New Leaderless Social Movements: From the Unified Mass to the Uneven Multitude

A Case Study of the Changing Pattern of Social Movements in Post-Revolutionary Iran

Word Count: 19,234

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Academic Dissertation

A dissertation submitted to Ghent University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Global Studies

Academic year: 2023-2024

Every subject is political. This is why there are few subjects and rarely any politics.

— Alain Badiou

Abstract

With the dawn of the twenty-first century, the discourse on leaderless movements gained traction through influential phenomena such as the anti-globalization protests and the Arab Spring. These movements introduced new dimensions to social movement studies, culminating in the emergence of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in Iran in 2022. This thesis explores how Iran, historically characterized by charismatic-led revolutions, transitioned to a paradigm exemplified by leaderless mobilization. By examining the trajectory of Iran's political civil society and its protest movements from the late 1990s to 2022, this study illustrates how these shifts have transformed the pathways of mobilization and repertoires within Iranian social movements.

Employing a mixed-method qualitative approach, including a Foucauldian perspective and macro discourse analysis, this thesis reveals how the intersection of the political sphere and everyday life has fostered a distinctive form of politics. This analysis introduces "Heterotopic Politics," a framework that captures contemporary Iran's evolving nature of protest and civic engagement within everyday life spaces. This study underscores the transformative impact of the new leaderless movements on traditional social movement frameworks and highlights the broader implications for understanding resistance and political engagement in a rapidly changing socio-political context.

Keywords: New Social Movements, Leaderless Movements, Woman Life Freedom, Iran, Heterotopia, Macro Discourse Analysis

Acknowledgment

The two-year journey that led to the completion of this thesis would have been impossible without the help and support of many.

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Dr. Christopher Parker. Thank you for all the fruitful discussions during our meetings. A piece of advice you gave me in the middle of one of our sessions significantly shaped my writing journey and will remain a guiding light in my academic and personal life. You told me, "Be ambitious in your writing and do not be afraid." This is the lesson from you that I will always carry with me.

Secondly, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to my family, especially my dear parents and my sister; my entire educational path would have been impossible without their support. I am grateful that you always encouraged me to explore the unknown, to ask questions, and to learn.

Thirdly, I am deeply thankful to my friends, particularly Sima, who made my difficult journey easier, believed in me, and pushed me forward.

I would also like to thank myself for continuing and striving to write, and as Deleuze said, "Bring something incomprehensible into the world!"

Lastly, I am grateful to the people, especially the women of Iran, who have been an inspiration throughout this thesis. I will never forget that "Woman, Life, Freedom" is a daily practice.

In the end, in memory of Mahsa Zhina Amini,

"Mahsa, you did not die; your name has become a symbol."

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Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative für Deutschland
CSN	Cyber Social Network
ICT	Information, Communication, Technology
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSM	New Social Movements
WLF	Woman, Life, Freedom (movement)

Introduction and Problem Statement

Following the Arab Spring of 2011, the Middle East witnessed another significant grassroots movement sparked by the death of Mahsa Jina Amini, a young Iranian woman detained by the morality police in Tehran for allegedly wearing an "improper hijab." Over more than 100 days, Iran was engulfed in mass protests that spread far beyond the urban centers that had characterized previous movements. This time, demonstrations reached not only major cities but also rural areas and marginalized provinces, representing a broad cross-section of Iranian society. The movement quickly resonated with the Iranian diaspora, leading to widespread international demonstrations, including a major rally in Berlin in October 2022, which drew an estimated 100,000 participants. This marked an unprecedented global response to protests originating in Iran. This level of international solidarity and participation is unique in the history of Iranian social movements and highlights the protests' global significance. A defining feature of these protests was their decentralized nature, marked by the absence of any clear, centralized leadership. This shift in protest dynamics mirrors the movement formats seen globally since 2011, when leaderless movements became increasingly common. This evolution in Iranian protest movements is a central focus of this thesis, which explores how the movements have become a form of leaderlessness and what new practices they introduce through this new form of collective.

As the Cold War drew to a close, Francis Fukuyama, in *The End of History and the Last (2006) Man*, brought the idea of the "end of history" into academic debate, suggesting that with the fall of the Soviet Union, human history had reached its endpoint in terms of ideological evolution. He argued that the significant revolutions and transformative movements of the past would no longer define the twenty-first century. Social movements, particularly those inspired by ideologies like Marxist-Leninism or post-colonial nationalism, seemed to lose momentum. Neoliberalism, for theorists like Fukuyama, had replaced these older ideologies, which were no longer relevant after the mid-twentieth century's political upheavals. But the events of the early twenty-first century told a different story.

The world saw the rise of new revolutions, social movements, wars, and significant changes. In 2011, massive protests and uprisings erupted—not only in Arab countries but also in places like the United States, which Fukuyama had seen as the pinnacle of liberal democracy. What stood out about these movements was their leaderless structure. This shift in how social movements were organized drew the attention of scholars, mainly as similar patterns emerged in other movements like Global Occupy and the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong. The idea

of "leaderless" movements became a central focus for researchers trying to understand how collective action was evolving in the modern world.

The topic of movement organization and the shift towards leaderless and horizontal mechanisms that reject traditional forms of representation (Melucci, 1980) has intrigued social scientists and scholars from related disciplines even before 2011. Scholars such as Graeber (2002) highlight horizontality as a defining progressive feature of these grassroots movements, while Zizék (2004) argues that leadership is crucial to their success. The sustainability of leaderless movements has sparked debate, often focusing on the effectiveness of these new forms of social organization. This thesis, however, seeks to explore the transition of social movements towards leaderlessness.

In this thesis, I aim to take a step back from the immediate focus on the WLF movement, the most recent and perhaps the most prominent example of leaderless organization in Iran. Rather than analyzing its successes and limitations in isolation, I intend to delve into the historical context of social movements in Iran. By examining the evolution of these movements, I aim to uncover the underlying patterns and shifts in organizational strategies that have led to the current trend of leaderless mobilization. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how past experiences and socio-political dynamics have influenced the trajectory of social movements, ultimately culminating in the emergence of leaderless movements like the WLF. From this perspective, I will demonstrate in this thesis how leaderless movements emerge from the dynamics of civil and political society *within* the existing order. These movements challenge traditional frameworks with their new repertoires. While they may not necessarily establish a new re-territorialized order, they do displace and de-territorialize the existing one, creating a transitional phase that signifies a departure from the status quo.

Methodology and Research Design

This thesis addresses two central research questions: how the patterns of social movements in post-revolutionary Iran have shifted from focusing on charismatic leadership to embracing leaderless organizations, and what new transformative practices these emerging organizations are introducing. The critical examination of these central questions in this thesis requires mixed methods. To establish the foundation of the mixed method, I employed an abductive reasoning approach, facilitating an iterative dialogue between theoretical frameworks and empirical sources. This method is particularly effective for understanding new social movements' complex and decentralized nature, as it allows for developing new theoretical insights rooted in existing scholarship. Moreover, this thesis adopts a constructivist ontological framework, asserting that social realities—including the dynamics of leadership and collective action—are socially constructed and continually evolve over time.

This research is anchored in an intrinsic—or a mere— case study (Gerring, 2004, p. 341) research design in the analytical sections. However, Since the phenomenon of leaderless movements has only garnered scholarly attention since 2011 and remains a relatively nascent area of inquiry, this thesis also incorporates an instrumental case study approach in its literature review. By analyzing additional cases, such as the Arab uprisings and the Occupy movement in the United States, the study provides comparative insights that enrich the understanding of Iran's context. This thesis's case study aims to understand the larger class of similar units (ibid., p. 342) while being cautious of generalization.

Research of social movements, particularly within sensitive or politically charged contexts, presents unique challenges regarding choosing a methodology. Various methodologies offer different lenses to examine the research questions at hand. However, the constraints imposed by security concerns and the limited availability of precise statistical data during the relevant time frame render quantitative approaches less suitable for this study. Given these limitations, a qualitative methodology is more appropriate, primarily as it provides a deeper understanding of the aspects of the central research questions.

This research integrates literature analysis with empirical data, including primary sources such as mottos, slogans, speeches, tweets, video clips, artworks, news articles, and governmental documents. I employed a documentation method to analyze the WLF movement, starting with collecting mottos and slogans primarily sourced from video materials. I

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documented key events along with specific dates for later review and gathered influential debates from news articles and social media platforms like X. This data collection was supplemented by targeted searches using keywords such as "leaderless," "social movements," "WLF," "Green movement," "civil society," within the time framework of September 2022 to February 2023 to explore connections related to my central and sub-research questions. This approach provided comprehensive insights by allowing me to gather data both during and after the movement, finding 'signifying agents' (Lindekilde, 2014). I incorporated the historical narrative into the discursive analysis by doing the exact search within the broader time framework of 2009 to 2022, especially at X.

This empirical data was coded both manually and with NVivo software to ensure a more coherent and systematic analysis. For the analytical procedure of these sources, I employed macro discourse analysis in conjunction with the broader theoretical literature, utilizing an interpretive epistemology. This 'macro' discourse analysis facilitated the identification of key themes and patterns across these varied data points instead of solely focusing on linguistic aspects. Hence, The mixed method is critical for examining leadership's dual presence and absence and identifying the new repertoires and transformative practices. It comprehensively explains the historical trajectories and narratives shaping these movements.

The central and sub-questions of this thesis, framed before and during the research process, are as follows:

Q1 (Central): How has the social movement pattern in Iran altered in post-revolutionary Iran, particularly after the 2009 Green Movement? – What transformative practices do these new leaderless movements introduce?

Q2: How has theocratic leadership at the state level influenced the grassroots leaderless movements?

Q3: How have gender-specific matters, such as protests against the mandatory hijab and the presence of women on the frontline of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement, affected its leaderless status?

Q4: What is the role of minorities' participation, either gender or ethnic minorities, in the becoming of leaderless movements?

Q5: How do the remains of the 1979 revolution prevent people from experiencing a new revolution?

Q6: What role do meso-level spaces play in shaping the strategies and practices of these leaderless movements?

Positionality

The central question of this research has been a persistent inquiry for me, emerging during various critical moments of social unrest in Iran over the years. This question was not merely an academic curiosity but a deeply personal one, stemming from my experiences as a student and observer within the country. My observations from 2009 onward have significantly influenced the formulation of this research question and the methodological approach I have adopted.

In many ways, this research process began long before I formally undertook this thesis. My years of witnessing and reflecting on the evolving landscape of social movements in Iran served as an informal yet critical phase of data collection. These lived experiences, coupled with my academic pursuits, have deeply informed my analysis. The insights gained from these observations have allowed me to approach the research not only with empirical data but also with a nuanced understanding of the complexities and dynamics at play. Thus, my analysis in this thesis is shaped by both the specific data gathered and the broader, more personal context of years of observation and reflection.

It is essential to clarify that I have not explicitly utilized ethnography as a research method in this thesis. My observations and interactions with protest participants occurred before I formally began this academic inquiry. Thus, while ethnographic techniques such as participant observation and informal interviews informed my understanding, they were not employed systematically in this research project. Nonetheless, I must acknowledge that these early experiences and discussions with individuals involved in the events I studied inevitably shaped my perspective and analysis. However, my primary objective as a researcher has been to set aside my personal experiences to critically examine the phenomena under study, even though these experiences have become almost second nature to me. I aimed to achieve a level of detachment, as Husserl (2012) frames it as 'epoché' in his phenomenological research, to

deconstruct what had once seemed self-evident. I hope this process of 'defamiliarization' allows me to approach the subject matter with fresh analytical insights.

State of the Art

Social movements encompass a vast array of theoretical literature. The relatively recent emergence of leaderless movements introduces a disproportion in the analysis of existing literature compared to social movements in general. Therefore, putting the case within a historical narrative becomes inevitable. This necessity significantly influences the methodology of this thesis as well. Consequently, examining three distinct time periods will be instrumental in addressing emerging 'leaderless' movements. First, the New Social Movement theories that analyze the changing demands of movements. In this section, I will explain the discourse framed after the 1960s, mostly in Western academia, to make sense of social movements and the upheavals. Second, I will provide a literature framed subsequent to the second phase of movements-revolutions, such as the Arab uprisings and the Occupy movement, considered as the figures of leaderless movements between 2011 and 2015. Third, I will illustrate the literature on the case of this thesis, Iran. In this part, the literature would be limited to the range of 2009 and 2022, comprising the Green movement literature and recently published works on the WLF movement. In the last part of this chapter, I will situate the concepts around the topic of the contemporary movements and upheavals regarding my thesis.

The New Social Movements: 1960s-2000

The study of social movements, particularly within the sociological tradition, has been deeply intertwined with Marxist theory. However, the movements and protests that emerged after the 1960s significantly departed from previous patterns, rendering earlier theoretical frameworks inadequate in explaining these new phenomena. Marxism, too, was not immune to this challenge. Consequently, many scholars within the leftist tradition sought to address this inadequacy, developing a new paradigm for studying movements. This shift, born out of the social upheavals of the 1960s, gave rise to what became known as the "New Social Movements" (NSM) paradigm.

The NSM paradigm represented a critical departure from traditional Marxist approaches, primarily focusing on class struggle and economic factors as the driving forces behind social movements. In contrast, the new paradigm recognized the emergence of movements such as

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women's liberation and civil rights movements centered around identity, culture, and other non-economic issues. This shift allowed for a more nuanced understanding of movements that could not be easily categorized within the classical Marxist framework. Now that it has been established that a new framework was necessary to understand and analyze the social movements of the 1960s and beyond, it is crucial to pose the question that Buechler (1995) aptly raised: What exactly is "new" about these movements?

The debate on NSM often traces back to scholars captivated by the wave of movements in the 1960s, particularly during the 1980s to early 2000s. Many of the scholars who focused on NSMs were leftists who, however, aligned their analyses with a post-Marxist perspective. The novelty of NSMs lies precisely in their Marxist roots and the shift from economic struggles to more cultural ones. Essentially, this new paradigm begins with a critique of Marxism, attempting to move beyond the narrow focus on political economy as the sole framework for understanding the struggles of marginalized groups. As Pichardo (1997) suggests, these movements are new in the sense that they move away from the traditional struggle for economic redistribution, instead focusing on issues related to quality of life and lifestyle, centering around individualized collective actions (Micheletti, 2003)—areas that are deeply cultural, non-economic, and non-political.

The focus on de-politicizing social movements is a central aspect of the NSM paradigm, but this very focus has also drawn significant criticism. Theorists like Touraine (1992) connect NSMs to the defense of individuality and the enhancement of quality of life, often viewing these movements as non-political. However, Touraine argues that this defense inherently opposes existing power structures. Similarly, Habermas (1987) suggests that these movements operate within the "lifeworld," acting defensively against the encroachment of systemic forces. The political nature of these movements seems so apparent that the NSM paradigm's characterization of them as apolitical overlooks their underlying political motives. The argument made by theorists like Touraine—that these movements are apolitical—can be challenged by considering their inherently political objectives. For instance, civil rights movements, which heavily influenced the NSM paradigm, explicitly aimed at redistributing power, a fundamentally political goal embodied in slogans like "Power to the People." While the demands of these movements have undoubtedly evolved, the NSM paradigm's strict separation of spheres leads to an oversimplification, mistakenly categorizing these movements as apolitical.

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The strong emphasis on the apolitical nature of new social movements has been widely criticized, and this thesis aligns with those critiques. Karl Werner Brand (1990) argues that these movements follow a cyclical pattern, challenging the idea that they are genuinely novel. Rather than their cultural or supposedly apolitical character defining their newness, it is the issue of representation that stands out—a central concern of this thesis. Melucci (1980) and Zimmermann (1987) emphasize that the essence of these new movements lies in their focus on direct participation and their rejection of traditional forms of representation. This shift in how movements engage with power and society is what truly distinguishes them. In other words, "since what is at stake is the reappropriation of identity, all mediation is rejected as it is likely to reproduce the mechanisms of control and manipulation that the struggle aims to counteract. Thus, the importance of direct action and direct participation is emphasized, highlighting the spontaneous, anti-authoritarian, and anti-hierarchical nature of the protests originating from these movements" (Melucci, 1980, pp. 220–221).

In conclusion, the NSM paradigm marks a clear departure from traditional Marxist approaches, offering a way to understand the social movements that emerged after the 1960s, which could not be fully explained by earlier theories focused on class struggle and economic issues. While some theorists have described these movements as apolitical, this thesis challenges that view, arguing that these movements are deeply political in their focus on identity, direct participation, and the rejection of traditional forms of representation. What truly sets these movements apart is their emphasis on cultural and identity-based struggles rather than purely economic ones. This shift underscores the importance of recognizing the political objectives of NSMs, which aim to challenge and transform existing power structures, advocating for a reappropriation of identity and direct engagement in social change.

Leaderless Uprisings: 2011-2015

The leaderless uprisings, similar to the new social movements, emerged after nearly a decade of lull. The year 2011 marked a significant moment in the history of social movements and revolutionary practices, most notably with the Arab Spring. Nevertheless, the wave of collective actions was not confined to the Arab world; it spread globally, with diverse forms of protests, social movements, uprisings, and revolutions erupting from North Africa and the Middle East to America and East Asia. This widespread unrest led to the perception that the

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world was witnessing "new global revolutions," (Bayat, 2017) "communism of movements" (Badiou, 2012), and "movements of movements" (Della Porta, 2005).

The global characteristic could refer to three different factors. First and foremost, their temporality and continuity suggest a developing discourse of solidarity across borders. These movements, though often emerging in distinct national contexts, display a pattern of learning from each other's strategies, tactics, and organizational methods. For example, the rapid spread of protest strategies from the Arab Spring to other parts of the world reflects a collective learning process. This phenomenon is not just about replicating demands but about adapting organizational forms that have proven effective elsewhere. The transfer of ideas, symbols, and even methods of resistance—like the use of social media to mobilize people—illustrates a shared understanding among these movements. This sense of solidarity emerges from shared grievances and an ongoing dialogue between movements that recognize each other as part of a broader struggle. Thus, what began as isolated national protests often evolved into a transnational movement ecosystem, where activists drew inspiration and strength from one another.

The second critical factor in understanding the global characteristic of these movements is their innovative organizational structures, particularly the emergence of 'leaderless' organizations. The lack of a central leadership structure is not merely a tactical choice but a reflection of a broader shift in how movements are conceptualized and executed in the modern era. This decentralized model allows for greater flexibility and resilience, as the movement is not reliant on a single leader or a centralized group that authorities could easily target. Instead, leadership becomes a collective and often fluid role shared among participants based on need and circumstance. This structure also enables these movements to be more inclusive, allowing a more comprehensive range of voices and perspectives to contribute to the cause. The global aspect of this leaderless organization is evident in how similar models have been adopted across diverse contexts—from the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States to the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. These movements show that even within different national frameworks, there is a shared global thread in their organizational approach, challenging traditional hierarchies and redefining what it means to lead a social movement.

The third factor that underscores the global characteristic of these movements is the pervasive influence of neoliberalism, which serves as both a common adversary and a unifying force for protesters worldwide. Neoliberal policies have created widespread economic and

social inequalities that transcend national borders. From the Arab uprisings, where people protested against regimes that had implemented neoliberal reforms at the expense of public welfare, to the Occupy Wall Street movement with its unique personal action frames (Bennett, 2012), which directly challenged the concentration of wealth and power among the '1%', these movements share a common critique of global capitalism. Scholars like Badiou (2012) and Hardt and Negri (2017) argue that these protests are not just isolated incidents but are responses to a global capitalist system that they describe as the "Empire." This 'Empire' represents a network of capitalist forces that, while operating within specific national contexts, are interconnected globally, creating a unified target for these movements. The protests against neoliberal policies in different parts of the world—whether it's the resistance to austerity in Greece, the opposition to privatization in Latin America, or the fight against urban gentrification in Turkey—demonstrate how the global spread of neoliberalism has generated a globalized form of resistance. These movements, though rooted in local grievances, collectively challenge the global structures of power that perpetuate inequality and injustice, highlighting the interconnectedness of their struggles.

The intense focus on neoliberal circumstances as the primary catalyst for global social movements runs the risk of overlooking the local specificities that are integral to understanding each movement's unique context. (See, e.g., Parvu, 2017; Seferiades & Johnston, 2012) While it is tempting to view these protests as unified by their opposition to global capitalism, this perspective might inadvertently exclude the diverse, locally rooted causes that also play a significant role in sparking these movements. A crucial question arises: Is capitalism truly the ultimate cause of these uprisings, or do these revolts stem from a multitude of intertwined factors? Hanieh (2013) offers insight into this debate by examining the roots of the Arab uprisings, arguing that while factors like authoritarianism and poverty were key in igniting these revolts, they are not independent causes but rather interconnected elements of the way capitalism has developed in the region. According to Hanieh, the various factors driving these movements cannot be separated into distinct, isolated causes; they are all deeply entwined within the fabric of regional capitalism (p. 173).

This perspective is particularly relevant when considering the protests in Iran between 2017 and 2019, which this thesis will explore in detail. While these movements can undoubtedly be framed within the broader context of neoliberal resistance, it would be overly simplistic to ignore the distinct local conditions that differentiate these protests from others

around the world. For instance, the specific grievances and historical contexts in Iran differ significantly from those in Tunisia, Egypt, or the United States, even if they share some common threads in their opposition to neoliberal policies. Negri and Hardt's concept of the "Empire" underscores the idea that while there is a global capitalist network that these movements challenge, this network's centers have unique characteristics. This raises important questions—though beyond the scope of this thesis—about why revolutions led to the overthrow of regimes in some places, like Egypt and Tunisia, but not in others, such as the United States, China, or within the Middle East, in Syria and Iraq. Understanding these differences is crucial for a more nuanced analysis of global social movements, recognizing that while neoliberalism is a significant factor, it is not the sole explanation for the complex dynamics at play.

The 2011 uprisings marked a significant turning point in the discourse surrounding social movements, particularly in the context of leaderless organization. After a relative lull from the late 1990s to 2010, the Arab uprisings reignited interest in this concept, bringing a new dimension that had been largely absent in earlier studies: the rise of social media as a transformative force in movement organization. Unlike previous eras, where the focus was more on traditional forms of communication and leadership structures, the events in Tunisia and Egypt demonstrated how social media could play a pivotal role in mobilizing the masses, organizing protests, and spreading information rapidly and widely. This gave rise to terms like the 'Twitter revolution' and 'Facebook revolution,' highlighting the platforms' centrality in these movements[1] (Marzouki et al., 2012).

In academic circles, this shift sparked a growing recognition of the need to study social media not just as a tool used by activists but as an integral part of the social movements themselves. This involves analyzing how social media shapes the nature of these movements, influences their strategies, and even alters the concept of leadership. Castells (2015) in his work *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, explores this transformation, focusing on how the internet has become a crucial element in what he calls a "networked society." Castells (2013) argues that the internet serves as a powerful platform for organizing and mobilizing individuals who share common goals, enabling them to build a sense of autonomy and collective identity. He emphasizes that the Internet's inherent "culture of freedom" has made it a natural fit for

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[1] In addition to the scholarly debate surrounding these terms, addressed in the literature review section, these concepts are significant in news articles (See, e.g., Beaumont, 2011; Shapiro, 2009).

movements that reject traditional hierarchies and seek more decentralized forms of organization. By providing a space for like-minded individuals to connect and coordinate their efforts, the Internet has fundamentally reshaped how social movements are organized and operate in the Internet age (Mosca, 2010; Van Laer & Van Aelst, 2010). This shift underscores the importance of understanding the role of technology in contemporary activism and how it continues to evolve the landscape of social movements.

Although I do not categorize Castells' theories within the broader camp of internet utopianism, the practical outcomes of such theories have contributed to a discourse that views media as a substitute for traditional leadership in social movements. This perspective posits that the collective actions facilitated by social media can serve as an alternative to conventional leadership structures. However, studies conducted after the wave of Arab uprisings have highlighted that the role of social media in these movements can often be overstated and exaggerated (Reardon, 2012). Morozov (2009) critiques this overemphasis, coining the term "slacktivism" to describe a form of activism that, while active online, lacks the substance needed to generate real political change. He expresses skepticism about the effectiveness of cybersociety in bringing about meaningful transformations.

This thesis contends that new social movements should not be analyzed using the framework established for older social movements. While these new movements generally oppose charismatic leadership, they also diverge from traditional leadership tactics in their later phases. Thus, rather than seeking to identify alternative forms of leadership—such as the role of social media—I argue that it is more consistent with the essence of these movements to focus on the forms of collectivity they create. This shift in focus better captures the decentralized and fluid nature of these movements, which resist the idea of leadership in any traditional sense. However, this does not imply that social media is somehow secondary or less critical in organizing social movements.

This thesis supports Castells' (2015) argument that the roots of social movements lie in the inherent contradictions and specific conflicts within societies and that social media is not the primary cause of these movements but a crucial tool in their development. In other words, while social media plays a vital role in communication and coordination, the emergence of social movements is deeply rooted in the social and political realities they seek to address. Communication has always been pivotal in the formation and execution of social movements,

both historically and in the present day. However, the extent to which social media can or should replace traditional leadership remains an open question.

The Case of Iran

In the third phase of this thesis, a deeper exploration of the literature specific to Iran's social movements is crucial. Much of the existing scholarship focuses on the Green Movement of 2009, which emerged in response to perceived electoral fraud in the presidential elections. This movement has received significant attention due to its scale and impact, making it a central subject of analysis. However, few studies delve into the broader contributions of Iran's movements to the NSM framework, arguing that these movements signal a transition in Iranian society towards a post-Islamist era. (See, e.g., Bayat, 1996; Kian, 1997; Mahdavi, 2011)

Regarding the NSM framework, Khosrokhavar (2002) identifies three fundamental movements in Iran—the Youth Movement, the Intellectual Movement, and the Women's Movement—which he sees embodying the characteristics of NSMs within the Iranian context. This thesis does not treat these movements in isolation; instead, it examines them within the broader context of interconnected social movements. Understanding these movements requires a comprehensive perspective that considers their links to other social and political developments. For example, the women's movement in Iran, from the time of the Constitutional Revolution to the present, cannot be fully understood without considering its relationship with other social movements and broader societal changes.

Historically, the women's movement in Iran has often been reactive rather than independent, particularly in the context of street protests. However, in other areas—such as legal rights and social activism—it has developed more distinct and autonomous characteristics. Given this interconnectedness, it is not surprising that scholars often emphasize movements like the Green Movement, which encapsulate the various strands of activism in Iran. The Green Movement serves as a focal point that brings together the concerns of multiple movements, making it a pivotal event in the study of Iran's post-revolutionary social dynamics.

The study of the Green Movement is crucial for understanding the evolution of protest movements in Iran, particularly in how these movements have shaped demands, organization, and their broader impact on subsequent activism. The Green Movement, which erupted after

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the disputed 2009 presidential elections, marked a significant moment in Iran's recent history, not only for its scale but also for the way it redefined political and social activism in the country.

One of the key aspects explored in the literature on the Green Movement is the role of the internet and social media in mobilizing and sustaining the protests. This focus on digital activism became a central theme in the analysis of the Green Movement, similar to the later Arab uprisings where the role of social media was also heavily scrutinized. Scholars have debated the extent to which these technologies fueled the movement and whether they represented a new form of organization and communication that transcended traditional forms of protest. The internet and social media allowed for rapid dissemination of information and coordination among protesters, which some argue was pivotal in sustaining the movement's momentum.

Beyond the role of technology, the demands of the Green Movement also occupy a significant portion of the scholarly discussion. The movement's main slogan, "Where is my vote?" became emblematic of the broader civil rights discourse that the movement represented. Many scholars, including Dabashi (2016) and Sundquist (2013), interpret this slogan as a clear indication of an epistemic shift in Iranian political culture, emphasizing the revival of civil rights and a move towards a more inclusive and democratic society. Rather than revolt against the state, the Green Movement was seen as a demand for accountability and transparency within the existing political framework, signaling a shift in political engagement.

The focus on civil rights within the Green Movement also raises important questions about the composition and motivations of the movement's participants. This has led to a substantial body of literature that explores who the 'green' people were, often framing the movement as a class-based struggle predominantly driven by the urban middle class. Abrahamian (2016) argues that the Green Movement was primarily composed of Iran's middle class, motivated by a desire for greater political and social freedoms. This framing suggests that the movement was not merely a reaction to electoral fraud but also a broader expression of dissatisfaction with the limitations imposed by the Iranian political system on civil liberties and individual rights.

In addition to examining the nature and composition of the Green Movement, scholars have placed significant emphasis on the role of emancipatory tools and practices, mainly Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), in shaping the movement. These

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technologies, including social media, mobile communications, and the internet, were central to how the Green Movement was organized and operated within the constraints of an authoritarian regime.

One particularly compelling metaphor Golkar (2011) uses is that of the internet as Janus—the Roman god of doorways and transitions, depicted with two faces looking in opposite directions. This metaphor captures the dual nature of ICTs in the context of the Green Movement. On one hand, ICTs served as powerful tools for organizing protests, spreading information, and connecting like-minded individuals in a repressive environment. Social media platforms, for instance, were crucial in mobilizing the masses, sharing real-time updates, and coordinating actions on the ground, thereby facilitating a decentralized organization that was less reliant on traditional leadership structures. On the other hand, the state could use these same technologies to suppress the movement. Authoritarian regimes, including Iran's, have increasingly developed sophisticated monitoring methods, manipulating and controlling access to digital communications. This dual capability of ICTs—liberatory and suppressive—creates a complex environment for social movements. It raises crucial questions about the extent to which these technologies genuinely empower activists versus the extent to which they expose them to new forms of surveillance and repression.

The role of ICTs is also deeply intertwined with the NSM paradigm, which emphasizes the shift from traditional, hierarchical forms of organization to more networked, horizontal structures. Cyber social networks (CSNs), such as Facebook and Twitter, enabled the Green Movement to publicize itself in a virtual space, creating a shared environment for expression, cooperation, and organizational planning. Shangapour et al. (2010) suggest that this networked form of leadership, where decisions are influenced by a collective rather than a single leader, represents a significant departure from the traditional, charismatic leadership models seen in earlier movements.

However, in the specific case of the Green Movement, this networked leadership structure conflicted with the more traditional, individualistic leadership associated with figures like Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi. While these leaders emerged as symbolic leaders of the movement, the thriving of CSNs introduced a new dynamic where leadership was more diffuse and less centered on a single individual. This tension between the old and new forms of leadership reflects broader debates within the literature about how social

movements are evolving in the digital age and whether traditional leadership models can coexist with the networked, horizontal structures enabled by ICTs.

The period between the Green Movement of 2009 and the WLF movement of 2022 marks a significant gap in Iran's socio-political landscape, characterized by a series of upheavals that differ in nature and scope. This era, which I refer to as the 'inter-movement' period, witnessed various social and political activities that, while not rising to the level of full-fledged social movements, were significant in their own right. The scholarly literature on this period often oscillates between categorizing these events as protests, protest movements, or nascent social movements, depending on the definitions employed. However, there is a general consensus that these events were more akin to protests or protest movements rather than fully developed social movements like the Green or WLF movements.

The peak of this 'inter-movement' period occurred between 2017 and 2019, a time characterized by widespread protests that signaled a shift in public dissent. Unlike the Green Movement, primarily driven by demands for civil rights and political reform, the protests took on a distinctly economic and political character during this period. These protests were fueled by widespread economic grievances, such as inflation, unemployment, and corruption, which gradually expanded to include broader political and social issues. As Fathollah Nejad (2020) argues, these protests were a response to what he terms a 'triple crisis'—a convergence of socio-economic, political, and ecological challenges that collectively threatened the stability of the Islamic Republic.

One of the most significant developments during this period was the geographical decentralization of protests. Unlike the Green Movement, which was concentrated mainly in major cities like Tehran, the protests of the inter-movement period spread across the country, reaching smaller towns and rural areas that had previously been less active in political dissent. This shift was partly due to the increasingly class-based nature of the protests, with economically marginalized groups outside the major urban centers playing a more prominent role. Shahi and Abdoh-Tabrizi (2020) highlight this decentralization as a critical factor, noting that it effectively broke the monopoly that large cities had on protest organization in Iran.

The research on the WLF movement is notably more limited compared to other movements due to the constraints of time and the movement's recent emergence. As a result, there is a significant gap in the completed research on the organizational structure of the WLF

movement, which is a critical aspect of this thesis. Although the issue of leadership within the movement has been a topic of discussion in social media and news outlets, the theoretical literature on this subject is sparse, likely because the movement is still very new.

Currently, the available literature on the WLF movement is primarily descriptive, focusing on the events that transpired in 2022. This literature is still in the early stages of development, offering an overview of what has occurred without delving deeply into the movement's theoretical underpinnings or organizational dynamics. Despite these limitations, one key element that can be discerned from the existing studies is the prominent feminist analysis, which highlights the crucial role of women in shaping the movement. This feminist perspective marks a significant shift from previous movements in Iran, emphasizing how gender issues have become central to the movement's identity and objectives.

The role of women, while critical, is not the sole dimension of the WLF movement. As Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023) articulates using Stuart Hall's terminology, the WLF movement represents a 'conjunctural crisis' that unfolds along four distinct axes. Gender oppression and social reproduction form one of these axes, underscoring the feminist core of the movement. The other axes include the crisis of the nation-state, the crisis of religious democracy, and the crisis of authoritarian neoliberalism within the Islamic Republic's political economy. These interconnected crises illustrate the complex and multifaceted nature of the movement, suggesting that it is not merely a continuation of past protests but a movement that emerges at the intersection of multiple social, political, and economic tensions. This concept of a 'conjunctural crisis' highlights how seemingly fragmented and temporally distinct movements can be connected to what I call accumulated grievances that persist over time.

A feminist analysis of the WLF movement offers crucial insights for understanding the issue of leadership within the broader framework of this thesis. Central to this analysis is the 'mandatory' veiling issue, which symbolizes a larger struggle where the body itself becomes a powerful site of rebellion. This concept, often called the 'common body,' highlights how Iranian women use their bodies as a collective tool for resistance. Assa (2023) elaborates on this by explaining that the WLF movement actively rejects the portrayal of Iranian women as passive victims. Instead, it reframes the movement as a feminist strike, characterized by its decentralized and collective nature. This decentralization is particularly significant for this thesis, as it reflects the broader challenge of collective formation in post-revolutionary Iran, especially in the years following the Green Movement.

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The issue of decentralization also connects to the evolving nature of leadership within these movements. Affary and Anderson (2023) argue that the prominent role of women in the WLF protests effectively positions them as leaders within the movement. These women lead various social initiatives and campaigns, underscoring their central role in driving the movement forward. However, the authors also highlight a crucial distinction: despite the 'leaderless' nature of these uprisings, they are neither aimless nor incoherent. This observation touches on a critical debate within the literature—how to define leadership in the context of decentralized movements.

All the cases examined in these three phases, which form the foundation of new and leaderless social movements, have mostly focused on examining the movements' structure. This applies whether considering the NSM paradigm, which focuses on new demands within movements, the Arab world movements and the global movements that followed, which for the first time introduced the concept of leaderless organization in movements, and finally, in the case of Iran, where during the periods of movements and inter-movement periods, the commonality has been the focus on analyzing the movements themselves. However, if we take a step back, the question of this thesis reveals itself: why have movements reached such a level of organization in the first place, regardless of whether they have been successful or not?

Overall, the events following 2011 have made the term 'leaderless' crucial in studying social movements. Unlike the experience in Tahrir Square, which led to a revolution, Iran's grievances are still ongoing. The WLF movement stands out as either a resurgence waiting to happen in the coming years or a movement that will be suppressed entirely; either way, it remains unique. This movement began with demands for women's rights and expanded to include anti-theocracy demands, managing to persist for almost 100 days before being suppressed, an unprecedented duration in post-revolutionary Iran. The WLF movement's significance lies in its broader impact. Despite its suppression, its influence extended globally, inspiring protests in Afghanistan against Taliban rule and in Turkey against the politicization of religion, all under the same slogan, "Woman, Life, Freedom." Even if suppression is seen as a form of failure, the very occurrence of these movements is notable. This underscores the importance of examining how such movements emerge and organize, especially without centralized leadership.

Leaderless Movements or New Social Movements?

Two concepts, 'New Social Movements' (NSM) and 'Leaderless Social Movements,' are used interchangeably in this thesis and the relevant literature. However, it is crucial to delineate the mixture of similarities and differences between them. As previously discussed, theories proposed by NSM scholars reveal two significant shifts in movements compared to their predecessors. First, there is a notable change in demands, which are now less focused on economic and labor-related issues characteristic of early Marxist theories. Instead, contemporary movements emphasize cultural and lifestyle issues, marking a clear distinction from older movements. Second, there has been a transformation in tactics and organization, which is central to the discussion of leaderless movements.

While movements of the 1960s, such as the civil rights movement led by influential figures like Martin Luther King Jr., were not devoid of leadership, the later phases of NSMs, exemplified by the Arab uprisings and the Occupy movement, introduced new organizational strategies and tactics. Attempting to categorize recent movements strictly as either 'leaderless' or solely within the NSM paradigm can be reductionist. The post-2011 movements exhibit characteristics that may not fit neatly into either category. Consequently, this thesis does not confine the case of Iran to just one classification; rather, it proposes a blend of both concepts. This blending is warranted for three primary reasons.

First, the NSM paradigm is rooted in Western European traditions, as most of its influential examples emerged within Western contexts. Although theorists like Touraine and Melucci emphasize that a defining feature of NSMs is their apolitical nature, this perspective overlooks the reality of numerous highly political movements both within and outside the West. These movements highlight the limitations of the NSM framework in accommodating the diverse nuances present in various protests and fail to account for significant developments occurring in non-Western societies. Therefore, not only is it necessary to focus on the leaderless character of the movements, but it is also essential to consider that many movements with the same tactics or demands should be included in the NSM paradigm.

Second, adopting a historical perspective in the study of social movements necessitates a flexible conceptual framework, particularly when examining varied incidents. In Iran, for example, the period from 2009 to 2022 witnessed a fluid transition between movements,

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protests, and non-movements. This continuum includes elements that align with the NSM paradigm but also instances where the term 'leaderless' more accurately describes the events.

Two key considerations emerge from this perspective. First, historical conditions dictate that research should not be confined to a single paradigm, as these paradigms themselves are products of specific historical contexts. This approach requires acknowledging the evolution of paradigms and concepts over time, ensuring that analysis remains sensitive to the chronological development of social movements. Second, the inherent fluidity of social movements must be recognized. These phenomena are not static; they evolve according to the historical moment and the specific conditions of their time. This fluidity demands that analysis be adaptable, considering the historical trajectory and the contemporary context.

Therefore, this thesis does not restrict its analysis to a single paradigm, such as NSM or leaderless movements. Instead, it considers both diachronic (historical) and synchronic (contemporary) perspectives, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of social movement phenomena. This approach ensures that the analysis remains relevant and responsive to the dynamic nature of social movements across different periods and contexts.

Third, the term "leaderless movements" often evokes associations with the concept of "leaderless resistance," a notion that spans a spectrum of ideologies, particularly within the U.S. context. This spectrum includes right-wing movements like the Tea Party, which can be described as conservative right, as well as neo-fascist examples of leaderless resistance (see, e.g., Kaplan, 1997). Additionally, leaderless characteristics are not confined to these U.S. examples; they also manifest in other political contexts, such as the dynamics within right-wing parties like the AfD in Germany (see, e.g., Zons & Halstenbach, 2019). Furthermore, the concept of leaderlessness extends beyond social movements and into areas like management studies, where there is ongoing debate about the sustainability of leaderless management models (see, e.g., Alvesson & Spicer, 2012). This highlights the broad applicability of the "leaderless" concept, which can be found in various fields, from political mobilizations to organizational management.

Overall, not all "leaderless" practices align with the focus of this thesis. It would be overly simplistic to lump together all forms of leaderless action under a single category. The term "leaderless movement," as used in this thesis, is specifically intended to explore a form of collective action that aligns with social movement theory and the NSM framework. This

distinction is crucial because it underscores the unique characteristics and dynamics of leaderless movements within the broader context of social movement studies while also acknowledging the limitations and potential misapplications of the term.

Continues Uprisings in Modern Iran

> The history of subaltern groups is necessarily fragmented and episodic.
> — Gramsci, Prison Notebooks

Modern Iran has been a crucible of social transformations, marked by revolutions, coups, strikes, uprisings, and social movements. Identifying a starting point to analyze these social phenomena is a challenging task, as it largely depends on the historical perspective adopted by the researcher. However, since the central question of this thesis concerns the evolution of mobilization in Iran's social movements, particularly the shift towards leaderless movements, it is appropriate to begin with two revolutionary milestones: the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and the Islamic Revolution of 1979. By analyzing these two pivotal events, I aim to provide a historical context to illuminate better the nature of social movements in the post-1979 era. In the second section, I will explore the post-1979 movements, situating them within the broader context of civil society to better understand the dynamics and characteristics of these more recent social mobilizations.

Two Revolutionary Moments: 1906 and 1979

Shocking events, particularly uprisings, tend to leave the most lasting impressions, and Iran's history is no exception. The global perception of Iran and its revolts is deeply intertwined with the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a watershed moment that reverberated both locally and internationally. The revolution, which saw the overthrow of the Pahlavi monarchy and the establishment of an Islamic Republic, shocked the world and disrupted the prevailing global order. The 1970s were marked by the binary thinking of the Cold War, a period in which nations were often compelled to align with either the capitalist West or the communist East. Yet, Iran's revolution defied this dichotomy by proclaiming, "Neither the East nor the West," a stance that challenged the entrenched geopolitical norms of the time. However, Iran's journey toward its form of modernity and enlightenment began not in 1979, but in 1906 with the Constitutional Revolution.

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For this thesis, the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 and the 1979 Islamic Revolution are pivotal in examining leader-based uprisings. Central to this analysis is the need to revisit an essential question: What has happened to charisma and its effect on the masses? I argue in the following paragraphs that leadership in both revolutions is deeply rooted in religious charisma. This charismatic influence can be seen in the figure of Ayatollah Khomeini during the 1979 revolution, whose personal leadership galvanized the masses, and in the role of the clergy during the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, where religious leaders played a crucial role in mobilizing the public. To address this question of charisma in revolutionary leadership, I will briefly explore these two revolutionary moments, highlighting the significance of religious charisma in shaping the course and character of both uprisings.

The Constitutional Revolution marked a significant turning point in Iran's journey toward governmental modernism. This movement, driven by both nationalist and clerical forces, sought to curtail the Shah's unlimited power, a figure traditionally regarded as the "shadow of God"[2] during the Qajar era. While the debate continues over whether it should be classified as a movement or a full-fledged revolution, Abrahamian (1979) convincingly argues that it qualifies as a revolution due to the radical, abrupt, and profound changes it brought to the governmental structure. Although the Constitutional Revolution did not dethrone the Shah—since the monarchy did not yet face a legitimacy crisis—it was nonetheless a revolutionary moment, not merely because of the establishment of the parliament but also because it was the first time that Iran's socio-political forces, from nationalists to the clergy, were mobilized on such a scale. These events are often regarded as the inception of 'modern' Iran.

The Constitutional Revolution's impact was profoundly revolutionary in its outcomes. Firstly, it shattered the sanctity of the Shah and the monarchy in the eyes of both political forces and the general populace, laying the groundwork for future challenges to monarchical authority. Secondly, it invigorated social movements across major Iranian cities such as Tehran, Tabriz, and Isfahan, fostering a new era of civic engagement and political activism. As Amanat (2017) notes, the Iranian Constitutional Revolution was unparalleled in the Middle East post-World War I, mainly due to its grassroots origins. Finally, the revolution facilitated an initial

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[2] Zel-al-Allah ظل الله

alliance[3] between nationalist forces and the clergy, a coalition that proved crucial in shaping the trajectory of Iran during the later years of the Pahlavi dynasty and is essential for understanding the context of the 1979 Revolution. This convergence between seemingly disparate groups underscored the complex and multifaceted nature of Iran's revolutionary movements, setting the stage for the profound transformations that would follow.

The rise of the clergy and the formation of various political parties and factions, ranging from nationalist to leftist, played a crucial role in shaping the political and social future of Iran. Although this thesis does not aim to examine the factors of the 1979 revolution—an extensively studied subject—the key aspect in the historical political and social analysis of Iran is the attention to the reconfiguration and coordination of political forces. What is significant is understanding how Iran transitioned from the convergence of opposing forces under the charismatic leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini to leaderless movements. In this context, the concept of space is highly influential and related to charisma, particularly concerning the Constitutional Revolution and the Islamic Revolution. Specific spaces during these revolutions and their associated movements significantly impacted the formation of political parties and this convergence of forces. In other words, the power of the clergy was tied to sacred places and their spiritual meaning for the masses.

The 1979 revolution is a salient example of the relationship between space and charisma. However, while charismatic power has been extensively examined, particularly given that the twentieth century is renowned for revolutions propelled by charismatic figures, space is less explored and plays an equally crucial role. In studying the interplay between charisma and leadership, I will analyze the extent to which effective leadership inherently involves a charismatic individual. This discussion will highlight how charismatic authority, as theorized by Max Weber, serves as a unifying force in revolutionary movements. Following this, I will examine the role of physical spaces in these revolutions, considering how certain locations become focal points during critical moments of upheaval. These spaces, imbued with symbolic meaning, often act as stages for expressing collective will and consolidating revolutionary

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[3] This dynamic shifted after the establishment of the parliament, as the new legal framework began to curtail the authority of the clergy. The constitutional revolution prioritized customary law over religious law (Sharia), leading to a significant reduction in the clergy's influence within the newly established 'political' system. This legal reorientation highlighted the tensions between the clergy and the emerging modernist forces, setting the stage for future conflicts over the role of religion in the state's legal and political systems.

energy. Later in this thesis, particularly in the section on the Politics of Heterotopia, I will discuss how the symbolic power of these sites changes in the context of leaderless movements.

Understanding the precise conditions under which charismatic leadership emerges is crucial for analyzing revolutionary movements. As Weber (1978) argues, Charismatic rulership in the typical sense described above always results from unusual, especially political or economic situations, or from extraordinary psychic, particularly religious states, or from both together. It arises from collective excitement produced by extraordinary events and from surrender to heroism of any kind" (p. 1121). In the context of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the political situation was marked by deep discontent with Shah's modernization plans, which were perceived as being out of step with the traditional and religious values of the 'mass.' This dissonance created fertile ground for the rise of a charismatic leader who could resonate with the people's religious and cultural identity. Given these circumstances, the emergence of Ayatollah Khomeini as a leader was not surprising. His ability to embody the religious sentiments of the population and channel the widespread dissatisfaction into a unified revolutionary movement exemplifies Weber's concept of charismatic rulership, highlighting how extraordinary political and social conditions can give rise to such figures.

However, my focus is not on dissecting the collective charisma of the clerical institution or the personal charisma of Khomeini himself. Instead, I aim to explore how the concept of charisma in revolutionary Iran in 1979 intersects with notions of unity and a monotheistic vision deeply embedded in the country's religious and cultural traditions. This monotheistic perspective, whether expressed through the pre-revolutionary slogan "God, King (Shah), Homeland" during the Pahlavi era or through the post-revolutionary doctrine of the absolute guardianship of the jurist (Velayat-e Faqih), highlights a consistent tendency toward the centralization of sovereign power. However, later in this thesis, I explore how the transformation of the 'mass' to the 'multitude' will challenge this centralization and unification.

By adopting a critical perspective on space and drawing on Lefebvre's theory (2012), which conceptualizes space as a socially constructed entity, the role of spaces in social movements and revolutionary contexts becomes essential. Lefebvre's assertion that space is not merely a physical location, but a product of social relations underscores the significance of spatial dynamics in shaping political and social outcomes. In revolutionary contexts, the power of space lies in its ability to organize and mobilize social forces, transforming abstract locations into arenas of political action. For example, during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution,

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spaces such as shrines and mosques became epicenters of protest, serving as physical gathering points and as symbols that aggregated and amplified dissent. Through their socially constructed meanings, these spaces became pivotal in the revolutionary struggle, demonstrating the interplay between physical locations and social forces. The agents who influence this power, particularly the clerics, play a crucial role in shaping the symbolic meaning of these spaces, revealing that protest sites are deeply embedded in the social fabric and are not merely neutral settings.

Overall, what makes these two revolutions particularly significant for our discussion is the expanding role of the clergy in politics and the transformation of religious sites into spaces of protest. The charisma associated with the traditional authority of the clergy becomes crucial in mobilizing social forces during revolutionary moments and periods of social change. These two elements—clerical influence and charisma—are essential for understanding the dynamics of mobilization and protest repertoires in post-revolutionary Iran. As Rieff (1979) argues, "Whether or not a monarch or a mass leader has great executive ability or power, modern politics suggests that his primary function may well be psychological; he acts as a center around which otherwise disturbed lives can be organized" (p. 236). This organization, initially centered around charismatic religious leaders and the spaces under their influence, will alter in post-revolutionary Iran. [4] As Bourdieu (1991) put it: "The social space is indeed the first and last reality since it still commands the representations that the social agents can have of it" (p. 275).

Post-Revolutionary Iran, Civil Society and Continuous Uprisings

Like any complex phenomenon, the ongoing protests and social movements in post-revolutionary Iran require a clear conceptual starting point, though not necessarily a chronological one. The remnants of civil society organizations from the Pahlavi era, rooted in nationalist and leftist movements, were dismantled after the 1979 revolution as they were considered incompatible with the new revolutionary order. While these organizations did not constitute a fully developed civil society by contemporary standards, they embodied certain

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[4] These considerations serve as introduction points of analysis in the subsequent sections of this thesis, particularly in the discussion on the politics of heterotopia.

institutionalized aspects of civil engagement. However, the revolution's unifying force, which had brought together various socio-political groups in the late 1970s, ultimately homogenized these diverse entities, stifling the pluralism that might have fostered a more robust civil society.

Despite this homogenization, there was a brief window of opportunity for establishing institutions in the immediate aftermath of the revolution that could have contributed to civil society. Unfortunately, these initiatives were quickly subsumed into state administration. For example, organizations such as the Construction Jihad (Jahad-e-Sazandegi) and the Literacy Movement Organization of Iran (Nehzat-e-Savad Amoozi) were created by direct orders from Ayatollah Khomeini to promote revolutionary development within a year of the revolution. Although these organizations were government-funded, their early participants were often ordinary revolutionaries with no formal ties to the government, blurring the lines between state and civil society.

Moreover, the 1980s, dominated by the Iran-Iraq War, further weakened the fragile foundation of civil society. The war placed Iran in a precarious position, necessitating a focus on militaristic priorities that overshadowed the potential for civil society development. This convergence of state and civil society, combined with the pressures of war, effectively stifled the emergence of an independent civil society, reinforcing the dominance of state authority over social engagement.

Understanding the intricate relationship between civil society and its role in the mobilization and organization of social movements necessitates an integrated approach in this section. Analyzing movements, protests, and civil society collectively reveals more profound insights into the core question of this research, meaning the distinctive organization of new leaderless movements. The changes in both civil society and movements often reflect and influence each other, creating a dynamic interplay. Therefore, this section will provide an overview of the protest movements and social movements from the late 1990s through the period following 2000. By doing so, I will explore how these shifts correspond to the broader transformations within civil society, shedding light on the emerging patterns of organization in leaderless movements.

The Iranian Civil Society: Lingering between the 'Civil' and the 'Political'

Before examining Iranian society, it is essential to clarify the definition of civil society adopted in this thesis. While the concept is often associated with Gramsci's contributions, his understanding of civil society requires deeper scrutiny. As Chandhoke (2001) astutely observes, since the 1980s, we witnessed, alongside the resurgence of civil society, an uncritical celebration of the concept to such an extent that it has become a consensual concept, which makes things problematic. This apparent consensus, however, warrants further questioning. From Locke to Hegel, modern thinkers have engaged with the notion of civil society in various ways, highlighting the diverse and non-homogenous interpretations of the concept. As Buttigieg (1995) suggests, civil society manifests in different "avatars," reflecting the complexity and evolving nature of its role across different historical and social contexts.

The conception of civil society is closely linked to how we define the state and perceive the relationship between the two. Generally, there are two primary perspectives: one views civil society as a part of the state and, in some instances, the market, while the other sees these spheres as entirely separate. This debate over separation or integration is evident even within the same intellectual traditions. For example, within the Marxist tradition, the understanding of civil society shifts from Hegel to Marx and Gramsci. Hegel considers the state as a precondition for the existence of civil society, suggesting an integrated relationship between the two (Hardt, 1997). Similarly, Gramsci views civil society as integral to the state, though he distinguishes between civil and political society. Despite recognizing them as separate spheres, Gramsci emphasizes their deep interconnection, which is crucial to understanding the dynamics between state power and social forces.

In the context of Iran, the debate surrounding civil and political society is particularly significant, as it highlights the complex interplay between these two spheres, especially considering Gramsci's theory of a "war of position," which describes the gradual capture of strategic strongholds within society. Gramsci posits that the state is a combination of both political and civil society, where the former wields overt coercive power while the latter exercises subtle cultural hegemony. However, in Iran, this theoretical framework encounters a unique challenge, what I call the state of "space suspension," where civil society cannot function effectively due to systematic repression, and the state, in turn, refrains from engaging directly with the populace. This dual disengagement creates a void that organized civil society cannot fill.

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Given this context, the pressing question is whether political society, ostensibly controlled by the state, can bridge this gap. To answer this, it is essential to revisit Gramsci's formulation and consider the evolving dynamics within Iranian society. A closer examination reveals that the boundaries between Iran's civil and political spheres are not merely blurred but profoundly intertwined. This intertwining suggests not just an overlap but a fundamental transformation in which the civil sphere has been deeply politicized while the political sphere increasingly encroaches upon and dominates civil life. In this scenario, Gramsci's concept of the "war of position" becomes particularly relevant, as it offers a lens to understand the ongoing struggles within Iranian society. The civil sphere, far from being an autonomous domain, has been co-opted into the broader political struggle, while the political sphere is no longer confined to traditional state functions but extends its influence into the very fabric of civil life. This complex amalgamation raises critical questions about the nature of state power and civil society in contemporary Iran and whether the current dynamics can lead to a reconfiguration of these spheres or further entrench the status quo.

I deliberately introduce the concept of "space suspension" to describe the current conditions of civil society in Iran rather than using the term "post-civil society" for two key reasons. First, the notion of post-civil society implies the prior existence of a fully realized civil society, making a transition from one state to another. This notion does not fully apply to Iran's context. While I do not deny the existence of civil society in post-revolutionary Iran, it is more accurately characterized by its fragmented and disjointed nature. Hardt's (1995) argument in *Withering Civil Society* suggests that the emergence of post-civil society is predicated on the complete dissolution of the social conditions that once supported civil society. However, in Iran, the fragmentation of civil society has been a persistent issue driven by the state's perceived threat to the very concept of "society" itself.

In this context, the idea of transitioning to a post-civil society is problematic—not because it lacks material evidence, but because the social conditions that Hardt argues have dissolved were never fully coherent in the first place in Iran. This incoherence can be traced back to the post-revolutionary period when the state systematically absorbed civil society institutions to align them with revolutionary values. As a result, the concept of space suspension better captures the ongoing struggle within Iranian civil society—a struggle marked by fragmentation and the state's overwhelming influence rather than a definitive transition to a post-civil society.

To establish a connection between the concept of space suspension in civil society and the emergence of so-called leaderless movements, this thesis will examine the evolving tactics and discourse of social movements within Iranian society. This analysis will draw on examples from the late 1990s to 2009 and extend to the post-2009 period. It is essential to clarify that 2009 did not mark a turning point in the collective tactics of social movements. Instead, the mass suppression of the 2009 protests had profound consequences for the organizational dynamics of subsequent movements. In other words, changes in the tactics of social movements reflect the state's shifting relationship with civil society and highlight a dialectical interaction between the two. Thus, in the following sections, I will provide an overview of the critical phases of protest movements in Iran, focusing on their relationship with civil society and their organizational structures. This examination is crucial for understanding the trajectory that has led to the rise of leaderless movements or what may be seen as the emergence of a new order within Iranian social movements.

What alters through these continuous uprisings can be traced back to the post-2009 events. A rift within civil society and the state due to the first post-revolution 'mass' repression butchered the space that was supposed to be the linking point of the state and the nation. With a Lefebvreian perspective, perceiving space as a socially constructed phenomenon, I argue that the space between the nation as part of civil society and the state is suspended. The space suspension means that the previous organizational practices within the civil society have almost vanished or at least lost their validity of change in a way they had influenced in the late 1990s to 2009. However, there is no new order 'stabilized' yet. In the following, I will discuss each movement in detail.

1990s-2009: Student Movement and Green Movement

Understanding changes in civil society is crucial to analyzing the shifts in social movement patterns in Iran. Civil society emerged as a prominent concept, particularly during the late 1990s to 2005, coinciding with the reformist presidential era. Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, president during this period, strategically centered his presidential campaign on civil society. His emphasis on civil society played a significant role in his campaign and contributed to his popularity, especially among the youth. This focus is evident in his speeches, where he consistently highlighted the importance of civil society as a foundation for his reformist agenda and to engage and mobilize the younger generation. The following speech exemplifies how

Khatami integrated the concept of 'rationalized bourgeois civil society' (Yaghmaian, 2012, p. 11) into his broader strategy to garner support and energize the electorate during his presidency.

> *Protecting the freedom of individuals and the rights of the nation, which constitute a fundamental obligation of the President upon taking the oath, is a necessity deriving from the dignity of man in the divine religion... [It requires] provision of the necessary conditions for the realization of the constitutional liberties, strengthening and expanding the institutions of civil society (jame'eh-ye Madani)... and preventing any violation of personal integrity, rights, and legal liberties. The growth of legality (qanun-mandi), and the strengthening and consolidation of a society based on a legal framework for conduct, interactions and rights, will provide a favorable framework for the realization of social needs and demands.... In a society well acquainted with its rights and ruled by law, the rights, and limits of the citizens (shahrvandan) are recognized (Arjomand, 2000, as cited in Ettelaàt, 8/5/97; translation in Khatami, 1997, pp. 81-82).*

The conflicts of the 1980s and early 1990s marked a tumultuous period for Iran, as the newly established Islamic Republic grappled with the aftermath of the revolution, the Iran-Iraq War, and internal instability, including the terrorist attacks by the Mojahedin. However, the first significant uprising within the systematic framework of the Islamic Republic occurred with the student movement in July 1999. This movement was heavily influenced by the political shift in 1997, which saw the victory of reformists and the rise of figures such as Mohammad Khatami. The student protests erupted in response to the closure of the reformist newspaper *Salam*, but the significance of this moment extended far beyond a single event.

The 1999 student movement represented the most violent and widespread protest since the revolution, preceding only the Green Movement following the 2009 election. This protest highlighted the deepening internal conflicts within the Islamic Republic, particularly between reformists and principlists[5], and underscored the growing tensions between the state and civil society. The brutal suppression of the protests—characterized by mass arrests, killings, and

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[5] Often referred to as Conservatives or Hardliners, they emphasize preserving the Islamic Republic's founding principles, advocating strict adherence to Islamic values, resisting Western influence, and maintaining the ideological legacy of the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

disappearances—exposed the state's willingness to use violence against dissenting voices, leading to a significant rupture between the state and civil society.

The student uprising of July 1999 should be understood as a movement rather than merely a protest, as it signified a broader societal shift and served as a foundational pillar in the emergence of Iran's post-revolutionary urban, middle-class civil society. This movement marked the early stages of a civil society that initially resembled what Gramsci (1992) identified as "civil society power," where social forces challenge and counterbalance the state's authority. As Hardt aptly noted, "The activation of the forces of civil society makes the state porous, destabilizing its dictatorial powers" (Hardt, 1995, p. 31). However, this destabilization is often temporary. The metamorphosis of the state-civil society into an almost paranoid and repressive relationship can lead to new forms of governmentality that not only reassert state control but also reshape the very structure of civil society. This dynamic highlights the complex and often cyclical relationship between civil society and state power in post-revolutionary Iran, where moments of social activism can provoke significant state responses that, in turn, alter the landscape of civil society.

The organizational dynamics of these movements are central to the analysis in this thesis, as they provide a key link between the student movement's lasting impact on Iranian civil society and its role in shaping subsequent uprisings. Rooted in student associations (Anjoman-e Daneshjooei), established in 1997, and the Office for Consolidation of Unity (Daftar-e Tahkim Vahdat), which later evolved into the Islamic Student Association (Anjoman-e Eslami), the student movement developed a structured foundation that played a crucial role in the political landscape of the late 1990s through 2009. These associations became the organizational base for the reformist student movement, which aligned with reformist policies and figures, such as Mohammad Khatami and, later, Mir Hossein Mousavi during the 2009 protests. The significance of this movement lies in its traceable organizational roots, which largely supported reformist agendas. While there were other student associations, including Student Unions with more leftist orientations, most of these groups shared common ideological foundations and were connected to prominent political figures.

The Green Movement specifically marked a significant turning point for Iranian civil society, functioning both as a pinnacle of activism and as the beginning of its decline. As the first widespread protest led predominantly by the middle class, the Green Movement saw extensive participation from civil society activists. However, this involvement triggered a

severe state backlash, with the subsequent repression leading to a sharp downturn in civil society activity. By 2011, nearly 90 organizations and associations had been dissolved (Deutsche Welle, 2012). These dissolutions encompassed not only newspapers like *Etemaad-e Melli*, *Shargh*, and *Sarmayeh*, but also prominent associations such as the Association of Iranian Journalists and the Committee of Human Rights Reporters. Additionally, there was intense pressure on campaigns like the One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality, which had been advocating for women's rights for 3 years before the Green Movement. This wave of repression targeted a broad spectrum of civil society organizations, significantly curtailing their activities and further stifling the already shrinking space for activism. Consequently, the nature of Iranian civil society began to transform, increasingly mirroring the trends observed during the Arab Spring (Bayat, 2021, p. 23). Civil society organizations were reduced to NGOs operating within a neoliberal framework, focusing more on survival than substantive activism.

Post-2009: Compression of the Protests Coil

The widespread impact of the Green Movement was so profound that Iran did not witness any large-scale movements for several years afterward. This hiatus in activism was partly attributed to a renewed focus on electoral politics, marked by the election of Hassan Rouhani, the revival of nuclear negotiations, and the drafting of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), temporarily alleviating public discontent. However, as the economic situation deteriorated and the Rouhani administration failed to fulfill its electoral promises during its second term, a new discourse began to emerge within Iran's social movements. This discourse, characterized by increasing frustration and disillusionment, gained momentum from 2017 onward. In this section, I will briefly examine the shifts in protests between 2017 and 2019 and the developments from 2020 to 2022, highlighting the evolving nature of dissent in Iran.

The protests of 2017 to 2019 marked a significant shift from the middle-class-led demonstrations of the late 1990s to 2009 toward those driven by the working class and economically marginalized groups. The primary causes of these protests were economic, centered around rising living costs and deteriorating economic conditions. These protests were largely spontaneous and lacked organizational structure, yet they were pervasive nationwide. This phenomenon starkly contrasted with the Green Movement, which was predominantly active in major urban centers like Tehran and Isfahan. In contrast, the 2017 and especially the more widespread 2019 protests were notable for their extensive geographic dispersion, with peripheral provinces playing a significant role in the uprising.

A notable aspect of the protests from 2017 to 2019 was the emergence of leaderlessness as a defining characteristic. This absence of a central figure or organized leadership led some analysts to describe these movements as mere riots rather than fully developed social movements (See, e.g., Ensaf News, 2020). The absence of leadership and coordination prevented these protests from evolving into a coherent movement, reflecting the broader collapse of previous political discourses. The failure of past frameworks was evident as the Green Movement's leaders remained under house arrest, the Reformist discourse lost credibility after two presidential terms leaned toward reform, and mounting pressures on civil society eroded the influence of the intellectual elite. The increasingly economic nature of these protests further discredited the earlier political narratives. Moreover, protests from 2017 to 2019 struggled to encompass all social strata. Although students expressed solidarity with the economically marginalized and workers, as seen in slogans like "Student, Worker, Unite," this solidarity lacked the necessary breadth to engage the wider society. Hence, the issue of representation also came to the forefront. Protests previously dominated by the urban middle class were now breaking, leaving activists with significant social influence in the past to become mere commentators, unable to effectively represent or lead these new movements.

The lack of convergence and the class-based nature of protests, which had characterized previous movements, began to dissolve just a few months later. In January 2020, the downing of the Ukrainian passenger plane, later revealed to have been struck by two missiles from the Islamic Republic only minutes after takeoff from Tehran, ignited a new wave of protests. This tragedy once again mobilized the urban middle class, although the street protests were short-lived. The widespread public outrage fostered greater social cohesion across different classes, with universities emerging as critical sites of protest. This was particularly significant as many of the victims on Flight PS752 were Iranian students studying in North America. As a result, the repertoires of protest gained new dimensions and had the potential to become more organized. The protests demonstrated a renewed capacity for organization and mobilization across social divides. However, the outbreak of COVID-19 played a crucial role in halting the momentum of these protests. The closure of universities and the imposition of lockdowns effectively subdued the demonstrations during the pandemic, preventing them from reaching the potential scale and impact they might have otherwise achieved.

The pinnacle of convergence in protests manifested in the WLF movement. Once again, civil society, the middle class, and economically marginalized groups[6] joined the protests. This movement began with a spark in the capital—the gathering outside the hospital where Mahsa Jina Amini was being treated—and quickly escalated into a widespread demonstration catalyzed by the collective call from women's rights activists. This convergence, along with the sustained momentum over a hundred days, is one of the critical factors that led to these protests being recognized as a movement. Therefore, the broad-based participation across different social strata and the enduring nature of these protests distinguish the WLF movement as a significant moment in Iran's contemporary social mobilization history. However, it is important to note that this convergence occurred primarily at the level of participation rather than leadership, mobilization, or organizational methods. This distinction may explain why the movement eventually receded in terms of street-level activity despite the unprecedented scale of the protests since the 1979 Revolution. As Alain Badiou observed regarding the WLF movement, while it possessed undeniable legitimacy, legitimacy alone was not sufficient for its success (BBC Persian, 2022).

Politics of Heterotopia (Heterotopic Politics)

I believe that the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time.

— Foucault, Diacritics

The question "What is politics?" may seem straightforward yet fundamentally profound. However, my intention in posing this question is not to provide a definitive answer or to delineate the essence of politics. What is crucial at revolutionary or transformative junctures is the recognition that politics, whatever its nature, is inherently mutable. The mutability of politics is evident in the ways it is practiced, encompassing a spectrum of actors from the political and social arenas. Modern Iran has been the site of significant socio-political transformations over the past century, often characterized by what can be termed a "revolutionary spirit." Another pertinent question then arises: What is this revolutionary spirit, and how does it relate to politics? Yet, again, I do not seek to define the revolutionary spirit.

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[6] The 82-day report by Iranian human rights activists highlights that many street protests related to the Mahsa Amini case in 2022 occurred in Iran's border cities (HRANA, 2022).

What is essential to extract from it is its inherent dynamism. The revolutionary spirit is always in motion, much like the ever-changing practice of politics.

The mutability of political practices and the persistent dynamism of the revolutionary spirit can manifest even in non-revolutionary contexts. The environment in which these phenomena emerge is distinctly different from that of a revolutionary situation, yet creating a new spatial reality can be considered revolutionary. To better understand such a space, I draw upon Foucault's (1986) concept of heterotopia, demonstrating how recent uprisings and movements in Iran have experienced a different trajectory of organization compared to previous revolutionary movements in the country's history. This shift is attributed to the evolving nature of political practices within a new space, the foundations of which are not yet fully cemented in reality.

To connect the concept of heterotopia with political practices and the discussion of social movements, I first turn to this concept in Foucault's thought. Foucault defines heterotopia in opposition to utopia, offering a definition that is more subtractive and contrasting. He argues, "Because these sites are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986, p. 24). What is crucial in Foucault's definition is the boundary that heterotopia creates between reality and ideals. In other words, heterotopia produces a mode of ordering instead of resulting in a radical break. (Johnson, 2013, p. 791).

 I aim to link heterotopia to the everyday practice of politics and to examine how political activity in contemporary Iran, particularly following the 2019 uprisings and the WLF movement in 2022, activates a revolutionary spirit within a non-revolutionary space, thereby rendering the everyday political and driving it toward change. However, an important question arises, one that many thinkers after Foucault, and indeed in response to his concept, have posed: Is heterotopia a matter of language or geography? In the context of Iran, I argue in this thesis that heterotopia exists at both levels and that these two dimensions influence one another. The precedence of one over the other may vary, and it might be challenging to make a definitive claim in this regard. The spectrum of heterotopia is broad and can involve either simultaneity or a sequence of precedence, depending on the specific issue at hand.

As Hetherington (2002) redefines heterotopia in line with Foucault's original concept, the alternative aspect of heterotopia emerges as its key characteristic. In essence, heterotopia is a space where it is possible to live differently. The WLF movement embodies this idea of

living differently in a way that demystifies the novelty of this new way of life. As one X user wrote during the movement: "I look at my old photos and can't believe we used to wear headscarves everywhere. Why didn't we just take them off when taking pictures?"

Mandatory hijab serves as a symbol of an imposed yet normalized life within a patriarchal system that affects a segment of Iranian society. In this context, the WLF movement, by rising against the normalized practice of mandatory hijab, created spaces of difference within the existing societal framework. This distinction aligns with Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which emphasizes spaces of difference. However, the nature of this difference can vary significantly, depending on how these heterotopias position themselves within a given context. Hence, heterotopia is a fluid concept. Consequently, when examining social movements, particularly concerning the power of heterotopias and socio-political spaces, two specific types of heterotopias emerge, which I will introduce in the following sections: one is the inhibiting heterotopia, and the other is the progressive heterotopia.

Inhibiting Heterotopia

The fluidity of heterotopia, rooted in its inherent characteristic of "otherness," allows it to connect to both the past and the future. Foucault's examples of heterotopias, such as prisons, cemeteries, and museums, are instrumental in understanding the inhibitory type of heterotopia. What distinguishes museums and cemeteries is their connection to what no longer exists—that is, their relationship with the past. For this reason, they can serve as distinct spaces, effectively illustrating the differential characteristics of heterotopia. In the context of Iranian society, as discussed in the previous section regarding the Constitutional Revolution and the 1979 Revolution, sacred sites such as shrines and mosques became significant protest sites. Now, if we seek to identify protest spaces in contemporary Iran, can these shrines and mosques still be considered among such sites?

If we consider shrines and mosques as heterotopias, what sets these sites apart from others is their sanctity and their connection to the past. However, these questions arise: how does society evaluate its relationship with its past? Is there an effort to preserve its religious and ritualistic heritage? Does society accept certain aspects of the past while leaving others behind? Addressing these questions requires a deep examination of Iran's political and religious history. What is clear, however, is that there has been a shift in the protest nature of these sacred heterotopias. In other words, one of the defining characteristics of heterotopia—their

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connection to the past—has turned into a form of inhibition. This is because the focal point of current protests in Iran has taken on a secular nature. Consequently, sacred heterotopias have lost their capacity to serve as sites of protest. However, this does not mean that religious elements have been entirely removed from protest movements.

To illustrate this shift, I turn to a poem that went viral during the WLF movement, which is originally a religious poem recited in the mosques of Yazd during Ashura mourning ceremonies. The Hazireh Mosque in Yazd is known for its unique style of mourning during Muharram, where participants chant protest poems rooted in Shia culture. These poems resonate with contemporary anti-oppression themes and have historically attracted attention. The poem "I despise your religion, curse your creed,"[7] originally a protest poem about the martyrdom of a Shia Imam and recited at Hazireh Mosque during Muharram, was transformed during the WLF movement into a protest poem against theocratic rule in Iran. This time, however, the poem was not chanted in a religious setting like a mosque, nor during a religious occasion like Muharram, but during protests by women who defiantly refused to wear the mandatory hijab, cutting their hair as a repertoire.

The concept of inhibitory heterotopia refers to a site that, while once functioning as a heterotopia, no longer possesses the differential quality that is essential to its nature. These sites carry a past that social forces no longer propel toward the future; instead, they seek to leave it behind, confined to the past. Regarding their protest nature, one could argue that sacred sites are no longer protest-oriented heterotopias. Although they retain some heterotopic qualities due to their sacredness, particularly for certain segments of society[8], it is evident that heterotopias

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[7] It is important to consider that this is a translation I have undertaken. The poetic nature of this statement prevents me from conveying its meaning with precision as a 'non-translator', resulting in a literal translation. Nevertheless, this protest poem refers to the event of Karbala, lamenting the martyrdom of the third Shia Imam, Hussein, and serves as an oration directed at the perpetrators of his murder.

[8] In this regard, the nature of protests in a province like Sistan and Baluchestan is noteworthy. For instance, during the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, people would march in the streets every Friday after the congregational prayers held in mosques. Thus, religious heterotopia remains highly significant in regions such as Sistan and Baluchestan, where the Sunni population is prominent, and it can serve as a platform for protest. Interestingly, in Baluchestan, these protests occurred not within the prayer spaces but in the streets following the prayers.

can change in function. As a result of losing their former status, they can acquire an inhibitory characteristic.

Progressive Heterotopia

The spatial aspect of social ordering is highly significant in the modern world, and heterotopias function as sites for alternative ordering (Hetherington, 2002). This idea is particularly insightful for understanding protest sites in social and political movements. If we view space as dynamic and active—its dynamism is potentially driven by specific agents—then heterotopias play a crucial role in altering and shifting the nature of protests. My focus here is not on urban planning or city design, which also impacts the nature of protests, but specifically on heterotopias and the symbolic meaning of these spaces. In other words, if protestors seek to establish a new social order during social movements, what is the role of heterotopias?

As Foucault mentions in *The Order of Things* (2005), heterotopia can be both alternate and alternative. The challenge Iranian society faces under totalitarianism is the limitation of alternatives as given options. Hence, heterotopia alternates in this case, meaning it alters the given oppressive situation; it is a metamorphosis. In other words, it functions as a form of metamorphosis; it doesn't just exist as an alternative space but actively transforms the oppressive situation by providing a means to resist, reinterpret, and reimagine the possibilities beyond the given constraints.

As previously discussed, sacred heterotopias have almost lost their function as sites of protest. Moreover, since the WLF movement, protest has become entangled with the everyday practice of life. In other words, protest is no longer tied to a specific site; instead, the act of protest itself has gained significance due to the obviousness of what is being surveilled and punished, such as not veiling. Everyday environments like streets, workplaces, schools, and universities have all acquired the potential to become protest sites. For this reason, I argue that the scope of being alternative expands to such an extent that it transforms ordinary spaces into heterotopias. This is what I refer to as "progressive heterotopia." It represents a coexistence between a new order that has not yet been established—though vividly *imagined* and showing practical aspects in acts, such as civil disobedience— and the old order.

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The Panopticon and the Revolt of the Heterotopic Bodies

Considering the advance of heterotopia in ordinary spaces and the subsequent politicization of everyday life, what could be more ordinary than the body? The politicization of the body in contemporary Iran can be traced back to the profound shifts that occurred before and after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, where the body became a central symbol of political and ideological struggles. Under the Pahlavi regime, the state's push toward Westernization was marked by the imposition of policies like Reza Shah's 1936[9] decree of forced unveiling, which aimed to modernize the nation by reshaping how women's bodies were presented in public. This move was not merely about clothing; it represented a broader state effort to secularize and exert control over the personal and public realms of life, particularly the female body, as part of a national identity aligned with Western norms.

The Islamic Revolution, however, reversed this trajectory, with the state imposing mandatory veiling as a cornerstone of its identity, linking the covered body to notions of Islamic purity and resistance against Western influence. This shift underscores a persistent theme in Iran's modern history: the state's use of the body, especially the female body, as a tool for political expression and control. The continuing struggles over dress codes and bodily autonomy in Iran today are deeply rooted in this historical context, revealing the body's enduring role as a *site* of political contestation and identity formation.

The disciplinary state in Iran has followed a similar process both before and after the revolution, first with the mandatory unveiling and later with the compulsory veiling. This policy has created a 'woman question' (Najmabadi, 1991, p.48). The core issue here is the criminalization of bodily autonomy, which can be observed by examining the documents based on the Islamic Penal Code governing post-revolutionary Iran. As seen in *Article 39* of the Bill of Hijab: "Anyone who insults the principle of hijab, whether in virtual or non-virtual spaces, or promotes nudity, indecency, lack of hijab, or improper dressing, or engages in behavior that is typically considered to promote these, shall be sentenced to a Grade 4 fine for the first offense. The offender may also be subject to a travel ban and prohibited from public activity in

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[9] The Mandatory Unveiling Law, which was enforced by Reza Shah on January 8, 1936, was a state-driven initiative. Although early sparks of the Iranian women's movement had already begun to appear in different sectors of society, with secret unveiling associations emerging among the intellectual circles of women, the broader Iranian society remained deeply traditional.

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virtual spaces for six months to two years and must remove all previous content that violates the law. In the case of repeated offenses, the fine will be increased by one grade, and other penalties from the first offense will also be applied"[10] (Guardian Council of Iran, 2023).

By deliberately defying the surveillance apparatus—whether by removing their hijabs, participating in public protests, or simply refusing to conform—women are not just resisting the physical imposition of the state but are also rejecting the symbolic control that the panoptic system seeks to enforce. This resistance reveals the limitations of the panoptic system; while it seeks to render bodies docile and compliant (Foucault, 1977), it simultaneously generates spaces of dissent where those same bodies become tools of political resistance and self-assertion. In other words, the individual begins with the self, reclaiming what has been most deeply politicized: the body. This act is not an attempt to depoliticize the body but rather to elevate it to a powerful symbol of resistance.

The role of the body as a site of resistance becomes crucial as a salient example of progressive heterotopia. In the WLF movement, the symbolic act of removing the mandatory hijab strongly ties the movement to the body and feminist theories. The second wave of feminism, in conjunction with the principles of Somaesthetics, is crucial for understanding the politicization of the body and its role in social movements. These frameworks extend beyond a mere focus on the body's materiality, emphasizing its performativity, contingency, and agency (Castelli, 2019, p. 180).

Data analysis from keywords in the X platform reveals that phrases such as "feminine revolution" and "feminist revolution"[11] have emerged during the WLF movement, each emphasizing different aspects, but both include the movement's slogans and core messages. The theme around the body is vividly reflected in the movement's slogans and artistic

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[10] See Article 51: "Any woman who appears in public places or thoroughfares without wearing a hijab, such as a chador, scarf, or shawl, shall be sentenced to a fine of a Grade 6 penalty for the first offense and a Grade 5 penalty for subsequent offenses. If the offense is repeated more than four times, the offender will be subject to the repeated offense punishment stipulated in Article 39 of this law." [own translation]

[11] The very use of the term "revolution" is subject to debate. However, I used the exact phrases used by X users from September 2022 to January 2023.

expressions, particularly in the music created during this period. For instance, two highly viral songs from the time of the movement capture this sentiment:

"They strike the witnesses with lashes that sting; these weary souls are pieces of my body's being."[12]

and,

"For the blood that's been shed, for life's decree, I swear by the wounds on womanhood's body."[13]

Overall, The WLF movement highlights how the panoptic system, wherein power is maintained through pervasive surveillance, is applied to regulating women's bodies. This system, manifesting in the form of morality police, traffic cameras that report women for not wearing the hijab, and surveillance in public spaces like shopping centers, creates an environment where women are constantly monitored and disciplined, ensuring their conformity to state-imposed norms. Yet, in this context, the body also becomes a site of resistance. Women, as the primary subjects of this panoptic scrutiny, actively challenge these mechanisms by asserting their autonomy over their own bodies.

The shift from collective, organized protests to more individualized, reactive forms of resistance and the connection to the body is not restricted to female bodies. For instance, during the 2017 labor protests, a Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Factory worker expressed his despair over poor economic conditions by self-immolating, just like the Tunisian hawker—Mohammad Bouazizi— which was the trigger to the Arab uprisings. It is the same with the death of Mahsa Jina Amini in 2022 that triggered a widespread and explosive reaction across various social strata in Iran. In other words, the female body itself becomes symbolic of minorities, as is evident in the slogan: "We are all Mahsa." This shift contrasts sharply with earlier movements, such as the student protests of the late 1990s and the Green Movement of 2009. These earlier movements were more organized and centered around specific within-system actions, such as

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[12] Persian: Bar tane shahedan taziyane mizanand, in ze jan khastegan pareye tane manand. بر تن شاهدان تازیانه می‌زنند، این ز جان خستگان پاره‌ی تن منند.

[13] Persian: Be pase khoone sorkh be ra'ye zendegi, ghasam be zolme rafte bar tane zananegi. به پاس خون سرخ به رای زندگی، قسم به ظلم رفته بر تن زنانگی.

the newspaper's closure or the assault on student dormitories and, later, the disputed presidential election results.

Leaderlessness, Politics of Heterotopia, and The Everyday Life

The most important question that arises in this section, and which ties this discussion to the central inquiry of this thesis, is how heterotopia and the spatial dimension of protests are related to the leaderless nature of these movements. Here, I will present arguments based on the two introduced types of heterotopias: the inhibiting and the progressive.

First, as previously explained, religious heterotopias have lost their function as sites of protest. Examining the history of protest and revolutionary movements in Iran shows that the clergy has been one of the most significant political forces in advancing these movements. However, the clergy's popularity gradually declined after the 1979 Revolution, particularly following the Green Movement in 2009. For instance, the fourth national survey on "Values and Attitudes of Iranians"[14] indicates that while the opposition to the separation of religion and politics was more widespread than support for it in 2015, the number of people in favor of separating religion from politics had tripled in 2023 compared to those opposing it. (Bastani, 2024). Although the clergy, historically a highly influential force in Iran, was already facing a serious and widespread crisis in the years leading up to the WLF movement, this rupture peaked in 2022.

This shift is evident in the slogans of the post-2009 movements, with a clear example being the slogan "This homeland won't become a homeland until the clerics are shrouded," which became particularly prominent since the protests of 2016, especially in the WLF movement. The shift in Iran's historical relationship with the clergy—from resistance and revolting under their leadership to resistance and revolting against their political position—has profoundly impacted the nature of protests. One significant outcome of this shift is the loss of the symbolic meaning of sacred heterotopias for protesting. Hence, heterotopic spaces and their protest potential provide critical insights into the state of socio-political forces.

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[14] conducted by the Office of National Plans at the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance in collaboration with the Social Monitoring Center of the Ministry of Interior

Metaphorically, the state of leadership within Iranian movements can be likened to a theater where the leading actor, once celebrated, can no longer continue in their role. Yet, no new actor has formally taken the stage. By imagining heterotopias as our theatrical stage, Iran's situation becomes even more complex. Not only has the actor exited, but many among the audience have also left the theater, leaving an empty space filled with uncertainty. It remains unclear what play will be performed next or which stage will be chosen. Iran is in a phase of experimenting with different stages, occasionally revisiting its previous theater through repertoires like participating in the election. However, what stands out is that the collective imagination of a new stage, distinct from the previous one, has already begun to take shape. This signifies a crucial shift—a readiness to explore new possibilities, even if the precise form they will take is still undetermined.

Second, progressive heterotopia illustrates how heterotopias expand to the point where the boundary between an ordinary site and a heterotopia becomes blurred. In other words, the *differential* aspect—crucial to the Foucauldian definition of heterotopia—becomes embedded in everyday life. This phenomenon can be better understood through the framework of street politics (Bayat, 2013). In his ethnographic research on the Arab uprisings, Bayat effectively demonstrates how the street becomes political and how sub-communities emerge that create a reality based on their own understanding—which differs from and sometimes contradicts the visibly apparent reality. These sub-communities are not hidden or invisible but rather opaque and ambiguous (Bayat, 2021, p. 30).

The interpretation of street politics and sub-communities also applies to Iranian society. The politicized street is what I refer to as a type of progressive heterotopia, where these sub-communities manifest themselves not in a space separate from the street but within it. They are visible, yet ambiguous, as they do not always have the power to emerge fully. Bayat argues that this opacity stands in direct contrast to the panoptic system (ibid., p. 31). However, in the case of Iran, these spaces are not isolated from the oppressive environments but are embedded within them, constantly under the watchful eye of the panoptic system's surveillance. Take, for instance, a woman who chooses to wear her preferred attire in the metro, defying the imposed dress code. She is fully aware that she might encounter the morality police or face hijab enforcers either within the metro or upon exiting. Yet, she actively engages in civil disobedience in that moment and within that space. The panoptic system is undeniably present, yet neither the individual nor the surveillant agent knows precisely when or where they

intersect. This form of "street politics" directly challenges the panopticon. However, this opposition exists within a tense coexistence—not necessarily peaceful, but rather a constant negotiation between control and resistance.

There is an observable dynamic at play with the politicization of everyday life and the issue of leadership. When everyday life becomes inherently political, it can lead to the depoliticization of specific traditional political actions. In such contexts, the necessity for figure-based or charismatic leadership becomes less critical as political actions emerge organically from daily interactions and experiences, independent of formal leadership structures. This does not imply that leadership is irrelevant for organizing or escalating a protest movement into a revolutionary force. Nor does it suggest that horizontal new social movements are destined for success. Instead, it points to a fundamental reason why a distinct leader might not emerge since the political agency is dispersed across the fabric of everyday life, reducing the reliance on a singular 'guiding' figure.

The Multitude Formation and The Issue of Representation

> "A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window." — Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus

The definition of the multitude can turn the theories around, either repetitive or completely novel. For so long, the field of study on social movements was dominated by the idea of unity. Social phenomena such as social movements usually are described by phrases like "the people," "the mass," or the "collective." These framings particularly focus on the one hand, synchronicity of the movement and, on the other hand, on the evenness of the so-called mass. This can be a reasonable framework for the study of revolutions in models such as the Iranian Revolution of 1979 (See, e.g., Ashraf & Banuazizi, 1985; Kurzman, 2004). Nevertheless, multiplicity is neither about the mass nor about the synchronicity of the movement, if there is any.

This thesis draws on the concept of the multitude, as articulated by Hardt and Negri in their trilogy *Empire* (2000), *Multitude* (2004), and *Assembly* (2017). A defining characteristic of the multitude is its capacity for political action, which is realized through 'networks of cooperation' rather than traditional leadership structures. In this context, the multitude signifies a departure from conventional collective action, emphasizing participation over representation.

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By fostering democratic collectives that prioritize individual contributions, the multitude challenges the belief that unity is a prerequisite for political agency.

The rejection of representation is central to the multitude's framework, as it limits authentic democratic engagement. Hardt and Negri argue that the multitude embodies a new political subjectivity, where the focus shifts from delegating authority to active participation. This transition is significant, as it reframes political power to arise from the collective involvement of diverse individuals, allowing for a more dynamic form of political action. Moreover, the multitude contests that political action must be unified to be effective. This characteristic of the multitude contrasts the traditional political theories that often assert unity is essential for a collective's political effectiveness.

The issue of representation in emerging leaderless social movements is further complicated by the insights of Rousseau, who argued that "Sovereignty cannot be represented for the same reason that it cannot be alienated; it consists essentially in the general will, and the will does not admit of being represented: either it is the same or it is different; there is no middle ground" (Hardt & Negri, 2017, p. 27). This perspective resonates deeply with contemporary movements, such as those seen in Iran, where the multitude rejects traditional forms of representation and centralized leadership. These movements, operating through decentralized networks, embody a sovereignty that cannot be reduced to a single, usually charismatic leader. As Rousseau suggests, the general will must be directly enacted by the people themselves rather than being mediated or represented by an external entity.

The very nature of plurality and multitude can contribute to the challenge of representation. Who can represent such a diverse uneven multitude? Representatives find it difficult to adequately address the needs and aspirations of the multitude. The reason is that the multitude is not synonymous with a mass with centralized ambitions, as we witnessed during the 1979 Revolution—a revolution remarkable for its wide array of participants and ideological diversity. Hence, coalesce, which is central to the unified and mass mobilization, is not present in these new leaderless movements. In the 1979 Revolution, such a coalescence occurred. Nevertheless, the last coalescence after the revolution was during the Reformist Movement and the Green Movement. Post-2009 protests, however, have struggled to achieve this level of coalescence for reasons explored throughout this thesis. As a result, these newer protests and movements are characterized by different repertoires and dynamics. This fragmentation has made it increasingly more work to unite under a single banner.

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By examining the rejection of representation in the post-2009 protests—especially during the so-called "Bloody November" of 2019—one can discern a clear shift in the rhetoric and demands of the protesters. The slogans from these protests are particularly telling. For instance, the chant "Reformist, Conservative, the game is over"[15] reflects a significant rejection of representation by the political factions within the current political system. This sentiment is further evidenced by the steadily declining voter turnout in presidential and parliamentary elections since 2017, which followed the failure of the reformist discourse to fulfill electoral promises.

Another notable slogan that emerged during the November 2019 protests, though less frequently than the previous one, was "Why are you sitting? The savior is you"[16], which departs from reliance on traditional political dualities. This slogan is particularly significant in the context of Shia culture, where the concept of a savior is deeply embedded, like many Abrahamic religions. It also aligns with the principles of leadership within the current political system in Iran. What is particularly striking is that even as social movements reject previous traditions and attempt to establish new orders, they still borrow linguistic markers from their cultural and traditional roots, often subverting them in the process. The mentioned slogan is a prime example of this phenomenon—it invokes the cultural notion of a savior. Still, it shifts the agency to the multitude, signaling a move beyond the traditional savior narrative while maintaining its form. This linguistic and cultural adaptation underscores the complexity of the evolving political consciousness in Iran. While the form of protest might retain elements of traditional discourse, the content and direction of these protests signify a profound shift in how the people perceive their role in political change, moving from reliance on established figures and ideologies towards a more self-reliant and collective agency.

While it cannot be claimed that historical memory plays no role in this dynamic, the idea of a return to the past is a narrative that cannot be ignored in the post-2009 protests. In fact, what we observe is not merely a rejection of representation. This rejection can sometimes become paradoxical, where there are moments of craving for leadership. Two slogans from the post-2017 protests exemplify this complexity. One is "Death to the oppressor, be it the Shah or

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[15] In Persian: Eslah-talab, Osool-gara, dige tamoome majara اصلاح‌طلب، اصول‌گرا دیگه تمومه ماجرا

[16] In Persian: Mellat chera neshasti, Monjie khod to hasti ملت چرا نشستی منجی خود تو هستی

the Leader,"[17] which clearly rejects all forms of sovereign power. In contrast, the others include chants like "Iran without a Shah has no order,"[18] "Shah of Iran, return to Iran,"[19] or "Reza Shah, rest in peace,"[20]

The slogans depict a longing to return to past leadership and glorify a bygone era. This duality—simultaneously rejecting current forms of sovereignty while romanticizing the past—warrants a separate, in-depth study and cannot be fully explored within the scope of this thesis. However, the recognition that this multitude is inherently unequal and does not necessarily act in a unified manner, even in its slogans, is crucial to this discussion. The conflicting messages within the same movement reveal the internal tensions and contradictions that characterize these protests. It highlights the complexities of a social movement where diverse historical memories and political aspirations coexist, sometimes in direct opposition. This internal dissonance complicates the movement's capacity for coherent action and unified leadership, further underscoring the fragmented nature of contemporary protests.

What completes the puzzle is the existing political context, with the state serving in any case as a primary interlocutor, if not the protesters' outright opponent (Della Porta & Fillieule, 2004, p. 217). The piece that offers the most precise understanding of "how" is the political environment in which these protests and social movements are taking place and how the state reacts to such protests and movements. One of the sub-questions that aids in addressing the thesis's primary inquiry is how protest and social movements manifest within an authoritarian and totalitarian context. Additionally, it questions whether there is a connection between such a political environment and the multiplicity of these movements.

Despite the persistent and growing grievances among the multitude, the increasing fragmentation of protests can be primarily attributed to the state's sophisticated suppression system, which has effectively deterred active participation in street movements. The Iranian government's use of extensive surveillance, coupled with harsh punitive measures, has created

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[17] Persian: Marg bar setamgar, che shah bashe che rahbar مرگ بر ستمگر چه شاه باشه چه رهبر

[18] Persian: Iran ke Shah nadare, hesab-ketab nadare ایران که شاه نداره، حساب‌کتاب نداره

[19] Ey Shah-e-Iran, bargard be Iran ای شاه ایران، برگرد به ایران

[20] Reza Shah, roohat shad رضا شاه روحت شاد

a climate of fear that discourages many from joining protests, even if they share the underlying discontent. In other words, although anger is the trigger, fear is the repressor. (Neuman, et.al, 2007). Consequently, there has been a significant rise in the number of observers—sympathizers (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015) who, while sympathetic to the cause, choose to remain on the sidelines rather than risk the severe consequences of direct involvement. This growing passivity among the 'multitude' highlights the effectiveness of the state's repressive tactics in maintaining control. It also underscores a paradox within the opposition; while discontent deepens and the desire for change intensifies, the capacity for mass mobilization diminishes, leaving a larger segment of the population as witnesses to the struggle rather than active participants.

The slogan "We don't want spectators; join us" points to several reasons part of the multitude might refrain from joining a movement. Factors such as the oppressive environment and the high costs of participation, the absence of a clear leader, or the failure to engage specific segments of society under the movement's repertoire could all contribute to the hesitation to join. Despite the increased frequency of protests in recent years and the significant number of small-scale demonstrations—particularly those related to economic grievances among various groups such as retirees, teachers, veterans, and nurses—there has been a noticeable lack of convergence among these protests. This lack of convergence can be seen as a significant barrier to these movements' emergence of cohesive collective leadership.

Moreover, each so-called "spectator" is likely experiencing some level of dissatisfaction or discontent, yet the necessary alignment and solidarity among these groups have not materialized. As a result, the majority remains active only in the form of everyday life politics, as discussed in the previous section, and the protests lack the collective momentum needed to coalesce into a more robust and organized movement. This fragmentation highlights the complexity of the protest landscape, where the sheer diversity of grievances and the dispersed nature of activism make it challenging for any single movement to gain widespread traction or to galvanize the entire population.

This lack of convergence is also evident in the gender dynamics within the movement. While the multitude is inherently diverse, as previously noted, it is also characterized by its 'unevenness.' This unevenness can inadvertently reproduce existing inequalities, even when equality is a central ideal and demand of the movement. A notable example of this is the role of women in social movements and revolutions. Drawing parallels from other contexts, such

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as the Egyptian Revolution, Manal al-Natour (2012) highlights how women's representation was often overlooked during revolutionary periods. She argues that despite the significant presence of Egyptian women during the January 25 revolution, their leadership was largely absent from media coverage.

In the case of Iran, this issue is particularly pressing. The WLF movement, which began as a response to the death of Mahsa Jina Amini and was initiated by Iranian women's rights activists, quickly became synonymous with the struggle for societal freedom, with women playing a central role. However, the framing of the movement as a 'feminine' or 'feminist' revolution sparked intense debate among participants about the 'right' and 'wrong' ways to characterize it. This debate underscores a key challenge of multiplicity within movements: the difficulty in achieving convergence, which can lead to tensions and disagreements over representation and the movement's core identity. Thus, the absence of conventional leadership can be seen both as a cause and a consequence of this broader lack of convergence among the multitude.

Overall, the concept of multitude represents a fluid and dynamic form of collective existence that is not fixed or definitive. The multitude can emerge from the ongoing processes of resistance and suppression within social movements, which shape it into an adaptable but inherently fragile entity. In other words, diversity allows the multitude to take on various forms, but this same diversity also contributes to its vulnerability. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) philosophy, a multiplicity is a form of rhizome, which "includes the best and the worst" (p. 7). Therefore, through its rhizomatic organization, the multitude that emerges can bring about a wide range of outcomes—best and worse—even a regression.

Conclusion

> Wherever there is power, there is resistance.
> — Foucault

In this thesis, I have analyzed the case study of Iran, drawing inspiration from the 2022 WLF leaderless movement to trace the evolving patterns in social movement organization and the emergence of transformative protest practices. This study highlights how these shifts reflect broader changes in the dynamics of collective action, offering insights into the future of social movements in the context of increasingly decentralized and innovative forms of resistance.

To address the central questions of my thesis, I employed a mixed-method qualitative approach, utilizing macro discourse analysis and literature analysis with a historical perspective. This methodology was chosen to effectively contextualize the case study of Iran within the broader framework of leaderless new social movements. While this method has its limitations—such as a focus on specific discursive trends that might overlook on-the-ground dynamics, which could be better explored through methods like participant interviews, and the risk of overgeneralization—it nonetheless provides a robust framework for analyzing social movements within the discursive meta-narratives of such movements. Despite potential changes in the years following 2022, this methodology is valuable for understanding the narratives and dynamics within the movement itself.

This case study has addressed the central research questions regarding the evolution of leadership patterns and the introduction of transformative practices by demonstrating the intersections between these issues in each section. Through this method, three main analyses are presented, each offering insights into how these dynamics interact and evolve within the broader context of leaderless social movements.

First, the analysis of continuous uprisings in Iran and their intersection with civil society and the state reveals a blurred line between these spheres. This overlap has disrupted traditional practices within each domain, leading to a state of suspended civic space. The ongoing cycle of uprisings and repression has impaired the functionality of civil society, limiting opportunities for effective leadership and resource mobilization during times of unrest. This analysis contributes to understanding why movements and protests have become leaderless by integrating theories of space and civil society with the historical context of Iran.

Second, this thesis utilized Foucault's concepts of heterotopia and biopower to explore the evolution of meso-level spaces—those situated beyond the realms of civil and political society—and their impact on the dynamics of social movements. Through an examination of these distinct spaces, I have shown that they have either diminished in their role as sites of protest or have acquired new significance. These transformative spaces, identified as heterotopias, highlight the critical role of spatial dynamics in the study of social movements and their organizational distinctions. For instance, certain heterotopias, such as sacred sites, may lose their traditional function as locations for protest, reflecting broader changes in the symbolic meaning of protest itself. This analysis also directly addresses the second key question of the thesis concerning transformative practices, illustrating how heterotopias can

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evolve into sites of progressive action. The extension of heterotopias into everyday spaces leads to the politicization of daily life, a phenomenon vividly demonstrated by the WLF movement, where bodies themselves became sites of resistance, embodying the concept of heterotopia through their actions and slogans.

Third and finally, this thesis has demonstrated how the convergence of changes in civil society, continuous uprisings, and the emergence of heterotopic spaces has given rise to what can be termed a multitude, drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's concept of rhizomatic mobilization and Negri and Hardt's theories of multiplicity. In this section, I addressed the research questions by detailing the multitude's capacity for change and its embodiment of a leaderless form of mobilization. However, I also highlighted the challenges posed by this uneven and diverse multitude, particularly concerning issues of representation. The rejection of traditional forms of representation, which paradoxically forms and sustains the multitude, operates in a dialectical manner, creating both opportunities and tensions within these movements.

Through this analysis, I reaffirm my thesis statement that the organization and repertoires of recent uprisings in Iran have fundamentally challenged the conventional frameworks of social movements. However, while these movements have yet to establish a fully realized new order, their new practices and forms of mobilization, along with the politicization of everyday life, have de-territorialized the existing social order and generated new repertoires of action by re-territorializing the oppressive spaces through changing them to progressive heterotopias. In conclusion, there is "no way of emancipating a constellation of social forces, except by creating a new power around a hegemonic center" (Butler et al. 2000, p. 208).

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