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Ghoncheh Ghavami and Bahar Noorizadeh

Editorial

Just over a year and a half ago, Jina Mahsa Amini, a twenty-two-year old Kurdish woman from a rural province, died in a hospital in Tehran after being arrested by Iran's morality police and severely beaten. Her death sparked some of the most encompassing protests of Iran's recent history, with shows of support from around the world under the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom." This issue began a little over a year ago in early 2023 with a question about Iran's ferociously outspoken community in the silences and intervals between uprisings, about intellectual life within and despite a clerical police state. Art and theory might seem insufficient for such conditions, yet they also carry a capacity to register and even traverse otherwise incommunicable distances—all the more important in times when contemporary art's breezy globalism reveals its own geopolitical interests. We are extremely thankful to Ghoncheh Ghavami and Bahar Noorizadeh, the guest editors of this issue, for responding that the only way to address this question is through the perspectives of activists working within Iran. The guest editors have gone to enormous lengths to bring together a courageous issue that takes on a specific case study about their home country to insist on transnational solidarities in the hardest of circumstances.

— e-flux journal *editors*

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This issue of *e-flux journal* is a collective reflection on the afterlife of the 2022 Jina uprising and the historical and material forces that compelled it. The issue's authors are all based in Iran and are women activists and writers working across feminist, social, and civil fields. Due to security concerns and the criminalization of dissident voices within Iran, all use pen names to mask their identities. The essays include voices from ethnic and national struggle movements (in Kurdistan and Balochistan), campaigns against the death penalty and Afghan migrant rights, and movements against the involuntary wearing of the hijab. Against the abstractions of our hyper-mediated time, their writing posits the body as a mode of inscription, as history incorporated, tracing its enforced subjections and emancipatory convulsions through the singular mutations of each body that contributed to the feminist revolution we witnessed. About twenty months since Jina's point zero, these writings map the movement's specificity in the genealogy of postrevolutionary insurrections in Iran.

The work of commissioning, compiling, and translating began about a year ago. At various stages, several individuals offered diligent and caring assistance, among whom are eight translators, both amateur and

professional, most of whom grew up in Iran and, like the authors, were part of the young generation that participated in the 2008 Green movement. We, the editors of this issue, have accepted only symbolic payment along with a number of these translators.

Beyond the usual platitudes of "Iran in translation," this issue is the first freshly commissioned body of work by feminists active in Iran's political arena translated into English, which we deem crucial for working through questions of intellectual and international solidarity. Taken together, we hope these reflections reassert the links between the Jina uprising and interconnected liberation struggles beyond national configurations. But first, we must account for certain deadlocks and affordances of translation as they reflect certain deadlocks and affordances of transnationalism for political action in Iran today.

Why a translated issue on the women's uprising in Iran now? Who is the addressee at the end of the regulated pipelines of the English language? After all, English in our ears has been reduced to the sound of liberal hegemony in genocidal times, the soporific stream of condemnations, silences, and clichés that only further dissuade any of us from holding the genocide of Palestinians in Gaza, literally, in the palm of one's hand. It is truly harrowing to realize how all the English that leaves our mouths today amounts to further complicity, further abstraction, a point that has been best elucidated recently by Palestinian activists and writers Islam al Khatib and Mohammed El-Kurd.[1] Al Khatib in particular credits the current vagueness of discourse on Palestine to not only the criminalization and suppression of the Palestinian cause (further systematized by Zionist lobbies today), but also to a matter of translation. Recalling Anis Sayegh, who insisted on producing Arabic content while heading the Palestine Research Center in Beirut in the late 1960s and '70s, al Khatib writes: "Unlike today, the focus on translation was much less about convincing and more about bridging and co-building." In Sayegh's time, (English) translation was strategically irrelevant because "the foreigners who mattered most were already there, fighting with Palestinians."

In today's Iran we cannot easily identify such foreign friends in struggle as Palestinians once did. It is not because they do not exist—recall the Afghan women in Kabul who rallied alongside Iranian women during the first months of the Jina uprising. Rather, it is due to a more severe condition of untranslatability resulting from the decades-long economic and sociocultural isolation Iranians have been subjected to. Any translation that does occur is through banalities and clichés, framing "Iran" as a case of failed or triumphant antagonism against American imperialism, but never as a player in the gamespace of global capitalism. Contemporary Iran is not allowed to be what it is: a complex arrangement of forces and counterforces resulting from the country's modernization, its anti-colonial struggles, and the rise of political Islam. Yet how else can we possibly place the plight of women and their struggle around the mandatory hijab in a biopolitical frame that avoids both the reductivism of liberal feminism and its critics in the West?

The events that followed the Jina uprising reveal the decades-long wealth of critical activity by organized councils, coalitions, unions, and syndicates, along with the feminist, worker, teacher, student, pensioner, and ethnic-national democratic movements that have been active in the country since the 1979 revolution and before. But even more, as the essays in this issue show, the uprising laid bare everyday acts of disobedience and resistance by individuals, whether women, queer, or trans people. This is where the formula of translational solidarity shifts from the common enemy—often misunderstood—to a common struggle.

Abstracts:

Nahal Nikan—To Summon Life in a Cemetery

"In Iran, 'death' and 'the cemetery' have certain connotations; when we combine them with the birthplace of a movement, everything becomes more meaningful." In this text, the author writes about the interplay between life and death that was the backdrop to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. She focuses on the inception of the uprising in Aychi cemetery, where Jina Amini was buried and where a force arising from her death went on to create an "earthly" and "life-affirming" movement in Iran—an inspiring act of finding life in death. The movement vindicated "earthly" living and delegitimized the promise of life after death.

Arnavaz—When Silence is Broken and Voices Ring Out

In the years leading up to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, a political discourse emerged in Iran that regarded women's makeup, fashion, and refusal to wear hijabs as a symptom of their "Westoxification," promiscuity, and ignorance. These women were viewed as idolatrous puppets of the Western. Their demonstrations against the mandatory hijab were ignored by the secular opposition. Arnavaz takes a historical look at women's battle against the compulsory hijab in Iran and argues that female attire got caught up in the ideological alliance forged between anti-imperialism and patriarchy.

Negar Hatami—Heads Without Headscarves

This text draws our attention to the embodied dimension of the Jina movement. Hatami begins by speaking from personal experience, exploring the transformations brought about by the loosening of traditional dress codes

during the movement. She goes on to examine the Jina movement as it unfolded on the streets, describing how a new bodily constitution emerged, which caught the author by surprise: "As a result of this movement's train of events, a new body has opened up to us that we haven't experienced before."

Elaheh—Cleansing Personal Archives and the Birth of the Black Hole of Collective Memory

Elaheh takes us on a journey from the 2009 Green movement in Iran to the Jina uprising. She describes how security concerns lead many Iranians to destroy digital and physical archives, leading to an absence of collective memory. To conceptualize this void, she uses the metaphor of a black hole.

Shouka Alizadeh and Goli Baharan—A Struggle for Everyone

The authors examine the margins of the Jina uprising, asking about the place of historically disenfranchised groups, like Iran's Afghan immigrant community, in the movement. Interviewing ten immigrants from Afghanistan living in Tehran, they show how the uprising affected the lives of these immigrants, and how the latter view their participation in the movement in light of a recent anti-immigrant media backlash.

Nuzhan Didartalab—A Power from Within

In the months of crackdown following the street protests, the world was shaken by sham trials and brutal executions of young protestors, the majority of whom were from underprivileged backgrounds and historically oppressed regions like Kurdistan and Balochistan. Inside Iran, the executions of Mohsen Shekari, Majidreza Rahnavard, Mohammad Mehdi Karami, and Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini mobilized mass solidarity against these verdicts and provoked public opposition to the death penalty. This text revisits the history of the campaign to abolish the death penalty in Iran. Leaping over human-rights discourse and its exclusive hold on the category of "life," the author rethinks the notion of "the right to life" in the context of the uprising and its collective emancipatory biopolitics.

Aram—Jina, the Moment of No Return

Aram looks at the lineage of the recent uprising and examines its particular place in the long history of social movements and insurgent action in Iran. The eruption of the Jina movement was unprecedented in the way that it connected experiences of injustice across class, gender, ethnic, and religious divides. Incremental but steady struggles at home and in the private sphere, argues the author, are what made the Jina movement a "revolution," insofar as it sparked the revolutionary transformation of political subjectivities and everyday life.

Parva—Inflection Points of a Pluralist Feminist Revolution

Given the ongoing crackdown in Iran against activists and women who resist the mandatory hijab, this text asks whether the Jina movement is over or lives on. It argues for an understanding of the movement as a pluralist feminist revolution, as distinguished from a sovereign revolution. Parva describes the unusual temporality of the Jina movement: "The time for this revolution is akin to a future in the past, a time that has begun but has not concluded, and is now 'picked back up' somewhere in the past. Its potentials roam free. Its capacities awaken. Its dreams come to life."

Dasgoharan—Why Is Maho Our Symbol?

This essay was the first piece of writing to appear on the Instagram account of Dasgoharan, a group of Balochi women who have been publishing theoretical and investigative writing from their field work in Iran's Balochistan since the start of the Jina movement. Dasgoharan's writings have since become pivotal for the intersection of feminist and anti-colonial movements inside Iran. This piece concerns the bloody repression of protesters from the Balochi village of Zahedan, who in September 2022 rose up in anger at the killing of Jina Amini and the rape of a local girl by a police commander.

Translators: Golchehr Hamidi-Manesh, Golnar Narimani, Niloufar Nematollahi, Saina Salarian, Roozbeh Seyedi, ZQ. Supervising translator: Soori Parsa.

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1
Al Khatib, “Becoming Monsters: What Happens When the Witness Becomes the Defendant?” *Verso blog* , March 13, 2024 https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/becoming-monsters-what-happens-when-the-witness-becomes-the-defendant ; El-Kurd, “Are We Indeed All Palestinians?” *Mondoweiss* , March 13, 2024 https://mondoweiss.net/2024/03/are-we-indeed-all-palestinians/ .

Nahal Nikan

To Summon Life in a Cemetery

We can now decisively say that the movement crying "Woman, Life, Freedom"[1] was born in a small cemetery which, on September 17, 2022, devoured the corpse of a young victim of Iran's mandatory hijab policies and morality police.[2] This woman was so young, it was as if part of our own collective youth was being buried with her. Who could have ever imagined that a movement to reclaim life would emerge from the graves of our most beloved dead? Jina Amini was being buried, and a power proceeding from her early death would go on to create the most *life-affirming* movement in memory in Iran.[3] While I address the Woman, Life, Freedom movement as a whole, I would like to keep this text centered around Aichi cemetery and the moment the movement came to light. I will also reflect on the relationship between life and death in Iran, and in turn, their relationship to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. In Iran, "death" and "the cemetery" have certain connotations; when we combine them with the birthplace of a movement, everything becomes more meaningful.

Can it be said that the most efficient political regimes are those that keep the lives of their citizens as close to life and as far from death as possible? Yes. Yet the truth is that in Iran, life is not based on life itself, but on a foundation of death. What I mean is that it is not life that stewards life; rather, it is death and the afterlife that oversee life and all that it contains. This is why the criteria for an efficient regime are inverted here in Iran, where the lives of citizens are kept so close to death and at the farthest possible distance from life. Life is allowed and justified only insofar as it leads to "happiness in the afterlife"; other possibilities for living that are extrinsic to that otherworldly happiness are trapped in an unbreakable web of punishments, rules, laws, and principles leading only to eventual annihilation. Subsequently, the feminine body trapped for decades in a web of religious doctrines, and in an endless set of rules, disciplines, teachings, and surveillance mechanisms, is gradually transformed into a docile and submissive body—one that is meant to be the great vitrine for the mandatory hijab for all its life. It is as if in Iran we are faced with spaces where all signs of life and death are intertwined, where life is mixed with death. All rules are established in order to extend the territory of death so far that it devours life. Some of the rules for the living are applied to the dead, and some signs and symbols of the dead slide into the lives of the living.

With all this in mind, it comes as no surprise that one of the rules implemented in Iranian cemeteries is gender segregation. These laws extend the politics of gender discrimination all the way to the grave. The strangest and most explicit sign of such gender discrimination in Iranian cemeteries is the prohibition against engraving women's portraits on their gravestones.[4] We have not forgotten that shortly before Jina Amini's murder, the "morality police" were patrolling cemeteries to monitor dead women's graves for any forbidden pictures. We have not forgotten *the morality police for the dead.* Gravestones that had

Women take off their headscarves at Jina's funeral, Aichi cemetery, 2022.

portraits of deceased women without hijabs were broken or completely removed, since, according to the authorities, they "upset the deceased's soul." For decades, then, the obituaries and graves of Iranian women have been faceless; instead of their faces one sees a picture of a flower or a landscape, or some verses of poetry. The woman and her individual identity disappear into the general phrase "Here lies a loving mother and a self-sacrificing wife." This is still, to this day, the dominant narrative assigned to a woman's identity. The politics of rendering women faceless and devoid of individual identity thus continues after death. French historian Philippe Aries shows in *Western Attitudes Toward Death: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (1974) that the transformation of gravestones from anonymous pieces of rock to carefully fashioned stones bearing the name and frequently the picture of the deceased person was the outcome of historical struggles to claim individuality. Engraving a person's name, identity, and picture on a gravestone is an effort toward upholding the person's individuality and immortalizing their memory. So, effacing deceased women's likenesses from their gravestones should be seen as a continuation of the effort to deprive them of identity and individuality in life, keeping them anonymous even after death. In such acts, instead of life taking care of life and being its guardian, death guards and takes care of life .

Let us return to Aichi cemetery, the birthplace of Iran's most recent feminist movement.[5] It seems that what happened there on the morning of September 17, 2022 was an unprecedented struggle to replace death with life. A collective action arose to return value and validity to earthly life, to push away and invalidate the world after death, and all those celestial and otherworldly values for which a young girl had been brutally killed. After Jina Amini's burial, a Kurdish sentence was inscribed on her gravestone—a sentence we had never seen before on any grave: "Jina, you will not die, your name will become a symbol." A girl has died, and the living are addressing her, promising "you will not die." This insistent denial of the death of someone who has died is in fact a serious refusal to sanction the sacredness of death. This refusal paved the way for the power of life to be birthed from a cemetery. On the day of Jina's burial, we witnessed two unprecedented events unfold when Kurdish women suddenly removed their headscarves, and when they shouted "Woman, Life, Freedom." Kurdish women became pioneers in removing their headscarves and crying out for life. No one had told the mourning women who showed up to that cemetery in the city of Saqqez when and where to gather or what to do. No one had asked them to throw off their headscarves in "a coordinated move" and "precisely at a certain hour" while they were crying over Jina's grave. No one mobilized them to shout out the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" and to perform a certain mourning ritual. But that illustrious moment, that moment that blended acts of protest and mourning and emerged from a mutual understanding between women, nonetheless crystallized. And herein lies the significance of such a moment: in its freedom from all those efforts that wanted to assign to it something exterior, it remains based solely on unique

Grave of Jina Amini, 2022.

shared pain. The significance of this rebellious movement—which soon expanded to other cities—was the creation of a mutual understanding among mourning women that mandatory hijabs and other discriminatory policies have transformed life into death and the realm of the living into one huge graveyard. Kurdish women took off their headscarves precisely in a place where it is forbidden to even engrave women's pictures on their headstones without the hijab, and they also did so during the burial of a girl who was the victim of the mandatory hijab. It was as if they represented not only all living women, but also liberated all the dead women's visages from the hijab. This moment of the refusal of the hijab, to go back to Aries's interpretation, was the moment of the refusal of anonymity—the moment of reclaiming individual identity and rejecting imposed identities, forced laws, and mandatory clothing norms.

Indeed, what took place was a reversal of values, from the otherworldly, sacred, and religious towards the earthly and the natural. Contrary to the "masculine and sacred" identity of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Jina movement of 2022 was born in Aichi cemetery with a "feminine and earthly" (nonsacred) identity. Therefore, we can claim that the latter movement developed in an explicit dialectical relation to the former revolution and ordered its transformations based on everything that was denied in the 1979 revolution. The narrators of the 2022 movement were women who reappropriated the masculinist 1979 slogans in order to make them compatible with the "feminine and earthly" nature of the Jina movement. Slogans such as "Independence, Freedom, the Islamic Republic," "God, Quran, Khomeini"—itself formulated in opposition to "God, the King, Homeland"—were replaced by "Woman, Life, Freedom," thereby turning, twisting, and subverting sacred, masculine values in favor of feminine, nonsacred ones. This crucial moment in Aichi cemetery, following in the tradition of the hijab protests of March 1979, created the foundation for the Woman, Life, Freedom movement and sparked the most serious protests against the mandatory hijab in the twenty-first century.[6] Listening to these cries for life emanating from the heart of a cemetery allows us to emphasize the *life-affirming* nature of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement and to understand how the movement articulated itself in opposition to death and all life-antagonizing symbols. Nevertheless, in order to fully grasp the significance of this "cemetery moment" in which the movement was formed, we should bring to light a prior chain of events that unfolded in close succession, became inscribed in our collective memory, and marshalled anger in our hearts. These events quickly made tangible the infinitesimal distance between death and Iranian women. Three events drew women to the edges of graves, and in one case, pushed one to her death.

On July 16, 2022, two months before Jina Amini's death, a widely circulated video showed a woman wearing a chador (a body-length cloak that covers the head) harassing a young woman in a bus for not wearing a hijab. The viral video revealed that the other passengers eventually kicked the veiled woman off the bus. It was announced the next day that the young woman in the video, Sepideh Rashno, had been arrested.[7] Protests erupted on social media in response to this news, with the hashtag "#WhereIsSepidehRashno?" creating a Twitter storm. Two weeks later, Iranian state television broadcasted a video of a forced confession from Rashno; bruises were clearly visible on her face. Once again, a wave of anger took over social media. A second event also seeped into public consciousness via a viral video. On July 19 of the same year, a mother was standing in front of a morality police van, begging them not to take her sick daughter.[8] The police, indifferent to the mother, who had draped her body over the front of their van, start driving, and the mother, crying and begging, is thrown to the ground as the van continues its forward motion. The release of this video led to another explosion of anger and hatred toward the morality police and policies associated with the hijab and women. The third event revealed another aspect of women's oppression. On September 8, 2022, exactly twelve days before Jina Amini's burial, a news item started circulating on social media about Shalir Rasouli, a thirty-six-year-old Kurdish woman. When a neighborhood man attacked Shalir, intending to rape her, she threw herself out of an apartment window and died.[9]

During Jina's burial, the Kurdish women, more than anyone else, recalled the image of Shalir Rasouli. One of the key moments at Aichi cemetery was when a Kurdish activist read the following statement: "What happened to Jina Amini in Tehran and to Shalir Rasouli in Marivan is the direct outcome of a patriarchal culture that paves the way for such atrocious acts."[10] Ultimately, these three events, along with others that targeted women, publicized narratives of oppression against women. Then came the tragic and highly publicized death of Jina Amini. The morality police accused her of wearing an "improper" hijab and arrested her. She never again returned to the brilliant life of her youth. Indeed, the constant accumulation of images of death and oppression in the lives of Iranian women made the desire for life burst forth, like a spring allowed to flow freely. At Jina's burial this desire for life was unleashed in the cries from the throats of Kurdish women. All those experiences of the mandatory hijab and forced anonymity, all those years of fear of the morality police, all those bans on any real presentation of the feminine image and visage, all those laws and clutches and "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts," all those years of *not* living in order to respect the afterlife. The accumulation of all those visceral images of oppression and discrimination compelled the Kurdish women mourning Jina Amini to perform an unprecedented act that would soon take over the country: removing their headscarves and saying yes to the optional, but not mandatory, hijab.

The murder of Jina Amini reminded me of a photo I took seven years ago for an exhibition of my photography. This collection of photographs presented important events in the lives of ordinary people—events that divided their lives into a "before" and an "after." In one of the photos, a woman in a black chador stands amidst the ashes of her burned-down house. On a winter morning, she had been putting on her chador to go out and run an errand. The edge of the chador caught on a kerosene heater, knocking it down and setting the house on fire. Her house was at the end of a long and narrow alley, so fire fighters couldn't get there in time, and the whole house burned down. In a highly symbolic way, the mandatory hijab had destroyed her life. But I had to change this woman's story in order to get a permit for my exhibition that year. At that time, the "sanctity of the hijab" was an absolute red line, rendering any criticism of it impossible. But in 2022, what happened to Jina Amini because of the hijab called into question its sanctity. The morality police's naked violence against women in effect de-sanctified the hijab. We could even argue that, in the realm of gender politics in Iran in recent years, no idea has been as costly and problematic for its creators as the establishment of a "morality police." Early on, the violence of the morality police took place behind prison walls. But in a rare unveiling, this violence eventually emerged from the obscurity of interrogation rooms and into the street—the most public of places. We had the fortune to witness and record these images of public violence against women in those moments when the morality police, despite their top-secret regulations and code of conduct, lost control.

The encounter between the life-affirming, death-defying nature of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement and the death-worshipping, life-rebuking nature of the Iranian regime was brought into sharp relief by a bizarre court sentence received by a woman who had posted photos of herself without a hijab during the first days of the Jina movement: washing corpses.[11] This verdict was explicitly meant to remind this life-seeking Iranian woman of death. The politics of the Iranian regime has created a rupture between Iranians: some are guardians of life in this world and others are guardians of the world after death. The guardians of earthly matters are supported only by themselves, whereas the guardians of heavenly matters enjoy the full support of the Islamic regime.

As a counterpart to the Aichi cemetery moment, allow me to relate another brilliant moment, one that I myself witnessed. This moment showed how women's fight for life quickly spread from the cemetery to the heart of life. As the movement was growing, I realized that I should look for female gathering spaces that tied together the scattered, wounded existences of thousands of women. I was convinced that only in feminine spaces could I closely observe women in the midst of a feminist tempest. Recreational complexes such as swimming pools, saunas, and jacuzzies were among those rare places where such intimate observation was possible. Such spaces in Iran are governed by a logic of "gender separation," whereby women and men must use them during separate hours. More significantly, the rule of the hijab doesn't apply in these spaces since everyone is half naked. No one can judge others based on their appearance or their level of conformity to hijab rules, which is precisely why the interactions among women in such spaces are more friendly and relaxed. The brilliant moment that caught my attention happened in a jacuzzi: the women gathered there loudly sang "Yar-e Dabestani-e Man" (My Grade-School Friend), a song that is a constant presence at protests in Iran.[12] This performance continued as the women sung other songs of resistance. Then one of the women stood in the middle of the jacuzzi and shouted, "Woman, Life, Freedom," accompanied by others around her. They were united in such a way that one could imagine they had been secretly practicing this collective chant for centuries in their private spaces—in kitchens and washrooms, in showers and *pastoos.*[13] Desires repressed for so long came to life when these women comprehended what was happening to *their* lives due to the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. These women were not teenagers or young women; rather, they were mostly middle-aged housewives and mothers who talked about their numerous regrets and lost dreams. It was clear to me that what manifested there in the hidden feminine life of a private space was the insurmountable power of connection. A passionate connection emerged from the sudden visibility of women at the heart of a movement. After jacuzzi sessions like this, a group of these women would take to the streets and continue their feminine performance in nightly street protests. Women were able to assemble and organize their diffuse forces in such spaces, and then take to the streets, their hair uncovered. Such glorious moments of life were made possible by the refusal of death in Aichi cemetery. The power of life spread from a small cemetery in a remote Kurdish village to the largest cities and farthest villages in Iran.

Who would have thought that the return of the female body in its simple and natural form would spark a movement? Who could have imagined that the presence of a woman with her hair uncovered would be seen as an unadulterated declaration of existence? The Woman, Life, Freedom movement is the dawn of an epoch when the unveiled, uncovered feminine body is not merely a body but a banner. Are we witnessing the descent of the feminine body from the skies to the earth? Yes! This body has descended in order to take care of her natural, human affairs. This is a body that has finally broken free of metaphors, so that it can align with what it really is. *Woman* has arrived in her most natural and human form. And she wants to vindicate the freedom of all women.

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Translated from the Farsi by Golnar Narimani. Translation edited by Soori Parsa.

Nahal Nikan is a writer and researcher.

1
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2
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3
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4
Ardeshir Tayebi, "Tehran Cemeteries Cover Graves that Have Pictures of Women Without Hijabs," Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, July 26, 2022 https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-graves-covered-women-hijab-decree-crackdown/31960716.html .

5
Aichi (Aychi) cemetery, where Jina (Mahsa) Amini is buried, is in Saqqez, Kurdistan.

6
Ed. note: for an account of these protests, see the essay by Elaheh in this issue, "Cleansing Personal Archives and the Birth of the Black Hole of Collective Memory."

7
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8
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9
"Marivan: The Death of Shalir Rasouli, a Woman Who Had Thrown Herself Out of a Widow for Fear of Rape," Hana Human Rights Organization, September 8, 2022 https://hana-hr.org/content/2022098-marivan-the-death-of-shalir-rasouli-a-woman-who-had-thrown-herself-out-of-a-widow-for-fear-of-rape .

10
See https://hammihanonline.ir/%D8%A8%D8%AE%D8%B4-%D8%AC%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B9%D9%87-23/1062-%D9%88%D8%B7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%86%D8%AF%D9%88%D9%87 (in Farsi).

11
Amnesty International UK, "Iran: Authorities in Huge Crackdown on Women for Not Wearing Headscarves," press release, July 26, 2023 https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/iran-authorities-huge-crackdown-women-not-wearing-headscarves .

12
Ed. note: for a brief explanation of the song, see this PBS article https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/11/my-grade-school-friend.html .

13
Trans. note: The connotation of the spaces listed here is somewhat lost in translation because they don't have exact equivalents in Western architecture. These are all traditional, "inner" spaces assigned to women by men.

Arnavaz

When Silence Is Broken and Voices Ring Out

For Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, who was the voice of the women of her generation.[1]

For Jina Amini, who opened her mouth in protest and was murdered because of it, but whose name became our symbol.

For Niloofar Hamedi and Elaheh Mohammadi, who write with brave voices and have been imprisoned since the beginning of the Jina uprising.

And for all rebellious, disobedient, and tongue-ful women in Iran.[2]

"Liberation is global, not Eastern or Western."

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On March 8, 1979 and for five days after, the streets of Tehran, covered in heavy snow, were the scene of protests and resistance by women who opposed the mandatory hijab. These protests took place less than a month after the victory of the anti-shah movement; they were the first of their kind against the newly established government of Ruhollah Khomeini.

A day earlier, on March 7, Khomeini had delivered a speech to seminary students in Qom. Explaining how government officials should handle "un-Islamic" attire worn by women, he said: "Naked women must not enter Islamic ministries. They can enter, but only with a hijab."[3]

The next day, during the International Women's Day ceremony at Tehran University, thousands of women took to the streets, chanting furiously against Khomeini's order. "In the spring of liberation, we are missing liberation!" they shouted, along with "Liberation is global, not Eastern or Western!"[4] The majority of these women were middle class; they worked as government employees or teachers, or were university or high school students. Those among them who were political activists had taken to the streets without being instructed to by the parties they belonged to. Anti-shah leftist and nationalist parties had abandoned these women, since they saw their fight as a distraction from the cause of revolution and deemed the protesting women bourgeois.[5]

The marching women were met by a row of radical Islamists holding broken bottles, knives, and batons. These nervous Muslims who, in the years prior to the Islamic Revolution, had called women without hijabs "Western dolls," "puppets of the *Taghut*,"[6] and "Westoxified," screamed in the faces of these so-called anti-revolutionary women: "Either wear the hijab or get hit in the head!" These angry men lifted up the skirts of protesting women, calling them "sluts" and "cheap whores." They flashed their penises at them, saying, "You don't want liberation, you want this!" During the six days

International Women's Day protests in Tehran, March 1979. Photo: Mohammad Sayyad. License: Public domain.

that these women protested and held sit-ins and public discussions, many would return home each day with bleeding heads and faces, angry and disenchanted. They could not believe that a government that had been established with their participation could commit such violence against them.

I asked my mother, who was a teenager during the revolution, how she remembered the process of the hijab becoming mandatory:

> I remember one day when we were dismissed from our class that prepared us for university entrance exams. The class was held in a building near the city center. I was wearing a short-sleeve blouse and a skirt that covered my knees. When I reached the exit door, I saw a few members of a paramilitary militia[7] marching with batons, yelling and attacking women without hijabs. Some of them chanted, "Either wear the hijab or get hit in the head!" To this day, the wounded, bleeding face of a girl on the street, roughly my age, is burned into my memory. I got scared and ran back into the classroom. I waited a few hours, and later my chemistry teacher drove me home. I hated the headscarf but I was also afraid to leave the house. So I ended up staying home. For about three years after that day, I almost never left the house. And if I was forced to go outside, I would only walk through the back alleys of my neighborhood, which I knew well.

In another 1979 speech, Khomeini articulated his vision of society's ideal sexual order:

> Islam prevents lust. Islam does not allow [people] to go swim naked in these seas. It will skin them alive! They go there with these naked women, and then these naked women come to the cities! Like what would happen in the time of the *Taghut*. If these things continue to happen today, the people will skin them. The people are Muslim. This is what they want from Civilization. This is what they [women without hijabs] want from liberation! They want Western liberation … but the government will stop them. If the government does not, the people will stop them.[8]

In his speeches, Khomeini incited revolutionary Muslim

men to attack women without hijabs. In the anti-imperialist Islamism of the revolutionaries, women without hijabs were the symbol of "Westoxification" and imperialism. One of the threats posed by the West to Muslim society was the loss of men's control over female sexuality. For these men, the sight of women without hijabs in the public sphere was so painful that they regarded any delay by the new government in cracking down on it as synonymous with the loss of revolutionary ideals.

Khomeini and his followers did not deem this crackdown as solely the government's responsibility. Pushing back against women without hijabs was the responsibility of each and every Muslim. It was a revolutionary responsibility, a religious duty. Husbands, fathers, and brothers had to monitor their female family members and suppress women without hijabs in the streets. Every woman without a hijab had to be confronted by a row of Muslim men so that *bihijabi* ("no-hijab" or "unveiled") was completely eradicated.

Attacks and sexual assaults against women on the pretext of enforcing the hijab showed that in this new Iran, the hijab was no longer a matter of "culture" or "convention" but a crucial marker for establishing the Islamic government in the symbolic order. Iran was supposed to become the ideal of a Muslim country, so much so that any traveler in the streets of Iran could, at a glance, see its superior sexual order. The hijab was imposed on the heads and bodies of women after the 1979 revolution by a primitive form of patriarchal rule. With the help of his "sons," Khomeini, this new yet old father, was determined to place middle class women without hijabs—the Western-oriented Pahlavi regime's most important cultural symbol—at the center of the new political discourse. Or more accurately, to displace them from it. Sixteen years prior to spearheading the Islamic Revolution, Khomeini had objected to Reza Shah Pahlavi's 1936 *kashf-e hijab* (unveiling) decree, which prohibited the wearing of hijabs in public: "Twenty-something years have passed since this ignominious kashf-e hijab . Look at what you've done. You have put women into governmental organizations. You can see that every governmental organization that now has women in it has become paralyzed."[9] In the position of father and leader, Khomeini asked every one of his sons to return women to the *pastoo*—the *pastoo* of the house and the hijab.[10]

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> Death to whomever desires to bury women alive.
>
> —Mirzadeh Eshghi, *The Black Shroud*, 1915

Khomeini and his followers' hatred of unveiled women was directly connected to the kashf-e hijab movement in early twentieth-century Iran. The anti-hijab movement emerged shortly after the success of Iran's Constitutional Revolution (1905–11) against the absolute power of the Qajar kings. This revolution succeeded under the banner of "equality and brotherhood." Shortly afterward, whispers against the hijab surfaced in the writings of both women and men. However, the main demands of the Iranian people at the time concerned the "growth of the home country" and progress towards the "gates of civilization."[11]

In the history of struggles between nationalists and Islamists to win votes in Iran, the issue of women has been articulated in multiple evolving ways. The significance of the hijab has at times been presented in the context of women's mothering role and the importance of their reproductive power in raising patriotic children; at other times, women have been portrayed as capable citizens eager to build the nation-state of Iran. In the early twentieth century, the issue of the hijab was at sometimes linked to women's health and their lack of movement; at other times, it was thought of as a symbol of their erasure from public and cultural life.

In 1920, the poet and constitutional activist Mirzadeh Eshghi published his lyric play *The Black Shroud* in the short-lived biweekly feminist publication *Women's Letter.* The narrator of Eshghi's story visits Iran's ancient historical sites. In the face of ancient ruins, he reminisces about his country's past glory and grieves for it. In a ruined building from the Sassanid Empire, he encounters a heaving black body, which he eventually realizes is a sick and fatigued woman wrapped in a black chador (a head-to-toe cloth covering). The woman explains to the narrator the oppression she has experienced at the hands of her countrymen:

> My only sin is that of being a woman
>
> It is because of this sin that I will remain enshrouded while I am alive
>
> I am wearing black, and up until the day I take this black [cloth] off my body
>
> Your luck will remain dark and miserable because I am your luck
>
> I am the person who can turn your luck around[12]

The woman (a metaphor for the lamentable and heartsick motherland of Iran) alerts the narrator (a symbol of the nationalist Iranian man) that the chador functions as her death shroud. The chador is framed as a symbol of the misfortune and death of Iranian women, and the salvation of Iran and its men is contingent upon their liberation. This liberation is only possible by ripping apart the

chador/shroud.

Twenty years after the publication of *The Black Shroud*, the connection that Eshghi drew between the development of Iran and the unveiling of women was so influential among intellectuals that they ardently supported the kashf-e hijab decree. Among the activists, writers, and thinkers who supported the decree were women such as Khadijeh Afzal Vaziri, Sediqeh Dowlatabadi, Shahnaz Roshdieh, Mastoureh Afshar, Fakhr-e Ozma Arghun, and Mehr Taj-Rakhshan, and men such as Ali-Akbar Davar, Ebrahim Khajenoori, Abolghasem Azad Maraghei, Saeed Nafisi, and Ahmad Kasravi.[13]

The decree was the result of a discourse that had been growing for at least two decades among Iranian nationalists. The years prior to the kashf-e hijab order saw the publication of an influential collection of feminist texts about the meaning of the hijab, evolving ideas of chastity and honor, and changing gender roles in the family and society. Supporters of the decree turned to these texts to argued that *bihijabi* was no longer a symbol of women's unchasteness but a sign of progress. Similar to other discourses of modernity, however, the kashf-e hijab discourse impacted the lives of Iranian women in two contradictory ways. On one hand, the compulsory nature of kashf-e hijab accelerated the disciplining of women's bodies and the erasure of traditional femininity; on the other, it made women's active participation in society possible.[14]

After Reza Shah, the first Pahlavi monarch, resigned in 1941, his eldest son, Mohammad Reza, was crowned the new monarch. Many women who had obeyed the decree then put their chador and hijab back on, though many urban women continued to go unveiled. The kashf-e hijab decree infuriated the clerics so much that to this day, after nearly ninety years, Iranian Islamists still hate the Pahlavi monarchy for it. Opponents of the Pahlavi monarchy regarded the increased presence of middle class women in the streets, wearing makeup and short skirts, dancing in clubs with male friends, frequenting cafes, movie theaters, and universities, as the greatest symbol of the Pahlavi regime's "Westoxification."

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> The occidentotic is effete. He is effeminate.
>
> —Jalal Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West*, 1962

The 1960s saw the emergence of a new discourse, one that had a fundamental impact on the intellectuals who took to the streets against the Shah fifteen years later and united with Khomeini: the discourse of authenticity and third-worldist power. With an emphasis on imperialism and indigenous culture, this discourse produced writing that intertwined the intelligentsia's hatred of Western imperialism, of the Pahlavi government, and of the government's Western-oriented view of modernization.[15] The most important book written in this period was *Occidentosis* by Jalal Al-e Ahmad.[16] Al-e Ahmad's examination of the manifestations of Westoxification in Iranian society, chief among them the attire and manners of middle class women, left a deep impression on generations of Iranian intellectuals. Al-e Ahmad regarded these "occidentotic" women as vacuous, peacockish, and without character:

> So we really have given women only the right to parade themselves in public. We have drawn women, the preservers of tradition, family, and future generations, into vacuity, into the street. We have forced them into ostentation and frivolity, every day to freshen up and try on a new style and wander around. What of work, duty, social responsibility, and character? There are very few women concerned with such things anymore.[17]

Al-e Ahmad directs his hatred towards "occidentotic" men as well, calling them foppish and effeminate:

> The occidentotic is effete. He is effeminate. He attends to his grooming a great deal. He spends much time sprucing himself up. Sometimes he even plucks his eyelashes. He attaches a great deal of importance to his shoes and his wardrobe, and to the furnishings of his home. It always seems he has been unwrapped from gold foil or come from some European "maison."[18]

Reza Baraheni, one of Iran's most prominent poets and intellectuals and a close friend of Al-e Ahmad, held similar ideas about urban and middle class women:

> The Iranian woman of the past ... was a good housewife, she understood affection and purity and at least she was filled with a sense of self-sacrifice for those around her. The urban woman is losing even these basic human characteristics. She has learned boundless promiscuity and uninhibitedness from the West and after she put aside the chador, she took a leap to the most ignoble of gatherings in order to arrive at the frontlines of the world's "cultured women," and we see how, after taking this leap, on the other side of these lines, she is falling into a nonsensical and nihilistic obscenity, and mire covers her face and head.[19]

In summer 1981, protestors demonstrated in front of the prime minister's office against the mandatory hijab in government offices. The banner reads "The Iranian warrior woman won't be enslaved."

Baraheni's words were written a few years after the success of the Islamic Revolution, at the peak of women's oppression. But the notion of "occidentotic" women's promiscuity was by no means foreign to the discourse of Iranian leftists. In 1983, the year Khomeini issued an edict requiring women to wear hijabs, the newspaper *Haqiqat*, an organ of an Iranian Maoist group, denounced the "gaudy" and "repulsive" attire of bourgeois women, connecting it to the imperialist West:

> Communists strongly oppose obscenity and women and men's gaudy and repulsive clothing, and they will not allow the spread of the rotten, backward culture of imperialism under the pretext of freedom. In their mind, women are not objects to be colored and varnished, and exhibited according to the daily fashion. In their mind, women are not objects of men's debauchery and tools to fulfill their sexual desires so that they may come to the streets and bazaars with gaudy and repulsive clothes and propagate depravity. Communists know better than anybody else how the bourgeoisie that rule imperial countries have made objects out of women.[20]

This language displays an eerie similarity to the writings of Murtaza Mutahhari, one of the most important theoreticians of the Islamic hijab in Iran:

> This disgraceful situation of *bihijabi* ... is one of the characteristics of evil Western capitalistic societies ... A woman's honor necessitates that she be composed, reserved, and gracious when she exits the house, that in her behavior and choice of dress, she does not deliberately intend to arouse or stimulate men, does not effectively invite them towards her, does not dress tongue-fully, does not tongue-fully and meaningfully color her speech with rhythm, because sometimes gestures speak, the way a human walks

> speaks; the way she actually speaks is another matter.[21]

These two texts are connected by a foregrounding of the objectification of women in the West and a rejection of Western imperialism's penetration into indigenous Iranian culture. At the time of their publication, the texts were by no means exceptional or controversial. Fifteen years prior to the 1979 revolution—a revolution during which Muslim men violently threatened women in the streets—intellectuals such as Al-e Ahmad, in sync with Islamists, introduced misogyny into the political discourse of the anti-monarchy movement. Like the Islamist revolutionaries, such intellectuals believed that unveiled middle class women were parasites without dignity who dressed to attract men and propagate depravity.

In 1980, during a conversation with a group of French feminists, Ayatollah Mahmoud Taleqani, one of the most important clerics after the revolution and a member of the Assembly of Experts, contrasted women's rights in Islam with women's rights in Europe: "First one must provide a definition of rights ... If women's rights means offering women as sexual objects, that which exists in European countries, where the woman has no right except for offering and selling herself as a sexual object, this is the negation of women's rights."[22]

That same year on March 8, International Women's Day, the magazine *Ket ab-e Jom'e* (The book of Friday), helmed by prominent leftist poet Ahmad Shamlou, underlined the importance of distinguishing between hard-working revolutionary women and bourgeois women:

> One year has passed since the brave movement and protest of the nation's women on March 8 ... but in our homeland some media and national television officials took a stance against these women's revolutionary act. By focusing the camera lens on the faces of a small number of women in full makeup, the media misrepresented the reality on the ground, trying hard to portray the vast crowd of hard-working, intellectual, and revolutionary women as a small reactionary group closely connected to the SAVAK.[23]

Even in this description of women protesting for the right to control their own bodies, the leftist writer draws clear class divisions between these women. It's as if the presence of a small number of affluent women in these protests embarrasses leftist intellectuals. In this account, what makes the privileged woman deserving of harassment is her clothing and makeup, her ostentation—in a word, the unapologetic expression of her sexuality.

At the time, it was commonly believed in Iran that there was no difference between the traditional headscarf of female laborers and the Islamic hijab. A flood of texts denouncing middle class women for wearing makeup convinced many women that that hijab was not a matter of religion or politics but of cultural difference among women. Meanwhile, many men had come to see the hijab as a tool of resistance against the monarchy and the West. They promoted "liberated" and "revolutionary" veiled women against "Western puppet women." As Iranian feminist writer Nayereh Tohidi has argued,

> In the list of the modern Iranian woman's sins, in addition to the sins listed for the Western woman, there was the bigger sin of becoming the fifth column for Western imperialism's motives and goals ... The extent to which a woman was occidentotic was generally measured based on her attire, the amount of skin she showed, the way she wore makeup and styled her hair, her mannerisms and social behavior, and her mode and amount of presence in a public space. Attacks on occidentotic women ... happened under the pretext of a Western-informed change in her social behavior, sexual behavior, and the way she presented herself.[24]

In this account, women revolutionaries either came from the working classes and wore the hijab customarily, or were women who consciously rejected makeup. In leftist groups, lipstick and short skirts were forbidden; any errors in dress or makeup that reeked of Westoxification led to prolonged "self-criticism" meetings.[25] The binary of the liberated woman versus the Westoxified woman that emerged from the discourse of authenticity focused on women's sexuality and the manner of its expression. In this discourse, the revolutionary woman was authentic, chaste, and self-sacrificing, while the bourgeois woman was ignorant, sexually promiscuous, and lacking in political agency. The bourgeois woman, protesting for the right to choose how to dress, was considered a puppet of the Pahlavi regime, in thrall to Western culture and superficial. Nothing more than a sexual object, her sole purpose in life was to fulfill the sexual desires of men.[26]

While writing this essay, I asked my parents about their memories of the hijab becoming mandatory. At the time of the 1979 revolution, my father was a young man in his twenties. He was a passionate, educated, secular revolutionary who, like his father and grandfather, was active in various leftist parties. While my mother shared her memories of the violence inflicted on unveiled women by paramilitary militias, my father said he didn't remember much. "In the beginning, there were only a few women who put on headscarves," he said. "But slowly the headscarf became obligatory." I asked him, "Did you attend any of the protests against the mandatory hijab?"

تصمیم نهائی دولت درباره کارمندان زائد

محدودیت اختیارات کمیته‌های موقت انقلاب

صدها ایرانی در فرودگاه لندن بازداشت شدند

● انگلیسی‌ها به ایرانی‌ها می‌گویند حالا که نفت نمی‌دهید گردش درلندن ممنوع است!

اطلاعات

پنجشنبه ۱۷ اسفندماه ۱۳۵۷ شماره ۱۵۸۰۳ تکشماره ۱۰ ریال

میزان بخشودگی خدمت وظیفه سربازان درجه‌داران وافسران

● دختران و بانوان درحال خدمت از روز شنبه بخانه برمیگردند خدمت وظیفه از دوره جدید یکسال شد

انعکاس وسیع نظر امام درمورد حجاب اسلامی

● حجاب اسلامی لازم نیست حتما چادر باشد

● خواست امام این است که حجاب اسلامی باید در مملکت رعایت بشود

● درباره حجاب اسلامی آقایان نصیحت بکنند ولی هیچگاه نباید ناراحتی برای کسی بوجود بیاورند

● امروز درباره حجاب اسلامی تظاهرات و راه‌پیمائی درقسمت‌هائی از شهر صورت گرفت

یک دختر مبارز با حجاب اسلامی

یک صحنه از تظاهراتی که امروز درمخالفت با حجاب در تهران انجام گرفت

اظهارات سخنگوی دولت و رالف شائمن عضو حقوق بشر درباره:

اسامی اعضای شورای انقلاب

ایران فقط ۳۳ روز ذخیره غذائی دارد

● اموال امثال خیامی ها و هژبر یزدانی‌ها بطور انقلابی مصادره میشود

بانکها باید طبق موازین اسلامی باشند

● ایسمهای وارداتی منسوخ شده است

● زنان دراسلام آنقدر حق دارند که مردها برای برابری با آنها قیام کنند

بنی احمد آزاد شد

عدم استفاده از ماهواره مخابراتی اسرائیل

سه چریک فدائی خلق کشته شدند

خزیمه علم یاغی شد

میخواهند جزیره کیش را ۸۰۰ میلیون تومان بفروشند

استخدام پزشکان خارجی ادامه می‌یابد

دانشگاه متحدین (فرح سابق) کلاسهای درس رشته‌های تربیت دبیر ازشنبه ۱۹ اسفند دائر است

قابل توجه فارغ التحصیلان دبیرستان عاوی تهران

Print from Ettela’at Daily, February 1979: “Wide coverage of Imam’s view on the hijab.”

He replied, “No. We considered these protests to be part of the counterrevolutionary movement. No one thought the hijab would actually become mandatory.” I asked him about his female colleagues in the leftist parties. I wondered about their opinions of the mandatory hijab, whether they accepted it easily or debated it with their male comrades. There was a long pause. “I don’t remember,” he said.

This gap in my father’s memory reminds me of the persistent silences in the writings of male leftist during the years after the revolution and in the decades since. With few exceptions, only leftist women have indicted left-wing parties in Iran for their refusal to oppose the mandatory hijab and for the sexism of party members. The powerful have a shorter memory and, with an easy conscience, accept their own silences. The silence of my father and his male comrades make the memories of my apolitical mother even more painful. She was just a middle class girl who dreamed of a university education and an independent life in the big city. A girl who, because of the way she dressed, was regarded as a Westoxified puppet by the male intellectuals of her generation. Her right to liberation and life, like the rights of many other women, was forgotten in the chaos of the revolutionary uprising of men. She was a girl who was forced to stay home for three years after the revolution. Who witnessed the murder and stoning of her female friends at the hands of the regime. The Islamic Revolution forever changed the course of her life, just like it changed that of many other women in Iran. In the face of this painful reality, men like my father have only one thing to say, shamelessly repeated over decades of regime violence against women: “I don’t remember.”

X

Translated from the Farsi by Niloufar Nematollahi.
Translation edited by Soori Parsa.

Arnavaz is a feminist activist and a researcher in sociology and gender studies.

1
One of the first Iranian feminists, Sediqeh Dowlatabadi (1882–1961) was the editor in chief of the magazine *Women's Tongue* . The name of the magazine was a subversion of the idea, popular at the time, that women who had "long tongues" and talked back should be punished.

2
Trans. note: In most of this text we have translated the Farsi term " *zabaan*"—literally "tongue"—as "voice." Here, however, we invented the word "tongue-ful" to emphasize how the tongue can become a weapon. The Farsi expression " *zaboon dar avordi* "—"you have grown a tongue"—is used when someone is deemed disrespectful for speaking out of turn or saying something unwelcome. So being "tongue-ful" means refusing to succumb to the forces that want you to hold your tongue, or that seek to cut it out.

3
Ruhollah Khomeini, *Sahifeh-e Imam: Oassese-ye Tanzim va Nashr Asar-e Imam khomeini* (Sahifeh-e Imam: An Anthology of Imam Khomeini's Speeches, Messages, Interviews, Decrees, Religious Permissions, and Letters) (Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini's Works, 2007), 329.

4
Trans. note: for more context see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROsyiZPFcPw .

5
A detailed account of the six days of unrest can be found in Mahnaz Matin and Nasser Mohajer, *Iranian Women's Uprising, March 8, 1979* , vol. 1 and 2 (Noghteh, 2013 and 2010).

6
Trans. note: the literal translation of this term is "tyrant" but at the time it was used as a shorthand for the Shah's government, an "earthly tyranny" that did not follow the rule of God.

7
Trans. note: broadly known as "the Basij."

8
Speech given at the Qom Feyziyeh School, March 7, 1979.

9
Khomeini, *Sahifeh-e Imam,* 118.

10
Trans. note: In traditional Persian houses, the *pastoo* is a closed-off, hidden space (usually behind a larger room) where food is stored. Resembling a small pantry or closet, it is used exclusively by women.

11
Trans. note: for an in-depth discussion of the Constitutional Revolution—a complex turning point in Iranian history—see https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/constitutional-revolution-index .

12
Mirzadeh Eshghi, *Koliyat-e Mosavar-e Mirzadeh Eshghi* (The complete Mirzadeh Eshghi illustrated collection), ed. Mashir Salimi and Ali Akbar (Amir Kabir, 1979).

13
Gholamreza Salami and Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Nehzat-e Nesvan-e Shargh* (Eastern women's congress) (Shiraz, 2011).

14
Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards* (University of California Press, 2005), 181–206.

15
Shirin Nabavi, *Intellectuals and the State in Iran: Politics, Discourse, and the Dilemma of Authenticity* (University Press of Florida, 2003), 123–95.

16
Trans. note: The title of the book in Farsi is *Gharbzadegi*, which, according to Liora Hendelman-Baavur, can be translated into English in various ways: "Occidentosis," "Westernism," "Occidentalization," "Weststruckness," "West-strickenness," "Westities," "Xenomania," "Westomania," and "Euromania." She states, however, that "by far the predominant translation in English references" is "Westoxication." Hendelman-Baavur, "The Odyssey of Jalal Al-Ahmad's Gharbzadegi – Five Decades After," in *Persian Language, Literature and Culture: New Leaves, Fresh Looks* , ed. Kamran Talattof (Routledge, 2015), 260. The translation of Al-e Ahmad's book quoted in the present essay uses the term "Occidentosis."

17
Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis: A Plague from the West* , trans. Roger Campbell (2004), 70 https://www.brygeog.net/uploads/7/9/8/5/7985035/occidentosis.pdf .

18
Al-e Ahmad, *Occidentosis*, 96.

19
Reza Barahani, *Tarikh-e Mozakar* (Masculine history: A thesis on cultural dispersion in Iran) (Nashr-e Aval, 1963).

20
Haqiqat , no. 81 (June 23, 1980), 4. Trans. note: " *haqiqat*" means "truth."

21
Morteza Motahari, *Masale-ye Hjab* (The question of hijab) (Sadra Publishing, 2000), 85, 93. Trans. note: for "tongue-fully" see footnote 2.

22
Quoted in Matin and Mohajer, *Iranian Women's Uprising, March 8, 1979* , vol. 2.

23
Ketab-e Jom'e , no. 30 (March 8, 1980), 14. Trans. note: "SAVAK" is an acronym for "Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar," or "Organization of National Security and Information." It was a loathed and violent government department chiefly responsible for creating an atmosphere of fear and repression, with moles infiltrating all layers of society.

24
Quoted in Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, *Hijab va Roshanfekran* (The hijab and intellectuals) (Nasher Moallef, 2011), 165.

25
Khorasani, *Hijab*, 160; and Haideh Moghissi, *Populism and Feminism in Iran* (Macmillan, 1996).

26
Kar (Labor), no. 16 (May 1979).

Negar Hatami

Heads Without Headscarves

As I write this, a year has passed since the Woman, Life, Freedom movement was sparked. This essay initially took shape as a collection of short paragraphs, in the form of journal entries addressed to a friend who got arrested during the uprising. I have kept the order of these entries but have reshaped them into expressions of my internal feelings and of the experiences I shared with other women. As I reworked the entries, new meanings came to light that were previously unknown to me. Feelings of bewilderment and astonishment are common in the descriptions of the singular moments of this movement—moments when the symbolic power and policing of the mandatory hijab shattered and an uncanny embodied experience was born in its stead. Recording and editing these scattered daily writings during the past twelve months has gradually shed light on a series of embodied maxims that have co-risen with this movement. Resonating with Chris Shilling's theory that the body is a site of sociological meaning, in every phase of the movement these changes became manifest in our behavior and cognition.[1] I ultimately reached the conclusion that as a result of this movement's train of events, a new body has opened up to us that we haven't experienced before.

Undoubtedly, there are methodological limitations in attempting a phenomenological description of personal experiences during the tumultuous year of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. The emotions involved are exceptionally recent, and perhaps to portray a landscape, more distance is required than I currently have. Sometimes, clarity necessitates time. The sociological terminology I use may not be theoretically precise, as something new like this movement likely requires new terms of its own. Despite these potential shortcomings, I felt compelled to publish these writings now, recognizing the ever-present threat of scrutiny by masculinist epistemologies in academia. What's more, some of these experiences might be overlooked by mainstream political discourses and media. Both assume the unwarranted authority to reshape narratives and impose interpretations that challenge and negate the individual experiences of those involved.

1.

In the last three months, it has felt like a new body has been shedding its skin inside of us. I'm not talking about bravery; nor is this an attempt to describe the body as a site of resistance. This pertains to the direct relationship between the scope of apprehension and cognition and the sensations we experience through our five senses. My senses are receiving something from the streets that is changing how I understand my body. I have read numerous analyses and interpretations, yet it seems as though the Woman, Life, Freedom movement is a colossal flood that stretches beyond the scope of my vision, gradually eroding my capacity to articulate or grasp it with the familiar words and discourses I have known thus far.

High school students leading the protests during the Jina uprising.

All our daily conversations are simply chronicles of being astonished by these moments. We moved our headscarves from our heads to around our necks. Then we moved them inside our handbags. Sometimes we have dispensed with them altogether. But is the absence of a piece of fabric the only thing that has shifted in our lives? What is shifting beyond this material experience? How can this transcend mere experience and become a problematic?

2.

Recently, a famous actress whom I had always seen wearing a hijab published a photo of herself without a headscarf for the first time. Today, I stared at her photo for a few seconds: her arms, her voluminous hair, her hairline. My curiosity about her evoked childhood memories of when I would see my schoolteacher at women's gatherings without a hijab. This astonishment at the celebrity's unveiled image is similar to the feeling I had two years ago when I saw some of my new colleagues without face masks for the first time. Each of these moments opens a passage that restructures the "interaction order" anew—an order that needs to adapt its embodied information to newfangled impressions.[2] Our eyes capture a new image, our senses receive the new visual information, and thus our intellect must fill the void of the veil. It needs to comprehend the body in a new semantic order that is no longer governed by the former embodied constitution. It must create a new meaning for the celebrity's body that contradicts its previous conventional representation and presents itself in a different way. We have had similar but quotidian experiences of encountering new "bodily orders" in the past, too.[3] For example, when we have seen a woman from the gym outside of that female "ghetto" wearing a scarf and manteau, or sometimes even with a chador, we have been unable recognize and identify each other after this 180-degree change in our attire.[4] In all these examples, whether it's a brief encounter at a party or a short interaction on the street, we receive new images of each other that can't be equated with our previous comprehension of the teacher or our gym companion. We have experienced the same feelings of bewilderment lately when we see women with altered coverings in the streets.

We have had pluralistic and contrary embodied selves in public and private spaces, formal and informal, work and school. To some degree, these days this change in attire is bringing these bodies closer to one another. We used to be women with fragmented figures in the public and private spheres. Contrary rules of attire used to prevent the formulation of a cohesive image of our physical body.[5] But now, we encounter a body that presents a more cohesive and shared image of itself in different spaces.

In the past our bodies have resembled fragments of shattered pottery, carefully divided across various public and private realms. Yet with the dynamic shifts brought about by these movements, we are now distancing ourselves from that fractured embodiment. The war between formal and informal bodies, which once besieged our individual presentation, is evolving into an embodied harmony.

It's as if the broken pieces are being delicately put back together, like a photograph that was once torn apart. The amalgamation of these diverse bodies is likely one of the unnamed transformations we've been sensing lately, as we have been captivated by the experience yet constrained by a limited vocabulary to fully articulate it.

3.

In the winter we realized that with every external change, we have to redefine our relationship to this new body and develop new strategies of dress so we don't revert to the past. For example, as I write these sentences, an intriguing phenomenon is unfolding as the temperature drops. This body has a new grasp on temperature, the cold, and heat. Our previous attire altered our thresholds for enduring cold and heat. A (woman) friend said that her ears are nipped by the biting wind but she still won't wrap a scarf around her head. This new body requires new forms of protection against the cold: strategies that can protect our unveiled heads from the winter cold, yet do not adhere to the force of the hijab. The sale of beanies has increased in the market, and more women are buying winter earmuffs, which in urban centers like Tehran has turned into a new fashion trend.

4.

It was only when we removed the scarf that we realized that this piece of cloth also acted to hide our bosoms. When the shawl and manteau were replaced by T-shirts, we found ourselves in the midst of a new internal battle. On the one hand, those who used scarves and veils to conceal their bust size or cover the gaps between their manteau buttons cannot easily let go of that inclination. For these women, the scarf's absence has altered the nuances of their bodily movements and their arm and hand gestures when walking. Some friends mention that since the scarf is no longer there, they hold on to the edges of their button-down shirt so it doesn't slide away from their bosom, or they slouch so that the curvature of their bosom is less visible. Or they find an excuse to wear their bags on the front. Another friend has been wearing small scarves around her neck to direct gazes away from her chest.

When spring arrives and the amount of clothing decreases, my bodily shame has a tighter grip on me than the ever-present possibility of being catcalled, sexually harassed, or arrested by the police for *bihijabi* ("no-hijab" or "unveiled"). The inner turmoil of this new body that resists the former prescripts can turn being in public space into a hysteric experience. Once, when I was wearing a button-down shirt in "men's" length (i.e., shorter than for women), the anxiety of showing my buttocks in the street forced me to rush into the first shop to buy a shirt that was three centimeters longer than the one I was wearing. Just those few extra centimeters relieved my tension and anxiety. It's as if the headscarf had imposed a different image of the female body, and now, its removal reveals that our bodies don't fit into the molds of those previous ideals. For example, when a friend of mine wears T-shirts, she is met with reactions such as "You don't have anything" or "You look like a boy."[6] She says it's as if the act of removing her hijab has led to the denial of her gender. Another friend, who wore a crop top beneath her button-down shirt, said she was mocked for her dark skin color by a man who was neither dogmatically religious nor affiliated with the government. Our experience of unveiling is influenced by a certain definition of the "feminine ideal." This emerging new body needs to be a specific size, a particular color, with hair well-groomed and styled, to be considered standard. When walking in the street with unkempt or unstyled hair, many of us have faced comments like "It wouldn't be so bad if you didn't remove your hijab." While in the past we could simply put on a scarf without having to blow-dry our hair, now we have to spend more time beautifying ourselves. Beauty salons have said that more clients come in for hair blowouts before going out these days. My experience as an adult woman is that as the anxiety of arrest for unveiling diminishes, new bodily fragilities emerge—byproducts of having endured the enforced hijab and of patriarchal definitions of ideal femininity. This is why we need to be more vigilant about incorporating a discourse of resistance to describe this new body.

The hijab has always been encoded as protection for women. It seems that for some of us there is a subconscious conviction that the hijab protected us from patriarchal judgment. On the other hand, there are other women, mostly younger, who have a completely different response to this experience. With the hijab gone, they seem to believe that this body that used to endure constant surveillance and protection no longer needs to be protected at all. In urban spaces, I see women who move with more confidence. They play volleyball in parks without worrying about which parts of their bodies are visible when they jump, or ride bicycles without any apprehension about exposing their lower body. They embody an admirable degree of agency and refuse the prevailing expectations of their bodies. As such, they resist not only the police but also entrenched patriarchal definitions of the female body.

5.

"Wearing long manteaus without a scarf looks so silly," a friend said in the early months of the movement—a feeling not exclusive to her. The recent changes have prompted many of us to visit a tailor to shorten our shirts, T-shirts, or manteaus. Women's experiences of appearing without a hijab and their new anxieties around greater visibility have infiltrated market trends. Manteaus have become shorter in the front—around the same length as men's shirts—but have grown longer in the back. While mainstream retailers in traditional markets and street vendors in Tehran still display loose and long gowns, clothing in Instagram shops has quickly become shorter (probably because these shops are mostly managed by women). Some scarf shops have announced that they're changing their business altogether, while others now stock new items, such as mini-scarves. There is even a new fashion trend, mostly among teenagers, of wearing mesh mini-scarves—a head covering that, while not adhering to the traditional mandatory hijab, can still calm internal anxiety or come in handy during a tense encounter with the police. However, most of these alternatives seem to be intermediary steps towards eliminating the hijab altogether. After a few months, the mini-scarves no longer have buyers.

6.

This movement started with the monumental image of scarves, the symbol of patriarchal authority, burning. It continues to unfold every day. Even if we cannot prolong these moments, our existence remains a form of resistance. With the arrival of summer, the strict measures and surveillance have reached their peak. It has been six months and "tomorrow feels like an incomprehensible and lost concept."[7] The overwhelming presence of military guards has replace the morality police. While they don't issue verbal threats, but they create a sense of intimidation and militarized surveillance. When we first started going out in public unveiled, we would regularly hear comments like "Well done," "You make us proud," and "Respect!," along with meaningful smiles from passersby. Now being unveiled has become more ordinary and no one thanks us. So much the better that not wearing a hijab is seen as the new norm, but in such unsafe conditions we'd prefer that public displays of support continue.

I have the privilege of mostly commuting by car, but friends share regular experiences of warnings, threats, and attacks in the metro from hijab-wearing women or municipal staff who have been hired for this purpose. Many taxis do not pick up women without hijabs, after being warned that their cars will be impounded. Stories circulate on social media of app-based taxis forcing women out of the car mid-journey for the same reason. Recently, I was stopped by a police officer because of the short length of my shirt. I created a scene and swiftly freed myself from the predicament. More women have returned to headscarves. Many put a headscarf around their neck in the hope that it can give them an alibi in an encounter with authorities. A few women have been subjected to nighttime raids and arrests at their own homes—not for going without a hijab in public but for posting unveiled photos of themselves on social media. Other women who have gone unveiled have received long prison sentences or strange forms of punishment, like being forced to wash dead bodies in the morgue. Long detention periods for feminist activists[8] have led to more conservative behavior, as the price for resisting the mandatory hijab increases exponentially. Malls, cafes, and shops have been shut down by the government because their customers weren't wearing hijabs. In Tehran, a few cafes ignore this risk to avoid losing the trust of their customers. However, in smaller towns and cities, not only do cafes post signs saying "No entry without a hijab"; they also hire people whose sole responsible is to admonish customers for going unveiled. These new hijab enforcers are also in the malls and luxury megastores of Tehran.

7.

One year after the start of the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising we can say that, more than anything, we have encountered new possibilities in our bodies that were confined under a compulsory covering. There was a body in whose framework we had not existed until now. Living in this new body has been our most significant achievement. Feminist activist Sarvenaz Ahmadi, after being sentenced to six years in prison, wrote on Instagram: "It was worth it. It was worth the sense of belonging to a large, powerful community that is striving to seize its own destiny."

X

Translated from the Farsi by Golchehr Hamidi-Manesh. Translation edited by Soori Parsa.

Negar Hatami is a feminist activist and researcher.

1
Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (Sage, 2012).

2
Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* , 6.

3
Shilling, *The Body and Social Theory* , 27.

4
Trans. note: A manteau is a mandatory garment for women resembling a coat or poncho. A chador is a kind of cloak or robe covering a woman from head to toe.

5
For example, female employees in government offices must wear long gowns, cover their hair with a specific type of headdress called a *maghna'e*, and sometimes even wear gloves to cover their wrists. However, the same individuals can go about their day-to-day outings, like shopping, with fewer restrictions, in relatively short coats and shawls. Also, in recent years women in the city have sometimes worn their shawls and scarves not over their hair but around their necks, in contrast to the mandatory hijab in universities and schools.

6
Trans. note: The implication here is that the woman does not have large enough breasts, which is seen as an important marker of a female body.

7
This is a verse from the poem "Aye-haye Zamini" (Earthly verses) by pioneering poet and filmmaker Forough Farrokhzad. It is found in her 1964 collection *Tavallodi Digar* (Another birth).

8
For example Elaheh Mohammadi https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elaheh_Mohammadi and Niloofar Hamedi https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Niloofar_Hamedi .

Elaheh

Cleansing Personal Archives and the Birth of the Black Hole of Collective Memory

For عشق, خس , that the silences between our words of love may not disappear.[1]

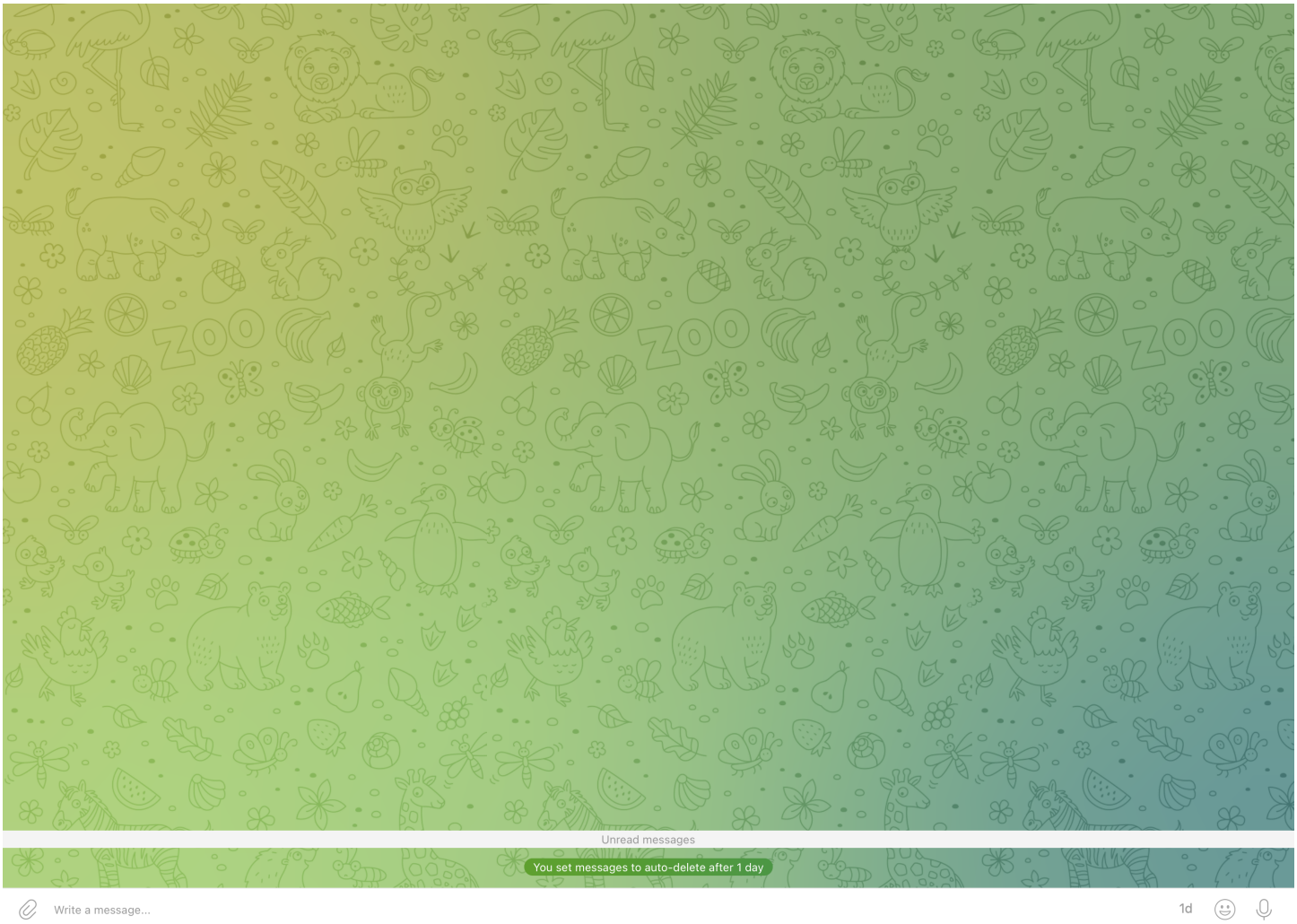
I am cold and I know nothing will remain

of the red delusions of a wild poppy

but a few drops of blood.[2]

I Wrote You This Letter in My Own Red Blood Standing on the Cold Street So That Laughter Should Spring from Pain[3]

A month after my last letter, I wanted to respond to N's recent letter, N being among those I regularly write to. I'd deleted my last letter due to the daily practice of cleansing all emails and other accounts, and I found myself wondering whether I'd already written what I was then on the verge of writing. What had I said to N? I couldn't remember the content or particulars of my emails and messages, of our conversations from these past weeks and months. What had we even talked about? What exists between us that's worth referencing and from which I can take my cue? An undated, decontextualized sentence of hers flashed in my mind for the thousandth time. She'd been describing a dead friend: "She'd wrap a simple shawl so tightly around her that …" That's all. The rest of the sentence becomes murky and escapes me in my incertitude, but every few days an image of that dead woman I never saw flashes before my eyes. An image that subsequently summons an image of N next to it. N, who'd watched that now dead woman with such precision and relayed such clear memories of her to me. For me, really, that dead woman's willowy figure, her way of wrapping that shawl around herself so tightly, evokes my relationship with N, and likely for N, watching her evoked something else. An image of that eternal sparkle in N's eyes and then a string of images is summoned in eternal repetition, which travels through history without my being able to discern the logic of the temporal dimensions of this evocation. Like every time I've wanted to write a few words in response to N's letter, I now arrive back at the night we suddenly became close after years of knowing each other, struck by the strange overlaps and similarities between our pasts that correspond to the larger narrative that might be said to characterize the progressive academic milieu of the early 2000s in Iran.[4] I remembered our exchange about the revolutionary calendar, the fortieth day of mourning[5] the deaths of Jina and Hadis,[6] gazing at the cemetery in Saqqez[7] together, and listening to the Mahabad mosque's loudspeaker together on the night of Fayegh Mam Qadiri's funeral.[8] Our shock and passion in the winter of 2017—all this clear and present, and N who always speaks so quickly and excitedly; our first encounter years ago in front of the city theater on a winter night, and



other ghosts that remain suspended in the post-2009 climate. Watching N smoke in the faculty of Social Sciences before knowing her on a "night … that glided on the window panes,"[9] so alive that it's like N is about to flick her cigarette again right now.

My irretrievable memory-wiped DMs in the face of N's letter and my doubt as to what I previously wrote her describe my overall state of being these days. The messages and sentences at times, out of urgency and necessity, due to the circumstances, disappear and get unsent before our eyes, as if the conversation never happened. A perpetual return to the moment before sentences coalesced. Setting the messages to self-destruct, annihilating the most quotidian daily interactions; at the end of the night cleansing the expressions of love and terms of endearment that you'd have liked to go back through and savor throughout the day, the group chats, the jokes. The daily reminders to one another, insisting that you must not keep anything on your devices. Any insignificant thing might be used to build a case against you. You might have to undergo hours of interrogation on account of the most ordinary sentence. Due to the sensitive security situation that's arisen after the uprising, we have and will have deleted and lost entire histories and archives of our personal networks, and at the moment of recalling the history of our personal relationships, this loss and lack of a personal archive will send us into a black hole of collective images and memory that exists for everyone on a vast and accessible platform. A shared platform of relations and emotions. Losing the personal archive to take refuge in the collective archive. What a strange loss, what a paradoxical poverty. I no longer have any of the emails N and I exchanged, but I do know how, at so many points in the Jina uprising, following every image, slogan, and protest, together we shared our awe and joy and trained our eyes on a collective image.

At times, we may have paused for a while before deleting some insignificant line in a private message. Gazed awhile at the shapes of the words, those simple words, just as N once gazed at that dead woman wrapping her shawl around herself and then disappearing. So that one day they could testify about the lines on her face and fingertips and her passion for spring.

Still from a video of Shouresh Niknam's mother singing laments over her son's grave in Mahabad. Shouresh Niknam was shot dead during the first month of Jina protests in Kurdistan.

Today Is Which Day of the Revolution?
I will let go of lines,

of counting numbers too,

and from among the limits of geometry,

seek refuge in the soul of infinity.[10]

He asked me, "How long have I loved you?" My memory and my phone's and my accounts' memories have been wiped so those early days can't be recovered and all I know is that I've loved him since the first few weeks of the revolution. Personal archives have been cleared in these times of terror and insecurity, in an ongoing uprising that's subdued the daily exchanges between friends and lovers and replaced them with the uprising's collective memory. A grand volume of images, sentences, moments, and videos we collectively sat down to watch and which impacted us with a rare intensity. Together we rehearse the words and stories[11] of those who were killed; together we watch the maddening and heartrending videos. We want to show our loved ones what we've seen. We publish our experiences and encounters as anonymous pieces and add weight to this dense mass of collective memory. Becoming anonymous in this collective archive and finding once more an individual connection to this collective memory. All those instances of "look at this." One day S and I cried along with Shouresh Niknam's mother's laments and spoke of our mothers[12]: "It's as if in the laments of Shouresh Niknam's mother I find my own mother and recognize something I hadn't noticed before, despite being Kurdish, even that way of wearing her scarf is so familiar to me. I miss my mother so much." Crying. Rewatching the laments of Shouresh Niknam's mother, I could again and again evoke that moment of closeness with S, and our mothers, and the history of our friendship, without having a single record, photo, or letter from that history at my disposal. Our private lives and relationships are signposted in the various moments of the Jina uprising: "Look at this woman." Crying. Watch "Hasanak's mother was a real brave woman."[13] Crying. Look, look at this body full of rubber bullets. Bewilderment. Look, look at these young schoolgirls, smiling with tears. Look at this crowd, look at them before the execution, look at us, look at ourselves, look at our executed teacher, look at our twenty-two-year-old youth,[14] and that is how we evoke our collective youth.

Among those arrested in the early days of the Jina uprising and freed after a few months, someone who, for the first time, was seeing that famous photo of the flood of people and that girl on top of the car on the fortieth day of mourning Jina's death asked on Twitter in shock and delight: "Do you know when and where this photo was taken?"[15] This simple question asked in cyberspace was absolutely shocking. They hadn't seen our collective experience of life over these past few months. For someone released from prison it isn't the necessity of relating private affairs that matters, but rather, the joy of relating and showing these collective-private-emotional experiences and impressions. We want to show our captive friends these shared moments. We show them the post-Jina world the same way we like to show and introduce the world to children, the same way we show a child a river and forest and butterfly and flower and say: Look! Look:

The sparrows' language means: spring, leaves, spring.

The sparrows' language means: breeze, fragrance, breeze.

The sparrows' language dies at the factory.[16]

We show the anthems and slogans, the scorched marks, the mourning wails, the floods of people, and that place where we've constructed our fluid private-collective archive to our friends in captivity who haven't experienced the new world and say: "Look."

In the early days when the uprising was in its passionate phase (if we consider its current stage as the depressive phase), a strange thing would happen to the protestors. We devotees of the revolution were all dreaming of love and love-making. Dead or unknown lovers came to us in our dreams so we could make love to them. We would wake up in the morning, and by that night, based on our respective time zones, narratives of our dreams would surface. An analyst said to one of the dreamers: "Dreaming of love signals hope."

"Hope means that while you're sitting in the depths of darkness, just as something suddenly takes form, hope should be revealed to you—all at once, like lightning, such that it deprives you of your ability to analyze."[17]

How does dreaming about love during a revolution become an epidemic? How does one's regular menstruation cycle get disrupted? How does a revolution intervene in the most intimate aspects of life and change absolutely everything?

The Sinister Echoes of "Cleansing"

I was chatting with a group of friends. Conversation had turned to a friend of ours who'd been arrested without "cleansing" their devices. Someone said, "They hadn't 'even' erased their diary—who has a diary[18] in the Islamic Republic?" and we were reminded of the mistake of keeping a personal diary under the Islamic Republic's regime of security. What was poignant about this

declaration was how much it took for granted that all personal archives and diaries of the protesting citizenry subject to the Islamic Republic should be "cleansed." The horror was recreated in echoing the term "cleansing," which has a long history in the Islamic Republic: the comprehensive cleansing of universities and the humanities that the government carried out during the cultural revolution throughout the eighties, and which it has continued to carry out to this day in various forms, such that we are today witnessing the same comprehensive cleansing of universities in the waves of expulsion of students and professors who protest the government.

When it comes to personal diaries/memories, is it also the government who's doing the cleansing? Or is this cleansing an ironic act of naming a core political principle in a suppressed security state? We erase our own names in our documents, messages, and personal records so that they might cost us less and we might endure longer as a force in the struggle. Erasing tracks and fingerprints and thwarting the police, while simultaneously chasing, constructing, and recollecting these personal histories by tethering to the archive of collective memory. Finding one another at the various coordinates of a movement and waiting for the occurrence of a memory from the future among the twists and turns of a movement that continues to go on.

This intervention is mutual. Individuals personally intervene in the construction of this collective archive. We no longer have an archive from which to recite personal memories; I no longer have a letter from which to describe N's dead friend as N described her. Memory no longer remains confined to the past but rather assumes an everlasting form. Indeed, every time our collective trauma or collective joy draws us into conversation, it's N's dead friend wrapping her shawl around herself. A memory from the future that is, like the uprising, ever unending and ever reviving. Our personal memory-archive will no longer accumulate somewhere but nowhere, in a negative space. In a black hole born of erased personal memories. Our terminated archives have been absorbed into the great black hole of collective memory and will remain there forever. Without knowing exactly what we said to each other, we're sure that we've said much; the movement's history is the evidence of our personal histories. Each personal history densifies this black hole and strengthens its gravity field, while that strengthened gravity affects personal circumstances more and more, thus necessarily tying the unconscious of politics to collective emotions, traumas, desires, and fantasies.

And this is how one can guess a slogan erased from a wall from the shape and outline of the paint that's been poured over it, just as one can remember a conversation from a blank screen and memorize the missing parts of a diary's pages.

And there are still silences amidst the fields to which we must listen. Conversations at the margins, the sound of black holes. That whisper that is so frightening to the oppressors. Can you hear it?

X

Translated from the Farsi by ZQ.

Elaheh is a feminist activist and researcher.

1
Trans. note: This dedication is adapted from the following lines of the poem “Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season” (1974) by Forugh Farrokhzad, trans. Sholeh Wolpé, in *Sin: Selected Poems of Forugh Farrokhzad* (University of Arkansas Press, 2007), 88: “I am naked, / naked, naked. Naked / as the hush between words of love.” The Farsi letters are, from right to left as Farsi is read: ‘ain, shin, nūn, ghain, khih, and sīn. In the text I’ve used the following necessarily unsatisfying approximations (or in some cases, simply swaps) in English, relying on only the simple alphabet rather than any system of phonetic transliteration: A, Z, N, G, K, and S. This was done in order to better create the simplicity and anonymity of the original essay.

2
All the poetry quoted in this piece is by Forugh Farrokhzad, lines that, while writing, suddenly came to me by association. Connecting with Forugh’s poetry, which is part of our collective memory in Iran, allows anyone to recall their youth or adolescence. These verses, which are linked to all of our lives, link us all to one another as well. Trans. note: from “Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season,” 87.

3
I laughed when quoting this part of the revolutionary slogan. The circumstances in which N and I write to each other aren’t quite so revolutionary and urgent. I haven’t written anything in my own blood. That’s too epic and hyperbolic for the present situation. But this slogan encapsulates the history that our generation lived between the 2009 protests and the Jina uprising. This slogan recalls a Green movement slogan, and only certain words have been changed—keywords that evoke the sociopolitical circumstances of that movement and this one, and the path that our generation has trodden to get here from the 2009 protests. Words that bring back to life the ghosts of the friends we’ve lost.

4
Trans. note: Or the eighties (1380s), according to the Iranian calendar, as it is put in the original. Subsequent dates have simply been converted to the Gregorian without further comment.

5
Trans. note: the fortieth day after a person’s death is commemorated as their “fortieth.”

6
Trans. note: that is, Mahsa Jina Amini and Hadis Nafisi.

7
Trans. note: Mahsa Jina Amini’s hometown in the Iranian province of Kurdistan, where she is buried.

8
See https://www.youtube.com/watch?si=MmW5veK8l11rSWw9&v=O3UIksCyZfc&feature=youtu.be (in Farsi).

9
From Farrokhzad. Trans. note: from “Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season,” 90.

10
Trans. note: Farrokhzad, from “Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season,” 87–88.

11
Trans. note: The word “stories” was transliterated into Farsi. The author possibly intended for two meanings of “story”—as “narrative” (in English) and as the Instagram feature (in its Farsi transliteration).

12
Trans. note: a video clip that went viral.

13
Refers to the story of Amir Hasanak, a vizier in *Tarikh-e Beyhaghi* , an important history book written by Abul-Fazl Bayhaqi in the eleventh century CE. Also a line from an Instagram post by Kamelia Sajadian, the mother of Mohammad Hassan Torkaman, who was among the martyrs of the Jina uprising. Trans. note: Farrokhzad, from “Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season,” 87–88.

14
An allusion to the famous poem by Ezzat Ebrahim-Nejad, who was killed in the attack on the University of Tehran in 1999: “Remember us! We who were youths of only twenty-two with love and passion in our hearts and who, before we could fall in love, died face down on the soft ground.”

15
See https://www.radiozamaneh.com/737967/ .

16
Trans. note: Farrokhzad, from “Let Us Believe in the Dawn of the Cold Season,” 92.

17
See https://harasswatch.com/news/2060/%D8%A2%D9%87-%DA%86%D9%82%D8%AF%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7-%D8%AF%D8%B1%DB%8C%D8%A7-%D8%A7%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%AF-%D9%88-%D8%A8%D8%B1%D8%A7%DB%8C-%D9%85%D8%A7 (in Farsi).

18
Trans. note: the word in Farsi is *“khatereh* ” which can also mean “a memory.”

Shouka Alizadeh and Goli Baharan

A Struggle for Everyone

The Jina uprising marked a significant turning point, leading to extensive transformations in Iran's social and political landscape. Unprecedented alliances were formed as marginalized and subaltern groups united to voice their oppressions and participate in the movement, with oppressed Iranians—including women, young people, individuals with disabilities, the elderly, and members of the LGBTQ+ community—taking to the streets with an inclusive interpretation of the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom." Immigrants from Afghanistan, among the most marginalized groups in Iran, also joined the uprising. Their names are not only on the lists of the arrestees, but among the casualties of the uprising as well.

The situation for Afghanistani[1] refugees in Iran is precarious. They are never conceived of as citizens and they face numerous legal restrictions, including limited job opportunities and property rights as well as a lack of access to government benefits, insurance, and education (they are barred from majoring in many academic fields). Additionally, they are restricted from entering and living in certain cities. The Iranian government's unstable policies and anti-immigrant sentiments have led to media campaigns against the presence of immigrants in the country, inciting incidents of violence against refugees both by the government and Iranian civilians. Such horrific acts of violence include but are not limited to burning immigrants' houses and expelling them from certain towns.

Nevertheless, violence does not constitute the entirety of immigrants' lives. The relationship between Iranians and Afghanistani immigrants is not always the same. By and large, widespread, public solidarity with immigrants increases during political upheavals, as our intertwined destinies manifest themselves more than ever during turbulent times. Ten Afghanistanis were among the 140 victims of the downing of Tehran-Kyiv flight PS-752 in 2020. The names of two Afghanistanis, Setareh Tajik and Mohammadreza Sarvari, echoed in the media as two martyrs of the Jina uprising. Just like us, they opposed the regime and lost their lives doing so. But has this movement truly brought the "others" closer to Iranian society?

In the months following the suppression of the uprising, a new anti-immigrant wave swept Iranian media: there were exaggerated statistics of the number of immigrants, who were falsely portrayed as agents of disruption and representatives of the Taliban. News stories with headlines like "An Afghan Citizen Killed Ten People in Iran by Stabbing Them to Death" were published as "proof." Some Afghanistanis confronted Iranians by asking them if they were the same people who supported the Jina uprising.

"Life will not go back to how it was before Jina's movement" was a motto that echoed across social media during the uprising. Did Afghanistani immigrants also feel

Afghan women protest in Kabul on August 13, 2022, two years after the Taliban takeover.

such changes in their lives? Did Jina's revolution change their perspectives on life in Iran?

To answer these questions, we interviewed ten Afghanistani men and women living in Tehran. We tried to learn about their lives before and after the Jina uprising as well as the impact of the subsequent anti-immigrant sentiment.

An Outsider Within a Group

Several factors impact the lives of Afghanistani people residing in Iran, including ethnicity, religion, gender identity, and the number of years they have lived in the country. In terms of Afghanistani ethnic groups, Hazarehs are some of the oldest immigrants in Iran. Their religion and status as long-term residents, unlike their physical features, bring them closer to integration with Iranians. Tajiks and Pashtuns are mostly Sunnis (unlike the majority of Iranians), but in terms of physical features, they are indistinguishable from Iranians, thus they are targeted much less in public spaces. The Ozbaks, who are considered newcomers, constitute the smallest portion of immigrants.

Raha Hazara is a twenty-six-year-old from Afghanistan. She was born in Iran and deprived of access to higher education. She believes that Afghanistanis in Iran face discrimination, inequality, and humiliation wherever they go: in bakery queues, schools and universities, taxis, the metro, the streets, and so on. She also feels that being ethnically Hazara has caused her to face more abuse in Iran: "One of the reasons I faced more discrimination is my Hazara facial features, because Iranians only know Afghanistanis with the Hazara features."

Most Afghanistanis, even those with a long history of residing in Iran, or who were born in Iran, have faced humiliation in public spaces. "Afghani" is a well-known derogatory term to refer to immigrants from Afghanistan.

Tayyebeh is a twenty-five-year-old born in Harat. She has lived in Iran for twenty-two years. She has a bachelor's degree in architecture from Azad University. She recalls that while growing up, "when we used to go to parks, we would hear parents asking their children: 'Are you an Afghani [that you are doing that]?!' as a means to warn them. In general, Iranian kids did not let us join their games, and if they did, they humiliated us by continuously calling us 'Afghani.'"

Zahra, a twenty-four-year-old with roots in Harat, was born in Iran. She is a college student in educational sciences at

Gender discrimination deepens as Afghan girls are barred from higher education by the Taliban.

a public university in Iran. She has never seen Afghanistan and says that Iran is her home, but throughout her life, she has been othered and has never been perceived as Iranian. She has had experiences similar to Tayyebeh: "People used the word 'Afghani' as a slur. It made me feel very ashamed."

Tayyebeh's experience demonstrates that educational institutions, namely "schools," play a big role in the process of othering Afghanistani kids. Children's education has always been a difficult story intertwined with the implementation of new policies by the government. In 2015 all immigrants were granted the right to study, based on a ruling by the Supreme Leader. Zahra, as one of the students who could attend school after the leader's ruling, faced severe discrimination there:

> For instance, we were not allowed to join extracurricular activities such as school trips or taking the "National Organization for Development of Exceptional Talents" tests. Affected by this climate, most of my classmates would not befriend us. They acted as if we were filthy objects. They would not approach us, would not talk to us, would not eat the snacks we ate. The teachers treated us badly too. If we did not do our homework or scored low on tests, they would yell at us: "You came from Afghanistan and you do not even want to study? Why are you here then?"

Universities, too, are sites of discrimination and educational exclusion for Afghanistanis. They are not allowed to enter all university programs. Fatemeh aspired to study flight engineering, but during Konkoor (the national university entrance exam) she realized that as an Afghanistani, she was not allowed to.

According to the "list of the four jobs allowed for foreign nationals," immigrants who retain the right to work in Iran are only allowed to work in four occupational categories. These include brick-making, construction, agricultural, and other jobs such as chemical waste recycling and gravedigging. Working in these hard and precarious jobs makes life difficult for immigrants, and it creates a narrow image of them as manual laborers. Meanwhile, a large number of second- and third-generation immigrants have studied in Iran and have attended university. They cannot enter the professions they studied for. Zahra's sister, who is a midwife, is one of them. "One of my sisters studied midwifery in Iran," she explains, "but because she could not have a practice here, she returned to Afghanistan at the height of the Taliban regime and was able to open a practice there, even though it was difficult."

The Other Speaks

Afghanistani immigrants have developed different strategies to confront the violence inflicted on them by Iranian civilians and the government. These strategies depend on the risks to their survival and the level of support from the Iranians. Their acts of resistance and daily struggle are directed toward the xenophobia of Iranian civilians and the systemic oppression of the regime. When they talk about themselves, they emphasize their Afghanistani identity and insist upon their equality from a human rights perspective.

Raha told us about her daily resistance in the Tehran metro:

> As soon as I entered the metro one day some passengers started talking with each other about me: "Why doesn't the government deport these Afghanis? ..." I used to react when I was younger, but now I do not dare. If there was one Iranian who would support me in that space, I would also protest.

The bravery of second- and third-wave immigrants, or those who have attended school and university in the country, in confronting this antagonism against Afghanistanis is remarkable. Their educational background and extended residence in Iran grant them greater ability than their parents to challenge discrimination. While another interviewee, Mohammad, strives for a rational perspective on immigration issues in Iran, he acknowledges that "I have not experienced racism recently since I don't leave the house that often due to the recent anti-immigrant wave, and if someone disrespects me, I try to ignore it." The fear of anti-immigrant sentiment and the potential for humiliation and danger have significantly impacted him. Despite his efforts to defend his rights in Iran over the years, he admits that he has been frightened. Mohammad recalls a case in which a student insulted him, leading to a disciplinary committee investigation that ruled in his favor and ultimately ended with the student apologizing.

Tayyebeh recounted an incident with a taxi driver who assumed she was illiterate solely based on her nationality:

> A taxi driver once gave me his business card. Later in our conversation, he asked where I was from. Upon learning that I was Afghanistani, he was shocked and remarked, "Oh, so you are illiterate!" He even asked for the card back. I informed him that I am currently taking advanced English classes and am pursuing a bachelor's degree in architecture. "And you tell me I cannot read?" The driver apologized and said that most Afghanistanis he had encountered were illiterate.

The oppression that Afghanistani immigrant women face is twofold: from the government and from their families. Unmarried women experience peculiar restrictions—for instance, a ban on obtaining a driver's license. Zahra sheds light on the difficult process of obtaining a driver's license and proudly relates her determination:

> They told me I had to change my passport to a student one. Then they said, "No, we do not issue driver's licenses to foreign nationals under any circumstances, unless you are married, in which case you have to apply through your husband." I informed them that I did not want to get married. I just wanted a driver's license. Eventually, after many attempts, and after signing a written pledge that I would only use the license for personal reasons and not for work, I managed to get it after six months.

Life During the Jina Uprising

Jina's movement changed marginalized lives not only within the geographic borders of Iran but throughout the world. Burning headscarves as a symbol of resistance against the Iranian regime's patriarchy caught the attention of many women around the globe. Afghanistani women showed the most solidarity with this uprising. In solidarity with Iranian women, Afghanistani women, starting in the first days of the Jina uprising, organized several demonstrations across different Taliban-controlled cities in Afghanistan. Afghanistanis living in Iran joined the uprising to protest the othering imposed on them by both the regime and civilians. The experience of death, prison, and a relentless police presence in the streets brought them closer to Iranians.

In our interviews with Afghanistani immigrants, we discussed life during and after the Jina uprising. In our interviews, we discovered that only women participated in street protests. They considered their presence as a means to simultaneously fight for changing the structure of the government, and defend their rights. Zahra shared her observations:

> During the uprising, Afghanistani women were much more involved than men. At the height of the protests, some of our relatives found it challenging and intriguing, but they did not allow their daughters to participate in the protests because they were afraid. But the protests by Iranian girls were interesting to them, and they said that these women were brave.

Hope for change is what motived Fatemeh to join the

Women march in Kabul on March 26, 2023, to protest the closure of girls' schools.

uprising:

> I attended the protests, as I was hopeful that social change would lead to us being accepted as citizens—especially as women—so that we could enjoy our fundamental human rights. I knew I was putting myself in danger, but I do not regret it at all, since I was fighting on the streets for my rights and for changing the regime.

Tayyebeh "found herself" in Jina's uprising. She pledged not to stop fighting, wherever she was in the world. She believes that achieving freedom comes with a price and sees it as her responsibility. She has tried to promote this idea to her family:

The Jina uprising generated critical questions in our life: What price are you willing to pay for freedom? What are our responsibilities to achieve this freedom? What are you willing to lose to achieve this freedom? In those days our ten-year-old sister was inspired, which gave her more courage to express her aspirations. We tried to liberate her mind from the ideology imposed by her school. We had a lot of conversations. Once we were on a walk when she told me she had heard of a girl called Armita who was also killed because of the hijab. It was surprising for me to see my ten-year-old sister so concerned about such issues. She asked me, "Why do they [the regime] do this? Why do we need to wear the hijab at school?" The uprising made her unafraid of her differences and has given her more courage; she tries to be more in touch with places or communities where she receives more support.

Due to the fear of losing their limited rights in Iran, Afghanistani families were concerned about their offspring attending the protests. They used various tricks to prevent them from going. For Zahra, resistance is a universal matter that she is willing to sacrifice for. Because of this, she has had conflict with her family:

> How often do I have the chance to raise my voice for my rights? My family told me they would not support me if anything happened to me. They were afraid I would get deported. The news about torture and rape in prisons stressed them out severely. They said: "What would people say?" I responded: "Yes, we must be aware of all these matters, but I must not set aside my defiance. If we stay silent and passive, the Iranian government will not grant us our rights, simply because we stayed silent. Nothing will change." For me, it wasn't even a question of "this is Iran, so it doesn't concern me." This resistance is a global matter. It's for everyone. If I were in Afghanistan, I would rise against the Taliban.

For Afghanistani women, just like Iranian women, the regime's patriarchy corresponds to domination within the family. Zahra, who is still struggling with nightmares about being arrested, told us about her experience:

> When I protested in those days, first I had the feeling that I could achieve freedom in my family—in the smallest unit that deprived me of freedom—and then I could achieve freedom in society, the biggest unit. I thought that when we achieve women's freedom in Iran, Afghanistani women will be free too. Even when the Taliban came to power, people protested in the streets. At the beginning of the protests, I was almost arrested once in the street, and for a long time I had nightmares that they were arresting me. But I continued protesting.

One of the achievements of the Jina uprising, she says, was when her mother surrendered to her own wishes and took off her hijab outside the house.

Compared to Iranians, interrogation is an entirely different experience for Afghanistanis. Not only do they face humiliation and abuse due to their nationality, but they are also threatened with deportation. Zahra has faced severe consequences for the Jina uprising: multiple interrogation at her university, nearly having her passport destroyed, and having a gun pointed at her during protests:

> I had a close encounter with a Special Units guard who pointed his gun at me and threatened me. Our university was very active during the Jina uprising. We organized demonstrations attended by many, many people. Eventually, the university security forces opened a security case against me and interrogated me multiple times. Three men and one woman interrogated me and made me feel like I was in court. They humiliated and threatened me because I am Afghanistani. At first, they told me to write down the names of everyone who attended the protests. I told them I did not know anyone. Afterward, the interrogator started humiliating me: "It is none of your business that there are problems in our country! Are you even from here?!" This was followed by slurs and abusive name-calling from all four of them. They threatened to tear up my passport, send me back to my country, to imprison, suspend, and deport me. I must stress that I refused to wear a headscarf during the interrogations. They usually lasted for two hours. I refused to talk during the interrogations. They yelled at and insulted me. Sometimes, after realizing that their aggressive behavior was not yielding a confession or response, they would pretend to act kindly. But I did not give them any information.

Some months after the suppression of the Jina uprising, the anti-immigrant media wave began to emerge. News outlets circulated stories about the alleged murder of an Iranian by an Afghanistani, and an increase in the number of Taliban immigrants in Iran since the victory of the Taliban. Subsequently, public life became more troublesome for Afghanistani immigrants. The government promised to resolve the issues supposedly caused by the immigrants and send them back to their country. Why did the solidarity of the Jina uprising give way, within a few months, to a war against immigrants? Is post-uprising despair the reason why the same people who chanted "Down with the Taliban, whether in Kabul or Tehran" during the movement now chanted "Afghanis get out of here"?

Fatemeh believes that this anti-immigrant wave is the result of Iranian people's frustration at the failure of the Jina uprising. Nonetheless, she will still go to protests:

> This anti-immigrant wave is a response to the anger caused by the despair and frustration of the suppressed uprising. They chose the wrong path. Despite the [anti-immigrant and xenophobic] movement orchestrated against us, if more protests erupt again, I will join. The government's goal is our pain and weakness. If we play their game, we will certainly lose, and the path we took together will be for nothing. So, we must not give up.

Comparing the periods before and after the Jina uprising, Zahra says she has lost many friends to the anti-immigrant wave:

> I used to have very close friends who shared the same beliefs and values as me during the Jina uprising. After the suppression of the uprising and the start of the anti-immigrant wave, they suddenly severed contact with me. Some of them even posted racist stories on Instagram and did not even hide them from me—content like: "Afghanistanis, get out of here! No to immigrants!"

Final Words

Afghanistanis in Iran face lives of instability and uncertainty. Immigrants in this country encounter numerous legal and social challenges. Politically, they will never be granted full citizenship, and socially, they are often perceived by Iranians as outsiders and "others." Despite facing discrimination, Afghanistanis in Iran share the same political faith as Iranians. They have participated in social movements in Iran and have been interrogated, imprisoned, and killed for their involvement.

During the Jina uprising, many Afghanistanis joined the movement and echoed its demands, which impacted their personal and social lives. The uprising gave them hope for change, not only in Iran but in Afghanistan. However, the wave of anti-immigrant sentiment that followed the suppression of the Jina uprising left them feeling hopeless. Despite this setback, Tayyebeh's words serve as a reminder that the struggle for a better life is ongoing: "If there is a struggle that is rooted in our human dimension, I am always there, even if those people had previously mistreated me as an immigrant. This is a higher dimension, and the Jina uprising was a human struggle because it saw 'women' as human beings. For any other uprising that has this characteristic, I will fight again."

X

Translated from the Farsi by Saina Salarian. Translation edited by Soori Parsa.

Shouka Alizadeh and **Goli Baharan** are social activists.

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Trans. note: “Afghanistani” is an inclusive term for all people of Afghanistan, while the term “Afghani” is an ethnonym that is used as a derogatory term for Afghanistanis in Iran.

Nuzhan Didartalab

A Power from Within

During the past three months I have tried to reflect on the "value of life" and the "right to life." And yet now, amidst of the incessant bombs being dropped on the people of my region [the Middle-East], bombs that have claimed, at the time of this writing, tens of thousands of lives; amidst the increasing number of executions in Iran and the horrifying news of femicide every single day and in every atrocious way possible; amidst the heartrending murder of sixteen-year-old Armita less than two weeks ago,[1] which feels like a repetition of the murder of twenty-two-year-old Jina, which made the Iranian people cry out for freedom, a cry heard around the world—amidst all this, I find myself in a perturbed and ironic situation. A situation in which anything I might write seems like it would add nothing to the reader's memory—would be but repetition and abstract babbling.

What's more, speaking of the value of life and the right to life implies that the writer takes a certain distance from the concrete situation of others, since by referring to their situation, the writer is trying to develop and express her own ideas. And yet, I am determined not to transform any situation or person—especially a person who went through very different experiences during the short time before her death—into an "object of analysis." I am determined to go beyond such a distance when it comes to people I write about in this text. I will try to mention those things that, though not lived directly by me, have an undeniable resemblance to my own situation. Throughout this text, my unconscious efforts might drive me to distance myself from notions such as "value" and "right"—notions that obtain their meaning in the context of certain "criteria" (in a capitalist world) and in the context of "law." They might drive me to denounce "human rights discourse" as a discourse belonging to world superpowers (especially considering the harrowing conditions in Gaza and the support for Israel by these same world powers, which undermines such a human rights discourse). They might drive me to articulate something visible and perceptible, something that can be lived and has an undeniable connection to the three elements of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" slogan: *desire*. In each individual, desire is the driving force that motivates her actions. It can manifest in diverse forms regardless of whether the person's life is considered "valuable" by exterior authorities, or whether such authorities believe in or respect her "right to life." In this journey, I walk among the corpses of those who were killed this past year during the Jina uprising. This gruesome wandering has taken me through blood-covered streets to secret torture chambers and suffocating prison cells. From the content and form of one of these deaths, which has repeatedly given me pause, I have recovered a meaning that I have insistently named the *desire for life*. And if, from grasping and cleaving to the life and death of the dead, and later returning to the world outside and to collective space, I have discovered a concrete power in society, this power was set in motion by the Jina uprising.

The Mothers of Khavaran gather in Khavaran cemetery on August 28, 2020. Despite pressure from state authorities, the Mothers of Khavaran have persisted for more than three decades in seeking justice for victims of a series of mass executions of political prisoners carried out in 1988.

A Brief History of Struggles for Abolishing the Death Penalty in Iran

In autumn 2013, twelve political activists and artists published a statement announcing the founding of the "LEGAM" campaign to abolish the death penalty in Iran.[2] The campaign started by focusing on abolishing the death penalty for individuals under eighteen years old. It also sought to abolish death by stoning, an atrocious form of execution. As the campaign grew, renowned figures joined in, and efforts turned towards convincing families of murder victims to pardon the accused.[3] In light of the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising, it's relevant to mention the case of Reyhaneh Jabbari, who was executed by hanging in October 2014 for killing her would-be rapist. Even though this was ostensibly a manslaughter case, various circumstances turned it into a political case and brought to the fore the gaps in Iranian law regarding rape, not to mention the inadequacy of the law from the perspective of women's rights. The case was hotly debated in the media. Efforts by influential people and NGOs—whose help was requested by Jabbari's family and government officials—to persuade the victim's family to pardon her were in vain.[4]

Participants in the LEGAM campaign, for all its strengths, were largely middle and upper class—political and civil rights activists, artists, writers, and influential figures. The campaign was not successful in extending its activities to different social classes and ordinary citizens.

However, in early September 2022, an extraordinary demonstration in front of the judicial ministry in Tehran expanded the fight against executions, from one limited to political activists to one spearheaded by ordinary people. These ordinary people were family members of those facing imminent execution. They had gathered in front of the ministry to stop the execution of their loved ones. The important aspect of the gathering was the absence of well-known figures. It was also notable fact that there was a plurality of families whose loved ones were charged with different crimes. This communicated a message to those passing by, one that the well-known activists of the LEGAM campaign had been unable to communicate after a decade of effort. Amazingly, this gathering lasted for six days. In the end, security forces violently repressed this people's demonstration against executions, arresting several family members.[5]

There was a young man in this gathering whose presence was even more eloquent than the surrounding banners and slogans: Farhad Qahremani. He came into the streets crying out from the depths of his pained soul, speaking not only to the passersby but also, thanks to social media, to all of society. He "narrated the pain" of the past eleven

The Mothers of Laleh Park are a group of women whose spouses or children were killed by government agents in the protests following the disputed 2009 elections, known as the Green movement. Here they visit the mother of Farzad Kamangar, a Kurdish teacher and poet executed in 2010.

years of his life. His father, a political prisoner, was executed in 2011. Qahremani's suffering after this violent loss put him in the position not of a political or human rights activist, but of an aggrieved narrator. His presence in this six-day gathering, alongside the families seeking justice, was a force that bridged the gap between ordinary people and political activists in the struggle to abolish the death penalty. In other words, Qahremani's public narration of his lived experience bridged the gap between those demonstrating and those facing execution, which the activists couldn't fully bridge because of their exterior position.

On the last day of this six-day gathering—September 12, 2022—Farhad Qahremani was arrested and taken to Evin prison.[6] The next day, Jina Amini went into a coma.

Struggles against the Death Penalty During the Jina Uprising

The Islamic regime killed more than five hundred people during the Jina uprising, both in the streets and in torture chambers. As the movement grew, the revolutionary people were just as strong and determined as in its early days. Faced with this, the regime launched a systematic fear campaign and started handing down death sentences for Jina protesters. More than twenty people were sentenced to death. While discontent over these death sentences spread quickly on social media, no major action was taken outside virtual space. On December 8, 2022 the regime executed a protester whose name was not even on the official list of people sentenced to death, which circulated on social media. This put Iranian society into a state of shock: Mohsen Shekari, a twenty-two-year-old protestor, was the first child of the Jina uprising devoured by the execution machine of the monstrous Islamic

regime.

On the morning of December 8, when a society in disbelief was coming to terms with this shock, a group of people gathered in front of Mohsen Shekari's house, in an act of protest and mourning. But before the public had time to absorb this shock, the regime delivered another blow: Majidreza Rahnavard, another young protester, was executed.

One of the first organized reactions to the execution of protesters was an open letter from female political prisoners inside Evin prison.[7] The eighteen prisoners who signed the open letter belonged to different political groups, from union activists to monarchists. Citing the impossibility of protesting in the street, they declared in the letter that they would stage a sit-in at the prison guard's office on December 12, in solidarity with the Iranian people outside the prison walls. This brave act coincided with the second execution of a Jina protester. The latter created an atmosphere of sorrow and temporary helplessness among people outside the prison. Early in the Jina uprising, there had been a living bond between people outside prison and prisoners inside. For instance, when Evin prison caught fire in October 2022, masses of people quickly gathered outside and surrounded the prison.[8] The open letter, however, sought to do the reverse: revive the scattered forces of the people on the other side of the wall.

Small protests reemerged around the country. They would eventually fade out, but what was remarkable about them, at least as reflected on social media, was how people from different class backgrounds and different political tendencies highlighted the class status of Mohsen Shekari, Majidreza Rahnavard, and other prisoners sentenced to death. This suggested that a union between different social classes was beginning to form, a union made possible by the Jina movement.

After the first executions of Jina protesters, the public reeled from this spectacle of state violence. They also worried about the protestors who had been sentenced to death, but whose sentences hadn't been carried out yet. Then on December 17, a seemingly ordinary night, officers at Ghezel Hesar prison did what was considered their job, their "responsibility" *...*

A Portrait of the Desire for Life in Prison

Siamak Baba, a thirty-six-year-old man serving a nine-month sentence for a crime that had nothing to do with the Jina protests, was killed at Ghezel Hesar prison on December 17, 2022. What were his last days and hours like? Let us try to imagine:

You have spent nine months in prison. Your sentence is coming to an end. The prison administrators will soon initiate your release process. According to people who have been to prison before, these are the slowest days of your imprisonment, when freedom is near. The wait is endless.

You are not even a political prisoner. You are an ordinary person with an ordinary life. On the night of December 17—at the end of the third month of the Jina movement, with many protesters feeling shocked, angry, and worried—prison officials are transferring a twenty-year-old man, sentenced to death for a crime unrelated to political activism, to a solitary cell in preparation for executing him the next morning. Other prisoners riot to stop this transfer and to defend a twenty-year-old's life. Along with other prisoners, you protest against this atrocity. The response to this uprising is teargas and rubber bullets—the same response that protestors on the other side of the wall have been facing.

But you're in prison. There are no back streets to escape through. No fellow protestor in a car will drive past with the door open so you can quickly escape death. In the chaotic, suffocating prison hallways, the only chance for escape is to reach the prison yard. But how many rioters can fit through the narrow hallways and into that small yard? You and a few others find yourselves trapped, and your body is bombarded with rubber bullets—like many of those killed in the streets during protests over the past three months.

Siamak Baba, without being a human rights or political activist, on the threshold of freedom, rioted against the imminent murder of someone much younger than he. Not expecting death, his motivation was not martyrdom but the will to affirm life, the life of another. In fighting to wrest the claws of death from the young neck of this other, Siamak was killed. Every aspect of this story suggests that what compelled him to act, in my view (I, who am not a human rights activist and have not, like Farhad Qahremani, lost a loved one to execution, but who have faced imminent arrest numerous times and have worried about people close to me dying, by a bullet in the street or by hanging in prison), was not some abstract conception of the value of human life but an intuitive, preconscious desire to protect life in its multitude of forms and meanings.

On that horrifying night, Siamak and other wounded prisoners were taken to the hospital. Three days later his family was called to retrieve their son's corpse. According to his mother, they didn't let her see his full body, only his face. His eyes had been shot by rubber bullets—an injury that, if they survive, permanently mutilates street protesters who are targeted with rubber bullets. The hundreds of protestors who have suffered serious eye injuries are a testament to this regime's oppressive violence.

We have found a trace of the desire for life in an incarcerated man, Siamak Baba. Is it possible to find, in the

The mothers of Khavaran gather over the unmarked graves of their loved ones in Khavaran cemetery.

protests and public gatherings that happened in the weeks after his death, this same desire on a larger collective scale? Can we find in the streets the kind of solidarity that fights to prevent the deaths of others?

Struggles against the Death Penalty during the Jina Uprising, Continued

Early January 2023 saw the atrocious executions of two working class Jina protesters, Seyyed Mohammad Hosseini and Mohammad Mehdi Karami, which prompted solidarity across classes. Then on the night of January 9, information circulating on social media suggested that two other protesters, Mohammad Borouqani and Mohammad Qobadlou, who were incarcerated at Rajaee Shahr prison, would soon be executed. A crowd quickly formed at the prison gates. With its strong sense of solidarity, shared destiny, and common desire, this crowd truly deserved to be called a "society." On that night, perhaps contrary to the expectations of many—myself included—these "ordinary" people, who had come together without any call to gather (though they may have been drawn by the news that the families of Borouqani and Qobadlou were there), people who had been protesting in the streets for months, found each other again at those prison gates. One could call it a "spontaneous" gathering. While I don't want to exaggerate the events of that night, it's fair to call it a historical turning point—a history whose starting point is the Jina movement. On the face of it, one might be inclined to see this gathering as a direct consequence of the executions that happened two days before. However, if we look closer, we can see that it was the years of struggle against the death penalty, bit by bit, that pulled these people together. From the campaigns led by well-known activists, to the struggles of the mothers of executed protesters, to the open letter and sit-in by female prisoners at Evin, to the protests against the death penalty

from *within* the Jina movement, to the prisoner riot at Ghezel Hesar prison, when Siamak Baba, a nonpolitical prisoner protesting the death sentence of another nonpolitical prisoner, was murdered in a way that closely resembled the murder of Jina street protestors—this anti–death penalty movement had been building for a long time. (We should not forget that, among all those murdered during the Jina movement, whether in the street or in prison, Baba, who had no background in political activism, is the only one killed for protesting against the death penalty.)[9]

In May 2023, people gathered outside Dastgerd prison in Isfahan to protest the imminent execution of three young protesters, Majid Kazemi, Saleh MirHashemi, and Saeed Yaqubi.[10] Tragically, these protests could not stop the executions. Two days later, a group of "the children of the executed political activists of the 1980s" released a powerful, brilliant statement decrying the death penalty.[11] The statement described the atrocity of execution from a personal perspective—the kind of testimony that, only a few days before the life-affirming Jina uprising began, also issued from the burning throat of Farhad Qahremani.

Harass Watch has published in Farsi a comprehensive text about the struggles against the death penalty during the Jina movement, connecting them the history of feminist struggles in Iran.[12] Here I have only presented a small selection.

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If during the eight years of the Iran-Iraq War people fought to "defend their motherland," and if the Green movement was about people "fighting for their right" to determine their future, the Jina uprising seems to have been a more organic and authentic space. This necessary space emerged from *desire*. The movement conceived of "Woman," "Life," and "Freedom"—its key animating ideas—in a way that was before and beyond preconceived notions.

Final Words

In Kurdish, the word "*jina*" means "life." On Mahsa Jina Amini's gravestone is the inscription "Your name will become our symbol."

That turning point on January 9, 2023, when a crowd gathered at the gates of Rajaee Shahr prison, happened when the Jina movement was almost four months old. Four months is when a fetus is supposed to be able to start hearing for the first time.[13]

Siamak Baba was killed at the end of the ninth month of his prison sentence, as he waited for his "rebirth."

And we cannot forget the continuity between the September 2022 protests against the death penalty and the birth of an uprising whose watchword is "Jina" (life). I assert that the street was pregnant with life when they murdered Jina. A life-affirming uprising was born from her death. Is it far-fetched to believe that a prescient power links the struggle against the death penalty and the life-affirming Woman, Life, Freedom movement? Is it far-fetched to believe that one man's outcry against the execution of his father called forth a struggle for life, a struggle that, over time, formed into a womb that gave meaning to the death of a thirty-six-year-old man in prison?

These are signs that we can read and portray, that can be recited as poems. By remembering them, we let them resonate in our minds. They show the *feminine spirit* of the people who filled the streets with their bodily presence and their passionate voices. These signs cannot and should not be interpreted with a masculine, analytical mentality.

Dayeh Sharifa, the mother of Kurdish prisoner Ramin Hossein-Panahi who was executed in 2018 following an unfair trial and alleged torture, sets fire to a noose during the Iranian festival of fire taking place on the last Wednesday of the year.

X

Translated from the Farsi by Golnar Narimani. Translation edited by Soori Parsa.

Nuzhan Didartalab is a feminist activist.

1
Armita Geravand died on October 28, 2023 after being in a coma for several weeks.

2
In Iran, courts sentence people to the death penalty for a number of different crimes, including manslaughter, drug crimes, extramarital affairs, and political crimes. Execution has been carried out by various means over the past forty years, including firing squad, hanging, and stoning. The latter is specific to extramarital affairs—a crime according to Iranian Sharia law. Trans. note: "LEGAM" is an acronym of sorts that combines the first letter of the Persian word for "abolish" with the word "step." An English equivalent would be "ASTEP."

3
Trans. note: In cases of intentional murder, the legal principle of *qisas* dictates that the assailant be executed according to Iranian Islamic law, unless the family of the victim pardons the assailant, in which case *diyah* or b lood money is paid. *Qisas* or *qiṣāṣ* (Arabic: قِصَاص, literally "accountability") is the Islamic term for "eye for an eye."

4
Trans. note: For more information about this case, see the 2023 film *Seven Winters in Tehran* by Stefani Niederzoll. Jabbari stabbed a man who had dragged her into an empty apartment to rape her. Various pieces of evidence that were recovered—e.g., drugged fruit juice, condoms—testified to his intentions, but these were largely ignored or obfuscated by the court, and Jabbari was ultimately tortured into incriminating herself.

5
This demonstration stands in stark contrast to one that took place a decade earlier to demand the repeal of the death sentence against a person who had attracted the attention of civil rights activists and the media. The demonstration was organized by civil rights groups rather than ordinary people. The family members of the accused were present, but the gathering did not attempt to foster solidarity by bringing together other families who were in a similar situation.

6
On October 15 of that same year—the twenty-seventh day of the Jina uprising—there was a fire in Evin prison. Farhad Qahremani, along with other prisoners, was subsequently transferred to Rajaee Shahr prison, after being brutally beaten. His situation was raised by well-known civil rights and political activists, albeit on a much smaller scale than before.

7
See https://www.hra-news.org/letters/a-919/ (in Farsi). Three days later, on December 15, two hundred and thirty five union workers published an open letter against the execution of Woman, Life, Freedom movement protestors https://harasswatch.com/news/2088 (in Farsi). In February of the following year, on the anniversary of the detention of a number of environmental activists, seven female political prisoners in Evin once again published an open letter against the death penalty https://harasswatch.com/news/2109 (in Farsi).

8
See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evin_Prison_fire .

9
Trans. note: Mohammad Borouqani's death sentence was revoked by an appeals court, but Mohammad Qobadlou was eventually executed in January 2024. Accused of killing a police officer during the Jina protests, Qobadlou was twenty-two and had bipolar disorder. Initially, his death sentence was revoked due to lack of evidence and his mental state. But while he was supposed to be awaiting retrial, the public learned that he had been executed without his family or lawyers being notified or present. His death shook Iranian society to its core.

10
The three young men were accused of killing a police officer and a soldier from the Basij paramilitary militia.

11
See https://www.radiozamaneh.com/765735 (in Farsi).

12
See https://harasswatch.com/news/2153/ (in Farsi).

13
According to Islam, which is the basis of Iranian law, the fourth month of pregnancy is when a soul is "breathed" into the fetus, and terminating a pregnancy is murdering a "human." What a startling contrast there is between this definition of human life and the reality of death sentences against humans with a history and emotional ties to

countless other humans.

Aram

Jina, the Moment of No Return

At 5 p.m. sharp we went towards the agreed-upon street. We'd been anxious since the day before, when the call for the protest was sent out to feminist groups and collectives. Will people come? Will the repressive forces of the state allow us to gather and protest?

As we reached the Hijab intersection,[1] suddenly hope and excitement replaced all our fear and anxiety. Groups of young people had gathered and joined one another. All of a sudden, we were in a river of people that changed our destiny, and probably Iran's destiny, forever. Jina's name became our symbol and a feminine uprising began.

In this essay, I will first discuss an alternative approach to political acts. In contrast to conventional approaches based on "revolutionary consciousness," this approach emphasizes emotions, politics, and the encounter. Then I will review the genealogy of post-1979 revolts in Iran and explicate the scope and boundaries of the Jina uprising. In so doing, I will compare the Jina movement to past movements in terms of the agency and geography of these uprisings. Finally, I will look at the organizational dimension of the Jina uprising to argue that it exemplified a new form of mobilization—spontaneous, self-generating, and decentered.

The Emotions and Politics of Encounter

Emotions are commonly perceived as inferior to consciousness. However, feminists have shown how emotions can precede consciousness and guide it. Emotion emerges from a problem or issue—when something becomes problematic for us, when we are hurt, when we are afraid, when we are exasperated, or when something erodes our soul like a cancer. We feel pain and suffering. Before we become "conscious" of it, we feel it with our flesh and blood. This feeling is the source of action. Each moment of suffering leaves a trace on our bodies. Traces of suffering, traces of pain, lead us to act. Contrary to the common belief that consciousness has a higher status than emotions, in fact consciousness is a derivative form of knowledge—a knowledge that forms only *after* emotions, in order to relieve the newly emerged pain.

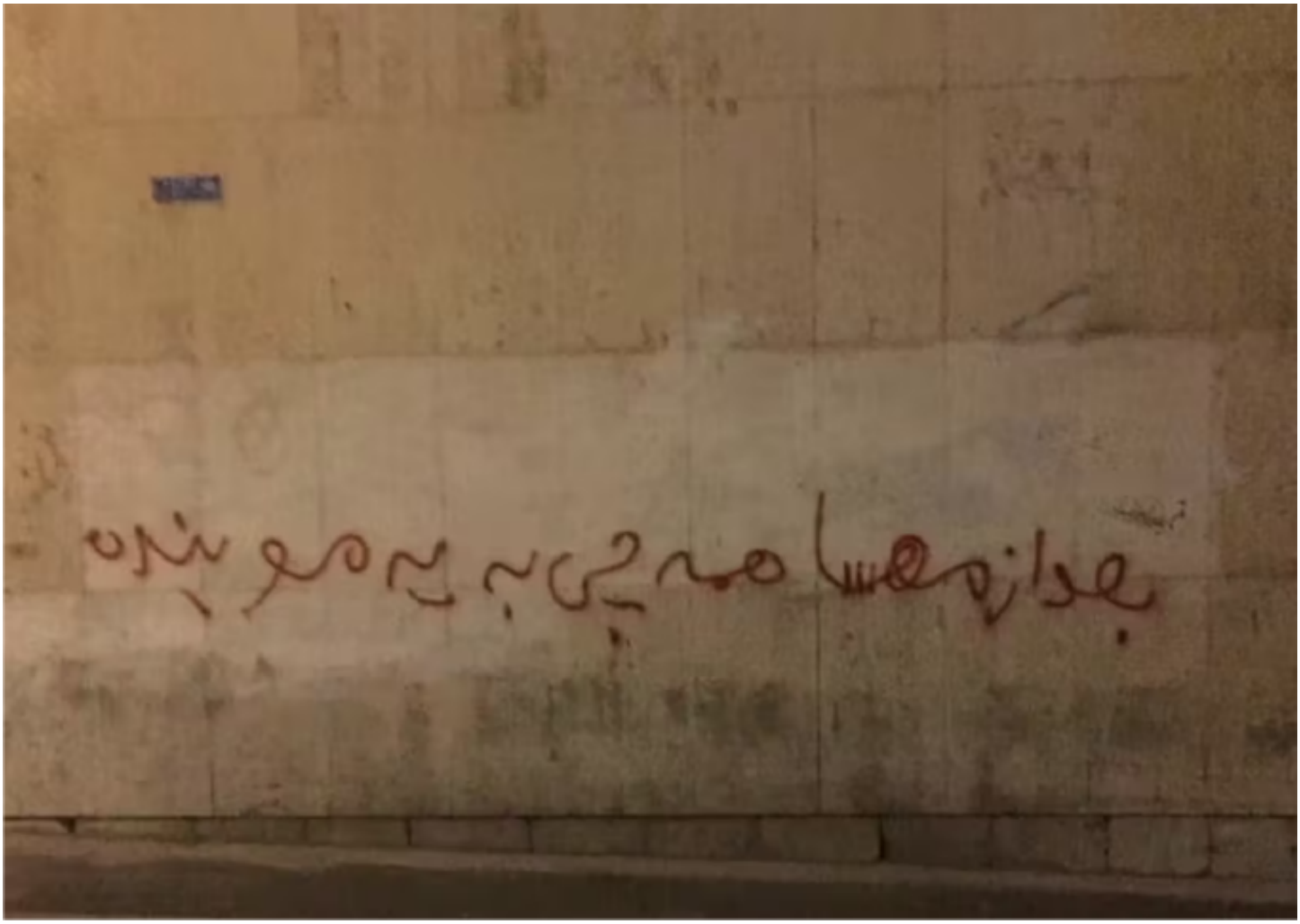
It might well be said that what emerged from the European Enlightenment was the supremacy of mind and thought. As humankind saw itself as the center of the universe, we assumed that we had defeated the "ignorance" of the Middle Ages, tamed the destructive force of nature, and harnessed it through the power of intellect and reason. From Descartes' "cogito" to Hegel's "Geist," philosophers emphasized mind over matter and thought over the body. The same vision dominated the tradition of critical thinking, and especially theories of social change. An emphasis on "raising consciousness" became one of the fundamental elements of revolutionary change. In Marx's view, revolution required the "consciousness" of the proletariat, and Lenin called the

A scene from the Jina uprising, 2022.

political elite the generating force of the working class. This mind-oriented approach has become a dominant discourse, so that most people assume change requires a "conscious" society. It's as if there's an ignorant mass whose consciousness should be raised with the aid of cultural and educational programs so that society changes in the "long term."

This tradition needs to be challenged. Taking the Jina movement as an example, I argue that what moved the Iranian population forward was not consciousness but emotions. As Sara Ahmed's works suggests, the origin of *any movement* is emotions; the rapture of uprising sprouts in us when something frustrates us and we become sensitive to it. In contrast to consciousness, emotion is not something that can be transferred from the high echelons of the elite to the lower echelons of the masses. Instead, it permeates horizontally from heart to heart, from one vision to another, and from one body to the one next to it. In recent years, institutional and party politics have lost their popularity. Accordingly, the formally approved parties who do not have mass support have lost their ability to mobilize the population in critical transformative moments.

One should examine the recent uprisings through the lens of the politics of encounter. To elucidate this politics, Andy Merrifield, inspired by Althusser, employs the allegory of parallel raindrops: raindrops fall parallel to each other until one drop swerves once, and only once, and collides with the drop next to it. From this swerving of the first drop, other drops collide, leading to a chain of encounters. These encounters create something new—a new order that is the foundation of collective and common action.[2] What happened in the Jina movement belongs to the politics of encounter. Unlike movements whose formation is predicated on a predesigned plan and vertical organization, the Jina movement, like many other movements of the last decade, formed from the agglomeration of previously separate and detached bodies that suddenly seized the street for a few hours in a spontaneous arrangement. It was the encounter of these



Graffiti during the uprising: “After Mahsa [Jina], everything hangs from a thread [of hair]”

separate bodies at the Hijab intersection that, like a knot of new compositions and arrangements, generated unprecedented acts and new forms of coming together. This form of direct and informal action challenged the ordinary politics of the political elite.

The Emergence of a New Subjectivity

Concurrent with this shift from institutional politics to the politics of encounter, political subjectivity has transformed as well. This new subjectivity represents a dissolution of and detachment from dominant socioeconomic systems, and presents a form of independent and individual subjectivity. As Sari Hanafi has shown in his studies on political subjectivity after the Arab Spring, this subject is not a competitive, antisocial, neoliberal individual but one “that involves the constant negotiation of an actor with the existing social structure in order to realize a (partial) emancipation from it.”[3] This new subjectivity enables political agents to carry out self-referential acts—agents who, despite recognizing social forces and pressures, resist disciplinary power.

Social networks and online activism facilitate the formation of this new subjectivity. The pervasive character of online social networks has made them the primary site for political organizing and analysis. Amplified by social networks (but not limited to them), the Jina movement temporarily succeeded in creating public spaces all around the country—spaces that were overtaken by groups of people, and that connected them to the history and memories of past revolutions and uprisings. A new political imaginary bloomed in their minds, suggesting that another way of life is possible.

The Specificity of the Jina Moment

We can trace the postrevolutionary uprisings in Iran back to the 1990s. With the end of the Iran-Iraq War in 1988, the main aim of the government (known as the

"Reconstruction Government") was to implement the World Bank's structural adjustment package. This ended up impoverishing the lower classes and widening inequality. A rise in consumer prices and staggering inflation paved the way for the first postrevolutionary uprisings. In the early nineties, scattered revolts often occurred in the slums of cities such as Tehran, Mashhad, Arak, and Qazvin. In Mashhad, in the Koo-ye Tollab area, the destruction of housing that was built without permits led the residents of impoverished slums to protest. Similar unrest broke out in Islamshahr when public transit fares were raised. In both cases there were violent clashes between protesters and the police and security forces. These uprisings were quickly suppressed and did not trigger unrest in city centers and major metropolises. The media and the public failed to pay attention to these protests, despite their violent and expansive character. It was as if, after the geographic erasure of these marginal classes, they had also been erased from the collective memory of the upper classes and city dwellers. These moments of lower-class unrest were known as "bread uprisings."

The second major metropolitan uprising, which became known as the "Green movement," happened a decade and a half later in response to the presidential election.[4] In 2009, Iranians, especially in bigger cities like Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, and Shiraz, objected to the election results and for a few months occupied the streets. The protests were so massive that coverage of them dominated local and international media for months. However, the Green movement was different from all the previous protests in the early 1990s. It was organized mainly through official platforms that had been established by past "Reconstructionist" and "Reformist" governments. Communication was spearheaded by official reformist parties and groups, who had been mobilizing their supporters in the lead-up to the election. The pre-election campaign had created a network of active participants. The strong street presence of the reformist supporters before the election (for instance, in the "green [human] chain" from Rah Ahan Square to Tajrish square in Tehran[5]) led to the novel experience of masses of people in the streets. After the results were announced, this new network organized protests through its official channels and online social networks. The Green movement, shaped by the election climate, was thus organized conventionally, with the top (the political elite) organizing the bottom (the masses). While certain groups of people organized horizontally and spontaneously, the dominant organizational character of the Green movement was top-down, party-centered, and middle-class.

The year 2019 witnessed another form of political organization. The spontaneity of the 2019 protests was different from the mobilization and organization that took place around the 2009 election. This time, anger at increasing gas prices was the driving force of the protests. In two short days, people from numerous cities took to the streets. The class and geographic character of these protests was different from the "bread uprising," when the marginalized poor revolted in city slums, and the Green movement, when the urban middle class protested against election tampering. In 2019 a new class emerged, characterized by Asef Bayat as the "urban middle poor."[6] Austerity measures over the preceding decade had pushed this group into poverty and out of urban centers to satellite cities. Along with the older areas of Tehran (such as Satarkhan and Haft Hoz), the movement was concentrated in small cities, city slums, urban outskirts, and satellite cities.

At the beginning of the 2019 protests, the Iranian government shut down the internet across the country for a week. So there was no way to communicate or organize through social networks or messaging apps. Local offline networks were activated instead. In smaller areas where most relationships are face-to-face and information spreads through word of mouth, street protests could be organized more spontaneously and with street smarts.

Three years later, after a long period of silence caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Jina movement took to the streets of Iran. The murder of a young Kurdish woman by the "morality police" during her visit to Tehran outraged Iranians. In less than a week, Iran witnessed its largest postrevolutionary urban uprising ever. The Jina movement gave birth to a new form of political organizing in Iran.

To start, a movement that initially seemed limited to the issue of the hijab transformed into an expression of decades of dissatisfaction and oppression. Unlike other forms of oppression and inequality, a death can transcend its cause. It can distill past moments of oppression and injustice. This feature of the Jina movement made it possible for anyone who had ever been the target of oppression or injustice to feel like they belonged to the movement.

If the "bread uprising" belonged to the proletariat, the Green movement to the middle class, and the 2017 and 2019 protests to the impoverished middle class, the Jina movement was different from all of these in terms of agency, geography, and organization. The feminist character of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement made this historical moment pregnant with many past historical moments: the middle class, the urban middle poor, and the proletariat all participated in the Jina movement. And while those earlier uprisings were each concentrated in a different type of place, the Jina movement upended all geographical division. From bigger cities to smaller ones, from wealthier neighborhoods to poorer ones, from satellite cities to capital cities, and from cities with Kurdish and Balouchi ethnicities to Farsi- and Turkish-speaking populations, all kinds of people joined the movement. As such, neither class nor local geography are sufficient frameworks for understanding it.

The historical moment of Jina was novel and unprecedented. As such, we can call it an "Aleph" moment, to borrow the title of a celebrated Jorge Luis Borges story. For Borges, Aleph is a place that contains every other place on earth, a place where "all places are—seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion or blending."[7] An Aleph moment is transformative; it makes us different human beings. In the same vein, we can see the Jina movement as a space-time that distilled other space-times. The Jina movement contains the essences of all the previous protests. In Jina, everyone can see a reflection of the injustices they've suffered. Jina's name lies at the intersection of all class, gender, ethnic, and religious discontent in Iran today.

The Jina movement was novel from another perspective too. While brutal and violent conflicts between protestors and security forces took place in the streets, gradual and persistent struggles occurred inside homes and in the private sphere among intimate relations. Revolutions cannot only happen in the squares and streets. Street protests, even if they last months, will end. They will inevitably quiet down, since people must go back to their ordinary lives. However, the political mobilization of the Jina movement spread to other spaces, to neighborhoods, to schools and universities, to workplaces and homes. The depth and expanse of the Jina movement differentiate it from previous movements, meriting the name "revolution." The Jina revolution not only transformed the fabric of the city but also transformed the bodies of its subjects and their way of relating to their environment. The Jina movement sparked a revolutionary transformation of everyday life—a revolution not in the political character of the state, but in the meaning-making acts of ordinary people.

In the Jina movement, we encountered a new woman who rethought herself and amplified her voice in her home and in the streets. This shift in subjectivity occurred as women saw themselves as part of the profound and public experience of struggling for change. Some of the most radical forms of resistance during the Jina revolution were enacted by ordinary women who resisted disciplinary methods and reimaged themselves and their environment. During the Jina movement, women created what Michelle Rosaldo calls "embodied thoughts"—the consciousness formed through the body and its feelings.[8] This is the emotional force that leads the body to think and to create meaning. Emotions formed by challenging social norms are a kind of embodied thought. Examples include mothers who became political actors by grieving for the children they lost during the Jina movement. They politicized private and public spaces and everyday life itself. This politicization of private and everyday life during the movement crept into public life and is in the process of transforming it, creating a crisis for Iran's tyrannical regime.

The Organization of the Movement

The Jina movement unleashed two parallel processes. On the one hand, repression and control of public space in recent years has limited the possibility of a new leader emerging. Any form of oppositional political organizing has been quickly shut down. Despite this repression—or perhaps because of it—we have seen the rise of urban "movements" of teachers, of students, of women. When these groups do not have enough resources to mobilize, more modest actions are undertaken by smaller and more diffuse groups, such as environmentalists, unions, pensioner associations, and justice groups.

On the other hand, social networks granted another characteristic to the protests: performance. Social networks channel protest to both the real world and the virtual world. Now protesters know that they should not only take to the streets but also control image production on social media. In the Jina movement they transformed moments of resistance against security forces into images that spread across the internet.[9] The reciprocal coexistence of virtual and real spaces facilitated the organizing of the protests. The real world was reinforced by virtual encounters, and the virtual space by street protests. So we should understand the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution as a performative uprising, with street performances leading to the proliferation of protest images. In this sense, the Jina movement could not have been organized centrally and top down. On the contrary, we witnessed a new form of spontaneous, decentered, and self-generating organization that was characterized by the "street space." Gradually and through their experience in the streets, people learned how to navigate this "field." As Asef Bayat argued in the case of the Arab Spring, despite the advantages of horizontal and spontaneous organization it is difficult to sustain and solidify such movements.[10] From the outset many people believed that victory for the Jina movement meant toppling the regime, but this was misguided. The movement was very young in its organizational form, although it has already provided many lessons for future protests. A new generation has overcome the dominant depoliticized discourse and has politicized urban space and everyday life—a generation of political subjects who do not accept top-down leadership and who conceive of themselves as agents of change. The song "Baraye ..." by Shervin Hajipour expresses the structure of this uprising perfectly: a song written by no one and everyone, shaped by the participants in the movement, is finally vocalized by a little-known singer, overtaking public and virtual space. The Jina revolution, in its moment of conception and in its moment of proliferation, was a multitudinous "song" without an individual songwriter, and its reverberation transformed city spaces and homes.

Jina uprising in Sanandaj, in the Kurdistan province of Iran.

X

Translated from the Farsi by Roozbeh Seyedi. Translation edited by Soori Parsa.

Aram is a feminist activist and researcher.

1
Trans. note: this refers to an actual intersection in Tehran named “Hijab.”

2
Merrifield, *The Politics of the Encounter: Urban Theory and Protest under Planetary Urbanization* (University of Georgia Press, 2013), 55–56.

3
Hanafi, “The Arab Revolutions: The Emergence of a New Political Subjectivity,” *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2012): 203.

4
Trans. note: Green was the campaign color of the major reformist candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi. He lost the dubious 2008 elections to Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the major conservative candidate.

5
Trans. note: this is a distance covering over seventeen kilometers (about ten and a half miles), connecting two major squares in the city through a main avenue called Vali Asr.

6
Bayat, *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East* (Amsterdam University Press, 2010). 44.

7
Borges, *The Aleph and Other Stories, 1933–1969* (E. P. Dutton, 1970), 10–11.

8
Rosaldo, “Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling,” in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion* , ed. R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine (Cambridge University Press, 1984).

9
Trans. note: for more on this, see L, “Women Reflected in their Own History,” *e-flux Notes*, October 14, 2022 https://www.e-flux.com/notes/497512/women-reflected-in-their-own-history .

10
Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries: Making Sense of the Arab Spring* (Stanford University Press, 2017).

Parva

Inflection Points of a Pluralist Feminist Revolution

A year has passed since the start of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. One wonders whether the movement is over. Or does it live on? Given the "modesty and hijab" bill passed by the Council of Guardians (September 2023) and the intensification of legal strictures around the hijab, what is the future of the movement at a glance? What does it want from, and what impact does it have on, Iranian society?

Qualities particular to a feminist movement are what enable the Jina [Mahsa Amini] movement to endure despite the roadblocks, finding a way through the slightest cracks and crevices in the current situation. Everyday renewed and in the trenches, consisting of small and yet decisive acts of protest by countless nameless supporters who are many and consistently multiplying, this truly is, in the words of Claude Lefort, a "pluralist revolution."[1] This revolution springs from many places and seeks diverse ends. It does not uphold one kind of life as the best, right kind of life. No "one" person bears responsibility for its future, nor is it meant to reach "one" ideal destination.

It now appears that we will only discover the impact of this pluralist revolution when we shatter certain preconceptions of what constitutes a revolution. Prevailing theories understand revolution in terms of sovereignty. To stage a revolution is to overthrow those in power and reshape society into an agreeable, unified form. This view intimates that there is a kind of power "vacuum" in society that revolutionary forces must fill. But distancing the movement from this definition and instead tracing it to pluralist feminist revolutions clarifies the force of its impact. A revolution that persists in the face of these obstacles will, over time, leave its mark on Iranian society.

1. The Child of the Revolution Does Not Need a Midwife

In Marxist-Leninist terms, the child of the revolution is birthed by the vanguard. That is, the revolutionaries must midwife history. The revolution bears witness to the end point of a revolutionary process that we aim to reach. A moment of "rupture" in the current order is meant to occur, and in the power vacuum that opens up in that moment of rupture, the vanguard takes power to transform social relations and establish revolutionary society. This common view takes a distinct approach to revolutionary time. The revolution "will occur" in the future and the moment of rupture "will arrive." The future becomes intertwined with "founding," and at the revolution's founding moment, popular or working class rule will make itself apparent. The oppressed will of the people or of the working class crystallizes into "one" single, unique collective will and seizes the founding moment as its own. Disrupting the legal order is what makes establishing the revolution possible.

In a pluralist feminist revolution, the child of the revolution is simply born. There is no need for a midwife. History has done the work. There is no power vacuum for the

Iranian students take off their compulsory Hijab in a classroom, holding a sign which reads "Woman Life Freedom," 2022.

revolution to fill. The revolution has already found its agents along the way. The time for this revolution is not the future. One might say that the perfect founding moment for the revolution has yet to "arrive"— the moment, if it indeed exists, to call for "sovereignty." But the pluralist feminist revolution has no predetermined relationship to—in fact, does not waste energy on—sovereignty. The time for this revolution is akin to a future in the past, a time that has begun but has not concluded, and is now "picked back up" somewhere in the past. Its potentials roam free. Its capacities awaken. Its dreams come to life.

2. The Revolution Puts Down Its Load

Since the start of the movement, various opposition groups have put great burdens on the shoulders of this pluralist revolution. The most significant was the burden of changing the entire system—to the point that imagining the revolution became entangled with establishing new rule, a wholly new legal order. Those who so burdened this revolution seeded its belly with perhaps the biggest regrets and are themselves now enduring the worst hopelessness. A pluralist revolution is not supposed to make everything possible. Aside from being incompatible with the pluralist nature of the feminist revolution, such a maximalist view of revolution heeds a sovereign view of revolution. Only a view from the perspective of sovereignty would proclaim that either all has been won and conquered, or all lost and the field surrendered. As we observed earlier, this sovereign-centered, maximalist view holds a future-oriented understanding of the revolution; it does not believe that revolution can emerge amidst currently existing forces.

When a revolution releases the charge to destroy the entire system, it courts gradual, resistive change over one-time, authoritarian change. In the pluralist feminist revolution, there is no homogenous plural called "they" that refers to the enemies of the revolution. What's more, rather than drawing an impenetrable red line between us and "them" to distinguish friend from foe, the pluralist feminist revolution strives to instill the revolution in "them" as well, to expose the lack of a heterogenous collective. It contemplates the strategies for that kind of revolution. Such a revolution wants to move beyond red lines to seek fresh spaces considered implausible—or better said, unthinkable—to penetrate. Hence pluralism replaces doublethink and the revolution thinks about collective freedom. That is its horizon, no matter how many roadblocks materialize in practice.

3. The Revolution Bids Goodbye to Infallibility

Whether knowingly or not, every sovereign revolution is associated with a kind of teleology. The voice of the people is the voice of God, and popular sovereignty serves as a surrogate for the king's absolute sovereignty qua the shadow of God. Indeed the history of sovereignty runs alongside the history of divine law. The revolution is thus permitted to perform any act, and moreover, the revolutionary act within itself buffs and cleans the edge of every action. Insomuch as the sovereign revolution is seemingly then meant to act as surrogate for the unjust, unfree order, any function deriving therefrom has the power to call itself just and liberating. Any struggle against injustice and unfreedom lends it the semblance of saintliness. The revolution thus figures itself the determining standard for differentiating truth from untruth, purity from impurity, right from wrong. This self-referentiality is extremely dangerous. It closes the door to critiques of the revolution and draws a halo of infallibility and saintliness around its players.

According to Judith Butler, feminism will continue to move forward only if it accepts that it can make mistakes.[2] Fallibility thus figures as a formative quality of any progressive movement. A non-sovereign movement that does not seek to fill power vacuums accepts when, how, and how much it has erred and will err. In this case self-referentiality founders, and instead, an attitude towards erring that is at once normative and more or less intersubjective takes its place. The fallibility of a movement takes away its purifying mechanism and reduces its destructive tendency. In a revolutionary movement that has internalized its own infallibility, no act is legitimized internally or according to self-determined criteria. And that's crucial in the midst of change. When the most important metric of an act's proximity to violence—that is, existing law—has proven untrustworthy, it follows that the issue of violence is altogether forgotten and any act becomes permissible. But the revolutionary movement takes seriously an action's normativity and the possibility of assessing whether that action is right or wrong intersubjectively, while simultaneously delegitimizing the existing law; it does not claim that there is no way to reliably assess the violence of an act in the absence of law. Delineating a justice that is restorative and transferrable and addresses other related issues, the revolutionary movement strives to value the intersubjectivity of how justice is established, and to keep a liberating and just mode of normative action alive.

4. The Revolution Commits to Life in All Its Contradictions

"Life" is one of three principles in the slogan "Women, Life, Freedom." But what does it mean to desire life in all its contradictions? When a movement concerns itself with life, it associates itself with the quotidian whether it wants to or not. Indeed, life does not solely amount to its exceptional moments—moments that are meant to determine the value of existence, whether socially or politically. Life instead has another dimension that is wholly unexceptional, tied to ordinary, non-singular moments. These ordinary, non-singular moments are not only undervalued by political thought, but moreover, are also subject to various kinds of manipulation by existing powers that aim to normalize the status quo and weaken the revolutionary movement. In recent months, many have tried to figure life in terms of extraordinary moments by normalizing resistance and describing it in a particular way, and in opposition to the government's censuring of such normalizing. But the reality is that when "life" is recognized as significant, one can no longer say "yay" to the extraordinary and singular moments and "nay" to the ordinary and non-singular.

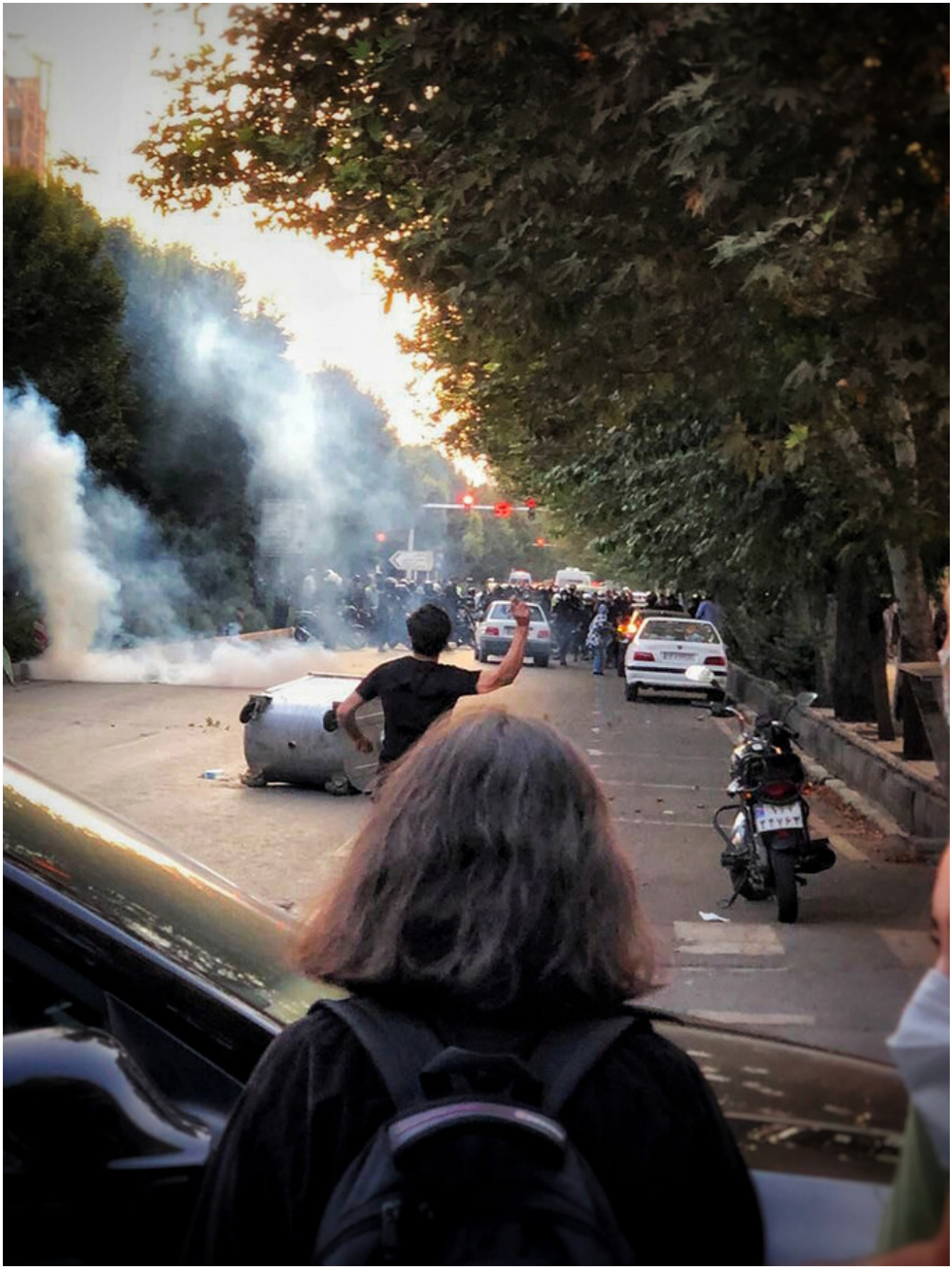
The various sites of a pluralist revolution can be found in the ordinary and unexceptional moments of life. In contrast to a sovereign revolution of the state that only recognizes exceptional time and that seeks to create its own founding moment from the moment of rupture, a pluralist revolution officially recognizes unexceptional, quotidian time as well. It seeks to create change from within the continuum of the quotidian and out of the ordinary liberatory actions that take place in various sites and arenas of activity. Such a revolution engages not with perceived power vacuums but with a pluralism of powers in a pluralism of sites in order to fight for a life that is less hierarchical, more equal, and freer.

This contradictory life lends a hand to the various fronts of the revolution and considers nothing expendable. To condemn normalizing conditions is to remain in the language of a sovereign revolution; but a pluralist feminist revolution does not view normalized affairs with unforgiving eyes, seeing them as a sin that delays the "revolution." Instead, it considers them a prized opportunity to bring about more profound change, aiming to empower ordinary, daily being as the ideal of a free and equal life.

5. The Revolution Establishes the Right to Resist

The Jina movement has no defined, predetermined goal. Could anyone say, for example, that the Jina movement's primary goal is simply to challenge the norms around female attire? It doesn't seem to be so. Though the revolution may lay down its excess burden, it nevertheless pursues various goals. The feminist ideal of free, equal existence progresses by struggling against a range of macho constructs that take many forms in the family, at school, around friends, at the factory, at the bakery, etc., etc., and thus require as many revolutionary ends. One might say that what all these ends have in common is the right to resist, or rather, ingraining the habit of resistance.

Whether in the state or elsewhere, when machismo and patriarchy refuse to withdraw, persisting and insisting on rights becomes doubly important. What is considered the most obvious face of the revolutionary movement, resisting the mandatory hijab, means nothing if not to



On Keshavarz Boulevard in Tehran, people protest against Jina's [Mahsa Amini] killing, 2022. License: CC BY-SA 4.0.

fortify rights. In fact it could be said that the pluralist revolutionary movement struggles for rights predicated on the social fabric and popular support. A right merely granted by the law is a fragile right. It is easily questioned and less substantively clad. But when a right that, through channels of resistance, has transformed custom itself and reaches the realm of law, it is more likely to endure. Resistance, and indeed, establishing the right to resistance, is a practice in the experience of holding rights, including the right to what is deemed freeing and equality-seeking. In a pluralist revolution, common sense, rather than concessionary law, is the guarantee of a right. In sum, there is more reason for hope that, in time, an earned right will not turn into an injustice or dissipate.

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The five arguments above are an effort to more or less elucidate the ways a pluralist revolution, with its many goals and diverse motives, might be distinguished from a sovereign revolution that follows a straight path. Each argument could be further elaborated and more precisely refined. By way of conclusion, it can be stated that a pluralist revolution takes democracy more seriously than a sovereign revolution, such that it pursues democracy in figuring not only the state but also society, knowing that, consequently, social change will take place both more peacefully and enduringly.

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Translated from the Farsi by ZQ.

Parva is a feminist and social researcher.

1
Quoted in Benjamin Ask Popp-Madsen, "The Self-limiting Revolution and the Mixed Constitution of Socialist Democracy: Claude Lefort's Vision of Council Democracy," in *Council Democracy: Towards a Democratic Socialist Politics* (Routledge, 2018).

2
Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (Verso, 2020).

Dasgoharan

Why Is Maho Our Symbol?

On September 1, 2022, the commander of the police force in Chabahar raped a fifteen-year-old girl named Maho while interrogating her.[1] *News of this rape circulated along with the news of Jina Mahsa Amini's murder by the state twenty days later. Then on Sunday, September 25, 2022, Molavi Abdolqaffar Naqshbandi, the interim leader of Friday prayers in Rasak, a town in Sistan and Balochistan (in the same region as Chabahar), released a statement confirming Colonel Ibrahim Koochakzayi's rape of this young girl and called for a public trial. Five days later, after Friday prayers on September 30, 2022, the people of nearby Zahedan took to the streets in support of Maho and against the state murder of Jina. The crackdown on this protest was so violent and bloody that it became known as "Bloody Friday," or the "2022 Zahedan massacre." On that day, the Islamic Republic's security forces opened fire on protestors after their prayers and killed at least ninety-six people. In an investigative report on this tragedy, the* New York Times *showed how security forces opened fire for no reason—there was not a single armed protestor among those praying.*[2] *Security forces targeted children, young adults, and the elderly. Islamic Republic snipers killed many of the protestors with shots to their heads and hearts. This essay was written by a group of Baloch women called "Dasgoharan" and was published on their Instagram page.*[3]

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This is not a scholarly or journalistic essay. It was written amidst the flames of anger and blood, and on trembling ground. It is not yet clear to us where the conflict between the military forces of the state/religion/tribe and the oppressed lower strata of society will lead. The outer hard shell of power does not hesitate to do everything it can to maintain the status quo and to suppress the anger of subordinate women and youth. The coming days are important. They will tell of the relentless but disorganized struggle of different assemblages of people who are socially excluded, especially women. This is a dynamic struggle that has always crystallized in the form of resistance in daily life and has often been ignored in the past. But today, it has come to the surface so powerfully that it is no longer possible to deny.

Maho's tragedy showed us the basic conflicts of Balochistan society all at once and in the most naked form. Suddenly, society lost its patience and began to boil over. We remember that when Iran was burning from the fires seeking justice for Jina Mahsa Amini, a news item disturbed Balochistan's cyberspace. A senior police officer in Chabahar had raped a teenage girl who lived in one of Chabahar's villages. The rumor mill was abuzz as numerous confirmations and denials circulated. The judiciary and law enforcement authorities did not feel the need to respond. The person accused of rape was from the same official apparatus of repression that never felt obliged to answer for its crimes, insults, and humiliations,

A banner with the slogan “Janin, Zand, Ajoyi” (Woman, Life, Freedom) held by Baloch women. Photo: Dasgoharan.

considering itself justified in doing whatever they pleased. Meanwhile, a well-known Baloch activist in Balochistan’s cyberspace publicly pursued the truth of the story through their network of acquaintances (while others did so secretly). While the official media remained silent, this civic activist made the matter public and spread information about the event. Soon after, he was threatened, forced to remain silent, and then arrested.

In a society known for its silence in the face of aggression, this level of scrutiny of independent citizen activists and their position was unprecedented. The general perception has always been something like: “It is Balochistan. The clan decides for itself. Most likely, the girl will disappear. The story is going to disappear similar to the rape of some forty women in Iranshahrin in 2018.” But society could not bear the silence any longer. Something had been cracked open. The wide understanding of discrimination, suffering, and the recognition of the people’s right to determine their destiny had changed. This transformation was particularly evident in the case of the movement seeking justice for Maho.

At first, the clergy remained “meaningfully silent” and called on the people to remain calm. Members of parliament and the official parties active in Balochistan shrouded themselves in silence, and no words came from the influential clans. The ruling Shiite central government handled this disaster similarly; this approach, of course, has become “normal”—a frequent occurrence in the territory of Balochistan. Perhaps a review of structural and historical discrimination in Balochistan will help illuminate the government’s approach to the violence that Maho was forced to endure and the movements that followed.

For years, the Shia central government has kept

A scene from the Jina uprising in Balochistan. The banner reads, "Do not threaten to kidnap our youth. The day after victory is our turn. No to executions."

Balochistan systematically underdeveloped. The region has been deprived of justice-oriented programs through disenfranchisement and structural discrimination. For years, the central government has destroyed any hope for a better life and dehumanized the population with its centrist, hegemonic system of meaning. It has represented Baloch men as untamed violent brutes and its women as oppressed and powerless figures. Only people from influential and wealthy circles could improve their own material positions through complicity with the central Iranian state. Today, widespread poverty, high illiteracy rates, unemployment, and lack of identity documents for residents in Balochistan are no longer a secret. Baloch people have been a forgotten nation for years, and the proof of this is the increase in executions of Baloch people in the last two years without transparency or fair trials, which leaves no hope for justice for other crimes as well.

Despite this painful history and systematic elimination, the massacre of justice-seeking, empty-handed people on Bloody Friday in Zahedan exposed to Iranians more than ever before the magnitude of the oppression and discrimination faced by the Baloch people. The government, which shut down the internet in the days following the uprising, could not silence the voices of justice-seeking Baloch people and could not implement its old and outdated scenario in Balochistan. The Iranian government, which has always pitted the interests of non-Baloch native residents against Baloch people to advance its own interests, has now found itself unable to win popular support. The armed groups active in the border areas of Balochistan had been previously weakened by Pakistan and the Taliban, and this time, the government could not defend the usual claim that "the people of Balochistan are armed." On that Bloody Friday, Baloch people had nothing but sticks and stones in their fight against machine guns, as evidenced by countless videos released after that bloody day.

The totality of these facts prompted people in other regions, with diverse ethnicities across Iran, to sympathize with and express their support for the Baloch in their protests and gatherings. These changes and sympathies promise new days, days that warn the government to be

Baloch women protesting in Zahedan, the capital of Iran's Sistan and Balochistan province, on December 2, 2022.

afraid of the transforming society of Balochistan.

For years, the Sunni clerical institution led by Abdul Hamid Ismail Zahi tried to institutionalize the oppression of women and maintain its base by fighting and negotiating with the government and clans. It still believed that Zahi has the last word and speaks for all Baloch. This institution had not dealt with this form of disobedience even when its support for the Taliban and Raeesi's presidency had discredited the institution in the eyes of women and activists in Balochistan. Other Sunni clerics in Balochistan found themselves in a similar situation. Among all the region's Sunni imams, only one was willing to listen to Maho's family and to speak from an official platform about the oppression they faced before the street protests started. However, the people of Chabahar spontaneously took to the streets and gathered without invitation or support from traditional authorities. The first rally, which lasted late into the night, eventually led to the arrest of several people, including Baloch women, some of whom are still in prison. Even three days after this rally—that is, on Zahedan's Bloody Friday—people did not remain silent and revolted in protest against Molavi Abdul Hamid. The statistics that have been compiled so far on the fatalities from this bloody day confirm the oppression already mentioned: many of those who were killed did not have birth certificates; some had a history of drug-related accusations and experienced humiliation in provincial prisons; some of them came from marginal areas like Shirabad, a neighborhood that is one of the poorest and most deprived areas in the peripheral regions of Iran. But because they were rebellious, they had to be put in their place by power.

The response to Bloody Friday by the public pushed some clerics to try to dampen the anger by making statements in support of the demonstrators. This shows how the people were able to endanger the clerics' hold on power and at the same time discredit the logics of the apparatus of repression without needing the support of an external authority.

But the Sunni clergy was not the only institution whose authority was shaken. The clan,[4] another authority in Balochistan's traditional society, also lost much of its credibility. The clan, which used to hold chieftaincy (*khawanin*) in Balochistan, largely lost its influence after the Iranian Revolution and with the spread of Islamism, when many of its chiefs fled Iran. This ancient institution, which could have been destroyed through the implementation of justice-oriented and democratic programs, returned to the political stage once again in the absence of a program for human development in Sistan and Balochistan and in the shadow of the repression of any form of civil, social, and independent political activity. Taking advantage of widespread poverty by exploiting problems of livelihood, the Islamic Republic has deployed and militarized the clan system. In order to control the borders and subjugate the critical and dissident Balochis, the Revolutionary Guard, with the help of the clans, have allowed much oppression

of the Balochis, especially women, by arming the clans and handpicking their leaders. In the case of Maho, the clans have once again dashed any hope of legal action and abandoned the Baloch people.

All these forces—the central government, the Sunni clerical body, and the tribes—have so far been unable to provide a response to the oppression undergone by Maho and the Baloch community. These days, government representatives are traveling to Sistan and Balochistan. They are negotiating or making agreements with imams, trustees, elders, and representatives. The old forces are coming together to settle the crisis. But the Baloch, who have taken to the streets empty-handed, have scuttled these agreements. Now Baloch women have also joined the protest movement. In schools in remote villages, teenage girls are tearing up photos of Islamic Republic leaders, making statements, and writing slogans on walls. Society in Sistan and Balochistan is shedding its skin. What we witnessed in the movement seeking justice for Maho and the Bloody Friday of Zahedan shows a great change in the lower strata of society. Maho has shown us that as much as the reactionary forces have resisted our cries for Janin, Zand, Ajoyi (Woman, Life, Freedom), we Baloch have changed and are breaking new ground more than ever before.

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Translation edited by Soori Parsa.

Dasgoharan is a group of Baloch women who have been working in various investigative, activist, and theoretical fields with a focus on Balochistan.

1
Chabahar, or Chah Bahar, is a port city on the Gulf of Oman. It is in the central district of southeastern Iran, in the province of Sistan and Balochistan. This article was originally published on October 16, 2022 with the title "Why Is the Chabahari Girl Our Symbol?" At that time, we did not know the real name of young Maho and called her by the name the media called her: "Chabahari girl." Now that we finally know her name, we are republishing this essay with a new title. "Dasgohari" is the term for a longstanding social tradition of camaraderie, companionship, care, and sisterhood among Baloch women.

2
Ed. note: see https://www.nytimes.com/2022/10/14/world/middleeast/iran-zahedan-crackdown.html?searchResultPosition=1 .

3
Trans. notes: the introduction to this essay is translated from Radio Zamaneh's republication of the essay https://www.radiozamaneh.com/736488/ .

4
Trans. note: or tribe.