collected data. And finally, chapter 8 summarizes the analysis of data and some suggestion about further investigation on Iranian women's movement.

A number of individuals and institutions have been of great assistance in the making of this thesis at different stages, from preparations and my visit to the field, to the writing of the thesis. I am very grateful to my project supervisor, Marit Tjomsland, for her guidance and support in the drafting of the project proposal, the analysis of data and writing process of the thesis.

I express my gratitude to all individuals who helped me in the process of gathering data. I am grateful to the members of One Million Signatures Campaign in Rasht, who warmly accepted me among their ranks, and opened the gate for further research. Without the kind help of the members of One Million Signatures Campaign in Tehran, who allowed me access to their seminars, workshops and social practices, this thesis would never have come to life. I think no word of gratitude would be sufficient to thank them, the people who can not even be named because of the political pressure on the social movement and the investigations they might become victims of.

Due to political sensitivity of social science research in Iran, I relied mostly on my family during data gathering. I owe my thanks to my parents, Mahin Maddah and Ali Seddighi, for their emotional support in the stressful days of gathering data in Tehran.

I am thankful to individuals from different institutions of the University of Bergen, for stimulating discussions on the issue of social movements, especially women's movement in Iran during data analysis and writing of this thesis. Furthermore, my gratitude covers the academic guidance I have received from the staff at the Gender and Development Studies,

Haldis Haukanes, Hilde Jakobsen, Thera Mjaaland. And last but not least, I thank my classmates for the useful discussions, suggestions, as well as moral and emotional support in the process of writing this thesis.

Gilda Seddighi

Bergen, May 2009

List of names and concepts:

Ayatollah Sane'i: Ayatollah Sane'i is a high-ranking clergyman who was the former General State Prosecutor and member of both the Council of Guardians and the Supreme Judicial Council (two highest legal bodies in the Islamic Republic of Iran). In the 1980s, he was among many other clerics who returned from politics to their religious scholarship and teaching position in Qom. In the later years, Sane'i has become known for his new women-friendly interpretation of the Quran (See for more Mir-Hosseini, 2000a, p. 144).

Basij: Basij literally means “mobilization”. Nirooy-e moqavemat-e basij (Basij Resistance Force) is an Iranian volunteer-based paramilitary force founded by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

Chador: Full veiling, a cloth which covers the whole female body.

Fatwa: In the Islamic faith, Fatwa is a religious opinion on Islamic law issued by an Islamic scholar. In the Islamic Republic of Iran where the legislation is based on Sharia law, the Fatwa might change the legislation (See for more "Oxford Reference Online", 2009a).

Hijab: Veiling

Haram: Religiously prohibited.

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps: IRGC was established in 1982 by Khomeini to protect the revolutionary goals. IRGC acts both internally and in foreign countries. Its domestic role is to enforce Islamic morality, such as ensuring women's appropriate appearance.

Khorasani: She is the author and translator of numerous articles and books on women's rights issues since the 1990s. She is the founding member of the Women's Cultural Centre, the One Million Signatures Campaign, and member of the organized network of the Feminist School (Rostami-Povey, 2005).

Marja': Marja' in Arabic literally means “source”. Here, it refers to clerics who have reached a level of education that makes them legitimate Islamic source for Shii Muslims.

Marja'-e Taqlid: Marja'-e Taqlid literally means “source of emulation”. It is one of the key leaders of Twelve Imam Shiism during the epoch of the occultation of the twelfth imam. Marja'-e Taqlid is a title of highest ranking clergies in Shiism , the one who guides those members of the Islamic community unable to exert independent judgment and interpretation of the Sharia law. With institutionalization of Islam in Iran, Marja'-e Taqlid became a political position in the Islamic Republic's system, who leads the members of the Islamic country during the period of the occultation of the twelfth imam ("Oxford Reference Online", 2009b).

Maraji: Plural of Marja'.

Mortad: Mortad is a reference to someone who has committed apostasy by leaving Islam.

Sharia: Islamic Law.

Short outline of the structure of power in Iran:

Supreme Leader:

At the top of the hierarchy of Iranian power structure is the Supreme Leader, currently Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The Supreme Leader, who is also called the leader of revolution, according to Iran's constitution is responsible for the administration of the domestic and foreign policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

President:

The second highest ranking official position is the presidency. The presidential candidate will first be selected by the Council of Guardians. While the president has the second highest ranking official position, the president and the state are not responsible for general policies. The president is mainly in charge of setting up the country's economic policies.

Parliament:

The Parliament, which is a unicameral legislative body, has 290 members. The Parliament's members will be elected by the citizens of Iran, but as the case of presidency, the electable candidates will first be selected by the Council of Guardians.

Assembly of Experts:

The Assembly of Experts has 86 elected members who are selected by the Council of Guardians. Members of the Assembly of Experts consecutively elect the Supreme Leader from within their own ranks.

Council of Guardians:

The Council of Guardians consists of twelve Islamic jurists. Six of the members are chosen by the Supreme Leader, and the remaining six are chosen by the Parliament. The members of the Council of Guardians interpret the constitution and decide if the laws passed by the Parliament are in correspondence with proportional Sharia law. The members have the power of veto over the Parliament.

Expediency Council:

According to the constitution of Iran, the Expediency Council works as an advisory body to the Supreme Leader.

Judiciary:

The Judiciary deals with public and civil cases, but is largely controlled by the Supreme Leader. (For more see "Iran Chamber Society", 2009)

The Supreme Leader: The leader of the revolution.

Velayat-e faqih: The concept of Velayat-e faqih consists of two concepts; Velayat (Guardianship) and Faqih (Islamic jurist). Velayat-e faqih literally means Guardianship of jurist. The concept, which derives from the understanding that the right of interpretation of Islamic laws belongs exclusively to maraji, was developed by Ayatollah Khomeini in relation to his theory of an Islamic government in the period 1960 to 1979. It later became a part of the structure of power in Iran. (See More "Oxford Reference Online", 2009c).

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Chapter 1

The struggle for gender equality within an Iranian Islamic framework:

The case of the One Million Signatures Campaign

1.1 Presentation of the study

Since the beginning, one of the main goals of the United Nations has been to “achieve international cooperation in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to, inter alia, sex” (“Division for the Advancement of Women”, 2007). In the 1960s, a new consciousness of the patterns of discrimination against women emerged and led to a rise in the number of organizations aimed at eliminating discrimination against women. This work resulted in the “Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women” (CEDAW) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979. In the 1980s-90s, it became clear that with respect to the creation of women’s human rights in the United Nations, there was a need for protection and fulfilment of these rights. At the fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995, state parties agreed on the incorporation of gender equality in all governmental/ national and international programmes (ibid, 2007). Integration of gender equality and human rights in development programmes was meant to ensure universal protection and fulfilment of women’s rights.

Whereas many governments get international help to fulfil human rights (through national policies), not all countries have respected and protected these rights by incorporating them into their national constitutions. Iran is one of these countries. This is one of the reasons why a study of women's rights in Iran is interesting; that programmes for gender equality are not supported or respected by Iranian government, but are in fact viewed as a threat to their Islamic ideology.

Three decades of rejecting the incorporation of CEDAW or women-friendly laws in Iranian legislation have often been interpreted as a sign of the restricting women’s situation in Iran. Knowing that, it was interesting to find out how such an open and active women’s movement

as the movement of One Million Signatures Campaign can exist in Iran. The first time I checked the websites of the One Million Signatures Campaign, I saw that it was demanding a new interpretation of the Sharia Law that would be in line with the universal human rights conventions. My initial curiosity about the campaign concerned how such a development was possible if the situation of Iranian women is as restricted as it has often been portrayed.

Studying the campaign's slogans and aims, I noticed a strong voice demanding women's human rights and gender equality which, compared to my previous studies of post-revolutionary women's movement, was new to this extent. The slogans of "demanding women's human rights" could be understood in relation to the global discourse of gender equality. However, as an Iranian, and having knowledge of the political situation in Iran, I was curious to know more about the internal Iranian discourse of gender equality. By studying the campaign's websites, I found that, while the term of gender equality was a very central issue for the campaign, no definition of the term was given. There was not much written about what they meant by gender equality.

The third issue that caught my attention was the campaign's structure, which is unique among Iranian social movements. The campaign attempts to lead a movement without a leader or a leadership, where activists initiate and participate in activities that are intended to lead to the change of legislation.

My first reflections around the campaign directed me towards these objectives:

To explore how the discourse of gender equality is created by the collective action of the One Million Signatures Campaign, and how (at the same time) it shapes the collective action of the One Million Signatures Campaign.

In order to be able to explore the duality of structure - the way the discourse was shaped by the action, and the way the action was shaped by the discourse - I decided to analyze the discourse of gender equality. Further, I was inspired by Fairclough's three-dimensional analytical frameworks of discourse analysis. Norman Fairclough is one of the founders of critical discourse analysis. The analysis of the dialectical relation between social practice and discourse is inspired by his three-dimensional analytical framework. The three-dimensional framework consists of: 1) analysis of written and verbal texts, 2) analysis of discourse practice and 3) analysis of discursive events as instances of sociocultural practice (Philips, L. & Jørgensen, W. M., 2002).

Since I did not collect my data for the purpose of a discourse analysis, I could not use his framework in my study. However, although this study is not a discourse analysis, it is an analysis of discourse. Inspired by his analytical framework, I decided to divide my empirical chapters in a way that would reveal the relation between the social practices of the campaign and the discourse of gender equality. In order to do that, in the first empirical chapter I focus on the way the discourse of gender equality has been presented in the One Million Signatures Campaign. In the second empirical chapter, I explain the discourse of democracy which was replaced by the discourse of gender equality in their everyday life in the campaign. In the third empirical chapter, I focus on the social practices of the campaign, to show how the campaign is an attempt at democratization from below to reach gender equality. In this chapter I also explore how the political limitations on the social practices contribute to spreading the discourse of democracy.

1.2 Context and scope of study

Since the fieldwork for this study was to be my first return to Iran after eight years of living in Norway, I was anxious about my travel some weeks before the departure. The fact that I might not have enough knowledge about the present conditions in the country made me worried. That was the reason why I started to collect top national news headlines from Iranian online newspapers¹.

In this part, I will draw a picture of the interior social and political situation in Iran at the time my fieldwork was conducted by going through some top news headlines from June 2008. This will make it possible for readers to understand both the situation that the One Million Signatures Campaign acts within, and the situation that I arrived to.

On the 15th of June 2008, only one week before my departure to Iran, the news of students' demonstrations in Zanjan was the top news headlines in many online newspapers. A film made by the students of the University of Zanjan, which was shown at YouTube and through some news agencies, was one of the reasons why the news became so important. Some students had filmed one of the university's employees having a "non-Islamic" relationship with a female student ("BBC Persian", 2008a). The students protested against sexual harassment of a female student by a university employee, requesting that the university

¹ The online newspapers which I refer to for reading the news related to Iran include BBC Persian, Peyke Iran and Radio Farda. All newspaper quotations used in this thesis are my translations.

employee should resign. Students from several other universities in other cities joined the protest and requested, among other things, the resignation of the Minister of Education.

Searching for more information on students' demonstrations over the last months, I discovered that protests concerning female students' situation was not a new phenomenon. Between April and June 2008, many student demonstrations had been reported by several news agencies. The protest of the students of Tabriz University at the end of April 2008 is one of them. The aim of this protest was "to object to the practices that limit students' activities, and the way the universities' staff, especially "Guarding"² (*Herasat*) staff, treat students" ("BBC Persian", 2008b).

The students requested "the resignation of some university staff, evaluation of the practices of disciplinary committees of the university, the ending of the sex segregation and discrimination between the university's different organizations" (ibid, 2008b). Students said that university staff has dishonoured female students, but that the "Guarding" staff put the blame on the female students. The students went on hunger strike for more than a week, and their slogans during the strike were: "*The agents of suppression, we are angry about your oppression. We are the men and women of war/fight (jang), if you fight with us, we will fight back.*" "*Students prefer to die, but would not accept the abjectness*"³ (ibid, 2008b).

Only between April and June 2008, there were student demonstrations in the universities of the cities of Karaj, Tehran, Shiraz, Sanandaj, Kermanshah, Tabriz and Zanjan. Going through the news, I recognized that the students' protests have usually been motivated by three main reasons: their concern with student associations and issues inside the university, their protest against governmental decision-making, and their objections to the detention of arrested students. The student demonstrations have usually been oppressed, and many have been arrested.

Student demonstrations were not the only demonstrations mentioned in the online newspapers of the time. On the 16th of June, the workers of the sugar cane industry of Haft Tapeh had a demonstration in the streets of the city after 48 days of strike ("Peyke Iran", 2008). The workers demanded their three months' postponed wages. Among the slogans of that day was "*we are the workers of the sugar cane industry of Haft Tapeh, we are hungry, hungry*" (ibid, 2008). Labour demonstrations for postponed wages did not surprise me, since I knew about

² "Guarding" is a practice included in most institutions in Iran, aimed at enforcing revolution's goals, and ensuring the Islamic behaviour in the institutions.

³ These slogans are quite famous in the current student movement.

the economic sanctions against Iran. This obviously had impact on the economy, and this was clear from a single glimpse at the daily news from Iran. Many companies and industries have not been able to pay their workers and have gone bankrupt. While the leaders of the country have held the sanctions responsible for the economic problems, on the 9th of June 2008, Palizdar (the secretary of the parliamentary committee of investigation and finding) accused the government and many of high-ranking religious members of the country's power structure for a mafia-type financial corruption in a meeting at a university ("Radio Farda", 2008a). He stated that the top leaders have a hand in the economic mafia and are responsible for the economic crisis. This created many discussions in the media (abroad). Some considered that, since Palizdar is a conservative Islamist like the president of Iran, the critique could show a rupture among conservatives. Others believed that it was only a political scheme from the conservatives in preparation for the next presidential election of Iran. On the 13th and 14th of June, people came to the streets in Mashhad and Tehran, requesting the names of the corrupt leaders and full resignation of Iranian government. A few days after the meeting, Palizdar was arrested for corruption and public agitation ("Radio Farda", 2008b).

When on the 22nd of June 2008 I arrived in Iran, I could no longer reach the news agencies and newspapers that I used to read in Norway. They were filtered in Iran. Officially, there was no sign of any of the demonstrations that I had read about. The newspapers in Iran had the focus on the economic crisis and the president's economic plan. I subscribed to the newspaper of "*Jomhuri-e Islami*" (The Islamic Republic) and "*Aftab-e Yazd*" (The Sun of Yazd⁴) which are among the most sold newspapers in Iran. "*Jomhuri-e Islami*" is known to share the fundamentalists' points of view, and "*Aftab-e Yazd*" is the newspaper of the reformists. "*Jomhuri-e Islami*" had the most news about economy, Ahmadinejad's (the president of Iran) travels to other countries and provinces of Iran, and analyses of the president's economic plan. "*Aftab-e Yazd*" presented critical analyses of the social, political and economical plans of Ahmadinejad, and had the presidential election of June 2009 at the centre of its attention.

Since my study objective was to explore the duality of the relation between the social practices of the campaign and the discourse of gender equality in the One Million Signatures Campaign, I needed to closely observe and participate in the campaign's activities. Shortly, upon my arrival to the field, it was clear to me that two issues were at the centre of the actions

⁴ Yazd is the name of a city in Iran. This is the city in which Khatami (former reformist president) was born.

in the Campaign. One of them was “The Family Protection Bill”, which I knew very little about after reading the newspapers. When I met the members of the campaign, they were very anxious about “The Family Protection Bill”. A lot of the campaign’s actions were focused on the protests against the Bill.

Women’s activists in Iran were working hard to change the legislation, especially the family laws, to gender equality based legislation, and the bill was seen as a step backwards. As an example, the Article 23 of the bill stated that “marriage to a subsequent permanent wife shall depend on court authorization upon ascertainment of the men’s financial capability and undertaking to uphold justice among his wives” (Amani, E., 2008). This article, which had created most discussion against the bill, not only recognizes men’s right to polygamy, but also rejects the first wife’s right to initiate divorce in such a situation.

Women activists from all ideological backgrounds along with Human Rights defenders united to protest against the bill. The bill was so important and the opposition group was so large, that Elahe Amini in Association for Women’s Rights in Development (AWID) called the union “one of the largest coalitions to oppose a bill since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran” (ibid, 2008). During my stay in the field, the One Million Signatures campaigners spent most of their time opposing the bill. They made Bluetooth and CDs to distribute among people, organized street theatre performances. They wrote and distributed brochures, talked to people face to face in the streets and asked people to protest against the bill in any peaceful way they were able to.

In the first days of September, as I was getting ready to return to Norway, the discussion about the bill had changed arena. It was then discussed in the media, especially in the governmental channels.

Besides the national issue of “The Family Protection Bill”, I observed that the actions of the members of the campaign were influenced by an internal issue centering on “The Feminist School” and its separation from the rest of the One Million Signatures Campaign in Tehran, called the “Change for Equality”. On one hand, as I mentioned earlier, the campaign’s intention was to work horizontally without leadership, but on the other hand, the social practices of the campaign were challenged by the political pressures. The members of “The Feminist School” represented the establishment of “The Feminist School” (as a small and independent group) as the only cure to the issues that were caused by the political pressures. To many others in the “Change for Equality”, it represented a misuse which challenged the

struggle for the horizontally structure of the campaign. This had created an atmosphere of mistrust and passivity in the campaign, which characterized the field.

While doing the fieldwork, I met many different people with very different social/ ideological backgrounds. However, all of them had one thing in common. They worked in an organized way in the networks of the campaign. That is the reason why I call the informants “the members of the organized networks of the campaign”. Some of the members live their life for the campaign; the campaign is their life. These people wake up for the campaign, use many hours of their everyday life for the campaign. For others, the campaign is a part of their life. They spend a few hours every day or week on the campaign. However, all of the members of the organized networks discuss the internal and external problems together. In this sense, in my point of view, the discourses of the campaign have been created.

Many of the campaign’s activists are not members of the organized networks. They work by themselves, and they do not have daily or even weekly communication with the members of the organized networks. Among them, there may be a lot of different understandings of gender equality. However, I did the research among the members of the organized networks in Tehran. This means that I had only access to the way the members of the organized networks in Tehran talked about their action and the meaning of gender equality.

1.3 One Million Signatures Campaign

The One Million Signatures Campaign, which is demanding gender equality and change of gender-discriminatory laws, started their collective action right after the demonstration of “The Solidarity Day” on 12th of June 2006. This demonstration that ended with brutal oppression from police towards women’s activists, gave new inspiration for collective action to women’s activists.

After the public meeting of 12th of June 2006, groups of women gathered together (in private spaces) to discuss the manifesto of the gathering. These debates continued for three months (Khorasani, 2007). As the result of the discussions, three documents were written. The first document is called *The Statement of the Campaign*. This document was supposed to be used as a petition in the face-to-face dialogues (“Change for Equality”, 2006a). The second document is *The Plan of the Campaign* (ibid, 2006b). In the plan, the goals and strategies of the campaign are explained. The third document is the folder which is called “*The impact of Laws on women’s lives*”. This folder was also created for distribution among people (ibid, 2006c).

The campaign was launched on 27 August 2006, and on the same day the campaign's website (changeforequality.com) was set up. In the beginning, the One Million Signatures Campaign was also known as "Change for Equality".

As Khorasani, who is one of the 54 initiators of the campaign⁵, states in the "The Movement of One Million Signatures; An internal narrative", the main goal of the campaign is to collect one million signatures⁶ through face-to-face dialogue with people. However, on its websites, the campaign claims that collecting signatures is only one of several aims. Other aims are promotion of collaboration and cooperation for social change, identification of women's needs and priorities, amplifying women's voices, and increasing knowledge and promoting democratic action (ibid, 2006d).

The signatures are seen as support for the demand for changing the discriminatory laws, and will be sent to the legislative institutions. Although the main purpose of the campaign is collecting signatures, during the fieldwork I recognized that some of the informants considered that their focal point was to contribute to collective gender sensitivity, rather than collecting signatures. Some considered that working to change culture can cause social change more efficiently than sending signatures to the parliament. Others believed that working to change culture is the second step of the campaign, but for now the priority should be the change of legislation. Whereas there was not a common argument on the aims, everyone had agreed on the method of action. The chosen method for reaching the aims was [direct⁷] contact and dialogue with men and women.

In *The Statement of the Campaign* it is written that "Iranian law considers women to be second class citizens and promotes discrimination against them" (ibid, 2006a). The campaign claims that the discriminatory laws are the creators of the discriminatory situations of women. The campaign wishes equal rights in arenas such as:

- **The marriage law** in which the age of marriage for girls is 13 and for boys it is 15, and every girl needs a "father's consent" where the father gives permission to the marriage (See

⁵ For more information, see page 5.

⁶ Any Iranian citizen above the age of 18 can sign the petition.

⁷ There was a consensus that the actions should be conducted in direct dialogue. However, there were many members that used most of their time writing articles and books. They claimed that they felt the need to do so, and this is their way of contributing to the collective actions.

also the Articles 1041, 1043, 1044 and 1060 of the Civil Code). According to Article 1041 of the Civil Code, girls younger than 13 years old and boys younger than 15 years old can get married with father's consent and court's permission.

- **Citizenship:** According to the law of Iran, the citizenship of a woman does not transfer to her child; having an Iranian mother does not make the child an Iranian citizen (See also the Bill 3 of Article 976 and 986 of the Civil Code).

- **Divorce:** According to the law, divorce is the right of a man, and a man can divorce his wife whenever he pleases. If the wife initiates a divorce, she must prove that the husband is guilty of misbehaviour (See also the Articles 1113, 1129 and 1130 of the Civil Code).

- **Age of criminal responsibility:** The age of criminal responsibility for girls is 8 years and nine months, and for boys 14 years and 6 months. Thus, if a 9-year-old girl committed a crime, she will be treated as an adult. The only exception is that in cases of execution, when the child will be jailed or kept in a juvenile institution until she/he reaches the age of 18 (the Article 49 of the Islamic Penal Codes).

- **Blood Money (*diyeh*):** Blood money is the amount of money a murderer or one who has inflicted serious bodily harm pays the victim or their family. According to Iranian law, a woman's life is considered to be worth half that of a man (See also the Articles 294, 300 and 301 of the Islamic Penal Codes).

- **Inheritance:** According to civil law, sons receive 2 times as much in inheritance as daughters, after the death of the father and mother. If a man who has a wife and children dies, the wife inherits one eighth of her husband's wealth. However, if they do not have any children, the wife inherits one fourth of her husband's wealth (See also the Articles 899,900,907,906, 909, 946 of the Civil Code and the Articles 630 and 220 of the Islamic Penal Codes).

- **Number of partners:** The laws give men the right to have 4 permanently married (*Aqdi*) wives and an infinite number of temporarily married (*Siqehi*) wives. (See also the Articles 1048, 1049, 900 and 901 of the Civil Code).

- **Bearing Witness:** In some cases of crime, women can not testify, such as homosexuality, prostitution and sodomy. In other cases, two female witnesses are equal to one male witness. (See also the Article 495 of the Civil Code and the Articles 74, 76, 119, 128, and 137 of the Islamic Penal Codes).

The One Million Signatures Campaign was initiated as a result of a critique of the work of women's NGOs that they reduce women's movement actors to members of staff. This, in the

point of the view of some campaigners, will create a hierarchy system (Khorasani, 2007). The campaign sees the solution to the problem of hierarchy in the usage of eager volunteers in a horizontal structure. Since the One Million Signature Campaign is against a hierarchical structure and leadership, the collective action is based on voluntary work, where everyone, from any political, social and ideological background, can join. Because of this, Khorasani claims that the focus of the campaign is on demands, not ideology (ibid, 2007). It is clear that the campaign has an open door for everyone with time they are willing to offer to the campaign. Since everyone, with any background and belief, can join the campaign, this makes the campaign dynamic in its actions and structure.

According to my observations, the campaign consisted of organized networks with a huge room for ad hoc actions. A lot of people work in the organized networks for a while, quit, and rejoin. Others collect signatures without being a part of the organized networks. The informants of my study are all members of the organized networks.

Although everyone in the organized networks of the campaign decides over their own actions, and the committees decide over their own actions, every action has to be within the boundaries of the Three Documents. This is a way to ensure that the campaign does not choose any particular position in political relations. As Khorasani says, the only position that the campaign has chosen is being against the discriminatory laws. Every action will be talked about as conducted by “some members of the campaign”, not by “the campaign”. This indicates that there is an acceptance that the members of the organized networks cannot make decisions on behalf of the whole campaign (ibid, 2007).

The campaign started its work with few committees in Tehran. The committees grew in numbers with increasing requirements and numbers of volunteers. As the number of committees increased in Tehran, the campaign succeeded to extend their networks to women’s activists in other cities in Iran. After two years of networking, the campaign had an organized network that was covering more than 20 cities from 13 provinces. The campaign has not only spread inside Iran, but has also got support from Iranian citizens abroad. The campaign had in 2008 created networks with and among Iranians in 7 countries in the Middle East, Europe and America. This is the reason why Shirin Ebadi⁸ has said “even if we wanted to stop the campaign, we are not able to anymore.” (Javaheri, 2007a, p. 10).

⁸ Iranian woman who was honored with The Nobel Peace Prize in 2003 for her efforts for democracy and human rights, especially for the rights of women and children (“Nobel prize”, 2003).

The campaign does not have any official space, but has succeeded in creating new spaces. “Our share of the public space was not much, we needed to take possession of public space” (ibid, 2007, p. 76). As I also experienced during the fieldwork, most seminars, meetings and activities were going on in parks, streets, cafes, restaurants, hairdressing salons, libraries, etc. Besides the public places, private spaces were also in use. Volunteers offered their houses for workshops, seminars and meetings. The campaign has also used the Internet as a space and a tool for communication. The increase in the number of the campaign’s websites and weblogs shows the importance of Internet. In the beginning, the campaign had only one website, but after two years the campaign’s news covers by three websites. Besides the websites, every city and country has their own weblog. As I noticed during the fieldwork, emails, especially group emails, were also used as spaces for discussion.

The campaign has got support from some Ayatollahs, such as Saneei⁹. This was one of the most debated topics inside the campaign. The issue was perceived in different ways among the members. Some considered that the campaign’s members are Muslim and that they work in a Muslim society. They felt the need for support from religious people. Others thought that they used the Ayatollahs as a tool in their work. As an informant told me, “we would be executed for being apostate (*mortad*), if we could not use Ayatollahs’ words”. Besides the support from known Iranian lawyers and artists, the campaign has also got support from the international society. The One Million Signatures Campaign has been honored with the Simone de Beauvoir Award (2009), the Global Women’s Rights by Feminist Majority Foundation (2009), the National Endowment for Democracy Award (2008) and the Olof Palme Prize (2007).

In spite of this recognition from global organizations, in this thesis I claim that the campaign’s discourse of gender equality is created locally, by the context and the action of the campaigners. This would not mean that in the globalized world the global discourses would not have an influence on the local creation of such discourses. But I argue that since Iran has a specific political situation, the discourse of gender equality has been created by the campaigners’ everyday actions, and their collective action is shaped by the discourse of gender equality. These actions have been influenced by the political situation and context.

⁹ Ayatollah Saneei is a high ranking clergyman who has become known for his new women-friendly interpretation of the Quran (for more see page 5).

On one hand, as one of the consequences of the political situation of Iran, the campaign has tried to work horizontally and without leadership. On the other hand, the political and social context challenges the same effort. The discourse of gender equality has been created and extended by social practices influenced by such context. As I said earlier, it is interesting to know how the discourse of gender equality is created in a country where Human Rights Conventions such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women is seen as a threat to Islamic culture.

My intention in this chapter was to present the purpose of this study, and to draw a picture of the context of the study and of situations that constitute a backdrop of the social actions of the One Million Signatures Campaign. The next chapter will present the methods used for gathering the required data.

Chapter 2

Methodology

In the previous chapter, I presented the context and background of the study. I explained how I experienced the context of the fieldwork. In this chapter, I will clarify the way I managed the fieldwork. I explore the methods that were used in data collection and also why these methods were used. The reasoning behind the research approach and strategies and the process of data collection will also be discussed. In this chapter, I will finally explain my position as researcher in the field.

2.1 The research approach

As Silverman discusses in “Doing Qualitative Research” (2005), some researchers consider that qualitative methodology will give more detailed data by understanding of people’s interaction, while others argue that a qualitative approach will provide a deeper understanding of social phenomena. A qualitative research approach gave me the possibility to understand my informants’ interactions. I could only understand the way informants produce the discourse of gender equality through a qualitative approach.

Partly, the research aim of this study is to understand the informants’ perceptions of their activities. Therefore, it was necessary to choose a methodology that would enable me to talk, listen and participate in the activities. As Denzin and Lincoln put it in “Handbook of Qualitative Research”, “qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry.” (Silverman, 2005, p. 10).

2.2 The process of gaining access

In January 2008, when the process of writing the proposal started, I contacted the “Change for Equality” by email, telling them about the planned research. They showed an interest for more communication. The plan was to contact them when I arrive in Iran. Since many of the members of the organized networks of the campaign had been arrested the last months before my departure, I thought access to the needed information would be difficult. This was the reason why I contacted the campaign in the town Rasht and made an appointment with a member there. The logic behind this was that I was born and grew up in Rasht, and therefore

it would be easier to obtain contact with and trust from the campaign there. By participating in the campaign's programs in Rasht, I got foreknowledge about the campaign in Tehran.

In the June 2008, I traveled to Rasht and met a member of the campaign, Sara. As I had thought, there were a lot of common memories about the city that we could talk about. At our first encounter, she brought me books and brochures. She also invited me to a seminar where I could meet some other members. After two weeks in Rasht, Sara suggested that I continue my research in Tehran. She considered that there would be many more activists that could be helpful for my understanding of the campaign in the capital. She gave me two phone numbers and names. One of the names was familiar to me; Zahra was the one I had already contacted in January. I decided that I would talk to her and that, hopefully, she would open the gate for me. When I met her in Tehran, I found out that she was no longer a member of the "Change for Equality", but a member of the organized network of "The Feminist School"¹⁰. I asked her if I could come to their seminars. She apologized that the political situation would not allow them to have an open seminar. I made it clear that I have already been in seminars and meetings in Rasht. In the end, she agreed to discuss my request with other members of the "Feminist School". Zahra gave me many names, phone numbers and email addresses from different committees of the "Change for Equality".

In Tehran, I sent a lot of emails to the members of committees, but Sanaz from the "Following-up Committee" was the first one to reply. In our first meeting, I suggested that I could get to know campaigners and take part in seminars/workshops by participating in the workshop for new volunteers. In the new volunteers workshop I presented myself as researcher interested in women's issues. However, as time passed, I was more accepted in the "Change for Equality", and was invited to different activities.

By participating in the seminars and every day actions of the campaign, I got to know that there are many small informal groups inside the organized networks of the campaign. Knowing that, I decided to choose the informants at seminars, workshops and meetings, since I was anxious that I would only get access only to a small informal group if I selected informants by snowballing. Making this choice, I created two problems for my study. First, people who usually came to such programs were highly associated with the campaign.

¹⁰ See description of the conflict in the previous chapter.

Therefore, I ignored other people who were less associated when focusing on them. Secondly, these programs were usually arranged by specific committees, so I would not meet members who were active in other committees when choosing my informants at such activities. Since the goal of study is to explore the way the discourse of gender equality was created by the activities, my data represents the informants who are most active in the social practices of the organized networks of the campaign. One of the most important disadvantages of this choice is that my data can not show the viewpoint of the activists whose activities were not as visible as some other.

2.3 Data collection methods

This research employed multiple methods for data collection, such as text analysis, participant observation and interviews. The methods were chosen in relation to the research questions and also the reality of the campaign. Silverman argues that methodological triangulation is used if “you have several research questions or because you want to use different methods and sources to coordinate each other [...]” (ibid, 2005, p. 121). The purpose of using different methods in this study has been to optimize the access to the way informants talk about some terms such as gender equality in actions and written texts. Ensuring the validity and reliability of data was also important.

Observation and Participant Observation:

Silverman argues that “the observational method has often been the chosen method to understand another culture or sub-culture” (ibid, 2005, p. 111). For me, the observational method was chosen in order to make it possible to see discourses in action and understand the dialectical relations between actions and the discourses of gender equality. In this way, participant observation was the method that allowed me to perceive the reality from the viewpoint of an “insider”. Since there was little written about the campaign from an external point of view, it was also important an outsider inside to see the “reality” as the organized networks of the campaign.

There was also an assumption that even though there are a huge numbers of articles and reports of seminars and workshops on websites, the fear of political problems would prevent parts of the “reality” from appearing.

Whereas the activities of programs were conducted in a “safe way”, and the programs took place at “safe houses/ places”, the programs were often open for every one who was in one way or another in contact with the campaign. This made it easier for me to participate in the programs. All in all, I participated in seminars, workshops, meetings, painting exhibiting, the group mail of the Art’s committee, and collection of signatures and distribution of brochures. Moreover, from the first encounter in Rasht, I wrote detailed rapports of all interactions with the informants, including encounters, seminars, meetings and workshops. Out of concern for the safety of myself and other participants, I did not record observations.

Interviews:

After a while of being in the field and in contact with members of the campaign, I felt the need to find out how the members perceive the collective action of the campaign. Through participant observation I had already found out that age and gender had impact on the way the actions would be done. This was the reason why I categorized the informants into four groups, to gender and age (below or above 35 years old). The reason why I chose the age of 35 as a division line was because of an article of Khorasani where she claims that the women’s activists below 35 are the new generation of Iranian feminists. Further, she claims that this generation has different demands and different collective behaviors (Khorasani, 2007). In practice, I got three groups since I did not meet any man above the age 35 among the members of the organized network of the campaign¹¹.

Since the activities of a committee were related to its thematic, I tried to interview members from different committees to cover the information I needed. In total, I interviewed 14 members of the organized networks of the campaign, 12 of them were from the “Change for Equality”, one from Feminist School and one from Rasht. Four of these informants were above 35 years old, and four of them were men. The male campaigners interviewed were Reza, Aidin, Siyamak and Hasan. The female campaigners aged above 35 were Mina, Mahin, Ra’na and Fatima. The rest of the campaigners interviewed were Sara, Mahtab, Zahra, Sanaz, Azita and Sima.

All interviews were written by hand, except from the interview with members of the “Mothers’ Committee”, which was recorded. After I called and sent a numbers of emails to

¹¹ The informants also told me that there are no male campaigners above the age 35.

three members of that committee, I got an appointment with one of them in a restaurant. When I arrived to the restaurant, I met three members of the committee (I did not expect to have a group interview). The interview situation in restaurant (with all the noisy interruptions) with three informants, made me record that particular interview. As I understood them, they did not feel comfortable to talk to me one by one, since we did not know each other from before. They were not very comfortable with the recorder either. This might be the reason why they started talking about their activities on the way back from the restaurant, in their car, when they were sure that I was not recording.

As the interview process came to an end, I was able to recognize some concepts or way of talking about their activities. These were about the ways the members talked about some issues such as democracy and how they tried to put them into practice by their action.

Text analysis:

Written texts (such as articles in websites or in the campaign's published books) were used in this study in two ways. The first way was before and during fieldwork, when I needed background information about the campaign in order to plan my strategies and even behavior. The second way was during and after fieldwork, when some specific ways of talking about their action had been derived from the interviews and observations. The texts were chosen from internal published books of the campaign, such as "*The Movement of One Million Signatures; An internal narrative*", "*A Campaign for All Seasons*" and "*The Nightmare of the Street; the stories that are out of history*".

I have also analyzed some articles from the websites of wechange.info and feministschool.com. The authors of the books and articles are members of the organized networks of the campaign. According to the ideology of the campaigners, the opportunity to publish articles is equal for all women's activists. The texts therefore represent the views of individual members of the campaign, rather than official standpoint of the campaign. The only official standpoint of the campaign is the Three Documents that I have presented in previous chapter.

2.4 Challenges faced

The most influential factor that created challenges was the political pressure on the campaign. I felt the pressure and the anxiousness during the participant observation and the interviews,

which I believe had impact on my choices, behavior and the research itself. The anxiousness concerned my appearance, the notes I carried and the places I met people.

Today I consider that a part of my worries were the results of my lack of knowledge about the social context. This I could never learn from reading about Iran, only by socializing and through interaction. Other challenges occurred because I was not socialized within the social movement, for instance, I did not know how to act when I encountered the police at a house I was invited to.

Since the campaign did not have any official place, the political pressure could easily create challenges at the places I met the campaigners. The lack of an official place brought us to private houses, public spaces, and Internet. Private houses challenged the power relations between me and some informants, such as the hosts. These challenged my role as a researcher; I often felt I was a guest in the house, and on some occasions I felt I was not welcome. The public spaces challenged the interactions and the process of observing and interviewing. For instance, I took some interviews in the parks, where focusing on the questions and answers could be difficult. In addition, I also had to think about the moral police that could appear at any time.

My interests and education made me more acceptable in the field, but I often felt I was a stranger among groups of friends. I was often reminded that I was an outsider who should write an article about the campaign, or I was slandered to be a spy for one or another network in the campaign.

Since I had started my research in the new volunteers' workshop of the "Change for Equality", I was often asked why I had not collected any signatures yet. These kinds of questions were repeated so many times that I often felt I was a very passive person.

2.5 My position as researcher in the field

To the people in the field, I was a woman who was born in Iran and grew up there until the age of 17. I had come back to Iran after 8 years. I sometimes felt that it was interesting for people around me (in the campaign) to know what I thought as an Iranian who had not been in Iran for a while, and also to know more about Norway.

The fact that I was coming from Norway rather than from e.g. USA was important. While the USA could have had a negative impact on my presence¹², coming from a peaceful country like Norway, which has also shown interest in the women's movement in Iran, had a positive impact on my position in the campaign. For instance, some informants used to compare their situation as a man or woman in Iran with Norway.

My specialization in gender studies was a field that most of the men and women activists were interested in. Some of them had studied sociology and others had been women's activists for many years. This created a more equal power relations between me and the informants.

I was a researcher in the field who might do not believe in all the viewpoints of the campaigners, but I appreciated the activities they did as a whole. I often thought through the relations I made in the field; on the one hand, I depended on close relations in order to be trusted, and on the other hand, I needed to preserve a distance that made me able to observe and analyze the field. It was sometimes a difficult balance to strike.

2.6 Ethical considerations

Since I considered the conditions of the research as politically sensitive, I had decided to think carefully about the consequences of my actions, and do the best to protect myself and the informants. In the fieldwork I recognized that I did not know the situation enough to be able to consider the consequences. I often was forced by necessity to ask people around me (including informants) if I acted in a correct way, or what they thought about the action. By asking informants about security, I found out that people from different generations have different understandings of the security and also of correct actions. I realized that by living many years abroad, I had lost the ability to recognize the limit between correct and wrong in some social situations. Partly, the problem was not only that I changed, but also that the society had changed. It seemed that we have developed in different directions.

Before I arrived to the field, I decided I should provide information about myself and the research to the informants. My plan was to give more information to the key informants (since I thought there would be some central or more important members in the campaign). I had

¹² Due to political issues between Iran and the USA

decided to let them decide how much the other members should know about the research. However, there were no central or more important members of the organized networks in the campaign, and the members believed in equal access to information. Information about my presence as researcher was quickly given to all by the members of the “Change for Equality” in an email written by a member of the campaign.

In general, I tried to have a friendly relationship with the participants, but also knew that I was responsible for my relationship with them. The identities of the informants were also protected by anonymization, despite the fact that many of my informants showed an interest in having their real name in the research. The intention with anonymization has been to protect people from harm. I also made sure that informants’ participation was voluntary.

The intention of this chapter has been to describe the methods that I have used for gathering data material. The description of the way I have used the methods and strategies of collecting data contributes to the validity of my study. In the next chapter, I explore the historical background of the study, and the historic and cultural context of the collective action of the campaign.

Chapter 3

The Iranian women's movement in a historical perspective

Gender relations often vary between Muslim societies, depending on the way Islam is integrated in everyday life. However, according to Etin Anwar in "Gender and Self in Islam" (2006), all Muslim societies, have one aspect in common; that gender differences are explained by sexual and biological differences. He claims that this way of thinking existed before Islam, but was reshaped in Islam and the Quran, for instance like this:

"And call upon two of your men to act as witnesses; and if two men are not available, then a man and two women from among [acceptable witnesses to you], so that if one of them make a mistake, the other would remind her. (Q.S. al-Baqarah, 2:282)"

(Anwar, 2006, p. 35).

Quran verses justify male superiority by their biological abilities. Biological differences are used to justify the division of labor, where men are considered rational, responsible for economy, and breadwinners. Women are categorized as the opposite of men, irrational, and their biological and sexual differences are considered to make them suitable as caretakers of the household. "The sexual division of labor divides private from public, personal from political, appropriate from inappropriate, obedience from disobedience, virtuous from vicious, dignity from humility, and other categories that perpetuate the status quo of a hierarchical gender system" (ibid, 2006, p. 19). Women's share of the division is the private and personal sphere.

Men and women's rights are connected to the biological responsibilities. Male responsibilities give them privilege over women in "economics, inheritance, power of divorce, the right to bestow a physical beating (on one's wife), and the right to act as witnesses" (ibid, 2006, p. 19).

This is a common way to describe Islam and the gender system in Islam. When we apply such a description on a modern age Muslim society, we picture it as an invariable reality. This is in contrast with the understanding of society in theory of modernity, where society is considered to be in constant dynamic change.

In this chapter I will go through the Iranian modern history, from 1850- 2008, to indicate the relations between women's activists' actions with social relations. As stated above, my initial curiosity that led me to study the campaign was to find out how a social movement is possible if the situation of women is as restricted as it is said to be in Iran. The main argument throughout this chapter is that the women's movement change and has been shaped by the social structure of the society. Women and women's movement in Iran should be understood in terms of its Islamic, national and international context. Furthermore, not only women in Islam should in the modern age be understood in relation to social relations, but also Islam.

In order to write this chapter, I had to consider who the readers of this thesis are likely to be. My assumption is that it will be people who are interested in Iranian or Islamic studies. However, this says nothing about how much the reader knows already about Iran or Islamic societies. For that reason, I have decided to write the historical background in a way that provides fundamental information about Iran, and I have also tried to make it interesting to read for those who already know much about Iran.

This chapter will be presented in two main parts; women in the pre-revolutionary era, and women in the post-revolutionary era. Since the Islamic revolution of 1979 has been led to fundamental changes in women's activists' actions, I have divided the chapter in relation to the revolution. Each part will again be divided in smaller parts, to make the discussion easier to follow for the readers.

3.1 Women in the pre-revolutionary era

In this part of the chapter, I will focus on the women's movements in Iran in the pre-revolutionary era. It will be divided in two parts: "From renewal movement to the dynasty of Pahlavi", and "From the dynasty of Pahlavi to the revolution of 1979". In the first part, we will see how modernism started as an intellectual movement, but from below. In the second part I will explore how the dynamism changes to modernization from above, which led to new social movements.

From the Renewal Movement to the Dynasty of Pahlavi

The French Revolution (1789) brought fundamental changes to France, as well as to the international society. It introduced the idea of the democratic governing structure to the world, including Iran. In the 1850s, discussions around modernity were popular in Iranian publications. These discussions developed to a movement that was called *Tajadod* "Renewal

Movement”. “Renewal or *tajadod*, began as an amorphous cultural movement that questioned the traditions of Iranian society on a variety of levels” (Amin, 2002, p. 25). Thus, clerics became anxious about their power of influence on the society, and started to participate to a larger extent in discussions of political issues. The Renewal Movement also challenged the monarchy (Qajar dynasty) by the request of limiting the King’s (*Shah*) power by the introduction of a parliamentary system. The challenge of traditional gender relations followed the critique of the other power relations in the society.

By the end of the 19th century, men who identified themselves as “modern men” criticized women’s conditions, which they considered a result of superstition and tyranny¹³. For instance, Kermani, an enlightenment writer, in his famous political treatise *Sad khetabeh* (The Hundred Sermons) mentioned women— like all members of Iranian society— as “victims of a social and political environment that deprived them of their natural and, implicitly, virtuous national attributes” (ibid, 2002, p. 27).

The discussion of women’s condition was always connected to veiling (*hijab*). Since the women’s condition was often presented as the result of the practice of Islam, the women question always turned to a question about belief or unbelief (ibid, 2002, p. 31). The women’s condition was not only discussed by men. In “Populism and Feminism in Iran”, Moghissi claims that some women in this period challenged the male supremacy by writing articles, such as Bibi Khanum in 1896, while “other women rebelled against their degraded place in the family and in the social life by abandoning shiism for the Babi faith ¹⁴”(Moghissi, 1994, p.28). An example is Qurrat- ul- Ain who was one of Babi’s leaders and came out unveiled in the public in order to give speeches.

The 20th century started with economic and political crisis in Iran. Those years are reminders of very weak governance and strong Russian and British political domination in Iran, along with a despotic governance towards the Iranian people. Intellectuals were against monarchical despotism, religious dogmatism and imperialism (Sanasarian, 2005). The clergies had influential power among people, but they worried about losing their power as result of the foreigners’ sovereignty in Iran. Businessmen were anxious about the foreigners’ control over

¹³ While many believed superstition was Islam itself, to others superstition derived from folk culture. Tyranny was often associated with monarchy (often with the Qajar dynasty) (Amin, 2002, p. 25).

¹⁴ The Babi faith was a religious movement founded in 1844 by Sayyid Ali Muhammad Shirazí (1819-1850), who took the title of The Bab (The Gate). The faith spread in Iran and was combined with the modern social movement.

the economy. These different groups united to change the monarchy and establish a constitutional government.

The coalition succeeded in establishing the first Iranian parliament in 1906. The constitution of 1906 was a strange combination of European constitutions and Islamic laws (ibid, 2005). In spite of the fact that the constitution stated equal rights for everyone, the rights did not include women in practice.

During the constitutional revolution, women made visible contributions. Women used not just the private spheres to fight against monarchy and imperialism, but also came to streets and participated in the demonstrations. The revolution gave the opportunity to many women to come out in to the streets and engage in social activities. Women's activities varied from peaceful demonstrations, such as writing diplomatic letters to national and international political characters, to violent actions, such as participating in bloody battles and armed threats to the Parliament (see also Sanasarian, 2005 and Moghissi, 1994).

In the early phase of the constitutional revolution, women's activities were usually influenced by the religious leaders¹⁵, "in the process of national struggle, many women transformed their self-image and consciousness of their place in Iranian society" (Moghissi, 1994, p. 30). With the changes in the structure of the society, many women were brought to the streets for national fights, and they reflected on their situation. Through the constitutional revolution of 1905-11, Iranian women established their own political identity.

Since women's activists did not see any progress in their condition after the revolution, they continued their critiques. They often criticized women's condition in their publications. One of the first women's journals was *Shokufe* "Blossom" (1910), which in its beginnings wrote mostly about motherhood, education for women and fight against superstition (Sanasarian, 2005). As Sanasarian claims, later this journal as many other publications, changed the focus towards women's rights issues. Women's publications not only criticized traditions, but also imperial countries for their politics in Iran. This was often not tolerated by the government. For instance, *Zabane zanan*, "Women's Language" (1919), was banned because of its harsh critique of Britain's politics (Moghissi, 1994).

Some associations argued that women's condition was a result of foreigners' dominance in Iran, and others believed that women's condition was caused by culture and religion. However, all of them worked in secret. While in the 19th century women were seen as the

15 Like the boycott of tobacco, when religious leaders declared tobacco as *haram* in 1891-92

honor (*namoos*) of the society, (which gave them the immunity from harm, and also a kind of freedom to participate in the demonstrations¹⁶), at the onset of 20th century, women were perceived by the government as a threat to the government and society. Many of the women's activists were arrested, jailed, or exiled by the government or harmed by religious people. Their associations were often closed down. This condition continued until the start of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925.

From the Dynasty of Pahlavi to the revolution of 1979

The Pahlavi dynasty

In 1920, Reza Khan stepped into the political arena of Iran by staging a coup, and in 1923 he became the prime minister. In 1925, he forced the parliament to depose the king of dynasty of Qajar, and declare him as the new king (*Shah*) of Iran¹⁷.

Although he had a dictator's character, he introduced many reforms in the juridical and social fields. Concerning women's issues, he focused on the areas that many women activists had already debated on. By his reforms, the laws on divorce and marriage became more women-friendly, and many governmental schools for girls were set up. As Sanasarian (2005) claims, the number of girls' schools changed from 41 in 1910, to 870 in 1933. In 1935, Reza Shah declared the *hijab* illegal, and forced women to wear non-traditional clothes. Women were often beaten if they were seen veiled in public. Earlier, many women activists had shown that they were against *hijab*, and many women from upper class families did not veil. However, since the social gap between upper and lower class people was wide and the unveiling plan was performed very rapidly in Iran, the new law made women from low class families isolated at home. Many parts of Iranian society were not ready for such a fundamental change. Reza Shah closed all independent women's associations, and opened governmental organizations. The only way of working to promote women's issues was through governmental activities. Under his monarchy, he controlled political parties, and also newspapers. Today it is clear that his plans for modernization first of all aimed for his control over the country, and for interested prestige in the eyes of western countries (see also Moghissi, 1994 and Sanasarian, 2005).

¹⁶ Such as women's protest against the scarcity of bread in Tehran (1880), where Shah ordered the police to arrest the women's husbands (see also Moghissi, 1994).

¹⁷ The same year he established the Dynasty of Pahlavi.

Although Reza Shah got the power in Iran with British and Russian support, his former British and Russian allies sent him into exile in 1941¹⁸. With the start of the Second World War and the exile of Reza Shah, many political parties and women's organizations were set up. Mohammad Reza, son of Reza Shah, became the new king. Sansarian argues that women's activists in this period cooperated with the political parties, and women's issues were not as important as political issues. In 1939, Mossadegh¹⁹ established "The National Front", where four different parties (Socialists, Liberal Nationalists, Fascists and Religious) united to nationalize Iran's oil industry. Mossadegh, who was a popular face among people, had always supported a republican system and criticized British imperialism. In any case, in 1953 when he was prime minister of Iran, he was overthrown by the army and CIA in a coup²⁰. Mohammad Reza Shah, just like his father, closed all political parties and controlled the newspapers. He also controlled women's organizations (Sanasarian, 2005).

Mohammad Reza Shah introduced many women-friendly law reforms, such as the "Family Protection Law". Since the country had passed through a fast industrialization, new laws about work for women were also integrated. The industry needed cheap workers, which increased the share of female workers from 5 percent in 1966 to 64 percent in 1972. The modernization plans had favored middle and upper class people. The situation of low urban class people and villagers were still the same. Despite the Shah's literacy plan, in 1979, sixty percent of the Iranian population was still illiterate, most of which were women (ibid, 2005). In spite of the fact that the rate of literacy among women had increased the last decades, this did not have much impact on gender perspectives and gender roles (ibid, 2005). Sanasarian argues that many women felt insecure because of the gap between the public gender policies and their families' values (ibid, 2005).

The revolution of 1979

After 25 years of arrest and killings of the opposition, Mohammad Reza Shah gave more freedom to political parties and newspapers in 1978. However, these strategies came too late; already many communist, socialist, and national parties were working towards a revolution.

¹⁸ Iran was occupied by Russia and Britain in 1941

¹⁹ Dr. Mohammad Mossadegh (1882-1967) was a lawyer, professor, author, Governor, Parliament member, Finance Minister, Defense Minister, and democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran (See more "Mohammad Mossadagh", n.d.)

²⁰ The king, in association with the American CIA, planned to overthrow the democratically elected government, and arrested and jailed Mosadegh ("Mohammad Mossadegh", n.d.)

Moghissi considers that the women who attended to the revolutionary movement in the late 1970s basically belonged to three categories (Moghissi, 1994).. The first category was the marginalized urban working women. “These women neither had a sense of themselves as a group, nor were they particularly drawn to Islamic ideology” (ibid, 1994, p. 57). The second group was the “women that formed the army of black *chadors* [full veiling] who filled the streets [...] during the revolution in support of the clerics” (ibid, 1994, p. 57). This group supported their men’s beliefs, which were “sexual division of labor and sex-role differences as a natural and necessary condition for social harmony” (ibid, 1994, p. 57). The third group was the women whose lives were shaped by the economic developments of the modernization plans. “They sought the overthrow of the Shah’s regime and an end to foreign economic and political domination” (ibid, 1994, p. 58), not unlike their male counterparts. Women in this category were ranged from either the secular nationalist or socialist tendencies to religious beliefs (ibid, 1994).

Moghissi (1994) argues that because of the absence of autonomous feminist organizations and discourses to expose the dominant patriarchal assumptions, women were not alert to male biases in the socialist or Islamic ideologies. Khorasani concludes that “feminists in this period were focused on ideology, not their own independent demands” (2007, p. 105).

As described above, from 19th century onward, the Iranian social structures started to change and power relations were challenged as a subsequent result. These changes were often brought from below, as critique of national and international power relations. This made the women’s movement in this period of time more of a political demand, rather than a social one. By the Pahlavi dynasty, modernization started as a plan from above started. This plan was combined with a political reign of authoritarian character. During this period, the Iranian women’s movement changed from an independent existence to a dependence on governmental support. However, the Shah’s modernization plan and foreign political influence guided the Iranian people- including the women’s activists- towards a search for a new identity.

3.2 Women in the post-revolutionary era

This part of the chapter deals with the history of Iran between the Islamic revolution in 1979 and the year of my study, 2008. Iranian governmental policies changed from western-oriented

plans to Islamization. Further, the Islamization as institutionalization of Islam was perceived as modernization of Islam. I will indicate how the institutionalization of Islam has shaped the women's movement.

This part of the chapter will be divided in four parts. In every part, I deal with a special phase of Iran's contemporary history. Each period contained some changes that had significant impact on the women's movement. In the first part, the establishment of the Islamic Republic will be discussed. The second part will focus on the changes that the end of the Iran-Iraq war brought to the society. In the third part, the reformist government and its impact on the women's movement will be the centre of discussion. In the last part, the current situation of the women's movement will be briefly described.

The first decade: 1979 - 1989

The first decade after the revolution was characterized by the struggle for the establishment of the Islamic Republic. On the 1st of February 1979, only 24 days after Shah left Iran for good, Ayatollah Khomeini returned to Iran and selected a temporary government (Eshkevari, Tapper, & Mir-Hosseini, 2006). While the Islamists got the power with the revolution, different Islamist groups fought against other groups and also with each other. The Islamist groups varied from non-clerical Islamists and nationalists that wanted a secular democratic republic, to populist Islamic radicals that intended to establish an Islamic state governed by Islamic law (ibid, 2006). The fight continued by terrorizing the oppositions until that the only tolerated opposition party, MBLM²¹, along with democrats, liberals, secularists and leftists were removed from the structure of power.

During the fights for power between different groups, the new constitution of Iran was written. Since gender was "the core revolutionary issue" (Paidar, 2001, p.6), the Islamization focused on gender relations. During the first days of March 1979, the Family Protection Act was abolished, and only some days after, on 7th of March, Khomeini demanded for re-veiling. "For Ayatollah Khomeini the re-veiling of women symbolized the re-establishment of Muslim identity and culture." (Moghissi, 1994, p. 141). On 8th of March 1979, women protested against Khomeini's demand for *hijab* and required that the discussion of women's clothing should be left to women. The protests continued for many days, and during the protests radical Islamists attacked women protestors with abusive slogans and physical assaults.

²¹ Members of Bazargan's Liberation Movement were the non-clerical Islamists and nationalists who were accused of not being Islamic enough.

The constitution became a mixture of democratic and theocratic principles (Sharia Law). For instance, as Mir-Hosseini argues, on the one hand there are established legislative and democratic institutions such as the Parliament, and on the other hand *Velayat-e Faqih*, or the leader of the Revolution, subordinates people's will by his unlimited rights²² (Eshkevari, Tapper, & Mir-Hosseini, 2006). According to the new constitution, *Velayat-e faqih* was located on the top of the hierarchical structure of the Islamic Republic, where he was not only the leader and the guardian of the nation, but also all *maraji*²³. In 1989, as a result of *maraji*'s negative reaction to the idea of *Velayat-e faqih*, Ayatollah Khomeini separated the leadership from *marja'yat*²⁴, meaning that *marja'yat* was not anymore a necessary characteristic of the Leader, who must simply be able to concern *fatwa*²⁵ in the field of Islamic law (for more see Eshkevari, Tapper, & Mir-Hosseini, 2006).

The second decade: Islamic feminism 1989 - 1997

After the death of Khomeini in 1989, the Assembly of Experts chose Khamenei (a middle-ranking cleric) as the new leader of the Revolution. According to some changes in the constitution made in 1989, the Supreme Leader²⁶ did not have only “the power to determine the general policies of the state and to oversee their implementation, but also the control of more institutions, notably Television and Radio” (Eshkevari, Tapper, & Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 23). The Right- faction of the Islamists, who were the more conservative and theocratic, soon occupied all institutions²⁷.

Mir-Hosseini considered that the Iranian society after the revolution paradoxically experienced a form of “secularization” from below²⁸ (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). Paidar believes that secularization is a result of the focus on gender issues, which has reconstructed the Iranian women's movement after the revolution. She argues that female collective actions during and after the revolution can be put in three categories: directed, associated and independent(Paidar, 2001, p. 6). The point in her argument is that, on the one hand, secular

²² In practice, this meant that people's right to choose who will govern them was limited to *Velayat-e faqih*'s selection. Those who could be elected were already selected by the experts of Islamic jurisprudence.

²³ Plural of *Marja'*, see more page 5.

²⁴ Being the Islamic source, see more pages 5-6.

²⁵ Religious opinion on Islamic law issued by Islamic scholar, see more page 5.

²⁶ The leader of Revolution, see more page 7.

²⁷ Parallel with all these changes, the political Islam gradually changed Islam from a God-given religion to a socially created policy.

²⁸ Like many others, Mir-Hosseini believes that the Islamization from above gave the possibility to many women from religious backgrounds to get an education, work and be empowered. Women came back to public spaces by sex-segregation plans. The number of female students increased to 70 percent in 2006.

women kept their gender awareness through the fight against forced Islamization, and on the other hand, many women became able to participate in political and civil society organizations, which raised the gender awareness.

This created a new gender consciousness that emerged in the early 1990s. This was called “Islamic feminism”, and it criticized gender biases in Islamic laws. The criticism was directed against traditional women, Islamic laws, as well as western culture and “West-toxicated” *gharbzade* women (Bodman & Tohidi, 1998).

Many women who had played a role in the Islamization of the women’s press in the 1980s, in 1990s funded women’s newspapers and magazines to support the theory of relativity of religious knowledge²⁹. These women demanded a new interpretation of Islam. This was what a group of Muslim intellectuals, known as “New Religious Thinking” (*now-andishi-ye-didni*), were trying to achieve. The new interpretation of Islam would take into account the factors of time and place. In “Islam and democracy in Iran”, Mir-Hosseini claims that “The new Religious Thinkers included laymen and women as well as clerics, all of whom now saw a widening gap between the ideals of the revolution and the realities and policies of the Islamic state in which they lived” (Eshkevari, Tapper, & Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 26). They argued that “the human understanding of Islam is flexible, and Islam’s tents can be interpreted to encourage both pluralism and democracy” (ibid, 2006, p. 27).

Khorasani considers that this generation of the women’s movement started after the end of the Iran- Iraq war in 1989, with the debate on women’s issues. However, she claims that this generation of women’s movement was searching for an identity. Every feminist group worked within their own ideological boundaries under names such as, “socialist feminism”, “liberal feminism” and “Islamic feminism”. The search for identity did not only go on in the public sphere, but also at the grassroots level. Women from similar ideological backgrounds had their own private gatherings (Khorasani, 2007).

The third decade: Reformist and feminist movement 1997 - 2005

In the election of 23rd of May 1997, Iranian people supported Khatami, who stood for democracy. Khatami’s ideas and language were like that of the New Religious Thinkers. People who supported Khatami were called Reformists. “The reformists were a loose coalition with a wide range of views and little consensus on aims and directions of reform.

²⁹ In addition, it should be mentioned that at this period, western feminist theories (especially Simon de Beauvoir’s texts) were often discussed in the women’s magazines.

They included “insiders” in the government who still supported an Islamic state, [...]; secularists who wanted not only democracy and civil society but the separation of religion from government.” (Eshkevari, Tapper, & Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 29).

The New Religious Thinkers used the new opportunity to debate the relation between religion and government. In “Islam and democracy in Iran” (2006), Mir- Hosseini analyzes that the reformists were not only worried about the future of the country, but also about political Islam that had become a tool for oppression. For some reformists, the solution was the separation between religion and government (See also Eshkevari, Tapper, & Mir-Hosseini, 2006, p. 151).

The reformist government gave more freedom to civil society and supported women’s organizations. Khatami and the reformist government encouraged women’s participation and supported women’s NGOs. In 2005 the number of women’s NGOs increased to 480, from 67 in 1997 (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). Informants of my study, who had worked in women’s NGOs during the reformist government, mentioned that government also had ensured relationships between Iranian and global NGOs.

In December 2003, Shirin Ebadi got the Nobel Peace Prize and as the interviewees of “The Nightmare of the Street” have explained, many women’s activists from different groups and NGOs came to welcome her at the airport. Entesari, one of the interviewees, says: “When we saw us as a great number of women in public space, we dreamed to extend our groups” (Change for Equality, 2008a, p. 19). From that day, the small groups that were working separately started to communicate with each other and organize meetings. They found out that there were many women’s groups that usually gathered and discussed their problems, but they were not connected to each other.

In June 2005, during the presidential election period, they decided to have a gathering in front of Tehran University. Through a call for the demonstration on 12th of June, they asked for solidarity and objection to women’s rights contravention in the constitution³⁰. The 12th of June 2005, which is called the Day of Solidarity, was also interpreted as the official birth of the post-revolutionary women’s movement. Among the slogans on that day was “*we are women, we are human beings, but we do not have any rights*” (Change for Equality, 2008, p. 25).

³⁰ Among many other laws, women demanded the change of Act 115 of the Constitution which mentions “*Rajal-e- siyasi*” as one of the conditions for becoming president of the country. “*Rajal-e- siyasi*” is a term which is often used for “politician”, but in the Constitution is interpreted as “man of politics” (“Change for Equality”, 2006c)

During the last years of the reformist rule, Iranian people were not satisfied with the government, and did not support Khatami anymore. While the reformist government gave more freedom to civil society, the conservative Islamists who had already influenced the non-democratic institutions, used the opportunity to terrorize and arrest opposition groups, such as journalists and students. As a result, many newspapers were closed during reformist government³¹. After the first four years of Khatami's presidency, it became clear that any fundamental reform within the Islamic Republic's system was not possible. While in the 1990s feminists in Iran cooperated with the reformists, women's activists became more independent with the failure of the reformists. Islamic feminists were disappointed with the minor role they had played in the structure of power. This prepared the ground for a union of women's activists from different ideological backgrounds. Besides that, a new influential social group emerged during this period. The demands of the young generation born after the revolution now shaped the social movements.

Feminists after the reformist government: after 2005 -

In June 2005, Ahmadinejad became president of Iran. His plan focused on economic issues. For the majority who participated in the Revolution of 1979, the revolution was about "Freedom, Independence, Islamic Republic", as mirrored in the well-known revolutionary slogan (Paidar, 2001). The revolutionary discourses, which also continued after the revolution, were often about independence from western countries and resistance towards the injustice. Discourses of resistance to oppression and injustice are very powerful in Iranian culture, which has been reshaped in different times and situations³². Ahmadinejad brought up again these discourses and took them to the national and international sphere.

Only some months after the start of his presidency, he demonstrated his policy on women's issues by changing the name of the Center for Women's Participation to the "Center for Women and Family Affairs" (Mir-Hosseini, 2006). As a result of Ahmadinejad's policies, many NGOs were closed. Women's activists lost their facilities and governmental economic supports. Like Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shah, Ahmadinejad considers that gender relations are the key to social change. As a result, he required the end of the western cultural

³¹However, the new space on the Internet was discovered. In 2005, Iran was mentioned as third largest country of bloggers with 700 000 weblogs ("Absolute astronomy, n.d.).

³² Like the story of Imam Hossein in Karbala, Rostam in Shahname, the rebirth of the sun in Shab-e Yalda etc.

influence in Iran, which was seen on *hijab* and youth appearance. During the summer 2006, female police with *chador* (full veiling) came to the streets to advise women with improper veiling (*bad hijab*) to return them on to the “right path”. After a while, this gender and social policy became harsh, arresting women. This also sometimes led to fights between the police and women.

On the 12th of June 2006, the women’s activists protested against “the discriminatory laws against women”, but the protest was suppressed by the police. Many were beaten, and around 70 persons were arrested (Change for Equality, 2008a). Only some days after that, One Million Signatures Campaign started its work to change the discriminatory laws. Since women’s activists did not have any governmental support³³, they changed their method of action from organizations to working in campaigns³⁴, such as “Say No to the Social Security Plan³⁵” and “My mother; my homeland”.

As mentioned earlier, Khorasani believes that this generation of women’s movement is pragmatic and works towards the achievement of their demands. In the book “The Movement of One Million Signatures” she claims that “it is not anymore possible to identify social movements only based on the ideologies. [...] For a better understanding of the function and the impact of movements we should look at the political, social and even regional and global context.” (Khorasani, 2008, p. 109). She argues that the same is true for this generation of women’s movements in Iran. “If 25 years ago some feminist elites wanted to make peace between Islamic, Secular and Socialist feminists, today the debates of Islamic, Secular and Socialist feminism are in crisis. There is no need for making peace.” (ibid, 2008, p. 109).

Conclusion

As we have seen above, the women’s movement in Iran was shaped by the question of modernity, which included the issue of nationality, and also challenged the Islam. The women’s movement created its identity through standpoints against the historical, religious, national and international injustices. As Moghissi argues, “early Iranian feminists insisted upon the inseparable links between democracy at home and democracy for Iran, and the interconnection of national liberation and women’s liberation” (1994, p. 33).

³³ International support was also not possible, since they could be accused of working for imperialism, and judged for being against the Revolution.

³⁴ Campaign means here a series of actions and plans to achieve a particular purpose.

³⁵ Social security plan is the name of the project of the moral police that blames social problems on women’s non-Islamic appearance.

In “The Movement of One Million Signatures”, Khorasani has classified this period of Iranian women’s movement as the “first generation” of the movement, which had their focus on the demand for change in women’s situation. Khorasani argues that, since this movement was pragmatic, it obtained the most valuable results of all the movements for Iranian women.

Later, the independent movement was governed by the modernization plans of the Pahlavi dynasty. While the legislation during this period became more women-friendly, the independent demands of the women’s movement disappeared in the revolution of 1979.

As we have seen, the Islamic Republic of Iran as an attempt to renew Islam in the modern era has caused many changes in Iran. One of the most important changes has been the centralization of power in the hands of clerics. Since the structure of power is based on Islam, centralization of power affected primarily the perception and practice of the religion. Power could be practiced only by clerics/religious who believed in the dominant ideology³⁶. This closed the access to practicing power for “the others”. In this way, through a centralization of power, many were marginalized, such as some *maraji*, women, and anyone who could or would not fit into the dominating ideology³⁷.

Another effect of the attempt to renew Islam has been modernization and secularization from below (see also Mir-Hosseini, 2006). Sex segregation as a part of Islamization gave the possibility to many women to participate in public spaces. According to Mir-Hosseini, by 2006 the literacy rate was more than 80 percent, and over 90 percent of the literate were born after the revolution. The number of female students increased to 70 percent in 2006.

Further, the project of Islamization as the modernization plans of the Pahlavi dynasty has had a strong focus on gender relations. The change of society was made visible in the change of women and their situation. Surprisingly, this has led to more reflection on women’s condition, challenging the power structure in many different ways.

This generation of women’s movements is also shaped by the context of their actions. The political situation and political Islam has guided Islamic feminists and secular feminists to unite. During the fieldwork, I recognized that the members of the Campaign often identified

³⁶ What is understood as ideology here is not only Islam, but the political Shiite Islam which structures the idea of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

³⁷ This marginalization included also men’s control over women which earlier was men’s responsibility, but by Islamization, the *velayat-e faqih* had the responsibility of controlling men and women of the country.

their movement with the first generation of women's movement. For instance, Khorasani claims that with the emergence of the campaign in the contemporary generation of women's movement, the movement became again pragmatic like their "grand mothers³⁸" (2007, p.108).

While in this chapter I have explored the history of women's movement in Iranian modern history to understand the context of the collective action of the campaign, in the next chapter I will explain the theoretical framework of the thesis. There, I will discuss collective action and its created structure (discourse) in theoretical terms.

³⁸ As the first generation of women's movement.

Chapter 4

Theoretical framework

The One Million Signatures Campaign's demand is to change Iranian legislation which, in their view, is discriminatory. The One Million Signatures Campaign is not only an action against legislation, but a search for and construction of new self-identity. This should not be perceived as meaning that Iranian men and women have spontaneously started to change their minds about how to live and whom to be. The explanation of the campaigners' actions should lie somewhere within the network of macro forces such as governmental actions and micro forces like individual self reflection.

In this chapter I will use four basic arguments in order to understand the structure that has shaped the social actions of the campaign and the structures that are shaped by the actions. The first one is that the social structures that have shaped the collective action of the campaign are structured in a modern age by modern dynamic sources. The second argument is that the campaign is understood as self-reflexive action, which has its characteristics from the existing structure and attempts to shape new structures. The third main argument is that the process of the self-reflection and the creation of new self-identity are not only "acting otherwise", but also an action towards the creation of equal power relations. By Structuration theory, in the fourth basic argument, I will argue that the collective action of the campaign does not only attempt to shape equal power relations on a personal level, but also on a political level. All these four basic arguments are interrelated, and are based on Anthony Giddens' theory of modernity. The sections of the chapter are not directly divided according to the arguments. However, I have tried to divide them in a way that makes it easier for the reader to follow the arguments.

4.1 Modernity and the consequences of modernity

Since the early 19th century, there have been many attempts to understand the modern era. While in the classical traditions the focus has been only on some aspects of this era, Giddens is one of several contemporary theorists who have tried to give a more general picture of the modern age. However, all of the theorists who have grappled with modernity have recognized a gap between the traditional era and the current one. Giddens considers modernity as the social system of post-traditional society. For him, a "social system" is "any set of practices, patterns of interaction and social relationships which are relatively enduring" (Giddens, 1990,

p. 55). Modernity, according to Giddens is a social system where social relations have dynamic sources. Giddens mentions four dynamic sources or facilitating conditions; *institutionalization, time and space distancing, disembedding mechanisms and reflexivity* (ibid, 1990). *Institutionalization* creates institutional dimensions of modernity such as *capitalism, industrialism, the phenomenon of surveillance, and the nation-state*. These are the four basic institutions of a modern society. With *time and space distancing* he means that in post-traditional societies, time and space will be separated and not longer linked to each other. In other words, “time and space [are] emptied of context” (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, p. 546). Upon the concept of time-space distancing, he creates the new concept of *disembedding mechanism*. This is an institutional mechanism that “lifts out” social relations from local contexts of interaction and actively restructure them across spans of space-time (Giddens, 1990). The *reflexive source* of modernity indicates that society becomes more reflexive on the self/ actions and the structures that they have reproduced. These mechanisms make the modern world complicated and dynamic. He describes the extreme dynamism of modernity as a “Juggernaut”; a runaway engine of enormous power that rushes out of our control (ibid, 1990).

All these dimensions will be continued and radicalized, and this will again create new institutions. Giddens calls the era of the consequences of modernity *late* or *high modernity*. Late or high modernity is an era in which the consequences of modernity are more radicalized and globalized than before (ibid, 1990). In other words, Giddens does not believe in a gap between modernity and late modernity (which is called post-modernity by other theorists), but sees it as a continuity and radicalization of modernity.

While many western theorists understand modern societies in relation to the norms and values of the societies, Giddens understands modern societies in relation to the social relations and institutions. This makes it possible to consider non-western modern societies, which are characterized by the dynamic sources of modernity, but have produced different norms and values. Iran is one such society.

This means that I consider Iran as a post-traditional society where not only the basic modern institutions exist, but where also the influences of other dynamic sources on the structures of society are obvious. Modern institutions such as the phenomenon of surveillance and the nation-state had already emerged by the Russo-Persian wars of 1813 and 1828. The modernization programs of the Pahlavi dynasty brought e.g. industrialization. The parallel

with the industrialization of modernity, many other aspects of modern dynamics were structured. Reflexivity, as one example of such dynamic sources, has created many social movements in Iran during the last century, such as the constitutional movement, the national movement, and the Islamist movement. The Islamist movement which led to the Islamic revolution is an example of such reflection on self and collective identity. In this study, I consider the One Million Signatures Campaign as a collective action in a modern society.

4.2 The theory of structuration

As a result of late modernity, the need to understand individual and collective actions grew. Many theorists tried to obtain a new level of understanding of social science's basic dichotomies, such as micro/macro- subjectivity/objectivity. One of these attempts is Giddens' "Theory of Structuration". In earlier sociological theories of modernity, individuals were seen as either objects or subjects of society/structure. The theory of structuration tries to overcome these divisions by recognizing individuals as social actors (agents) that reproduce structure. By structure, Giddens means rules and resources that structure social practices. *Rules* here are what gives shape to social practice, and *resources* are what makes the exercise of power possible (Cassell, 1993).

For Giddens, *actors* are knowledgeable and capable agents who reflexively monitor their actions (Giddens, 1991). This means that agents do not only reproduce structures, they are capable of changing them. However, their capability to change the structure depends on the structure that they act through (rules and resources). For Giddens, "agency and structure can refer to either micro-level or macro-level phenomena or to both" (Ritzer & Goodman, 2004, p. 509). In this sense, social actions can be both individual actions and collective actions, and structure can be both on micro-level, such as human interaction, and macro-level, such as national laws.

When "structure" and "action" are conjoined, social structures will be the medium and at the same time the unintended outcome of social practices. Giddens calls the reproduction of structure the "duality of structure". Through the *duality of structure*, we will be able to understand the dialectical links between social actions and structures (Giddens, 1990).

Iran has, as other societies, its own tradition, culture etc. These earlier structures are recreated through their interconnection to the more recent dynamic sources of modernity, like

Islamization (the institutionalization of Islam) after the revolution of 1979. The collective action of One Million Signatures Campaign is built upon the structures that already exist. Since the goal of One Million Signatures Campaign is a legislation that ensures gender equality, the new created structures of the collective actions can be new discourses, new rules and resources for action, which in the end may lead to changes in Iranian legislation. Since my focus is on the discourse of gender equality, the structuration theory will not only indicate the way the discourse (as a structure) enables the collective action of the action, but also how it is created by the social practices of the collective action.

Structuration and reflexive modernity

As mentioned earlier, modernity has many sources of dynamism. In this study, reflexivity, as a dynamic character of modernity, is the centre of interest. According to structuration theory reflexivity is a fundamental feature of human actions. In traditional cultures, this feature was limited to a reflexive self regulation (Jary & Bryant, 2001). For Giddens, reflexivity takes on special meaning in the modern world. “Reflexivity is the reflexive ordering and re-ordering of social relations in the light of continual inputs of knowledge affecting the expectations and actions of individuals and groups” (Giddens, 1990, p.17 in Jary & Bryant, 2001, p. 98). Under such conditions, everything is open to reflection, including reflection upon the nature of reflection itself.

One central kind of reflexivity that develops in the context of the modern era is the *self reflexivity*. By self reflexivity, the *self* becomes a reflexive project. Self reflection enlarges the capacity of reflecting and monitoring our own actions, which can also sometimes lead to the re-forming of ourselves and our identities. “What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity- and ones which, on some level or another, all of us answer, either discursively or through day-to-day social behavior” (Giddens, 1991, p. 70). Giddens goes further and argues that when the self is a reflexive project, “we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves” (Giddens, 1991, p. 75).

What happens when we cannot be what we want to make of ourselves? Put differently, what happens when some part of the existing structure does not let us be what we want to make of ourselves? In the case of the One Million Signatures Campaign, Iranian legislation does not let Iranian men and women act according to their self reflections. Thus there exists, as a basis

for the collective action of the campaign, a reflection on self, action and the structure. Here, the One Million Signatures Campaign is understood as a self-reflexive collective action.

As mentioned above, according to the theory of structuration, human actions are enabled and constrained by structures, and at the same time, social structures are the medium and outcome of social actions. *Reflexivity*, the dynamic source of the current social system, influences structuration. If reflexivity impacts on our choice of action, the actions produce structures that reflect our reflexivity. In other words, by reflexivity, not only the self (through action) becomes more reflexive, but also the actions and structures themselves. The duality of structure does not only indicate the relation between structure and agency, but also the connection between micro and macro levels. The critical issue that Giddens tries to emphasize is the linkage between the reflexivity of modernity on micro and macro level. The different levels have impact upon each other, and cannot really be understood in isolation.

In this way, the One Million Signatures Campaign is a reflection of its members on their self. The campaign also attempts to create *self reflexivity* among people. The self-reflexive action produces self-reflexive structures. This can again be on both levels, such as self-reflexive discourses, new social movements/ women's movement, new legislations etc.

4.3 Power and the capacity to act otherwise: changing structures

In structuration theory, where the actions shape the structures and the structures shape the actions, the power is connected to the “duality of structure”. “What is the nature of the logical connection between action and power?”, Giddens asks in “The Constitution of Society” (1984, p. 14). For him, power is the capacity of making a difference in a pre-existing course of events. This means that power is understood first of all in relation to agents' capacity of acting otherwise. “To be able to act otherwise means being able to intervene in the world, or to refrain from such intervention, with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs.” (ibid, 1984, p. 14).

The ability to act otherwise of the existing structure (changing the structure) depends on the structure that the agent acts through. In other words, the recourses of exercising power in the actions are shaped by the structures that the action is exercising. This means that every structure has its own opportunities that enable the agents to choose to change the structure. The capacity to make a difference is the result of the agents' knowledge of the structure and different choices. Since Giddens writes the structuration theory based on the modern age, he

has taken the agents' knowledge of its condition for granted. Can we take for granted women's knowledge of their situation? Is the exercising of power possible when the oppression permeates the self to the point that consciousness itself becomes a product of the oppressive situation? Can individuals whose self-construction is constructed by oppression act otherwise? In this part I will discuss power (the capacity of acting otherwise) in relation to reconstruction of self-identity.

The Otherness and the capacity of acting otherwise

As mentioned earlier, Giddens considers that there is a dialectical relation between action and structure, where the structure is both the medium and the outcome of social actions. This means that women as actors reproduce structures (in the case of my study, legislation and culture), and at the same time the structures (legislation, culture) recreates women's daily activities. However, why should women create and recreate a self-discriminatory structure? Giddens' understanding of power in relation to structuration theory can be understood, here, as women's capacity of acting otherwise in existing discriminatory legislation and culture. Being able to act otherwise in my study means the ability to act differently from the actions produced by the discriminatory legislation and culture.

In order to discuss the objectivity of women and the capacity to act otherwise, I will use Simon de Beauvoir's concept of Otherness. My purpose of using Simon de Beauvoir's way of understanding women's situation is to indicate two issues: firstly, the way women have been understood as the Other, which is relevant to my study, and secondly, the way power is drawn in the reconstruction of the self, along with the creation of new structures.

The conflicts involved in production of structures have been at the centre of interest for feminists. Feminists have posed the question of what a woman is and her relation to society. Simon de Beauvoir is one of the founders of feminist theory. Her way of thinking around the issue of conflict is philosophical, which is in contrast to Giddens sociological perception of the world. Through the book "The Second Sex" (1949), which can be understood as a self-reflexive work, she attempted to reveal what a woman is.

"What is a woman? [...] She is determined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her, she is the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute; she is the Other." (Beauvoir, 1972, p. 16).

From a phenomenological perspective, she understands women in concrete situations, which gives women some concrete experiences (Mortensen, 2008). In her view, the situation that

women get socialized in and that they internalize (embody the situation by experiencing the situation) is produced by the patriarchy of the society they live in.

From an existential perspective, she understands human beings as free to choose the life they want, but their freedom is limited to the situation. However, human beings have the ability to go beyond such limitations (ibid, 2008). This process, in existentialist terms, is called *transcendence*. The transcendence of the situation is the action of subjectivity which leads to freedom from the situation. “Beauvoir’s fundamental understanding of subjectivity is based on the assumption that we continuously make something of what the world makes of us” (Moi, 1999, p. 199). However, when women’s experience of life is understood as the production of patriarchy, women’s image of self and their choice of life are as the other to the women (since it was created in first place as the other by men). In this way, Beauvoir claims that woman is the Other. Women’s subjectivity is immanent, non transcendental, since it happens through a process of Otherizing.

The famous sentence of Beauvoir “One is not born, but rather become, a woman” can be interpreted in many different ways. One of them is that, since in existentialism one does not believe in nature, woman is not her nature. However, she becomes a woman by subjectivity, what she makes of her self. Women’s project of liberation is in the first step the creation of a non-objectified self and situation, where women can transcend their self and situation by subjectivity.

If we understand women’s liberation project as “acting otherwise” (from an otherized self and situation), power here becomes not only the capacity of acting otherwise, but also an action towards equal power relations.

The Otherizing is not necessarily the doing of every single man, but takes place through a (patriarchal) culture, language, etc. In other words, rules and resources (which Giddens calls structures) are what Otherize women in an unequal and discriminatory situation.

The collective action of the One Million Signatures Campaign argues that the law Otherizes women. By acting otherwise (from an objectified woman), they act against the objectivity. By this they create a new self/ identity in the struggle for equal power relations. This means that their self is constructed through the actions. In the thesis I will indicate how the new identity/self is being constructed by the actions.

While women in the campaign fight against the Otherizing of women by masculinity, men in the campaign fight against the Otherizing of *men* by masculinity. They act against the

Otherized situation that they are put in, the self that is socialized by the situation. Like women, men also work in the campaign to construct their new subjectivity/self. They search for, produce, and construct a new identity through their actions against patriarchy.

Men, as the women in the campaign, fight against objectifications of their subjectivity (self). Both men and women perceive their situation as the other to masculinity. Does this mean that the men feel that they have been excluded from the process of producing male subjectivity?

Marginalized men and making a difference

Reflection on the self and its condition is one central consequence of modernity. As I described in the previous section, reflection on self's situation is a precondition for acting otherwise. According to Giddens, such reflection has resulted in the creation of many social movements. Can we say that the *reflection on self* increases to such levels in late modernity, that even men believe that they have gone through an Otherizing by masculinity?

Beauvoir describes masculinity as one unit of self/subjectivity in France in the 1950s. Later on, in the 1980s, gender studies described masculinity as multiple. For Connell, one of the most known theorists of masculinity, masculinity is “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender and the effect of practices in bodily experience, personality and culture” (2005, p. 71). Two critical components of this definition are, firstly, that “masculinity is a social location that individuals can move into through practices, [which can be called] the masculine position” (Schippers, 2004, p. 5). Secondly, “masculinity is a performance that situates the actor into the masculine position in relation to others” (ibid, 2004, p. 5). Furthermore, “masculinity structures the production and distribution of resources and the distribution of power in the form of authority [...]” (ibid, 2004, p. 5). In other words, the concept of masculinities refers to actors of different positions of power in gender relations. Among different relations of masculinities, he mentions hegemonic and marginalized masculinity.

Hegemonic masculinity is described as “the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Marginalized masculinity is the position in the gender relations among men that is marginalized in the processes of authorization of hegemonic masculinity. In short, marginalized men are not engaged in the process of creating the hegemonic model.

In other words, this theory recognizes not only the hierarchical relations between men and women, but also hierarchical relations among men. It points out a hierarchy of gender relations which ranges from hegemonic masculinity to femininity. Through this, I will emphasize two points. Firstly, it is as a result of exclusion from the processes of hegemonic masculinity that male members of the campaign have understood their self as the other. Secondly, male campaigners have felt that they are the Other to the hegemonic masculinity. Because of this, they fight against Otherizing.

Since marginalized men have not been engaged in the process of constructing hegemonic masculinity, they can feel that their socialization of the Otherized self objectifies them. Men, as women in the campaign, are Otherized/ objectified, and fight against hegemonic masculinity through the construction of a new identity by their actions. Furthermore, they fight against gender hierarchy (unequal power relations in gender relations) through engaging in the process of constructing their “subjectivity”. It is by constructing subjectivity (self) that they exercise power.

Structuration and self-identity: the interrelation between personal and political

Giddens believes that the self-reflexivity has effects on gender relations and even sexual relations. In my study, the sexual relations are not at the centre of interest, but I will use Giddens’ understanding of “pure relationship” to get to his theory of the interrelation between the personal and the political. He mentions *pure relationships* as an example of this interrelation. He argues that, while the rate of divorce is high in late modernity, “pure relationship comes to be of elementary importance for the reflexive project of the self” (Giddens, 1991, p. 88). Pure relationships structures, e.g. new family structures, and are, according to Giddens, “the outcome of the decline of tradition and fixed roles, and the remaking of relationships as open relationships in conjunction with a self- identity in which the self is reflexively organized as an open, individual, internally self- referential biography” (Jary & Bryant, 2001, p. 123). Giddens calls it *the transformation of intimacy*. He argues that the ideal of the new intimacy is “confluent love”. He suggests that this might be a “new democracy” in sexual relationships (ibid, 2001, p. 138). Furthermore, he claims that democratization of personal life produces democratization of democracy (and it is produced by exercising democracy). Giddens does not only indicate a link between the self-reflexivity and new structures, but also between self-reflexivity and new social movements. This is a central interrelation that Giddens sees between the personal and the political, which is a result of structuration in the late modernity.

In Giddens' point of view, democratization of structures constructs parallels between democratization of action and the self. Moreover, the democratization of structure is the outcome of earlier actions and structures. Then, the democratization of structures will be created differently in different contexts.

I have said earlier that agents' capability to change the structures depends on the structures that they act through. Furthermore, agents' choice of action depends on the structures that produce the action /self: agents' democratization of action/self depends on the structures that produce the democratization of action/self.

The collective action of One Million Signatures mirrors the reflections of the campaign members on the position they are put in (as the Other). The fighting against hegemonic masculinity and the construction of self (through the action against objectification) should be understood as democratization of gender relations, as well as democratization of political structure (structure on macro level). Thus, the One Million Signatures Campaign is understood as *a collective action for reconstruction of subjectivity in the personal (micro) and political (macro) level.*

Conclusion

As I said earlier, the campaign in this study is understood as a collective action. In the modern era, because of the dynamism of the social system, actions become more important than they were in the traditional societies, in the sense that actors have more knowledge about the structure that they have created and are creating.

According to Giddens, one aspect of the structuration is the self-reflexivity, where the self becomes a reflexive project of what the actor wants to become. In this study, the collective action of the campaign has been understood as self-reflexive collective action. The actors reflect on their self, and attempt to extend the reflection among Iranian citizens. Since the collective action by the reflection on self aims to create a new situation for women in Iran, the collective action of the campaign is an action of making a difference. According to Giddens, and his theory of power in structuration, power is necessary for being able to "act otherwise". Since the campaign does reflect on the objectified situation of women (and also men), the "acting otherwise" is about having the possibility to create an own self/personality.

According to Simon de Beauvoir's perception of woman's situation, this can be understood as transcending the situation. In this manner, creation of a new self is not only about involvement of power, but about equal and symmetric power relations.

This process is not limited to women's situation. According to Connell's theory of masculinities, there exist unequal power relations among men, which Otherize also some male positions in the structure of gender relations.

Further, these power relations exist not only on a personal level. Structuration theory interconnects the personal and political levels. The self-reflection and the creation of a new self takes place on both political and personal levels. They aim to extend the self-reflection among the citizens of Iran as a means of changing the discriminatory laws. Through this, they create new resources for exercising power on both personal and political levels.

Chapter 5

I want my human rights: the discourse of gender equality in the One Million Signatures Campaign

As I mentioned in the Introduction, inspired by Fairclough's framework of discourse analysis, the first empirical chapter will focus on the written and verbal discourse of gender equality in the One Million Signatures Campaign. According to Giddens' structuration theory, discourse is a structure that enables actions, and at the same time it is an outcome of actions. For me, in this thesis, the discourse of gender equality is a structure that enables women's activist's actions in the campaign, while at the same time being the outcome of their actions. In this chapter I will explore the way the discourse of gender equality is perceived and framed by the informants, bearing in mind that there are a lot of different structures that influence this discourse of gender equality.

In order to understand the discourse of gender equality produced within the campaign, there is a need to understand the structure of gender relations in Iran. As discussed in chapter 3, the Muslim gender system is based on biological differences, where the differences shape the norms, values, roles and prohibitions, as well as the male and female morality (Anwar, 2006). In this chapter I will indicate how campaigners object to the current gender system and attempt to build a structure of gender relations that is not based on biological differences.

Since not much has been written about what gender equality means for the campaigners, I started my analysis from the concept of the campaigners' presentation of gender. The first part of this chapter deals with how "men" and "women" are represented in the campaign, which will enable me to understand their perception of the structure of gender relations. In the last part of the chapter, the perception of "gender equality" as the demanded structure of gender relations will be discussed.

5.1 The interrelation of gender and the structure of gender relations

As discussed in chapter 3, Anwar, in "Gender and Self in Islam" (2006), argued that gender differences in most Muslim societies are justified by sexual and biological differences. Accordingly, since the justified sexual differences-which are perceived to be opposite of each other-create social responsibilities and rights, this also makes, the gender system hierarchical.

The society of Iran is an example to such a gender system. Indeed, in a country like Iran, where the legislation is based on Sharia Law, the gender system is legally supported.

In order to understand how the campaigners perceive gender relations in Iran, I intended to start off by understanding the way the campaigners present the two genders and their interrelation in the campaign. Members of the campaign have often written about women's conditions to justify the need for new legislation. Besides the texts that were found in the campaign's websites, the informants were also asked about the meaning of "woman" and "man" in the interviews³⁹. The meanings of man and woman which are presented in the campaign are important, since, firstly, they indicate the way informants have reflected on their situation, and secondly, it pictures interrelations of gender in the structure that has produced the meaning.

While there were many different ways of talking about "women" and "men", I recognized some similarities in the presentations. I have categorized the different kinds of descriptions of "men" and "women" as "the Otherized men and women" and "the new identity". These different presentations of men and women reveal different interrelations of gender in different structures of relations.

The Otherized men and women

In the early morning of a July day 2008, I met Reza in a park for an interview. While men and women around us were jogging or playing badminton, we started the interview. Among many other questions, I asked him what a woman is. He answered: *"I do not know, it does not have any specific meaning, it just reminds me of my mom"*.

I posed the same question to all of my informants, among others to Sara, whose answer was quite different from Reza's. She answered that *"The meaning of what a woman is has been constructed historically, especially the meaning of motherhood. For me, motherhood is a magnificent event which has been tampered with by history. For me, femininity starts with giving birth and with motherhood. In the campaign, we have so many daily problems, that we have no time to think about such things."*

³⁹ All interviews and most of the texts of the campaign's websites that I later refer to are my translations. The exceptions will be marked.

While the informants often talked differently about what a woman is, most of them presented “woman” as socially constructed.

Me: *What is a woman?*

Sima: *“Woman in today’s society is an object of sex/ commodity (Jens)⁴⁰. I want that women should be seen as human beings.”*

Fatima: *“To be a mother, a wife. In this society women are born to make someone happy.”*

Siyamak: *“It seems that a woman is only a body, not a human being, they are enslaved. But they are trying to change that.”*

Aidin: *“A woman becomes a woman by gender clichés. I like better the clichés related to women than those related to men, the clichés such as motherhood, criticizing power, unselfishness.”*

In the interviews, when I asked the informants about the meaning of “woman”, many of them started by the description of society’s perception of women. This presentation of “woman” has also been framed in the campaign’s websites as reports from the society, for instance in an article entitled *“Zahra, 11 years old, was sent to the marriage of death by the green light of laws”* (Hosseini-Khah, 2008a). In this article, the life story of Zahra, an 11 years old girl who committed suicide, and her mother is described. Zahra, who grew up in jail with her mom until the age of 7, was sent to her father since guardianship⁴¹ over children is men’s right in Iran. As Zahra’s letters to her mother show, she lived with continual violence in her father’s home. She killed herself at the age of 11, when her father forced her to marry a 35 years old man. Through short description of true life stories, laws related to marriage, divorce and guardianship are discussed. The author concludes by saying: *“Zahra is only one of the thousands of girls who have been sent to marriage of death as a result of discriminatory laws. The consequence is a marriage of which women can decide neither the start, nor the end. It usually ends with “husband killing”, suicide or running away from home in a society where there exist no “safe houses” for women.”* (ibid, 2008a).

As I have tried to show here, “women” are often presented in the campaign and by campaigners as socially constructed. In other words, women as inferior and discriminated are created by the society and the legislation. In addition, the created inferior women are

⁴⁰ *Jens* means sex, goods and commodity.

⁴¹ The right to custody in Iran is divided in two parts; caring (*hezanat*) and guardianship (*velayat*). Guardianship is men’s right (father or the paternal grand father of the child). (See more Articles 1181 and 1169 of the Civil Code).

presented by legislation and society. In this sense, the identity and situation are given to the women by legislation and society. I call this description of woman “the Otherized woman”. The Otherized woman is a woman whose identity is given to her by legislation, culture, society, and men, and her situation is shaped by culture and legislation. In addition, the given identity is justified by sexual and biological differences. “Women” are, not only, as Anwar argues, understood as biologically inferior and the opposite of men in a society, their condition and self have also been created by the society and legislation.

Browsing through the published texts on the websites, I realized that men were represented in relation to women’s discriminatory condition; in relation to “the Otherized woman”, which is a result of the discriminatory legislation. Men, society and legislation were held responsible for women’s situation. For example, in the article *“Zahra, 11 years old, was sent to the marriage of death by the green light of laws”*, Zahra’s father, the future husband and legislation were represented as responsible for the death of Zahra.

In another article, in which the woman Raheleh’s life story is described, her husband and legislation are again presented as responsible for her legal and cultural situation. The article was written in jail after Raheleh was imprisoned for killing her husband. There she met one of the campaign’s activists who was also arrested, for participation in the campaign’s activities. She wrote the story and asked why Raheleh (who later was executed) killed her husband. Raheleh described the oppression she had suffered under her husband’s violent behavior, and the blind eye of the legislation. Raheleh’s husband’s death is represented in the article as the consequence of the discrimination against Raheleh. *““I did not want to kill him, it all happened in a single moment. He made me tired, made me hate him. I was tired of him [...].” This would not happen if someone could have helped her when she was beaten, if [...] she had the right to complain, if someone had believed her, or if she could get a divorce.”* (Hossein-Khah, 2008b).

Further, “men” in the campaign were perceived as representatives of laws and culture in society, and sometimes they were treated as synonyms with them. For example, in the article *“They want women in the private arenas”* which is about the new student quota bill⁴², the bill was represented as a manly wish to control women (Karami, 2008). The word “they” used in the article refers to both men and legislation. In other words, law, culture and society do not

⁴² In the new student quota bill, female students can only study in the provinces that they are born in.

just discriminate women, but they are produced by men, and they produce “man” and the inferior “woman”.

When I asked the informants about what a “man” is, they said;

Sima: *“Today men are the reproduction of the forms that structure the Islamic Republic. They are the reproduction of power, a high self-reliance. Some of them think they control the world.”*

Reza: *“Men are often selfish. Men have the feeling of ownership over everything.”*

Aidin: *“Suppressor, I like mostly the clichés that are related to women.”*

Zahra: *“Here, a man is a human being, but not a woman. Men get support and protection from the society.”*

Both the verbal and written texts describe a dominant power relation between men and women. The dominant power relation Otherizes women; make something of them that discriminated against them. This can, according to Connell’s theory of masculinities, be called *hegemonic masculinity* (Connell, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity as the dominant position in gender relations creates a hierarchical structure of gender relations. The campaigners’ description of the relation between women’s discrimination and “men” is a description of women’s relation to hegemonic masculinity. The campaigners’ description of the “man” as powerful, violating and controlling corresponds with what Connell calls hegemonic masculinity.

The male domination over women was often represented in the articles as created by legislation. Further, the legislation is produced by men. While “men” were often represented as the ones responsible for women’s discrimination, some informants, mainly male, considered men as discriminated against by masculinity. Like the male informant Siyamak put it; *“More than anything, masculinity is destroying men. In the patriarchy, the patriarch is the one who will be demolished; people do not respect him because he is a human being, but because he is a patriarch.”*

Aidin: [when we were talking about gender equality, he said] *“Do you think I have psychological security in this society? Every time I pass a girl in a narrow alley, the girl walks fast a way to make sure that there is enough distance between us, as she was scared that I would abuse her. Or, other times, when I sit in a taxi next to a woman, I always try hard to keep the distance. So the woman would not think that I will abuse her. What is really the*

meaning of hijab? It implies that I cannot control my desire. That is why women have to cover their body and take distance. Is that really who I am?"

Sanaz: "I am not sure if I should say women are discriminated against or not, but I know that women are in a position which they should not be in. Women do not deserve it. Women are not treated as human beings. This has created inequality. In this situation, men are considered human beings, unlike women. But after I got to know the boys [male campaigners], I think men are also discriminated against."

Some campaigners believe that masculinity first of all denies men any other identity than the identity of the discriminator. As I understood the discourse, some informants considered that since men's identity is constructed by hegemonic masculinity, men as well as women have been Otherized. This means that while hegemonic masculinity is created in order for men to have a dominant position in relation to women, it discriminates men by giving them such an identity. This description of men was often referred to in the weblog of "Men for Equality Committee" (which is linked to the website of "Change for Equality"). In the article "Men in the Women's Movement", the author says:

"Men's presence in the movement is not a contemptuous sympathy; it is an objection, a cry against the oppression of us – side by side with women. It is perhaps strange for men to hear that men are oppressed more than women in this society, but we are the victims of our "oppressive Self"." ("Men for Equality Committee", 2008)

He further says: *"The content of the women's movement is an objection to all aspects of the gender relations that are governing our Self and soul; a costly critique against the everyday contempt for us [men]. Our voice is the silent voice of victim men."* (ibid, 2008).

As mentioned in the chapter on historical background, I argued that many Iranian men might be marginalized in the power structure of Iran. By the Islamization of the governing structures of the country, the Supreme Leader was justified as the guardian of both Iranian men and women. Iranians may therefore feel powerless, since there are always some other men (such as those who work in the army of revolutionary guards, or the Moral Police) who have higher status of guardianship over the women and men of the country. An example is the *hijab*. A husband-even though he is the legally and religiously defined guardian of his wife-cannot decide about the appearance his wife, since it has already been decided by the Supreme

Leader. This also means that the practice of hegemonic masculinity of marginalized men is reduced to private life.

Such hierarchical relations between men in Iran imply that most Iranian men are marginalized, even if they act according to the hegemonic masculinity. When political Islam becomes more oppressive, men may thus also feel more as the Other. This current position of men in Iranian gender relations may be one of several reasons why so many young men participate in the collective actions of One Million Signatures. However, this aspect of the complexity of gender relations was not recognized or mentioned by any of the informants in the campaign.

The new identity

As pointed out, “women” and “men” were described in the campaign’s discourse as created by hegemonic masculinity. The Otherized woman’s identity was described by the campaigners as “women have been seen as ...”, indicating that the campaigners believe that this identity is not related to women’s nature. Rather, it is the way society constructs them and their situation. Through reflection on the self and its condition in the collective action of the One Million Signatures, men and women in the campaign are trying to create new gendered identities.

“The new woman” is present in texts produced by the campaign since the first documents that were published in 2006. For instance, in the document *The Effect of Laws on Women’s Lives*, it is written that;

“Although women have shown their strength in different social and financial arenas, this backwardness, in relation to laws related to women, is extremely discriminatory and disadvantageous to women. [...] Women try to upgrade the living standards of their families and themselves by individually struggling to complete many educational or occupational degrees. However, because of the existing discriminatory laws many of these individual struggles meet a dead end⁴³.” (“Change for Equality”, 2006c)

This way of talking about women as active, struggling actors is also how the female informants talked about themselves. One example is from the group interview of three members of the “Mothers’ Committee”, Fatima, Mahin and Mina;

⁴³ Translated by Rahma Tohidi, published on the website of “Change for Equality”

Mahin: *“When I talk to men in the streets about our rights, some of them tell me “Oh! You women sit together and exaggerate things, these days women are the bosses at home”. This is partly true. Many of us women have struggled and worked hard individually to show that we can decide for ourselves and even for the household. We can make decisions at home, but if we appear in court, it is no longer important if we can make decisions at home or not. What is important is that the dominant gaze, which recognizes us as half of a human being, should be changed.”*

Mina: *“I have to add that the position that women have at home changes with their education or social class. This is not the reality for women in the villages. They can not decide even for themselves.”*

Fatima: *“Yes, we have seen such issues in villages around Tehran. We in the “Mothers’ Committee” usually go to villages around Tehran and talk to women. We encourage women to work outside and be independent. There have been some cases where women have told us that their relations with their husbands have got better after they started to earn some money.”*

Me: *“This does not concern all women in the whole Iran. Take for instance, the women from Northern Iran. Traditionally, women from that area are known as the ones working in the field, and even working at the market is the job of women.”*

Fatima: *“Yes, they work their whole lives in the fields, but according to the law they can not inherit the land. I understand what you mean. This is the culture of north Iran. But we have seen that when women work outside and gain money, where it is not their culture, women will be more respected at home.”*

Mahin: *“Generally, I think that, if any woman can at least individually influence men and women around her, we will succeed.”*

In my consideration, “the new women”, who were presented as active, were women whose lives are untraditional. They are women who are productive and reflect on their situation. These women also, like “the Otherized women”, struggle under discriminatory legislation, but they try to change their situation. The presentations of “women” who struggle for recognition

in the society, women who work to change their situation, were often repeated in the interviews;

Mahtab: *"I am a capable woman. I am not a woman from 100 years ago, but the laws have not changed since then."*

Siyamak: *"They [women] are enslaved. But they are trying to change it."*

Zahra: *"We are educated and work hard. We do not deserve these laws [...] In Iran, women are the struggle for equal rights. It would be very passive if I said women are discriminated against. Women are the fight against discriminatory laws."*

"The new woman" is an image of an active and productive woman who struggles for justice (equality) in the society. This identity does not only show women's demand for the change of their situation, but also their actions to obtain change. The new identity is shaped by the action, and is at the same time a result of reflection on self in modern age. According to Giddens, "The idea that each person has a unique character and special potentialities that may or may not be fulfilled is alien to pre-modern culture." (Giddens, 1991, p. 74). It is through our actions that we express what we want to be in modern age.

In the campaign's website there is very little written about a similar "new identity" for men. However, there are some interviews with male campaigners in the website of "Change for Equality", which shows a different identity from the "Otherized men":

Garmestani, a male campaigner, answers the question of why he is active in the women's movement in this way:

"In this society we have been oppressed by many different aspects. From family, religion, ethnicity and gender etc. The oppression wants us, both men and women, to obey the structure of power. One of those aspects [of oppression] is patriarchy. If you fight against it, you will become feminist, and if you fight against all aspects, you will become anarchist.

But the difference between patriarchy and other hierarchical structures is that patriarchy is more fundamental. Children learn the oppression from the household, where father oppress the mother. Then the children will accept the hierarchical structure in society."(Farokhi, 2008).

To the same question, male campaigner Khodayi answers: *“I am from a family full of violence [...] and physical violence against my mother. There was also verbal violence. [...] But when I got to the age of 18-19, I dared to resist my father. [...] Sometimes I cannot sleep at night because of my childhood’s memories. Can you even imagine how a child with such experiences will be harmed when one says you should beat your wife! [...] My goal is to continue working in the movement. If they take the campaign from us, we will write. If they ban us from writing, we will talk. We will object with our behavior [...]. It seems that the act of objecting is in our blood now. They can not take the objection from us. This is a part of us.”* (Farokhi & Garmestani, 2009).

While earlier in the chapter men were presented as both discriminatory and discriminated by hegemonic masculinity, “feminist men” or “egalitarian men”, as carriers of the new identity, were considered to be active and against the discrimination. They were neither a part of the hegemonic masculinity, nor among those who are destroyed by the masculinity. However, perhaps surprisingly, the action of resisting patriarchy (hegemonic masculinity) is not presented as an alternative masculinity. In addition, I did not find any article in the websites and the weblog of “Men for Equality Committee” that could indicate a perception of such actions as an alternative masculinity. On the contrary, some of my male informants actually described their action as feminine, like Hasan: *“I want that the world becomes full of female values. What does it mean? I know that there are no female or male values. But some values are regarded as associated with women, such as solidarity, love, kindness [...] I want these values to construct the world.”*

5.2 Gender equality

In this part I will explore the way “gender equality” was understood in the campaign. I should mention that in spite of the fact that “gender equality” is the declared aim of the campaign, the term “gender equality” is rarely defined or discussed in the websites. The term is often used without any description of what it means for the campaign or what it refers to. This made me curious about finding out how the campaigners talk about gender equality and what it means to them. In this part, I will try to grasp the meaning that gender equality has for the campaigners.

Disconnection from biology

In the website of the “Change for Equality” it is stated that the campaign demands the change of all laws that discriminate women. The campaign demands equal rights for women in marriage, divorce and inheritance, equal “blood money”, etc, as described in chapter 1.

In the interviews, when I asked the informants what should replace the current laws, they often talked about equal rights. As Sanaz, who says: *“For me, the right to initiate divorce and also the right to witness is important. This means that women should have the right to initiate divorce and that a female witness should be equal to a male witness.”*

However, talking about specific rights was more problematic. For instance, I asked Sima what her suggestion is for equal right to guardianship of children. She answered that they have not discussed that yet. While most informants talked very briefly about rights, and often just mentioned which rights are most important for them, Hasan was among the few informants who discussed his ideas about equal rights with me at some length:

“I believe that the right to equal blood money is one of the most important rights that can challenge and change other discriminatory rights. Most of Maraje’ believe that the reason of unequal blood money for men and women is the issue that men are considered economically responsible for the household. Men have higher blood money because they have to pay for nafaqeh (maintenance⁴⁴). If it changes, I believe the right of tamkin (submission⁴⁵) will also change. The rights of tamkin and velayat (guardianship) are related to each other; and also the rights that support honor killings.”

Me: *“Then are you saying that the key of the change of legislation is economy?”*

Hasan: *“No, I believe the laws are more masculine, rather than related to economy. For example, if you look at the right of inheritance, the legislation has not accepted a woman as the head of a household. If the legislation would expect a woman to be the head of a household, then the laws would be formulated in a way that allows women to get equal share of inheritance.”*

⁴⁴ According to Mir-Hoseini in the book “Marriage on Trial” (2000b), in most Muslim societies, *nafaqeh* is the economic responsibility of men in the marital relationship. She argues that in Iranian legislation, like many other Islamic countries, *nafaqeh* becomes obligatory for the husband only when the wife submits (*tamkin*) to husbands’ sexual demands. (Article 1108 and 106 of Civil Code)

⁴⁵ A part of the right of “*tamkin*” obliges women to submit to their husbands’ sexual demands. (See more Article 1108 of the Civil Code)

As I understood him, he considered that the laws are based on responsibilities that have been justified by biology. Hasan, like many others, believed that the legal expectations of individuals should not be limited to their sex. In the interviews, I asked the informants about the meaning of gender equality. Some of them said;

Azita: "Gender equality is something without any frame. It is something that will allow people to find themselves, without calling them a man or a woman. When someone is referred to as a woman, there are certain expectations attached to that. But I want to do a range of things that are perhaps expected of men. Today's laws impose gender, motherhood and being a wife. They expect men to make money. Maybe a man does not like to work. These expectations should not be based on sex."

Sanaz: "Gender equality is when you would not have different rights because you are a man or a woman."

Zahra: "We talk about equal rights: that difference in biology has nothing to do with equality. I want my human rights. My feminist activities are about demanding equality. I want to have the right of choice. What has been chosen for me as a man or a woman should not be important. Even if there is a difference in biology, the rights should be equal; the right of choice should exist."

Aidin: "The meaning of gender equality is not that we should be like each other. The meaning is that you will live beyond the biology/sex; that there will not be any external pressure on how you should behave. Maybe a man will acquire some feminine attributes. There should not be any oppression based on biology."

One of the issues that became obvious to me in this part is that gender equality was perceived as a structure where the individuals' identities are not limited to the way biology has been justified by the "hegemonic masculinity". This is an end to the justification of the domination of biology. This is the demand of people who live in a society where individuals' rights and identities are created based on their biology. In this sense, this is a radical demand, where the campaigners want a totally different society.

Becoming human beings by gender equality

Mahtab: *“You cannot apply the laws of 1400 years ago on the women of today. The change of legislation is women’s need. How can women supply their demands when they cannot participate in the making of law? Women are interpreted from men’s point of view”.*

As mentioned earlier, in the current legislation and in Iranian society as a whole, women have been framed from society and legislation’s point of view; the structure of gender relations implies women’s identity is given to them. The “gender equality” is a demand for legislation which would allow women to create their own identity by equally distribution of opportunities within a society.

Me: *“What comes to your mind when you talk about gender equality?” Or “What is the meaning of gender equality for you?”*

Reza: *“To be able to say we are human beings before saying we are men or women.”*

Siyamak: *“In the beginning [when I was religious] I thought gender equality is the different rights for men and women. But now I think different rights are not necessarily equal. We can not say that this right is equal with that right. The sex should not be the issue in the laws. As a human being, you should be able to create your personality. You can not grow up (develop) in a society where a religion makes sexist laws.”*

Fatima: *“I believe that you should have an equal welfare, even if you have different biology. You should be accepted as a human being.”*

By the informants’ descriptions of gender equality and their relative lack of focus on specific rights, it became clear that “gender equality” does not refer to certain rights that will give woman the opportunity to be equal with men, or having the opportunities that men already have. Rather, “gender equality” is understood as an end to a gender hierarchy system where individuals are Otherized and objectified. As I understood it, “gender equality” is for my informants a structure where neither man nor woman is recognized, and where behavior in accordance with hegemonic masculinity does not exist.

In addition, “gender equality” is about having opportunities to create your personality / identity disconnected from your biology. It was often discussed that the rights and

opportunities should not be based on the sex. In this sense, the change of legislation is understood in terms of enabling the actors' capacity to act otherwise. Acting otherwise happens in disconnection from the biology. This is equal distribution of power, where everyone would have equal capacity to act otherwise.

Further, gender equality will give people the opportunity to make choices that are not based on their sex. Since behavior is no longer based on sex, and people are free to choose, it may make society genderless. I call it genderless since there would not be any interrelation of gender. In such a society, individuals can have the ability and the choice to be the one they want to be. This was often presented as "to become human beings". As we have seen, female informants often said that they wanted to be recognized as human beings.

Male campaigners, in line with the women, wanted to be accepted as human beings. I asked some female informants about what they think about feminist men. Sanaz said;

"I always tell the boys [feminist men] that it is not profitable for them to demand equality. We [women] are trying to take a part of your rights from you. But they answer that it is important for them that their wives know that they see them as human beings, and then the women will also see them as human beings. They no longer want to be seen as workers or violators. They also want to become human beings."

Zahra: *"When the earlier generations of Iranian men supported the women's movement, they usually felt pity for women, the same way the European women think about us. But this generation of men believes that equal rights are also their rights."*

There was a perception among the campaigners that a society which is shaped by gender equality will create the individuals of the society as human beings, and that such society would be genderless. This was made very clear in Reza's interview, when I ask him about the meaning of gender equality and gender:

Me: *"What is a man?"*

Reza: *"Men are often selfish. Men have the feeling of ownership over everything."*

Me: *"What is a woman?"*

Reza: *"I do not know, it does not have any specific meaning, it just reminds me of my mom"*.

Me: *"What comes to your mind when you talk about gender equality?"*

Reza: *"One Million Signatures Campaign"*

Me: *“What is the meaning of gender equality for you?”*

Reza: *“To be able to say we are human beings before saying we are men or women.”*

As indicated earlier in this chapter, the genderless society was sometimes understood as feminine, especially among male campaigners since masculinity was perceived as the creator of discrimination. This might result from the informants’ preoccupation with the feminine/masculine dichotomy.

Me: *Who is a human being?*

Aidin: *“Unselfish, criticizes the power.”*

Hasan: *“Being human means helping each other. It is to demand equality, to say the truth, not committing violence. In one word it is being feminine.”*

Conclusion

In the first part of this chapter, I tried to indicate the main character of the perceived gender relations. The “Otherized men and women” are presented in relation to hegemonic masculinity. These “Otherized men and women” are marginalized and discriminated since both of them were perceived as shaped by given identities. Both male and female informants felt the given identities discriminate them. In addition, men discriminate both themselves and women. The idea of the woman as the Other was presented by Simon de Beauvoir in 1949. Beauvoir argued that woman as an object does not refer to her nature, but the way her identity and self has been produced by men. Women have internalized and externalized the identity. In this sense, Beauvoir considered that women’s subjectivity is not transcendental.

“The Otherized men and woman” are created by the hegemonic masculinity of the society and by legislation. The descriptions of the “Otherized men and women” indicate a significant level of self-reflection among campaigners. The presentation of the ideas of the “Otherized men and women”, and the reflection on their situation, are not conducted by “Otherized men and women”, but by men and women who have already transcended the limits to what they want to make out of their selves. I called the presentation of this kind of men and women, “the new identity”. “The new women” were presented as productive and struggling to change the injustice. “The new men”, “feminist men”, were often presented by male informants as fighters of oppression. The newly constructed identities for men and women in the campaign may be described as transcendental subjectivity according to Simon de Beauvoir’s conceptual

terms. This might mean that men and women in the campaign have been able, to some extent, to make something of themselves beyond the limitations (the discriminatory situation) that were given to them by the hegemonic masculinity. The new identity is created by acting otherwise than being Otherized. In this sense, this is what Giddens calls “the power in the structuration”.

In the second part of this chapter, I tried to discuss the perceived meaning of gender equality in the campaign. I also indicated how the campaigners discuss the equal rights. I found that there was a lack in concrete alternative rights. Surprisingly, gender equality was neither defined nor explained in their website, despite the fact that gender equality was the goal of the campaign. As I said earlier, there was not one common way of presenting gender equality. The informants talked about gender equality in different ways, but most of them described gender equality according to two aspects. One aspect of the description was that the legislation and social construction of rules should be disconnected from biology. The other aspect of the description was that men and women should be able to create their own identity. To become the one they want to be, there should not be any interference from hegemonic masculinity. It was often presented as being recognized and accepted as human beings. As I argued earlier, some informants described “human being” as feminine. Since the society shaped by gender equality is sometimes imaged as a “feminized genderless structure”, the structure of such a society can not be called “the structure of gender relations”. There would not be (as it was perceived) any relations of gender. Instead it would be a gendered (feminized) structure of social relations.

While in this chapter I tried to understand campaigners’ perceptions on the structure of gender relations that they act through, in the next chapter I will indicate the way they talk about gender equality in everyday life of the campaign.

Chapter 6

The gendered democracy: the discourse practice of democracy in the campaign's everyday life

During the interviews, I recognized that sometimes the discussion of gender equality turned towards an argument for democracy. Gender equality was operationalized as democracy. This seemed logical when democracy was understood as a precondition of gender equality and vice versa. “*Gender equality is the precondition of democracy. No country can claim that they have democracy if they do not have gender equality*” (Sanaz). “*The path of the One Million Signatures Campaign is through democracy*” (Siyamak). During the fieldwork, I recognized that the members of the organized networks of the campaign talked mostly about democracy. In other words, the discourse of gender equality was replaced with democracy in the campaign's everyday actions.

Inspired by Fairclough's framework of discourse analysis, this chapter will focus on the way democracy was talked about and discussed in the everyday social practices. Based on Structuration theory, actors are seen as knowledgeable and capable actors who reflexively monitor their action. By understanding the discourse of democracy, we can find the way they reflect on and perceive the structures within which they act.

This chapter will deal with the way the informants talked about the issue of democracy during social practices such as collecting signatures and participating in workshops and seminars. Since I was in the field for two and a half months, I decided to include the campaign's written texts about democracy. These texts⁴⁶ will indicate the discussions around the social practices. In the first part of this chapter, I will indicate the way informants talked about the terms of democracy and feminism in relation to patriarchy. Through this, the perception of the structure of social relations will be pointed out. In the second part of the chapter, I will show how the members of the organized networks genderized their social actions and relations.

6.1 Feminism and Democracy

In the last days of August 2008 in a park in Tehran, the “Following-up Committee” had a meeting for the committee's members on the topic of “the Anniversary of the Campaign”. The meeting started with the members' curiosity about the campaign's general meeting (in

⁴⁶ All interviews and most of the texts are my translation. The exceptions will be marked.

which only 2 candidates of every committee had participated). It was stated that some part of the information that was debated in the general meeting could not be distributed among all members. As usual, the discussion quickly turned towards the issue of democracy.

Laleh: *“We try to work democratically, but this is not democracy.”*

Ala: *“We all have the right to have equal access to the information. This is not acceptable.”*

While members were negotiating to access to all information, one of the committee’s candidates asked the members to accept the situation as it is, until the information comes out on the website.

After a long discussion against this statement, Laleh said: *“But this is not right. We have to criticize each other. This is the way we learn about democracy. We have to criticize the power; this is what feminism is about.”*

In many conversations I had recognized a kind of relation between democracy and feminism. This relationship is critical for understanding the actions and the perception of the structure of social relations. In this part I will explore their way of talking about democracy and feminism. The focus of my attention will be to find out how the discussion about democracy changed and developed by the context, since I believe that the discussions have challenged and changed by the situation the informants have been in. All articles referred in this chapter are written by the members of the campaign, and are about their own actions. Interestingly, all published articles in the website about democracy are about the individual and collective actions of the members of the campaign.

Democracy versus Patriarchy

During the interviews, I rarely came across debates about democracy. However, as I have already pointed out, democracy and democratic ways of action were among the most discussed issues in the daily life of the campaign. I found out that the discussion about democratic ways of action began with the establishment of the campaign in the summer 2006, when the campaign decided to have open access for all new women’s activists. This has later led to a discussion about “opportunities for new activists”.

Some informants explained to me that to get access to women’s NGOs (before the start of the campaign) was impossible. A new activist needed earlier experience, or related education in order to be accepted. *“I started to work in the campaign because the doors were open for everyone who wanted to be a part of the game.”* (Sanaz).

Javaheri, as one of the initiators of the campaign, says in the book “A campaign for all seasons”, “*the campaign is the start of the new networked relations. [... Here] we have had the presumption to trust individuals who we do not know, but we have common identity with them.*” (2007a, p. 13).

By the time the number of volunteers grew, the discussion turned among other things towards the way of doing the collective actions. The discussions around the way of doing the collective actions were often illustrated in the websites. In many articles, democracy was discussed in relation to the issue of activists’ participation.

“In the first year of experience with the Campaign we have learned that the more we distribute our activities and responsibilities across (horizontally) the wider the spread of activists who share the will to change discrimination. [...] On the contrary, in the process of addressing discrimination and demanding “change” persons who join in become active according to their own capacities and interests, thus impacting the overall spirit of the Campaign through their own actions and ideas. Therefore, the continuation of their participation is a key to the success of this Campaign.⁴⁷” (Javaheri, 2007b). The author considers that the path that One Million Signatures Campaign follows is of non-centralized and democratic power structure. This, in her point of view, would maximize activists’ participation. When the campaign opened the door for new activists, the discussion about decision making got new shape. *“The initiators wanted to have some privilege in the decision making, but we “newcomers” could not accept it.”* (Siyamak).

Javaheri, in the article “A year with the Campaign” in 2007, claims that in the horizontal structure of the campaign everyone based on the scope and the level of their involvement and participation have the right to take part in decision making. She calls the right to participation and the right to decision making “direct democracy”, where *“cooperation is the right of each member, not a privilege. Everyone is encouraged to join in and to participate to the best of their abilities.⁴⁸”* (Javaheri, 2007b).

Furthermore, newcomers were not only anxious to keep the right to make decisions, but also worried that anyone or any group would derive a benefit of their activity. They wondered if they are the soldiers of any leader that they do not know about. In the article “I am equal with

⁴⁷ Translated by Sholeh Shahrokhi, published on the website of the “Change for Equality”.

⁴⁸ Translated by Shohle Shahrokhi, published on the website of the “Change for Equality”.

Shirin Ebadi”, Mehdiian tried to express her anxiousness that the campaign has a hierarchical leadership. “[...] dear, feminism is against the hierarchical system. All of us are equal; here in this movement, I am equal with Shirin Ebadi.” (2007).

In the summer of 2008, when I was in the field, many of the informants believed that they did not have equal access to information and participation in activities.

“We try to work democratically, but all our problems show the fact that we do not act democratically. For instance the books⁴⁹, as the member of the campaign I should know about the books. I should have the right to participate in the publishing of the books if I wanted. But only a few members knew and participated in this.” (Sima).

“I did not like the way the boys’ committee [Men for Equality’s Committee] worked. The information would not circulate among all members. Some had more access to information than others. This is not democratic”. (Siyamak).

In the campaign, as I recognized, the access to information was important. Access to information was often related to the members’ personal network, which they called “Friends’ Circles” (*halghehaye doosti*). The informal “Friends’ Circles” were small groups that exist within the campaign across committees, where friends usually exchanged information about what they wanted to do and how. The participation in actions and the size of the “Friends’ Circle” could be important in their creation of an identity as campaigner and also their decision making. The identity in turn would create power. Having large numbers of friends could be helpful, for instance, in relation to being released from jail. In this way they tried to create “identity”⁵⁰ as campaigners to ensure their security.

In the article “The dangerous rust of the non democratic procedures in the campaign”, Keshavarz-Niya in the summer 2008 criticizes this situation and discusses the relation between “using the non criticized power” and “the violation of the circulation of information”. She mentions three reasons for the violation of the circulation of information: 1) activists’ usage of power on the basis of their social resources, and the scope of their participation in the campaign’s activities; 2) infatuation by charismatic personalities; 3) personal and individual conflicts. She calls it the problem of the hierarchical structure and power-seeking leadership (Keshavarz- Niya, 2008).

⁴⁹ She was talking about some books, recently published by the campaign.

⁵⁰ There was a belief that if someone’s name has been published, and was known, it would be easier to get the person’s release from jail.

During the fieldwork, I realized that the issue of democracy could appear in any discussion related to the structure of power relations in the campaign, in Iran as well as on the global level. However, most discussed issues were related to internal issues of the campaign. Democracy was perceived as related to power relations on any level. It was often mentioned by critics of the hierarchical system. Hierarchical structure was understood as the structure of power relations that not equally distributes the existing opportunities among all individuals of the society. In general, democracy was often mentioned as the opposite of hierarchical structure. As it is also mentioned in the Javahei's article "A year with the campaign", such structure was called horizontal system or structure. Horizontal structure was often mentioned as a structure where everyone has equal opportunity to participate in the campaign's activities. In this sense, the image of democracy was that everyone's position or capacity in the campaign should not be limited or identified by the dominating group's actions.

In the conversations about democracy, I noticed that "hierarchical system" was synonymous with "patriarchy". Sometimes these terms were used interchangeably; like "hierarchical structure of household" instead of "patriarchy":

"How can we fight against hierarchical system in the households, when we act hierarchically in our movement? We try to work horizontally." (Sima).

In the campaign's workshop on "Violence in the Households", the discussion about patriarchy was a rather central issue. Patriarchy was mentioned as the reason for violence in the household. The instructor of the workshop asked the participants what patriarchy is. The answer was: a hierarchical system where the power and opportunities were not equally distributed. Participants mentioned culture, religion, households, laws, government, and the Islamic Republic of Iran as patriarchal.

Feminism against Patriarchy

Whereas the discourse of democracy was rarely brought up in the interviews, many of the interviewees showed an intention to talk about feminism. For instance, when I asked Aidin about gender and gender equality, he said he prefers to talk about feminism, rather than gender. He later added that he is more comfortable to talk about feminism, since he has read about and discussed feminism with other campaigners earlier. It was obvious that the campaign's members often debated feminism and women's movements. Besides the seminars

on women's movements, campaigners also often referred to the collective actions as "feminism". I noticed that feminism was mentioned in discussions related to the "Feminist School", the "Mothers' Committee", the "Men for Equality Committee", and any other groups or individuals that the campaigners believed were related to unequal distribution of power.

In the article called "Patriarchy against Patriarchy", Abdi discusses why men should become feminists. To answer this question, he describes what feminism is as seen from different perspectives. He concludes that *"Feminism is a continuous and fluid action; a dynamic movement in all aspects of our social lives. Feminism in its nature is an attempt of critique. Feminism is the critique of injustice, the critique of power structures, culture, values and norms of patriarchy."* (Abdi, 2008).

Furthermore, all campaigners that I met and talked to identified themselves as feminists. "Feminist" was defined as an actor that primarily criticizes the unequal power relations.

"The "Feminist School" decided to focus on the discourses of feminism, but they are not feminists. They left us (the group of "Change for Equality") because of power. They wanted to have a hierarchal system in which they would be at the top of it. They left us for power, they are not feminists. A feminist is a criticizer of power." (Sima).

Later I recognized that there were two goals behind such statements. Firstly, through such critiques, the participants would become feminists or prove that they are feminists. Secondly, they would create democracy and act democratically. In other words, through the action of critique of unequal power relations (feminism), they would try to create a horizontal structure (democracy) by equal power relations and distribution of opportunities. Everyone who was able to do that was perceived as feminist. Thus, the campaigners also perceived "democracy" as a process to be created by feminists.

In other words, by criticizing power relations, feminists challenge the hierarchical structure of social relations. This was the reason for Abdi in the article "Patriarchy against Patriarchy" to have an identity as feminist. *"To be a feminist for a man is like drawing a sword against his Self. The identity of being feminist is the identity of reconstruction of the self. [...] Patriarchy has made a way into the legislation, language, culture, norms. Patriarchy does not have any goal other than producing patriarchs. Men have to resist patriarchy, since men, along with the women, are victims of the patriarchal order."* (Abdi, 2008).

In my view, Abdi is talking about the self-reflection and the creation of new identity. It is through the new identity as actor, "human being", the identity as feminist is shaped.

As we have seen in the last chapter, masculinity was seen in the campaign as the creator of hegemonic masculinity. In this sense, the identity of a feminist man is one who resists patriarchy (by criticizing power relations of such structures of relations). In this way, the Feminist School's members were considered patriarchal, since it was sometimes perceived that they wanted to centralize power through a hierarchical system. The same label was given to the "Men for Equality's Committee", and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the article "The Beliefs of the Patriarch; Women and National Media", Khodayi discusses "the nature of patriarchy". He tries to describe why patriarchy has a problem with change. "*The element of quiescence (the absence of change) is the most important axis of present patriarchy. The present patriarchy considers that a man has natural particulars that can not change. [...] The belief of quiescence brings us to the point of "not being changeable".*" (Khodayi, 2008). As I mentioned in the previous chapter, hegemonic masculinity was perceived as both discriminatory and discriminating. As long as hegemonic masculinity would not construct a new identity (which is disconnected from biology), the aspect of discrimination would remain. In this sense, patriarchy was understood as unchangeable, and passive to change.

In the article "Men in the Women's Movement", which is dedicated to Yaqubali⁵¹, the author says that "*in this world, oppression will quickly change to the antagonist of self (zedde khod). Patriarchy has changed to the antagonist of self, and has enslaved "us" [men]. Patriarchy has assumed us as the human beings of childish thoughts, always stimulated/ turned on (tahrik shode), and naturally rapper/aggressive/offensive (motajavez). They [patriarchy] have disgraced the becoming human being of human beings.*" (Men for Equality Committee, 2008).

"[...] *Men are fighting to "become human being". We [men] are not supporters of women's movement; [...]. We are an integral part of the continuous struggle of the women's movement.*" (ibid, 2008).

In his closing lines, he sums up and claims that the presence of a feminist man in the women's movement is "*the greatest start of the creation of the essence (mahiyat bakhshi) of a post-gendered movement; a movement which also belongs to us men.*" (ibid, 2008).

⁵¹ Amir Yaqubali was the first male member of the campaign. He had been arrested for his activities in the campaign.

In short, the campaign's perception of the process of democratization is that the critics of power (feminists) resist patriarchy to create democracy. In this sense, feminists create "democracy" and abolish patriarchy. By the act of critique, the identity as feminist is created. However, while there seemed to be a difference between democracy and feminism, "democrat" and "feminist" were sometimes used in the same way. For instance, I noticed that feminist men sometimes called themselves "demanders of equality" (egalitarian). By this they meant both demanders of equality and of democracy.

6.2 Dichotomy of gender and social relations

By analyzing the way the campaign talked about their own actions and social relations, I noticed a dichotomy in the understanding of social relations and gender relations. Both gender relations and social relations were described by feminine and masculine dichotomies. As we remember, gender equality was perceived as a structure of "gender relations" whose masculinity is eliminated. Further, gender equality was framed as a feminized structure of genderlessness.

In this section, I will describe the relation between the perceptions of gender equality and democracy. In order to do so, I will analyze how both "democracy" and "gender equality" were gendered.

Patriarchy and masculinity

As I argued earlier in this chapter, the members of organized networks of campaign often described "patriarchy" as a structure of hierarchical power relations. Such structures were considered to produce masculinity, while at the same time they themselves were a product of masculinity. It was perceived that, Patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity recreate each other.

"This kind of unequal and unpleasant relations is a reminder of masculine competitions which are common in our society. This cannot be a proper ideal for the feminine and feminist activities". (Keshavarz-Niya, 2008, P.5).

"If One Million Signatures Campaign would not overcome this situation [the creation of small independent networks (hastehaye khod bonyad)], the campaigners have stepped on a finite path which many other groups and movements have earlier stepped on. This refers to

those movements which were meant to work for women, but their leadership systems were masculine.” (Keshavarz Niya, 2008, p. 6).

Many campaigners considered masculinity as an aspect of patriarchy. It can be considered that patriarchy and masculinity recreate each other. Since the masculine way of action was exercised or created by unequal power relations, the masculinity was not perceived as linked to biology.

Democracy, gender equality and femininity

The campaigners fight against masculinity Otherizing both men and women. They believe that through gender equality, where everyone can equally access resources, everyone can construct and develop their self. In order to create structure where everyone can construct their own identity, everyone should have equal access to resources. Thus, a non-hierarchical structure of power relations is needed. In other words, “gender equality” can only be created through horizontal social relations. This horizontal structure of social relations campaigners call democracy.

Feminism for the campaigners was the action against unequal power relations. Feminists, as the actors of such action, were described as a feminine position in gender relations. The criticizing of power could be considered as an identity which is created by reflection on self and its condition. Feminists as “the new identity” are the result of a transcendental subjectivity. Feminists challenge the hegemonic masculinity, but the identity is independent from the hegemonic gaze.

This is called by Howson the “protest femininities”. He considers that there are different femininities in the structure of gender relations. “Protest femininities” is a type of gender relations. He argues that “the project of protest femininities can be understood as ideologically disconnected from hegemonic masculinity and, more, as its full exclusion”. (2006, p. 71). The “protest femininities” is not only concerned with the women’s question, but also with social justice in gender relations. However, in my opinion, it is not clear from his book whether “protest femininities” is a position in the gender relations, or if it is related to female biology. According to my study, such a position in gender relations is not connected to female biology, but to the recognition of being Otherized in the structure of gender relations. On the other hand, the discourse of gender equality and democracy which campaigners have constructed is similarly femininized. In order to create democracy as defined by campaigners,

there is a need for criticizing the hierarchical social relations. In this sense, there is a need for reflection on self and its condition. It is by protest femininity that the femininized horizontal structure of social relations and femininized structure of genderlessness will be created.

Although both “democracy” and “gender equality” are understood as quite similar, in the discourse of democracy, the emphasis was on power relations, while in the discourse of “gender equality”, construction of self was stressed. However, neither of the two can be created without the other.

“Gender equality is the precondition of democracy. No country can claim that they have democracy if they do not have gender equality.” (Sanaz).

“The path of One Million Signatures Campaign is through democracy.” (Siyamak).

Furthermore, it is reasonable to consider that the discourse of democracy was replaced by the discourse of gender equality, since the campaigners needed to create the power, the capacity to act otherwise, to constantly reshape their self as a human being, as a feminist.

Conclusion

While the goal of the One Million Signatures Campaign has been to change the discriminatory laws to laws based on gender equality, the most frequently discussed issue inside the campaign during my fieldwork was about democracy. In this chapter, I intended to analyze how campaigners talked and produced texts about democracy, since “democracy” to a large degree was replaced by “gender equality”. By this I attempted to reveal the relation between the discourse of gender equality and democracy.

“Democracy” for the campaigners is a horizontal structure of social relations which creates equal power relations and opportunities for the members of society. Democracy is created by the action of criticizing unequal power relations. This action is called feminism. Thus understood, feminism can be considered as “acting otherwise” in Giddens’ theoretical terms. That is, as a knowledgeable act to influence a specific process or state of affairs. Feminism will eliminate patriarchy since patriarchy is seen as its opposite, namely hierarchical social relations that produce unequal power relations in a society.

Since gender equality, as discussed in Chapter 5, was understood as a structure of social relations where the self can be created as disconnected from biology and hegemonic

masculinity, a horizontal power relation is needed for the creation of gender equality. Replacement of democracy by gender equality, among many other things, shows that the campaigner has not been able to operationalize the discussion of gender equality.

In order to understand why the discourse of democracy was replaced by “gender equality” in the campaign, we need to understand the relation between the context of the campaign and its social practices. In the next chapter, I will explore the social practices of the campaign and the context of actions and discourses.

Chapter 7

Situational feminism: the social practices of the Campaign

In this chapter, I will explore the social practices of the organized networks of the campaign. The situational feminism⁵² as a way of doing collective action in the campaign has in my point of view been the most significant influence on the construction of the structures of the campaign (including discourses). Thus, it is essential to understand the social practices of the campaigners before one can understand the created discourse of democracy in the campaign. In the first part of this chapter, I will explore the situational feminism and its relation to the context of actions. It is important to understand situational feminism as an attempt to transcend the limitations (context of action) to create a new situation, such as changed laws. In the second part of this chapter, I will show that situational feminism in the case of One Million Signatures Campaign reasonably may be understood as democratization from below. In the last section of this chapter, “They are not feminists, a feminist is one who criticizes power”, I will explore the interrelation between the collective action of the campaign and the campaign’s structure. The interrelation has further structured the discourses of democracy in the campaign, and also the discourse of gender equality.

7.1 The Situational feminism

Khorasani refers to the present generation of Iranian feminists as “situational feminists” (2007, p. 99), who no longer discuss ideology, but have focus on women’s daily situation. She considers the One Million Signatures Campaign a prime example of such feminism. In her point of view, situational feminism as a way of doing action is the result of the social condition that they live in.

“Indeed I mean that our minds and views should not be shaped in the vacuum or by the external sources; on the contrary, our thoughts are shaped by a collection of social and everyday conditions. If our condition leads us to use a specific theory or strategy, we should

⁵² This concept has been used by Khorasani in her book “The Movement of One Million Signatures”. I have not seen this concept in any other text. However, the concept probably derives from Simon de Beauvoir’s way of understanding women and liberation, where freedom will be reached by transcending the limitation of the situation.

*use them for the purpose of change of the limitations of the same society we live in.*⁵³” (ibid, p.101)

She says “*Yes, this generation is seeking justice and equality, it is seeking new and exciting strategies. This generation wants to test feminine imagination, which originates from everyday life to a civil fight.*” (ibid, p. 98)

Khorasani argues that the social and political context of Iran has made the present feminists choose a strategy for their actions. This also means that the current situation leads them to act in a specific way to change the current situation. Since different ideological feminist perspectives, such as Islamic and secular feminisms, could not promote women’s condition in that context (where women from all perspectives have been marginalized in the structure of power in Iran and any bargaining was impossible), the feminists have been led to pragmatic feminism. The campaign, as a prime example of situational feminism, has tried to create new possibilities in daily and legal situations. In order to understand the action of situational feminism, we need to know the context of the action.

For many members of the organized networks of the campaign, the country’s Islamic culture was an important context of the collective actions. The issue of why Ayatollah Saneei has been mentioned in the documents of the campaign has been one of the most discussed strategies that the campaign has chosen. The campaign chose to use some *maraji*’s names, including Saneei, to describe the aim of the campaign. While many intellectuals were skeptic to *maraji*’s support, (since they believed that any discourse of equality should not be limited to religion) the campaigners reasoned that they work in an Islamic country, and many people like to know what their *maraji* think about their actions and decisions. While the campaigners argue that religion is one source of patriarchy, they use a specific interpretation of the religion offered by some *maraji* to describe and transcend the discriminatory situation of women. Other campaigners considered the context of their action to be the Islamized politics, where their actions without the name of a *maraji* could cost their lives⁵⁴.

Another influential context has been the political pressure on the campaign. As I mentioned earlier, the government has tried to limit the campaigners’ resources and facilities. The

⁵³ The majority of texts referred to in this chapter are my translation. The exceptions will be marked.

⁵⁴ Many believed that they could be executed for being apostate (*mortad*) if *Maraji* would not support the campaign.

campaign often tried to find new resources to go beyond such limitations. When the streets and metros were no longer safe and many were arrested and jailed, campaigners tried to find new spaces for collecting signatures. Taxis, shopping centers, parks, universities and hairdressers were mentioned in the interviews as new spaces for the collective action. In some articles written by some of those who have been jailed, jail was described as a new space for accessing the women who are most marginalized. Jail was described as a new space for the collective action (see also Javaheri, 2007a).

An example describing situational feminism and the informants' eagerness to try new strategies is what Zahra told me in the interview: *"Here we have to be creative. I often say that here we have given birth to so many new strategies, that we simply got used to giving birth"*.

7.2 The Situational feminism: Democracy from below

In 2006, when the pressure from the government increased on women activists in demonstrations, women activists decided to change their strategies. They found out that they need a closer and more continuous relationship with Iranian men and women. The new method to reach their goal was to collect signatures by face-to-face dialogue, arguing in favor of changing the discriminatory laws. They considered that, through collecting signatures, they will discuss the laws with people. In their perception, it would create reflection on the situation women live in. Women's activism has in the last decade been accused of being an issue that concerns a small group of women (intellectuals or secular women). In the summer 2006, women's activists thought that if they get the possibility to talk to other women, they can prove that their goal does not concern only a small group of women. By collecting signatures, they would make the objections to the legislation a public issue. This is referred to by Khorasani as "democracy from below" in the book "The Movement of One Million Signatures".

When any bargaining between women's activists and the government was no longer possible, a grassroots model for change was chosen. The attempt to change legal situation of women should be seen both as an act of situational feminism and also a democratization from below.

In this part I will explore in which way the collective action of the One Million Signatures Campaign may be termed situational feminism and democratization from below⁵⁵.

“A signature is the minimum action against patriarchy”⁵⁶

On the website of “Change for Equality”, it is written that *“One Million Signatures Campaign is a decentralized movement, and all Iranian and foreign egalitarians, both men and women, can participate as actors in the movement. The most important part of the actors’ work is collecting signatures through face-to-face dialogue with people on women’s issues in relation to discriminatory legislation”* (“Change for Equality”, 2008b).

The website recommends participation in the “Instruction Workshop” before starting to collect signatures. Moreover, for people who cannot participate in the workshops, online books about legislation and collecting signatures are available on the site.

In the “instruction folder of face-to-face dialogue” it is stressed that the method of enforcing the campaign is face-to-face dialogue. *“To enforce that, the campaign uses 4 methods;*

- 1. Communication and collection of signatures by visiting houses (the plan of house-to-house) and talking individually to women.*
- 2. Communication and collection of signatures by visiting centers where women usually gather [...]. Indeed, it is the use of public spaces, such as public transportation, parks, universities [...] and any other space where women can collectively participate.*
- 3. Communication and collection of signatures by holding seminars and discussion meetings in the halls and cultural centers.*
- 4. Communication and collection of signatures via Internet by sending “The instruction folder on legislation” (“Change for Equality”, 2008c).*

By participating in the “Instruction Workshops”, I found out that the workshop was divided in three sections. The first part was an introduction to the campaign and its goals, and the presentation of volunteers. The second part was about reading the folder of *“The impact of Laws on women’s lives”* and discussing it in small groups. As I recognized, this part was important since the instructors and new volunteers would discuss the legislation from different points of views. This could also be helpful for volunteers’ ability to argue. After the laws had been discussed in small groups, the results were presented to other groups. These

⁵⁵ Democratization from below, here, is understood as grassroots collective actions aimed to bring change from below to all layers of the society.

⁵⁶ It was mentioned by Soreh, the instructor of the “Instruction Workshop”.

discussions were usually guided by some questions. The last part of the workshop consisted of role-play. Here, every group had a scenario about a particular situation of collecting signatures. This part would help the new volunteers learn more about different problems regarding the various situations of collecting signatures.

As I noticed during the workshops, some volunteers had already collected some signatures when they came to the workshop for the first time. However, many volunteers do not participate in the workshops. In the interview with Sanaz, member of the “Following-up Committee”, she mentioned that many women take contact with her only to submit signatures. When I was with the members of the campaign in public spaces in Tehran, I also noticed that many people asked for a copy of the petition paper, where they could collect signatures by themselves. They mentioned that they would like to collect signatures from their own networks, relatives and friends.

The One Million Signatures Campaign also recommends gathering signatures primarily among your own family and relatives. The reason given is that the volunteers can train arguing with the relatives whom they are most comfortable with.

The gathering of signatures does not end in family and relative networks for the members of the campaign. Sometimes the members jointly gather signatures in streets, parks, busses, metros. However, it is more common to collect signatures alone. During my fieldwork, we had often planned to collect signatures in a group, but this never happened. I have frequently seen that the members collecting signatures, when we were in cafes, parks, streets, during the interviews, after the interviews. One should bear in mind that when I was in the field, the attention of campaigners was focused on objecting to the “Family Protection Bill”, and in addition many were confused and hurt by the emergence of the new group “The Feminist School”. These factors had a very obvious effect on the signature collecting, where many did participants no longer prioritized this kind of activities (as they told me).

I recognized that, in general, the action of collecting signatures was understood in two different ways. For some members of the organized networks of the campaign, collecting signatures was seen as a method to reach one million signatures in order to object the discriminatory laws. For others, collecting signatures was primarily a method to spread the information and gender sensitivity. The first group considered collecting one million signatures as the goal of the campaign. Many in this group also emphasized the importance of stressing information and creating gender sensitivity among people, but their main goal was

reaching one million signatures as soon as possible. This group usually argued that change of legislation is an emergency. They would start another campaign for further change.

The second group placed emphasis on disseminating knowledge among people. This group believed that, even if they collect one million signatures and submit them to the parliament, the laws will never change. It seems very difficult to separate the action of signing or collecting signatures from creating knowledge. Creating knowledge was discussed in the campaign firstly in relation to creating space for discussion around women's issues and gender equality, like the websites, books, and seminars. This would expand the discourse of gender equality. Creating knowledge was discussed secondly in relation to training new activists for this and the future campaigns. This would, in their point of view, strengthen the women's movement. Thirdly, creating knowledge was mentioned in relation to direct dialogue with people to learn about their situation and also share their own experience. Thus, they would expand the discourse of gender equality and gender sensitivity among people through face-to-face dialogue.

However, the signing of the petition was understood among both groups as the action of objection to discriminatory laws. Situational feminism in the case of the One Million Signatures Campaign is first of all an attempt to create gender sensitivity, which starts with reflection on the self and its condition. This is an attempt to extend gender equality which is (as the campaigners perceived) a structure where no one is Otherized by hegemonic masculinity. The situational feminism in the case of the campaign is also the action of objection, criticising the hierarchical structure of gender and social relations. It is by challenging the hierarchical social relations that the perceived democracy will be created. Objecting to the structure is acting Otherwise. By such action they create resources for exercising power, thus they challenge the power relations.

This objection could only be achieved via self reflection, where the person could see her/his self as the Other to patriarchy (in the household and legislation). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the action of objection was understood as feminism. Only by dialogue and extending the discourse of gender equality, and by signing the petition, one becomes a human being, feminist and creator of democracy.

The objection to the unequal power relations occurs both on personal and political levels. This is the interrelation between the personal, the democratization of household, and the political, the democratization of power relations.

7.3 “They are not feminists. A Feminist is one who criticizes power⁵⁷.”

When I asked campaigners if they have seen any changes in the structure of the campaign since the start of their work, they always said, yes a lot. This was Mahtab’s answer to the question: *“The campaign does not have any specific structure. Earlier we worked in committees, and each committee had its responsibilities. Later, committees changed to sub-groups, thus forming smaller groups. In smaller groups people formed closer friendships, and we became more like friendships circles. The structure emerged by itself”*.

“How can we expect a civil movement to have a stable and permanent strategy, when we live in a country where every month and every week a new case will come up, and the tension it creates causes its citizens to feel unstable and confused.” (Khorasani, 2007, p. 117).

As indicated in earlier sections, the face-to-face method of the campaign is not the only example of situational feminism; one should also consider the way they shape their everyday actions. In other words, situational feminism, as a way of doing action, influences the structure of their collective actions. By their everyday practices, they challenge the context of their action. Thus, they create new situations and change and re-change the structure of the campaign. In this section, I will indicate the way newly created situations change the structure of actions, and continually re-shape the campaign’s discourse of democracy. I will also explore how the existing patriarchal resources reconstruct a hierarchical structure within the campaign. Furthermore, this has created the discourse of democracy in the organized networks of the campaign.

The Feminist School

The “Women’s School” usually referred to as “The Feminist School⁵⁸”, is the name of a group within the One Million Signatures Campaign in Tehran. This group separated from the central part of organized networks in Tehran and claim they are an independent group/network.

⁵⁷ Mentioned by Sima when she was talking about “The Feminist School”.

⁵⁸ Because of the name of its webpage, which is The Feminist School.

“The Feminist’s School” considers that men and women in different cities and countries have created their own independent groups, and this is a new direction that the campaign is moving towards. In addition, this group claims that “Men for Equality’s Committee” is a small and independent network beside the “Change for Equality”.

This group was shaped based on the belief that the campaign, due to external pressures, can work more effectively in smaller and independent groups. While the central part of the organized network in Tehran (Change for Equality) believed that a centralization of activities with horizontal structure would be democratic and create the possibility of participation for all, “The Feminist’s School” believed that a multiple centre with independent networks would be more democratic and more flexible in the times of such strong external pressures.

This group started its independent work by establishing the website of “The Feminist School” in 2008. “The Feminist School” was established to create a space for discussing feminist theories (see more The Feminist School, n.d. a). The website of feministschool.com is a kind of forum for discussion around the issues of gender. Unlike “Change for Equality” which encouraged new volunteers to contact them in order to participate in the workshops, “The Feminist School” encourages new volunteers to create small groups of 3-4 individuals. “The Feminist School” recommends that when the new group is shaped, they should contact other groups for instructions.

The members of “The Feminist School”, as well as the members of the “Change for Equality”, collect signatures, organize workshops, and publish articles. However, in contrast to “Change for Equality”, they do not share their experience of attending workshops and collecting signatures on the website. In addition, I did not find any articles about their internal issues, structure or distribution of opportunities, which is quite different from the “Change for Equality”. Thus, I may claim that, since the group is too small, that any “exercising of democracy” is not possible. Although in the first written articles and documents the emphasis was on face-to-face collecting of signatures in the streets, the focus of “The Feminist School” shifted to individual networks. They suggest that new groups should start gathering of signatures from their respective families, and then expand to their relatives, friends, neighbors, and workplace colleagues, collecting signatures even when invited to parties. In this way, they believe that gathering of signatures and dialogue with people will be safer. (See more The Feminist School, n.d. b). However, one problem may appear; extending of discourse and the creating knowledge about gender equality will develop only among middle class activists.

The discourse of democracy was shaped in relation to the reflection on self condition in the campaign's structure. In other words, the discourse of democracy was shaped by critiques of the newly created situations, which were sometimes referred to as recreation of patriarchy.

The Men for Equality Committee

The campaign started its work with women's activists for women's rights. Only some months after the start of the campaign, the members recognized a new trend. Many young men wanted to participate in the campaign's activities. Khorasani says in "The movement of One Million Signatures" that among the first members of the campaign, 2 of 54 members were men. Three months after the start of the campaign, the number of male volunteers increased to 16. (2007, p. 114).

The reason why men started their own committee was described differently by the informants. Some considered that this was due to some experienced female activists who did not want to have men in the meetings. Others considered Moral Police as the external pressure to the sex-segregation. Within the campaign, I often heard many stories about some male and female campaigners being arrested for participating in a mixed sex workshop in Khoram Abad. Here is what men's committee has written about such external forces "*when discussion about establishing a weblog for male members of the campaign first arose, many rightly opposed the idea. [...] However, as time passed and marginal pressures on social activities and prohibitory accusations (tohmat hay-e monkarati) intensified, we had to separate the joint spaces of men and women activities.*" Later, the writer adds that "*we solicit the dear readers to consider the sex-segregation as the result of external forces on the social activists rather than a chosen ideology. [...] We consider that gender equality can only be confirmed, when men and women jointly struggle for proving it.*" ("Men for Equality", n.d.).

This might be the main reason for the forming of the men's committee. However, some mentioned that sex-segregation would give women the possibility to participate more freely. Some mentioned that in a culture which is effected by patriarchy, women can be embarrassed to talk when men are present, and also men can talk too much.

The committee of men does the same activities that the rest of the members usually do; collecting signatures, organizing workshops and writing articles. While women participated in a range of different committees, men could work [almost] only in the committee of men. This means that men in this committee had to do the work that was described as responsibilities of

different campaign committees, such as “Following-up Committee”, “Instruction’s Committee”, etc. Whereas in the rest of the campaign, these respective committees were in charge of following up the new volunteers and organizing new workshops, the “Men for Equality Committee” had to do all of these by itself. Since the male committee could not participate in the meetings of the campaign, they became, as the result, an independent group which decided over their own actions.

Since male campaigners could not easily participate in the meetings with the rest of the campaign (all committees), their discourse of men’s position in the structure of gender relations was not well integrated among the rest of the campaign⁵⁹. When I participated in the Instruction workshops, the campaigners performed the workshops with both sexes for the first time. Some of the male campaigners said that they still feel it is dangerous to have joint meetings, but it is more important to work together.

The Mothers’ Committee

When campaign started its work, campaign’s members established a supporting unit. The plan was to call the mobile phone of the supporting unit if anyone was in trouble.

When Peighambarzade, the first arrested campaigner, called the phone of the supporting unit to tell the campaigners that she had been arrested, the phone was with Moghadam. Moghadam, a middle-aged woman, recalls the events of that day: *“At that time, I did not know Peighambarzade very well. When I asked her if her parents knew that she had been arrested, she said her father did not know, and she did not have a mother. At that moment I instantly felt my motherly instinct. I told them [to the officers at the detention barracks] that I was her mother. When they asked about the ID, I said I was not her biological mother, but her social mother, I raised her.”* (Zandi, 2008).

This was the start of the recognizing the hidden resource of middle-aged women and a way in which they could exercise power. They quickly discovered that, because of their age (which also brings them economic, social and cultural privileges), they have been respected among officers (who were mostly men). They identified a bargaining resource in their situation. The Mothers’ Committee was originally established for the purpose of bargaining with the officers. However, they also found out that many parents of the young campaigners need help

⁵⁹ Some of the female interviewees mentioned what they think, and what they have heard as male campaigners’ opinions about men’s position in the structure of gender relations.

when their children are in detention. Mothers' Committee helped both campaigners and their parents (ibid, 2008).

In a report of establishing the "Mothers' Committee" in the campaign in Rasht, the "Mothers' Committee" highlighted that they have a stable social and economic situation. This will privilege them to *"a particularly good position to collaborate with the campaign and expand the meaning and the role of motherhood, removing it from the private sphere to encompass broader social aspects of motherhood."*⁶⁰ (Abdi, 2009).

In the article "A Motherly narrative of the Campaign", the "Mothers' Committee" issued that they had recognized that many young campaigners had problems with their parents because of their activities. The Mothers' Committee also bargained with the parents of the campaigners, who are usually young, aged between 18 and 35.

"From the start of the campaign, the youth continually asked us why their mothers and fathers pressured them so much because of their activities, and [they also asked] what had happened to us [our generation] in earlier days. This made us [The Mothers' Committee] invite young campaigners' parents to a meeting [...]."

Moghadam: *"When mothers saw us, our houses and our lives, and realized we were middle-aged, they started trusting the campaign. In fact, a part of the trust to the campaign is created by the Mothers of the campaign."* (Zandi, 2008).

Some "mothers" of the campaigners joined the "Mothers' Committee". In addition to the bargaining, the committee has tried to make the mothers of the campaigners active. The committee not only encouraged other mothers to engage in the campaign's activities, but also in the process of releasing their children from detention.

Moghadam: *"The mother of Amir Yaqubali became also very active after her son has been arrested. I remember the time he was arrested for collecting signatures. His sister told us their mother should not find out about this, for she might faint. [...] it is true that his mother was ill for a while, because they did not let him [Yagubali] call home. But when we talked to his mother, told her that she should speak out [... she became more active]. Especially after her appeals on different radio stations, they finally let Amir call home."*(Zandi, 2008).

⁶⁰ Translated by Ali Abdi, published on the website of "Change for Equality".

This committee later developed and created a new committee, which is not a part of the campaign. On that committee (the Committee of Mothers of Peace), they help all arrested activists from different social movements. While middle-aged women found a new side of their situation which could pass beyond any limitation, this created an unequal power relation inside the campaign. Since middle-aged women were already privileged by the social, cultural and economical resources, they got a new source of power in the campaign. Actually, the resources they discovered were shaped by the hierarchical structure of social relations. This means that the age and social resources which gave new opportunities have already been constructed by the existing non-democratic structure.

Situational feminism in the case of the campaign is objecting and criticizing the unequal power relations. It has influenced the internal structure of the campaign. As we have seen from this section, although situational feminism intended to change the limitations of the existing situations, they sometimes reconstructed the hierarchical structure of power relations inside the campaign. In this sense, the discourse of democracy was created within the campaign. However, this shows that situational feminism is not perceived only as changing the limitations, but also as changing the horizontal structure of social relations. This means that the campaigners believed that, by working in this way, they create equal resources for exercising power.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, the method for performing the collective actions of One Million Signatures is situational feminism, which in Khorasani's point of view results from the political and social context they live in. In a political situation where no single ideological feminism could promote women's situation, feminists have been guided to such course of action⁶¹.

The situational feminism in the case of One Million Signatures Campaign struggling for gender equality has two specific aspects. Firstly, the situational feminism tries to extend the discourse of gender equality, resulting in a structure where people are no longer Otherized. Secondly, the situational feminism in the case of One Million Signatures Campaign which struggles to extend the discourse of gender equality by face-to-face dialogue and gathering

⁶¹ Interestingly enough, this way of doing collective action has not been perceived among other social or political actions. While women from different ideological and political backgrounds have been able to work together for a single goal cause under the name of "One Million Signatures Campaign", men from the same groups could not unify in the same way.

signatures is a way of learning to object the Otherizing, to object the hierarchical structure of gender relations by challenging the hierarchical structure of social relations. This means that situational feminism in the case of One Million Signatures Campaign is an attempt to create new resources for exercising power by objection to the hierarchical structure of both gender and social relations.

Situational feminism, in the meaning of creation of horizontal structures, has influenced the internal structure of the campaign. Since situational feminists were attempting to change the hierarchical structure by means of the given structure, it sometimes led to the reconstruction of hierarchical structure. This reconstruction has created the discourse of democracy. In fact, the intention of the situational feminism in the case of One Million Signatures Campaign of Tehran was not only to change the present situation, but to initiate a change that would lead to a horizontal structure of social relations. The discourse of democracy, as described in the previous chapter, has been created by the challenges of the struggle for such changes. This is the dialectical relation between the action and structure.

Chapter 8

Conclusion

In a summer day in the field, Tehran, I was looking for a recorder in *Satar Khan* Street, when I felt the staring look of a *basiji*⁶² who was standing next to the car of Moral Police. I got panicked and for a second I did not know what to do. I could only feel my heart beating very fast. He, the *basiji*, walked towards me, while I was still looking at him. I checked in my mind if my appearance was correct. I was no longer sure what was correct. I decided to change my direction. I turned and looked at a shop window. I felt the person next to me was staring at me. I looked at her, a young woman. She smiled at me and said, “Do you know that a lion would never bite you, even if he is hungry, unless you run from him?”. And I was shocked.

The process of writing the thesis proposal involved a lot of emotions, when I considered the One Million Signatures Campaign as the collective action of women who were discriminated from many different aspects; at personal level in their daily life, at political level in their social activities. Women who could, based on law, be beaten at home, and arrested for participating in the women’s movement.

When I arrived to Iran, I was surprised by women’s awareness of the restrictions and by their active challenging of these limitations. I was shocked, since I did not expect it. However, I had a feeling that it was all rather familiar to me. Searching in my memories, I could remember my school days, many years ago, when me and my classmates had to bargain to challenge the restrictions at school, streets etc, with our teachers and the Moral Police who wanted to continually control and Islamize us. I found the members of the organized networks of the campaign as dynamic and flexible as women outside the campaign. I wondered how this was possible in a country with such gendered restrictions, where do the awareness and the willingness to change limitations come from?

Self reflection - In an era when many countries get international aid for mainstreaming gender equality in the local governance and development programs, Iranian government is among few countries that consider such programs a threat to Islam and a sign of imperialism. Already in the Introduction to this thesis I mentioned that the study of an Iranian grassroots’

⁶² *Basij* literally means “mobilization”. *Nirooy-e moqavemat-e basij* (Basij Resistance Force) is an Iranian volunteer-based paramilitary force founded by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. The women and men who work as volunteers in this group are called *basiji*. They receive their orders from Iranian Revolutionary Guard.

movement which seeks gender equality in such situation is interesting. With knowledge of Iranian political situation, I assumed that the development of the discourse of gender equality should be more effected by Iranian internal issues, rather than global discourses of gender equality. Thus, the purpose of this thesis has been to explore the way the discourse of gender equality that the campaigners try to spread among the citizens of Iran is shaped by the social practices of the campaign, and also to explain the way the discourse of gender equality shapes the social practices. In this sense, I attempted to understand the complex relations between context, action and discourse.

Earlier in this thesis I argued that the collective action of the One Million Signatures Campaign has been understood as self-reflexive collective action. The members have reflected on their social position and try to create self reflexivity among the citizens of Iran. The argument was discussed by Giddens' theory of modernity, where he claims that modernity is a social system where social relations are shaped by dynamic sources such as reflexivity (Giddens, 1984). In other words, I argued that the patterns of the social practices that the discourse of gender equality is created by may be seen as dynamic sources of modernity. In this sense, the collective action of One Million Signatures Campaign is a result of the consequences of modernity. Although I emphasized that the dynamic sources of modernity do exist in Iranian society, however, Iran has some special features that differentiate Iran from the western societies on which Giddens' theory of modernity was based.

One of several differences is that Iranian legislation does not accept individuals as project of self creation, but as members of a whole, where their rights are in regard to their position and responsibilities within the society. In addition, the members' responsibilities derive from sexual differences. In this sense, a self-reflexive project as the One Million Signatures Campaign is a very radical action. In this investigation I discovered that, through self-reflection, the members of the campaign have recognized two aspects of the gender relations within which they act. Firstly, the self and its condition are given to them by the legislation and society, which according to Connell's theory was called the "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell, 2005). Secondly, the given identity which constructs their discriminatory situation is justified by the hierarchical values of biology.

The campaigners believed that legislation and society give them an identity which Otherizes them; it creates a self or self-condition which they do not deserve. This, in their view,

discriminates them. I called this identity “the Otherized men and women”, which is shaped in discriminatory relation to hegemonic masculinity.

I have, further, argued that the discourse of gender equality in the campaign shows that the campaigners have created a new identity. “The new identity” is being active, productive and working for the change of the condition. “The new identity”, as it was shown in the fifth chapter, is among other things a result of the modern age. It represents women who are not living traditionally; women who work in non-traditional settings and decide over their lives and their households. In addition to non-traditional activities, these women reflect on their situation and try to change it.

Political influences - As mentioned in the fourth chapter, I argued that according to Giddens’ theory of structuration, self-reflexivity in the modern age does not only challenge and change the self, but also the action and structure. In other words, the new self/identity will be created through action and creation of structure, and at the same time, creates actions and structure. Thus, I claimed in the sixth chapter that campaigners talked mostly about democracy, and identified themselves as “feminists”, the creators of democracy. In the fieldwork, I recognized that the campaigners were mostly concerned about democratic ways of action. By this I argue that the social practices and the created discourses are formed by campaigners’ reflection on self-position in the society.

One of many issues that have had great impact on social practices and the created discourses of the campaign is the political situation of Iran. The Islamic revolution, which institutionalized Islam in Iran, changed the existing power relations in the country. Women and all who did not fit into the dominating ideology of the political Shiite Islam were marginalized. Men, like women, could feel marginalized since clerics had control over their wives, a control which both traditionally and religiously has been the right of men. The marginalization resulted, among other things, from the laws which ruled over men and women, and which construct their situations.

However, as I have discussed in the chapter on historical background, according to Mir-Hosseini (2006), the Islamization from above has caused modernization and secularization from below. Many religious women came to participate in the public spaces as result of the sex-segregation programmes. However, as time passed, they, along with the secular women silenced by the revolution, demanded greater roles in the public and governmental spheres. As example of this are the demonstrations against the presidency law on 12th of June 2005.

Further, the exclusion of men and women from the country's power structures has had an important impact on the social practices of the campaign. On one hand, women from different ideological perspectives gathered and united to change the discriminatory laws against women. On the other hand, more than before, men who already felt marginalized joined the campaign to change the gender discriminatory laws.

These two different aspects have had different impacts on created discourses and social practices of the campaign. By entering men to the campaign, the focus is changing from women's issues to gendered issues. In addition, by opening the door of the campaign to everyone, the collective action became so wide that it is no longer possible to specify the demands. For instance, as I concluded in Chapter 5, there was a lack in concrete alternative rights. In other words, a discourse of gender equality could not be shaped since there are so many different ideological backgrounds in the campaign. This is one of several reasons why the discourse of gender equality was so utopian. While very little was written about gender equality in the campaign, I found that "gender equality" was for campaigners a structure of social relations where the self would not be shaped in its Otherized / objectified relation to the hegemonic masculinity; when the identity (self and its condition) is not created by the justification of biology. What does this mean? It means that by gender equality, men and women can create their conditions regardless of biology and the legislation, or society's given identity.

Furthermore, one could ask, why should men join a women's movement, even if they feel as marginalized as women. One should bear in mind that there is no active political party in Iran, and the members of the opposition groups have already been executed, inactivated or exiled. Thus, social movements like women's movement can easily attract the marginalized groups. By this I argue that, since there is no political party in Iran, the campaign became a collective action of all marginalized groups. In this sense, the campaign was easily perceived by the government as the opposition group. In addition, since Islamization of the society happened through Islamization of women and gender relations, any challenge of women's and gendered issues has been understood as a challenge to Islamization of the country. The personal issues are "essentially" interrelated to political issues. Thus, the collective action of the campaign does not only attempt to shape equal power relations (democratization of gender and social relations) on personal level, but also on a political level.

These might be few of several reasons why the members of the organized networks of the campaign replaced gender equality by democracy in their everyday life. Since it was

important to know how the discourse of gender equality was created by the social practices of the campaign, as we have seen in Chapter 6, I planned to analyze the way these terms were used in everyday actions. Going through the texts that were written about democracy in the website of the campaign, I found that the discussion tends to be termed in relation to internal issues and structure of the campaign. “Democracy” was discussed to challenge the hierarchical power relations in the campaign of Tehran. As I explored in the chapter on “gendered democracy” (Chapter 6), democracy was understood as a horizontal structure of social relations where everyone would have equal opportunities in the society. This might mean that democracy was considered to be a structure where the resources of exercising power are equally distributed among the members of the society. By entering different marginalized groups to the campaign, the discourse of gender equality turned towards the discussion of democracy.

Dynamism - As I mentioned earlier in the Introduction, one of my initial curiosities of studying the campaign was the special structure of the campaign. Over the last three years, the campaign has tried to work without a leader or leadership. This is unique in Iranian setting. At first sight, it might seem like it resulted from the demand for democracy. However, it could also be the result of the assumption that the campaign could survive longer the political pressures without a leader or leadership. In this sense, the horizontal structure of the collective action of the campaign might be a structure that is created by situational feminism. I have discussed in Chapter 7 that situational feminism in the case of the One Million Signatures Campaign is a collective action to transcend the discriminatory situation of women. In addition, it is an attempt to create new structures for exercising power by objection to the hierarchical structure of both gender and social relations. By self reflection, the citizens of Iran can sign the petition to object the unequal power relations; to criticize the hierarchical social and gender relations. This might mean that they create new resources for exercising power. In this sense, by self-reflection and by criticizing power relations they create democracy, the horizontal structure of social relations.

Since the collective action changes by situation, the social practices of the campaign are dynamic; for instance, the focus on “The Family Protection Bill” in summer 2008, and presidential election in present days, May 2009. The social practices change with the social and political situations. By this dynamism, the campaigners search for new resources for

exercising power. In this sense, every situation does not only have limitations, but also resources for exercising power, for bargaining to change the gender discriminatory legislation.

Femininity - One of several reasons why gender equality had been replaced by democracy could be the understanding of the gender system in Muslim modern societies. Since, as Anwar argues, social responsibilities and behaviour are created on the basis of sexual differences, then any change of social behaviour and relations could have viewed as the change of gendered behaviour. As we remember from the historical background, in the modern age both Shah and Khomeini tried to change the society by focusing on gender relations, especially on women's issues. While Shah tried to modernize the country by obligatory unveiling of women, Khomeini tried to Islamize the country by obligatory veiling of women. I argue that this time it might be about equal rights of women for equal rights for the nation, just as it once had been liberation of women for liberation of the nation, modernization of women for modernization of the country, Islamization of women for Islamization of the country.

However, this time the social change happens from below, and since it is through a women's movement, the created discourses are feminine. In Chapters 5 and 6 I discussed how gender equality and democracy were described as femininized structure of social relations. I have already discussed that the lack of political parties and strong opposition groups have attracted many men and women from different marginalized political interests to the campaign. However, I can also ask why such possibility has only been occurred in the women's movement. Why was such a "democratic" structure emerged in the women's movement? There must be many different answers to these questions, but I consider one of the answers to be the gender-based Islamization of society. As Paidar claims "The Gender of Democracy" (2001), on one hand, secular women practice their gender awareness by criticizing the gender discrimination in the Islamic Republic, while on the other hand, many religious women increased their gender awareness by participating in governmental programmes (Mir-Hosseini terms this "secularization and modernization from below"). However, the result of this was that religious women, like secular women, started to criticize women's restrictions. Moreover, this gender awareness (self reflection) created an opportunity that did not exist for marginalized men. Marginalized men developed their gender awareness through working in the women's movement. However, in my opinion, their gender awareness has characteristics of protest femininity, according to Howson (2006).

In May 2009, only one month before the presidential election in Iran, the top national news headlines reports the tension around the election. While students host different presidential candidates at universities and labour hoping for a positive future of their promises, women's movement has created a coalition (*E'telaf-e zanan*) to bargain their demands in political arena. The coalition, which includes different women groups and individuals, negotiates change of some discriminatory laws and signing of CEDAW with the candidates⁶³. The coalition has already been shaped once, when the parliament was working on "The Family Protection Bill" in summer 2008. The way the Coalition of Women (*E'telaf-e zanan*) works, made me curious to know how they bargain the laws at the governmental level; which strategies do they rely on. It would be interesting to investigate in which ways they are trying to promote the discussion on women's human rights to a higher level in the country's power structure. It would be interesting for me to find out how they expand their feminine discourses in the "masculine" spaces, namely the Iranian government.

⁶³ The coalition has got more support from the "Feminist School", than "Change for Equality" in the campaign in Tehran.

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Appendices.

Appendix 1

List of the informants:

Sara; female informant, below 35 years old

Mahtab; female informant, below 35 years old

Zahra; female informant, below 35 years old

Sanaz; female informant, below 35 years old

Azita; female informant, below 35 years old

Sima; female informant, below 35 years old

Siyamak; male informant, below 35 years old

Reza; male informant, below 35 years old

Aidin; male informant, below 35 years old

Hasan; male informant, below 35 years old

Fatima; female informant, above 35 years old

Ra'na; female informant, above 35 years old

Mahin; female informant, above 35 years old

Mina; female informant, above 35 years old

Appendix 2

Guiding Questionnaires:

1. Can you tell me how you started to work for the campaign?

- How did you hear about it? How did you get to know about it?
- Why did you start to work?
- Why do you continue to work?
- How easy was it to start working?
- How easy was it to communicate with other members?

2. How do you think the members can help the campaign to archive its aim?

- What is the aim of the campaign?
- What do you do here in the campaign?
- How do you work?
- What do you wish to do?
- Why are not you able to do?

3. Can you describe how you collect signatures?

- How was it the first time?
- People's reactions?
- Your feelings?
- What has changed since the first time? In the campaign/ the way of collecting signatures/ their perception of work?
- Have the campaign/ you chosen different strategies? Which strategies, why?

4. Can you describe a normal day in the campaign?

- What do you (as a member) do in the campaign?
- How do you organize the work you would like to do during a day?
- How do you communicate with other members?
- How do you communicate with people?
- And the government?

- How do the campaign participate decision making?
- What are the members mostly absorbed with?

5. Can you tell me about what you usually do after working to the campaign?

- Do you talk about campaign at home?
- On the way home?
- Can you separate it from rest of the day?
- How do the family react to her/his work?
- What are the family's feelings towards the work?

6. Can you tell me how the committees of Men and Mothers were organized?

- Why were the committees needed?
- What do the committees do?
- How do the committees work?
- What other strategies (if these were a strategy for their work) have been created?

7. Can you tell me about what comes to your mind when you argue for change for equality?

- The meaning of gender equality
- The meaning of womanhood
- Suggestions for the new laws?
- Change in the understanding of the term "gender equality" since the start of membership
- The understanding of Sanei's use of the term "women's rights"
- Have you ever heard about international women's rights, such as the CEDAW convention? If yes, how you can describe the campaign's work in relation to the international women's rights?
- Have your perception of gender equality changed since the start of the campaign?

