

## **Reclaiming the Disciplined Body: Feminist Activism, Social Media and the Politics of the Female Body in Iran**

This research project will trace Iranian women's activism in the post-revolution era to analyze how they engage both in platform and street activism to assert their agency and resist Iranian governmental regulations and discrete patriarchal regimes of power that rigidly discipline and control female bodies. In my project, I aim to emphasize the dynamic dialogue and mutual shaping that characterize the evolving landscape of Iranian women's activism. Throughout my research, I will delve into the intricate interplay between digital and street-based activism, shedding light on how these two forms of feminism coexist and deeply influence each other. To provide further insight into this interplay, I will explore how digital activism serves as a catalyst for on-the-ground movements, mobilizing individuals and amplifying their voices. Conversely, street-based activism often triggers discussions and actions within digital platforms, fostering a sense of unity and solidarity among activists. This symbiotic relationship aims to examine how each form reinforces, informs, and shapes the other, ultimately contributing to the broader goals of Iranian women's struggle for body sovereignty and gender equality.

At the same time, my research seeks to investigate how Iranian women's digital performative practices arise within and despite a unique social context wherein religio-cultural prohibitions, governmental restrictions, legal discrimination, and mainstream media stereotyping aggregately work to oppress women, specifically, and to render this oppression as normal. Following this line of inquiry, I will analyze how platform affordances such as distinct types of visual communication and hashtags are deployed on Instagram and Twitter by Iranian women activists and non-activists, specifically the ways in which they deploy these to question the subjugation and policing of women's bodies, fight against oppressive bodily regulation, and retake control of their bodies in

challenges to sanctions and prohibitions issued by the Islamic regime of Iran. I will argue that Iranian women have turned to platform feminism as a connected space of resistance to fight against Iran's Islamization project, take back agency, and demand body sovereignty via expanded feminist discourses and practices across Iranian local and diasporic communities. Then, I will demonstrate how the long history of Iranian women's struggle for body sovereignty took a radical and transgressive form in 2022. This transformation resulted in two forms of feminism, which manifested both on digital platforms and in street-based activism. Importantly, I will explore the intricate relationship and dynamic dialogue that developed between these two forms of activism, highlighting their mutual influence and interconnectedness. Hence, in my project and through the chapters, I aim to discuss how the feminist movement in Iran has employed different tactics and engaged in different activities to fight for women's bodily autonomy and has confronted biopolitical practices of control and domination since the Revolution in 1979.

Despite the vast empirical literature on body politics (Bordo 2002; Baer 2018; Smith and Agius 2021) and digital feminist activism in the West (Clark 2016; Linabary & et al 2019; Mendes & Ringrose 2019; Li et al 2020), little has addressed the restrictive socio-political contexts like Iran.

Accordingly, the research questions for this project will be: How do social media platforms currently provide opportunities for Iranian women to deploy new forms of agency and assert bodily sovereignty to challenge the corporeal forms of governance that systematically subjugate and discipline them? What are the intersectional gender, religious, age, class and feminist power dynamics that affect women's integration or exclusion in feminist activism in Iran? Finally, are practices of platform feminism and/or street-based activism fueling more population support for WLF demands including women's body autonomy?

**Project Design**

The main focus of this project is on how the female body is politically deployed by Iranian women via diverse digital and street practices within and outside of Iran to challenge formidable and synergistic Iranian power structures. Hence, the research will include five chapters addressing a different practice of activism.

Drawing upon the legacies of Iranian feminist activism, the introductory chapter will focus on a systematic review of the literature on feminist activism and body politics in Iran to analyze the platform and street strategies, practices, and resilience techniques activists employed to combat bodily regulation imposed on women by patriarchal and Islamic state powers since 1979. In this chapter, I will track shifts in networked feminism and platform feminism in Iran to show how the movements engaged in activities with different aims and unique tactics over the past decades.

In the second chapter, I will examine the discursive power of hashtag feminism in the Iranian context, focusing on the most famous examples including #MyStealthyFreedom, #WhiteWenesdays, #GirlsofEnghelabStreet and #Metoo. Through this chapter, adopting an intersectional perspective, I consider the role played by social identity characteristics of women social media users that made it possible for them to engage or be excluded from hashtag activism on Persian social media platforms.

The third chapter will refer to feminist art activism and specifically focuses on Iranian women artists who leverage their art to promote dialogue about women's bodies and express the suffering and patriarchal injustice that women bear in Iran.

In the next chapter, I will shift to street-based activism to illustrate how and why women's fights for body sovereignty since the Revolution in 1979 took more radical forms during the WLF.

Finally, the conclusion chapter will reflect on what lies ahead for feminist body politics in the Iranian context and discuss the counter-hegemonic potentials of digital feminist practices in Iran. Additionally, it discusses the emergence of novel embodied practices within feminist activism, which appeared during the Women, Life, Freedom movement in the form of street activism to confront biopower practices of domination and governance that systematically discipline women's bodies. This is because the gender violence that was imposed on Mahsa/Jina Amini's body drastically transformed the highly regulated hegemonic physical space/streets in Iran to a political stage where women created a bodily performative resistance by cutting their hair, dancing around fire and burning their compulsory hijab. In the final chapter, I will argue that there has been a shift in women's activism in Iran from traditional localized activism to a digitally enabled, globally interconnected approach which leverages digital platforms and social media to foster connections, amplify voices, and catalyze collective efforts on a broader scale.

To comprehensively address the research questions posed in this study, I will employ a feminist media studies approach and draw on feminist literature (Najmabadi 1997; Banerjee 2003; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 2005; Moghissi 2008, 2016) inspired by the Foucauldian concept of biopolitics to outline how women's bodies are regulated by diverse regimes and forces in Iran.

To achieve this, I'll follow a mixed-method approach, including Ethnographic Content Analysis (ECA), Textual and Visual Discourse Analysis (Rose 2007), Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar 2014) and an intersectional approach to understanding the power dynamics operating within digital feminist activism in Iran, with attention to its unique attributes that respond to socio-political and religious structures in Iran.

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