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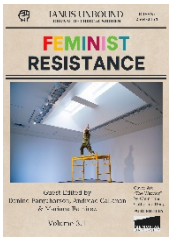

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Feminist Resistance in Iran from 1978 to 2023

Arezou Darvishi

Abstract

The recent wave of protests in Iran following the tragic death of Mahsa Jina Amini has sparked discussions about the sudden and unforeseen nature of these events. This paper explores the interconnected nature of women's movements in Iran over the past 45 years, demonstrating that these movements are linked and culminate in the Women, Life, Freedom uprising. By examining various initiatives ranging from the online campaign One Million Signatures in the 1980s, to the collective and collaborative actions of The Girls of the Street Revolution, our objective is to provide a comprehensive understanding of women's rights issues in Iran and shed light on the formation of the Women, Life, Freedom movement.

Key words: Biopolitics, Feminism in Iran, Feminist Movements, Middle East, Spatial Politics, Women's Rights

Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies.

— Hélène Cixous (2010)

Introduction

In recent decades, there have been significant women's movements advocating to gain women's rights within the Islamic Republic (IR) administration in Iran. From the protests in the early 1980s after the imposition of the mandatory dress code law that necessitated all women to wear hijab in public spheres, to the Women, Life, Freedom (WLF) revolutionary movement in 2022 after the "suspicious" death of Mahsa Jina Amini, these uprisings aimed not only to achieve gender equality but also to challenge and transform power dynamics. The tragic death of Mahsa Jina Amini sparked a remarkable wave of women's participation in the WLF uprisings. This movement led to increased freedom of clothing for women in current Iran (see Figure 1) and propagated

a revolutionary spirit that still exists among ordinary people, especially women. Unveiled women still resist wearing scarves in public spaces in spite of the pressure from hard-liners, and people still write and share grievances about the victims of the WLF and spread the hope for a democratic Iran on Instagram and Twitter, despite it being filtered. Nonetheless, having the relative liberty not to wear scarves in Iran does not mean that the outcome or the objective of the WLF was only gaining the mundane right of freedom of clothing. Burning scarves or cutting hair in the WLF movement was a creative, spontaneous performance, an idea that emerged from the inner impulse of Iranian women, not from premeditation or external stimulus of any feminist groups. So, the WLF has a very different essence from the Suffrage Parade of 1913, for example, which was organized by many feminist associations, including the National American Woman Suffrage Association and the National Women's Party (U.S. National Park Service 2021). Regarding the theocratic political systems in Iran, scarves—like bras in the women's liberation movement during second wave feminism—act as an "instrument of oppression" for those who do not believe in veiling, so removing them is liberation from the oppressive power exerted by the political system. Mandatory hijab law reducing women to their bodies is a tool of suppression used by misogynic power. Unlike the popular belief about the WLF being merely feminist or having been propelled by feminists, "this is the first time that popular movement, in Iran, was propelled by feminists" (Makaremi and Naves 2022), the recent Mahsa Amini uprising was driven and led in part by women, not by feminists. The fact that there is no secular, popular, and trustworthy feminist association inside or outside Iran that feeds and guides women to rise for gender equality can be seen as one of the reasons for the absence of feminists' support or role in the WLF movement. The absence of such organizations inside Iran, despite their crucial importance in addressing the misogynistic situation, underscores the oppressive influence of the Islamic administration, which actively suppresses any secular, feminist initiatives. For example, Zanan Magazine, a publication dedicated to advocating women's rights, was founded in 1992. However, it faced various challenges and eventually ceased publication in 2008 when its founder, Shahla Sherkat, was charged in Iran's Press Court (Brekke 2014). Another instance of suppressing feminist movements occurred in 2006 during the Campaign of One Million Signatures. This significant movement advocating for women's rights was met with hostility as its members were targeted and its founders unjustly sentenced to prison (Smeal 2010). Therefore, the systemic oppression of the women's movement exemplifies the prevailing resistance of the Islamic Republic regime to raising awareness about women's rights. Thus the lack of such feminist groups or organizations shows that the WLF movement was not led or organized by feminists; it was rather a manifestation of women probably not all subscribing to feminist ideologies. The movement was also reinforced by men and teenagers who questioned restrictive laws on everyone's rights and sought for everyone's "dignified lives." Limiting the WLF to a specific gender, women here, denies the presence of men and non-binaries who reinforced and perpetuated the shared objective of the revolt, which was to announce that "all" citizens deserve

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"a dignified life," a life that had been humiliated for decades by mismanagement, a poor economic system, and widespread corruption in the government. Hence, I agree with Asef Bayat who argues that this movement is neither a feminist movement by itself nor a revolt mainly against mandatory hijab, but rather a movement to reclaim life and to liberate dignified lives from an internally colonized system (2023, 19). The government acts as a colonizer, marked by an unfamiliar mindset, emotions, and authority, which bear little resemblance to the experiences and beliefs of the majority, which perceives this foreign presence as having taken control of the nation and its assets while continuing to dominate the populace and their way of life. Nevertheless, the importance and peculiarity of this movement compared to the past protests resides in the widespread presence of women who acted as the "major protagonists" as they were once the primary object of a system that colonized its citizens (2023, 19). The Islamic regime employs a religious rhetoric that significantly influences the political system and educational settings. Moreover, the regime not only espouses this distinctive rhetoric but also enforces its beliefs on people's lives, regulating aspects such as dress codes and the educational system with a religious focus. Thus, this paper traces women's role during and after the WLF movement with a focus on the history of women's resistance in Iran after the Islamic revolution in 1978. This study will shed light on the relation of feminist resistance movements in Iran after the 1978 Islamic Revolution to argue that the widespread presence of people, particularly women, in the WLF movement was not abrupt; rather it was a public manifestation of a social turmoil mounting for decades. Throughout this historical review, we notice how women resisted and reclaimed their rights and how such uprisings influenced and gave birth to the other women's movements. In other words, how such uprisings shaped new forms of solidarity among women and de-shaped the theocratic beliefs of the regime. I examine closely how political performances in individual forms, such as Girls of the Revolution Street, and collective forms, such as the common act of women burning their scarves or cutting their hair within the WLF uprising, chains the women's rights movements in Iran. I also refer to "spatial politics" (Pourmokhtari 2022, 2) to understand how women's presence is in dialogue with the politics of public spaces that have become a place for political contests. The contestation of government authority occurs in public spaces, which is referred to as "spatial politics." This phenomenon is particularly prominent in urban areas as these locales in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region historically serve as centers of opposition to state rule. When subjugated bodies confront power to reject or question it, resistance emerges (Foucault 1978, 95). The utilization of public spaces as platforms for counter-power tends to coincide with the dynamics of everyday life, especially in situations where conventional political avenues are lacking. This often happens in regions where political parties are either absent or have limited functionality, and where oppositional groups are deprived of their political rights, particularly when it comes to challenging government policies. Therefore, this is power itself acting as a controller and causing the birth of the resistance.

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Figure 1. Women show resistance by not wearing their head scarves in a street in Tehran (@Tavaana Instagram 2023b).

How Mahsa Jina Amini's Death Gave Rise to Public Resistance

The "suspicious" death of Mahsa Jina Amini on 16 September 2022 in Gasht-E-Ershad (morality police) station for "improper hijab" triggered a public outcry, turning into one of the most severe protests in the history of the Islamic Republic (Bayat 2023, 20). The video footage from a surveillance camera at Gasht-E-Ershad station leaked on social media. It revealed a distressing scene where Mahsa Jina Amini was seen standing in front of a police agent, engaged in a discussion before suffering from a heart attack. Her resistance in the act of standing up for herself to question her unjust arrest in the confines of the police station later extended to her fellow compatriots, taking on various forms of defiance, one of which was active participation in the nationwide protests:

> Waves of protests, led mostly by women, broke out immediately, sending some two-million people into the streets of 160 cities and small towns, inspiring

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> extraordinary international support. The Twitter hashtag #MahsaAmini broke the world record of 284 million tweets, and the UN Human Rights Commission voted on November 24 to investigate the regime's deadly repression, which has claimed five-hundred lives and put thousands of people under arrest and eleven hundred on trial. (Bayat 2023, 20)

Unlike previous anti-system protests, secular women who had been marginalized by the regime and subjected to degradation through the compulsory hijab law after the Islamic Revolution in 1978 played the principal role in leading the WLF movement (Gheytanchi 2022). Generation Z also joined the movement by appearing as resistance forces, reclaiming their agency through unveiling in schools. Amid the WLF movement, videos depicting high school girls removing their hijab went viral. They performed bold acts of defiance by tearing down the portraits of Khomeini, the father of the Islamic revolution, from classroom walls (@Iran International 2022). Another video that gained attraction and became widely shared on social media platforms was female highschoolers chanting in the streets "Zan, Zendegi, Azadi" (Women, Life, Freedom) after they were off of school, while waving their *maqnae* (scarf) in the air (Van Esveld and Sajadi 2022). Similarly, on 23 September 2022, in Mahabad, students at a girls' school gathered in the school courtyard, raising their voices in unison to sing "Baraye" (@Iran International 2022). This powerful protest song, released by Shervin Hajipour, gained significant recognition by turning into one of the revolutionary songs of the movement, and it even received the Social Change Award at the Grammy Awards in 2023. "Baraye" means "for the sake of," and Shervin Hajipour based each verse on tweets where users expressed various reasons for protesting. These reasons encompassed issues like low income, reduced life satisfaction, women's rights, children's rights, refugee rights, animal rights, environmental concerns, economic troubles, theocratic governance, outdated norms, military involvement, political and local corruption, limited freedom of speech, and hostile foreign relations.

The active participation of female students in the WLF movement was not only a means to express their dissatisfaction with the religious norms and advocate for a transformative change in women's rights laws, but it also demonstrated how the revolutionary narratives can permeate within the society, reaching even children, young girls, and teenagers, who adopted these narratives. This further shows how the younger generation is aware of the status quo and how their outlook on the future transcends the limitation of a solely theocratic system. Such revolutionary narratives embraced sharing videos about the movement, tweeting about the movement, the common act of women and girls unveiling in public spheres, cutting hair, and burning headscarves. Women were actively present and demonstrated their agency, contrary to the regime's belief that women should remain confined to their homes, confined to the role of housewives, and obliged to cover their bodies in public spaces, which "are increasingly coming under the control of the state" (Bayat 2013, 53, ctd in Pourmokhtari 2022, 5). But these public places are also serving the will of the people; they become "spaces of resistance," places for political contests, the rejection

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of power, and remaining resilient while being spaces of solidarity as well (Pourmokhtari 5). In authoritarian systems, where public opinion has no outlet, public spaces serve as arenas for expressing dissent. Thus, such "spaces of resistance" serve as spaces of politics that politicize any civil demonstration, including women's presence whose body is "directly involved in a political field" (Pourmokhtari 5). Politicizing public spaces within the power dynamics of the IR regime creates opportunities for dissent and resistance. However, these acts of resistance have also been met with a distressing escalation in atrocities against the protesters. As in the case of the WLF movement, the hard-liners of the regime, in their bid to hold power, continued their atrocities by shooting plastic bullets at female school students in the street who were chanting anti-regime slogans; they also resorted to chemical attacks on female schools. The attack, which began in November 2022, occurred just one month after the protests following Mahsa Jina Amini's death. Thousands of schoolgirls were poisoned and subsequently hospitalized, experiencing respiratory issues, shortness of breath, dizziness, and vomiting (Amnesty International 2023). As stated in *The Guardian*, speculation about possible perpetrators includes the Iranian government itself which seeks revenge against compulsory hijab protesters (Parent 2023). However, the protests were not solely about compulsory hijab; they were fueled by decades of oppression and corruption prevalent across all governmental systems. While the state failed to investigate, many people believed that the government was the likely culprit (VOA Persian Service 2023). The poisoning of the female high schoolers was widely believed to be an intentional act carried out by individuals who had access to specialized military materials and equipment. This led to strong suspicions that the regime was bound to retaliate against the schoolgirls due to their active roles in the WLF revolutionary movement (Admin 2023).

However, the uprising and the support for the movement cannot be confined solely to women, nor are its participants exclusively from Generation Z, the successors of the millennials born from 1990 to 2010, the generation of technology: "This is neither a 'feminist revolution' per se, nor simply the revolt of generation Z" (Bayat 2023, 19). People from various backgrounds actively showed their support by sharing films of themselves removing scarves on social media. One notable feature that distinguished the WLF was the unprecedented support from artists and celebrities who had previously remained silent and faced threats for expressing their views during past protests: "Iranian actresses Hengameh Ghaziani and Katayoun Riahi have been arrested after expressing solidarity with the protest movement and removing their headscarves in public" (Tabbara 2022).

Another Iconic feature of female resistance is Gohar Eshghi, Sattar Beheshti's mother. Her son was a little-known blogger who was arrested and brutally tortured for what the government claimed were "actions against the national security" in 2012 (Memri 2012). Through her unwavering determination to seek justice against her son's murderers, Gohar Eshghi garnered public attention and raised questions about the ruling system of the Islamic Republic. Despite numerous attacks and threats, she displayed immense courage by standing firm

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in her resistance. In a recent act of solidarity with the protesters of the WLF movement, Gohar Eshghi unveiled her hijab after 80 years of abiding by it. Her unwavering actions not only showcased her resilience and support but also indicated that the movement had supporters and participants beyond Generation Z. Also, many supporters, like Gohar Eshghi, were women or men who believed in the scarf and in its religious significance.

How Performance Showcases Resistance

Public acts of women during the WLF revolutionary movement—such as unveiling and symbolically burning scarves, dancing around the flames, and singing revolutionary and inspiring songs at night—captured widespread attention through viral videos (Homa 2022); "Entering its fifth consecutive night, protests in Sari, north of Iran, saw large crowds cheering as women danced around a fire, setting their hijabs alight in defiance of Sharia law" (Tu 2022). Such acts, especially dancing and singing, went against the government's limitation that reserves dancing, singing, and unveiling for private spheres, while publicizing them through collective performances not only showcased a shared unity of purpose and a strong yearning for transformative change but also called into question the existence of the hijab as an oppressor for those who did not believe in wearing it. As Ava Homa states, scarves in Iran's history have symbolized conflicting ideas (2022). However, burning scarves signifies the voicelessness experienced by women in their lack of freedom to choose whether to wear the hijab. This lack of choice is evident not only in the Islamic Republic regime, where hijab is mandatory, but also in Reza Shah's regime (1925-1941), where having a hijab was deemed illegal (Abrahamian 1982). In both cases, women were deprived of the freedom to choose for themselves; the decision was already made on their behalf regarding whether they should or should not wear the hijab:

> Head scarves have a long and complicated history in Iran. Over the years, they have represented contradictory ideas: both backwardness and progressiveness; both misogyny and anti-colonialism; both subversion and subservience. In Iran, over the last century, they have been both wholly banned and wholly mandated. Ultimately, the hijab doesn't mean much in and of itself; it's the wearer who imbues it with meaning. Today, by burning their head scarves, Iranian women are providing meaning: they are breaking that voicelessness. Although Iranian women have been muffled and our bodies barred from the public sphere for centuries. (Homa 2022)

Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that the acts of burning hijabs and cutting hair symbolize more than just clothing choices; they represent resistance against oppression and the reclaiming of personal autonomy. According to Kumari Jayawardena in her book *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, the adoption of Western clothing styles in the 19th century by Third World countries signified the emergence of the "new woman" or a modernist woman who breaks away from seclusion and embraces a more liberated identity: "The modernists saw the veil as a mark of women's seclusion and backwardness; the

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act of throwing off the veil, regarded as a symbol of feudalism, was given great significance, and occasions when prominent women appeared unveiled became dramatic moments of defiance of the old order" (Jayawardena 1986, 12). In Iran, women's desire for unveiling and their "defiance of the old order," as highlighted by Jayawardena, may not necessarily be driven by aspirations to become "new women" or "modernists." Instead, Iranian women's actions reflect their already existing modernity, awareness, and active presence in society. Their defiance, though, represents a rejection of traditional gender roles and a pursuit of equality and social progress within their own cultural context.

What the History of Feminist Resistance in Iran Reveals

The uprising of women after Mahsa Jina Amini's death was neither abrupt nor a result of agitated public sentiment. The culmination of decades of women's objectification in public spaces through their dress code is one of the reasons for this unprecedented revolt, followed by the spark of feminist resistance (Bayat 2023, 20). The spark of the revolutionary movement WLF had been ignited years ago due to the neglecting of women's rights in Islamic Republic constitution laws:

> When that regime abolished the relatively liberal Family Protection Laws of 1967, women overnight lost their right to initiate divorce, to assume child custody, to become judges, and to travel abroad without the permission of a male guardian. Polygamy came back, sex-segregation was imposed, and all women were forced to wear the hijab in public. Social control and discriminatory quotas in education and employment compelled many women to stay at home, take early retirement, or work in informal or family businesses. (Bayat 21)

Therefore, the outcry was not necessarily against the hijab or Islam in and of itself but rather against the imposition of restrictive laws on women's independence and social rights. Although, women showed their objectification against such patriarchal laws many years ago. One of these acts of disagreement, related to the abolition of the Family Protection Laws of 1967, was the One Million Signature Campaign in 2006. Navid Pourmokhtari, in an interview with Zeynab Peyghambarzade and Sabra Rezaei, two of the campaign's members, writes:

> The campaign's objective lay in reforming all criminal, civil, and family law that discriminated against women. The proposed reforms included equal marital rights for women, e.g., the right to divorce spouses; the abolition of polygamy and temporary marriages; the right of women to pass their nationality onto their children; gender equality with respect to *dieh*, i.e., compensation for bodily injury or death at the hands of a spouse; equal inheritance rights; more stringent laws to deter honor killings; and equal weight given to testimony provided by women in courts of law. (2022, 9)

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Despite the reformist nature of the campaign, the juridical system took a radical approach and sentenced leaders of the campaign to jail and even to lashes (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2009).

During the reformist administration of Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), women's resistance took shape within the framework of reformism. The One Million Signature Campaign serves as an illustrative example of this. At the grassroots level, many women challenged the regime's prescribed dress code by altering their clothing choices. By consistently asserting their presence in the public sphere, they began wearing tight, colorful clothing, heavy makeup, and gradually pushing their scarves further back, seen as the "heritage of reformist government" according to *NBC News*: "The looser social rules and dress codes are one of the few legacies left from Iran's once-strong reform movement" (2006). Such loose social rules, however, were prevented in Ahmadinejad's administration (2005-2013), where the morality police were established for the first time. In his administration, after banning women from cycling in cities in 2012, a wave of women cyclists appeared in the streets, causing great anxiety for the authorities (Zamaneh Media 2016): "Thus, it was that on any given day, huge numbers of female cyclists might be seen riding through the parks, boulevards, streets and alleyways of major cities, their mere visibility an act of defiance" (Green Path 2010, ctd in Pourmokhtari 2022, 3).

The Islamic Regime has consistently pursued a policy of concealing the female body and confining women to domestic spaces. Consequently, these gender-based, prohibitive measures, such as banning cycling and mandatory hijab laws, are employed as a means of oppressing women's bodies and curtailing their autonomy by controlling their bodies. Pius Adesanmi believes that the body has always been an arena of suppression and is codified through conservative attire regulations or body inscription:

> The female body has for long been a subject of feminist polemical activity, for the simple reason that it is the site in which centuries of gender oppression are inscribed and made physically manifest, indeed, religion and tradition have often colluded to perpetuate the conquest and the codification of the female body through hyper-conservative vestimental codes or through more extreme corporal inscription like female excision and infibulation. (2002, 138-9)

Therefore, during the WLF movement, the emancipation of instruments of control that objectified female bodies fostered women's empowerment and dismantled the oppressive structures that sought to confine and suppress women. However, these structures have been enfeebled by other women's resistance movements before. For example, My Stealthy Freedom played a crucial role in raising awareness about "hijab as a tool of oppression." Amid the peak of arresting women for "improper hijab," the campaign of My Stealthy Freedom (MSF) (May 2014) was launched by Masih Alinejad, an Iranian Journalist, wherein women posted their photos without a scarf on MSF's Facebook page. The campaign was advanced further by another campaign, White Wednesdays, in May 2017 (Alinejad 2021). It was an individual, connective movement of

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resistance where women removed their white scarves in public places every Wednesday, took a video of this, and sent it to Masih Alinejad. The videos of unveiled women were published on the Facebook account of MSF (Alinejad 2020). Such online movements played a pivotal role in challenging taboos and stereotypes surrounding mandatory hijab, just as social media played a significant role in creating political debates during the Arab Spring: "These [online] movements contributed to the spread of democratic ideas and sparked the grassroots revolution" (Howard et al. 2011, 23). This has been evidenced in the WLF, MSF, and White Wednesdays, which shared similar characteristics, as they aimed to raise awareness about mandatory hijab as an oppressive and undemocratic tool. The White Wednesdays and MSF movements also served as a foundation for the WLF movement, generating grassroots momentum. Whereas Sara Talebian referred to MSF as "slacktivism," suggesting that it only brought joy to unveiled women without leading to on-street protests or legal changes (2019), I believe that the impact of these movements should not be undermined. They actively challenged societal norms and fostered meaningful discussions, contributing to the overall push for change. Hence, it is not unwarranted to assert that the Girls of the Revolution Street in 2017, an individual street-level protest, can be seen as a direct result of these two online movements that had already challenged the stereotypes around hijab. The Girls of the Street Revolution, an urban, individual performance showcasing the feminist anti-hijab resistance, started with Vida Movahed, standing on a utility box on Revolution Street, one of the most crowded streets in Tehran, in 2017, raising a white head scarf high on a stick. She became identified and subsequently arrested. However, her impact and influence have persisted on both significant and smaller levels (Homa 2022). This was followed by other women, and even men, performing the same act in other cities:

> The women were mimicking the act of civil disobedience first exhibited by Vida Movahed on a sidewalk on Revolution St. in Tehran on December 27, 2017. Photos of Movahed's silent protest went viral on social media, turning her into a symbol for women who oppose compulsory clothing regulations. (Center for Human Rights in Iran 2018)

Feminist resistance in Iran has a rich history that extends beyond responding to mandatory hijab and denial of women's rights. The political and economic landscape of Iran has given rise to communities of mothers, wives, and sisters who seek justice for their loved ones, such as children, husbands, or brothers killed during various protests under the Islamic Republic regime. In 2020, the economic uprising sparked by the increase in oil prices led to the emergence of a collective feminist resistance known as the *Maadaraan-e Aban* (Mothers of October), reminiscent of the "Mothers of Khavaran" campaign in the 1990s. These campaigns embody the collective resilience and solidarity of justice-seeking mothers whose sons and daughters lost their lives due to state actions, whether in the October 2022 uprising or in the mass execution of political prisoners during the summer of 1989 (Mohajer 2007). These groups of mothers

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eventually formed a larger community called the Iranian Complainant Mothers, including mothers who lost their children in the WLF movement, the 2017-18 protests, and the Ukraine Flight tragedy (Ghajar 2021). The activism of Iranian Complainant Mothers expands the feminist resistance narrative, connecting it to a broader struggle for human rights and social justice within Iran. In this way, the feminist resistance movement in Iran embodies a multifaceted approach that intersects with various forms of oppression, amplifying the voices and experiences of women in their fight for equality and justice.

Maryam Golabi, in her important article "Aesthetics of Invisibility in Iranian Women's Identity and their Domestic Space during the 1980s," takes an interdisciplinary approach to architecture and gender studies to indicate that dwellings are not only spaces to live in, but they also showcase how social practices and rules influence the reshaping of gender identity (2022, 1634). She conceptualized the "aesthetic of invisibility," referring to the fact that the IR regime aestheticized and appreciated the invisibility of the female body and domestic spaces. Golabi states that:

> Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, attributed the invisibility of the female body and the domestic interior to aesthetics in his Resaleh, Towzih al-Masael (A Clarification of Questions). Commenting on the importance of veiling, Ayatollah Khomeini stated that 'the perfect woman (the veiled woman described in the Quran) is like a pearl in a shell, and an unveiled woman is similar to artificial jewelry, which is available without cover everywhere.' (Khomeini 1980, 54, ctd in Golabi 2023, 1623)

Therefore, if the "aesthetic of invisibility" in the Islamic Republic regime defines women and their beauty by their "invisibility," in their "veiling," Iranian women's resistance, as demonstrated through their political actions, can manifest within the realm of an "aesthetic of visibility." The objective of the aesthetic of visibility is to garner attention so that women can be heard, felt, and seen. To achieve this, the women actively bring themselves into view by being present in the social sphere, discarding the veil in which they do not believe, and sharing the stories of victims on their social media channels. Despite enduring injuries during the WLF uprising, many victims continue to propagate revolutionary ideas by sharing their life experiences following the movement. To name a few, Sima Moradbeigi, who courageously endured a gunshot wound to her arm by the police during the uprising, and Elahe Tavakolian, who unfortunately lost one of her eyes, still share their hope for a better future on their social media accounts; thus serving as remarkable examples of resilience.

Conclusion

The studied performative protests not only vouched for the revolutionary power of women but also they were means of self-expression against the systemic oppression of women's rights. Throughout this article, I argued that the regime aims to invisibilize, exclude, and remove women, while feminist movements aim to visibilize, include, and discuss women's rights. To accomplish this,

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women, exemplified by the Women, Life, Freedom and Girls of the Street Revolution movement, seize control of public spaces to exhibit their resilience and strength. Furthermore, social media serves as an additional platform where women capitalize on opportunities to voice their unity and engage in discussions surrounding their rights, as evidenced by movements like Mothers of October and White Wednesdays. Performances such as cutting hair and burning scarves, dancing around the fire in solidarity, raising a white headscarf on a stick, taking off the white scarves on White Wednesdays, being present in public spaces without hijab, and bicycling in streets, show the "art of presence" (Bayat 2023). In this research, I outlined past feminist movements to argue that Women, Life, Freedom was not unexpected. The history of the women's movement also demonstrated how each movement was defined by its political era. Activists first took a reformist perspective to women's rights during Khatami's administration, but after Ahmadinejad's government, feminist uprisings became more radical and intertwined with demanding regime change. Even though women gained a relative freedom to hijab these days in Iran, hard-liners and some religious citizens have never stopped "enjoining good and forbidding wrong" (*Amr-e be marouf va nahy az monkar*), in Sharia law. They still warn unveiled women to wear a scarf in public places (@Tavaana 2023a).

The primary emphasis of this paper was on selected feminist resistance movements that emerged after the 1978 Revolution. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that the scope of this research did not encompass all feminist movements such as the *Dokhtar-e Abi* (Blue Girl). Also, it is necessary to focus on a nuanced perspective of the feminist resistance on a domestic level. In my future research, I will write about many women and girls whose parents act as a localized oppressive power curbing the choice of attire of the female members in families. Their stories underscore the need to address domestic violence and control, which is a hindrance to feminist activism, stifles the reclamation of women's autonomy and independence within their own homes, and deters them from voicing their rights collectively in public spaces alongside others. Recognizing the significance of a comprehensive understanding, further exploration of the history of feminism in Iran, including periods preceding the Islamic revolution, such as the Pahlavi and Qajar eras, would provide valuable insights into the evolution, challenges, and contributions of feminism in the Iranian context.

Biography

Arezou Darvishi is a second-year master's student in French at the Romance Languages Department at the University of Oregon. She received her BA in French Translation and Language in 2019 from Allameh Tabatabai University. Born and raised in Iran, her passions lie in Iran's women's studies, gender and language, religion and gender, and digital feminism. She is currently working on her thesis titled "Veiling and unveiling in Iran and in France: how French feminism interprets Women, Life, Freedom movement." She presented her initial findings in this paper at the 2023 Fall Forum held by the Romance Languages Department of the University of Oregon.

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