UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ONLINE RESISTANCE AGAINST COMPULSORY HIJAB LAW IN FACEBOOK POSTINGS, IRAN

EHSAN DEHGHAN

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By

EHSAN DEHGHAN

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

December 2015

DEDICATION

To Iranian women…

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ONLINE RESISTANCE AGAINST COMPULSORY HIJAB LAW IN FACEBOOK POSTINGS, IRAN

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EHSAN DEHGHAN

December 2015

Chairman : Afida Mohamad Ali PhD
Faculty   : Modern Languages and Communication

Iran is one of the few countries in the world with laws of compulsory hijab for women, regardless of their religion. In the last couple of years, Iranian women have formed online communities to resist such laws and voice their dissent. The role of online social networks in causing social change, and the extent by which these New Media can help the process of democratization, has been a matter of increasing academic attention. However, there are not enough studies, particularly from a linguistics viewpoint, on the online resistance movement of Iranian women against compulsory hijab. This leaves a gap in our understanding of both the dynamics and strategies of such movements, and also the bigger question of whether or not New Media can be useful tools in advancing human rights, democracy, and equality. This study, employing the Discourse-Historical Approach to Critical Discourse Analysis, is an attempt to fill this gap by investigating a corpora consisting of over 500 Facebook posts by pages created for the purpose of resisting compulsory hijab in Iran. The findings of the study point to a strong dichotomization of Self and Others in the online Iranian discourse of hijab, in which the Self is comprised of Iranian women, while the Others are pro-state and pro-compulsory-hijab men. Using an array of social theories from sociology, psychology, philosophy, and feminism, it is discussed how the resistance movement under study is self-destructive, mainly due to the discourse participants' lack of awareness of how the linguistic, discursive, and argumentative strategies employed reproduce the same ideologies the Iranian women are resisting.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Master of Arts

ANALISIS WACANA KRITIS RINTANGAN DALAM TALIAN TERHADAP UNDANG-UNDANG HIJAB WAJIB DI POSTING FACEBOOK IRAN

Oleh

EHSAN DEHGHAN

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Iran merupakan salah satu daripada beberapa negara di dunia yang mempunyai hukum wajib berhijab bagi wanita, tanpa menambil kira agama mereka. Dalam beberapa tahun kebelakangan ini, wanita Iran telah membentuk komuniti dalam talian untuk menentang undang-undang itu dan menyuarakan perbezaan pendapat mereka. Peranan rangkaian sosial dalam talian dalam menyebabkan perubahan sosial, dan tahap di mana Media Baru ini dapat membantu proses pendemokrasian, telah menjadi perkara yang semakin meningkat perhatian para ahli akademik. Walau bagaimanapun, tidak ada kajian yang mencukupi pada gerakan penentangan dalam talian wanita Iran terhadap hukum wajib berhijab terutamanya dari sudut pandangan linguistik. Ini meninggalkan jurang dalam pemahaman kita tentang kedua-dua dinamik dan strategi pergerakan itu, dan juga dalam soalan yang lebih besar iaitu sama ada Media Baru boleh atau tidak berfingsi sebagai suatu alat yang berguna dalam memajukan hak asasi manusia, demokrasi, dan kesaksamaan. Kajian ini yang menggunakan pendekatan seperti Wacana-Sejarah dan Analisis Wacana Kritis, merupakan satu percubaan untuk mengisi jurang ini dengan mengkaji corpora yang terdiri daripada lebih 500 paparan oleh halaman yang dibuat di Facebook untuk tujuan menentang hukum wajib berhijab di Iran. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan proses dikotomi *Self* (Diri) dan *Others* (Lain) yang kuat dalam wacana berhijab Iran dalam talian, di mana *Self* yang terdiri daripada wanita Iran, manakala *Others* adalah pro-kerajaan dan pro-wajib-berhijab lelaki. Menggunakan pelbagai teori-teori sosial dari psikologi, falsafah, sosiologi, dan feminisme, kajian ini membincangkan bagaimana gerakan penentangan rujukan tersebut merosakkan diri, terutamanya kerana kurangnya kesedaran dari pihak peserta wacana tentang bagaimana strategi linguistik, diskursif, dan juga argumentatif yang digunakan dapat menghasilkan ideologi yang sama dengan ideologi yang ditentang oleh wanita Iran.

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Acknowledging all the people and factors contributing to this thesis is an impossible task.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 22 December 2015 to conduct the final examination of Ehsan Dehghan on his thesis entitled "Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Resistance Against Compulsory Hijab Law in Facebook Postings, Iran" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Master of Arts.

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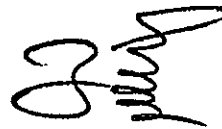Universiti Putra Malaysia
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- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CDA: Critical Discourse Analysis

DHA: Discourse-Historical Approach

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Formation of Context

Iran is one of the few countries in the world imposing laws on compulsory hijab on all women, Muslim or non-Muslim. This necessitates a brief introduction to the context in which this study has been done, since the peculiarity of the Iranian discursive environment surrounding the concept of hijab makes it a unique study setting, in many ways different from other environments in which hijab has been studied, interpreted, debated, and discussed.

The notion of hijab has been shown to be of a more historical rather than religious nature in different cultures and geographical settings (Bedmar & Palma, 2010; Hoodfar, 1993; Shirazi & Mishra, 2010). In Iran, covering the body has been practiced since thousands of years ago. Archaeological and anthropological findings in sites dating back to the pre-Islamic era of Iran, such as the stone carvings in Persepolis, dating back to 2500 years ago, point to the fact that a form of hijab was practiced in Iran at the time. However, after the introduction of Islam to the country with the invasion of Umar in 637, the form of hijab practiced in Iran underwent significant alterations (Afary & Anderson, 2005).

In 1687, Muhammad Baqir Majlisi became a religious leader whose ideas heavily influenced those of the Safavid King, Sultan Hussein Shah (r. 1694-1722). His *fitwas* put several restrictions on Iranian women, and the concept of hijab turned from a form of cultural clothing to a more political means of limiting women. The new rules and *fitwas* by Majlisi required women not to leave home without a legitimate reason, not to stroll in gardens, and to move out of their private space *(harem)* only with the permission of their husbands or legal guardians (Afary & Anderson, 2005).

The rise of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1925 brought upon a series of reformations towards a more modernized Iran. The modernization process, triggered by Reza Shah Pahlavi, aimed at narrowing the gap between the West and Iran, both industrially and culturally. In the cultural sphere, Reza Shah passed laws against hijab, and more specifically, the traditional veil – which is called *Chador* in Iran. This law, which is known as '*Kashf-e-Hijab*' or de-veiling, banned the use of Chador, headscarf, or any cover on the head by women. The enforcement of de-veiling was violently practiced by the police force (Hoodfar, 1993).

At the time of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, who became the second king of the Pahlavi dynasty in 1941, the anti-hijab law was not enforced as radically as in his father's time. Nonetheless, Western values were still a matter of heated debate, especially in academic circles. During the years prior to the 1979 revolution, some groups of academics and intellectuals questioned the advancement of Western values, and regarded Islamic hijab for women a culture to be maintained. In social spaces, however, women were free to choose their type of clothing, whether Islamic or Westernized. Later, during the 1979 revolution, hijab turned to become a symbol of

resistance and protest, and crowds of women used hijab to show their opposition to the Western values imposed by the Pahlavi regime, although they did not wear hijab before the revolution (Afary & Anderson, 2005; Hoodfar, 1993).

1.1.1 Compulsory Veiling in Iran

In 1979, millions of people with different and sometimes contradictory presumptions and ideologies, but one shared objective, joined each other on the streets of Tehran and other cities in a revolution to overthrow Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi. After the exile of Muhammad Reza Shah and victory of people, Ayatullah Khomeini was invited back to Iran to become the Supreme Leader. This event was the beginning of a new era for Iran. After many years, this was the first government in Iran favoring a theocratic democracy.

The new political system after the revolution, formed after a referendum on 30th and 31st of March, 1979, is known as 'the Islamic Republic'. During the referendum, 98% of the voters were in favor of an Islamic regime.

However, the rollercoaster of the events leading to the revolution meant that the public was not completely aware of what exactly was meant by an Islamic Republic (Afary & Anderson, 2005). The two words in the title of the new political system, combining an Islamic theocracy and a republic democracy, promised a bright future for Iranians, a future containing their revolutionary goals: maintaining their religion and religious values, and at the same time, putting them in control of their destiny by giving them rights to influence decision making in political circles.

What was missing from the calculations was the challenge of priorities and balance. Before the revolution, it had not been clarified how to balance religious principles with democratic prerogatives. In other words, it was not clear for the people how to solve contradictions emerging from opposing values of Islamic rules and democratic ones. What if the public, following democratic principles, voted for something against which there existed Islamic rules? Which part of the two-word label had a higher priority in decision making, the 'Islamic theocracy' or the 'Republic democracy'?

During the first years after the victory of the revolution, the answer to these questions revealed itself: the Shia clergymen, now in political power, decided that Islam (or at least their interpretation of it) was the higher priority (Afary & Anderson, 2005; Razavi, 2006).

The first case of such a contradiction emerged only 24 days after the victory of Islamic Revolution, when Khomeini requested women to appear with an Islamic hijab in all governmental buildings (Justice for Iran, 2014). The next day - 8th March 1980, the International Women Day- thousands of women protested against the new rule. The protest was supported by both veiled and unveiled women, who believed an imposition of hijab meant violation of women's democratic rights. The protest was suppressed violently by police and para-military groups, and the subsequent chain of events eventually led to compulsory hijab for all Iranian women in all places. In 1983, hijab was officially included in the jurisprudential texts as a law, violation of which could be followed by a fine, imprisonment, or exile (ibid.).

Although there is some debate among Islamic scholars regarding the limits of hijab, and the parts of body to be covered, almost all Muslim scholars agree on a series of practices, such as covering the hair (See 2.2.1). On the contrary, the Iranian government has maintained a vague position concerning the issue of hijab, with guidelines being set, modified, or changed over time, along with the fashion of the year. For example, criteria defining or limiting the color of clothing, its tightness or looseness, wearing of boots over trousers, stretch pants and alike have been added to regulations of dress codes over the years.

What follows is a brief timeline of the events, rules, and actions regarding compulsory hijab in Iran, derived from an in-depth report by Justice for Iran Foundation. Only the most important events, especially those included in the laws, are reported here (Justice for Iran, 2014).

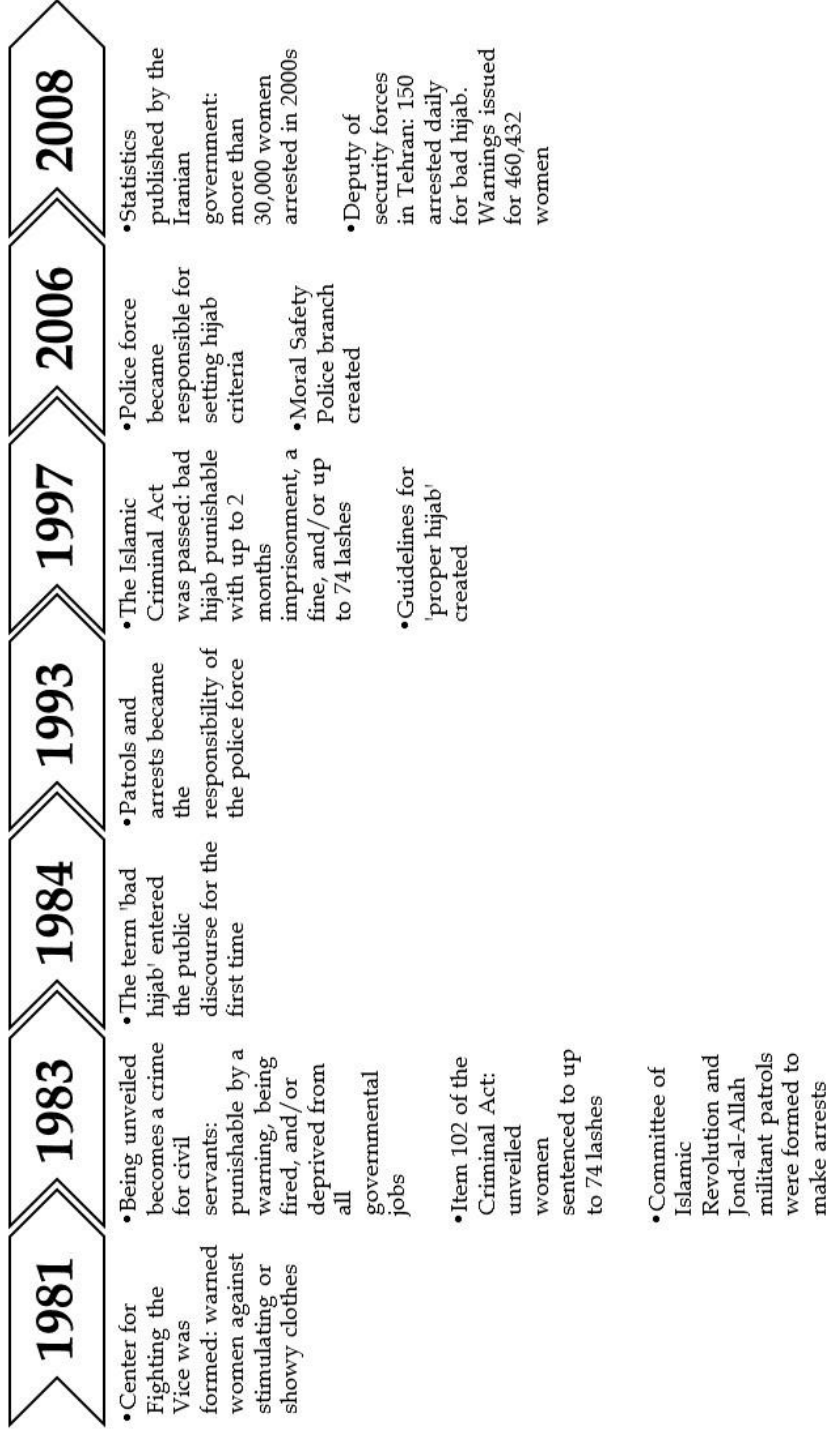| 1981	1983	1984	1993	1997	2006	2008
• Center for Fighting the Vice was formed: warned women against stimulating or showy clothes	• Being unveiled becomes a crime for civil servants: punishable by a warning, being fired, and/or deprived from all governmental jobs • Item 102 of the Criminal Act: unveiled women sentenced to up to 74 lashes • Committee of Islamic Revolution and Jond-al-Allah militant patrols were formed to make arrests	• The term "bad hijab' entered the public discourse for the first time	• Patrols and arrests became the responsibility of the police force	• The Islamic Criminal Act was passed: bad hijab punishable with up to 2 months imprisonment, a fine, and/or up to 74 lashes • Guidelines for 'proper hijab' created	• Police force became responsible for setting hijab criteria • Moral Safety Police branch created	• Statistics published by the Iranian government: more than 30,000 women arrested in 2000s • Deputy of security forces in Tehran: 150 arrested daily for bad hijab. Warnings issued for 460,432 women

Figure 1 1: Timeline of Hijab Laws in Iran

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1.1.2 Political System in Iran

Before discussing the present situation of Iranian women in general, and compulsory hijab laws in specific, it is important to point to a complex political matter in Iran, often overlooked by the public during key political events, such as presidential elections.

As it was discussed in 1.1.1 and 1.1.2, the dual nature of the political system after the 1979 revolution, bearing the title "the Islamic Republic," has serious contradictions within it. One contradiction coming to light is solving the balance between a theocracy and a democracy.

The result of this contradiction in Iran is the simultaneous presence of both democratic and non-democratic political institutions in the body of the government, all under the supervision of the Supreme Leader, currently being Ayatullah Khamenei.

The political hierarchy in Iran can briefly be presented in the following fashion:

- x The Supreme Leader
- x The three branches of the political system:
    - o Judicial Branch
    - o Legislative Branch
    - o Executive Branch

The judicial branch is responsible for executing the laws passed by the legislative branch of the government, and includes courts and the police force. The head of the judicial branch of the government in Iran, known as the Chief Justice, is directly assigned by the Supreme Leader. Therefore, the judicial branch of the government is among the non-democratic institutions in politics of Iran, since people have no effect in selecting or electing its head or members.

The legislative branch, which is responsible for passing laws, is a democratic political institution, the members of which form the parliament of Iran, and are elected every four years by people.

However, all the laws passed in the parliament have to be confirmed by the Guardian Council, also known as the Constitutional Council. Therefore, if the Guardian Council concludes that a law passed by the government is against the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran or Islamic laws, the law will not be confirmed. The Guardian Council consists of 12 jurists, 6 or whom are assigned directly by the Supreme Leader, and the other 6 selected by the Chief Justice. In cases where there is a dispute over a law between the parliament and the Guardian Council, another political institution, the Expediency Council, resolves the dispute. Interestingly, the Expediency Council is comprised of 44 permanent members, all of whom are assigned directly by the Supreme Leader.

This complex web of councils over councils means that it is ensured no law will be passed by the parliament, as an ironically democratic institution, which is against the ideological standpoints of the Supreme Leader and his proponents. Moreover, it is also noteworthy that as it was previously mentioned, the laws in Iran are not only passed

based on legal considerations or democratic choices of people. A very important aspect of jurisprudence in Iran, having a higher priority than the legal aspect, is a law's compatibility with the Shia faith.

The only other democratic institution in the Iranian political system is the head of the executive branch, the president of Iran, who is elected by people every four years. However, the multi-level, highly non-democratic web of institutions controlling the laws and their execution leaves the president not powerful enough to make substantial changes in the political or judicial spheres.

Another important factor in the Iranian political system is the role of the Guardian Council in all the democratic elections. In all elections, the candidates must first be approved by the Guardian Council. That is, ironically perhaps, people have the right to democratically elect their president or members of the parliament, but only from candidates selected by a non-democratic institute.

Finally, the role of the Supreme Leader must not be ignored at all. Historically, there have been cases where the disputes among the political figures have not been easily resolved and have continued for months. In such rare cases, the Supreme Leader can use his privileges over all the branches of the government, and pass a sentence, even beyond the constitution, to put an end to the disputes. This is referred to as *Dastoor-e-Velaei*, roughly translated into 'Order by the Guardian'. The term guardian in this phrase refers to the Supreme Leader in Iran, currently being Ayatullah Khamenei.

It should be clear now why I put an emphasis on the importance of understanding the political system in Iran. In 1.1.1, it was briefly pointed that in the Iranian system of government, the contradiction between theocracy and democracy was resolved in favor of the theocratic side. Moreover, what appears to be a democratic system of elections and politics can be seen as merely an illusion of democracy, giving people no real power over policy-making processes. The significance of this political system and its complexity will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Figure 1-2 presents this complex political hierarchy in a visual way. Noticing the red and green arrows in the figure can illustrate what was referred to as the illusion of democracy in Iran.
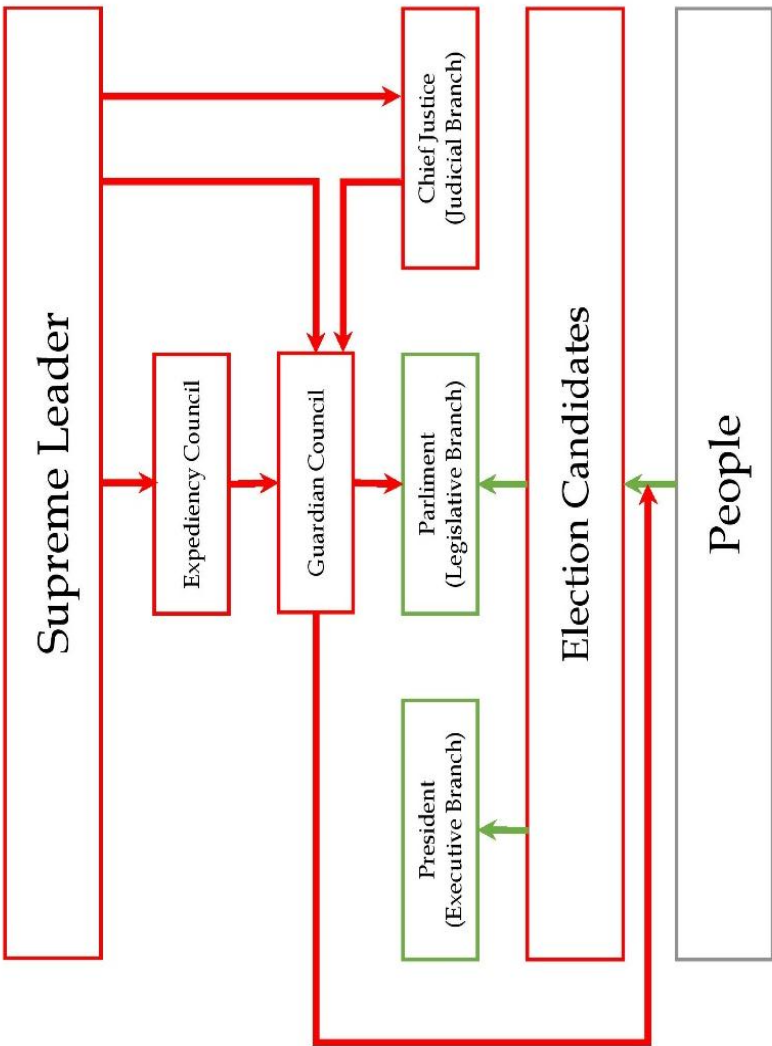
Figure 1-2: Political System in Iran. Red arrows represent non-democratic institutions, and the green show democratic ones.

As it can be seen in the diagram, the only democratic branches of the political system in Iran are the legislative branch (the parliament) and the executive branch (the president). However, the candidates for these branches are first confirmed by the Guardian Council, whose members are selected non-democratically. Furthermore, any laws and bills passed by the parliament need to be evaluated by the Guardian Council before they can become executable. Such a system ensures that the democratic branches of the political system are always in tune with the non-democratic branches, which are directly in line with the Supreme Leader's ideology.

1.1.3   The Present Situation

The current president of Iran, following Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a radical fundamentalist, is Hassan Rohani, a moderate conservative. He is a clergy holding a degree in law, and during his presidential campaign, he made a number of promises to Iranian people, including a promise to eliminate the Morality Police, make economic reforms, observe human rights, focus more on women's rights, etc. (Hasan Miri, 2013). Iranian people, overlooking the complexities of the political system in Iran, and with hopes of a brighter future after the presidency of Ahmadinejad, supported Rohani widely.

Nevertheless, the series of events after Rohani's becoming the president, proved once more the stronger hand the fundamentalist Shia jurisprudence has in Iranian power relations. In the following section, I will briefly present a number of events happening during the first year of the presidency of Hassan Rohani. Obviously, I will report only the events relating to the situation of Iranian women and hijab.

Contrary to a promise of eliminating the Morality Police, this section of the armed forces is still present in all major cities, continuing to issue arrests and warrants for women and men with bad hijab (BBC Persian, 2014; Tabnak.ir, 2013). Moreover, just recently, a session of the parliament meetings was dedicated to showing videos of non-conformist women in Iran, requesting harsher measures to be taken against them (Tabnak.ir, 2014b). At present, there is talk of a new law to be passed concerning *Amr –e- be Ma'roof va Nahi –e- az Monkar,* a Shi'a value meaning "Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice". According to reports, this law will support people who try to promote virtues such as hijab, and enable them to make citizen arrests concerning hijab (ISNA.ir, 2014).

Moreover, a non-governmental militant group, identifying itself as *Ansar -e- Hezbollah*, which was inactive during the last decade, has recently announced its concerns about women's hijab in Iran, and has announced that its independent motorcycle patrols will be resuscitated soon to confront women with bad hijab (Tabnak.ir, 2014e; Yalasarat.com, 2014).

Another surprising turn of events was the passing of a new law, following the Supreme Leader's requests of increasing the Iranian population, which incriminates any contraceptive surgery, such as Vasectomy and Tubectomy (Tabnak.ir, 2014a, 2014c). This amount of control over bodies of men and women has been unprecedented in Iran.

Finally, a very recent decision by the Municipality of Tehran imposed sexual segregation in all branches of the municipality, firing all women holding official positions in the Municipality of Tehran (Tabnak.ir, 2014d), backing this decision with the claim that it is against Islamic principles and values that a woman works long hours alongside men, often leaving them alone together in an office (Tabnak.ir, 2014f).

Despite all the promises of reform and equality, president Rohani has not been able (or willing) to meet his promises. Even the most optimistic observer of the situation in Iran comes to the conclusion that the situation of women in Iran, if not worsened drastically, has not seen any changes under the presidency of Hassan Rohani.

1.1.4   Online Protest and Activism

In recent years, a number of Facebook pages have been created to show Iranian women's resistance, and protest laws of compulsory hijab in Iran. One of these pages, known as "My Stealthy Freedoms", was created by an Iranian journalist, Masih Alinejad, who had to leave Iran to escape prosecutions. In her page, she encourages Iranian women to post their photographs without hijab and write about their experiences, opinions, etc. This page has received wide international attention, and currently has more than 856000 'likes'. The other pages, which are also included in the data corpus of this study, have not published the name of their administrators. They, too, have been created for the same purpose. Iranian women post their narratives of experiences as a woman in Iran, their confrontations with the laws of compulsory hijab, post their photographs, etc.

This new trend has opened a discourse of resistance and protest for some Iranian women, where they can find a voice, and freely speak out their dissidence. This very newly-opened discourse has created the foundation of the present study. The young age of the discourse leaves unanswered questions about the nature and content of the resistance movement, and ideologies of the Iranian women participating in it. Therefore, the present study will focus on such data as its primary source.

1.2 Problem Statement

Equality, human rights, and freedom are values central to the world thinking today. It is almost impossible to find politicians who do not use these terms in their public discourse. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, created in 1949, is observed by all members of the United Nations. Unfortunately, however, the wide gap between theoretically affirming these rights, and practically respecting them is hugely felt in some countries, up to the point that one might feel the twain shall never meet. Iran is one of the countries in which half of the population (49.26 per cent according to the latest consensus) have been deprived of some of their basic rights for almost three decades. Iranian women, facing inequalities in their everyday life, including legally imposed limitations in their choice of clothing (See 1.1.1 and 1.1.3), have long been deprived of a space to voice their opinions.

In recent years, however, with a relative rise in the use of the internet (61.7% penetration ratio in Iran, as of 2013), and online social networking services, such as Facebook, some Iranian women have found a domain to express their dissidence against the laws of compulsory hijab. Several Facebook pages have been created to express such protests, in which these women post their photographs without the governmentally approved hijab, write about their experiences, feelings, and ideas regarding the issue, and form an online activist community, united in protesting and abolishing such laws and practices.

A large number of studies have been done on hijab (Al-Balagh, 2015; Bilge, 2010; El Guindi, 1999; Macdonald, 2006), compulsory hijab in Iran (Afshar, 1998; de Groot, 2010; Justice for Iran, 2014; Poya, 1999; Terman, 2010), the woman question (Bordo, 1993; Evans, 2011; Mir-Hosseini, 2006; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 1993), and the situation of Iranian women (Afshar, 1998; Hoodfar, 1993; Poya, 1999; Shirazi & Mishra, 2010). However, almost all these studies have been done either from legal and religious points of views, or have focused on the dominant ideology and governmental practices. Virtually no studies have been done or published up to this moment on the resistance movement, the discourse of Iranian women themselves, or the online activism regarding the issue of compulsory hijab in Iran, especially from a discourse analytical point of view.

Taking this dearth of studies into account, and the aforementioned significance of doing such studies, the present research is an attempt to fill this gap by critically analyzing the discourse of such online resistance movements, in order to shed more light on the ideologies motivating such causes. In practical domains, the findings of this study can help achieve a deeper understanding of the situation, the movement, and its pitfalls, and thus providing the activists, academics, and the public with more knowledge and tools in their battle against the existing inequalities.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The present study lays bare its noteworthiness when one takes into account the complex relationship between discourses and human experiences. The totality of discourses, forming the body of knowledge of humans at a given time, is heavily under the influence of power relations in a society, defining the identities and access levels of

individuals in a society (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2012). In Foucauldian terms, it is the discourse which defines "who can speak", "what about one can speak", and "what one can say" (McNeil, 1993). Given this complexity, and the implications thereof, it becomes clear why a researcher needs to unravel the power-knowledge relations circulating among the discourses in a society.

One instance of power relations within discourses is particularly seen in the discourse of the media. With the emergence of Web 2.0, new media, and in turn new discourses came into life. As a result, some of the previous theorizations of discourse and power relations faced new challenges. The participatory nature of Web 2.0 and New Media gave more freedom and power to the general public, who in older theories were considered solely as users of mass media. This culture of 'produsage' (Bruns, 2007) turned each and every individual into a user and producer at the same time, giving them more power than was previously pictured.

A manifestation of this newly-born power and freedom through the New Media is seen in the discourse of resistance to compulsory hijab in Iran. This young discourse, having been circulating in New Media circles for only a few years, has enabled some Iranian women to voice their opinion and protest such laws in Iran.

Consequently, this study is significant in two ways. Firstly, due to the relatively young age of the discourse of online resistance via the New Media, the present body of literature is not yet conclusive on whether the New Media has the potential to influence any real changes in the civic and communal life of people, and if so, how it can be utilized to cause any hypothetical changes (Boyd, 2008). Therefore, by taking into account one of the manifestations of resistance via New Media, which is the topic of this study, the present research can contribute to finding an answer for this question.

Secondly, on a practical/political level, this research will shed more light on the limitations, inherent problems, and also strengths of such a resistance movement. Both the political activists working in these areas and the policy makers in Iran can potentially benefit from the findings of this study. For activists, these findings might help discover the potentials, pitfalls, and shortcomings of their movement, helping them reform their policies if they deem necessary. As for the political leaders of Iran, the findings can make them aware of the general public's desires, motives, and demands through an in-depth analysis of their discourse. This can help them make reformations in their policies towards hijab, and perhaps coming to a balanced situation in which both the public and the policy makers can benefit. Of course, this can happen if they are willing to do so (more on this in Chapter 5).

Finally, and again in an academic/theoretical landscape, this research will point to methodological, analytical, and conceptual issues of doing CDA in the New Media. This can help future researchers working on online participatory platforms.

I hope the present study can achieve its desired objectives, and open up spaces for the public and also academia for more work towards emancipation of the marginalized groups, and theorization of online acts of protest.

1.4   Research Objectives

This research was done revolving around one main objective, which is to investigate the linguistic, discursive, and ideological aspects of the online resistance movement to compulsory hijab in Iran.

The specific objectives of the research can be listed as:

- To investigate how social actors, actions, phenomena, events, etc. pertaining to compulsory hijab in Iran are represented linguistically.
- To explore the strategies used to discursively construct social actors, actions, phenomena, events, etc.
- To understand the ideological stance of the social actors and discourse participants active in the movement under study.

1.5   Research Questions

With regards to the aforementioned objectives, four research questions are formulated for the present study:

1. How are social actors, actions, phenomena, and processes related to compulsory hijab linguistically represented in the discourse under study?

   a. How are 'Self' and 'Others' referred to?
   b. What qualities and attributes are assigned to them?

2. What are the discursive strategies used by the pages and individuals posting in them in constructing and representing social actors, actions, phenomena, and processes?

   a. What are the most recurrent discursive themes and strategies?
   b. How are Self, Others, and relevant issues perspectivized or framed?
   c. What argumentation processes are used?

3. What are the ideologies underlying discursive representations of 'Self' and 'Others' regarding the compulsory hijab in Iran?

4. How do these linguistic representations, discursive strategies, and ideological assumptions serve to influence, change, or maintain the status quo?

1.6   Theoretical Framework

This study is located within the domain of Critical Discourse Analysis, henceforth referred to as CDA. Critical Discourse Analysis is identified by seminal scholars of the field not as a discipline with rigid methodologies to be dogmatically followed by the researcher, but rather a school, an attitude, or a research program (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Therefore, the various analytical tools and approaches developed by prominent figures in this field are applied in this study. In other words, the present research will be eclectic in two ways, by following the eclectic nature of Critical Discourse Analysis itself, and by combining the various tools and principles used in different CDA methodologies and approaches.

However, the main approach to CDA used in this project is the Discourse-Historical Approach, developed by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl, henceforth known as DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009).

A point accurately observed by Wodak is how different scholars working under the umbrella term Discourse Analysis use and define the most common terms, such as discourse, power, and ideology (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). In light of this, it seems necessary to address the terminology of the research before moving to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks employed.

1.6.1   Discourse

What is meant by the term 'discourse' in this study follows its usage in theories of Jürgen Link. He defines discourse as: "an institutionalized way of talking that regulates and reinforces action and thereby exerts power." (Wodak & Meyer, 2009 p.25)
Wodak and Reisigl conceptualize 'discourse' to be:

   x   "A cluster of context-dependent semiotic practices that are situated within specific fields of action
   x   Socially constituted and socially constitutive
   x   Related to a macro-topic
   x   Linked to the argumentation about validity claims such as truth and normative validity involving several social actors who have different points of view" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009).

1.6.2   Discourse Participants and Social Actors

In this study, a discourse participant or social actor is defined as any individual, entity, or group, who either has an active role in a given discourse, or is represented positively or negatively by the other individuals or entities. The two terms are used interchangeably in this study, and include the Iranian women posting on the Facebook pages under investigation, as well as the other entities they focus on and represent in their discourse, such as Iranian men, politicians, foreigners, etc. Therefore, both the Self and the Others are considered as social actors or discourse participants in the present study.

1.6.3   Critique

Epistemologically, DHA follows the socio-philosophical orientations of the Critical Theory. Therefore, the concept of critique for DHA has three related aspects:

1- *Text* or *discourse-immanent critique*, which aims at discovering "inconsistencies, self-contradictions, paradoxes and dilemmas inside the text or the discourse."

2- *Socio-diagnostic critique*, which is concerned with demystifying the discursive practices and their persuasive/manipulative character, both in the more visible and manifest levels and the less visible and latent. In this step, the contextual knowledge and social theories play an important role.

3- Future-related *prospective critique,* which seeks to contribute to the improvement of communication. In this level, the critique and criticism of the findings will be used to provide more knowledge, and in cases guidelines, for the public and other researchers (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009 p.88).

Such an understanding of critique means that the analyst's own position, and the object under investigation must be clearly and explicitly introduced. In any case, a critique is at best 'a situated critique'. Particularly, all critique comes from within a discourse, and although the analyst tries to distance herself/himself from the discursive data, she/he cannot become completely detached from all discourses. In accordance with poststructuralist notions of discourse, there is no reality outside of the discursive (Derrida, 1998; Foucault, 1995). Therefore, an analyst is simply drawing from another theory, another perspective, or another discourse in order to critique a given discourse. For example, in a critique about resistance against compulsory hijab, which is the focus of this research, an analyst cannot merely critique this notion without locating one's claims either within Islamic discourses, or another discourse, such as Human Rights, Liberal Democracy, poststructuralism, etc. This view of discourse, therefore, requires the researcher to explicitly position oneself, and make clear one's critical stance regarding the discourse under investigation.

A final point about the term 'critique', and also the label 'critical' in CDA, is a misconception often found in works written against this approach. This misconception arises from a confusion between the two nouns creating the adjective 'critical': critique and criticism.

Perhaps this quote by Michel Foucault can best explain the distinction between the two:

> *"A critique does not consist in saying that things aren't good the way they are. It consists in seeing on just what type of assumptions, of familiar notions, of established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based... To do criticism is to make harder those acts which are now too easy"* (Foucault, 2001 p.456).

In Chapter 5, the discussion of the findings will be done under this distinction between critique and criticism.

1.6.4   Principles of DHA

Wodak summarizes the main principles of DHA in ten statements:

1- "The approach is interdisciplinary. Interdisciplinarity involves theory, methods, methodology, research practice, and practical application.
2- The approach is problem-oriented.
3- Various theories and methods are combined, wherever integration leads to an adequate understanding and explanation of the research object.
4- The research incorporates fieldwork and ethnography (study from 'inside'), where required for a thorough analysis and theorizing of the object under investigation.
5- The research necessarily moves recursively between theory and empirical data.
6- Numerous genres and public spaces, as well as intertextual and interdiscursive relationships are studied.
7- The historical context is taken into account in interpreting texts and discourses. The historical orientation permits the reconstruction of how recontextualizaiton functions as an important process linking texts and discourses intertextually and interdiscursively over time.
8- Categories and tools are not fixed once and for all. They must be elaborated for each analysis according to the specific problem under investigation.
9- 'Grand-theories' often serve as a foundation. In the specific analyses, however, 'middle-range theories' frequently supply a better theoretical basis.
10- The application of results is an important target. Results should be made available to and applied by experts and be communicated to the public" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001, 2009).

A summary of the theoretical and conceptual framework of this research project, moving from what Wodak calls 'grand-theories' to tools and methods, can be summarized in Figure 1-3. Each of these will be discussed in greater detail in Chapters 2 and 3.
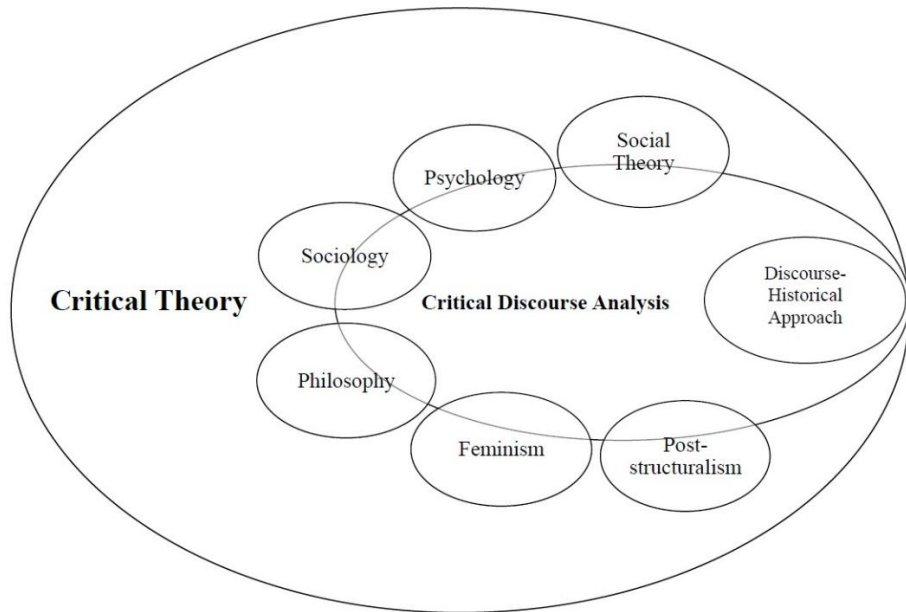
Figure 1-3: Theoretical Framework

Figure 1-4 provides a visual representation of the Discourse Historical Approach, and how discourse and representation is seen and analyzed in this framework. The details and explanations of each section will be provided in Chapter 3.
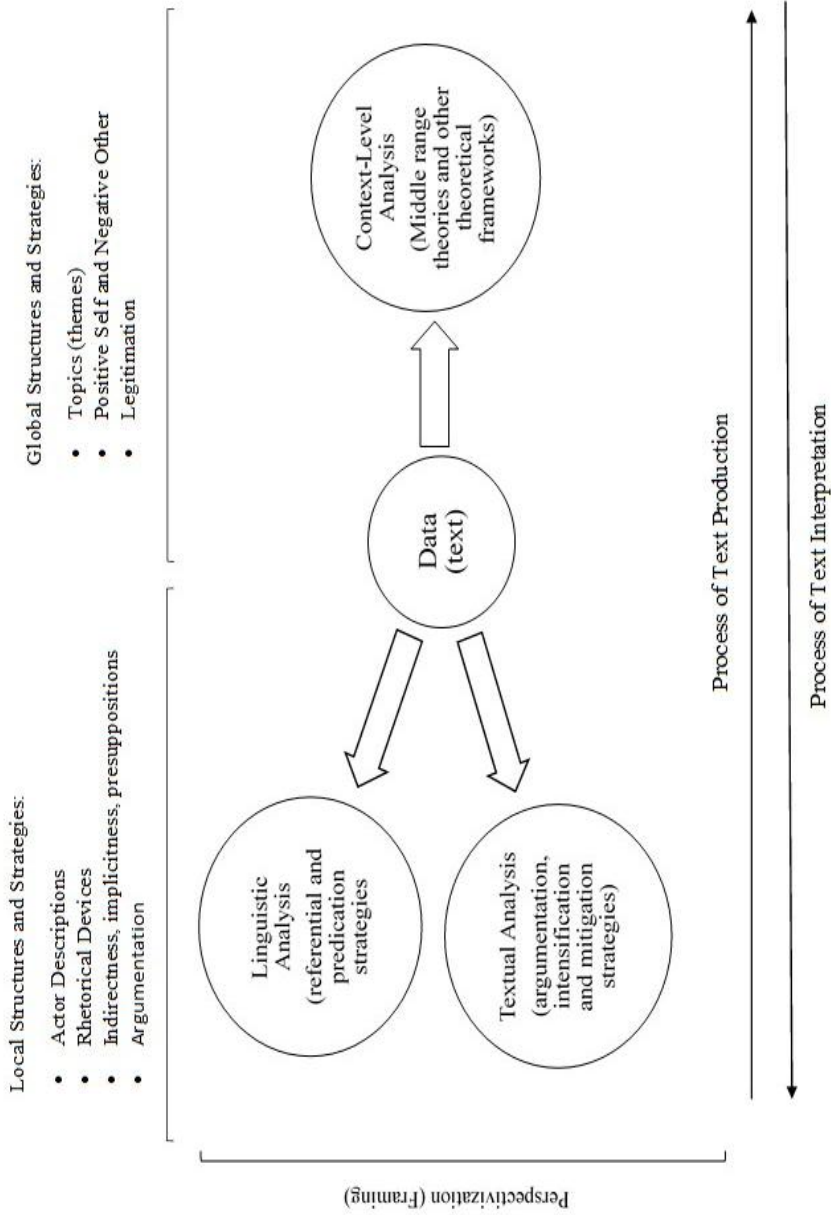
Figure 1 4: Conceptual Framework of the study

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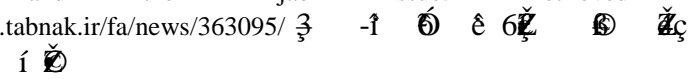
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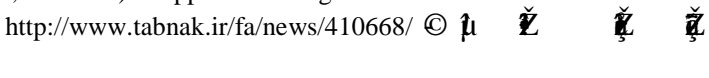Serjoie, K. A. (2014). Young Iranians Stay Home in Fear of Acid Attacks. *Time*. Retrieved from http://time.com/3534179/young-iranians-stay-home-in-fear-of-acid-attacks/

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