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ART EDUCATION AS A TOOL OF FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN IRAN (1979-2022)

SEDIGHEH FATHOLLAHZADEH DIZAJI

68 Pages

Art Education as a Tool of Feminist Resistance in Iran is a thesis that explores the use of art education as a form of resistance against patriarchy and gender inequality in Iran. Iran's historical and cultural background is examined in this study, along with the effects of the Islamic Revolution and the place of women in society. I interviewed Iranian female artists, art educators, and activists using an ethnographic research methodology to learn about their perspectives on using art education as a form of resistance. This research explores the various ways that art education can be a tool of resistance, including encouraging critical thinking, the development of alternative narratives, and promoting a sense of community and solidarity. It also makes the case that art education can give women a voice and a platform to question gender norms and expectations in a culture that frequently tries to silence them. The thesis highlights the challenges Iranian female artists and educators face in their efforts to use art education as a tool of resistance. These challenges include censorship, lack of funding and resources, and threats. Despite these challenges, the study emphasizes the resilience and determination of Iranian women in their pursuit of gender equality and social justice. It also highlights the critical role that art education can play in promoting gender equality and challenging patriarchal structures and offers insights and recommendations for future research and policy interventions to support and empower Iranian women.

KEYWORDS: Art Education, Feminist Resistance, Islamic Revolution

ART EDUCATION AS A TOOL OF FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN IRAN (1979-2022)

SEDIGHEH FATHOLLAHZADEH DIZAJI

A Thesis Submitted in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

Wonsook Kim School of Art

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2023

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I am incredibly appreciative of the brave women in my country who have continuously inspired me throughout my artistic and scholarly path with their unshakable resistance and unrelenting struggle. I also want to thank the family, committee members, and friends who have always supported me on my journey believed in my skills and supported me throughout this path.

S. F. D.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

My experience as a female artist and art teacher from the Middle East, a geographic area characterized by various tensions, has taught me how important education and art education is to reform essential structures, especially social ones. This issue inspired my thesis topic, which examines how women in Iran used art education to secretly resist the status quo in a society where the spaces for freedom are shrinking (Iran). In this ethnographic research, I examine the importance of art education to four Iranian female artists, art educators, and visual art's place in Iranian schools. Additionally, I explore the education and training of Iranian artists following the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which has had a significant impact on the education of Iranian women. I explore the factors that have influenced women's art education. Additionally, I analyze how art education can serve as a tool of resistance for women.

Purpose of Study

In this thesis, I examine the role of art education in Iranian schools after the Islamic Revolution and its importance in Iranian society, as the four study participants perceived. Iranian society has many restrictions, including the influence of religion on education and art education. In my experience, Iranian women use artistic training to prepare for and confront their entry into society as artists who are able to work actively in society. However, this training may hinder their participation in the labor force. I began the study by reflecting on my own experience with Iranian art education. I didn't share this experience with my study participants. I interviewed four female-identifying Iranian art teachers who have taught art in Iran after the Islamic Revolution to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences in art classes at schools for women in Iran. Afterward, I compared the art education systems of the United States and Iran to identify weaknesses and suggest ways to improve Iranian art education.

Need for the Study

Art education involves emotions and feelings, making it essential in educating marginalized communities, especially women. Through art, individuals have the opportunity for self-expression and critical thinking, providing a powerful tool for empowerment and personal development. In Iran's educational system, women have many strengths and weaknesses as teachers and students. Despite facing challenges, hidden resistance has enabled Iranian women to relate powerfully to their communities.

According to Shadi Sadr (as cited in Naomi, 2004, p.15), "The women's movement in Iran is like drizzle. You don't feel it, but by the time you reach your destination, you are totally soaked." We have witnessed many protest movements and women's struggles in recent years, which have been important efforts to get closer to women's access to their rights. English artist Richard Godfrey Rivers (1992), Says" art teaches us to communicate ideas and feelings in a variety of modes and media" (p. 596). Works of art help us to reflect ethically, accept ambiguity and variety, and examine our culture's past, present, and future. Creating art helps us to realize our ideas (Danny, 2017). Art has played a significant role in the presence of women in many parts of Iranian society. (Bahramitash & Hooglund, 2011).

Considering women's role in the victory of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, literacy was necessary for the government after the Revolution (Bahramitash & Hoogland, 2011). Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the percentage of educated women in Iran has increased by more than 50%. In 1956, the literacy rate of rural women was meager, only 1.2 %, but in 1996, it rose to 62.4 % and has continued to rise. Literacy among urban women rose throughout the 1960s, but in 1970, 55% of all females in Iran were still illiterate. By 1999, due to the post-revolutionary literacy drive, the total number of illiterate women had dropped to 8.7 %. In the first decade of the twenty-first

century, women comprised most adult learners and even entered such fields as physics, which had hardly any women in previous years. However, it is necessary to recognize the inequality in fundamental rights for women despite all this data and collect research to discover more about the work of Iranian artists and their hidden resistance through art education.

Research Question

What did Iranian girls' art education look like for the study participants? Did the Iranian government and religion play a part in the participants' art education? How did art education play a role in any hidden resistance of the participants, if at all?

Definition of Terms

Autoethnography- research, writing, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social. (Mirgolia & Smilan, 2014).

Ethnography- "qualitative research project where the intent is to provide a detailed, in-depth description of everyday life and practice. This is sometimes referred to as a 'thick description'" (Hoey, 2014).

Islamic Feminism- a process of 'ijtihad' removing the traditional, patriarchal, colonial and other cultural layers with which Islam has been veiled. (Althalathini, Al-Dajani, & Apostolopoulos, 2022).

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In my following literature review, I look at an analysis of Iranian society after the 1979 Islamic Revolution. This analysis includes the Iranian revolution, women's position and education after the Islamic Revolution, and women's art production and art education, including limitations to women's artistic activities. The history of debates about women's rights cannot be separated from the broader history of the struggle for democratic rights in Iran.

Iranian Revolution

Given that the study period is post-Iranian Islamic Revolution, it is essential to provide a brief overview of the events that occurred during the revolution in 1979. During the revolution, which took place between 1978 and 1979, the Pahlavi monarchy was destroyed, and an Islamic republic governed by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was formed in its place. The revolution, spearheaded by several opposition organizations, was sparked by resistance to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's administration. The new Islamic administration's reputation was tarnished by political repression and the suppression of opposing viewpoints, notwithstanding its efforts to improve social justice and economic equality. The Iranian revolution was a turning point in the nation's history, leading to a shift from secularism, with a Western orientation, to Islamic fundamentalism. This alteration had effects on Iran as well as the greater Middle East (Goli M. Rezai-Rashti, 2013).

Iran's culture saw substantial changes, primarily due to the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, which replaced the Pahlavi monarchy with an Islamic republic. The republic's founders deliberately encouraged individuals to uphold their religious beliefs in both their personal and professional lives (Mokhtari, Shariat, Ardebil, & Shalbafan, 2021).

After 1979, Islam was incorporated into modern Iranian culture. Iranian society was "Islamized." Political Islam permeated public and private life, and political and religious

authorities firmly upheld Islamic rules and regulations (Mehran, 2003). Iran differed from other Muslim nations in that it was regarded as a traditional society for its need to uphold traditional beliefs and practices governed by religious laws. Iran was influenced by modernization because the government understood the value of industrialization, technology, and political development (Mehran, 2003).

Importance of Art Education

According to a (2018) case study of arts education in two Iranian elementary schools, two Iranian researchers determined that, although art education's emotional and social advantages have been established, the most significant benefit may be enhancing cognitive skills through art-based learning experiences (Nouri and Farsi, 2018). Their study demonstrated the significance of arts education. Cognitive capacities like the perception of relationships, awareness of multiple solutions to problems, and imagination were engaged and nurtured through learning in the arts. Students' attitudes toward school, academic performance, communication skills, self-concept, motivation, empathy, and tolerance for others are improved through arts learning experiences. Brain research confirmed the critical role of arts in developing students' emotional, social, and cognitive abilities. Therefore, arts programs could facilitate learning in other disciplines and be recognized as a vital subject for general cognitive development and higher-order thinking skills.

Nouri and Farsi (2018) concluded that Arts education could contribute to global citizenship, but it was often absent from the curriculum, which indicates a "null" curriculum. They argued that schools and teachers must recognize the importance of aesthetic understanding for child development. The study provided insights into the challenges faced by Iran's arts education, including the lack of value given to the arts, inappropriate physical architecture, insufficient time

allotted for art teaching, incompatible pedagogical methods, and non-expert teachers. Teachers' development programs were necessary to implement the arts curriculum effectively.

According to theorist Robert Godfrey (1992), In the modern world, the importance of art and its influence on other sciences are apparent, and we are now seeing its collaboration with other disciplines in developed nations. The advancement of society and its citizens depends on art. It teaches us how to convey thoughts and feelings through various expressions when taught early on and made a regular component of schooling. It also helps us learn how to analyze information through comparison and visual aids, accept compromise, ambiguity, and diversity as positive human qualities, and develop ethical standards for making judgments and acting. Artworks serve as a record of where we have been and where we are and provide a source of education, enlightenment, and enjoyment for future generations to come.

Arguing that the arts should be included in schools, Gregory (2017) states that besides being exceptionally creative, a great artist can think creatively and act as an entrepreneur, presenter, and more. If creativity were integrated into K-12 education, students would learn how to communicate ideas through sketches, explore the world through sketchbooks, generate concepts, and solve real problems. Theatre would focus on collaboration, presentation, and problem-solving, while music classes would emphasize creative habits, teamwork, skill refinement, composition, and improvisation. The curriculum would teach students about the creative process, including idea generation, finding inspiration, and learning from established artists. They would also learn how to work with others to refine and test their ideas effectively, bring their ideas to life through the supply chain, and present, market, and share their creations.

According to Nouri and Farsi's study (2018), a significant obstacle to effective arts education in primary schools is the lack of importance given to the subject. When school budgets

are tight, arts programs are often among the first to be cut, leaving students uncertain about the nature of arts and dissatisfied with the teaching program. This lack of exposure to aesthetic knowledge deprives students of the opportunity to develop their artistic capabilities and the other benefits of arts education.

Teachers propose that the arts curriculum encompass various art forms such as visual arts, music, drama, dance, media arts, calligraphy, and crafts, which could be covered in a textbook. However, the time devoted to arts education is limited, with only 1.5 hours per week for third to fifth graders and 2 hours for sixth graders. This time is often in the afternoon, when students are less attentive, and school principals sometimes use it to teach other subjects (Nour & Farsi, 2018).

Women's Position and Education After the Islamic Revolution

After 1979, Islam was incorporated into modern Iranian culture. After the Iranian Revolution, schools primarily spread political and religious values among the younger population. Their primary duty was to influence the "New Muslim Woman" and act as an essential socialization force. Notably, schools are entrusted with training girls to become the ultimate female figure of the future, who excels both as a loving wife and mother and actively contributes to social and political concerns. The dilemma of mixing contemporary education for women with traditional values is evident in the Islamic Republic's official records (Mehran, 2003).

The Islamic Revolution in 1979 led to a significant increase in the percentage of educated women in Iran, with the literacy rate of rural women increasing from 1.2% in 1956 to 62.4% in 1996. The government addressed obstacles to female education, such as gender segregation and accessibility to learning centers for lower-income women, allowing women to enter fields previously dominated by men. However, co-educational settings and male instructors who are not trusted in the community had been found to hinder female access to education and cause early

dropouts (Bahramitash and Hooglund, 2011). Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, believed that education was a religious obligation for all Iranians, including women. The Literacy Movement Organization (LMO) was formed to promote education nationwide and focused on making learning centers accessible to rural women. Separating schools by gender allowed conservative families to permit their daughters to attend high school and university. Consequently, the proportion of educated women in Iran increased significantly, with women now accounting for 65 percent of new university students and often prioritizing careers over marriage (Bahramitash and Hooglund, 2011).

After the Iranian Revolution, the Islamic Republic aimed to improve education for women, which led to more female students enrolling in universities. However, some professors expressed concern about male students' underperformance, leading some to suggest positive discrimination against men in certain subjects. Women's formal employment rates have also increased since the Revolution, with many women working in health and education. Women's cooperatives have been established to support self-employment and have helped to increase rural employment and alleviate poverty. The Ministry of Cooperatives provides training and support for women in these cooperatives, covering administration and technical skills. Iranian women enjoy legal protection in their workplace, including maternity benefits during pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing. Labor laws also prohibit gender, religion, political orientation, race-based wage discrimination, and hazardous jobs for women. The maternity leave in Iran is more generous than in many Western countries, and women can keep their previous positions after returning from leave. The law also provides for nursing rights and childcare facilities in the workplace. The holistic approach of Islamic law recognizes the significance of women's role in childbirth and child-rearing in the

workforce, unlike many Western societies where these responsibilities are solely on women (Bahramitash and Hooglund, 2011).

Although Islamic fundamentalism has resulted in the exclusion of women from public life in some countries such as Afghanistan, there has been an increase in female employment in the MENA (Middle East North Africa countries) region. However, the level of female employment is still comparatively low when compared to other regions. Although female employment is low in Iran, it has been rising despite a decline in the early post-revolutionary period, which was more likely caused by factors such as war and economic sanctions, with most job losses occurring in rural areas. The decline in rural employment was linked to the decline of the carpet industry, while education expansion played a significant role in the rural employment figures. Data on unwaged family workers indicates that the decline in rural labor was related to education (Bahramitash and Hooglund, 2011).

In Iran, female unemployment is a significant problem, especially among educated women, with 30% unemployment among urban women. Although the informal sector provides more accessible employment opportunities for women. Sexual segregation limits women's access to certain professions but also creates opportunities for women to work in all-female businesses in the informal sector. Women in low-income households are involved in various activities that are crucial for survival strategies and the social safety net, tied to community networks. Women in Iran are now more active in the labor force than before and have entered previously male-dominated professions. Women have used gender segregation education to enter previously closed professions, According to Bahramitash and Hooglund (2011), women have successfully challenged and broken down barriers and continue to strive for more change.

School textbooks underwent significant revisions after the Iranian Revolution to align with the Islamic values of society. One notable change was the inclusion of illustrations depicting women wearing veils constantly. The content of the textbooks was also modified to reflect gender-based roles and responsibilities, with fathers presented as the primary providers for their families, and mothers as the homemakers responsible for cooking, cleaning, raising children, and imparting religious teachings. However, some textbooks also featured instances where women worked outside the home, such as in rural areas where they assisted with agricultural tasks or in urban centers where they were employed in various industries, including schools, hospitals, factories, and offices. The textbooks in Iran propagate the idea that women only work outside their homes to assist their husbands and in occupations that conform to traditional gender roles. Both formal and non-formal education books often promote gender stereotypes (Mehran, 2003).

Although the gender gap in enrollment rates has gradually decreased, traditional segregation between male- and female-oriented disciplines persists in Iran. In the 1998-99 academic year, 56% of those enrolled in the theoretical-academic division at the secondary school level were girls, compared to only 29% female enrollment in the technical-vocational division. Most girls were enrolled in literature, humanities, and experimental sciences, while math-physics had less female enrollment. This trend continues at the university level, where women enroll less in male-dominated disciplines and advanced studies. In the 1999-2000 academic year, women constituted 34% of associate degree students, 48% of bachelor's degree students, 20% of master's degree students, and 25% of doctoral students (Mehran, 2003).

Iranian society's cultural and Islamic background, combined with the implementation of Islamic ideologies after the 1979 Iranian Islamic Revolution, has created significant paradoxes for young Iranians. This is particularly evident in global changes in attitudes towards premarital

intercourse and the impact of Worldwide Media and Globalization. College students have been specifically targeted because they represent a highly influential group with the potential to become future leaders in academia, industry, government, and non-governmental organizations (Mokhtari, Shariati, Ardebili, & Shalbafan, 2021).

In 1990, Iran's society changed with a younger, more educated, and urban population. However, the strict interpretation of Islam by the leadership led to restrictions on personal freedoms. Women were affected by the patriarchal application of Islamic law through the modern legal system, abolishing most pre-revolutionary legal reforms while retaining their right to vote. Following the Iranian Revolution, men's rights to unilateral divorce and polygamy were reinstated, while women's rights to divorce and child custody were restricted, and they faced limitations in studying mining and agriculture, serving as judges, and appearing in public without hijab. This led to disillusionment among many Islamist women who had initially believed in improving women's status under an Islamic state. Consequently, discussions about gender issues, suppressed after the revolution, started to resurface (Shavarini, 2006).

In Iran, women are encouraged to pursue higher education but face challenges in integrating into the workforce, leading to low rates of paid labor participation. Despite performing better than men in national college entrance exams, women's workforce participation is among the lowest globally. The societal expectation for women to prioritize domestic roles alongside education reinforces traditional gender roles. Developing nations benefit greatly from higher education, as it promotes economic stability and growth (Shavarini, 2006).

The education system in the Islamic Republic was initially geared towards creating Islamic individuals, with religious and spiritual goals given more priority than other goals such as scientific, cultural, social, political, and economic ones. Men were expected to support their

families economically and represent them in other institutions, while women were primarily expected to be mothers and care for their children. Although the government is responsible for providing free education up to the secondary level, women's rights were to be ensured in accordance with Islamic criteria. Ayatollah Khomeini acknowledged women's participation in the revolution, their role in family and society, and their achievements in higher education, provided it did not go against chastity or harm the nation. According to Ayatollah Khomeini, women were essential to the revolutionary movement and should be involved in all aspects of the country. He criticized the previous regime for treating women as objects and encouraged them to have a say in their fate. Khomeini believed that women, with proper education, could produce and cultivate humanity, and God intended them to be involved in all aspects of life. He urged all Iranians to work together to rebuild the country. Ayatollah Khomeini criticized the previous regime for oppressing women and treating them as objects instead of active subjects. He believed that women, with proper education, could contribute to society. In the following phases of the Islamic Republic's policies towards women's education, restrictions on women entering any fields of study in universities were lifted, and women's admission to universities has recently exceeded 60% of the total student population at the undergraduate level (Baharmitash and Hooglund ,2011).

In the 1990s, the number of women attending universities increased significantly, and they were well-represented in all fields of study, with some traditionally male-dominated fields showing an improvement in female participation. Although women's participation in technical and engineering fields was still lower than that of men, it had increased threefold from earlier decades. This change reflects a shift in the gendered structures of the academy, particularly in fields such as sciences, agriculture, and medicine. In a study of Iranian gender roles published by Roksana Baharmitash and Eric Hooglund (2011), according to students, men had more job opportunities

compared to women, with positions such as taxi drivers, factory workers, construction workers, security guards, and restaurant workers being more accessible to men. Women faced challenges in management positions because male employees may challenge their authority. A male Ph.D. student believed there is less incentive for boys to attend university due to the possibility of not finding a well-paying job after graduation. Traditionally, men were expected to financially support their families, which made women more likely to pursue higher education. The discussion also involved the impact of masculinity and femininity on men's lack of interest in attending university, with participants agreeing that women had fewer choices and were thus more likely to attend university than men, who had more options.

During a discussion among graduate students, it was noted that their own motivation and perseverance enabled them to pursue higher education despite their families' lack of resources and education (Baharmitash & Hooglund 2011). The Iranian revolution also opened up opportunities for lower-middle-class and rural individuals to attend university. The students believed that attending university positively impacted gender relations by creating a safe and equal environment for both men and women to interact and become friends. Women's increased participation in university was changing men's attitudes towards women and their abilities. Many participants discussed the trend of women getting married at an older age. They explained that highly educated women often faced difficulties finding partners because men were traditionally more educated and had better financial stability. With the increase in the number of women with higher education, men often hesitate to enter relationships with women who are their educational or professional equals or superiors (Baharmitash & Hooglund, 2011).

Education and Art Education After the Revolution

To carry out the cultural revolution, the Islamic government changed the curriculum and made it a prerequisite for university admission that applicants be conversant with Islamic law. Its significant goals were indoctrinating the younger generation with state ideology and fending off Western influence. Yet, this reform resulted in a decrease in educational quality since revolutionary enthusiasm was given priority over academic achievement. Despite this, Iran's long tradition of Islamic study has helped people from humble backgrounds excel in various disciplines. The regime's emphasis on political ideology rather than academic ability has resulted in a lack of tolerance for intellectual freedom and open discussion, contributing to the current problems in Iranian education (Hunter, 1992).

Iran's Islamic regime aimed to eliminate all aspects of Iranian culture that went against Islamic values or endangered its hegemony over the nation. To achieve this, they overturned the secular policies of the Pahlavi era, imposed a strict moral code on citizens, and worked to erase traces of pre-Islamic culture and Persian identity. The regime promoted a revolutionary spirit in cultural and artistic spheres, maintaining that art must serve the revolution by instilling Islamic and revolutionary values. Art contradicting these values was not permitted (Hunter, 1992).

By emphasizing significant institutions like marriage, family, and education, the Islamic rule in Iran made deliberate attempts to bring about long-lasting societal reforms. They pursued a "detoxification" campaign to eliminate Western influences and promote Islamic ideology. This campaign involved controlling the media and transforming the entire education system from elementary to higher education. College students were explicitly targeted due to their potential as future leaders, and the Cultural Revolution was initiated to oversee changes to the educational

system, including curricula, textbooks, teacher training, extracurricular activities, and dress codes (Mokhtari, Shariat, Ardebill, & Shalbafan, 2021).

Iran had a low acceptance rate for higher education, and those with military or Islamic law knowledge were prioritized. As a result, the country's technological and economic progress suffered. President Rafsanjani, one of the presidents of Iran's peripheral republics after the revolution, emphasized academic brilliance as the primary standard for education and employment and acknowledged the need for cultural and educational rejuvenation. Yet, due to the resistance of particular factions, the execution of this strategy was curbed. Despite modest improvement in recent years, ideological and political limitations constrained Iran's creative sector. The continual rehabilitation of Iranianism and better flexibility were necessary for a true cultural and aesthetic resurgence. Since culture and politics are interrelated in Iran, the political outcome determines the direction of the cultural scene (Hunter, 1992).

The Iranian regime has become more tolerant of certain forms of artistic expressions, such as music, which can be bought and sold if it is not used for corrupt purposes. While rhythmic music with a strong beat is still prohibited, classical Persian music and nationalistic singing have improved in quality, and there have been occasional performances of Western classical music. Despite Islam's prohibition of portrait painting, painting has thrived in Iran, with regular exhibitions and a flourishing art poster scene (Hunter, 1992). The government also promotes calligraphy and photography, with some Iranian photographers winning international awards.

The Iranian government tried to convert the humanities to Islam after the 1979 Revolution and the contentious 2009 election. As a result, research topics became more conservative, and specific majors, such as arts management, were removed. This made art and humanities research

more challenging, especially since theory, aesthetics, art criticism, and art history were not firmly established in the Iranian education system (Keshmirshekan, 2015).

One of the most significant educational reforms in Iran occurred in 2007 with the implementation of the Comprehensive Islamic Education Program. The education system in Iran used to include art education as a mandatory part of the curriculum from the first through the eighth grade prior to the educational reforms in 2007. The program's main aim was to help students discover their artistic potential, build knowledge of art, and develop artistic skills. The Arts Department of Iran's Curriculum Planning Division provided teachers with guidelines, including various activities like drawing, handicrafts, storytelling, and acting. The approach to art education focused on "artistic training," allowing students to participate in creative activities to unleash their artistic talents. While primary school teachers followed the Ministry of Education guidelines, the Bureau of Arts Education Planning's 2007 course books for grades six through eight focused on drawing and calligraphy (Noaparast & Rezaei, 2014).

The Iranian government's art education program successfully developed artistic abilities and knowledge among students. Although there were no written course books for primary school, the guidelines provided a clear structure for the curriculum. The program had three main objectives: building knowledge of art, developing artistic skills, and fostering artistic insight. Students who pursued technical, professional, and career knowledge branches in high school could continue their artistic education with different majors, including graphics, drawing, drama, music, handicraft, cinema, and sculpture. However, students in the theoretical branch did not receive any further arts education. With the educational reforms in 2007, it remains to be seen how teaching art in schools has been impacted. Before 2007, most high school students in Iran pursued a theoretical education. However, in 2013, seventh-grade students started attending high school, and

arts education was incorporated into the curriculum for the first three years of high school. The subsequent three years of high school were divided into theoretical and skill-oriented education, which included technical, professional, and career-knowledge education (Noaparast & Rezaei, 2014).

Iranian arts educator Bagheri Noraparast (2014) described Iranian art education as follows:

Naturally, a drastic change has occurred in arts education, as well as in education in general, since the revolution was Islamic, and it was expected that Islamic teachings would have their influence on reconstructing arts education. In consequence, arts education is defined in terms of an explicit teleological orientation in which art is a process with a certain end, namely, appreciation of God. As an ontological foundation, it is assumed in educational documents of the Islamic Republic of Iran that the world as a whole is the manifestation of God's power and beauty. In this context, arts education deals mainly with the manifestation of God's beauty. Thus, in the documents, art is taken as a way to appreciate God's beauty in the world. (pps, 52 & 53).

it is important to note that the incorporation of Islamic teachings in arts education has been a fundamental aspect of the Iranian education system since the Islamic Revolution.

According to Noaparast (2014):

the aim of education in general is that pupils "get near to God," which is a particular phrase in Islamic texts, and become God-like creatures, and, on the other hand, arts education, in the teleological sense, is taken to be in the service of the whole system of education by providing pupils with [an appreciation of] God's beauties. (pps.52 & 53)

Iranian art education is classified as Culture and Art (Iranian National Curriculum, 2012). It contains five key concepts: aesthetics, relating to nature, art history, art criticism, and art

production, linked to a set of specific topic areas and grouped by learning objectives. The topic areas include strengthening listening, drawing, handcrafts, storytelling, drama, calligraphy, and theatre. Familiarity with artistic heritage and domains of artistic activity also includes two other topics that should be taught to students (ORCD, 2012). It should also be noted that the school curriculum has no place for dance and music. These two areas of arts education are prohibited in terms of an explicit teleological orientation that governs the whole education system of Iran. In practice, the central focus is on painting, calligraphy, and occasionally handcrafts. Students were not, however, allowed to make handicrafts in the classroom and should make their crafts at home (Nouri & Farsi, 2018).

The Ministry of Education oversaw the development of the whole curriculum of Iran, which has a centralized educational system. Yet historically, arts education has received little attention. In 2000, the Iranian Organization for Research and Curriculum Development revised the arts curriculum to promote artistic thinking from elementary to secondary school. The process took over two years, was validated, and was field-tested multiple times before implementation. The revised curriculum, fully implemented in 2009, emphasized ten fundamental principles, including incorporating multiple arts domains, encouraging active learning and problem-solving, and promoting social development. The curriculum also recognized educational goals in knowledge, skills, and attitudes—the effectiveness of the revised arts curriculum needed to be carefully assessed in terms of its implementation. A study conducted to evaluate the experiences of Iranian teachers in teaching arts to elementary school students indicated that they have not been successful in doing so. Consequently, students have not been able to reap the benefits of the new arts curriculum (Nouri & Farsi, 2018).

The national curriculum of Iran referred to elementary-level arts instruction as "artistic training" and recognized it as a distinct topic. However, teachers felt that the objectives were impractical and not attainable, and that arts education was not perceived as a way to improve students' social and personal status. The curriculum needed to redefine its approach and learning objectives. Teachers struggled to apply the objectives to help students develop concepts and skills appropriate to their experiences and level of development. Therefore, teachers advocated for significant changes to the structure and function of the arts curriculum (Nouri & Farsi, 2018).

During the primary and first three years of secondary education, which encompasses nine years, the content is centered on "artistic training." During the second three years of secondary education, the content is organized by a multidisciplinary approach based on the branches of secondary education. The two primary branches are "theoretical" (consisting of four subdivisions, including literature and humanities, science, mathematics, and Islamic knowledge and teachings) and "skill-oriented" (including three subdivisions of industry, services, and agriculture). The goal is to integrate arts education into each branch and their respective subdivisions. In terms of methodology, indirect methods are utilized to teach arts education during primary education, while direct methods suited to each discipline are employed in the latter part of secondary education (Noaparast & Rezaei, 2014).

Arts education is severely overlooked in Iran, with specific art forms such as music and dancing sometimes prohibited. In contrast, others, like painting and calligraphy, are included in the curriculum but not treated with importance. The education system in Iran is governed by an Islamic perspective, which has led to the banning some aspects of arts education. Additionally, certain types of art are labeled as "Western," which faces even stricter prohibitions in Iran. As a result of Ministry of Education policies that disregard or prohibit certain types of art, Iranian youth

often turn to Western media as their primary source of exposure and interest in art. Private institutes offering arts education have become the sole option for Iranian students pursuing this field (Noaparast & Rezaei, 2014).

The restriction of arts education has detrimental impacts on low-income students who cannot pursue their artistic interests and those who attend private art classes and face tension with their families. Private institutions are perceived as deviant in Iran, resulting in unique tensions. These outcomes are harmful, depriving certain forms of arts education and causing familial strife (Noaparast & Rezaei, 2014).

According to Noaparast and Rezaei (2014), In Islam, there are two ways to address limitations in arts education: a top-down approach, which involves a critical examination of Islamic texts called Ijtihad, and a bottom-up approach, where bargaining between students and families leads to changes in arts education. Ayatollah Khomeini's promotion (in the late 1980s) of Ijtihad led to significant changes in art education, such as the allowance of music and chess. Mild forms of dance and music have also been integrated into schools under different names through the bottom-up approach. This approach showed that international art concepts could be adapted to fit local cultures. The bottom-up approach sometimes leads to developing a critical approach in religious leaders and vice versa. Noaparast and Rezaei (2014) believe that, ultimately, education will prioritize its needs, and art forms with educational value will eventually be incorporated into education while considering cultural sensitivities. They argue that art education is an essential component of the curriculum to help policymakers in the Islamic Republic of Iran get the information they need to accomplish sustainable development of cultural knowledge in the country's main cities.

Art education in Iran faces various challenges, such as limited resources and outdated curricula, which hinder students' development and advancement of artistic skills. State institutions responsible for art education and exhibitions in Iran, such as the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance and the Iranian Academy of the Arts, do not consider contemporary art important and approach it from an ideological perspective. Universities and publishing houses also ignore contemporary art; some even make it difficult for students to study or write about it. Several publications and journals are published by the Iranian Academy of the Arts, which concentrates on protecting national and Islamic cultural legacy, but none are about contemporary art (Keshmirshekan, 2015).

The Iranian state institutions responsible for art education and exhibitions have largely neglected contemporary Iranian art. Morteza Goudarzi, head of the Islamic Art and Cultural Research Centre, has written a book on contemporary Iranian painting that covers the last 100 years and this is one of the few books published on this topic in Iran.. However, Goudarzi excluded many post-Revolution painters due to his ideological biases, and his historical accuracy has been criticized. According to Keshmirshekan (2015), he was dissatisfied with the manifestation of identity in contemporary Iranian painting.

The Jihad-i danishgahi was established to protect Islamic art and culture from Western influences, but their Scientific Information Database shows they have little knowledge of contemporary art. The Organization for Researching and Composing University Textbooks in the Humanities has published over 1,700 traditional and historical art textbooks, but none on contemporary art (Keshmirshekan, 2015).

According to Hamid Keshmirshekan (2015), the availability of formal academic knowledge of contemporary art is restricted in Iran. However, there are other resources, such as

research, curation, online media, and documentary films, that can be used to expand our knowledge. Nonetheless, there are numerous barriers to research and knowledge production, both internal and external, in the humanities. Specific examples of these obstacles include insufficient methodology, a small research community in the humanities, weak scientific staff, hostility towards foreign knowledge, and the perception that the country's humanities knowledge is worthless.

Young artists, students, and a growing international market drive Iran's high demand for contemporary art publications. However, most of the printed materials are not academic or scholarly. While many translations of art books and articles are published in Iran, their role is complex. Alternative spaces often host translations and provide essential sources of knowledge for artists and students to understand contemporary art (Keshmirshekan, 2015). The lack of access to knowledge about contemporary art can limit students' educational opportunities, restrict their creativity and innovation, reduce their understanding of global art trends, and limit cultural exchange and intercultural understanding.

Khosrow Bagheri Noaparast and Somaye Rezaei (2014) believe that the government thinks that arts education is not essential in Iran. The first reason is a common belief worldwide that subjects such as mathematics and science are more significant than art, leading to a lower priority for art in official curricula. The second reason is specific to Iran and other Islamic countries, where certain art forms like music and sculpture are banned due to a misinterpretation of Islamic texts. This misinterpretation has created a negative perception of these art forms, resulting in their exclusion or marginalization in education. However, the statements in the texts refer to the misuse of these art forms rather than the arts themselves. Unfortunately, this negative perception has influenced the education system, leading to a marginalized position for art in the curriculum.

In Iran, while there is limited knowledge production in official spaces, alternative spaces proliferate with knowledge production. However, there has been little change in infrastructure for primary knowledge production, and funding remains a challenge for independent research outlets. Advancement in knowledge production requires the establishment of disciplines such as art history and education, archives of artwork and texts, and philanthropist-funded research projects. Despite cultural and political restrictions, younger scholars, artists, and curators produce knowledge through writing, artistic research, online publications, and documentary films (Keshmirshakan, 2015).

Politics and Gender in Iran

Since 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran has implemented biased regulations pertaining to gender relations. As a result, the government is cautious and touchy regarding research, especially studies done by Iranian feminists who have connections with Western institutions. It is contradictory that despite these discriminatory policies, women have experienced more significant opportunities for education, particularly at the tertiary level (Mehran, 2003; Rezai-m & James, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 2013).

During the Iranian revolution, women's activism and participation compelled Ayatollah Khomeini to alter his stance on women's involvement in public life. Although he had previously opposed women's right to vote and participate in politics, he later declared that it was their right and duty to do so, claiming that "Islam is a political religion." This shift was facilitated by the revolutionary rhetoric and the Islamists' need to broaden their support base, which allowed traditional women to engage in politics (Sakr, 2004).

The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran does not grant equal rights to women, and its policies seek to exclude women from public life. This policy includes gender segregation,

mandatory veiling, limited job opportunities, and reinforcing patriarchal practices related to marriage and custody. Women were only valued as mothers, daughters, and wives, and their rights were violated to protect cultural purity and national honor (Sakr, 2004).

The globalization process in Iran has led to changes in the area that benefit women but also exacerbate existing gender biases in society. The patriarchal culture in Iran restricts many women from working outside the home, while the expectation that men should be the sole breadwinners puts pressure on both genders, particularly with high unemployment rates (Ghajarieh, 2009).

During the period of 1979 to 1989, the Islamic government of Iran aimed to replace the secular discourse of the previous regime with an Islamic one by dismantling various symbols, institutions, and customs associated with the Pahlavi regime. However, the policies formulated during this period resulted from ad hoc initiatives taken by various stakeholders with conflicting views. The first phase of these policies was centered around regulating and defining the proper representation of Muslim women, including their appearance, behavior, and activities. As a result, many reforms introduced by the previous regime, such as the revocation of family protection laws, segregation of women in public spaces, and the reintroduction of the veil, were reversed (Rezai-Rashti, 2013).

The Iranian Constitution acknowledges both the traditional value of motherhood in strengthening familial relationships and the importance of women's involvement in socio-economic and political progress. However, in practice, women have encountered limitations despite this stated policy. The emphasis on motherhood aligns with established cultural values, while encouraging women's engagement in public life reflects the necessity for modernization. The authorities in power have emphasized that all regulations should adhere to Islam's perception

of women's position within the family, and laws must enable women to balance their professional and domestic responsibilities (Mehran, 2003).

Although women in Iran have experienced some improvements in specific areas of public life, the notion that these changes are solely attributed to Islam is debatable. While Islam has been a part of Iranian culture for centuries, it is only one of many factors shaping society. The impact of nationalist sentiment and a strong secular and progressive culture in modern Iran cannot be ignored. Therefore, the advancements made by Iranian women under the Islamic Republic are better attributed to the influence of modern, secular traditions rather than Islam (Sakr, 2004).

The review of existing literature reveals that Iranian scholars and social scientists have predominantly employed quantitative research techniques when studying women's involvement in education, but they have not delved into analyzing the aspirations of young women or the evolution of gender relationships to a great extent. Moreover, most of the studies have been carried out by male researchers, which has resulted in a scarcity of female perspectives in the literature. This gap can be attributed to the risk of potential government repression, self-imposed constraints, and the possible repercussions faced by researchers working in universities and public institutions which do not adhere to the state's ideology. Failure to comply with the government's stance can lead to job termination and decreased social standing in a politically repressive and unpredictable environment (Mehran, 2003; Rezai-Rashti & James, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 2013).

Following the start of the war with Iraq in 1980, there was a lack of autonomous women's activism in Iran, and significant laws against women were enacted. Despite relying more on popular support, including from women, the state did not provide them with any incentives. The government initiated a program to promote women as homemakers and mothers, in which the state-backed media played a vital role in. The few female parliamentarians had similar perspectives

to their male colleagues and belonged to the entrenched elite, with minimal education beyond elementary and religious studies (Sakr, 2004).

The concept of gender equality is not universal and is influenced by social and material conditions. Traditional religions like Islam cannot support this idea, but there is an ongoing debate about women's rights and their societal roles in Iran. Even the conservative leader Ayatollah Khamenei recognized that Islam does not permit differences between men and women in their development and social activities. The debate often centers around the role of Islam as a primary factor affecting women's lives in Islamic societies and involves both secular and Muslim activists. "Islam is no different from other major religious traditions that take for granted the superiority of men over women and protect the institutions of patriarchy; the similarities between the holy texts are greater than the differences" (Sakr, 2004, p.20).

Various ideological approaches have been used to explain the lack of women's rights in Iran, including those of secular feminists, cultural relativists, and proponents of essential cultural differences. However, these explanations fail to consider the potential for resistance and the ways in which social and economic factors shape ideology. Ideologies can be flexible and adapt to social conditions, as evidenced by Iran's program to Islamicize all aspects of life (Sakr, 2004).

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war and the death of Ayatollah Khomeini in 1985, the Second Republic began in Iran. The gender debate became more prominent, and women's university studies were expanded. In 1988, family planning became official policy, and changes were made to the divorce law, allowing women judges to return to court in advisory roles. The Social and Cultural Council of Women and the Office of Women's Affairs were established. Despite contentious issues like segregation and the compulsory hejab, calls for a more radical interpretation of Islam were published. More educated and formally trained women were elected to the Majlis,

and in the 1999 local council elections, 1,120 women were elected, forcing the government to address issues raised by women activists (Sakr, 2004).

Following the revolution, it was politically urgent for the Islamic state to have more female supporters in educational institutions. The state aimed to control the education system by replacing secular students, particularly women, with religious ones to counteract the influence of the secular middle classes. The education system was restructured to train individuals according to their expected societal roles. The curriculum was modified to include more religious instruction and a biased history of Islam and the Islamic revolution (Teckchandani, 2017).

After the Iranian revolution, despite official encouragement for women's education, the reality was different due to the Islamization of the education system, lack of coordination between decision-makers, and economic issues. The segregation policy resulted in the dismissal of girls from mixed schools, a shortage of girls' schools in rural areas, and many girls dropping out. Private tertiary institutions also faced difficulties accommodating female students due to low enrollment, resulting in them being refused registration or asked to change their subjects (Teckchandani, 2017).

The rise of women's enrollment in higher education is a trend observed globally. The trend has been particularly notable in Iran since the 1990s, with a significant increase in women's participation in higher education. Official data indicates that over 60% of university admissions at the undergraduate level are now female. This higher rate of female participation in higher education has attracted the interest of academics and researchers, who seek to understand the conflicting policy developments resulting from greater access to education. These developments are reflected in the paradoxical nature of policies surrounding marriage, divorce, and other legal family matters, which are discriminatory towards women (Mehran, 2003; Rezai-Rashti & James, 2009; Rezai-Rashti, 2013).

According to Mehran (2003), in Iran, women have been viewed as instruments to serve specific purposes within traditional and modern perspectives. However, a new approach has emerged that treats women as individuals with their own rights and aims to empower them. This shift is reflected in the words of President Khatami, who stressed the importance of increasing women's knowledge and education so that they can recognize and demand their own rights. The Iranian government is supporting this change by preparing the ground for women to achieve their rightful position in society without enforcing their rights.

Although Iranian labor regulations emphasize equal job opportunities, wages, and privileges for both genders, gender discrimination in employment remains a significant issue. Despite women demonstrating high potential, with a 60% acceptance rate for female university applicants, their unemployment rates for college graduates were worse than men, increasing by 34.1% between 1997 and 2007. Female experts also faced a gap between their job interests and accessibility, indicating the presence of gender discrimination. Although the literacy rate for women has improved, it still falls short of achieving gender balance (Hedayat, Kahn, & Hanafi, 2013).

Contradictions have marked Iranian women's education since the Islamic Republic's establishment. While female enrollment and completion rates have increased, and the gender gap in primary and secondary schooling has decreased, there is a ban on coeducation, compulsory veiling of female students, gender stereotyping in textbooks, and steering female students towards traditionally feminine specializations. These seemingly contradictory policies reflect the paradox of tradition and modernity in post-revolutionary Iran, where the ideal female citizen is expected to be socialized, politicized, and Islamized to serve both the traditional needs of a religious society and the modern demands of the country (Mehran, 2003).

The Education Plan expects women to balance their traditional roles in the family with having social and political awareness and occupying top-level positions in education planning and decision-making. This paradox is also evident in the educational measures taken by Iran, where efforts to create a traditional atmosphere in schools to teach "modest girls and courageous boys" have coincided with a noteworthy increase in female enrollment (Mehran, 2003). Mehran (2003) argues that "Iranian women have used the paradox of tradition and modernity to serve their own purpose, which is none other than empowerment" (p. 286).

The closure and reopening of universities in Iran were part of a broader plan to eradicate modern, secular culture. Although women were initially excluded from various science courses and prevented from studying abroad to shield them from Western influence, they seized every opportunity available and often exceeded expectations. Creating all-female institutions like Al-Zahra University and private schools like Azad brought new prospects. Employment was another critical area of conflict, as many women were dismissed from their jobs after the revolution. The Islamic Republic Constitution aimed to liberate women from foreign exploitation, but it also overturned certain sections of the 1967 Family Law, allowing men to prohibit their wives and daughters from paid employment and to marry multiple women. After a lengthy struggle, the ban on unmarried women studying abroad was ultimately lifted in 2000 (Sakr, 2004).

The Education Plan established by the Islamic Republic of Iran lays down certain guidelines for the education of females. These include acknowledging women's position in the family and society, considering girls' abilities and interests while providing education, enhancing their awareness of social and political matters, prioritizing the stability of the family, eradicating discriminatory practices, motivating married women to pursue education, and advocating for female involvement in education-related planning and management (Mehran, 2003).

In Iran, separate textbooks were prepared for boys and girls, but the curricular content and schoolbooks were identical. The Ministry of Education in 1982 launched the KAr va Danesh (KAD) project, which allowed secondary school students to engage in practical work in factories, workshops, and agricultural tasks one day a week. The aim was to expose boys to industrial, agricultural, and scientific subjects, while girls were taught skills that were believed to be necessary for their role as wives and mothers in Islamic culture, such as cooking, sewing, knitting, and handicrafts. The project has since been discontinued (Mehran, 2003).

In 1986, the census showed that female literacy rates in Iran had increased due to the Islamic Republic's reintroduction of segregation and veiling, and a more religious curriculum. The regime promoted this type of education to make it more acceptable to traditional classes and combat cultural imperialism and Westernization. However, women's entry into higher education was controversial, and the "Cultural Revolution" in 1984 led to a policy restricting women's entry into non-feminine fields. This resulted in women being denied admission to fields such as engineering, agriculture, aviation, political science, law, management, and veterinary medicine (Teckchandani, 2017).

Women were restricted from enrolling in certain fields, including medical, environmental, and human sciences, with a cap of 20-50% of available spots for women. More than half of all higher education subjects were not open to women. However, training for certain professions like teaching and nursing was encouraged, along with Islamic theology. To qualify for government scholarships to study abroad, women had to be married and accompanied by their husbands. While the number of women in university education stayed at around 30%, the distribution of women in different subjects changed. There was a rise in natural and mathematical sciences but a decline in

agricultural and engineering fields. Only 13.5% of students studying abroad were women (Teckchandani, 2017).

Despite the Iranian regime's policy of sexual segregation, economic difficulties and war led to more women needing to work, forcing the government to allow women to take paid employment eventually. This contradicted their rhetoric of an "Islamic economy." The reconstruction phase after the war brought further liberalization and changes in family law, including accepting contraception and abortion. Structural adjustment and privatization policies also arrived with World Bank loans in 1991 and 1994 (Sakr, 2004).

In Iran, the veiling order impacted women in education early on, with the Ministry of Education mandating Islamic uniforms for female employees and students in the 1980-81 academic year. Later, compulsory veiling was imposed on all women, including girls as young as six, who were required to wear Islamic uniforms and head covers to school. Female literacy instructors were also required to wear the chador or full black veil (Mehran, 2003).

Following the 1980-83 Cultural Revolution, which aimed to Islamize universities, Iranian women were prohibited from enrolling in male-dominated fields of study, such as mining, petroleum engineering, veterinary science, and agricultural engineering. In contrast, men were unable to apply for obstetrics-gynecology. After a failed attempt to segregate medicine, a women's medical institute was established in Qom to train female doctors for female patients. In 1987-88, many fields of study in mathematics, computer science, experimental sciences, and humanities were closed to women. However, limitations were reduced in 1993, and now female students have access to almost all disciplines at all levels of higher education. Statistical data could provide a more accurate understanding of how Iranian women have responded to traditional attempts at limiting them (Mehran, 2003).

Feminist Activism

The dissatisfaction with the Iranian government and its authoritarian rule is reflected in the debate over gender and women's position in the country. Islamic feminism aims to justify a "gender-sensitive" version of Islam, but the political system in Iran legitimizes oppressive social relations. The women's press in Iran faces similar difficulties as other publications when the regime exercises its political power. The struggle to establish an open public sphere against an ailing theocracy has contributed to something "new," but this cannot be born of the current structure. Therefore, Islam is not the only factor in gender relations or the Iranian revolution (Sakr, 2004). Nouriaie- Simone (2005) states the following:

The rise of global communications is one of the many forces of change that are transforming the lives of Muslim women today-and in turn, being transformed by them. Throughout the Muslim world, women are making their voices heard: documenting the realities of their own lives, exploring their changing identities, and insisting upon greater participation in the public sphere (p. 17).

Muslim women now have a tremendous instrument for self-expression, empowerment, and social change because to the expansion of global communications. Muslim women are defying stereotypes, expressing their agency, and altering how society sees and values them by speaking up and sharing their stories with the world.

In 1979, anti-veil protests in Iran sparked a powerful women's movement that challenged the new regime's fundamentalist political agenda. Despite the formation of numerous women's associations and groups, feminist demands for women's autonomy and choice were dismissed in the post-revolutionary political climate. The Left's focus on anti-imperialism placed women's rights at the bottom of its list of revolutionary goals, confusing and discouraging young, secular,

urban women who had protested against fundamentalism. As a result, the clerics used un-veiled women as symbols of an imperialist plot against Iran (Cronin, 2004).

Although no political organizations or parties were behind the women's mobilization, the protest was not fully supported by the community of secular intellectuals, who considered women's issues peripheral to the national and anti-imperialist struggles. Despite some support from left-leaning men, most secular intellectuals did not endorse the women's cause, leaving the movement unsupported and disheartened. This hindered the possibility of an effective democratic movement in defense of human rights, social justice, and democracy, which the women's uprising could have sparked (Cronin, 2004)

Elizabeth Bucar (2011) states:

The clerics share a concern with placing limitations of what counts as proper public action for women by setting rules for public dress and barring women from particular leadership positions. Their limitations on the roles of women's bodies in public are both visual (through veiling) and symbolic (through a ban of women's bodies in certain capacities from the pulpit). In the clerical rhetoric, women's bodies are important sites for maintaining control, whether that control is of church tradition or a theocratic nation-state. (p. 128).

In Iran, the younger generation is challenging authority, including their parents, and is worried about a future without hope or freedom to choose. A survey commissioned in 2003 by the Center for Promoting Women's Participation found that unemployment and the lack of job opportunities were the biggest concerns for young Iranian women. Interestingly, marriage was the least important factor in improving their social position, with only seven percent of women prioritizing it. The survey polled 120,000 women aged fifteen to sixty, and those aged twenty to twenty-four were the most concerned about low income, economic problems, sociocultural issues,

and job insecurity. The survey's categories included age, education, income, marital status, and place of residence (Nourai-Simone, 2005).

Nourai-Simone (2005) writes:

Lack of privacy in public space and constant surveillance create an atmosphere of fear and paranoia, leading to the need to create separate public and private lives.

Intimidation by regulation of the public space is intimately tied to social control of identity. Women's mobility in terms of identity and "their place" in the public space are closely connected. Oppressive restriction of women's dress, behavior, movement, and speech has made the female body an object of male obsession in Iran. Public spaces are an arena for suggestive remarks and jokes at the expense of the female clothed body. (p. 69).

Mahnaz Kousha (2002) reveals:

The lack of freedom to engage in simple activities such as visiting with friends or going to the movies along with having to acquire permission from fathers, mothers, and later husbands severely hampers women's autonomy and keeps them in a state of perpetual subjugation. Almost everything seems to be a right to be gained and negotiated. No right is automatically granted to women; arrangements have to be made. Negotiations are constantly in the process because some women wish to enjoy certain activities outside the family boundaries. (p. 199).

Women living in societies that value family responsibilities more than individual interests may have difficulty finding time for themselves and pursuing their passions. These societies expect women to prioritize their family obligations and maintain harmony within the household. While fathers are typically responsible for providing financial support for the family, mothers are responsible for managing all other aspects of the home. Any attempt to deviate from these norms

may result in social disapproval and guilt, making it challenging for women to pursue their own interests outside of their family obligations (Kousha, 2002).

The city of Tehran underwent significant changes in politics and social spaces, which affected the younger generation's identity. The new Islamic landscape was characterized by hundreds of new mosques, slogans, and images of martyrs and clerics. Social divisions were broken down, and the regime reshaped public spaces by enforcing strict dress codes and monitoring moral conduct. The government established boundaries separating men and women in public places, and the visual space was controlled and selectively hidden from sight through the imposition of the veil and strict Islamic dress codes. This had significant implications for both men and women regarding spatial mobility and visual control (Nouraie-Simone, 2005).

As women in Iran gained greater access to education, politics, and public life, they became more aware of the limitations imposed upon them and began to expect more from themselves, their families, and their country. The attempt to politicize traditional women, originally intended to weaken the secular women's movement, instead exposed the shortcomings of Sharia in contemporary Iran. Even after the secular opposition was defeated, the women's movement persisted as a viable alternative and regained momentum following the Iraq War. Progress in education and employment enabled more women to participate in public life, suggesting that their status cannot be entirely attributed to Islamic ideology (Sakr, 2004).

In the early 1990s, "Islamic feminism" emerged, characterized by a new awareness of gender issues and a criticism of the gender biases present in Islamic law. While the Islamic Republic's policies in the 1980s were focused on marginalizing and excluding "Westernized" women, they empowered other women who began to identify themselves as citizens entitled to

equal rights. These women increasingly realized they could not become full citizens unless a modern, democratic interpretation of Islamic law was accepted (Mir-Hosseini & Tapper, 2006).

The internet is a unique outlet for self-expression in a society governed by theocracy. Independent young women can exercise their agency and control their environment online. The internet offers a platform for free dialogue, self-expression, and dissenting voices, allowing individuals to transcend traditional gender roles and expectations. The concept of a fixed identity is being challenged with the emergence of a new subjectivity created through online interaction. This new identity is seen as multifaceted and complex. The ease and speed of sharing stories allows for wider dissemination and amplification of personal experiences and perspectives (Nourraie-Simone, 2005).

The policy of general access to education has created a socially and politically active young generation, including many educated and committed women who are visible in public life and the blogosphere. Despite encouraging education and public participation, the regime still limits women's legal rights and enforces traditional gender roles, creating an ongoing paradox and identity crisis among the youth. Female activists call for greater rights and social equality, highlighting the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Iranian society (Nourraie-Simone, 2005) :

The generation that brought about the Iranian Revolution in 1979 was characterized by youthful idealism and a willingness to sacrifice everything for social justice and political freedom. This same spirit carried into the war with Iraq in the 1980s, but today's younger generation no longer shares this idealism or zeal for sacrifice. Many feel betrayed by unfulfilled promises and have become disillusioned with authority. They desire freedom, job security, and less intrusive political space but do not want another revolution (Nourraie-Simone, 2005).

The post-revolution generation in Iran no longer possesses the same idealism and willingness to sacrifice everything for an ideal as their predecessors. Instead, they are pragmatic and driven by anger, focusing on expanding their social horizons and achieving their goals. They have developed skills for navigating oppressive circumstances, and while they may repeat empty slogans, they do not feel guilty because they are trapped in an unfair situation, not of their making. They have been taught to be skeptical, hide, lie, and pretend to survive (Nourai-Simone, 2005).

Despite its theocratic regime, Iran has modern bureaucratic structures, western-style education, and a high demand for skilled workers due to the emigration of male professionals. The country needs educated women in the workforce, and this need is recognized by the religious leaders who run the country, some of whom have female family members in the same position. Therefore, there are occasional gestures of recognizing the importance of women in Islamic society, along with some concessions toward gender equality (Ansari & Martin, 2002).

Women's Art Production and Art Education

Iranians have a traumatic experience in their collective memory due to the horrific history of the revolution, war, mass political executions, systematic elite killings, cultural repressions, and foreign sanctions. Iranian artists struggle to choose the right words to convey a subject rife with suffering. They are responding to their own experiences in the context of a cultural trauma that permeates the entire society and are looking for ways to interpret the traumatic events in their nation effectively. Artists continue to establish their identity through discursive techniques, contesting the state's ideologically formed history and cultural past, despite challenging conditions for living, let alone practicing art (Keshmirshekan, 2015).

In Iran, women have faced significant barriers to artistic expression and professional development, particularly since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Despite these challenges, many

Iranian women have persisted in creating innovative and impactful works of art and have also worked to expand educational opportunities for themselves and other women in the field.

The advancement of Iran has resulted in progress for women in terms of education, health, urbanization, life expectancy, family structure, and participation in public matters. Despite opposition from those who adhere to traditional beliefs, women's representation has grown in various areas such as politics, media, arts, academia, and human rights activism. Although the traditional concept of womanhood as a wife and mother remains strong, the increasing presence of women in non-traditional occupations has presented a contemporary model for young girls and their families. However, a significant demand for educational resources still exceeds the current supply (Mehran, 2003).

Over the world, artists—and women artists—have had to overcome many obstacles to follow their dreams. Iranian women face restrictions beyond the actual creative process. These restrictions, which can hinder the creativity of female artists, include cultural expectations and standards, gender prejudices, and a lack of opportunity. Likewise, female artists sometimes struggle more to re-enter the business and resume their activities after taking a break for personal or familial reasons. Women artists may have more difficulty navigating the nuances of their job in traditional settings. Lack of support may deter individuals from following their goals, and social pressures may compel them to give up their desire to be artists. In these civilizations, women's duties are frequently restricted to the stereotypical roles of wife and mother, and the thought of women having jobs is still frowned upon (Hedayat, Kahn, & Hanafi, 2013).

Several female artists have persevered and pushed limits despite these obstacles to produce works that inspire and move viewers. They have questioned cultural standards and advocated for social change via their work, bringing to light frequently ignored concerns. They have

demonstrated that art has no borders and that the human spirit is strong enough to overcome challenges through ingenuity and perseverance. The women who lived in Iran spoke about various issues related to their lives, such as economic, social, familial, legal, and religious factors, which are more inhibiting for female artists. The impact of these factors is difficult to understand since they are all interconnected. Although some women have good economic situations, they may experience family conflict or not receive support from the law. Societal constraints may also create difficulties for women, even if they have successful personal lives. Some women recognize men and women's different problems, while others find women's issues unbearable but believe in their strength to overcome them (Kousha, 2002).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

My method is autoethnography, qualitative research that uses thick descriptions to detail subjects' everyday lives (Hoey, 2014). My personal background as an Iranian with knowledge of the culture and university system was an asset in conducting this research. I collected data by looking through Iranian art journals and books and interviewing four Iranian art teachers to examine their experiences within Iranian art education and what may have influenced these experiences. I chose to use autoethnography as a research method to explore the experiences of Iranian art teachers within the context of Iranian art education.

My participants are four female teachers and artists who had teaching experience in schools, universities, and various institutions in Iran, and after immigrating to America, they continued to be involved in art education either as students or teachers. Their unique experiences allowed me to gain valuable insights into the similarities and differences between art education in Iran and the US.

By selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth, I was able to gain a nuanced understanding of the experiences of Iranian art teachers within the context of Iranian art education. After receiving the approval from ISU Internal Review Board, I proceeded to schedule interviews with all four participants who are Iranian artists/educators who currently reside in the United States. I analyzed the data by coding my recordings and finding themes throughout. Patton (1990) argues that individual cases "selected purposefully permit inquiry into and understanding of a phenomenon in-depth"(page 169).* He argues that the "logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth" (page 169).

In addition, Creswell (2017) argues that we use qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist for specific populations and samples or if existing theories do not adequately capture the complexity of the problem we are explaining. In addition, being an Iranian who speaks the language and is familiar with the culture and university system was undoubtedly an asset in conducting this research.

Interview Questions

Questions that I asked each participant are as follows:

1. Describe your Iranian art training.
2. Describe your Iranian art education teacher training.
3. When, where, and whom did you teach?
4. Have you been involved in writing visual art lesson plans? Have you been involved in teaching these lesson plans?
5. What are the components of your lesson plans? What was the focus of your teaching?
6. In what ways did the Iranian government influence your art education and your art curricula?
7. In what ways did religion influence your art education and curricula?
8. How has Iranian art education helped and hindered you as an Iranian woman? In what ways?
9. What part has art education played in Iranian women's political resistance, if at all?
10. What is the difference between art education in Iran and in the US?
11. What are the art community's weaknesses and strengths and your presence as an artist or art teacher in Iran?

12. How has an art education and art itself positively or negatively affected your entry into Iranian society?
13. Is there a difference between the way art is taught and the courses offered in schools between male and female students in Iran?
14. What would you like to add to the discussion?

Participants

Participants are Iranian women art teachers and artists who have taught in Iranian schools. They live in the US, and their education and teaching experiences in Iran after the Islamic Revolution varied depending on the time period in which they received their education or were taught.

The education and teaching experiences of individuals in Iran after the Islamic Revolution have been shaped by various factors, including changes in the education system, social and cultural norms, and political and religious developments.

There are four participants in total, and I provide a brief explanation about each of them.

Participant A:

The first participant is a graduate of film and theater, with eight years of teaching experience in Iranian universities in the same field. She has also been active in the film and editing industry in Iran for about 10 years. In addition to her experience in the same field in Iran, she also works part-time as a professor at the university level in the United States.

Participant B:

She obtained a diploma in graphic design from the Academy of Arts in Iran, followed by a bachelor's degree in painting and a master's degree in illustration. While pursuing her bachelor's degree, she also worked as an art teacher at a middle school and an intellectual education center. After finishing her undergraduate studies, she continued teaching and later taught graphic design

and art history at universities for four years after completing her master's degree. Throughout this time, she also taught art at various art schools at different levels.

Participant C:

She earned a bachelor's degree in industrial design from a university in Tehran and has been working continuously in the field of jewelry design in Iran. Currently, she works as a part-time professor in design at one of the well-known universities in the US. Her teaching experience was limited to open schools, where she taught various jewelry-making techniques to over 20, drawing on her background as a jewelry designer.

Participant D:

She earned both a bachelor's and master's degree in painting from a university in Iran. During his years of study and afterward, she was involved in teaching in the same field at schools and universities, while also maintaining an active artistic practice. Currently residing in the US, she has completed a degree in art education from a US university.

Limitations

In the past year, Iran has experienced widespread protests and unrest, leading to increased pressure and scrutiny from the government on various sectors of society, including the cultural sphere. As a result, many Iranian activists have faced restrictions on their freedom of expression, which has had a detrimental impact on their ability to participate fully in their fields. This problem is not limited to those currently residing in Iran, as some potential participants in this study have declined to participate due to concerns about recounting sensitive issues affecting the country. The protection of research participants and ethical issues will thus be of utmost importance. It will be crucial to make sure that the participants' names and personal information are secured while simultaneously providing a safe and welcoming environment for them to express their experiences

and viewpoints. The study's results will also be published in a way that correctly portrays the participants' worries and experiences while also preserving their privacy. Notwithstanding the difficulties, this research is essential to understanding how art education empowers women in Iran and fosters feminist opposition. We can better grasp the difficulties and chances Iranian female artists and educators confront in advocating for gender equality and social change in the nation by learning more about their experiences and viewpoints. Finally, the findings of this study may influence policies and programs targeted at advancing more fairness and empowerment for women in Iran and other nations dealing with comparable issues.

Summary

The proposed study attempts to answer the research questions: What did Iranian girls' art education look like for the participants? How have the Iranian government and religion played a part in participants' art education? How has art education played a role in the hidden resistance of the participants, if at all?

The study hopes to address the broader questions: What is the definition of art education in Iran? What has been the state of Iranian girls' art education after the Islamic revolution and the present? How has art education played a role in the hidden resistance of Iranian women? In Iran, how did the Islamic revolution and the spread of religion affect women's education, especially in the arts? Does ignoring or neglecting art education have a political component? Have Iranian women been involved in the writing of art lesson plans? In Iran's anti-feminist society, how has art education helped Iranian women?

CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS

Interview Questions

1. Describe your Iranian art training.
2. Describe your Iranian art education teacher training.
3. When, where, and whom did you teach?
4. Have you been involved in writing visual art lesson plans? Have you been involved in teaching these lesson plans?
5. What are the components of your lesson plans? What was the focus of your teaching?
6. In what ways did the Iranian government influence your art education and your art curricula?
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13. Is there a difference between the way art is taught and the courses offered in schools between male and female students in Iran?
14. What would you like to add to the discussion?

Interview Outcomes

Iranian art training and education: Questions 1&2

All the participants mentioned receiving formal art training and education in Iran. They discussed various art forms such as painting (oil color, watercolor, and gouache) with a main focus on Western styles, calligraphy, sculpture, and graphic design that they learned. Most received training from universities or art schools, while one had apprenticeships with a famous artist who is implementing Safavid Iran's styles in modern jewelry design. They also mentioned that their education was heavily focused on technical skills and craftsmanship.

Participants emphasized the importance of traditional Iranian art techniques (Iranian National Curriculum, 2012), and styles such as calligraphy, miniature painting, and carpet weaving in Iranian primary school art training. One participant also noted the influence of Western art curriculum and techniques in Iranian art education in middle and high schools, particularly in more recent years.

The four Participants agreed that there is no specific training for teaching art in Iran and that art education is not as emphasized as other subjects. Additionally, all participants highlighted the lack of practical training and the emphasis on theoretical learning in Iranian art education as noted by Nori and Farsi (2018) in their study where they mentioned that Iranian art education had a teleological approach linked to the glorification of God (Noaparast, 2014). All participants also mentioned the limited availability of art schools and the perception that students who attended these schools are less successful in other subjects as Noaparast and Rezaei (2014) argue that the Iranian government does not consider art education essential, prioritizing math and science over it. Noaparast and Rezaei (2014) attribute this to a widespread belief and a misinterpretation of Islamic texts regarding certain art forms.

Participant A noted that traditional teaching methods were becoming outdated and weren't geared toward preparing students for the job market as Noaparast and Rezaei's work (2014) claims. Students must turn to the internet for contemporary art media. Participant B discussed her experience with art education at different levels and noted that students had to choose between theoretical and skill level education that narrowed the availability of art education (Noaparast & Rezaei, 2014).

Overall, interviews suggested there is a need for improvement in art education in Iran, particularly in providing more practical training and resources for students interested in art.

Teaching experience: Questions 3

All the participants had teaching experience; those who taught did so at universities, art schools, or private studios. They talked about the challenges of teaching in a highly regulated and conservative environment and how they had to adapt their teaching to fit the cultural and religious context, according to Teckchandani (2017). The Islamic Republic of Iran's reintroduction of segregation and veiling increased female literacy rates, but women faced restrictions due to the "Cultural Revolution" in 1984. Some participants noted the lack of formal teacher training programs specifically for art education in Iran.

Resource Constraints: Interviewees mentioned the lack of teaching resources such as the lack of books or publications about contemporary art as a challenge in Iran. The first interviewee struggled with obtaining necessary teaching materials, while the second interviewee taught at private institutes due to a lack of resources in the public system. Noaparast and Rezaei (2014) believes that private institutes offering arts education have become the sole option for Iranian students pursuing this field.

Variety in Syllabus: Questions 4& 5

Despite the lack of resources, interviewees tried to use various methods and educational materials such as articles, and YouTube educational videos to create variety in their syllabi.

Artistic Background: Questions 2 &3

Interviewees have a background in the arts and were able to leverage their skills by teaching at different levels in schools and institutions and experience teaching in their respective fields.

Experience Teaching: all participants had extensive teaching experience, spanning multiple levels of education, including middle school, high school, and university.

Diverse Methods: Questions 4&5

Participant A mentioned using diverse educational methods, including translating interviews and articles for their students. Meanwhile, Participant B taught students of different ages. Due to the prohibition of teaching contemporary art and the lack of text and research materials, the younger generation has been forced to improve their skills by accessing the internet.

Overall, all participants highlighted the challenges of teaching in Iran, including resource constraints and the importance of leveraging diverse methods and backgrounds to create practical teaching experiences.

Lesson planning: Questions 4&5

Two of the participants had experience developing lesson plans for visual art classes. They discussed the importance of including technical skills, cultural and historical context, and critical thinking in their lesson plans. Regarding art lesson plans in Iran, participant A argued that the lack of a detailed lesson plan was a significant weakness in Iran's education system. They noted that the Iranian art education syllabus had remained unchanged for decades; Nouri and Farsi (2018) state the Iranian Ministry of Education revised the arts curriculum to promote artistic thinking, but teachers have not been successful in teaching it. while there was a syllabus, there was no specific

lesson plan examples. In contrast, participant B noted that the syllabi at the university level in Iran were more detailed than those in the United States, despite the differences between universities, based on her teaching experiences in the US. However, both also noted that they did not have a resource like the U.S. National Visual Art Standards (2014) for lesson plans. Instead, they relied on a general lesson plan that gave them more freedom as teachers to use different teaching methods in each section.

They also emphasized the importance of planning specific lessons for each session based on the given syllabi, which was required in their university teaching experience which is different in universities. In summary, while there are differences in the level of detail provided in art syllabi and lesson plans in Iran, participant A and B stressed the importance of having some structured program for effective art teaching, similar to that in the U.S.

Iranian government and religion: Questions 6&7

All participants discussed the influence of the Iranian government and religion on their art education and curricula. They talked about how the government controlled the content and the messaging in the art they produced. Bagheri Noraparast (2014) states that arts education in the Islamic Republic of Iran is defined in terms of an explicit teleological orientation, where art is a process of appreciation of God's power and beauty. They also talked about the influence of religion on the art they created and how it impacted their artistic expression. Participant D said that she has been forced to remove her works from exhibitions many times due to showing naked parts of the body. Participants identified the government as a significant influence on Iranian art education and curricula, particularly regarding the subjects related to Iranian culture before Islam and deemed acceptable imagery.

Censorship and restrictions on artistic expression have significantly impacted the film and cinema industry, as well as other art forms. Participant A stated:

This censorship has led to the emergence of an underground film genre in Iran, with many renowned artists, such as Bahman Ghobadi and Jafar Panahi, active in it. I distinctly recall Panahi's movie titled "This is Not a Movie," which was a protest against the government and led to his arrest and years of exile. In Iran, discussing and criticizing certain topics through film was prohibited, which is unfortunate since the role of an artist, particularly in restricted societies, is to critique the state of the society and its conditions. (Participant A, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

Artists face limitations on the topics they can address, and there are restrictions on accessing critical film sources. Government and religious regulations also limit the creativity and expression of artists, particularly during religious festivals. Participant A claimed:

For instance, in cinema and theater, many films are commissioned by the government for religious festivals, such as the Razavi festival, where the films produced must align with the Shia religion. To participate in Iranian cinema, filmmakers must be active in these festivals, and religious regulations thus limit their creativity. (Participant A, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

Religion resulted in limitations and restrictions on creative expression, particularly for women. The mandatory hijab regulations for teachers and students have created barriers and restrictions in the classroom. Participant B stated:

At the school where I taught, I was required to cover all of my hair and wear long dresses and prohibited from wearing jean pants. As a result, my students perceived me as someone with conservative beliefs, similar to the government officials who imposed these

regulations. However, this mandatory dress code contradicted my personal beliefs.
(Participant B, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

Gender segregation during group assignments and projects in art school was also prevalent.

Participant A stated:

Religious restrictions also caused gender segregation during group assignments and projects in art school. I recall one instance when we performed the Aros Gol show, a traditional Iranian show that celebrated the coming of spring and the end of winter. However, university security reprimanded us for having a boy dancer in the snake group, and we were eventually punished and had our art space closed due to violating religious boundaries. (Participant A, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

Additionally, the influence of religion on education has resulted in censorship of textbooks and lesson plans, mainly related to pre-Islamic times. Participant B stated:

For instance, textbooks often feature censored or edited images, such as historical works containing nude photographs by renowned artists. Although such works were described in the book, the corresponding pictures were cut or absent, prompting readers to seek them elsewhere. (Participant B, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

Finally, the government's attempt to push female students into traditional roles and prioritize motherhood and wifehood was discouraging, particularly in the context of gender segregation and mandatory hijab regulations. participant D stated that:

Recently, I read on an Iranian news website that the advisor to the Minister of Education announced that the role of motherhood and wifehood had been prioritized for female

students. This attempt to push female students into traditional roles and fulfill the role of a Muslim woman is very discouraging. (Participant D, personal communication, 2, 20, 2023)

Mehran (2003) notes that historically in Iran, women have been viewed as instruments to serve specific purposes.

Iranian women in art education: Question 8

The participants discussed how being a woman in Iran impacted their art education and career. They talked about the challenges they faced in a male-dominated field and how they had to fight for recognition and equal opportunities. They also talked about how Iranian art education helped and hindered them as women. All participants noted the challenges faced by women in Iranian art education, particularly in terms of gender-based discrimination and lack of opportunities. However, participants B, C and D also noted the increasing participation of women in Iranian art education and the arts community more broadly.

Art education had exposed Iranian women to diverse perspectives and enriched their understanding of cultural history. However, the government's restrictions on art have limited opportunities for women, and they faced additional limitations due to gender discrimination; Nourai-Simone (2005) mentioned the government enforced strict dress codes and monitored moral conduct, which led to the establishment of boundaries separating men and women in public places. Visual space is controlled through the imposition of the veil and Islamic dress codes, affecting spatial mobility and visual control for both men and women. Despite these challenges, Iranian women have used art as a political resistance, with critical art becoming an effective means to participate in political struggles. The artistic sector has faced setbacks due to the economic conditions in Iran, but Iranian women continue to express their interest and involvement in the art world. They see art as a platform for self-expression and a way to address discrimination issues

against women. Additionally, art has played a crucial role in recent protests by creating revolutionary songs, posters, and artworks in Iran, with women's contributions being especially remarkable. Art, with its creative and innovative nature and healing power, makes it possible for Iranian women to become independent and break free from the constraints of gender discrimination.

One interviewee pointed out the advantages of being immersed in art, which include exposure to cultural history and diverse perspectives. Participant A states that:

One of the greatest advantages of being immersed in art and pursuing artistic education is that it exposes me to a rich cultural history and opens up my mind to diverse perspectives. Iran has a wealth of myths and symbols that are the envy of many less culturally developed countries. (Participant A, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

However, the limitations faced by women in the field of art in Iran cannot be ignored, especially when their work is restricted to government-affiliated organizations (Hedayat, Kahn, & Hanafi, 2013). Women also face censorship challenges, such as limitations on showing their faces in close-up shots in Iranian cinema. Participant B stated the following:

As a woman, I experienced additional limitations in this environment. Even female voices are censored in Iran, such as in singing and dancing. As a female filmmaker, I was not given equal opportunities compared to male artists. Moreover, showing a woman's face in close-up shots, particularly on national television, was prohibited in Iranian cinema. (Participant B, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

The interviews revealed that critical art has effectively enabled Iranian women to participate in political struggles such as recent protests in Iran despite censorship challenges. Art has provided a platform for women to express their position and rights in society.

The interviews suggest that art has played a crucial role in the recent protests in Iran, with women's contributions being especially remarkable. Art in various forms, such as revolutionary music, songs, posters, and performances, has given people hope and encouraged them to continue their struggles. Participant C stated:

One particular artwork (jewelry) that caught my attention in Instagram was a flower made in the shape of an Iranian map, with the head shaped like a cartridge and the combination of bullet, map, and woman's hair representing the recent protests. (Participant C, personal communication, 2, 18, 2023)

In terms of the economic situation, the creative sector has faced severe setbacks because art is not deemed one of society's essential requirements. Despite the precarious economic situation and the shortage of employment opportunities for the new generation of artists in Iran, they continue to express their interest in participating in the art scene and attending universities in these fields (Kousha, 2002). Participant B says:

The economic conditions of Iran and the fact that art is not deemed as one of the essential requirements of society has caused severe setbacks in the creative sector. Despite my profound interest in art, the economic situation has deeply saddened me. For example, even though I have taught in schools for several years, I was not hired as an official teacher due to the scarcity of artistic talent in schools. (Participant B, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

The rationale behind women's continued interest and involvement in art is rooted in profound psychological causes. Art provides a platform for individuals to come together and

discuss culture, current events, and other topics clearly and open-mindedly. Through art, communities are formed that fosters intellectual growth and stimulate conversation. Participant B says :

I found it fascinating that any form of art can provide a platform for women to express their position and rights in society. Schools that offer art education can create a space for women to discuss themselves and their experiences. (Participant B, personal communication, 2, 16, 2023)

The interviews reveal that these Iranian women face significant limitations in pursuing artistic careers due to gender discrimination and censorship challenges. However, art has provided a platform them to express their position and rights in society and participate in political struggles. Despite the economic setbacks, the creative sector continues to thrive, and women's contributions to the field of art cannot be ignored (Keshmirshekan, 2015). Art education has played a crucial role in shaping the perspectives and experiences in art of these Iranian women study participants.

Art education in Iran and the US: Questions 10

The participants discussed the differences between art education in Iran and the US. They contend that the US education system focuses more on conceptual and experimental approaches to art, while Iranian education focuses on technical skills and craftsmanship. Participants noted several differences between art education in Iran and the US, including differences in teaching styles, emphasis on traditional vs. contemporary art, and availability of resources and opportunities.

From the three interviews, it is clear that there are significant differences in art education between Iran and the US according to the participants. Participant A highlighted the teacher-centered nature of art education in Iran, where the teacher's primary objective is to convey concepts to the students. In contrast, Participant B noted that the American system places a significant

emphasis on continuously updating resources and lessons, with students being encouraged to read about art to develop critical thinking skills and enhance creativity. The interviewee also lamented the lack of emphasis on creativity in Iran and the absence of lesson plans for art classes. However, they acknowledged that the syllabi in Iran are more flexible, giving teachers more freedom to use different teaching methods based on their knowledge and preferences of the teachers.

Participant C added that the education system for art in Iran does not place the same emphasis on it as other subjects, and there is no serious effort to teach it in schools. Instead, students interested in art attended free schools outside regular schooling or enrolled in specialized art schools. The interviewee also highlighted the difficulty in gaining admission to art universities due to high competition, because art fields are interdisciplinary fields where students from all different backgrounds and majors can study.

The interviewees' observations suggested that Iran's art education system was lagging behind the U.S.'s in terms of creativity, emphasis on critical thinking, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The US system appeared to provide more opportunities for students to engage with art, both within and outside the classroom.

Art community strengths and weaknesses: Questions 11

The participants highlighted both the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian art community. They noted a lack of diversity in various art fields and the challenges associated with securing funding and recognition. Additionally, there was a general sentiment that community art was not emphasized enough within public schools. However, they also mentioned how the community was supportive and how artists helped each other in times of need. Participants identified several strengths of the art community in Iran, including a strong tradition of craftsmanship and technical skill, and a deep appreciation for the tradition and Islamic arts among the Iranian population. They

also mentioned that galleries, private art institutions, and theaters serve as the primary meeting places for artists and art students. Weaknesses of the art community identified by participants included a lack of institutional support and infrastructure for the arts and limited opportunities for artists to exhibit and sell their work.

One strength that is consistently highlighted is the community's ability to generate novel ideas through group private activities such as poetic night circles or drawing clubs and foster intellectual growth and conversation in such efforts to preserve the country's cultural richness despite government attempts to diminish it.

However, there were also several weaknesses that were mentioned. The segregation of male and female artists across different organizations and bodies was seen as a significant barrier to implementing group ideas, and the exclusivity of the art community makes it challenging for non-artists to engage. Additionally, the perception that art is a pastime rather than a specialized field may discourage students from pursuing it (Noaparast & Rezaei, 2014).

Another weakness mentioned by one participant is the lack of general public participation in the community's efforts to preserve the country's cultural richness, which causes the isolation of art activities. The presence of ordinary people is sometimes viewed as a weakness in the art process because artistic circles consider elitist circles and also women with weaker Islamic clothing face barriers to accessing art circles. Noaparast & Rezaei (2014) state that private art classes in Iran are seen as deviant, depriving low-income students of arts education and causing familial strife.

Overall, the interviews suggested that while the Iranian art community has many strengths, there are significant challenges that need to be addressed to make it more inclusive and accessible to a wider range of people. Also, Despite the strict rules in many schools, institutions or galleries, female students and artists continue to gather and discuss their rights. In some instances, there are

unwritten rules that attempt to limit women's activities, but many teachers and government employees allow female students and artists to engage in these activities despite the unwritten rules.

The challenges Iranian women faced as artists in Iranian society: Questions 9 &12

Both participants A and C touched on the challenges they faced as artists in Iranian society. Participant A noted that art is not highly regarded as a specialized field in Iran, which can discourage students from pursuing it. They also mention limited opportunities available to enter the art community after completing their education, which can be frustrating for aspiring artists. However, despite these obstacles, Participant A chose to continue pursuing their passion for art, recognizing its connections to other fields such as sociology, psychology, and human subjects to inter powerfully in her field as a cinema director.

On the other hand, Participant C noted that their art education helped them develop critical thinking skills by studying art trends in other societies that have been useful in navigating society. However, they also highlighted the lack of investment in art education in Iranian society when it comes to arts they know as non-Islamic arts and how it is not seen as an essential science or branch of education. This sentiment is similar to Participant A's observation that art is often regarded as a pastime rather than a specialized field.

Overall, these interviews suggested that art education and art itself can have both positive and negative effects on an individual's entry into Iranian society. While art can help develop critical thinking skills, it is not highly valued as a specialized field, which can limit opportunities for artists in the country. Additionally, the lack of investment in art in Iranian society may also hinder its potential impact.

Gender differences in art education: Questions 13

All participants discussed gender differences in art education in Iran. They talked about how female students were often given less attention and opportunities compared to male students.

Based on the interviews provided, there are clear gender differences in art education in Iran. Participants A, B, and D all mentioned some form of segregation or variation in art education based on gender.

Participant A noted that while subjects were not typically segregated, there were some variations in art education courses between male and female students in middle school. Cooking and defense training were taught to female and male students, respectively. However, it's unclear if this was a common practice throughout Iran or just at the participant's school. Participant B mentioned that in middle school, girls typically received art lessons in embroidery, weaving, and cooking, while boys were taught more practical subjects such as woodworking. This indicated a clear gender divide in the type of art education provided at the elementary school level. Participant D also noted a similar pattern of gender-based vocational and technical education in high school, with girls, taught gardening, cooking, and first aid, while boys were taught carpentry and welding.

Overall, these interviews suggest that gender-based segregation in art education is present in Iran, with girls and boys receiving different types of art education based on gender stereotypes. However, it's unclear whether this is a universal practice throughout the country or varies based on region or school.

Final thoughts: Questions 14

The participants had various final thoughts, such as the importance of preserving traditional Iranian art forms, the need for more funding and recognition for Iranian artists, and the impact of art on society such as encouraging people to move through freedom in societies where freedom

is shrinking. The responses provided some valuable insights into the Iranian art education system and the challenges faced by these Iranian artists, particularly women. They also highlighted some differences between art education in Iran and the U.S. and the strengths and weaknesses of the Iranian art community. Participants believed that critical thinking could be a powerful tool for feminist resistance through art education, enabling individuals to identify and challenge oppressive power structures, develop effective advocacy strategies, and build coalitions and solidarity in pursuit of social justice, such as solidarity which is essential to promote collective action toward social justice.

Overall, in cultures where freedom is dwindling due to the challenge of patriarchal norms, art education can play a critical role in feminist opposition. Traditional gender roles and assumptions that support dominance can be questioned and subverted through the use of art. Students who are exposed to various feminist viewpoints in art communities may be inspired to confront and question oppressive standards and expectations. Art education can give marginalized groups the power to develop a sense of community, spark action, and defy censorship (Nourai-Simone, 2005).

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

Art as a means of empowerment: while I cannot generalize based on the experience of my four participants, their responses, alongside the literature reviewed, points out the pervasiveness of education system that limits the creative freedom of women artists. Interviews discuss how art can be utilized to empower oneself. This is particularly true for Iranian women. Women may fight gender norms and claim their rights as equal members of society by using art education as a platform for self-expression and creativity. This can be especially crucial in a setting where women's voices are frequently silenced or disregarded.

Art as a form of feminist resistance: Interviews demonstrate how using art as a means of resistance against patriarchal systems and norms is possible as participant A pointed out, male and female music performances in Iran's artistic environments contradict the government's and Islam's gender-segregation ideas. The dominant narratives that support gender inequality can be challenged through art by subverting conventional gender roles and upending the status quo. As Nourai-Simone (2005) mentioned, one of the numerous forces of change that are affecting Muslim women's lives today and, in turn, are being affected by them is the growth of global communications. This can be crucial in a setting where women's agency is frequently constrained.

The role of art education is in building communities. The function of art education in creating communities is highlighted in interviews, which show how it can create networks of women committed to advancing social justice and gender equality. Nouri and Farsi (2018) believe arts education is essential for developing students' emotional, social, and cognitive abilities and can be used to facilitate learning in other disciplines. Art education may contribute to developing a feeling of community and shared purpose among women by bringing them together in creative

and collaborative undertakings. This can be crucial when women feel alone or excluded, such as Local Iranian art exhibitions that show how art education can build communities and promote social justice and gender equality. These exhibitions unite women committed to advancing these causes and create networks of individuals who share a common purpose.

The importance of accessibility: According to interviewees, all women, regardless of their social or economic circumstances, should have access to art education. According to theorist Robert Godfrey (1992), art teaches us how to convey thoughts and feelings, analyze information, accept compromise, ambiguity, and diversity, and develop ethical standards. It serves as a record of where we have been and where we are, providing education, enlightenment, and enjoyment for future generations. We can make sure that women from all backgrounds have the chance to take part in feminist resistance by offering inexpensive and accessible art education programs. This can be crucial in a situation where women from underrepresented groups may encounter more difficulties getting access to resources and education.

The need for policy change: The necessity for policy reform in Iran is highlighted by interviews, which show how important it is to promote art education as a means of feminism resistance. Participant D emphasized the importance of promoting art education as a means of feminism resistance in Iran, highlighting Shadi Ghadirian's work as a powerful example of how Iranian women's art can be used to resist patriarchal norms and promote feminist ideals. Shadi Ghadirian, therefore, serves as a role model for female artists who want to express themselves and use their art to push for social change in a restrictive environment. However, Iran's current policies and restrictions make it difficult for female artists to do so. The need for policy reform in Iran is highlighted to address this, including campaigning for more financing for art education programs, advancing gender-sensitive curriculum, and working with legislators and other stakeholders to

ensure that art education is acknowledged as a crucial instrument for achieving gender equality and social justice.

Interviews show the critical part that art education may play in fostering female resistance and social justice in Iran, such as the Iranian Female Composers Association that supports and promotes female composers in Iran to provide a platform for female composers to showcase their work and increase their visibility in the music industry, the Tehran Museum of Contemporary Art that is dedicated to showcasing contemporary art with a large collection of Iranian and international modern and contemporary art, including paintings, sculptures, and photography, and the Art Therapy Institute of Iran provides art therapy services to individuals in Iran by using art as a means of therapy to promote healing, personal growth, and self-expression which is the conclusion of this article. Education in the arts may aid in the fight against gender inequality and the advancement of women's rights by offering a platform for empowerment, resistance, community building, and accessibility such as empowerment through art workshops, community building through public art, resistance through art exhibitions, accessibility through art education programs. To guarantee that art education is acknowledged as a crucial instrument for advancing social justice and gender equality in Iran, however, continued funding and legislative reform are required.

Recommendations

Increase access to art education: More women from underserved communities, in particular, need to have easier access to art education. This can be accomplished by offering accessible and affordable art education programs across Iran. In order to make sure that art education programs are adaptable to the requirements of various communities, it is possible to build them in conjunction with regional Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and community groups.

Promote community building and cooperation: Art education may be utilized to promote community building and collaboration among women. Creating joint artistic endeavors that unite women and encourage the sharing of their viewpoints and experiences can accomplish this. This may foster a feeling of support and camaraderie among women and boost feminist resistance. One example that Participant D mentioned is art workshops in a gallery she worked in the U.S. by bringing women together to share their experiences and perspectives through artistic collaboration.

Advocate for policy change: We may encourage policymakers and other stakeholders to acknowledge the contribution that art education makes to feminism and social justice. Advocates for art education can help create a more supportive environment for women and girls to express themselves and develop their skills, contributing to gender equality and social justice in Iran. This may entail arguing for more financing for art education initiatives as well as for laws that support women's rights and gender equality in Iran.

Build partnerships with international organizations: For Iran's art education initiatives to be successful, it is important to establish collaborations with international groups that can offer guidance and funding. In order to exchange best practices, resources, and knowledge about art education and feminist resistance, this may entail working together with international NGOs, educational institutions, and cultural groups.

Need for a more inclusive approach: Despite the fact that this study focuses on Iranian women's experiences, it is crucial to understand that gender inequality affects people of both sexes. It is crucial to develop a more inclusive strategy that takes male and non-binary people into account. By doing this, we can develop a more thorough and successful plan for advancing gender equality via art education. By taking a more inclusive approach to promoting gender equality

through art education, advocates can help to ensure that their efforts are more effective and impactful and that they are able to reach a wider audience of students and artists.

The role of intersectionality: The relevance of intersectionality in comprehending Iranian women's perspectives has been demonstrated through the study. It is critical to understand that racial, ethnic, sexual, and socioeconomic characteristics as well as a woman's gender have a role in shaping her experiences. As a result, it's crucial to approach art education intersectionally and make sure that women from a variety of backgrounds may access it.

The impact of political and social context: The influence of the political and social environment: This study focuses on how Iran's political and social environment impacts the possibilities and obstacles that women in the arts confront. Consequently, while developing and putting into practice art education programs, it is crucial to comprehend and handle these contextual elements. To ensure that art education programs are in line with regional needs and priorities, this may entail collaborating with stakeholders and local organizations.

In conclusion, this research and interviews with the four female art educators from Iran highlights that the nation's feminist opposition can be effectively aided by art education. Women can question patriarchal standards, sharpen their critical thinking skills, and support marginalized perspectives through art education. Programs for art education can be created to advance social justice and gender equity by using an inclusive and intersectional strategy that takes into account the political and social environment. It is essential to note that sustained support is necessary to ensure the lasting impact of these programs. The support can come from various sources, such as government funding, institutional support, and community involvement. By providing sustained support, art education programs can continue to empower women and promote feminist resistance in Iran. This, in turn, can create a more just and equitable society for all.

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