Digital Feminist Activism and Imagining the Future:

Case Study of the "Women, Life, Freedom" Movement in Iran

By

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, Azadeh Shamsi, candidate for the MA degree in Gender Studies declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research and only such external information as properly credited in notes and bibliography. I declare that no unidentified and illegitimate use was made of the work of others, and no part of the thesis infringes on any person's or institution's copyright. I also declare that no part of the thesis has been submitted in this form to any other institution of higher education for an academic degree. I further declare that the following word count for this thesis are accurate: Body of the thesis (all chapters excluding notes and references): 25643 Entire manuscripts: 27877 Signed: Vienna, 10, September 2023

Abstract

This research investigates Iranian women's imagination of the future by focusing on the politics of affect and emotion and the experience of doing digital feminist activism during the "Women, Life, Freedom" uprising in Iran. The death of Mahsa Jina Amini, in September 2022, sparked a massive street protest in Iran, primarily led by women. Alongside massive street protests in large and small cities across the country, digital media platforms remained a crucial part of the uprising. Jina's tragic death brought up different emotions: anger, sadness, despair, and hope. People, specifically women, started to talk about their experiences, their emotions, and memories of inequality and violence in recent decades on social media platforms. The focus of this project is on how through this emotion sharing, affective publics or counterpublics, enabled by the affordances of digital media, shaped Iranian women's imagination of future. In order to do so, I adopt an ethnographic approach in this research. In addition, because of the complexity and multilayeredness of Iranian women's media engagement, I adopt a mixed method approach including discourse analysis of 100 tweets posted on Twitter by Iranian women and 8 semi-structured in-depth interviews with women who are active on social media platforms. Through critical discourse analysis of 100 textual and visual Tweets published on Farsi Twitter in the first eight months after the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement, I traced mourning, anger, remembrance, joy, and hope as the main shared emotions.

In memory of Jina and all women who never stopped dreaming,
Dreaming of light in endless darkness.

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Introduction

"The last image my right eye recorded was the smiling face of the man who was shooting at me. Why were you smiling when you shot me? The shooter didn't know that I'm bulletproof. He didn't know that my soul and body are more than that".

Gazal Ranjkesh, a 21-year-old law student, posted these sentences on her Instagram account after she lost her right eye while participating in a protest in Bandar Abbas, Iran[1].

This research began as a way of engaging the profound guilt and pain I felt for leaving my country during the which uprising. I left Iran during the days when the "Woman, Life, Freedom"[2] movement started and gained momentum in the late summer of 2022. The movement began as a reaction to the murder of Jina[3]/Mahsa Amini at the hands of the state, a 22-year-old Kurdish girl who had travelled from Saghez, a small town in Kurdistan, Iran, to Tehran for a vacation. On September 13, 2022, she was arrested by so-called morality police[4] because of allegedly wearing her hejab[5] improperly[6]. She was beaten up and transferred to a detention centre, where she fell into a coma, and three days later died because of brain injuries.

As I prepared to leave the country to start my MA in Gender Studies in Austria, I experienced the bittersweet feeling of saying goodbye to my family and friends, collecting my things, and packing my suitcase, while people, specifically, women, were demonstrating in the streets, chanting slogans, dancing, lighting fires, and burning their scarves. From the

[1] Published on 22 November 2022 (in Persian, 225000 likes as of 15 January 2023)
[2] This movement has also been referred to by various names, including "Jina Revolution", "Jina Revolt", "Feminist Revolution", and others.
[3] Jina's registered name is Mahsa, but her family was calling her Jina, which in Kurdish means "life". This is because the state does not allow citizens to easily register names that are not Persian or Islamic. Therefore, when she got arrested, her name was registered as Mahsa by the police. Even on social media, the most commonly used hashtag during protests was Mahsa Amini (Zandi 2022).
[4] "Gasht-e Ershad" or in Frasi گشت ارشاد, the exact translation is guidance patrol.
[5] In this thesis, I use the transliteration style based on Iranian Studies.
[6] Siamdoust describes Jina's dress as "impeccable" by the time her arrest happened and she argues that one of the reasons for the outburst for her death was the fact that she was killed because of a few strands of hair (Siamdoust 2022).

first day, the state started to respond to the protesters violently. Every day, lots of men, women, and children were being killed in different parts of the country. At night, the loud voices of people, chanting "Woman, Life, Freedom" or "Death to the dictator" from the windows of houses echoed through the city streets. Social media platforms began paying tribute to news about those who had been injured or killed. While I was watching videos and images of injured and lifeless bodies or videos of funerals of fallen members of the movement on social media platforms, I was also scrolling through and liking the photos and videos representing the memories of people who were killed, their happy moments; when they were singing, dancing, or blowing out their birthday candles, shared by their friends and family on social media platforms. I began to grieve for people who I did not know personally but I felt a deep connection with their loss. I was still in Tehran when I heard about the death of Sarina[1]- a sixteen-year-old YouTuber[2] and started watching her videos on her YouTube channel. I also saw Nika's picture on her aunt's Instagram account as a missing person, and then after a few days, her family found her crushed body in the Kahrizak morgue (*BBC News* 2023). I was watching every poignant video posted on Twitter, videos of the dying moments of Shirin Alizadeh[3] or Ghazaleh Chalabi[4] who got shot when they were filming the protesters and ended up recording the image of their shooters and the last moments of their lives.

During the first weeks of my arrival in Austria, the biggest anti-government show of force in favour of women's liberation coalesced in Iran was happening (Afary and Anderson 2023). So, I found myself spending lots of time on social media, specifically Twitter, to stay updated

[1] Sarina Esmaeelzadeh the 16-year-old Youtuber created videos about her everyday life; music, food, and experiences as a schoolgirl and about restrictions on women in Iran. She died on 23 September 2022, in her hometown Karaj, after being severely beaten on the head by security forces (Iranhr,2022).
[2] See Sarinas Youtuber Channel here: https://www.youtube.com/@sarinacmz4015/videos
[3] Driving back home from a holiday, Shirin Alizadeh, aged 36, found herself in the middle of a violent crackdown on a protest in the town of Salmanshahr on the Caspian Sea. Alizadeh and her husband, who was driving the car, saw people being shot dead in the street. Shirin started to film the scene with her mobile and got shot on her neck and her head while she was filming the events.
[4] Ghazaleh, aged 33, participated in a protest in the city of Amol. While chanting "Do not be afraid, we are together" and filming the demonstration with her phone, she got shot directly in her head on 21 September.

with the news, to see what active protestors were talking about, and to watch the videos of protests and shed tears for the people being killed. As I was scrolling through the endless posts on Twitter and Instagram, I witnessed how people, particularly women, were using digital platforms as a means to show their resistance against the state and how people were trying to gain social media attention and make the world know about the movement and the ongoing state violence against the participants.

In that sense, the death of Jina in the hands of the morality police has raised women's collective traumas and sad experiences rooted in gender inequalities and structural misogyny. I was inspired by the way women started using social media platforms to communicate their affect and emotion, anger, anxiety, pain, frustration, and experiences of inequality, and how through these emotion-sharing and personal narratives, they were imagining a different and alternative future for themselves. So, I decided to explore these forms of women's digital activism in my study. My thesis focuses on the event and the representation over the first eight months of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement in the wake of Jina's death. I investigated how affective publics or counterpublics (Papacharissi 2015) enabled by the affordances of digital media, shape the political formation of affect (Ahmed 2014) among Iranian women who are active on social media platforms. And how through emotion sharing and digital narratives communicated by textual and visual tweets, a new collective future is imagined. I also seek to understand how women find a voice across multiple platforms and spaces, bringing together street protests and Twitter wars in new forms. My research addresses the following questions: How do Iranian women who are active on social media platforms imagine a collective feminist future through the emotion-sharing and affective affordances of social media? What is the political meaning of women's emotion-sharing on Farsi Twitter? In addition, in order to understand these women's experiences of using social media platforms as activist tools, I investigate to what extent social media activism affects the

personal lives of women, how they see these emotions sharing, and how they manage the risks and consequences of their activism. Furthermore, how this activism helps them to imagine an alternative future for themselves and for other women in the country.

In chapter one, I provide the context of the women's movement and digital activism in Iran. Then I will review related scholarly literature. In chapter two, I explain my research methodology. In chapter three, I locate scholarly debates and theoretical discourses on affect theory. Then, in chapter four I will bring my research findings through discourse analysis of 100 tweets. In chapter five, the discourse analyses of women's narratives gathered through 8 semi-structured in-depth interviews will be presented.

Chapter One: Political Context of "Women, Life, Freedom" movement and Literature Review

Does not laugh at anyone, Tehran
Is the assistant of death, Tehran
Put morning attire on poetry and left the music be
As if a widow in solitude, Tehran
Shirku Bikas[1]

Although "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement originated as a reaction to the death of Mahsa/Jina Amini at the hands of morality police on September 16th, 2022 for what is alleged to be inappropriate Hejab, this incident served as a catalyst to react against systemic misogyny and women's suppression by the state for more than four decades (Bayat 2023). It led to a nationwide hybrid protest that unfolded not only on the streets of the country but also across various social media platforms. The primary objective of this chapter is to provide a concise overview of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement and outline its distinctive characteristics. Furthermore, it aims to contextualise this movement within the broader context of women's movements and digital activism in Iran.

Following the death of Jian, the news of her death, the image of her unconscious and lifeless body, and videos capturing her family while they were mourning in the hospital went viral on social media platforms (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023). Soon after that people gathered outside Kasra Hospital in Tehran, where Jina died a few hours ago, police dispersed people and arrested a few. The following day, at the Ichy[2] graveyard in Saqqez, Kurdistan, Jina's hometown, people gathered for her funeral. Videos of women who were waving their scarves

[1] At Jina's funeral, her grandfather read this piece of poetry from the Kurdish poet, Shirku Bikas, referring to the fact of being a part of minority ethnic groups in Tehran. The original poetry is written in Kurdish and translated to English by me.
[2] Also, a photo from a handwritten sentence on Mahsa's grave became significant in the movement as well: "Jina, dear! You will not die. Your name will become a symbol". In Kurdish: ژینا گیان تو نامری، ناوت ئبیتە رەمز

and chanting the 'Woman, life, freedom'[1] slogan in Kurdish (Jin, Jiyan, Azadî) went viral. The slogan foregrounds women as a problematic and challenging issue in contemporary Iran. Following the performative mourning of Kurdish women in Saghez, Jina's hometown, the act of unveiling and the slogan quickly spread to demonstrations in other parts of the country. The slogan was translated into Farsi, the formal language of Iran, and other languages of the country including Baluchi[2] and Azeri. Shortly, it became the signature slogan of the movement. The protest in Tehran was initiated when a feminist activist group published a protest call and asked people to join. In this protest and other demonstrations in various parts of the country, women were on the frontline and encouraged men to join. For the first time after 1979, hundreds of women went to the streets of the country without hejab. The breath-taking videos of men and women who have been always questioned for their appearance, specifically unveiled women who were resisting police, standing on city bins, on the roof of cars, and even police cars went viral on social media platforms.

Woman, Life, Freedom, a Feminist Movement to Reclaim Life[3]

The prominence of women's issues in the main motto of the movement, accompanied by the outstanding presence, and in some way, women's leadership, particularly young women, in peaceful demonstrations, were brutally oppressed by the government[4]. Performances by young Iranian women, removing and burning their headscarves and cutting their hair, as a traditional feminine act of mourning and loss, circulated widely on social media platforms, and caught the attention of international media. This nationwide movement, which is still

[1] The slogan "Jin, Jian, Azadi" (ژن، ژیان، ئازادی) originated from the Kurdish women's liberation movement within Kurdish guerrilla groups in Turkey. It was also used during the battle in Kobani, Syria against ISIS, and represents the concept of liberation through women's emancipation (Siamdoust, 2022).
[2] جَنین، زِند، آجوئی
[3] I borrowed the phrase "reclaim life" from Asef Bayat's (2022) article titled Is Iran on the verge of another revolution?
[4] Although the possibility of free investigation on the number of dead, injured, or prisoned people in recent protests in Iran is not possible, human rights reports show that almost 500 people had been killed by the end of December 2022. Reports such as the "Hrana report on the first 82 days of the protest in Iran" (Hrana, 2022) and the Amnesty International reports (Amnesty International, 2022)

ongoing in various forms, is estimated to have sent more than two million people from 160 cities of the country into the streets (Khatam 2023), causing the biggest Twitter storm in the country with the initial hashtag of #MahsaAmini, which broke the world record of 500 million tweets (Kermani, 2023).

Nearly a year after Jina's death and despite the protesters' hope for a rapid major political change in Iran, the movement has not yet led to a dramatic shift. According to Asef Bayat, an Iranian-American sociologist, although this movement has not led Iran into a revolutionary situation, it differs from various uprisings in recent decades after the 1979 revolution. It has set Iranian society on a revolutionary course, which means a large part of society think, imagine, talk, and act in terms of a different future. Several gender-related elements of the movement led some analysts and scholars, such as Kian Tajbakhsh (2022), to describe the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising as a feminist social movement. He believes that this movement demands recognition of women as equal citizens and has been rooted in the imposition of the Islamist model of public space on women over the past four decades. He argues that despite the short-term outcomes, this movement will have a long-term profound, and positive impact on gender relations in Iran (Tajbakhsh 2022). In contrast, Asef Bayat believes that this movement is not a feminist revolution or a revolt of Generation Z, it is not merely a protest against mandatory hejab, the uprising includes wider concerns that affect ethnic minorities who like women have been considered as second-class citizens and people from different socio-political backgrounds who feel a normal life has taken from them. So, it's a movement to reclaim life and freedom from internal colonisation. He argues that what made this movement unique is "a paradigm shift in Iranian subjectivity recognition that the liberation of women may also bring the liberation of all other oppressed, excluded, and dejected people" (Bayat 2023).In addition, Janet Afary and Kevin Anderson see this movement as a part of the women's movement in Iran over the past century which has

brought the country to the obvious confrontation with the theocratic regime. These historian scholars find the root of this uprising in gender apartheid and women's unequal situation in Iran. They also refer to state authoritarianism, economic stagnation, severe unemployment, climate disaster, and religious fundamentalism as the other reasons for this national movement (Afary and Anderson 2023).

Noushin Ahmadi Khrasani (2023), a grassroots feminist living in Iran, believes that although the protest against compulsory hejab, one of the primary demands of this uprising, triggered a cultural revolution, it faced a generational gap that hindered the achievement of a political overthrow. She explains that, with the exception of regions like Kurdistan and Baluchistan, the movement remained largely confined to the younger generation and failed to attract the middle generation, who predominantly hold economic resources, thus preventing significant political change. She argues that because "women" and their demands were at the heart of this movement, it has the potential to generate uncertainty and conflict within a patriarchal society, affecting both modern and traditional groups. While the focus on women's demands, such as the optional hejab, could potentially position modern patriarchy (whether within modern religious groups or secular modern groups) against traditional patriarchy, it may also lead to alliances between them as they seek to deepen and expand their own influence. Ahmadi Khorasani (2023) maintains that the addition of "Man, homeland, Prosperity"[1] to the movement's main slogan, alongside "Women, Life, Freedom", stems from this concern within modern patriarchy.

According to Azam Khatam (2023), these recent protests can be defined by four key characteristics; she believes the movement has a radical strategy, feminists are on the frontline, it's aiming to improve the quality of life for young people, and also it seeks freedom, equal rights and recognition for various ethnic and religious groups within the

[1] In Farsi مرد، میهمن، آبادی

country. Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi (2023) believes that this movement put women's rights and bodily autonomy at the centre and fought for the right to human dignity, the desire for a 'normal' life, and the wish to openly experience joy and everyday pleasures which is impossible for people in the country, specifically for women. He also argues that Iran's Islamic regime faces four contradictions which generated this historic movement; it includes the crises of gendered social control and social reproduction, the nation-state and excluding ethnicities, religious democracy, neoliberal authoritarians, and the state political economy (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023).

These various contradictions not only united people from different classes, religions, gender, or ethnic minorities against the regime (Bayat, 2023), but also provided an opportunity for more suppressed groups such as the LGBTQA community to talk about their experiences of inequality under Islamic regime (Gharibi, 2022) which introduce queerness as "western moral deficit" (Omer 2023). Therefore, the queer community also seized the opportunity to challenge the main slogan of the movement, suggesting "Queer, Life, Freedom" and "Queer, Trans, Freedom" as alternatives to evoke society to go beyond the heteronormative understanding of gender, acknowledge the queer community and their suffers and hope for a change in the future. Lots of Iranian queers started to use the hashtag #من-کوییر-هستم (I am queer) on social media platforms to raise their voices, and talk about their experiences of inequality and demands for a better future. In order to be visible and active in the recent movement, despite the state's ruthless repression of queer people in Iran and associated risks, members of the queer community attempted to participate in the protests either inside the country or at political gatherings outside the country (Omer 2023). However, it seems, regrettably, the movement has not yet fully embraced the demand for freedom and rights for the queer community as a central focus.

Ahmadi Khrosani (2023) provides an intergenerational explanation for the radicalization of the recent uprising. She believes that a few years ago, most of the younger generation from middle-class families, due to the lack of support from their families, did not support radical actions. The middle generation, especially mothers managing the family foundation, who experienced government violence and oppression against women's resistance and also inherited the traumatic experiences of the turbulent 80s as the first generation of the revolution, were supporting gradual and slow political reforms.

Consequently, they tried to keep their children away from this violence and restrain their children's radical energy by providing what society and the government were withholding, whether in more private or semi-private spheres or by offering opportunities such as migrating abroad (Ahmadi Khorasani 2023). This feminist activist also argues that even though women of the middle generation, who had suffered the wounds of compulsory hejab themselves, showed remarkable empathy with their young daughters, they kept them away from radical actions and attempted to advance their legitimacy with low-cost forms of activism. However, severe economic hardship in recent years is weakening the parents' power and authority over their children in middle-class families, and they can no longer offer any alternative to their children. Consequently, the political action in Iran is moving towards a more radical phase. However, despite uniting youth from different ethnicities and classes, the movement is still unsuccessful in attracting middle-aged people. However, Bayat (2023) believes that although because of state suppression or other reasons, it seems that the protests paused, Iran’s society is experiencing a cycle of protests which can be started easily again.

Revolutionising Unveiling: Women’s Body as Signifiers of Modernity

If we agree that this ongoing uprising is a feminist revolution or if we consider it as a nationwide movement that centres on fighting for women's rights, one thing remains certain: women are at the heart of this movement. Even after a year, women’s resistance against

compulsory hejab continues to be the most prominent form of defiance in Iran. Deeply embedded in trajectories of previous feminist struggles and women's rights movements in Iran, this new wave of protests highlighted gender inequality and discrimination against women and minority groups in the country with renewed dynamics and hope toward a more gender-equal future.

In order to understand the significance of the "woman's question", its central struggles such as hejab/veiling/unveiling, and its complex nature as a major challenge in contemporary Iran particularly in the recent movement, it is essential to understand it within its historical context. Afsaneh Najmabadi (2000), a feminist historian, emphasises that when we discuss feminism in Islamic countries, it is important to avoid ahistorical generalisations and ignore the historical and contemporary differences of these countries. She argues that to understand Iran's current situation, It is important to consider configurations of the politics of modernity and the unfolding configurations of Islam, feminism, nationalism, and secularism in Iran which is very much affected by the experiences of the past and the fact that an Islamic republic has been in power from 1979 so far (Najmabadi 2000).

The women's movement in Iran, emerging in the mid-nineteenth century, has faced considerable challenges, and despite more than a century-long endeavour to secure women's rights, attaining fundamental rights still remains hard to reach. Najmabadi (1993) believes that Iranian women constituted "terrains of political and cultural contestations" that have been central to the contemporary politics of the country. Since the early nineteenth century, "the woman's question" has been one of the central notions through which modernists and counter-modernists, in particular Islamic discourses, have formed their respective concepts of modernity and tradition (Najmabadi 1993). Women's rights remained at the centre of political contestation between these forces, neither of which has been "interested in the plight of women" (Hoodfar and Sadr 2010). The political structure of Iran seems to have afforded

only a limited number of opportunities for women's demands and claims. However, Iranian women have utilised even the smallest structural opportunities (Tohidi 2016) to raise their issues and claims being recognised whenever any spaces become available due to changes and contradictions within the political system and social developments, particularly during national scale movements.

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, Iranian political modernity witnessed the rise of various nationalist and Islamist ideologies. It was during the Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906 that Iran witnessed massive women's participation in political processes. Many women, while supporting the Constitutionalists, claimed their civil rights, including the right to vote and education (Sadeghi 2010), quested for equal rights and collectively acted for socio-political empowerment (Tohidi 2016). In fact, women used the momentum provided by the revolution as an opportunity to bring women's causes into the public (Sanasarian 1982). However, women's efforts and demands, even for education, were considered contrary to the laws of Islam by religious leaders and also neglected by constitutionalists (Mahdi 2004).

The era of modern nation-state-building and secular modernisation in Iran during the Pahlavi dynasty, between 1925 and 1979, was described as a turning point for women in the mid-twentieth century by Iranian scholars (Najmabadi 1991; Sadeghi, 2010; Arasteh 1964). Fundamental changes in women's condition started with Reza Shah Pahlavi's reformist plans (1925 to 1941) and the emergence of distinct manifestations of Iranian nationalism which was created based on the idea of Reza Shah to create a powerful and modern country. Therefore, in order to weaken the possibility of separatist ethnic movements, specific ethnic groups such as Kurds and Turks were forcibly relocated to different parts of the country in Reza Shah's plan, while Shi'i and Farsi-speaking populations were acknowledged as dominant entities (Afary and Anderson 2023).

Women and women's bodies in Iran, similar to other countries in the whole region, have been the agent of geopolitical space for governments to construct specific gender norms which serve to reproduce and naturalise the boundaries between modernity and modesty (Pratt 2020). Reza Shah believed that in order to achieve a modern, progressive, and westernised country, women should not be covered in a veil. He set about forcibly unveiling women, and put into motion a divide in how women in urban centres versus rural communities felt about the practice of head covering. The forceful unveiling of women started in 1936 and was understood by society as not only anti-Islam but also in an imperialist context, offensive. According to Najmabadi (2000) and Sadegh (2010), the act of unveiling can be considered a significant contributing factor to the Islamist backlash and the eventual Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In general, the era of Pahlavi dynasty is associated with mobilisation for literacy and women's admission to universities, the gradual expansion of women's associations, and women's press which led to some crucial changes in women's status (Mahdi 2004). However, government initiatives regarding women were focused on their welfare and educational activities, and all women's activities were channelled through government-controlled organisations which were following the "processes of making the women's movements apolitical", as Mahdi (2004) describes it, this continued until 1977. However, more women participated in public and political activism and many reform projects and egalitarian ideas concerning women's roles and status were brought about into the public discourse by women's groups and associations.

Reconfiguration of the Veil: Hejab as Protector of the Nation

Sadeghi believes that, despite all restrictions, social and political movements resulting in the 1979 Revolution, provided women some chances to participate in political processes (Sadeghi 2010). The state's view of woman-as-culture and the centrality of women in the

construction and establishment of the Islamist political discourse has rendered the women's question more immediate and pressing and led to the incredible flourishing of women in intellectual and cultural production (Najmabadi, 2000).

Nevertheless, shortly after the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979, despite the massive participation of women and women's role "as a major force for change" during the revolution (Mahdi, 2004), Islamists fundamentalists began to disparage women on the pretext of religion (Sadeghi 2010). By abolishing the family protection law of 1967, women lost all their citizen's rights overnight; their rights to divorce, to have their children's custody, to go abroad, study, and work without their husband's permission (Bayat 2023). Polygamy and child marriage became legal, and women were forced to wear a very strict form of Islamic hejab in public, including long dark manteau, big scarf and thick socks.

Concerned with the implications of these laws, massive populations of women responded pouring into the streets and demonstrating against the forced hejab, and the abolition of the Family Protection Act (Mahdi, 2004). In March 1979, around 50 thousand women gathered in Tehran and protested against compulsory hejab in workplaces for six days (Hosseinkhah 2017). But this oppositions soon disappeared from the public view due to the oppressive political environment and were silenced by a wide spectrum of political groups including leftists, liberals, and both religious and secular groups, who "denied the importance of the anti-women measures of the new government" (Shahidian 1994). Women were the first group whose freedom was curtailed in pursuit of establishing an anti-imperialist Islamic state. This passivity facilitated the state's further suppression of dissenters and a greater encroachment on women's rights in the subsequent months and years. In this situation, small details of women's clothing such as the thickness of the women's stockings have become matters of public policy (Najmabadi 2000), foreign policy, and a major component of the flag or a signifier of the configuration of an Islamic society which wants to play a strategic role in

the region. Minoo Moallem (1999), Iranian Gender studies scholar, believes that “de-veiling” and “re-veiling” in Iran’s contemporary history created sites where “female bodies were imprinted by the history of state intervention in the performance and perpetuation of particular forms of femininity, but were also used as an incorporating practice to create social authority for local men” (Moallem 1999).

Despite all restrictions that made women legally far from equal to men and made especially secular feminists silenced, suppressed, and exiled and exclude women from lots of opportunities, not only women have not disappeared from public and political activities, they have been active in every field including art, sport, academic education, politics and etc. Afsaneh Najmabadi (2000) argues that it is tempting to view all these accomplishments as mere reactions against the Islamic Republic. However, women used any opportunity to continue the battle against their discriminatory situation over these four decades, the battle that Asef Bayat describes as non-movement which occurs through presence in public domains, daily resistance of ordinary people against government ideology, and engagement in everyday practices (Bayat 2007, 169). However, some scholars believe that such terminology as leading to “diminishing and even the unconscious disempowerment of women's movements” (Hoodfar and Sadeghi 2009, 215). They believe women's movement in Iran does not conform to the classic model of coordinated and centralized organization with specific leaders or other bureaucracies' (Hoodfar and Sadeghi 2009, 222), this movement can instead be identified as a new social movement (Mahdi 2004, 447). Although debates over the naming of women's movements in Iran continue, it can be concluded, as Tohidi (2016, 79-80) suggests, that “in the shadow of public protests by Iranian women, their networks and campaigns have brought to light many non-essential debates and conflicts between women activists and government organizations, sometimes non-constructive in nature”.

During the so-called Reform Movement that led to Mohammad Khatami's election in the 1997 presidential contest, women found another opportunity to become more involved in the political process (Sadeghi, 2010). During the election and also during two turns of the reformist government, activists managed to advance women's causes and keep gender justice at the centre of public discourse, and in particular to sustain public debate on legal reform (Hoodfar & Sadeghi, 2009). While these developments, at first, created optimism about working within an Islamic framework to advance women's rights, at the end of the reformist era, the failure to achieve "any democratic or gender-equitable legal reform" (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010) was a disappointment for many women across different social classes (Sadeghi, 2010). The decline of the reform movement, which led to the boycott of the 2005 presidential election, alongside the conservative takeover of Mahmood Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013) has produced 'the most discriminatory conditions ever experienced by Iranian women (Sadeghi, 2010). It somehow explains the vast participation of women in the post-electoral pro-democracy protests of June 2009 onward in a way that it is argued the Green Movement[1] was impossible without the participation of women (Sadeghi, 2010).

After the crackdown of the movement, violation of human rights, especially of women's rights, increased. Accordingly, Iran witnessed a wave of migration of activists, including feminists, who were questioning whether activism in the current political structure could ever make a difference (Hoodfar & Sadeghi, 2009). Although the circumstances diminished women's open activism, it could not silence the movement, which developed a new strategy, shifting to the digital public sphere (Hoodfar & Sadr, 2010).

[1] In Farsi Jonbesh-e Sabz (جنبش سبز)

Digital Activism; Inclusion in proper politics

Women's movements in Iran, throughout its historical evolution, have always used a combination of interpersonal and collective communication methods, as well as the latest communication technologies prominent in the country at that time. Najmabadi and Salami (2010) refer to women's use of communication tools such as spreading leaflets, publication of books, magazines, newspapers, women's gatherings, and pieces and play as the first effort to achieve and advance their social and economic rights. Since the introduction of the Internet and blogging to Iran's society in 2001, Iranian women started to use Weblogistan, the Iranian blogosphere, not only as a means of accessing and disseminating information but also as a means of voicing their concerns and talking about discriminatory laws against women in Iran (Shirazi 2012).

At the time of the popularity of blogging, lots of Iranian middle-class, urban residents started to use blogging, and as Siam Shakhsari, Gender Studies scholar, argues women bloggers have fought to be included in the representation of Webelogistan and negotiate their subjectivity. However, their inclusion may be considered as limited to finding freedom of expression by mostly confession about their sex lives and not be read as participation in proper politics (Shakhsari 2011). Amir Ebrahimi (2008) describes Weblogistan as a place that made women able to challenge political restrictions and patriarchal beliefs of society and make minor daily transgressions (Amir-Ebrahimi 2008). In general, during this period, Iran's digital landscape witnessed the emergence of many bloggers and content creators striving for awareness and public discourse on a wide range of women's issues; From legal and civil rights demands to women's bodily liberation, gender identity, sexual matters, and women's health and well-being, they were actively engaged in informing and discussing these topics (Akhavan 2013).

The next stage of digital activism, involving women, took place during the Green Movement which basically started as a reaction to Mahmood Ahmadinejad[1]'s disputed victory in the presidential election of June 2009, people came out to the streets to protest against the regime and also used media platforms, specifically Facebook and Twitter extensively to launch, develop and expand the movement (Golkar 2011) to the extent that some researchers describe this movement as a Twitter revolution. This metaphor gained popularity when Andrew Sullivan, an American-British writer and blogger, claimed during the context of the 2009 Iranian protests that a revolution could be tweeted (Fuchs 2012). The discussion about the affordances of social media platforms such as Twitter or in general internet is not excluded to Iran, during Arab Spring 2010-2012 in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and etc, many scholars emphasized the influence of this wave on the significance of social media in shaping new forms of social mobilisation and the transformative role of digital media in the region, especially in authoritarian countries.

For example, Marwan Kraidy (2016) in "Naked Blogger of Cairo" refers to women's radical and creative use of blogging in Egypt revolution. Philip Howard and his colleagues (2011, 1-3), in a study focusing on Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, and political blogs in Egypt and Tunisia, introduced the power of social media as one of the sources or causes of the Arab Spring. In addition, Wael Ghonim, an Egyptian digital activist known for his statement "If you want to liberate a society, just give them the Internet", referred to the Egyptian revolution as the "Internet revolution" (2012). However, some other scholars criticised such arguments for being over-optimistic (See Aouragh, 2012).

One of the main characteristics of the Green Movement was the massive participation of women in street protests and also on social media platforms demanding "Where is my vote?" The face of the Green Movement was also a woman whose death was captured by a video on

[1]Ahmadinejad was the sixth president of Iran who served in two presidential periods from 2005 to 2013.

cell phones during a street protest in Tehran, June 2009. The death of Neda Aghasoltan, a 26-year-old woman, went viral on social media platforms, and despite the state's effort to manipulate it and claim the video to have been fabricated, Neda became the face and symbol of the Green Movement (Sadeghi 2012). She was representing the victimisation, courage, bravery, and agency of Iranian women (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2010).

Regarding the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement, we could say that it is similar to the Green Movement, specifically in terms of using social media platforms as an activism tool. Asef Bayat (2023), however, believes that the recent uprising is different from the previous national protests that happened after the Islamic revolution in Iran. It has different qualities and dynamics, going further in message, size, and make-up. In contrast to the green movement which mostly was limited to urban middle-class citizens, the recent uprising brought people from different social and economic classes, ethnicity, and genders together. He argues that movements such as the Green Movement or revolt of 2018[1] and 2019[2] (against fuel-price increase) happened mostly over sectoral claims and there was no collective action, there were some parallel concerns that social media facilitated it to be united. Similarly, Ahmadi Khorasani (2023) asserts that due to the widespread use of social media and the globalisation of lifestyle among the new generation, the Woman, Life, freedom movement relied on the shared experiences of the young generation scattered throughout the country across different classes and ethnicities. But, one of the main differences between the Green Movement and "Women, Life, Freedom" is the centrality of the women's issue in the latter. While women were massively involved and were a main part of the Green Movement and they were beaten up and killed in the streets, the Green Movement was not open to women's

[1] These protests started from Mashahd over high price of living expenses and spread to other cities of the country.

[2] A series of national protests started in November 2019 as a reaction against a fuel-price increase, leading to massive protests of 200,000 people, particularly in low-income neighbourhoods across the country. In a few days, 1500 people were killed. This incident has become known as "Bloody Aban" or "Bloody November" (In Farsi آبان خونین) which was followed by the shooting down of Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752.

political demands or issues (Hosseinkhah, 2017) the women's movement became too integrated and marginalised within the Green Movement and lost its autonomy (Daraeezadeh and Ardalan 2011).

In the wake of the Green Movement and the widespread presence and activity of the Iranians on social media platforms, a new moment of suppression of (feminist) social media activists and their media channels started. Many of them migrated. This pressure created a new phase in women's activism in Iran which is more pronounced on social media platforms. First of all, it gives women a platform an opportunity to make their voice heard in a society where their concerns are hardly presented in mainstream media. Even the hybrid social and political women's practices such as Girls of Enghelab Street or My Stealthy Freedom which were centered on issues of compulsory hejab gained attention through social media platforms.

Feminism and Digital Activism

Women's presence on social media has generally been regarded as a way to transgress traditional and cultural boundaries and a terrain of political and social activism (Khiabany and Sreberny, 2007). Feminist media scholars have focused on social media affordances as enabling diverse voices specifically in authoritarian regimes (See Eltantawy & Wiest, 2011; Newsom & Lengel, 2012).

Gulum Şener (2021) describes digital media activism as a counter-public sphere that added a new dimension to women's struggle. Investigating digital feminism in Turkey, she argues that digital storytelling strengthens women's solidarity by creating a sense of digital sisterhood, a feminist 'We'. Rosemary Clark (2016) describes hashtag feminism as a powerful tactic for fighting gender inequalities and campaigning for social change around the world. Jing Zeng's study of China's #MeToo campaign (Zeng 2020) shows how a feminist social movement in an authoritarian context can evade online censorship, amplify social activism, and effect structural change through social media. Johnson and Parry (2022),

focusing on the connective, visual, and resistant logic of hashtags, explore hashtag affordances as a way to mobilise and shape and stimulate social and political emotions of the public on Twitter. Steele (2021) discusses the history of black feminist activism and the ways it has been shaped by digital technologies, including social media. She explores the ways in which black women have been both empowered and marginalised by digital technologies and how black feminist activists use digital technologies to create new forms of political expression and to mobilise around social justice issues.

In the context of Iran, studies mainly focus on the achievements of women's digital activism such as raising public awareness and mobilising support (Tahmasebi-Birgani, 2017), creating a collective identity (Rahimi and Bichranloo, 2019; Khazraee & Novak, 2018), targeting a wider range of audiences (Karimi, 2018), connecting women's rights activists at home and in diaspora (Abbasgholizadeh, 2014), and to the activists in the region, having the opportunity to access a broader range of transnational feminist ideas (Batmanghelichi & Mouri, 2017) and transnational solidarity (Tafakori, 2021). Noushin Ahmadi-Khorasani, a grassroots activist in Iran, argues that young women in Iran are increasingly interested in digital activism for its visual, fluid, short-term, collective, and also self-promoting affordances (Ahmadi-Khorasani, 2018). Some scholars consider feminist digital activism as a form of slacktivism, lacking significant socio-political effects (Talebian and Talebian, 2017). However, the scope of the majority of research is limited to opportunities provided by social media for transformation politics and tends to focus on the emancipatory and empowering nature of digital activism in Iran. Furthermore, there has been little scholarly interest in the intersection of affect, feminism and social media platforms in the context of Iran. For instance, Sara Tafakori (2022) refers to the mediated affective practices of the network of #justice-seeking mothers in Iran and their digital mourning as a form of bottom-up political intervention into the national terrain and imagining new forms of

solidaristic collectivity connection. This research aims to contribute to the knowledge on fordances of digital media for affective publics and the political formation of affect among Iranian women.

Chapter Two: Methodology

Fieldwork Notes: Two Visits to Iran

"*Our bodies as women have always been under supervision and punishment, objectified, and killed, yet remained silent. Every day as we walked down the street, we were criminals. Every day, we've experienced fear, humiliation, anxiety, confrontation, resistance, and courage; we've stored these feelings in a bag and carried them with us. The uprising of last year prompted us to reach into this bag, bring out these feelings, and speak of them. As we are standing in the midst of a movement, these experiences are no longer cries of despair; they are the medals of our courage. Because of all those experiences, we made today possible".*[1]

Over the course of two trips back to Iran in January 2023 and May 2023, in general, during these two trips to Iran, not only did I conduct 8 interviews, I tried to fill a gap between following the protest through social media platforms, reading tweets, viewing photos and videos online, and going beyond the virtual experience of the movement and being close to what is going on the street of the country.

The interviews have been conducted with Iranian women who have routinely participated in online activism through narrating their thoughts regarding the social and political situation in Iran on social media platforms specifically during "Woman, Life, Freedom". These women may not consider themselves as activists but they have been involved in creating content on social media platforms during this movement.

Interviewees were chosen through snowball sampling, all of the interviewees were relatively young between 27 to 42, educated, and identified themselves as non-religious. These women were based in Tehran. The location of all interviews was cafes except for one of them which was conducted at the house of the interviewee. All 8 Interviewees were chosen through snowball sampling which -because of my research topic and interview question and the political situation of Iran- is an effective recruitment strategy that enables me to gain

[1] From Interview with Sima, Tehran, May 2023

access to vulnerable populations that are otherwise difficult to reach (Edmonds 2019). Therefore, because of the sensitive nature of the discussion in interviews, I considered snowball sampling as being beneficial for me as a researcher to rely on informants who trust me and talk to me and provide the contact information of others who may be willing to participate. However, one of the challenges with this method of sampling is the bias in choosing the informants (Edmonds 2019). All the interviews were conducted in Farsi and translated into English by me.

During my stay, for the first time in my life, I did not have my scarf with me when I was walking in the streets or while I was sitting in the cafes speaking to women about their experiences and their involvement in the protests. A few years ago, I started to let my scarf slide on my shoulder and twist it around my neck, whenever it was possible. But not having it with me was a new and challenging experience that I did not have the courage to do it before protests against Jina's death. It was exciting, joyful, and sometimes scary.

My first trip to Iran took place in January 2022, four months after Jina's death, while protests were still active in various parts of the country. I distinctly remember arriving in Tehran and going out for a walk and I was unable to stop myself from smiling when I saw lots of women in the streets, restaurants, and cafes without wearing mandatory hejab, not only in Tehran but also in other more conservative cities in where I spent a few days during my stay, cities such as my hometown, Kermanshah, the largest Kurdish city in Iran which was quite active during the recent protests, or Qeshm Island in the Persian gulf which is a winter holiday destination for inland tourism a freer public pace.

During this trip, I felt a sense of euphoria and togetherness as we/women stood together in the streets. When I was walking in the street without a hejab, women, whether wearing hejab or not and as well as men were looking at me/us, unveiled women, with admiration. I even

received a small bag of candies with this note “Thank you for making the streets beautiful with your hair”, from a woman in the street in Tehran.

In my hometown, Kermanshah, I went to visit a doctor and noticed that she was removing pellets[1] from a very young man's ear. When the boy was leaving the doctor’s office with his bandaged ear, he saw me without a scarf sitting in the waiting room, and whispered “Woman, Life, Freedom” with a smile. During my stay in Iran, the Morality Police which was responsible for Jina’s death was not active anymore, and the state seemed to be too busy suppressing the protests to care about women’s hejab. Even in official and government buildings -such as airports- no one prevented women from entering the building without a hejab. However, cities still did not have their normal look, the main squares were occupied by lines of security police. The walls were full of handwritten slogans and some slogans were later covered in white or black painted by the state. People were still so hopeful that the protest could make serious changes in the country. I departed a few days after the executions of Mohammad Hosseini and Mehdi Karimi who were arrested at the protests during the funeral of one of the other protesters, Hadis Najafi[2]. They were executed for their involvement in the alleged murder of a member of the informal state forces in January 2023. I was able to see the hopelessness and despair among people when one morning they woke up and read the news[3] about the execution.

I travelled to Iran once again in May 2023, a few days after Ahmadreza Radan, Iran's Chief of Police, had given an interview threatening to use traffic monitoring cameras to identify women who were not wearing hejab (To read more on hejab and digital surveillance see Akbari 2019). However, when I arrived, I saw that despite all those severe threats,

[1] There are numerous reports disclosing that Iranian security forces have been firing shotguns at the faces, eyes, and ears of protesters, as well as at the breasts and genitals of female protesters (Parent and Habibiazad 2022). Many photos of bodies of women, men, children, and even street animals such as cats riddled by small metal bullets have been published on social media platforms.
[2] Hadis was a 22-year-old woman who was killed during a protest in Karaj, Mehrshahr on September 21, 2022.
[3] According to Islamic rules, normally, executions occur after the morning Azan and before sunrise.

refusing not to wear the compulsory hejab[1] was the most visible form of resistance and protest in the country.

During my one month stay in my second trip to Iran, I visited Tehran, Qazvin, Kermanshah, my home town, and Ramsar, a small city on the Caspian Sea. In these places, I observed lots of young, middle-aged, and elderly women who were not wearing hejab in public spaces and had a different and freer clothing style. This more casual dress code meant that they don't want to follow the state dictated dress code anymore. But the situation was different this time. Not wearing a hejab was again a really risky thing to do. As the police were done with suppressing the protesters, again they had time and energy to force women to wear the hejab. For instance, the cafe that I visited in my previous visit, where unveiled women were freely sitting inside and outside, drinking coffee and smoking, was closed and a big banner was on the door warning that this cafe has been closed because of not obeying rules and serving unveiled customers.[2]

Right after the death of Jina and the massive protests against compulsory hejab, the state decided to retrieve morality police forces from the public places. But they just replaced police forces with plain clothes, their responsibilities stayed forcing hejab. There were lots of banners and billboards all over the cities I visited to encourage women to keep their hejab such as "Hejab is not a barrier for women's career", "Hejab is our mothers' heritage", and "Hejab is a tool to show I am not a tool". During my stay, I experienced and witnessed lots of arguments in the city between us/women and this new form of informal morality police forces standing at the entrances of lots of public places such as Bazars, museums, shopping

[1] In addition to wearing a scarf to cover hair, women in Iran are compelled to wear long, loose dresses (similar to a manteau) in public places. They are not allowed to show their legs or wear short sleeve clothes. Even when they wear trousers, their dress should have a length that covers their backside. These rules are considerably more restricted in schools, universities, and formal and governmental workspaces. However, in the decades after the revolution, women started to challenge all these rules and the morality police were there not to let women forget that it is a compulsory rule.

[2] In Farsi: (این واحد صنفی به دلیل عدم رعایت ضوابط انتظامی -کشف حجاب- پلمپ شده است)

malls, etc. to force women to enact rules of compulsory hejab and to ban them from entering the building if they refuse.

Figure 1. Link: https://twitter.com/enghelabezanane/status/1657406492373385216

Unfortunately, I was not able to take photos of city billboards but the billboard in this tweet is one of the billboards that I saw in Tehran. On the billboard this slogan was written: “Hejab is our mothers’ heritage” and the tweet shows the reaction of two young women to this slogan. Before I went back to Iran, I saw tweets of women who posted their photos in the street without the hejab and as it was getting warmer in Iran, they were wearing freer clothes. I was looking at them admirably and did not realise what they were experiencing. But after spending one month trying not to wear a hejab and experiencing lots of stress, moments of fear, and arguments with lots of people such as Taxi drivers or morality agents, I found this form of resistance a difficult everyday battle for women to keep a trench that they achieved after decades.

Now, as time of writing this thesis, the state is trying to use more indirect ways to force women to wear the hejabs and antagonise citizens against each other to achieve their goals, for instance, by threatening taxi drivers working with mobile taxi apps like Snapp, the most popular network for Taxi service in Iran (Peyvast 2022), with bail and seizing their cars to force them to refuse to pick up unveiled women as their passengers. One of the women I interviewed, for instance, told me that after having lots of arguments with taxi drivers, in order to avoid encountering drivers who did not pick up unveiled women, she changed her username in her Snapp[1] account to "I don't have a scarf!".

During my second stay in Iran, I had the same experience of arguing over hejab with Snapp taxi drivers, with so called hejab agents, and security teams in public places like museums or shopping centres several times. It was exhausting, scary, and traumatic. In the city of Qazvin, while I was interviewing one of my interlocutors, two morality agents were walking between the café's chairs and reminded us and other women to wear our hejab. They also forced the owner not to give service to unveiled women. On another occasion, I visited one of my interviewees in an outdoor cafe in the main square of the Ekbatan neighbourhood- one of the main locations of protests in Tehran. We were sitting beside some other cafes that had been destroyed the previous day by the state's attempt to decentralise the square and prevent people from gathering.

[1] In 2019, one of Snapp's drivers forced a woman to get out of his car and had a fight with her because she did not have a proper hejab. The woman tweeted and explained the incident and said that the Snapp company apologised to her and fired the driver. Then Media platforms that are close to the state started to criticise Snapp. Under pressure, Snapp changed its strategy and published a statement to support the driver, and the state forced the girl to apologise to the driver. Then a social media campaign was formed and people started to boycott Snapp for a few months and use the other alternative apps in solidarity with the woman.

Archiving Twitter Farsi

Following Jina's death, I started to read Twitter systematically and archive tweets related to women's emotion and feelings about the protests. The forthcoming section offers an overview of this observation and the analysis of the shifting dynamics within this online sphere during these 8 months.

During the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protest in Iran, Twitter and Instagram were widely used as two prominent social media platforms. In the 2009 presidential election and the subsequent Green Movement, Twitter played a significant role in Iranian politics for the first time. Despite the state's block on Twitter in Iran since 2009, people have continued to utilise the platform for political purposes, employing circumvention tools such as VPNs and proxy servers (Kermani 2022). Additionally, while Instagram is often utilised as a lifestyle-oriented social media platform in Iran and it has faced criticism for depoliticizing attitudes and behaviours and engaging users in vulgar content, it has been massively used for the first time to reflect on political incidents.

However, in this research, I chose to focus on Twitter for two reasons. Firstly, Twitter still remains more central in facilitating political discussions in Iran. Secondly, accounts on Twitter are typically public, while Instagram accounts are mostly private, leading people to write for their circles rather than sharing content publicly.

Therefore, I selected 100 pieces of visual and textual tweets published by public accounts from 16 September 2022 (the time of Jina's death) until the end of May 2023. The decision behind the choice of tweets was strategic, in which I chose each tweet based on a series of main/umbrella events alongside smaller related events. For instance, the death of Nika Shakarami, a 17-year-old-girl in Tehran is considered a main event, and other news, events and images and videos circulated on social media platforms, as related events. In addition, I also looked at the trendy hashtags related to the events as well, including #زن_زندگی_آزادی

(Woman, Life, Freedom), #Mahsa_Amini (مهسا_امینی), ##IranRevolution, #من_کوئیر_هستم (#IAmQueer), #انقلاب_زنانه (#Women_Revolution), #Ekbatan[1], #انقلاب_ژینا (Jina Revolution) #For (برای). However, since I adopted an ethnographic approach in this research, I don't use data mining methods on big data sets. I don't want to generalise my findings to the whole field of the study and I am aware that I just open a window towards this digital content.

During the first months after the protest, Twitter Farsi experienced different trends and waves. In the first month, the platform was heavily influenced by the ongoing protests. People were focused on the protests and they were ignoring any other kinds of topics, and if someone was posting about their everyday life or any other kind of topic, they were accused of wasting the opportunity. Twitter has always been political in Iran, and in recent months, it has become even more political. Among Iranian Twitter users, there's a common expression: "Twitter is not Instagram" which means that it's not a platform for lifestyle content. Newcomers, especially celebrities, are often made fun of because they don't know the language or culture of Twitter. Therefore, in the first month, Iranian Twitter users were mostly angry and were not going easy on people who wanted to use this space for any other kind of content rather than political ones.

Generally, it is difficult to learn the gender of all Twitter users, as lots of them use pseudonyms to stay unanimous. I took Twitter handles, profile pictures, or descriptions of their biography as my criteria to collect my sample from women users on Twitter from September 16, 2022, to April 01, 2023. I did not have access to the demographic information of the users I observed on Twitter. However, based on the content of their tweets, profile biographies, and profile pictures, it seems that most of them are young adults between 18 to 40, residing in urban areas, and belonging to the middle class. The most commonly used

[1] Ekbatan township has been a hotbed of anti-regime protests in Tehran from the first days of protests.

language among Iranian Twitter users is Farsi. They use English when they want to inform English speakers about the situation in Iran, typically by journalists, politicians, and activists.

Based on my observation, several groups could be recognized as active groups who tried to make their agendas and interests visible on Twitter in Iran, such as the state cyber army which seemed to be using the platform to spread misinformation and propaganda, women's rights activists who were more focused on keeping women's issues at the forefront of the digital conversation. Meanwhile, royalists- who support Reza Pahlavi, the son of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the last Shah of Iran, and advocate for his return to rule the country- were pushing for the return of the former heir to the previous king as a replacement for the current regime. Some activists were advocating for a coalition of different political parties and political figures. Additionally, members of the LGBTQIA+ community were using Twitter to gain more visibility and inclusion in the wider movement. There seems to be a lot of debate and disagreement among these different groups, which is contributing to the overall diversity of voices and perspectives on Twitter.

Creating trendy hashtags and gaining international attention to Iran’s revolution, specifically with #Mahsa_Amini and #women_life_freedom hashtags was the main goal. Twitter Farsi still is heavily influenced by the protests and the political situation of the country. However, other kinds of content can be seen as well.

In recent months, users' political orientation has become more important, and they use various textual and visual signs and symbols to showcase their political affiliations. For example, some users added flags, signs, victory hand emojis, or slogans on their profiles.

Women often add the “Woman, Life, Freedom” slogan or “Mahsa/Jina Amini” name to their profiles, while supporters of the previous monarchy in Iran use Iran's previous flag with the figure of “lion and sun”. Conversely, those who support the Islamic regime often use Iran's current flag with the sign of Allah in their profiles.

Previously, it was common for women to use profile pictures of themselves wearing a hejab, even if they did not believe in it. However, this trend has shifted in recent months, particularly among the younger generation.

Positionality and Mixed Methods

Reflecting on my own positionality as an Iranian feminist from a Kurdish city and a relatively middle-class and non-religious family, I am an insider to the community and my research topic. Like many Iranians born after the 1979 revolution, from a very early age, I learned that we are living a double life. We are different people in our homes and in our private lives, and as long as we set foot outside our homes, we should ignore and hide a part of ourselves and act like a different person. I witnessed that this double life has always been more dramatic and more challenging for us/women and we always hoped and fought for a better future. In 2009, when the Iranian Green Movement[1] was happening in the streets of the country, as a media student at the University of Tehran, one of the most political universities in the country, I witnessed all the turbulence; Not only in this movement but also in all other later social and political waves, women were at the frontline of demanding the changes. Either in the newsrooms where I was working as a journalist or in tech companies where I worked in recent years in Iran, I observed how women were forced to fight not only against

[1] Green Movement in Iran refers to a political protest and aftermath of Iran’s fraudulent presidential election of June 2009 and lasted until early 2010. In these protests the state attacked peaceful demonstrations of people in the streets of Tehran and some other cities Despite the non-violent nature of protest, lots of protesters were killed and hundreds of people arrested (Tahmasebi-Birgani 2010)

political limitations but also against misogyny in a patriarchal society that always expects women to sacrifice, to step behind, to wait for a better situation to talk about their demands and issues. And I think “Woman, life, freedom” is a momentum that women decided to prioritise their women’s issues over anything else.

Therefore, as a feminist researcher who has been participating in (digital) activism in Iran, I consider myself an insider researcher, involved in the activities I am reflecting on. I think my identity, my experiences, my traumas, and my hopes and aspirations for the future of my homeland are interwoven in this research. I think these backgrounds, which I think is very similar to most of the women I interviewed, helped me to create a connection with them when during interviews we were talking about their experiences. My insider status not only gave me access to informants and interlocutors (Ademolu 2023) but also helped me to build a mutual trust-based relationship with my interviewees, so that we can discuss potentially risky topics. Although Bridges (2001) argues that challenges in a field affect everyone regardless of their position, and shared commonalities are not a prerequisite for a researcher, I think my gender as a woman with the same experiences, traumas, and emotions and also my political identity and orientation, as one of them (protesters) not against them (the regime supporter), enabled me, to build a trust-based relationship and connection with my interviewees.

In most of the interviews I conducted, the process was similar to a friendly conversation between two women. However, I can relate to what Fayard et al. (2015) argue that the positionality boundaries of the researcher sometimes are blurred and not clear (Fayard, 2015). There were moments when I realised that my interviewees are talking about events and incidents that they experienced closely and directly which I witnessed through social media while I was kilometres away.

In addition, as I mentioned before, this research has come to life through a sense of guilt for leaving my country in the middle of a feminist movement. However, when I found myself

in the process of research, I felt guilty again to be in my safe spot observing women, who put themselves in danger and using their narratives, stories, and emotions that they shared on social media as data for my research. I asked myself several times that as Raywyne Conell argues (Connell 2014), “Am I seeing this social-political movement just as a case? And do I just bring local data from the periphery and combine it with theory from metropole? I can’t precisely answer these questions, however, in this research, I am trying to see my research topic and my questions in a historical and political context to animate nuances and complexities of gender dynamics of this movement. In addition, I am trying to go beyond the Western scholarship and have an eye on local grassroots feminist scholarship in Iran.

In terms of self-reflexivity, it is imperative to underscore that despite my trips to Iran and conducting most of the interviews while I was sitting beside these women in public spaces without a scarf (as a form of resistance), I did not directly participate in the protests nor did I experience their moments of fear, distress, and anxiety. I managed to avoid experiencing those emotions and envisioned a future outside the country for myself. These inherent differences (Ademolu 2023) complexities, and power dynamics significantly influence my perspective, my relationship with interviewees, and the outcomes of my research (Ademolu 2023).

Little is much known about how women use social media platforms to share their emotions and how these digital practices empower women to collectively imagine a feminist future of Iran, connecting the ephemerality of daily life to larger temporalities. Therefore, because of the complexity and multilayeredness of Iranian women's digital activism, I decided to apply a mixed-method approach, to see my topic from different angles. In this research, I have chosen discourse analysis of the tweets that were posted on Twitter accounts by Iranian women. In addition to the discourse analysis of the Twitter posts, I also carried out visual analysis of images on Twitter in their multiple social and political contexts (Aiello and

Parry 2020). The other set of data consists in the life narratives I gathered through, I conducted interviews with women who are active on social media and were members of the feminist affective publics who use social media to practise feminism in their everyday lives.

I designed interviews with a view to incorporating subjugated knowledge and silenced voices into the research and acknowledge the lived experience of my participants (Leckenby and Hesse-Biber 2007, Cole and Stewart 2012). Furthermore, combining discourse analysis of tweets and women's narratives gathered through semi-structured in-depth interviews with women who use social media platforms mainly Twitter and Instagram as a means of activism enabled me to focus on the relatedness of online and offline aspects of the research field which offers a better way of understanding women's digital activism (Postill and Pink 2012) .

My methodological approach draws on digital ethnography (Varis 2015, Caliandro 2018, Abidin and Seta 2020) and tries to attune to Iranian women's lived experiences of digital activism through an ethnographic sensibility including empathy, openness, reflexivity, a willingness to suspend judgement and to gain field-based knowledge of practices and beliefs of these particular communities (McGranahan 2018). This ethnographic approach allows me, as a feminist researcher, to create a relationship with the subject(s) of my research, actively listen, and be reflexive (S. N. Hesse-Biber 2011).

As for the various types of text I could gather through the different methods, I employ critical discourse analysis (CDA) which enables me to theories and describe both the social processes and structures that contribute to the creation of a text, as well as the social structures and processes through which individuals or groups, as social-historical subjects, generate meanings in their interaction with texts (Fairclough 2003). In applying this methodological approach to meaning making in my research, I could pay focus on the interplay between to the concepts of power, history, and ideology (Wodak and Meyer 2006). Given that the central objective in critical discourse analytical studies is to focus on the way

social power is produced and organized in societies and how power imbalances and inequality in access to power and control enacted, resisted and reproduce in a social and political context and how its shapes people's emotion and opinion around a topic (Tannen and Van Dijk 2003).

I utilise this approach as developed by Fairclough (2003) to critically examine the texts including transcripts of (spoken) conversations and interviews with Iranian women who are active on social media platforms and the language and images of tweets published by women on their public accounts of Farsi Twitter during September 19, 2023, until the end of May 2023.

Limitation and Ethical Considerations

While I was writing this thesis, I experienced dealing with different dilemmas, spending lots of time on social media platforms and watching and reading about traumatic events, travelling to the country during a social movement, and listening to people's stories were emotionally difficult for me. In addition, because of the political situation of the country and the sensitivity of the topic of my research, there were inherent risks associated with this study; for me as a researcher and for the participants of my study including interviewees or Twitter users because of the possibility of revealing information regarding their online or offline political engagement in the recent protest. However, taking some steps I tried to minimise these risks. For interview recruitment, I use snowball sampling to reach out to people I know and trust. Participants were volunteers and were not obliged to participate in the research in any way. I obtained oral consent from my interviewees since I did not want to carry written consent forms when I was passing the borders. To protect women's privacy, I pseudonymised interviewees' names to protect the informants and the community I work in (Sanjek and Tratner 2016).

During the interviews, I had to stop recording several times to store files in lower sizes in order to email them right after each interview and delete them from my devices to prevent carrying any data during my stay and border crossing. Data collection of Twitter in my research is only limited to public accounts to prevent revealing any private digital data. Moreover, in my interviews, I made a conscious effort to be careful, empathetic, and compassionate. Since my research questions could recall traumatising and emotional memories for participants, I tried to be empathic and prepared during interviews and suggested possible psychological and emotional support and help to the interviewees.

I am aware that the selection of content, tweets, and hashtags for analysis was inevitably shaped to some extent by my subjective bias as a researcher. It is also inevitable that the limited selection of respondents for the interviews, based on snowball sampling, does not fully reflect the diversity and breadth of the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' movement, or Iranian women's perspectives on the movement, collected data, identification, and prioritisation of particular discourses in the tweets and interviews were dependent on my judgement as a researcher to a large extent. Most of the selected tweets are in Farsi and translated into English.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

For dancing in the streets/ For not being afraid anymore
For tomorrow when we'll be laughing/ For kissing! Hey!
The wind through Jina's hair/ A knot on Sarina's shoe
A shout from Romin's throat/ These things must go! Hey!
Let the woman be free/ Don't be afraid of mind and body/
Take a breath! Stop the killing! /Let the homeland be a homeland! Hey [1]

Introduction

From the first day of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" protest in Iran, emotion was the main and primary fuel of the protest. It was the first national protest since November 2020 which was brutally suppressed by the state and created feelings of fear and hopelessness in the country. However, Mahsa/Jina Amini tragic death sparked nationwide protests and brought a mixture of feelings together. The reflection of the devastating story and her tragic death, at first, on social media platforms and, then, in two national newspapers Shargh2 and Ham-Mihan3 raised rage and anger among people, specifically women who could easily imagine themselves to be killed instead of Jina. As Sara Ahmed, (2014, 130) refers, "If I can imagine that the person who was lost could-have-been me, then the other's grief can also become my grief". Therefore, Jina's death turned into nationwide and the slogan "We are all Mahsa, fighting until the last battle"4 emerged. The revolutionary moment and the solidarity between people, specifically women resulted in turning rage and anger into hope for a new and different future specifically for women. The role of emotions as political means (Ahmed,

[1] A part of a song known as "the song of Leilas" published by anonymous women singers and producers on social media platforms during the protests in October 2020. This feminist song refers to various gender, ethnicities and religion suppressed groups, referring to painful collective memories and remembering the past as a continuum or the past as a part of this current movement. Available on: https://soundcloud.com/mahnoush-faghiri/gxcitb5qswmv
[2] Shargh newspaper was founded in 2003 and has been one of the most popular reformist daily newspapers.
[3] Ham-Mihan is a reformist daily newspaper. It started its circulation from 2000 to 2009 and then was banned until 2020. The ban on publication was lifted in August 2022. "Elahe Mohammadi" Journalist at Ham-Mihan and "Niloufar Hamedi" Shargh newspaper journalist are still in jail at the time.
[4] In Farsi: ما همه مهسا هستیم، بجنگ تا بجنگیم

2014) provided an opportunity for women to participate in the protests in the streets of the country and show their "feelings", and also to use social media platforms to talk about their emotions, to mobilise, unite, and be able to think of new possibilities for women's situation in Iran. These digitally mediated emotions (Papacharissi 2015) gave women the opportunity to collectively imagine a future for themselves, a new alternative "feminist future"(Clark-Parsons 2022). By referring to emotions as "mediated," I am highlighting how social media environments and online practices let women express their feelings, communicate, and generate them (Papacharissi 2015) and, through this digital storytelling, imagine an alternative future for themselves.

Therefore, in the following section, I review different approaches in feminist and media studies to affect. Then, I focus on what these mediated emotions, the anger, the mourning, the despair, and specifically the hope can do for the women's movement in Iran. I am also following Margaret Wetherell's understanding of the term affect and use them interchangeably (Wetherell 2012).

Affect Theory

Emotions have historically been associated with gendered inferiority. Linda A. Hall (Åhäll 2018) a feminist security studies scholar- is interested in the question of nationalism and affect and she refers to emotion as a methodology to understand global politics and a term that has long been associated with femininity and a political strategy to keep women out of political spheres. She argues that for feminists, affects generate feminist questions, and feminist analysis is both political and affective because how we feel tells us how the world works, and by feeling differently a space for thinking, acting, and knowing differently is being opened.

In the decolonial approach, emotions have historically been related to race, history, and culture. Sara Ahmed (2014) emphasises the importance of affect for feminist theory and how

emotion can create different readings of the world that we live in. The role of anger, pain, love, joy, and hope bound up us as individuals or as a collective with politicisation (Ahmed 2014). She considers emotions as agents of shaping the surface of individuals and collective bodies with political and structural affect. She approaches emotions as collective, political feelings shaped by cultural and social histories, practices, and memories rather than individual and psychological states (Ahmed 2014). Ahmed introduces her model of the sociality of emotion and argues that emotions are not simply a social presence or something that individuals or we as a collective group possess, but rather are a fundamental aspect of how we relate to the world around us. Ahmed argues that "emotions create the effect of the surface and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside and how we respond to objects and others that surface and boundaries are made"(Ahmed 2014, 194). The "surface and boundaries" that emotions create are therefore an essential part of how we navigate the world around us. Margaret Wetherell (2012)-feminist social psychologist- similarly argues that affect is not an individual feeling, it is shaped by social practices. In her book "Affect and Emotion: a new social science understanding". Wetherell refers to affect as embodied meaning-making or human emotion. She defines studies of affect as bringing dramatic and everyday into social analysis, a focus on pain and pleasure, feelings and memories of people, and an attempt to understand how people are moved and what attracts them. Wetherell emphasises that affect is not solely an individual experience but is also socially constructed and influenced by cultural norms and values. She suggests that affect is shaped by social practices, such as rituals, language, and social interactions, and that it plays a crucial role in the formation and maintenance of social relationships and identities (Wetherell 2012). I use the Wetherell framework to make sense of the relationship between affect and emotion in the scholarship. In addition, Zizi Papacharissi (2015), a Media and Communication scholar, defines affect as the intensity of emotion, sentiments, moods, and

the sense of feeling and intensity of what we feel. She focuses on the role of networked technologies in enabling affective processes that can call the public into being. Papacharissi argues that the internet has created a new public space for politically oriented conversation, which enables crowds to facilitate the feeling of engagement via online networks of support in ways that discursively render affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015:125). She defines 'affective publics' as networked public formations that are mobilised through expressions of sentiment that occur through digital storytelling and the exchange of personal stories and micro-narratives.

Chapter Four: Discussion and Analysis: Discourse analysis of Tweets

Introduction

In the following sections, to discuss the politics of emotions and to highlight women's different emotions, I use the affect theory to discuss the main emotions which I recognised through the discourse analysis of the sample of 100 Tweets including Mourning, Anger, Remembrance, Joy, and Hop.

In The Presence of Death: Collective Digital Mourning

After the widespread publication of news about Jina's death and images of her lifeless body in the hospital bed and circulating videos and images of her funeral, a process of collective "digital mourning" (Giaxoglou and Döveling 2018) or networked mourning (Papailias 2019) started on social media platforms and continued not only about her but about the many other protesters killed throughout the country during the movement. I interpret this performance of mourning through the mediation of affect on social media as a form of resistance, opposition, and justice-seeking. (Tafakori2022). Also, drawing on Papailias (2019), I address this performative digital grieving as a form of mediated witnessing and public grief.

In parallel with the street protests, digital media turned to a battleground for protestors through resharing and publishing of her photos, "memification" (Moro et al. 2023) of Jina, and later on other people who lost their lives in the protests. Digital grieving over Jina's body was followed by the performative digital act of hair cutting, reappropriating the traditional feminine act of mourning in Iran. As Jina was killed because of showing some strands of heir, the act of grieving through the heir cutting found a new meaning. It became the symbol of solidarity with Iranian women and a performance against the systematic misogyny of the

state, and was imitated by lots of men and women including international bloggers, TikToker, Instagramers, celebrities and politicians around the world on social media platforms and also during the protests inside Iran and in political gatherings outside of the country. Discursively, in the course of memification, Jina's body emerged as a site of public mourning. In addition, through the process of "thingification" it turned into an "image object" (Stage 2011) to convey thingified public messages. Carsten Stage (2011) by referring to world circulated image of the dead moment of Neda Aghasoltan during the Green Movement in Iran, defines thingification as when an image circulating all over the world turns into a range of new objects. "These objects are often thingifications due to the fact that the circulating images make it possible for people all over the world, who have not witnessed the event first-hand, to create material forms relating to the event. The circulating images materialized, but on the other hand, the objects in an odd way also recirculate the images and making of an "image-object"" (Stage 2011, 425).

The ongoing practice of publishing images, graphic designs, memes, and artworks illustrating Jina or related events the movement published on social media platforms specifically Twitter, a battle could be traced between various forces. Pro-government cyber forces, royalists, leftists, feminist, women's rights activists, etc. fight for their cause and create new dynamics between the concepts of woman and nation. In the same vein, Jina's body was represented in various ways in other political narrations; as a victim of the state's violence against women, as a brave woman who stood up for herself and is a source of inspiration, hope, and aspiration, as a symbol of feminist solidarity against gender oppression and patriarchy and also a means of solidarity between ethnicities against the state. She was also portrayed as the daughter of the nation or "Dokhtarane Vatan" (Najmabadi 2005) which needs to be thanked and grieved over, or in contrast, the warrior or the protector of the nation, motherland or "Vatan" who sacrifices her life for the nation.

As Sara Ahmed in the book “The Cultural Politics of Emotion” argues: “Some bodies more than others represent the nation in mourning” (Ahmed 2014) and in this situation, Jina’s dead body, a woman from an ethnic minority, could be worthy of national mourning and public grief (Butler, 2004).

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

In these two graphic designs, we can see Jina as the symbol of awakening, hope, and solidarity between women. In Figure 2, designed by an anonymous artist, Jina is a red Kurdish dress and a light in her hand, showing the way to other women who had their cut hair in their hands.

Figure 4. Link: https://twitter.com/mobiinax/status/1573099788471607300

In this design, Jina is represented as the victim of the morality police, the green hand a woman in a green police uniform pulling her hair.

Figure 5. Link: https://twitter.com/SGhooshe/status/1575583930777948160

In this design, the “Vatan” is knitted together from Jina’s hair and Jina's body. Similarly, in the following design Jina illustrates as a spark for a change and a figure who sacrifices herself to burn her body to be the fuel of the protest. Jina is portrayed like “Arash”; an Iranian mythical heroic archer figure. He is a man who sacrifice his life to be transform into the power of an arrow's launch, which traveled for days and landed on the other side of the Jeihoon river and saved Iran’s borders from Tooran (Wikipedia, 2023). It seems that, now Jina, a young Kurdish girl played this heroic role.

Figure 6. Link: https://twitter.com/Scorpiiongurl/status/1573461868122968070

In the two following graphic designs, Jina is portrayed as equal to the motherland or "Vatan". Jina's body merges with the national body.

Figure 7. Link: https://twitter.com/Mahdali91/status/1573098652930904065

Figure 8. Link: https://twitter.com/imhds7/status/1573096414409854977

In following design, Jina portrayed as sign of solidarity which can united people's anger against the state.

Figure 9. Link: https://twitter.com/weareunitediran/status/1575628048275476481

In the figure 10, Jina is portrayed in a frame surrounded by tulips which is the sign of "mortrym" or "Shahadat" in Iran.

Figure 10.
https://twitter.com/Sanamajaan1/status/1573098072690794500

In this context, Afsaneh Najmabadi (1997) refers to the complex relationship between women and nationalism in Iran and argues that the concept of "Vatan" (homeland) is often personified as a beloved one for men and also as a mother figure who needs to be protected by men which has lots of examples in Persian poetry, literature, Sufi thought, and also nationalist discourses. Portraying

the homeland as a feminine entity presents a gendered understanding of nationhood and creates a complex and often erotic relationship between the individual and the nation, in which the nation is both loved and possessed by male individuals.

This conceptualization affects the construction of national identity and how one relates to their homeland differently for women and men which led to placing women outside of the centre of the nationalist movement and dominant discourse of configuration of "vatan". Similarly, Minoo Moallem (2005) tries to provide insight into how Islamic fundamentalism, as the leading ideology of Iran after the Islamic revolution of 1979, constructed the new notion of nationalism. Through analysis of Iranian war movies made in Iran during and after the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), she makes a distinction between the gendered meaning and political uses of the "warrior brother" and the "veiled sister" in Iran's patriarchal political discourse. In this sense, in parallel to reinforcing the conventional relationship of both women and nationalist discourses, through social media affordances and through emotional reactions and digital public mourning over Jina's "object image", it seems that a new form or a new connection between women and nation has been created, a relation which allowed women to be at the centre of a national movement and a national grief; In a context that, usually women's photos are not allowed to be published on their death announcements or on their tombstones their dead bodies, their death stories, circulated went viral and they became the symbol of this movement.

Concurrent with publishing the corpse-images, death-moment images, and videos of protesters on social media platforms, lots of pre-mortal images (Papailias 2019) and videos of these people went viral on social media platforms which show them alive, smiling, and leaving their everyday life; posing with family and friends, singing, dancing, dumb-smashing, blowing their birthday cake candles, posing as young brides and grooms.

Figure 11. Link: https://twitter.com/PanahianEffat/status/1577272715534544901

Translation: They are enemies of beauty, enemies of happiness and singing. #Nika_Shakermi #Mahsa_Amini #Hadeis_Najafi

This image is made of video screenshots capturing Jina, Hadis, and Nika dancing and singing. Jina -on the right side- in a red Kurdish dress, inviting others to dance. This video was used as a symbol of Jina inviting others to join the protests. On the left side, Nika laughing and singing this part of King of Hearts -an old Farsi song from the 60s: “Part of my heart tells me to go, go, the other part tells me to stay, stay”. In the middle, Hadis asks others to join her to dance in a TikTok video.

In her essay discussing the widely circulated image of Alan Kurdi, a 3-year-old refugee whose body was discovered on a Turkish beach, social anthropologist Penelope Papailias (2019) argues that constant shift, the gap, and the paradox between life and dead images “blurring the line between life and death” and making the absence of dead people more affective (Papailias 2019). The digital images of the happy moments of the dead protesters during the Women, Life, Freedom movement let the dead bodies intensify the meaning of numbers and names. Ordinary women from

different parts of the country whose life stories does not match the fundamentalist state narratives of womanhood or girlhood in Iran become lively faces of affective engagements.

Additionally, in this process of thingification, the life stories of these dead bodies have been used by different political orientations to create their own agendas. For instance, in the case of Nika Shakarami her sexual preference has become the site of dispute. Nika Shakarami was a 16-year-old who disappeared during the protest in Tehran and her body was found and identified ten days later by her family in a morgue. Nika's tragic death and later on distribution of videos and images of her participation in the protests which showed her on the frontline standing on a city trash bin burning her scarf, made her one of the icons of the protests. Even CNN published an investigative report on the hours of her life and how she went missing (Pourahmadi 2022). Later, the German online magazine -Zeit-Magazin- (Hommerich 2022) published a report about Nika's online friendship with a German girl "Nele". The published interview with Nele and their intimate online friendship, created a discussion about Nika's sexual orientation. These discussions led Shadi Amin- a German-based Iranian LGBTIQA activist- to dedicate her international Lesbian Visibility Award 2022 to Nika. Amin's action and her speech about Nika's sexual orientation were followed by Nika's family's reaction. Her Aunt -Atash Shakarami- whom Nika lived with during the last year of her life- published a series of Instagram stories and accused Shadi Amin of disregarding Nika's rights as a child and "seizing Nika's case for personal purposes and promoting herself in international forums". Besides the family, lots of other people started to talk about the life story of Nika online. The following Tweet treads, the user criticising Amin for talking about a" child" sexual orientation publicly without asking consent from her family or being sure about it.

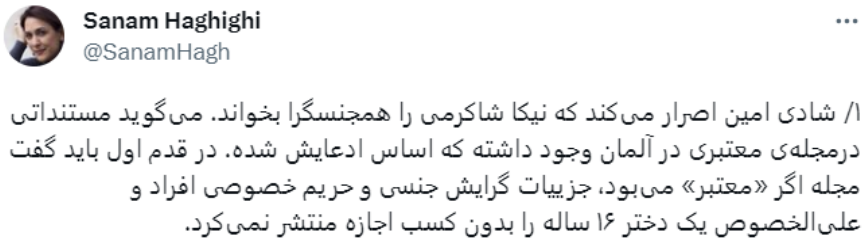

Figure 12. Link: https://twitter.com/SanamHagh/status/1618632170842771461?lang=en

Translation: Shadi Amin insists on labeling Nika Shakermi as a homosexual. She claims that there have been documents in a reputable magazine in Germany that support her assertion. As a primary point, it must be mentioned that if the magazine was indeed "reputable," it would not publish the details of individuals' sexual orientation and private matters, especially those of a sixteen-year-old girl, without obtaining permission.

The following tweet is another example of how the personal life of Nika -despite its true or not- opens a window to talk about homosexuality as a personal choice despite it being a serious taboo in Iran’s society.

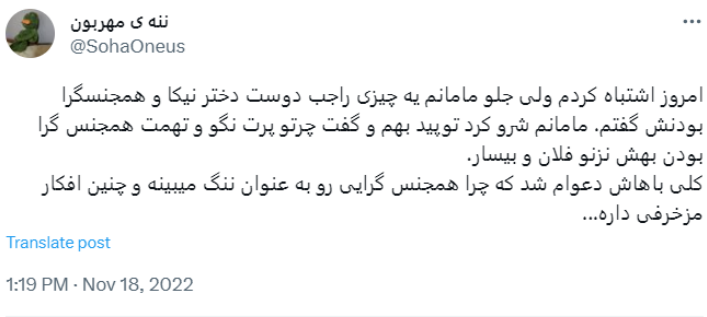

Figure 13. Link: https://twitter.com/SohaOneus/status/1593579590206758916

Translation: Today I made a mistake and talked to my mom about something related to Nika's girlfriend and her being homosexual. My mom got really upset and scolded me, saying not to talk nonsense and not to accuse her of being homosexual without any evidence. We had a big argument about why she sees homosexuality as a disgrace and holds such ridiculous beliefs…

Additionally, many families and parents, particularly mothers and sisters, of people who were killed in the protests started to use social media platforms, specifically Instagram and Twitter[1], to give information, as a counter-narrative to the state narrative of the death of their family members. In lots of cases of killed protestors, the state tried to create various scenarios to justify the death of these people not accepting responsibility. In addition, families began to talk about the incidents related to the death of their family members and post photos and videos of them in an attempt to invite the public to "witness" (Papailias 2016, 442) their loss. Papailias refers to the term "mediated witnessing" of mourning, as a term that contains two meanings of testifying and responsivity; she argues that witnesses of public mourning through social media platforms and affective participation relate to what they are seeing, through shared vulnerability and connectedness. As she explains "mediated witnessing makes the viewer a potential mourner whose corporeal and contagious testifying produces material derivatives" (Papailias 2016, 442).

In this connection, this mediated affective practice (Wetherell, 2012) of grieving was performed not only by the families but also by other people on social media platforms. This public engagement and affective attunement into grieving which was formed around structures of feelings blurred the lines between public and private mourning and led to resistance against the state's attempt to boycott and shut down the protest and to intervene in changing the main discourse of the state being the only source to decide which bodies deserve grieving.

Furthermore, in this process of digital grieving, people started to use the word "Martyr" or "Shahid" to call people who were killed in the protest or were executed by the state. In fact, this is an attempt to regain this essential word from the state; a word which is central to Islam fundamentalism and is basically a masculine position which normally men can achieve. As Minoo Moallem (2005) argues, in the concept of Martyr in Shia Islam, death, power, and political representation are closely intertwined. In this construction, women can mainly occupy

[1] In the protest, lots of data were shared across the platforms of Instagram and Twitter

these three places; representing in the reconstruction of the past, domesticated role in the drama of martyrdom [as sisters or mothers], veiling, and reterritorialisation of their bodies (Moallem, 2005). However, during the recent uprising, not only did people name the dead protesters, specifically women as “Shahid”, but also the more radical nationalist groups started to use an alternative Farsi word “Javidnam”[1] which means "immortal name”-instead of the Arabic/shia word- to honourably refer to the people who lost their lives in recent protests.

Zizi Papacharissi and Fatima Oliveira (2012), a media and communication scholar, refers to social media affordances in social and political movements as a means to express and amplify emotion to mediate and archive opinions, facts, and emotions to disrupt the mainstream media and as a window of opportunity to change (Papacharissi and De Fatima Oliveira 2012).

Additionally, from first days of “Women, Life, Freedom” many families, parents, mothers, brothers and sisters, and even aunts of people who lost their lives during “Woman, Life, Freedom” started to use social media platforms to talk about their loss. The grief can be seen not as a private and solitary concept but rather as a political means, a means of creating ‘political community (Butler 2004) created a space for families to talk about their emotions and their wounds and also as a site for justice-seeking. Given the lack of any formal or legal justice-seeking process available for families inside the country, families used social media to create a space for them to talk about the cruelty, injustice, and pain that they have been experiencing.

Tafakori (2022) focuses on the formation of justice-seeking mothers in Iran, referring to “Mothers of Khavaran” formed after the massacre of leftists in 1988, and “Mourning Mothers of Laleh Park” formed after the Green Movement in 2009, and investigates how these women collectively use affective affordances of digital and physical spaces for grassroots political intervention in national terrain. She maintains that this mothers’ assembly as a plural, solidaristic collectivity can contest the state’s attempts to determine whose lives can appear as grievable and

[1] In Farsi جاویدنام

worthy of recognition (Tafakori 2022). In the same trend, in the process of grief and justice-seeking by families of victims of the recent uprising a network has formed among not only the families who lost someone in the “Woman, Life, Freedom” protests but also families of the other victims of other protests or incidents after the 1979 Revolution.

Mahdavi, mother of Sivash Mahmoodi, a 17-year-old boy who was killed in Naziabad- one of the relatively lower-income neighborhoods of Tehran- during protests, after losing his son created her Twitter account to talk about her pain and his unstoppable effort for justice-seeking for his son. Most of her tweets show her beside Siavash's graveyard as a space for mourning and justice-seeking performance and also to keep his memory alive.

Figure 14. Link: https://twitter.com/MahdaviLeily/status/1650777882426241026

Translation: As long as I live in my body, I am a petitioner for your blood. And I have the banner of reckoning day. And I shout your beautiful name with pride. You are well-known in this land, and [your] mother is seeking vengeance and justice. For a free Iran and for your sister Setayesh.

Ragging Subjects: Anger

The sadness and grief of Jina's death rapidly turned into rage and anger. The #Baraye[1]- for the sake of- was one of the hashtags which was widely used in the protests in Iran. People, specifically women, started to use this hashtag to talk about their experiences and memories of inequality during recent decades, and their emotions, including anger and sadness for these experiences to say why they are angry so that they are protesting and what their motivations are. Lots of people shared these thoughts mentioning that speaking of this pain was a healing and therapeutic experience for them and describing this public emotion sharing as a collective therapy.

Sara Ahmed (2014, 11) defines emotion as "what moves us" and believes that "identifying as a feminist is dependent upon taking that anger as the grounds for a critique of the world" (Sara Ahmed 2014, 171) She believes that:

"How we are moved involves interpretations of sensations and feelings not only in the sense that we interpret what we feel, but also in that what we feel might be dependent on past interpretations that are not necessarily made by us, but that comes before us. "Focusing on emotions as mediated rather than immediate reminds us that knowledge cannot be separated from the bodily world of feeling and sensation; knowledge is bound up with what makes us sweat, shudder, tremble, all those feelings that are crucially felt on the bodily surface, the skin surface where we touch and are touched by the world."

Inspired by Sara Ahmad, I argue that Iranian women started to show their rage on the streets of the country, while they were using that anger as a means of change on social media platforms. Within this discourse, the murder of Jina is connected to all the oppressive experiences that Iranian woman have suffered, in particular, under the Islamic regime, and in general, under the patriarchal structure of the society. Women, among them feminist activists, started challenging the sexist and misogynist gender discourses produced by the Islamic government in the middle of the movement.

[1] In Farsi برای

For instance, in the following tweet, the government discourse of motherhood is challenged. Motherhood is one of the concepts that has not only been publicised in state mainstream media but also has been forced on women's bodies through biopolitical strategies over the recent forty decades (Rahbari 2021, Kashani-Sabet 2006).

Figure 15. Link: https://twitter.com/elahekhyegane/status/1593250510219644931

Translation: The only role they considered for a woman for these forty years was motherhood, but now the only thing they don't think about is that this person is a mother's darling. Every day they impose a huge amount of pressure on the mothers in this country and leave us with a new source of sadness in our hearts. But we are standing until the day when people like Gohar Eshghi[1] would laugh again.

In another example, the femicides of recent years are the topic of many tweets, for instance, in the following one, the user mentions femicide as a motivation for protesting:

Figure 16. Link:https://twitter.com/bakeremoghadas/status/1573046387880894464

[1] Gohar Eshghi is the mother of Sattar Beheshti, an Iranian blogger was killed in November 2012 in the custody of the state. She is one of the Iranian Complainant Mothers and removed her hejab in support of protests in October 2022.

Translation: For Mona Heidari, RominA Ashrafi, Raheaneh Amiri, Fatemeh Farahi, Shekiba Bakhtiyar, Mobina Soori, and all headless women[1].

The tweet refers to the names of young victims of femicide in recent years at the hands of their family members, mainly their fathers which has rooted not only in the structured patriarchy inside the society but also rooted in law. Under Iranian Islamic Law, Article 301 of the Islamic Penal Code stipulates that the father, acting as the legal guardian, is not subject to retribution for murdering his child, but instead faces a penalty or a brief period of imprisonment.

Women's anger is directed not only at the state but also toward society, highlighting how the state's policy of gender segregation has led to further oppression of women by the whole society.

Figure 17. Link: https://twitter.com/adighodsi/status/1575552333735374848

Translation: In everything that has been divided as a result of gender segregation, the worst part is for women. Mosques, wedding halls, toilets, dining halls, entrances, and other areas are often small, hidden away with narrow stairs, and poor ventilation, and quite depressing, patrolled by so-called Fati Commandos (a derogatory term referring to morality police) #Mahsa_Amini.

[1] Tweet refers to women who were killed by their family members in recent years in Iran. Such as Mona Heydari a young woman who was beheaded in Ahvaz, Iran in a femicide by her husband in February 2022. Pictures and videos of her husband, smiling while carrying her head, went viral on social media. However, since Mona's father as her guardian forgave the killer (who was Mona's cousin), he was only sentenced to 5 to 8 years of prison. Romina Ashrafi was killed by his father, she was14-year-old and left home to marry her boyfriend and when the police found her and returned her home, his father killed her with a sickle. According to Romina's mother's lawyer, during the trial, the head of the court asked her father, "If you believed that your honour was tarnished, why didn't you kill her boyfriend?... Is this the behaviour of a father towards his child?" The father replied, "If I killed Bahman-the boyfriend-, I would have been avenged."

Lack of bodily autonomy is another shared experience among women in Iran, seamlessly integrating itself into everyday life. The following tweet underscores the virginity of unmarried women in Iranian society and how it can affect women's health. The user discusses how some gynecologists subject unmarried women to humiliation if they are found not to be virgins, which can make them avoid regular check-ups[1].

Figure 18. Link: https://twitter.com/witted1995/status/1573824461639503875

Translation: For a simple check-up with a gynecologist which many of us because of our fear, choose not to go.

In addition, anger of women regarding their experiences of inequality addresses the family as a source of reproducing the patriarchal system of society. The anger arising from these memories and experiences of inequality and gendered violence wasn't only directed at the state but was also addressing the prevalent misogyny and patriarchal structures within the private sphere and the family, as a source of reproducing the patriarchal system of society

For instance, during Nowruz, New Year's Eve in Iran, a female user, Pari, who is living in a village in Iran, wrote five tweets to blame men in her family who do not do any domestic work specifically at family gatherings, and they just sit and chat when women prepare everything for them". Pari concluded that "we should start the Women, Life, Freedom from our home".

[1] Last year, #secure_physician# became trendy on Twitter and women started to talk about their experiences of being humiliated for not being virgins in check-ups and began to introduce secure physicians to each other.

Figure 19. Link: https://twitter.com/rabieepardis/status/1641543594002591744

Translation: I think this is familiar to you. My father's side of the family is religious. We should also wear a headscarf in front of everyone because it is a matter of respect for men regardless of the Islamic and religious aspects of the hejab. Older women wear pants under skirts and the housework is all on the shoulders of us, younger girls. My mother's side of the family is not religious. Funerals and weddings are not gender segregated, drinking wine is free for all, but women should drink it with a little bit of guilt, and the housework is all on us, the younger girls, again, we are still in the kitchen, cooking, washing, and cleaning, with the only difference that we don't have to wear a scarf and we can wear makeup. There, [in my father's family gathering] they say: Where are the tea and pastry? Here [in my mother's family gathering] they say: where are our wine and munchies?

In lots of my samples of tweets, women use Twitter as a site to talk about their collective sad experiences, to share their feelings of rage, anger, and frustration with other people who have the same experiences; and also, to bring up this anger and show it as their motivation for political action. The name of Sepideh Rashno and what happened to her frequently has been mentioned as the reason for anger and political action. On July 22 Sepideh -a young writer- was on a public bus while she had her scarf around her neck and did not wear it. She had an argument with a woman who was trying to enforce hejab over her and she and other women on the bus made women leave the bus. The video of their altercation went viral and Sepideh got arrested at her home. Lots of people admired her brave actions on social media platforms .A few days after her arrest, she

showed up on a national TV channel with bruised eyes, made a forced confession, and apologised for her action.

Many women referred to a sense of humiliation and suppression that they experienced by watching that video. The following tweet refers to "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement as a part of a chain that started after Ebrahim Raissi- the hardcore Islamist president- and passing the Hejab and Chastity law to impose state-enforced dress codes on women (Sadeghi-Boroujerdi 2023).

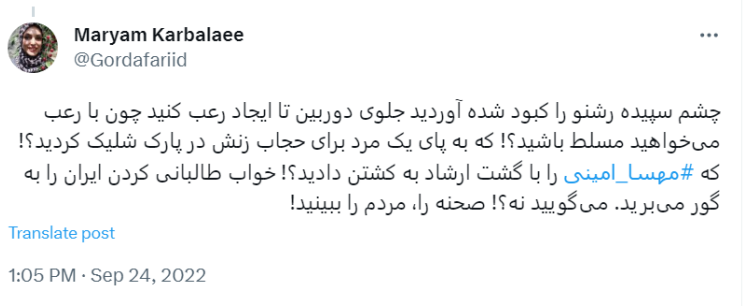

Figure 20. Link: https://twitter.com/Gordafariid/status/1573629587178852353

Translation: You brought Sepideh with a bruised eye in front of the camera, aiming to evoke fear or take control over us by threatening us? Did you shoot a man for defending his wife's hejab in the park?[1] Did you give the order to kill Mahsa Amini to the morality police? You will bury the dream of turning Iran into a Talibanian country. Do you deny it? Look at the scene, at the people!

Figure 21. Link: https://twitter.com/Fatemekerimi/status/1570798009860128768

Translation: The murder of #Jina_Amini is a complete manifestation of systemic systematic violence that has gripped women since the inception of the Islamic Republic. This violence is a

[1]Referring to another incident involving an argument over the hejab in Pardisan Park, Tehran, during the summer of 2022. This altercation led to the shooting of a man who was defending his wife against the morality police.

result of the entrenched patriarchal role in society, extending from divine and clerical authority to police forces. #Mahsa_Amini #Jina_Amini

These feelings of anger are translated into direct political action during the protests. Ahmed (2014) argues that it is impossible to consider the relationship between feminism and anger without reflecting on the politics of pain. She maintains that testimonies of the pain and their experiences of violence are essential for the formation of feminist subjects -reading pain as a structural rather than incidental violence- and to feminist collectives (Ahmed 2014). Exploring women's tweets writing about the anger and pain they experienced, I argue, is not only about reflecting on their personal experiences and lives but it is also about understanding them in terms of larger structures.

Remembering painful Past

Referring to collective memories of the past is one of the media practices that has been repeated in lots of tweets. In this trend, women began to review and narrate the pain that they have been experiencing on Twitter, bringing out the buried memories of the past, the memories that were neglected, undermined, and untold, and shedding light on them. and, during this process of reminiscing, they also un/less narrated parts of the history of the women's struggle for equal rights movement in Iran.

Wetherell (2012) believes that emotions can be the consequence of internal cognitions and thoughts such as memories. Memory, and imagination, shape how we experience emotions in social situations. She emphasises that we are more than a gateway or site through which affecting forces pass or transmit on to other human receivers. Instead, a massive and distinctive re-working of the social event is occurring as emotion passes through human subjectivity. Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2014) believes that feelings can be shaped in contact with the memory, and also in the process of orientation towards what is remembered. Thus, I understand this process of remembering the past

which happened in Twitter threats during the recent uprising, both created by the feelings about the tragic death of Jina and also played as the source for feelings evoked by revealing this past.

In the following tweet, aiming to criticise the compulsory hejab in Iran, the user retraces the history of the women's movement in Iran mentioning its lack of success in granting women the right to choose their clothing. She refers to the name of Tahreh Qurrat al-Ayn -a poet, and one of the most important leaders of the Babi[1] movement in Iran (Afary and Anderson 2023), who openly opposed polygamy and advocated against mandatory hejab almost two centuries ago, to show that women in Iran have been fighting for their right to choose their clothing for almost 200 years and they are still struggling to achieve their basic rights.

Figure 22. Link: https://twitter.com/ferani666/status/1648405427057557504

Translation: Since the rise of Tahereh Qara-ul-Ain, Iranian women have been fighting for their right to clothing for almost 180 years.

Tahereh who was killed in 1852 because of an unveiling during a religious assembly of men (Afary and Anderson 2023), is among the female figures whom the state prefers to ignore and not to talk about on formal media platforms, in school books, even as an Iranian women poet. But now, this momentum is captured by Iranian female Twitter users as an opportunity to recall and memorise her despite all the censorship.

Homa Darabi is one of the other females figures whose name was mentioned on Twitter frequently, specifically in the first months after the protests began. Homa publicly opposed the compulsory hejab and set herself on fire in 1994 to object to all discrimination women experienced

[1] Bábism (Persian: بابیه) is a religion founded in 1844 by the Báb, an Iranian merchant turned prophet who taught that there is one incomprehensible God who manifests his will in an unending series of Manifestations of God.

during the first years after the 1979 revolution (Gallagher 2000). But at that time, no one heard her voice.

Figure 23. Link: https://twitter.com/moote60/status/1571790558494085 12

Translation: #Homa_Darabi (1940–1994) was an Iranian child psychiatrist who committed self-immolation in Tajrish Square, Tehran, in protest against the mandatory hejab.

Ahmed (2014) believes that "in order to break the seal of the past, in order to move away from attachments that are hurtful, we must first bring them into the realm of political action. Bringing pain into politics requires that we give up the fetish of the wound through different kinds of remembrance. The past is living rather than dead; the past lives in the very wounds that remain open in the present" (Ahmed 2014, 33). It appears that the pain of the past, the trauma of discrimination that women have endured not only under the Islamic regime but also far before that, have remained unhealed. These wounds have left profound scars that now offer women an opportunity to openly discuss the pain they have felt.

The following tweet is related to the boycotted of Iran's men's national football team during World Cup 2022 because of team's lack of support from the ongoing movement and their failure to seize the opportunity to show solidarity with the protesters. Following Iran's victory over Velz, the security forces who had already occupied the streets started to celebrate in the streets. However,

when Iran lost to the United States, numerous individuals went to the streets to celebrate the national team's defeat[1].

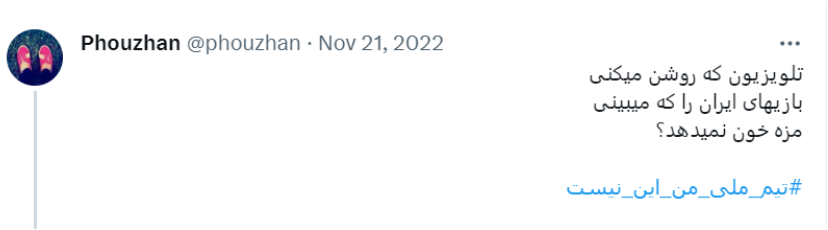

Figure 24. Link: https://twitter.com/phouzhan/status/1594599047343521794

Translation: When you turn on the television, and watch the games of Iran, Dose it tastes like blood? #ThisIsNotMyNationalTeam

In this situation, while women on Twitter were supporting the boycott, they began to recall all the deprivation they experienced because of not being allowed to enter the stadiums and watch football matches. The name of Sahar Khodayari[2], a 29-year-old woman who is known as “Blue Girl” -in a nod to her favourite football team colour- (Shahrokni and Sofos 2022) has been recalled several times and her heart-breaking death was reviewed over and over.

Figure 25. Link: https://twitter.com/phouzhan/status/1594599047343521794

[1] Mehrdad Samak, 27, a year-old man was killed on that night in Bandar Anzali, Iran.
[2] Sahar set herself on fire outside of a court in Tehran in 2019 after she realised, she might face imprisonment for her attempt to enter Tehran's Azadi (Freedom) Stadium to watch her favourite team match while she disguised herself as a man and was halted by the police (Safi 2019).

Translation: Do you know who wanted to watch football now? Sahar Khodayari (the Blue Girl), who three years ago was such tormented because of watching football that she set herself on fire.

Shahrokni and Sofos (2022) review Sahar's "hyper-mediatized death" and the circulated image of her in a hospital bed through politics of pity arguing that this incident and the pity that generated, created a sense of solidarity -even temporarily- between Iranians, in Iran and the diaspora in grieving, sharing a sense of injustice and attributing blame to the discriminatory practices of the Iranian state It seems that the memory of Shara as one of the state's "victims" and the feeling of "pity" was not forgotten (Shahrokni and Sofos 2022).

The next tweets refer to the names of Vida Movahed as ""pioneers of the battle against compulsory hejab". On December 2017, Vida Movahed stood on a utility box in one of the most crowded streets of Tehran. She tied her hejab, a white scarf, to a pole and waved it as a flag. She was brought down and arrested by the police. When she was arrested, the hashtag where_is_she statred to trend and recorded pictures and videos of her action went viral on social media platforms. Vida's distinctive and visual action symbolised the long-standing suppression of hejab over Iranian women's bodies (Hashemi, 2018). In the next few days, dozens of other women imitated Movahed[1]. The state responded harshly to this protest, arresting and detaining women and imposing long prison sentences. This street movement was stopped at the very beginning, but it created fierce discussions regarding hejab with different points of view on social media. As these sample tweets show, the movement remained as part of the collective memory of Iranian society in regard to the historical trajectories of women's movements and was recycled on digital platforms during the current uprising again.

[1] As Vida was standing on a utility box on Enghelab Street (Revolution Street), all these women were described as the "Girls of Enghelab Street".

Figure 26. Link: https://twitter.com/Gandom_Sa007/status/1572745989920006144

Translation: In memory of Vida Mohed, the heroine of the anti-hejab movement, who for the first time bravely made her headscarf the white flag of the fight against IR. And in memory of Homa Darabi, who took off her headscarf in Tajrish Square and set her body on fire to protest the mandatory hejab. #Mahsa_Amini

Wetherell (2012) points out, when a narrative or experience goes missing or gets repressed can be the source of trauma (Wetherell 2012). Similarly, Zizi Papacharissi (2015) refers to the role of media in recycling events which are coming through personal experiences, however, they are permanent parts of our history and our identity as it is imprinted in our psyches as a collective memory.

Joyful Bodies, Hope and Imagination of Future

Form the first protests after Jina's death, in Saghez, in Tehran, and other cities around the country, women were leaders of the street protests, the "ordinary" women were on the front lines, in the center of gatherings, shouting slogans, set their scarf on fire, resisting against police forces, hitting them back, crashing the police cars, standing on the roof of cars. It seems that they found the chance to show their anger and rage which eventually seemed legitimate at least in the eyes of

society. Ahall (2018) defines affects as energies transmitted through bodily encounters (Ahall 2018). So, women who have been bodily suppressed, have always been under the surveillance of the state and have been even questioned for the small details of their clothing, were leading the street protests and even inviting men to join them. Being able to express rage and anger led women to feel the joy of solidarity and togetherness. Ahmed (2014) believes that "pleasures can allow bodies to take up more space" (Ahmed 2014, 164). She emphasizes that pleasures can work as a form of entitlement and belonging and spaces can be claimed through joy, an enjoyment that comes from being witnessed by others. Rosemary Clark (Clark-Parsons 2018) while referring to media campaigns such as the Metoo movement, define the concept of "networked feminism" as the use of digitally mediated areas to go beyond print media, in-person communal spaces, and face-to-face meetings to have mobilised global protest actions. She believes that although sometimes this networked feminism can start with the action and aspiration of a person, it turns into a collective endeavour and grows with the energy and solidarity of a group. She explains that "Its practitioners possess a rebellious spirit that thrives on the type of cooperative creativity that emerges when either collective outrage, a collective need, or both combine with a collective commitment to change, limited access to organizational resources, and a certain degree of networked media know-how"(Clark-Parsons 2018). This feeling of joy and ownership of public spaces by women in Iran was not only limited to the streets, but in parallel, social media platforms were also a site for women to reflect on what they were experiencing. The following tweets reflected on two of the most circulated images of protests in Tehran; in the first one (Figure 27), an unveiled woman sets her scarf on fire and stands on the roof of a car, in the middle of a protest and a traffic blockage and everybody claps for her. In this tweet, this enjoyment of solidarity and togetherness against compulsory hejab is framed. In the second one (Figure 28), young women participated in protests without hejab, an unusual and new appearance for women in public spaces in Iran at that time. One

of these women has a traditional Kurdish-style head scarf around her neck as a sign of solidarity with Jina.

Figure 27. Link: https://twitter.com/hediekimiaee/status/1571981949199347715

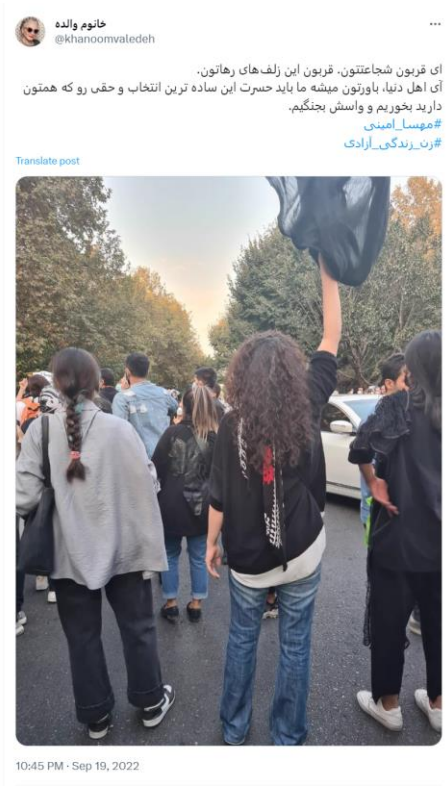

Figure 28. Link: https://twitter.com/khanoomvaledeh/status/1571963744410021888

Translation of Figure 27: For a long time, we dreamed of walking on the streets of #Iran and seeing each other without #compulsory_hejab. And today, on the 28th of Shahrivar (September 19), Iranian women have taken off their headscarves and chanted the slogan #Women_Free_Life. #Mahsa_Amini

Translation of Figure 28: Oh, your courage is praiseworthy. Salute to your liberated hair. Oh, people of the world, can you believe that we have to yearn for this simplest choice and right that you all have, and we have to fight for it? #Mahsa_Amini #Women_Free_Life

The images of unveiled women were not limited to the protests, concurrently, women started to show up in all public spaces even in ones that are known as more masculine spaces with their elective clothes rather than compulsory hejab. One of the images that went viral on Twitter was the

Figure.29; the images of two young women having brunch without the hejab in a coffee house in Tehran. Coffee-house has been traditionally and historically a masculine space in North Africa and the Middle East (Collins 2009). This photo represented women's dreams and desire for a different life and an alternative world. Through this image, these two young women could imagine a different future for themselves and other women, a future where hejab no longer would be compulsory and they can have the agency to choose it. What was powerful about the image was its ordinariness, it is about a world that didn't quite exist but it comes to existence through performance. This was a performance circulated on social media and generated hope.

Figure 29. link: https://twitter.com/DinaRad86/status/1575618366596792320

One of the women in this picture, Donya Rad, who published the photo on her Twitter account in September 2022 were arrested a day after and were in custody for 11 days. She was forced to remove the photo from her account and her sister Dina published it again. However, Donya after her release, published another image in the same location while she was eating dinner with two other women.

One of the other iconic images of the "Women, life, Freedom" movement was taken during the street protests in November 2022 (Figure 30). After protesters entered the Tehran subway and

continued chanting slogans in the metro cabin, police entered the cabins and attacked them. To escape the state surveillance, women covered cabin security cameras with menstrual pads. Talking about periods is still a big taboo in Iran, even stores put the pads in dark bags and give it to customers in order to hide them from the public. However, in recent years specifically on social media, women started to talk about periods in order to normalise it.

Figure 30. Link: https://twitter.com/Vahid/status/1592958348491882497

Translation: When you forced the sanitary strip to live in a black plastic, you never thought one day it would use its wings to fly.

The comment on this tweet, metaphorically refers to this fact by referring to pad's wings, referring to women who find new wings to fly. The tweet figure 30 also refers to the period being taboo in Iran and how this movement allows women to reveal themselves and their bodies from all suppressions.

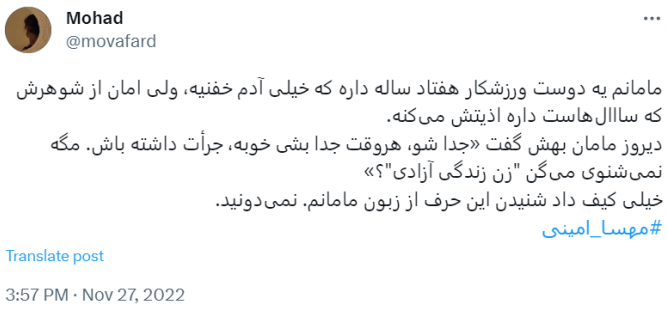

Figure 31. Link: https://twitter.com/movafard/status/1596880857968496640

Translation: My mom has a seventy-year-old athlete friend who is an incredible person, but her husband has been bothering her for years. Yesterday, my mom told her “Separate, it worthy, whenever you do it, have the courage. Don't you hear them say Woman, Life, Freedom?” Hearing these words from my mom's mouth was really enjoyable. You have no idea. #Mahsa_Amini

This tweet shows that how this movement and its transmitted emotion gave women the courage to not only protests against state oppressions, but also go beyond and target the patriarchal society.

Women’s refusal to wear compulsory hejab did not exclude to the time of street protests, still it is the most obvious form of resistance in the public spaces of the country. Despite all the risks, such as harassment of police or plan clothes agent, arrest, fine, or physical violence, lots of women around the county even in the most conservative and religious cities, still not only go outside without hejab, but also take pictures of themselves and post them on social media platforms to spread courage and create solidarity with other women. Panacheries argues that “the connective affordances of social media help activate the in-between bond of publics, and they also enable expression and information sharing that liberate the individual and collective imaginations” (Papacharissi, 2015).

Figure 32. Link: https://twitter.com/maryamm68478961/status/1596993378755149824

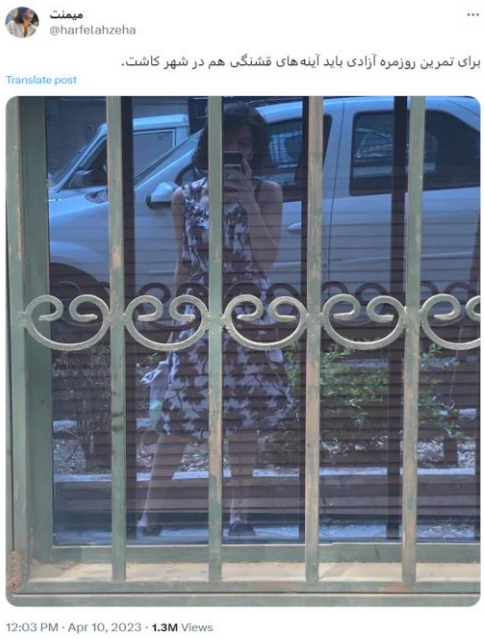

Figure 33. Link: https://twitter.com/harfelahzeha/status/1645366776354557952

Translation of Figure 32: I'm a free woman; You are a nuisance.

Today #Mashhad was filled with veiled women and officers, but the people were giving them a good response, Let's proliferate courage.

Translation of Figure 33: For everyday practice of freedom, beautiful mirrors should also be installed in the city.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Analysis: Discourse Analysis of Interviews

"The heaviness of oppression, the harshness of executions, the brutality of direct shooting, and the haunting shadow of suicides, all make it really tough to write on social media. Sometimes, I think whatever I write is meaningless and empty, and it's better to remain silent. However, eventually, I chose to write rather than stay silent.[1]

Introduction

Following the analysis of tweets published in the third chapter, this chapter provides an overview and analysis of the narratives of women who are active on social media. These women regularly write about social and political issues, as well as their personal experiences as women. In this chapter, the focus is on women's experiences of social media activism and I aim to examine how they understand the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement, how they confront the challenges and risks associated with their activism, and how they define their emotions, fears, and hopes for the future.

Throughout this chapter, my main focus is to see the experience of doing digital activism from these women's point of view and answer these questions that how social media activism means for them and can affect their lives.

Solidarity Shaped around the display of emotion

Almost all of my interviewees referred to social media platforms as a space where they believed they could express their emotions about what is happening in society, especially during the "Women, Life, Freedom" movement and after the death of Jina. Moreover, through sharing these emotions, they felt they were not alone in their feelings.

Writing on social media platforms was a way for me to express my anger and share my emotions with others. It allowed me to feel I am connected, as well as resonate with others. Perhaps for the first time, all of us, both men and women, had a similar feeling—a combination of anger and expecting a change. "Hoda"

[1] From interviews with Ghazaleh, Tehran, May 2020

Negin also referred to her rage as the motivation that led her to write about the recent movement on Twitter and she explained how this rage made her more courageous in sharing her thoughts.

> The anger that had been suppressed in me for all these years was the primary reason for me to start tweeting. I felt that this moment was a turning point where I needed to write about it. Another point was the sense of responsibility I felt towards the people who were following me. I have significant number of followers, I felt that I should be a platform for those who didn't have such an opportunity; These led me to write fearlessly. “Negin”

Almost all of the women I interviewed mentioned that social media platforms provided them with an alternative perspective and increased their courage. For instance, Maria described social media as a space that not only bolstered her own courage but also influenced her religious mother. Her mother had been questioning the necessity of wearing the hejab for some time, but she hadn't felt brave enough to remove it. However, after seeing images of women without the hejab in public, her mother started going out without it and defended her choice. She didn't want to carry something that had now become an excuse for the state to oppress people.

Shirin, another woman who I interviewed, described when she overcame her fear and decided to go outside without hejab for the first time:

> On the first day I went out without a headscarf, my knees were trembling with fear. Then, I thought about how I could have not worn this headscarf all those years, but I had never imagined or considered it because I felt I am alone in this and I believed it was impossible. However, after Mahsa's death, everything changed. I feel that I owe this change to those defiant women who, for the first time, stepped out onto the streets without a headscarf. Seeing their videos and their images on social media, I questioned myself for a moment, wondering where we had stood in this story. “Shirin”

My interviews also mentioned feeling of togetherness and solidarity as one of social media affordances for them. They described social media as a site that made it possible for them to find each other and feel they are standing beside each other as a part of society which has been departed from each other, intentionally, by the state and made them feel they were isolated. However, now they are now there are more people who think similar to them.

Social platforms have given us the opportunity as members of a society to connect with each other closely. Before this, we all led dual lives, showing only the public part to others. We always thought that we were the only ones who thought differently because we had been homogenised in society. However, for instance, Instagram provided us with the chance to feel like we are all similar,

and we have similar concerns, and gradually led us towards not wanting to preserve this duality. “Ghazaleh”

What Ghazaleh pointed out was not unique, Sima also referred to sharing the women’s experiences which made us to see personal experiences in abroad and in more a political structure:

Social media has given us, as women, the opportunity to become aware of each other's experiences and transform our personal experiences into social ones. It has empowered us and reduced the feeling of personal victimisation. However, on the other hand, we must be aware that social media also amplifies the force that turns shame and humiliation against women. The key point, though, is that this force has always existed, and now social media has provided women with the means to speak up as well. “Sima”

Sahar referred to social media platforms as the only possibilities for people to gather around and freely talk specifically, for women who are mostly excluded from public spaces. She explained:

Social media for us is a part of our living space and it is involved in creating our memories and let sufferers and isolated people come together and ask for justice. In the recent uprising, social media provided the opportunity for public justice-seeking. It lets sufferers of recent decades find each other. For instance, those who lost loved ones in the early days of the revolution connect with those affected by the war [Iran-Iraq war], the Green Movement, or the plane incident[1]; even those who lost loved ones due to not receiving the vaccine during the COVID-19 pandemic joined the protest movement. “Shahr”

Hoda, one of my interviewees, was shot three years ago during the street protests of Bloody November. Her two knees were seriously injured, and she still has many small bullets in her lungs. She compared her experience with people who were shot during the recent protests:

Three years ago, when I got shot, a few people were writing about these issues on social media. My family and I were threatened not to say a word about it. When I was going to different doctors for the follow up of my treatments, I had to explain why I got shot, they didn't understand the meaning of that. One of the doctors asked if I had gone hunting. I laughed and said no, I was hunted. Having to explain what has happened to me to everyone was a burden for me. It was as if I was to blame for getting shot. But now, because everyone, write about their experiences and their feelings, the situation is different. It's understandable that getting shot can happen through a peaceful protest. In my opinion, writing on social media has made everyone aware and courageous. “Hoda”

[1] During an international crisis between Iran and the United States, Ukraine International Airlines Flight No. PS752 took off from Tehran's Imam Khomeini International Airport on January 8, 2020, at 6:12 a.m. It was hit by two missiles fired by the Iranian Military shortly after take-off and crashed outside Tehran, resulting in the tragic loss of all 176 passengers and nine crew members on board.(Rochon Genova, 2023).

Papacharissi (2015) argues that publics are activated and sustained by feelings of belonging and solidarity, the connective affordances of social media help activate the in-between bond of publics and they also enable expression and information sharing that liberate the individual and collective imaginations. This is perhaps why the influence of social media in uprisings that take place in autocratic regimes frequently persists despite attempts to shut down the networked infrastructure that supports them.

Women as Everyday Criminal Fighters

The feeling of being considered criminals was also a common sentiment that emerged during my interviews. Many of these women expressed the belief that society assumes them to be inherently criminal simply because they are women. Interestingly, they referred to this sense of "always being seen as criminals" as a source of their courage. They explained that this ongoing struggle made them more willing to take risks. Sahar mentioned that this feeling of being considered a criminal gives her the courage to take risk of writing on social media despite the fact that she knows lots of people including her own friends had been arrested because of their tweets. she knows that if the state wants her to be accused of something, it is not hard for them to find something in her life which is against rules.

Similar to Shara, Maria referred to this feeling of being criminal as the source of her courage:

> Being born as a woman in Iran is inherently to be considered as a potential criminal. We, as women, have been always forced to fight for our basic rights and against inequality. However, we have always been faced with this project of criminalising women, and the scope of what constitutes a crime has expanded day by day. Previously, when a woman sat in my car and her headscarf fell, I would ask her to put it back on, due to the fear of getting the car impounded, which had happened to me three times. But gradually, this has given me the courage to not be afraid anymore. Because in order to survive, confronting my fears is inevitable. "Maria"

Sima also highlighted the controversial situation of women in Iran and how it inherently placed them in oppositional positions against the state.

Women in Iran, from every social and economic class, are experiencing a sort of tension now. Going out to the streets is stressful for them, forming a family, and finding employment are challenging. The expectations of women, even traditional ones, have changed, but the political and economic structure of this society, which is prosperous in terms of discrimination against women, has not changed. Therefore, these conditions have made the situation of women problematic and placed them in opposition to the government. “Sima”

Publics come into existence through modalities of communication between very different kinds of actors, Craig Calhoun (2002) has pointed out that the public sphere is not only a mechanism for debate and deliberation, but also a space for building solidarity and a sense of belonging. As such, the public sphere both builds on emotions and produces them. It seems that this sense of belonging can be created through the pain and alienation rooted in the same experiences of women’s everyday lives.

Affordances of Social Media

The women I interviewed consciously use the affordances of social media platforms smartly in different ways and in different situations in order to achieve their intended goals and results. Shirin, mentioned hashtagactivism (Clark-Parsons 2022) as a way of showing solidarity specifically for women:

I used to not believe much in using hashtags on Twitter, but two hashtags, #Women_Life_Freedom and #Mahsa_Amini, especially for us women, became a way to show our solidarity. I started to use hashtags to have my tweets seen, to the point that I was forced to remove them. Because they [state] declared using hashtags as a prominent form of crime. In the judicial rulings that were communicated to individuals, the charges of disrupting public order and conspiracy were often mentioned, and using the #MahsaAmini hashtag was cited as a crime. My verdict was the same, which led me to go back and delete some of these hashtags. “Shirin”

Sahar also mentioned that she using even minor but effective affordances of social media platforms to make small changes:

It has always been important for me to be active on Twitter using my real name and photo. This is because Twitter is full of fake accounts and fake reactions that can influence events. Despite all the risks, I strive to maintain “writing with my name and photo”. Firstly, for me as a woman without a headscarf, the image is a tool, and we women don't have many tools at our disposal to willingly remove some of them. On the other hand, the online space is rife with accounts that have budgets and resources from the government or, try to steer social movements towards their own

agenda. Writing with my name and photo is a form of resistance against them. “Sahar”

Maria also referred to resharing posts, stories and tweets on social media as an opportunity to make people feel united and sending a message to the state:

Sometimes, when I wanted to share something about recent events on social media, I would see many others doing the same thing, yet I still went ahead and did it. Firstly, because I believe it showed that there are a considerable number of us who share the same thoughts, and we were sending a message to the government that we were actively monitoring social networks. “Maria”

It seems that, living under the control of an authoritarian regime which tries to bloke every possible way of change, women are well appreciate every small and limited affordances of social media.

Hejab as a Central demand

The majority of the respondents asserted that they think one of the main reasons of this protest is opposition against the compulsory hejab which has been denied as an important demand of women by various political and social forces for decades:

I think the reaction to the compulsory hejab was a significant part of this movement. Personally, I was willing to pay a price for many other things [political demands], but not for the hejab. I never thought that the demand for optional hejab could be this influential. We have always been told that the demand for the hejab is a minor thing, and there are more important things to fight for. “Sahar”

Sima, one of the other interviewees, emphasised that while she believes the hejab is a central demand in this movement, she thinks that if women want to go beyond this demand, the society's reaction would be different:

In my opinion, we should raise other demands such as the right to divorce, equal inheritance, and guardianship over children and see what the society's reaction would be if women's demands go beyond this headscarf. I think very pessimistically that society's support for women not wearing the headscarf is not support for bodily autonomy but rather a challenge to authority. Removing Hejab, as imposing a dress code, is a serious demand in this movement. But Iran is conservative society, and people has strong opinions about women's and also men's dress. However, we went beyond the idea of hejab as a policing tool, and women have gained more control over their clothing choices. The experiences of unveiled women who now walk into the streets show that they received no harassment from people. This society used to be different, but it has changed over the years. “Sima”

Fear is Real

The other common topic that I identify to argue is the emotion of fear that all of the women whom I interviewed referred to it. These women experienced this fear during their digital activism and while they were protesting in the streets and although they were aware of all the risk that was threatening them, they continue their activism and find ways to minimise it as much as possible. These fears that is not excluded to their current activities but it's the feeling that they are experiencing over their life in different situation as Ahemd (2014) argues,

Ghazaleh who has the experience of writing on social media and also participating in the street protests in Tehran referred these two different activisms and consider both of them risky but she emphasis that she is more careful on social media platform because she received some threat and in case of arrest, she preferred to be arrested in the street doing something "real":

> Lately, I write less on social media because I received some threats[1]. I felt that writing in a place where a significant portion of the audience consists of friends and like-minded individuals, and where my writing had led to threats, was unwise. I thought that if I were to incur a cost, it would be better for me to be arrested during my real struggle on the streets and be thrown into prison.

Ghazaleh also referred to the fear that she experienced during the street protests and the fear that now she experiences every day when she goes to the street without hejab:

> At the beginning, when I was participating in street protests, I wasn't afraid. It felt like I understood the rules; there was a kind of game between the guards and the protesting people, and I knew how to protect myself. But at some point, the violence escalated significantly. The guards were exhausted and hitting everyone. There was a high chance of getting hit in the eye, head and face. Once they shot me closely, which was very painful. At that moment, I couldn't distinguish what hit me. Was it a plastic bullet or a real bullet? It was plastic but it could be actual. Now, I feel a different fear. I work as a manager in a government institution. When I leave work, I leave the headscarf around my neck. If my colleagues see me without my headscarf, it can have strange consequences for me. Nevertheless, my choice is not to wear the headscarf as much as possible. "Ghazaleh"

[1] These threats, which some of these women referred to, can generally be received in various forms and degrees. Threats can come from anonymous social media accounts through direct message, unknown phone calls or even legal letters.

Negin mentioned the distinction between individual digital activism as a personal daily practice and collective group-based engagement. She highlighted that choosing the former as a strategy helped her mitigate risks:

I am active on Twitter, but I don't act as part of a group. Some of my friends react to incidents or write things in parallel with others and organisationally. However, I merely try to represent my daily life and political views as a citizen. Since my place of residence was a centre for many protests, my activity sometimes involved sharing updates about my living area, posting photos, and events. Occasionally, it can intersect with my work, allowing me to analyse political subjects from a professional perspective. Generally, I try to protect myself from any risks of writing on social media platforms. For instance, after a while, I delete sensitive tweets or I don't refer to our group activity such as reading groups or anything else which I know they[government] are sensitive about.

Shirin also refers to this fear and the risk she faced by being active on social media platforms:

To be honest, I was very afraid of tweeting and I was censoring myself. Despite that, I received threatening calls several times, but I tried to overcome my fear and continue to write. Because others have paid a higher price. Honestly, more than fear, I was ashamed that I wasn't braver. Nevertheless, this feeling of fear was very strong; when one of my tweets got a lot of attention (liked, retweeted or quoted extensively, I wouldn't go home for several nights. I had a bag of my personal things in my car. I would go and hide at my distant friend's place and with any door bell, I thought they came after me. "Shirin"

Imagining the future

Almost all of my interviewees referred to social media platforms as a site that helped them to imagine alternatives for themselves specifically because the women's opportunities are less than men in our society and they learned to seize any possibilities to change their life:

Social media holds greater significance for women in Iran, as they face compounded oppression in our country. They endure sacrifices for even the bare essentials and recognize the importance of limited resources. They quickly realised that this movement offers them a glimpse into the future. At the very least, it allows them to envision an alternative way of life. Social networks facilitated the transition of this imagination from an individual level to a collective form. "Sahar"

Sahar also see a negative side for this imagination of future through social media, she added:

Sometimes, when this vision of the future becomes a reality, it has consequences. Sometimes, it only affects a limited few who suddenly become overnight celebrities, like Sepideh Rashno or Sepideh Qolian[1]. It's as if we get accustomed to the idea that only they have to pay the price. After a while, it seems like others become indifferent to that imagination and return to their ordinary lives. In addition, part of this future imagination is accompanied by a kind of vengefulness, which is frightening. If we were to take revenge on all those who have committed wrongs, freedom wouldn't

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await us.“Sahar”

Hoda believes, however, that now women in Iran are going beyond the imagination of the future and now they are trying to bring their dreams into life:

In my opinion, we used to casually discuss our ideals and imagine our expected life on social media networks. We envisioned the future. But. now, I think we've moved beyond that. Prior to recent events, we had a vague notion of the future. I never thought that one day I could step out without my scarf. But now, we're doing it – it's as if we're in the process of releasing this dream. No, the borders of social media and real life are resolving; engaging on social media has merged with actions in the real world. For instance, before, we used to sit at home and use hashtags like #No_to_execution to protests against execution. But now, when they [the state] want to execute, people gather in front of prisons, so the social media activism has transitioned into the real world. “Hoda”

This imagination of future through social media affordances can show although social media can be ephemeral, but it has a dipper layers of futurity and imagination which can offer new possibilities.

Sima also discusses the role of social media in shaping the future, but she could also see a negative aspect to it:

I believe that imagination empowers us to persevere and create. It helps us avoid getting stuck in today's problems and prompts us to think about the future, urging us to strive towards it. Social networks offer the potential to grant us a collective strength by sharing individual experiences and dreams. Moreover, they provide the opportunity to consider that something else might be possible in the future, even if the image is unclear. However, social networks also have other aspects – they share the fear of the future and sometimes promote a sense of victimhood. “Sima”

Shirin also mentioned the act of imagining new possibilities during the recent protests in Iran, where social media played a significant role in shaping these ideas:

This time everything was different. the differences were not about the scale of the protests, the number of people who died, or the costs that we paid. The distinctiveness was in the fact that we could able to imagine something that had previously been unimaginable for us. It was as though a lock had been placed on all these imaginings, and it finally came undone. At the age of 30, I was confronted with the realisation that I could remove that tightly-bound headscarf and pay the price for it. But why hadn't I done it before? Because I felt alone, I felt that when I saw women’s pictures and videos on social media platforms and in the streets. However, when photos and videos of women without headscarves walking in the streets were shared, I felt that it was my duty to support them. “Shirin”

The limitations of Social Media

Some of the women that I interviewed referred to what they described as “the limitations and the negative effects of social media platforms on the “Woman, Life, Freedom" movement”. For instance, Sahar mentioned the role of social media in giving voice to political forces, such as royalists who can deceive the movement:

During these years that I have been active on Twitter, I have witnessed the growth of other forces on social networks that have budgets and resources, such as the royalists. I don't think we, as ordinary people, can confront these waves, a limited number of people follow me, and my influence is limited accordingly. Although I still believe that writing is effective, I try not to become delusional. On the other hand, we are not free in our writing in this space, as we are constantly self-censoring, and we are always at risk because writing on Twitter can be the basis for a 5-year sentence, as happened to Anisha Asadollahi[1].

Hoda referred to the role of social media in enhancing frustration and disappointment. She added:

As social media lets us talk about our feelings and share our emotions and it can give us energy to fight, it can make us more disappointed when it goes to a kind of silence and everyone goes back to normal. In addition, hearing about all those deaths, arrests and violence can make us feel we are unable to make any kind of change. “Hoda”s

Ghazaleh also referred to “delusion of everyone think like us” as the side effects of social media activism which can work as a bubble which narrowcasting our experience of social media platforms. Eli Pariser (2011) describes it as “filter bubble” or “the consequences of “web personalisation” which is like tailoring to our supposed needs.

[1] Anisha is a Workers' rights activist and has commenced serving her five-year, eight-month sentence at Evin Prison because of her post on social media and her activism.

Conclusion

This research focused on the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement in Iran, which stands out as one of the most significant anti-government protests since the 1979 revolution. It highlighted the struggles faced by women and placed women's issues at the forefront of a nationwide movement. I examined the experiences of Iranian women engaging in digital feminist activism in their daily lives. Additionally, I analysed how women participating in the “Women, Life, Freedom’ uprising utilized social media platforms, particularly Twitter, to communicate their emotions, including anger, grief, joy, and their past experiences of inequality. Through these shared emotions and personal narratives, women envisioned a different and alternative future for themselves.

In this research, I used affect theory as my conceptual framework to shed light on the political meanings of the emotions that Jina’s death brought up and shared on social media, as well as the new possibilities that this emotion-sharing offered. Through critical discourse analysis of 100 textual and visual Tweets published on Farsi Twitter in the first eight months after the “Women, Life, Freedom” movement, I traced mourning, anger, remembrance, joy, and hope as the main shared emotions. In my analysis, I examined how sharing each of these emotions publicly on social media platforms can go beyond a personal experience or individual decision and create sites of resistance. For example, women, through sharing the emotion of grief over Jina’s death on social media platforms, not only created new political opportunities for solidarity between women to resist the state’s systems of meaning-making or oppression but also offered a new configuration of women and the nation. Similarly, women, by showing their anger and taking that anger as the ground for the critique of the state, made a link between Jina’s death and all the oppressive experiences that Iranian women have suffered, in particular, under the Islamic regime, and in general, under the patriarchal

structure of society. In addition, I shed light on how women used social media affordances to go through their collective memories of the past and used Jina's death as a window to bring out the buried memories of the past and resist state narratives of women's movement in Iran. Furthermore, I illustrated through examples of tweets how anger and rage over Jina's death transformed into feelings of joy and solidarity among women, allowing them to experience revolutionary moments. These moments encouraged them to occupy more space in public sites, ultimately leading to "unveiling" as a form of resistance. This remains one of the prominent forms of resistance by women within the country until now.

Additionally, I investigated the experiences of using social media platforms as tools of activism and focused on the effects and risks of this activism for women in their personal lives. I conducted eight semi-structured, in-depth interviews with women who utilise social media platforms to discuss political, social, and specifically women's issues. From my findings, I identified seven themes through the discourse analysis of women's interviews, many of which were related to and aligned with the emotions traced in the discourse analysis of tweets. The women I interviewed spoke about their fears and the risks associated with their activism. They highlighted how sharing emotions through social media platforms served as a source of courage and solidarity among them.

They also mentioned feeling stigmatised as criminals in society, which motivated them to take more risks and be less fearful of the consequences of their actions. Furthermore, they pointed out the limitations and negative effects of social media activism on the overall movement and emphasized the centrality of the choice of wearing the hejab as a key demand. These women also saw social media platforms as spaces that helped them envision alternatives and strive to turn their dreams into reality.

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