

Collaboration of Islamic Scholars and feminist publication, the case of “Rejaal”¹ and the expediency of women to stand for the presidential election.

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Abstract

This paper proposes an analytical framework, which is used to capture the counterhegemonic project undertaken by Iranian feminist publications as an element of feminist civil society (FCS). This framework draws on a Gramscian perspective on civil society as a potential empowering terrain in which subordinated social groups can change the relations of power through raising collective critical consciousness, confronting the hegemonic discourse of the dominant group, and articulating counterhegemonic discourse. It also utilizes Bakhtinian “Dialogism” to explore how a document -produced by a feminist publication- communicate its ideological positions to promote empowerment and whether/how, their counterhegemonic project is in accordance with the Gramscian perspective on hegemonic battle. I demonstrate the usefulness of this framework through an analysis of one key publication, which discusses the use of the term Rejaal in political decision making around “if women can stand for presidential election”.

By using a Gramscian-Bakhtinian analytical framework to analyse the above-mentioned document, this paper demonstrates how the author i.e., an Islamic scholar is able to challenge hegemonic discourses regarding gendered political power relations in Iran. In so doing, I show how the document creates a heteroglot environment in which diverse voices/discourses condition each other including the dominant patriarchal discourse, which, consequently, culminates in confrontation of the hegemonic patriarchal discourse. Lastly, this paper contends that the dialogue between FCS (here, feminist publication) and progressive religious scholars provides social actors in FCS with critical approaches toward religion that can be mobilized in favour of women's rights.

Key words: Women Empowerment, Power, Hegemony, Civil Society/State, Feminist Civil Society.

Introduction

A significant body of literature demonstrates that the empowerment of women and achievement of gender equality are catalysing the attainment of sustainable human development, peace, and good governance (UN Women, 2013b, Potter, 2004, UN, 2014, United Nations Global Impact, 2018). Thus, it is argued that governments should be committed to guaranteeing gender equality and equal opportunities for women to participate in the social, economic, and political realms (UN Women, 2013a). In contexts where there is an observed absence of accountable government mechanisms, which address the status of women in society, many argue that civil society can be a potential channel through which women can exercise socio- political power and articulate their agenda (Potter, 2004, Phillips, 2002; Howell and Mulligan, 2005; Pateman, 1988).

The following section illustrates the research problem i.e., political underrepresentation of Iranian women and the significance of feminist civil society in promoting political women's empowerment in Iran.

The research problem: Political underrepresentation of women in Iran

In relation to the Iranian political sphere, it is widely understood that women are denied equal rights to work in specific political roles under the law. These areas include the Supreme Leader (Article 109), the Head of the

¹ *Rejaal*, is a Quranic term that is referenced in IR Constitution (Article 115) regarding “whether women can stand for presidential position. While the literal meaning of this- formal and classic- term refers to men, Islamic scholars interpreted it as religious and political person.

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Judiciary (Article 157), the six members of the Guardian Council (Article 91), the General Attorney, and the Head of the Supreme Court (Article 162)³.

Additionally, being a judge is seen to be an exclusive right for men, although, women can be appointed to certain judicial positions including counsellors and investigators. There is no written legal impediment to women being elected as members of parliament or ministers in the cabinet in Iran (Nayeri 2013), yet women have never succeeded to occupy more than five percent of the seats in the parliament since 1990 (UN data 2014). The same percentage of women (five percent of the seats) have managed to hold ministerial positions (UNICEF, 2011).

Similarly, the appointment of a woman as the president has always been a controversial issue. According to the Article 115 of the IRI constitution, 'the president must be selected from political and religious Rejaal. The term Rejaal has raised substantial legal debates. While some (majority) interpret Rejaal as 'men' (Nayeri 2013), women's right activists among whom many are from devout Muslim backgrounds, contend that the term does not essentially refer exclusively to men rather it means 'a person' (Bahramitash, 2007). However, the Guardian Council has never approved a woman as a candidate for presidential election since the Revolution in 1979 (Nayeri 2013).

In light of the above situation, it can be concluded that FCS in Iran is located in a context that involves gender discriminatory laws and limited political representation in a range of various positions. Arguably, this situation is significant in shaping calls for social change. Thus, in this study, I will investigate how collaboration of an Islamic scholar and feminist publication can promote Iranian women's political representation in this context. These are significant areas since, as the above account shows, discrimination and oppression are not merely culturally practiced, but are also explicit at the institutional level - making it visible to those experiencing being women in this context.

The forthcoming section will discuss the research aim and research questions as well as the analytical framework proposed by this research. The discourse analysis of the document -using the Gramscian-Bakhtinian framework- will be followed.

Research aims and research questions

This paper reports on research, which examines the collaboration of Islamic scholars and feminist publication- as an emergent feminist civil society (FCS) - in championing gender inequality in Iran. Using discourse analysis, this paper also explores a) how the documents written by an Islamic scholar and published by feminist publication can support women's empowerment in Iran, b) how they articulate and communicate their ideologies, c) and how these ideologies are positioned in relation to the ideologies of the state (Iranian government).

Theory and methodology

This paper proposes an analytical framework, which is used to identify the counter-hegemonic project undertaken by Islamic scholar author(s) within feminist publication. This framework draws on a Gramscian perspective on civil society as a potentially emancipating terrain in which subordinated social groups- including women- can change the relations of power. It also utilizes Bakhtinian "Dialogism"⁴ - as a conceptual tool- to explore how documents produced by FCS (feminist publication) communicate their ideological positions to promote empowerment in accordance with Gramscian perspective on hegemonic battle as means of power transformation. I demonstrate the potential usefulness of this framework through discourse analysis of one key publication, which discusses the use of the term Rejaal in political decision-making around "if women can stand for presidential election".

I chose to focus on the (Quranic) term Rejaal since this is the only term- used in the Islamic Republic's constitution- to determine that women cannot be approved as an eligible presidential candidate⁵.

The author of the document analysed in this paper discusses the interpretation of Rejaal by Islamic scholars in the early history of Islam, the lawmakers in Islamic Republic (IR), and progressive contemporary Islamic scholars. It is worth mentioning that the author of this article is a high profiled (male) religious scholar, however, the article is published in a feminist Journal. This author has written a dozen articles concerning women's social, familial, and legal rights⁶. This article was selected in accordance with the foci of this study which are a) investigating how the

³ Please see <https://en.parliran.ir/eng/en/Constitution>.

⁴ Dialogism is the characteristic epistemological mode of a world whereby everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole-there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others. This dialogic imperative, mandated by the pre-existence of the language world relative to any of its current inhabitants, ensures that there can be no actual monologue. Therefore, the unitariness is relative to the overpowering force of multi-voices and thus dialogism (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 426).

⁵ Mir-Hosseini (2001); Kian (1997)

⁶ please see the following page for the list of his related publications:
<https://www.magiran.com/author/farajollah%20hedayatnia>

selected document confronts IR state's use of the term Rejaal for decision/policy making around expediency of women for presidential election, b) verifying the proposed analytical framework by examining the politics of the language and meaning generation(discourse) in the document. Having said that, this article is an example of a marginal discourse (Hansen, 2006) as there are limited number of articles written by Islamic scholars written in favour of women's rights and published in feminist publication.

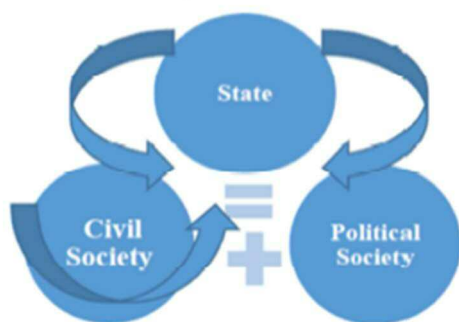
The rationale for developing this analytical framework

I have adopted a Gramscian perspective on civil society and state/civil society relations as the basis of my conceptual framework in this study as, arguably; it captures well the reality of the civil society in the context of this research. My rationale for using Gramsci to understand this particular context (Iran) can be explained in the following ways: first, the relationship between state and civil society in Iran can be said to be one where a hegemonic discourse of the theocratic state is being disseminated and reproduced in civil society as a means of substantiating the power ⁷. Secondly, from a feminist perspective, the state/civil society power relationship and the state's hegemonic project in Gramsci's theories, resembles the exercise of the theocratic state's patriarchal hegemony as a means to promote the "Disempowerment of Women" in Iran. Lastly, this can bring an insight to the emancipatory potential of civil society for subjugated social groups including women.

As identified in figure 1 below, for Gramsci, political and civil society are distinct entities but are also dynamically related in constituting the overarching state. In fact, Gramsci identifies the state as ensemble of political society and civil society in which the latter is made up of organisms commonly considered as private like families, schools, and unions that are non-coercive. The former is consisted of state institutions such as the army and the central bureaucracy, which play the role of direct command or domination in polity (Gramsci, 1971). In this set up, political society- in which direct domination is exercised- is ascribed to state, and hegemony and consent is equated with civil society. Following Gramsci, intellectuals connect these two superstructures. In this, within both political society (e.g., administrative and public agencies) and civil society (e.g., intersect groups, sects, political parties) intellectuals plays the role of agents of reciprocal communication, thereby, they connect civil society with political society simultaneously.

The arrows on the left side of the figure represent the patriarchal hegemony that emerges, disseminated, and reproduced between state and the civil society. In that, the integral state will synchronize subordinate groups' interpretive horizons into their own ideology (Fontana, 2006). This entails the state communicating with the cultural, ideological, religious, educational, and political activities taking place in civil society arena. On the other hand, the arrow on the right side of the figure represents the material/coercive power that is exerted through state institutions including army and the central bureaucracy- to substantiate the state's dominance and consolidate the patriarchal hegemony.

Figure 1: Circulation of Hegemony of "Patriarchy" between State and Civil Society (developed by the author based on Gramsci's theories)



By using this framework, I aim at exploring how author(s) within a feminist publication can contribute to the disintegration of patriarchal hegemony and the generation and exercise of "counter-hegemony" as a means of empowerment.

Civil society, according to Gramsci, is identified as the plurality of ideological and cultural conceptions as well as intellectual and moral systems of knowledge. This is the space whereby the organization of consent or hegemony is established (Nardone, 1971; Bobbio, 1975; Buci-Glucksmann, 1975; Grain, 1975; Adamson, 1987; Germino, 1990; Chen and Arato, 1992; Buttigieg, 1995 cited in Fontana, 2006).

⁷ Hegemony means the supremacy of one group over the other groups; it is established and substantiated through meaning-making system (discourse) and consent rather than reliance on coercion.

However, in this sphere “the battle of hegemony “is actualized. The battle of hegemony is characterized by cultural and intellectual conflicts including ideology, religion, value systems, and forms of knowledge. The goal of these competitive conflicts is the construction of social and political reality, which can lead to the generation of power and the organisation of consent (Gramsci 1980, p.1236-1493). These conflicts occur in civil society, which is constituted by a “complex” of multi-layered associations as well as voluntary groups (Fontana, 2006, p. 39). These conflicts aim to identify the subordinate social groups in modern society who are capable of challenging the supremacy of the dominant groups intellectually and morally.

Gramsci (1971) identifies the battle of hegemony -within civil society- as a cultural and political transformation process and assigns a significant role for intellectuals as they are playing vital roles in the terrain of civil society since they are contributing to maintain the existing hegemony or challenge it.

Moreover, he notes that subordinated groups can only become (counter) hegemonic when they attain self-consciousness. This self-consciousness, for Gramsci, entails the synthesis of knowledge of intellectuals and feeling/understanding of people. He contends that such synthesis is the persuasive force for transformation of fragmented subordinated groups into political actors confronting the hegemonic established system and proposing their viable alternative (counterhegemony) to it (Fontana, 2006, 2008). To replace the dominant social order by an alternative subordinate vision of society, as Gramsci notes, the counterhegemonic strategy should be applied. Central to developing counterhegemony is formulation of a vision that is in accordance with subaltern's everyday practices (Haugaard, 2006). Yet, for subalterns to confront hegemony of bourgeois entails transcending beyond the level of class formation, attract the other social groups and classes, and present their interests and demands as universal (Ives, 2004).

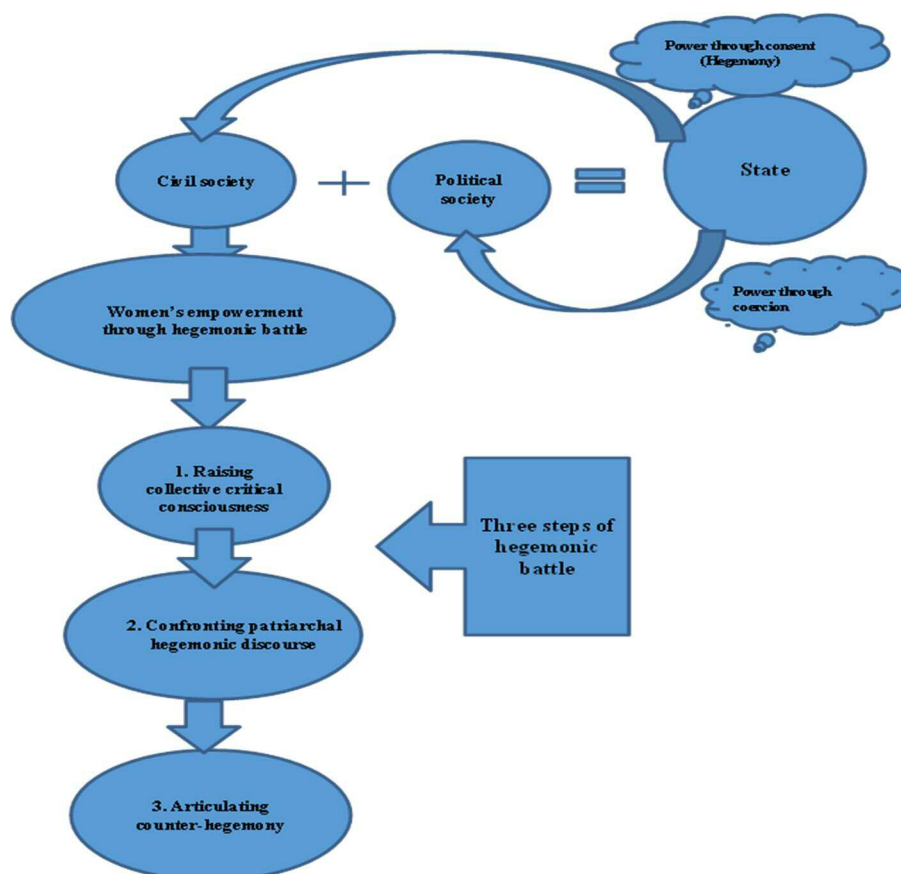
While Gramsci views the counter-hegemonic strategy as revolutionary project that resolves the issue of power domination once-and-universal, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) envisage counter hegemonic intervention as a directing force that avoids closure within the social field, thus, to them, domination can be confronted continually.

In the same vein, Mouffe (2000) contends that central to articulation of a counterhegemonic strategy is (to operate) from within the logic and ontology of existing hegemony. She adds that the most effective strategy of developing counter-hegemony is radicalization of the logic of key points (quilting points in her own word) of democratic liberalism. She, then, argues that if the Left utilizes existing key points from the existing hegemonic discourse, the radicalized discourse will earn significant support from the existing hegemonic bloc while creating new hegemony. Therefore, it can be argued that there is an implicit claim in this strategy that these key points/signifiers have an essential telos or logic, which can be used to articulate a counterhegemonic strategy (Haugaard, 2006).

Moreover, whilst Gramsci mainly focused on social class in his theories related to hegemonic battle, Laclau and Mouffe (2001) propose that, “the idea of challenging hegemony can be exercised with regard to women's empowerment in the contexts where “a feminine pole is subordinated to a masculine pole” (2001: 117-8). In this pursuit, in patriarchal societies, patriarchal hegemony determines the gendered political trends toward suppressive systematic relationships (e.g., legal injustice against women or low/non-political representations of women in the context of Iran). Thus, the pursuit of challenging these patriarchal hegemony and gendered political trends by feminist activists can potentially contribute to realizing feminism as the political frontier. As such, this feminist political frontier may dislocate the sedimented patriarchal system of meaning (hegemony) which can lead to the destabilization of the patriarchal social structure (ibid).

Given the above-mentioned social theories (Gramsci and Laclau and Mouffe) on challenging power relations through the transformation of hegemony and the exercise of “counter-hegemony”, I have developed an analytical framework as a means to understand how religious author(s) collaborating with feminist publications -as a significant element of Iranian feminist civil society- are contributing to empower Iranian women through their publications. This framework outlines the underpinning processes of women's empowerment, which are in three steps based on Gramsci's account of hegemonic battle referred to above: raising collective critical consciousness (step 1), confronting patriarchal hegemonic discourse (step 2), and articulation of counterhegemonic discourses (step 3) in order to explore how these steps are apparent in the document (See Figure 2).

Figure 2: The three steps of a hegemonic battle as a means of empowerment (developed by the author based on Gramsci's theories on civil society/state and hegemonic battle)



Prior to the commencement of the document analysis where I develop this analytical framework, I will provide an overview on how Bakhtin's literary theory and its concepts can be integrated with Gramsci's political theory of the hegemonic battle as a means of empowerment. I will also explain how this unity will enable me to investigate the potential alignment between FCS documents and Gramsci's empowerment framework.

The dialogism of hegemony: integration of Bakhtin circle's theory of language and Gramsci's political theory

Many researchers (Williams, 1977; Bennett, 1990 cited in Ives, 2004) recognize the Bakhtin circle as a significant source for Gramscian cultural studies, specifically due to the connection between language, power, and ideology. Bakhtinian concepts allow for an analysis of how the hegemonic battle may be played out in the discourses of feminist publication. The rationale behind the integration of these two theories is that despite the dissonances between them, these two can be united for the following reasons.

- 1) While Bakhtin is not a political thinker in the strict sense (Hirschkop, 1999), he articulated the cultural and aesthetic conditions that have enabling potentiality for emancipation of the subordinated groups.
- 2) Although Gramsci developed theoretical theories/concepts focused on empowerment of subaltern social groups in order to oppose the dominant hegemonic discourse, these theories have never been reflected in his writing on language and grammar.

Therefore, I have integrated these two perspectives and developed the analytical framework to explore the politics of language and generation of meaning (discourse), within the document produced by feminist publication and is the focus of this paper. Doing so involves using Bakhtin's literary analytical concepts (including heteroglossia, dialogism, and othering) as conceptual tools- in order to analyse the discourses of the document. In so doing, I will investigate how strategies and uses of language that manifest these concepts might help author(s) to dehegemonize the dominant patriarchal hegemony and create an alternative hegemony based on the will of subordinated group (women).

The introduction to the document analysis

In the forthcoming part, I analyse a journal article written by – Hedayatnia (2006) - a high profile (male) Islamic scholar and published in a feminist journal called "Women's Strategic Studies". This article presents a discussion on the use of the term Rejaal in political decision making about "if women can stand for presidential election".

This may be doubted that why one article has been analysed in this research. This article has been selected to be analysed for the following reasons: 1) women activists have done large number of works with the focus on challenging patriarchal interpretation of Islamic texts and reinterpreting them in conformity with reality of today's life. However, there are limited number of articles written by Islamic scholars in favour of women's rights and published in feminist publication.

2) Amongst these Islamic scholars' works, this is the only document which discusses the expediency of women for presidential election drawing on Islamic discourses. Given the fact that many problems concerning equal rights between men and women and the second-class position of women in the family and public sphere resulted from traditional perspectives within the framework of the religion (Jahanshahrad, 2012), using Islamic scholars' critical approaches toward these perspectives can culminate in promotion of women's right. Thus, drawing upon Lene Hansen's seminal work (2006), the article analysed in this study is representative of a "marginal discourse" in the Islamic Republic i.e., Islamic scholars' works championing for women's empowerment.

The analysis of this document follows its original structure in order to retain the argument contained within the whole text throughout. However, I have separated the text into quotes for in depth analysis to illustrate how the author constructs a message which can be mapped on to the three steps in -which I have identified based on Gramsci's perspectives. This in-depth analysis also draws on the aforementioned Bakhtinian concepts in order to examine how the text articulates a position within the hegemonic battle. In other words, Bakhtinian literary concepts are the analytical tools with which I investigate whether the content produced and communicated in the document is line with Gramsci's perspectives on transformation of power relations through hegemonic battle and enactment of counterhegemony. I present each quote, identify aspects of it that demonstrate Bakhtinian concepts manifest in the text; define them, and then illustrate how the utilization of these concepts is in alignment with the three steps of Gramsci's empowerment framework.

Analysis of "Women's presidency?": (Hedayatnia, 2006; in the journal of Women's Strategic Studies)

The term Rejaal in the constitution P.1, p.1:

The only legal reason that those who are opposing to the eligibility of women for presidential position raised is the phrase: "religious and political men" in the-article 115- constitution. They believe that the term Rejaal is gender oriented and means men (Hedayatnia, 2006).

We can see here how the author confront/stratify the authoritative discourse, which in this case is the specification of 'religious and political men' in article 115 of the constitution. By using terms such as 'the only reason', 'those who are opposing' and 'they believe', the author others this authoritative discourse - suggesting it is one interpretation or belief regarding the term rather than THE only interpretation possible. This stratification and othering of the authoritative discourse is in alignment with the second step identified in Gramscian conceptual framework that is the confrontation of the dominant hegemonic discourse, since it destabilises what is deemed to be 'authority' and thereby opens up space for an alternative message. At the same time, the author draws the readers' attention to the fact that those who argue against women's eligibility for presidential position rely on a single article (115) and this is the only article regarding this issue. Here I connect this strategy to Gramsci's step one i.e., consciousness raising because its point is to highlight the limited evidence that supports an argument against women's eligibility.

In making this interpretation, I argue that the Bakhtinian concept of the 'authoritative discourse' is synonymous to Gramsci's concept of the hegemonic discourse as Bakhtin defines it as this is privileged language that approaches us from the external world; it is distanced, taboo, and permits no play with its framing context. It has great power over us, but only while in power; if ever dethroned it immediately becomes a dead thing, a relic (Bakhtin, 1981, p.424).

Moreover, Bakhtin's concepts of 'othering' and 'stratification' -as manifested in the above analysis-functions as confrontation of the authoritative/hegemonic discourse by the virtue of their definition. Bakhtin defined 'othering' as: othering implies otherness- of place, point of view, possession, or person. This is simply something that one has made her/his own, seen or heard from the point of view of an outsider (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 423).

Similarly, Bakhtin defines 'stratification' as a process in which languages are continually stratifying under pressure of the centrifugal force, whose project everywhere is to challenge fixed definitions. Represented characters in a novel exist in order to find, reject, redefine a stratum of their own; formal authors exist to coordinate these stratifying impulses. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 433). Above, we observed that stratification and othering were utilized as a strategy to decentralize the unitary of the authoritative/dominant discourse and thereby confront the dominant hegemonic discourse in Gramsci's terms.

The embodiment of the term Rejaal in men

In the following sections, the author overviews how the concept of Rejaal was embodied as men in the IR constitution.

To some, the term Rejaal means men as it stands against (Nesaa') meaning women.

Therefore, from a constitutional perspective, the president should be man and women cannot be president regardless of being qualified in all other required areas (Hedayatnia, 2006).

Here, the author highlights how the lawmakers have justified and objectified their opposition against women's eligibility for presidential position based on their interpretation of the term Rejaal. In doing so, the author exposes the authoritative nature of this discourse which prevents any flexibility for amending this law -this is evident in the use of 'the constitution's 'perspective' which signifies authority and the terms 'should be man' and 'women cannot be' which highlight what is and is not possible. However, the author also uses the final phrase "regardless of how qualified women might be" to question this authority since it potentially exposes a scenario of exclusion of women who may be suitable for presidency 'on merit'. Through these opposing and questioning strategies, the author appears to confront the hegemonic interpretation of term Rejaal by outlining its consequences -i.e., that suitably qualified women are excluded. In Gramscian terms, this confrontation of the authoritative discourse involves exposing the ideology of the dominant class that Gramsci defines as hegemony.

In the following example, we can see the author begins to question the hegemonic/authoritative discourse more explicitly by directly presenting multiple interpretations of the term Rejaal (heteroglossia):

According to the members of council of clergy in law making: the first interpretation of Rejaal -at the time of developing IR constitution- is offered as well-known scholars and politicians, while article 115 does not necessarily offer this meaning (Hedayatnia, 2006).

This sentence attracts the readers' attention to the fact that how the meaning of Rejaal has been shaped and reshaped under different conditions (time/political era). This can be translated to consciousness raising i.e., Gramsci's first step since the author draws the reader's attention to the fact that the current interpretation of Rejaal (in article 115) is not the only interpretation. Furthermore, the author, here, employs chronotope in order to demonstrate to the reader that in a different time/space, the term Rejaal has been interpreted differently. To Bakhtin chronotope means 'time-space'. Bakhtin defines it as unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 425).

Therefore, they appear to suggest that although the term was initially interpreted as "well-known scholars and politicians", it was subsequently interpreted and materialized as men. Here, the use of chronotope can be considered as confrontation of canonized discourse i.e., the use of Rejaal as men. This can be translated to the second step of Gramscian framework that is confrontation of the hegemonic discourse.

Bakhtin (1981) defines canonization as "the tendency in every form to harden its generic skeleton and elevate the existing norms to a model that resists change. Canonization is the process that blurs heteroglossia and facilitates a naive, single-voiced reading (Bakhtin, 1981, p.425). Thus, the canonized meaning bears resemblance to what Gramsci perceives as a dominant hegemonic discourse.

The author furthers a questioning of the hegemonic interpretation of Rejaal in the following example:

This question can be raised then: why the lawmakers did not use the term men to reflect their intention, which is opposing against the eligibility of women for presidential position? Why did they use the ambiguous term [Rejaal]?

Consciousness raising (the first stage in Gramsci's framework) is reflected in this paragraph through stratification of the encrusted meaning. In that, the author is calling the readers' attention to the ambiguity of the term Rejaal. In so doing, the author emphasizes the 'heteroglot' atmosphere in which lawmakers used/interpreted Rejaal as men. The author, then, notes that the lawmakers did not use the term men itself; instead, they use Rejaal, which is- an ambiguous and foreign/Arabic term. By raising questions, the author voices the intentions of the 'other' but in a format, which seeks to de-stabilize its authority. Asking 'why' makes visible the intended ambiguity of the term and therefore, counters the certainty that the term refers to 'men only'.

We can observe that 'othering' and 'Heteroglossia' are used in the above to confront the authoritative/hegemonic meaning (in line with the second step identified in Gramscian framework). Similarly, through generating a matrix of forces and voice (heteroglossia), the author appears to condition and confront a single/dominant conception of the term Rejaal. According to Bakhtin (1981), heteroglossia demonstrates the primacy of context over text so that there is no one interpretation that is 'true', rather, there are multiple interpretations or meanings that are in constant struggle, and which are only fixed within a particular moment in time and space. In this sense, "at any given time, in any given place, there will be a set of conditions-social, historical, meteorological, physiological that will ensure that a word uttered in that place and at that time will have a meaning

different than it would have under any other conditions. All utterances are heteroglot in that they are functions of a matrix of forces practically impossible to recoup, and therefore impossible to resolve" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263,428). This means that Rejaal can only be understood in its particular moment or utterance and must be seen as open to an ideological struggle across time and space. It is this point that the author appears to refer to in his questioning of the term above.

The following example shows us how the hegemonic interpretation of the term Rejaal as men has been established/canonized and how the author of the document appears to confront it.

The negotiations of the council of clergies indicate that Rejaal was initially defined as men and they [clergies/lawmakers] believed that in Islamic government, women cannot be in the statesmanship position, specifically, at presidential level. However, they present it using a heavier phrase in order to prevent controversy for others (Hedayatnia, 2006).

Here, the author calls our attention (consciousness raising i.e., the first step identified in Gramscian framework) to the fact that the lawmakers used an ennobled discourse in order to canonize the meaning of the term.⁸ In here, ennobled discourse is reflected in using Quranic, Arabic, ambiguous term Rejaal.

In the above quote, the author refers to 'how the council of clergies use 'a heavier phrase' to firmly establish that Rejaal means men and consequently women cannot be in statesmanship position. In this, the reference to 'prevent controversy for others' indicates recognition that the council sees its discourse as absolute and completely defined.

The following quote shows another example of the creation of heteroglot atmosphere and dialogized text -by the author-in order to oppose the authoritative discourse.

In the above quotes, it is perceived that Rejaal does not mean men and the lawmakers avoid using men for the sake of the expediency of the regime and its international reputation. They avoid using the term "men" in order to prevent international objection and criticism (Hedayatnia, 2006).

Here, by using a dialogic strategy and raising conditioning voices (Heteroglossia), the author is confronting/conditioning the hegemonic use of term Rejaal as men. In so doing, the author presents heteroglot utterances in this paragraph, which are matrix of voices including the voice of the author, the voice of lawmakers and the potential objective voice of the international community. These voices/forces appear to be conditioning each other in that the author brings the lawmakers and international community into a mutual relation where one is seen as addressing the other.

In this sense, the author has created a dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) between these voices -which makes the hegemonic discourse refracted and distorted, and thereby, mutable (Voloshinov and Bachtin, 1986). Bakhtin (1981) defines dialogue, as "It is precisely as verbal process that their force is most accurately sensed. A word, discourse, language, or culture undergoes "dialogization" when it becomes relativized, de-privileged, and aware of competing definitions for the same things. Undialogized language is authoritative or absolute" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.425).

Here, I argue that by creating a dialogized text, the author can confront the hegemonic understanding of the term Rejaal.

The following quote presents how the author confronts the authoritative meaning of the term Rejaal as men by more strategic utilization of heteroglossia and a clowning strategy, which in Bakhtinian terms refers to the use of sarcasm and satire.

This is the first and most important legal reason against women's eligibility to be president.

However, the observations indicate that the phrase is not gender oriented. The reason to use this ambiguous phrase is not to prevent the interference of aliens neither does it concern the international reputation. The detailed records of the negotiation in the law-making sessions reflect that the hypothesis of the lack of eligibility of women for the presidential position was not acceptable by considerable number of council of clergies. Consequently, some clergies and law experts voted against using men. Therefore, they resorted to use of the ambiguous term which eventually gained enough votes. There is no clear evidence for the reason they [lawmakers] chose Rejaal (Hedayatnia, 2006).

In Gramscian terms, the author here raises consciousness about the advent of the term in the first place. By the juxtaposition of the terms "first, only, and most important" and the subsequent 'however', the author attempts to confront the canonized nature of former with the latter.

⁸ When discourse is "ennobled" it is elevated, made less accessible, more literary and better ordered. "Ennobled language" always presumes some privilege and exercises some social control (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 263,427).

Subsequently, they use a clowning strategy by using the term ‘aliens’ as a mythical figure in order to mock the fear demonstrated by those in authority over interference from external parties. Once again, this attempts to confront and de-homogenize the hegemonic understanding of the term Rejaal as men.

They then return to the historical analysis of discourse and continue telling us the story of the negotiation between lawmakers who represented different perspectives (heteroglossia) on this issue when the law was negotiated. This story telling is used to explain how the lawmakers resorted to use an ambiguous term, which draws on an ennobled discourse to settle the dispute.

According to the head of the council of clergies, Dr. Beheshti, the article had to be passed by 2/3rd of the votes in order to consolidate its Islamic, dialogic, and religious background but since it did not gain enough votes, it was ratified as open-ended to be expanded and revised in the future. Therefore, the lawmakers who intended to gain the consent of majority of the members used the term, which reflects the eligibility of men while it does not oppose to the eligibility of women. Thus, in the constitution of IR, there is no term and phrase, which reflect women’s lack of eligibility for presidential position.

In this paragraph, the interpretation by some lawmakers i.e., Rejaal as men is relativized since the author now explicitly states there are competing definitions and interpretations for the same term from other perspectives e.g., other lawmakers including the head of the council. The author is raising consciousness (step 1) and confronting the hegemonic discourse (step 2) through again dialogizing and creating a heteroglot context in which there is dialogue between different voices, which condition each other, and consequently de-hegemonizing the authoritative discourse. This paragraph reflects a lively and vital discourse since it is dynamic and open to be expanded rather than finished and absolute.

One might suggest here that this is articulation of counter-hegemonic strategy since in the last line the author directly rebuts the exclusion of women based on the term Rejaal (the counter position to the authoritative discourse). This counter-hegemonic statement is the outcome of dialogue that has included the authoritative dominant discourse and thereby shaped within the dominant discourse.

Being a male as a required condition in jurisprudence resources

In the forthcoming section, we will read about how jurisprudence resources in IR require that those who stand for presidential election are male.

There are two [proposed] reasons behind being a male as a required condition in jurisprudence resources:

- In Islam, the eligibility of women for the statesmanship and governance is rejected.
- The presidential position is the statesmanship and governance position. Therefore, women cannot be president.

The reasons against the eligibility of women for statesmanship in Islam:

Quran: there is no clear/precise evidence against/for women’s governance in Quran.

However, they -those against women’s governance- refer to a single verse in Quran i.e., number 34 in Nesaa’ Surah. It states that Men are in charge of women by [right of] what Allah has given one over the other and what they spend [for maintenance] from their wealth (Hedayatnia, 2006).

The above excerpt reflects consciousness raising and confronting the hegemonic discourse (the first and second Gramscian steps), since the author is:

1) Penetrating the authoritative discourse through archeologically investigating the basis of the Islamic belief that women are not eligible for the statesmanship and governance. When referencing the Quran, the author states, “there is no clear/precise evidence against/for women’s governance” and then points to the use of a single verse” which is used by ‘those against women’s governance’. In doing this, I argue that the author seeks to use the voice of Islam to question the truth’ asserted by those in authority regarding the eligibility of women. This involves bringing novel-ness to the authoritative discourse, which I suggest, is reflected in the use of the Quran, as an alternative authority in itself, to confront the authoritative discourse. This is in accordance with Mouffe’s (2000) proposed counterhegemonic strategy, which operates from within the ontology and ethos of the existing hegemony, to disintegrate the current hegemony, and thereby propose an alternative hegemony.

2) The author again appears to other those who are opposed to the eligibility of women for governance by using “those against women’s governance” in the first sentence and “they” in the last sentence, which distances themselves from those scholars who maintain the orthodox/ patriarchal interpretation of this Quranic verse.

In this text, it seems the author is intrinsically challenging or confronting the hegemonic discourse by decentralizing the authoritative discourse from within i.e., by using their own interpretation of Islam and the Quran.

The next two following quotes in the document show again the strategic use of choronotope⁹ -by the author- in order to confront the authoritative discourse.

It seems that this verse can be used against the eligibility of women for statesmanship provided that:

1. Rejaal and Nesaa mean men and women in general
2. The term "Ghavam" should mean governance and statesmanship.

Scrutinizing the interpretations of this verse indicates that both aforementioned conditions are controversial. Some experts believe that Rejaal means husbands and Nesaa' means a wife.

Then, it does not mean the guardianship of all men for women. In the following part of the verse, we can see that it refers particularly to husband/wife relationship. Therefore, this verse is related to the relationship of husband/wife not men vs women (Hedayatnia, 2006).

Here, the author indicates a misinterpretation of the term Rejaal by those in authority -which they achieve by reference to 'some experts' who hold a different meaning for the term i.e., 'husband'. They then substantiate this position referring to the 'following part of the verse', which refers to financial dependence of a wife (see the quote above). The conclusion 'Therefore, this verse...' is a declarative statement, which asserts the correct interpretation based on authority of Islamic scholarship 'experts', that seeks to re-stabilize the meaning of the term.

In this text, therefore, I argue that the author has made strategic use of chronotope to relativize and confront the authoritative/hegemonic discourse i.e., in line with the second step identified in Gramscian framework. In this sense, this is manifest in the reference to the context (space-time) in which the terms Rejaal and Nesaa are discussed reflecting different meanings from that of the constitution.

It [this verse] refers to men being responsible for providing living and supporting marital life and they need to meet their wives' needs. Thus, it is clear that the verse does not precisely refer to men and women. There is no clear reason/clue for superiority of men over women. Moreover, the verse does not indicate governance and guardianship for men over women. Therefore, referring to this verse -as an evidence- for the lack of eligibility in women for presidential position is not complete (Hedayatnia, 2006).

In this quote, the stabilisation of Rejaal as meaning husband is used to assert a counter hegemonic position i.e., that the term cannot be used to exclude women from governance. There is also confrontation of the hegemonic discourse where the text references those in authority stating, 'referring to this verse' (i.e., those who do so) adopt an interpretation that 'is not complete'. The author, then, produces a counter-hegemonic discourse in this paragraph by bringing up the Qur'anic context to support their position. This counter-hegemonic strategy uses one authority (religion) to challenge another (the state) but does not suggest a radical shift from governance based on theocracy. The last sentence articulates this counter argument most explicitly.

Hadith and tradition of the prophet's (and his family) life

In the following section, the author is examining ahadith [the sayings of the Prophet and Tradition/ Sunnah i.e., the way of Prophet's life] in relation to governance of women in Islam.

In order to refer to Hadith for objecting eligibility of women for presidential position, some issues should be taken into consideration.

1. Authenticity of Hadith
2. If the Hadith refers to the lack of eligibility of women for all the times and all the states
3. Hadith can be considered as an advice rather than religious decree.
4. The reasons for arguing against eligibility of women for presidential position (Hedayatnia, 2006)

Here, the author appears to be relativizing the authenticity and the significance of the ahadith through creating multiple novel conditions for their validation. The author has again made strategic use of chronotope i.e., emphasising the context in which the ahadith have been articulated -this is particularly apparent in point two, which refers to time-space explicitly. The author again de-stabilizes the authority of the Hadith by demoting them to 'advice' rather than 'religious decree' (3) and this is used to question the legitimacy of the conditions used to justify the ineligibility of women to become president (4) by the dominant hegemonic discourse.

In this excerpt, chronotope is employed as a centrifugal force to question the context (2), authenticity (1), reasoning (4) and the level of importance of the Hadith (3). Utilizing chronotope as a centrifugal force, the author appears to decentralize the dominant discourse i.e., patriarchal use/interpretation of ahadith here.

⁹ chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 425).

In general, although some of the ahadith are authentic, we ignore the lack of the reasons in these ahadith. Moreover, there are not applicable in IR for the following reasons:

- Analysis of the objection against women's eligibility for governance
- Clarifying of the position of president in Iran

About the presidential position, there are possibilities based on which conditions and authorities of a president can be defined. Therefore, these possibilities should be considered and mentioned in order to evaluate their applicability for the presidential position in IR [based on the constitution] (Hedayatnia, 2006).

In this paragraph, the author appears to confront the hegemonic interpretation of ahadith (second Gramscian step) by saying 'we ignore' and that they are 'not applicable to IR'. In this sense, the author again refers to the chronotope -time-space- of the utterance as a strategy to relativize the objection against women's eligibility for presidential election in Iran. In so doing, they firstly, investigate under what conditions and in which contexts women's eligibility is objected to from an Islamic perspective (consciousness raising, 1st Gramscian step). Consequently, they propose a counter-hegemonic position (step 3) by stating 'there are possibilities' whereby certain 'conditions' might make women eligible and these should be 'evaluated' in terms of how applicable they are to the current context. This position challenges the canonized nature of the authoritative discourse and thereby destabilizes it in such a way as to construct an alternative possibility.

The unconformity of the reasons against governance of women based on ahadith:

The ahadith and traditions are not in conformity with the definitions and conditions of presidential position in Iran. The ahadith refer to the absolute authority while the presidential position in Iran is not defined/granted absolute authority. It is merely an executive position i.e., political advocacy in the above categories.

It is only advocacy and executive position for the following reasons:

- supreme leader has superiority over president.
- MPs are supervising and can question, interpellate, and even dismiss the president.
- The Judiciary can deprive him of his legal authority and dismiss him
- in the executive arena: he cannot exercise his own will and desire but only the laws passed by legislatives
- in the financial arena: president must spend the budget that is planned by parliament (Hedayatnia, 2006).

In the above paragraph, the author questions the use of ahadith as support for the ineligibility of women for president since they refer to 'absolute authority', which does not apply to the presidential position for several stated reasons. In this sense, the author is stratifying and relativizing one authoritative discourse through his scholarly interpretation of the religious text i.e., another authority. As before, this destabilizes the authority and holds up the claim of ineligibility as one perspective amongst others. By comparing the meaning of 'authority' in the ahadith and in the presidential role in Iran, the author is raising consciousness (Step 1 identified in Gramsci's framework) since he makes visible the discrepancy between meanings.

We should respond to some questions before moving to conclusion:

Are the ahadith against the eligibility of women for statesmanship in all the governing/management positions? At any/all level of authority? If yes, how we have witnessed women in management and leadership positions in different executive fields in state institutions after the Islamic revolution? It includes the military commanders, management of mega organizations. Additionally, women we appointed as ministers. Therefore, given the dominance and guardianship of women over men in those positions, it should be against Sharia' (Hedayatnia, 2006).

In the above quote, the author appears to raise the readers' consciousness regarding the fact that women have already been positioned in senior managerial positions in IR (Gramscian first step) for some time. Therefore, by using chronotope (the context of space-time around the utterance), the author raises a rhetorical question that if in the Islamic perspective, the dominance of women over men is not acceptable at any level, how has the IR appointed women as ministers, military commanders, and senior managers? By raising this question, the author directly addresses the government/clergy council as the audience and indicates contradiction between the discursive product of 'ineligibility for president' and their actions where women have been appointed to positions which hold authority. In other words, they penetrate and de-hegemonize the hegemonic/authoritative discourse (confronting the hegemonic discourse i.e., Gramscian second step) through presenting novel attitudes and conditions to stratify the meaning of Rejaal as men and the way it is exercised on the real ground (space-time of Iran). The implication is that there are already forces mobilized against the centralized discourse in IR since women have been already in dominant positions to men in some highly ranked managerial positions.

Conclusion:

- Permit Principal: in which women are eligible to be president. According to this principal, people should not be deprived of any right unless it has been clearly mentioned in the constitution. Since in the current constitution, the presidency of women is not precisely prohibited, therefore, women should be eligible for this position.

- The equality/equity principal: Iranian citizens from all ethnicities are equal before the constitution and issues related to colour, race, language, and gender are not considered as privileges in the constitution.
 - The phrase Rejaal is not gender-oriented. This phrase confirms the eligibility of men for presidential position, yet it stays silent about women's eligibility. Therefore, this phrase cannot be used as an excuse for violating the permit and equality principal and depriving half of population of their rights.
 - There is no single verse in Quran against women's statesmanship and governance.
 - The ahadith against women's eligibility are not authentic and if they would be, they are not applicable to/in conformity with executive responsibility of presidential position in Iran since these responsibilities are limited, transient, and technically are not included in the related ahadith.
- Taken all together, there are no legal/jurisprudent obstacles to eligibility of women for presidential position (Hedayatnia, 2006).

In the above section, the author wraps up the article by articulating an explicit counterhegemonic statement that 'women are eligible to be president' and the constitution does not deny them this right since that they are not 'precisely prohibited'. The author utilises terms such as 'the equality principal', 'privileges' and 'violation of rights' to highlight contradictions in the way the constitution is being interpreted since these terms are associated with 'access for all' whereas the authoritative discourse would prevent access for women. The author then questions again the use of Islamic texts to substantiate the argument for ineligibility and refers to no 'legal' and 'jurisprudent obstacles' i.e., he uses alternative discourses to counter the hegemony of the patriarchal discourse in this case. Here, I argue again that this counter-hegemonic strategy operates from inside the dominant power relations rather than seeking a radical transformation of the authoritative discourse.

In the same vein, the articulation of counter-hegemony has been undertaken intrinsically as the pointed issues are all based on unitary and absolute discourse of Quran, ahadith, and IR constitution. However, this hegemonic discourse is still dialogized in that multiple voices and audiences are manifest in the text.

Conclusion and implications

Through the above analysis, I have illustrated how the author articulates a counterhegemonic discourse through the decentralization of the hegemonic discourse of the dominant group/theocratic state to express an argument that counters the ineligibility of women for presidency. For instance, the author, who is a high profiled (male) Islamic scholar and equipped with the language of the religion and speak from within Islam, utilizes Qur'anic verses and Hadith to examine and confront the objection against expediency of women to stand for presidential election. This qualifies as counter-hegemonic since although there is reverence to the Islamic discourse, it also demonstrates commitment -to the discourse of the feminist journal in which the document is published through confronting the IR's orthodox interpretation of the Islamic sources and its related policies.

The use of Bakhtinian analytical tools has demonstrated how this counter-hegemonic discourse is articulated through creating a heteroglot environment in which various voices and forces are conditioning each other. At several points in the above analysis, I noted how the author appeared to disintegrate and dehegemonize the hegemonic use of the term 'Rejaal' by the regime as a means of excluding women from standing for presidential election.

In addition, I have shown how the author employs different dialogic strategies including chronotope and heteroglossia to dehegemonize the validity of the Hadith and the applicability of Hadith or Qur'anic verses in the current social conditions in Iran. Furthermore, a dialogic approach has been utilized to interact with the reader in order to convey the confronting message through using strategies such as othering those who passed the law in the first place and considering their interpretation as one among many voices by conditioning and contrasting their interpretation with multiple other interpretive voices.

This is indicative of what Mouffe (2000) notes as enactment of counterhegemonic strategy since the author disintegrates the hegemonic discourse from within, using its key points and logics, thus, the author proposes an alternative discourse/counter-hegemony.

Overall, by the virtue of the above analysis, it can be concluded that the author articulates a discourse that can be aligned with Gramsci's perspectives on hegemonic battle and the its three steps that I identified at the beginning of this paper. I have demonstrated how utilization of chronotope strategy and creation of heteroglot environment is manifest in the document and how this raises awareness about the conditions, validity, and applicability of hegemonic interpretation of Rejaal as men (Step 1 - Consciousness raising). Moreover, by utilizing multiple voices (Heteroglossia), the document challenges the monopoly of an authoritative interpretation of Rejaal, which can be translated to the second step identified in Gramscian framework i.e., confrontation of hegemonic discourse. Lastly, the document articulates an objection against those who interpreted Rejaal as men and exclude women from standing for presidential election by using othering of 'those' who exclude as well decentralizing their discourse. Therefore, in numerous parts of the document, the justification of the patriarchal hegemonic position (that women are ineligible) is rejected since -according to the author- there is no legal and Islamic reasoning against

women's expediency to stand for presidential election. This can be translated as articulation of counterhegemonic discourse that is in alignment with third step identified in Gramscian framework.

My analysis of this document has implications for studies/agendas focused on FCS operating under theocratic states and in particular Iran. Given that the author of this document is a high profile male Islamic scholar, this paper suggests that the interaction between the women's movement and the project of modern religious thinking may be crucial for furthering the agenda of women's empowerment for two basic reasons.

First, drawing on the above analysis, the absence of women's presidential candidate, resulted from traditional perspectives within the framework of the religion. Thus, the interaction between women's rights activists and progressive Islamic scholars equips the women's movement with critical approaches toward patriarchal interpretation of Islam in favour of women's rights.

A second reason for activists of the women's movement to interact with religious intellectuals is that these intellectuals are one of the avenues through which the women's movement can gain support from the masses to push forward reforms pertaining to women's rights. Through taking a historical perspective towards Islamic texts and religious precepts concerning women's rights, these intellectuals and women's rights activists can extract laws and regulations from the Qur'an and hadith in favour of equal rights for women. In so doing, as shown above, they can create a heteroglot environment in which diverse voices/forces condition each other including the dominant voice/discourse, this, consequently, can be culminated in confrontation of the patriarchal dominant discourse and creation of counterhegemonic discourse in order to advance women's empowerment.

A few studies (Afshar, 1998, Mir-Hosseini, 2001, Sedghi, 2007, Jahanshahrad, 2012, Tohidi, 2010) discussed the collaboration of Islamic scholars and feminist activists and pointed out that their alliance may potentially promote women's condition. However, to my best knowledge of the related literature, this is the first study that examines this collaboration through critically analysing the discourse of document -written by an Islamic scholar in favour of women's political right and published in a feminist journal- employing an analytical framework that is developed based on Western social/political theories.

Lastly, the proposed analytical framework -derived from Gramscian socio-political theory conjoined with Bakhtinian literacy theory- assists me 1) to demonstrate how the intricate use of discourse (specifically Islamic discourse) can implicitly confront the IR regime's patriarchal hegemonic agenda. Under an authoritative state where confrontation cannot be explicitly expressed, these subtle uses of discourse function as confrontation and may potentially pave the way toward social transformation; 2) to recognize the alignment between the discourse of a progressive Islamic scholar and that of feminist publication through critically unpacking voices -within the analysed document- and investigating their relation to women's empowerment. Thus, this paper presents an analytical framework that can be employed to demonstrate the way discourses subtly enact ideologies that confront the patriarchal hegemony of a theocratic state like Iran.

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