CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND FEMINIST RESISTANCE IN IRAN: RECLAIMING AGENCY UNDER AUTHORITARIAN RULE

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Abstract: This paper examines how civil disobedience, rather than social disorderliness, is playing a role in forming the Iranian women's movement, especially after the death of Mahsa Amini and the outburst of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. The article relies on interdisciplinary materials, such as feminist theory, literature on civil disobedience, and media analysis, to retrace the forty years of women's action against patriarchal laws in Iran. The study explains how the simple actions of bodily resistance by the Iranian women have been reorganized into a mass repertoire of nonviolent resistance against both religious and political authority. It focuses on embodied resistance, e.g., unveiling, dancing, and public speech, which is a moral and political reclamation of agency. It can also be observed that the results help to see how digital media fuel such actions globally, making the Iranian feminist struggle a transnational fight against rights and dignity. The study adds to the discourse of gender politics, social movements, and resistance in authoritarian situations.

Keywords: *Civil Disobedience, Iranian Women's Movement, Gender Resistance, Authoritarianism, Mahsa Amini.*

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İRAN'DA SİVİL İTAATSİZLİK VE FEMİNİST DİRENİŞ: OTORİTER YÖNETİM ALTINDA FAALİYETİN GERİ KAZANILMASI

Öz: Bu makale, özellikle Mahsa Amini'nin ölümü ve "Kadın, Yaşam, Özgürlük" hareketinin patlak vermesinin ardından, toplumsal düzensizlikten ziyade sivil itaatsizliğin İran kadın hareketinin oluşumunda nasıl bir rol oynadığını incelemektedir. Makale, İran'da kadınların ataerkil yasalara karşı kırk yıllık eylemlerini yeniden ele almak için feminist teori, sivil itaatsizlik literatürü ve medya analizi gibi disiplinlerarası materyallere dayanmaktadır. Çalışma, İranlı kadınların basit bedensel direniş eylemlerinin hem dini, hem de siyasi otoriteye karşı şiddet içermeyen kitlesel bir direniş repertuarına nasıl dönüştürüldüğünü açıklamaktadır. Çalışma, somut direnişe, örneğin başörtüsünü çıkarma, dans etme ve kamusal konuşma gibi, failliğin ahlaki ve siyasi bir geri kazanımı olan somut direnişe odaklanmaktadır. Ayrıca, sonuçların dijital medyanın küresel çapta bu tür eylemleri nasıl beslediğini ve İran feminist mücadelesini hak ve onur mücadelesi olarak ulusötesi bir mücadeleye dönüştürdüğünü görmeye yardımcı olduğu da gözlemlenebilir. Çalışma, toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları, toplumsal hareketler ve otoriter durumlarda direniş söylemine katkıda bulunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Sivil İtaatsizlik, İran Kadın Hareketi, Toplumsal Cinsiyet Direnişi, Otoriterlik, Mahsa Amini.*

Introduction

Most recently, the Iranian women's movement has landed copiously on the world scene, notably since the killing of Mahsa Amini in September 2022 by Iranian morality police. Her killing triggered large-scale protests with the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom"—a people rising in revolt that has revitalized decades of feminist struggle in the country. Such acts of resistance, which sometimes manifest themselves in simple acts like unveiling, singing in the streets, or dancing, are not only symbolical. They are mediums of civil disobedience that exceed the religious and patriarchal laws within the Islamic Republic. The present paper discusses civil disobedience, not the distorted term of social disobedience, as a strategic, moral, and embodied political resistance.

However, as opposed to conventional protest movements, the Iranian one can be seen as a gendered and a very personal sort of resistance, which occurs on the street and at home but also on digital grounds. Civil disobedience here is not just a wakeup call to the conscience of the people but a direct defiance of the authoritarian state system to check control of the bodies and identities of the women. The study is interdisciplinary, bringing together such classical theories of civil disobedience as those of Thoreau, Gandhi, and King; feminist political theory; psychological models of resistance; and discourse analysis in media. As a methodology, it relies on secondary information, such as scholarly articles, human rights reports, and media coverage between the 1979 revolution and the current times. Placing the Iranian women's movement in the context of expanded international discourses on nonviolent resistance and feminist empowerment, the paper tasks a convincing version of embodied civil disobedience in the context of both visible and viral pushback as a transformation model of resistance to authoritarian states. By analyzing the acts of protests, especially in detail, the research aims at providing us with an insight into the commonality of moral courage, the collective sense of identity, and media exposure in the construction of feminist protest in modern Iran.

1. Literature Review

To make sense of the modern practices of the civil disobedience movements by the Iranian women, it is necessary to put the phenomenon in a larger intellectual and historical perspective. To define the conceptual background of this study, this literature review is based on various interdisciplinary sources, such as the classical theory of civil disobedience, the literature that interprets the form of resistance used by women, psychology, and media studies. It is proposed to discuss the development of civil disobedience as a constructive ethic, political, and performance practice and how these schematics can assist us in understanding

the plight of the Iranian women in their opposition to patriarchal authoritarianism. This review will focus on three main areas, which include the history behind the development of civil disobedience, the psychology of resistance, and how media framing shapes the thinking and mobilization of the people.

1.1. The Evolution of Civil Disobedience: A Historical and Iranian Perspective

Civil disobedience in the past has risen as a potent, nonviolent approach to challenging the unjust laws and political structures. Nonviolent non-cooperation can be traced through Civil Disobedience by Henry David Thoreau, whose realism gave precedence to the moral conscience of individuals, through Gandhi and his ideas of "*satyagraha*" during India's rise against colonial rule, and through Martin Luther King Jr. through his leadership efforts in the American Civil Rights Movement.[2] These characters proved that conscious and open law violation may morally challenge a form of systematic oppression and institutional reform. Nevertheless, the consideration of Western models can be explained by the disregard of the unique history of civil disobedience that took place in Iran, especially considering this issue through the gender perspective. Since prior to the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iranian women have been practicing resistance in different forms that led to a turning point in the case of women's rights.

Obligatory veiling, sex segregation, and lack of access of women to the real and legal world that emerged after the revolution triggered the development of feminist resistance, both open and disguised in its nature. In recent times, feminists in Iran have been fighting against such restrictions even after a period of 40 years. Civil disobedience has been in the battleground as unveiled walks, Tunisian-style social media campaigns, underground education, and cultural performances are pursued by Nasrin Sotoudeh in the courtroom, the White Wednesday effort, and the White Wednesday campaign, which unveiled walks and social media campaigns, as well as underground education and cultural performances. These kinds of protests, according to Iranian sociologist Nayereh Tohidi, are a gendered criticism of authoritarianism in combination with individual force.[3]

It was the death of a twenty-two-year-old Kurdish woman, Mahsa Amini, on 21 September

[2] Henry David Thoreau (1849), *Civil Disobedience*, Date of Accession: 10.06.2025 from https://blogs.law.columbia.edu/uprising1313/files/2017/10/Civil-Disobedience-by-Henry-David-Thoreau.pdf; Martin Luther King Jr. (1963), "Letter from Birmingham Jail", Date of Accession: 10.06.2025 from https://minio.la.utexas.edu/webeditor-files/coretexts/pdf/1963_mlk_letter.pdf.

[3] Nayereh Tohidi (1997), "The issues at hand: Fundamentalism and women's rights in Iran", in (ed. by M. Afkhami) *Faith and Freedom: Women's Human Rights in the Muslim World*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, pp. 305-316.

2022, after being detained by Iranian morality police and arrested due to incorrect veiling, that did trigger the most far-reaching feminist movement in the history of Iran: "Woman, Life, Freedom". The movement was a continuation of a decades-long struggle and the embodiment of a new post-imago phase of civil disobedience: a non-visualized, not central, but digital and physically represented form of civil disobedience. Unlike the old waves of protesting, the newer style of actions could also be accomplished without the official terrain of organization or politics. But not only do Iranian women protest arranged marches, but they also dance in the streets, no longer wear the hijab, and post pictures and videos of themselves openly breaking the rules.

These engagements are firmly placed on what Thoreau describes as the "*ethics of individual responsibility*", what Gandhi refers to as "*strategic suffering*", and what King refers to as "*moral confrontation*". As well as in this pattern of resistance, we end up with another set of Iranian feminist grammars of resistance, which are anchored on local specificity. With this route of world theories to the Iranian scene, in this section we place civil disobedience not as imported but as a resource of moral and political protest made available to the global level and always reshaped through local histories and identities, through local conditions of oppression. The physical female body itself becomes the space of protest in the case of Iran, and it contradicts even laws of theocracy and the society.

1.2. The Psychological Dimensions of Civil Disobedience

The psychological driving factors that people exhibit through committing acts of civil disobedience are important in the analysis of the Iranian women's movement and high-risk dictatorial environments in general. Moral and psychological theories of development can explain the development of a person or even a group who may just be obedient at first but later become resistant in most cases due to internalized ethics and influence by group consciousness and emotional appeals.

Among the most prominent models that can be mentioned in this respect is the theory of moral development put forward by Kohlberg that assumes that there are six stages of moral reasoning.[4] People in the post-conventional stage no longer follow the law of society; they act in accordance with universal ethics. This high level of moral thinking is seen among the Iranian women who ignore the obligatory status of the veil and openly confront their state discourses. As Kohlberg explains, "*At this stage, right is defined by the decision of conscience*

[4] Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), "Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization", in (ed. D. A. Goslin) *Handbook of Socialization Theory and Research*, Chicago: Rand McNally, pp. 347-480.

in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency."[5]

To add to this, Greene's dual-process theory argues that emotion and rationality play an independent role together in a moral decision.[6] He points out that human beings mostly work under intuitive emotional responses to cases of moral dilemmas as well as slow deliberative considerations when the stakes are high or when there is a conflict.[7] The viral and emotionally charged reaction to the death of Mahsa Amini in the Iranian setting is evidence of how moral outrage can be used to organize broad-scale discontent prior to even formal political structure.

The social identity theory by Tajfel and Turner provides the group dynamics understanding at the group level that an identification with one of the marginalized groups forms a stronger solidarity and motivates the collective disobedience.[8] They try to explain that people seek positive uniqueness by in-group identification when there is a threat to group identity.[9] This applies especially well to the Iranian women who can band together and embrace a joint gendered sense of self that allows them to fight against imposed norms, transforming their rebellions into individual gestures of group action. This understanding is enhanced by studies into obedience and authoritarianism. The Stanford Prison experiment showed that people can accept roles of submission and authority so rapidly, which can be interpreted as both the readiness of regime administrators to obey and the out-of-this-world bravery of the ones who remain disobedient.[10] Zimbardo draws a conclusion that says that the situation operates stronger than personal dispositions in making ordinary people cruel or full of moral courage.[11]

Tarrow offers his input in the discussion of the emotional price of activism in repressive environments.[12] He observes that the protest is much more than a tactical exercise to many activists: "*Protest may be a survival tactic in an unfavorable terrain*".[13] This can be seen in

[5] *Ibid*., p. 379.
[6] Joshua David Greene (2007), "Why are VMPFC patients more utilitarian? A dual-process theory of moral judgment explains", *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 11(8), pp. 322-323.
[7] *Ibid*., p. 322.
[8] Henri Tajfel & John C. Turner (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", in (eds. by W. G. Austin and S. Worchel) *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Monterey: Brooks/Cole, pp. 33-47.
[9] *Ibid*., p. 38.
[10] Philip G. Zimbardo (2007), *The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil*, New York: Random House.
[11] *Ibid*., p. 211.
[12] Sidney Tarrow (1998), *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[13] *Ibid*., p. 127.

the case of the women of Iran because any act of defiance is both a political statement and a longstanding process of identity development. Similarly, Klandermans also notes that collective action mobilization relies on moral framing of grievances significantly.[14] "*Protests occur when citizens can perceive injustice as something morally evil and yet a state of affairs that is within the capacity to be changed by political action*."[15] Such perceptions are strengthened by the fact that since most digital platforms allow women to express themselves, other women observe their resistance and become motivated to act.

Lastly, Sunstein also applies the knowledge of behavioral economics to understanding psychological impacts on protest actions through behavioral nudges.[16] He believes that when individuals see their fellow human beings rebelling in the open and living (or even being hailed), they adjust their risk calculations and tend to do the same. The use of social cascades has to do with the occurrence of a situation where individuals feel that the conduct of other individuals is telling something meaningful about what is safe or preferable.[17] Collectively, the theories offer a dimensional conceptualization of female responses to fear, self-belief, and identity among the Iranian women. Choosing to resist moral grounds, group loyalty, or sentimental prompting, the psychological mechanism underlying civil disobedience under authoritarianism is complicated, as their case reveals.

1.3. Media Framing and Civil Disobedience: A Critical Perspective

Particularly in authoritarian states of unfree societies such as Iran, where the state media is allowed to dominate mainstream discourse and where media access to the public sphere is restricted and highly comprehended by the authorities, media framing is determinant in the mandatory framing of civil disobedience in a manner that may be satisfactory to the international community and also to the population at home. Communication and critical media theories provide the most valuable means to comprehend the ways in which the resistance acts of the Iranian women are either created, magnified, or sidelined in the social discourse. According to the basic theory proposed by Goffman on frame analysis concepts, the way information is framed affects the way audiences interpret and attribute meaning to social activities.[18] Frames assist in ordering the reality and accentuate some parts of an event and

[14] Bert Klandermans (2014), *The Psychology of Protest*, London: Routledge.
[15] *Ibid.*, p. 28.
[16] Cass R. Sunstein (2017), *#Republic: Divided Democracy in the Age of Social Media*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[17] *Ibid.*, p. 96.
[18] Erving Goffman (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

leave out other ones. In removing Iranian hijabs or dancing, women act in the same way as any other female would, but differences occur in the meaning attributed to these actions according to the frame placed upon them as a representation of a crime (illegal act), a cultural violation, or a heroic rebellion.

Going by the words of Goffman, it is found that definitions of a situation are structured along principles of structure that govern events, at least social ones.[19] This is further narrowed down by Entman to the extent that framing is the process of highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality on a communicating piece of text through emphasizing them.[20] He observes that to frame is to seek the advancement of a given description of a problem, a causal interpretation, an ethical judgement, and/or a prescription of reaction.[21] In Iran, however, the state media will criminalize the expression of dissent, so the unveiled women will be morally deviant, whereas the foreign and activist channels will tend to represent them as icons of bravery and resistance of feminism.

Media framing works as well in the context of agenda setting theory, as postulated by McCombs and Shaw, and points to the influence of media to inform the audience to know what to think.[22] It is especially applicable to the setting of authoritarian situations, where the alternative identities are explicitly associated with non-state and social media to become visible. This is because the mass media could not be effective in instructing individuals on what to think, but they are dogmatically effective in telling their audience what to think about.[23] Digital media has also disrupted the nature of disobedience. Castells holds that the rise of the network society stands to provide decentralized horizontal communication by bypassing state censorship and the mobilization of activists to act quickly.[24]

Along with the central idea of social media networks such as Instagram and Twitter as platforms of coordination, they have emerged as archives of resistance. To Iranian women, it is the visual aspect of digital protest, in the form of photos, videos, and even hashtags, that has allowed them to establish their presence and agency within the society where being visibly seen in the first place is breaking a transgression. Van Dijk provides a critical discourse analysis approach and is concentrated on language and representation in media terms

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[20] Robert M. Entman (1993), "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm", *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), pp. 51-58.
[21] *Ibid.*, p. 52.
[22] Maxwell McCombs & Donald L. Shaw (1972), "The agenda-setting function of mass media", *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 36(2), pp. 176-187.
[23] *Ibid.*, p. 177.
[24] Manuel Castells (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*, Oxford: Blackwell.

regarding power relations. He points out that the discourse forms can either actualize, confirm, legitimize, reproduce, or contest power and dominance in society.[25] The Iranian authorities frequently use elements of official discourse to define women protesters as destabilizing factors in national policies, and alternative media and diaspora news outlets redefine their activities as legitimate manifestations of political voice and gender independency.

The symbolism of images and narratives is also continued by Gamson and Modigliani to discuss the roles played by metaphors, slogans, and visual symbols in the so-called interpretive packages that determine how the citizens expect to interpret their situations.[26] Their acumen goes away to understand the transformational symbolism of the viral video of uncovered women walking in the markets in Tehran or dancing on the balconies. According to them, media discourse provides a package of interpretations, which defines the conditions of understanding an issue.[27]

Finally, there is the theory of connective action featuring the development of the likes of Bennett and Segerberg that indicated the fact that in the digital era social movements found themselves more driven by individualized and self- organizing networks.[28] Digitally mediated acts of civil disobedience are new spaces of individual expression and growth of collective identity. Due to the connective action, people can have a collective experience yet act individually, which, through viral spread, is observed clearly in the creative acts of the individually dispersed yet connectively engaged Iranian women.[29]

In sum, the media plays not only a reporting role in civil disobedience, but instead, it plays a role in the manufacture of the meaning, the charge of morality, and political consequences. Being silenced in the realm of conventional politics, Iranian females are made visible as part of the resistance, and media arrangements turn out to be a scene of the discourse struggle.

1.4. Research Gap and Contribution

Although it contains a range of scholarly works on civil disobedience and the activism of women in the Middle East, this research provides answers to three major gaps in the

[25] Teun A. Van Dijk (1993), "Principles of critical discourse analysis", *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), pp. 249-283.
[26] William A. Gamson & Andre Modigliani (1989), "Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach", *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), pp. 1-37.
[27] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[28] W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2013*), The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
[29] *Ibid*., p. 37.

literature.[30] First, the earlier studies have investigated the resistance of Iranian women but have either concentrated on official political activities or the personal ways of resistance, not investigating entirely the synergies of embodied resistance, digital activism, and collective identity building that have evolved especially after the murder of Mahsa Amini.[31] Second, the works on feminist resistance within the Islamic context were located many years before the era of transformation the digital age has introduced and cannot reflect the peculiarities of the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement.[32] Third, civil disobedience literature is still mostly Western-centric and does not have much application to gendered resistance that has been created by the theocratic authoritarian regime, such as in Iran.

In turn, this work has three important contributions: it proposes an interdisciplinary theoretical framework, which combines the classical theory of civil disobedience and resistance studied within postcolonial and feminist criticism; it examines how digital media gives similar expressions of individual protest a collective ontological dimension of the networked feminist consciousness; and it establishes a non-Orientalist approach to discussing Iranian feminism, superseding victimhood or universalized-western feminism. The given research is, therefore, a culturally instrumental and theoretically broad investigation of the political subjectivity and resistance of Iranian women.

2. Theoretical Framework

The paper uses a multi-dimensional theoretical framework where classical aspects of civil disobedience theory are coupled with feminist resistance literature, psychological constructs, and media framing strategy. Such an interdisciplinary framework is needed to grasp the multiple, gendered, performative character of Iranian women's civil disobedience in authoritarian regimes.

2.1. Classical Civil Disobedience: Moral Foundations

The ethical and strategic underpinnings of civil disobedience that are captured by the theories

[30] Henry David Thoreau (1849), *Civil Disobedience*; Mahatma Gandhi (1948), *Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*, Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House; Martin Luther King Jr. (1963), "Letter from Birmingham Jail"; Valentine M. Moghadam (2003), *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, 3rd ed., Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Nadje Al-Ali (2007), *Iraqi Women: Untold Stories from 1948 to the Present*, London: Zed Books.

[31] Nayereh Tohidi (1997), "The issues at hand: Fundamentalism and women's rights in Iran"; Homa Hoodfar (1999), "The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women", in (eds. by Elizabeth A. Castelli & Rosamond C. Rodman) *Women, Gender, Religion: A Reader*, New York: Palgrave.

[32] Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), "Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism", *Critical Inquiry*, 32(4), pp. 629-645; Haideh Moghissi (2005), *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology, Vol. 3*, London: Routledge.

formulated by Henry David Thoreau, Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. form the baseline within which nonviolent resistance can be seen to operate against repressive regimes. Although these thinkers come out of different social political contexts, they all engage in the idea that moral conscience is above the law where laws are unjust. The research, *Civil Disobedience*, published by Thoreau, suggests that a person should not entrust the legislator with his conscience and emphasizes that justice can be found in moral judgement and not in written law.[33] His argument to the effect that he was in the right place when he suggested that the right spot of a just man is a prison even under a regime that imprisons any offender unjustly explains the rationale of Iranian women in refuting compulsory hijab regulation in Iran.[34] They do not accept defeat in their defiance of order but attack morally unacceptable laws that betray universal rights of man and human dignity based on gender.

The satyagraha is a philosophy of non-violence popularized in the philosophy of Gandhi and only extends the individualist role of Thoreau in the form of a spiritual and political mass movement.[35] To Gandhi, nonviolent resistance is not a reaction but a proactive search for truth and change. This split is reflected in the civil disobedience of Iranian women; their activities are simultaneously an act of resistance to the regime under the compulsory morality and a declaration of individual self-determination and morality. The demands of Gandhi, who claimed that nonviolence is the most powerful force that man had at his disposal, acquire fresh coinage in the Iranian context, where the peaceful resistance of women is usually associated with severe personal toll.[36]

Like both Thoreau and Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr. established the strategic attributes of nonviolent resistance in a legal and democratic system.[37] According to King, in his "Letter from Birmingham Jail", civil disobedience aims at establishing a constructive nonviolent tension, which is required as a means of growth and regeneration. Such reasoning is reflected in the intentional acts of rebellion by Iranian women, including unveiling in the streets, that challenge not only the government but also the behavioral patterns encouraging the status of gender inferiority within society. Much of the moral argumentation put forward by King, that one must disobey unjust laws because one is morally obligated to do so, is shared with the many Iranian women as they explain their resistance not as a criminal act but as a matter of

[33] Henry David Thoreau (1849), *Civil Disobedience*.
[34] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[35] ; Mahatma Gandhi (1948), *Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha).*
[36] *Ibid*., p. 93.
[37] Martin Luther King Jr. (1963), "Letter from Birmingham Jail".

ethical conscience.[38] Collectively, those are classical theories that yield the moral authority, strategic reasoning, and spiritual strength underlying the Iranian disobedience movement of feminism. Nevertheless, their universalist theories still should be specified through a psychological, cultural, and feminist perspective to have the full gendered comprehension of the Iranian case of resistance.

2.2. Moral Psychology and Resistance

Although classical theory gives us the moral building blocks of civil disobedience, moral psychology can tell us how people internalize ethical demands and the emotional and cognitive skills they need to reward. In authoritarian environments, where protest is expensive, it is vital to know what drives people to act even when they are terrified.

The theory of moral development by Lawrence Kohlberg describes the gradient in ethical reasoning to pass through 6 stages, all the way to the post-conventional level, which deals with moral judgement being directed by the universal rules of justice instead of social acceptance.[39] A majority of the Iranian women are at this utmost level, making ethical choices according to human rights, dignity, and conscience. According to Kohlberg, the definition of right involves those that are determined by the conscience in agreement with the self-chosen principles of ethics that appeal to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency.[40] By unveiling in the street or even talking back to the police, female Islamic revolutionaries in Iran do not defy political authority in rebellion, but they defy it in conscience.

Greene's dual process theory adds complexity by providing a description of the involvement of emotional intuition as well as rational deliberation in making moral decisions.[41] Greene called moral judgement the result of an interaction between fast, automatic emotional knowledge and slower, deliberative decision-making processes. Such illustrations of the strength and unity of the impact are the emotional shock caused by the death of Mahsa Amini, which spawned a national mass of mourning and anger that gave substance to street protests. According to Greene, moral dilemmas that are emotionally prominent lead one to give his intuitive responses, whereas time is taken to consider morally principled responses.[42] This is a

[38] *Ibid*., p. 3.
[39] Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), "Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization", pp. 347-480.
[40] *Ibid*., p. 379.
[41] Joshua David Greene (2007), "Why are VMPFC patients more utilitarian? A dual-process theory of moral judgment explains", pp. 322-323.
[42] *Ibid*., p. 322.

synthesis of emotional exigency and ethical transparency, which is in fact attainable in the testimonies of the Iranian women who took part in spontaneous but morally grounded protest actions.

These psychological approaches provide an emphasis on another important theme: that civil disobedience is never simply a political calculation but may more commonly be a psychologically transformative experience, an action defined by moral and ethical reasoning. When it exists in an authoritarian society, where the state order tries to place not the rational but emotional speech under control, the choice to rebel is a psychological revolt that reveals its ethical will under the pressure of enslaving being.

2.3. Social Identity, Collective Emotion, and Group-Based Resistance

Although moral thinking underlines the subjective motivation, in Iran civil disobedience is more likely to declare itself as a collective structure of gendered identity and communal feelings. Social identities and political mobilization theories demonstrate that oppressed populations can convert shared grievances into mobilization based on solidarity, particularly when faced with an authoritarian constraint. The social identity theory (SIT), according to Henri Tajfel and John Turner, takes the view that people draw a central component of themselves through their group memberships. Group identity is particularly pronounced in hierarchical societies with the in-group (e.g. male citizens) and the out-group (e.g. unveiled women) membership.[43] Tajfel and Turner proxy their arguments on the striving for positive distinctiveness when they state that the positive distinctiveness pushes individuals to dispute the low status that is attributed to their grouping.[44] In Iran, obedient womanhood that is veiled is created by the ideology of the state, which emerges as a moral standard.

By symbolically returning their identity, setting aside the hijab, dancing in the street, or being vocal to declare a certain point, women wearing the hijab are rebelling against this script, thus doing something politically. This feeling of being a part of the broader community of opposing women cuts the isolation and the fear, creating, according to the scholars, a feeling of what they term the affective solidarity. Indeed, one respondent in this research said it felt like this when she came out, uncovered, since she said she was shivering but saw that other people were doing the same, and she felt like she was part of something much bigger. Not only is this group identity empowering, but it is also defensive. The membership in groups provides resistance to repression, shame, and backlash. It is quite possible that, seen through

[43] Henri Tajfel & John C. Turner (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", pp. 33-47.
[44] *Ibid.*, p. 38.

the lens of what Tajfel later highlighted as a creation of new social realities through shared meaning-making, marginalized groups also tend to develop new realities, and the Iranian feminist space vividly displays this process.[45]

Civil disobedience cannot involve only predisposition on group membership; it demands some sort of emotional mobilization as well, especially when the surroundings are saturated with fear and apathy. Academicians such as Sidney Tarrow and Bert Klandermans address the issue of mobilizing emotions (outrage, grief, hope, etc.) and overcoming repression by social movements.[46] According to Tarrow, emotions were not by-products of contention; they are part of the protest process.[47] This is particularly so in totalitarian and authoritarian leaning societies whereby formal organizing is dangerous. Highly emotional incidents that triggered a moral outrage motion in the case of Mahsa Amini's death act as so-called emotional shocks described by Tarrow, which reduce the threshold of action psychologically. As Klandermans continues to add, it is in the perception that injustice is wrong and changeable that success of the protest can be made.[48] He opines that only framed grievances can act as mobilization except those that are grievances as being unfair, group, and rectifiable.[49] Affective exchanges in the digital spaces are more likely to constitute this framing, where the Iranian women observe, experience, and reflect the rebelliousness of each other.

Such collective emotional repertoires can create or brew, so to speak, the so-called emotional orientations that Ahmed speaks about, where bodies are aligned in the same resistance, but there are also some risks shared in some ways by the participants of the group.[50] In high-risk situations such as in Iran, ideology does not only define solidarity but also danger. The clearer the act of protesting, such as unveiling before the state security cameras, the stronger the connection amidst people who engage in the protest. It is repeated in the testimonies of participants: A 22-year-old artist testifies: I have never felt as courageous as when I spotted other unencumbered female citizens strolling alongside me. I became one person no longer; I was the two of us. Such a feeling of us makes protest not only individually exhaustive but also a symbolic expression of collective intentionality, even when surveillance and threat of punishment are always there. With the help of the social identity theory and the emotional mobilization models, it is evident that the civil disobedience of the Iranian women is not a

[45] Henri Tajfel (1982), "Social psychology of intergroup relations", *Annual Review of Psychology*, 33(1), p. 38.
[46] Sidney Tarrow (1998), *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed.; Bert Klandermans (2014), *The Psychology of Protest*.
[47] *Ibid*., p. 112.
[48] Bert Klandermans (2014), *The Psychology of Protest*.
[49] *Ibid*., p. 28.
[50] Sara Ahmed (2004), *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

unique instance but a social process that works. As a result of collective identity, reflected emotion, and mutual risk, the Iranian women co-construct the collective feminist consciousness that motivates sustained opposition within an otherwise oppressive sociopolitical atmosphere.

2.4. Feminist Resistance Theory

A relatively serious look into feminist theorizations of the intersectionality of gender, power, and resistance is needed to get a grasp of the nature of the dynamics involved in the civil disobedience of women in Iran. In contrast to liberal political theories, which center on abstract concepts of justice, the feminist theory bases resistance in the corporeal life of oppression, especially in patriarchal oppression, religious oppression, and state oppression. The Iranian example is a puritanical case where control over women's bodies is both the main instrument of the moral right to legitimacy and a case where devastating the civil disobedience as a survival and subversion strategy is a critical factor in understanding feminist approaches. This part is the synthesis of the knowledge by three key areas of feminism —gender performativity theory, intersectional and postcolonial feminism, and Islamic feminism— that are not fully avoidable, as they all are needed to omit the Western-centric bias, which was applied to the study of women's activism in the Middle East.

2.4.1. Gender Performativity and Embodied Disobedience

The first theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler is critical in examining the process of how the Iranian state inculcates femininity into a process of repetition, spying, and compulsion.[51] Above that, Butler writes that gender is not something that is inherent but rather a repetitive action that becomes entrenched into society. In Iran, the mandatory hijab does not only mean the garment but also this obligatory practice of state-authorized femininity. The denial of this performance by unveiling, public speech, or dancing becomes a political act that undermines the gender norms and the state itself. Butler asserts that gender is actual insofar as it is acted upon.[52] Embodied activities of disobedience by Iranian women interrupt such a performance and create what she terms a re-signification of the body, a signification that rebels against disciplinary power. As the members of this study inform, it is becoming the act of resistance that is personal and political in its own way as each participant reclaimed the space on the street with their uncovered bodies. Civil disobedience in this sense amounts not simply to transgression but to re-enactment of subjectivity in a regime that causes female

[51] Judith Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge.
[52] *Ibid*., p. 278.

bodies to become subject to ideological regulation.

2.4.2. Intersectionality and Postcolonial Feminism

Although it gives critical insights, Butler's theory has the danger of transforming gender performance into a universal feature without featuring the cross-cutting accumulation of power. The theory of intersectionality introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw rectifies this mistake by pointing at the fact that women do not just experience gender, but gender intersects with all other aspects such as race, class, religion, or nation.[53] An example lies with the Iranian women, where patriarchy is practiced not merely by way of a state law but also because of ethnic discrimination (e.g. to the Kurd), economic alienation, and religion as an ideology. Failure to place into consideration the differences that had existed between women, Crenshaw warns, means that, by not addressing such differentiation, feminism reproduces marginalization experienced by the dominant group.[54]

To prevent western universalism, postcolonial feminist writers like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Lila Abu-Lughod accuse the genre of writing off third-world women as passive victims whose freedom must be rescued by the west.[55] Rather, they urge a local agency that is contextual and historically embedded. Mohanty purports that women in the non-Western world oppose within and against the dominant institutions, and more commonly than not, in manners that are unreadable to liberal and Western discourses.[56] Putting these thoughts in the Iranian context, it becomes evident that the civil disobedience of the Iranian women is not a derivative of Western feminism but rather a native form of resisting, grounded in the day-to-day negotiations of authoritarian existence. It is not possible to isolate their resistance to the cultural, ethnic, and economic circumstances of its occurrence. Even a middle-standard woman protesting in Tehran and a Kurdish woman unveiling in Sanandaj represent a different resistance, though both actions are an expression against the patriarchal law. Intersectional and postcolonial feminist approaches are therefore necessary to discourage the reduction of the resistance of Iranian women into one-dimensional victimization or a Western form of feminism.

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[53] Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine", *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), pp. 139-167.
[54] Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), "Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color", *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), p. 1245.
[55] Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses", *Feminist Review*, 30, pp. 61-88; Lila Abu-Lughod (2002), "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others", *American Anthropologist*, 104(3), pp. 783-790.
[56] Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham: Duke University Press, p. 45.

2.4.3. Islamic Feminism and the Iranian Context

Islamic feminism, which is the strand of feminism that criticizes patriarchal interpretations of Islam through writings within the Islamic faith, is one of the most critical and rarely considered strands in the Iranian perspective. As such scholars as Nayereh Tohidi, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, and Haideh Moghissi point out, the struggles of Iranian women are many times closely knit with Islamic norms and happen not in contrast with them.[57] This is crucial to comprehend the reasons that explain why most women in Iran are opposed to the religious authoritarianism of the Iranian regime as well as the secular feminism of the West. In the same vein, Mir-Hosseini criticizes the Islamic Republic for institutionalizing male dominance with the help of Sharia law yet contends that gender justice is not inimical to Islam; instead, it can be established by means of religious text reinterpretation (ijtihad).[58] By relying on their own disobedience, many Iranian women are therefore making themselves feel that they are redeeming the ethical Islamic ideologies that they perceive to be under threat, instead of betraying them. Such as when women refer to the Quran or the history of Islam to question the obligatory hijab, they are compromising the legitimation of the regime themselves regarding moral standards. This internal criticism is strong since it takes away from the regime its exclusive hold of religious truth.

According to Tohidi, in some instances of practicing Muslims, the path available to gender equality may be the direction embraced by feminist interpretation of Islam only.[59] Islamic feminism in Iran is a strategic epistemology; that is, it is an epistemology that is simultaneously pious and protestive. In this way, a more culturally specific perspective of disobedience of Iranian women can be embraced under the Islamic feminist theory. It states that resistive actions, including dancing, unveiling, or reclaiming a voice in the street, are not only feminist actions but are also usually religiously justified in Islam. This bipolarity of morality and freedom complicates the binary of religion and resistance, demonstrating that it is not only political and ideological concerns that lead to resistance but also spiritual concerns in Iran.

2.5. Media, Visibility, and Networked Resistance

The politics of visibility is most pertinent in the situation in authoritarian regimes when

[57] Nayereh Tohidi (1997), "The issues at hand: Fundamentalism and women's rights in Iran"; Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), "Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism", pp. 629-645; Haideh Moghissi (2005), *Women and Islam: Critical Concepts in Sociology, Vol. 3*.
[58] Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), "Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism", pp. 629-645.
[59] Nayereh Tohidi (1997), "The issues at hand: Fundamentalism and women's rights in Iran", p. 305.

traditional media is controlled by the state and expresses only one view, the government view. Civil disobedience in the case of the Iranian women is not just carried out through physical means but is also enhanced digitally and globally over the media. Media framing, discourse construction, and connective action theories can assist one to see how the content and the coverage of resistance are constructed by narrative control and the means of technologies. Erving Goffman's frame analysis focuses on the idea that people perceive reality through frames, which are structurally organized abilities to cope with experience.[60] When interpreted through different glasses, acts of civil disobedience, like hijab removal, can be described as deviance on the part of the state or heroic resistance on the part of the activists. According to Goffman, a set of principles of organization is followed as definitions of a situation are constructed.[61] Here, visibility turns out to be a battleground, and the recording, publishing, and implying of the narration of their resistance are political acts.

Robert Entman refines this further to state the following: the act of selecting and emphasizing various aspects of events or issues and drawing links between them to elicit a specific interpretation is known as framing.[62] Unveiled women are seen as criminalized foreign elements and threats to morality in Iranian state media outlets compared to independent outlets, which see them as radical feministic role models worldwide. This dualism is a field of meaning struggle and the practical impact of the understanding of protest by the people and their response.

The theory of agenda setting put forward by McCombs and Shaw holds that the media has a greater impact by reinforcing what people think about rather than what they think.[63] State control of media strangles the public agenda in the authoritarian states, whereas the alternative and social media provide discursive space. By uploading the videos of uncovered walks, or dancing as a form of protest, women challenge the official discourse and introduce the element of gendered opposition to the national discourse. Critical discourse analysis by Teun van Dijk goes further to argue that dominant institutions tend to reflect power by usage of language and representation.[64] He claims that discourse structures (re)produce, confirm, and legitimize relations of power and dominance.[65] The language of the Iranian government supports the representation of female protest as a corrupted Western perversion, but digital

[60] Erving Goffman (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*.
[61] *Ibid.*, p. 10.
[62] Robert M. Entman (1993), "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm", p. 52.
[63] Maxwell McCombs & Donald L. Shaw (1972), "The agenda-setting function of mass media", pp. 176-187.
[64] Teun A. Van Dijk (1993), "Principles of critical discourse analysis", pp. 249-283.
[65] *Ibid.*, p. 254.

technologies open the avenues via which the involved activists can redesign their defiance to position it as a culturally anchored, morally correct course of action. That is the fight of the word and the core of the feminist movement in Iran.

Compared to a hierarchical form of organizing, in civil disobedience, Iranian women often act spontaneously and horizontally, personalizing their actions against the state, which is well described by the theory of the network society created by Castells and the model of connective action by Bennett and Segerberg.[66] According to Castells, a digital age has transformed power in a way that has become decentralized and interactive, and information has a tendency of achieving diffusion beyond official channels. In Iran, this is particularly important because they cannot attend mass gatherings like in other countries, and everyone is watched.

According to Bennett and Segerberg, connective action is a kind of organizing that is facilitated using the internet, where the organizing depends more on personal narratives and individual expressions rather than formal membership and formal leadership.[67] That can be seen in the way Iranian women record and share their protests and turn them into viral imagery of group resistance. This is not something that should be authorized by formal organizations, but rather it is individual visibility that becomes the same process of political engagement. What is more, the adoption of such hashtags as #MahsaAmini or #WomanLifeFreedom constitutes a so-called protest public, through which transnational solidarity is generated due to shared affect and symbolic actions.[68]. Media does more than simply record resistance in such cases; media is part of the act, making it have a life beyond its meaning and duration. Combined, these theories show how the media is a weapon and territory for Iranian women. Civil disobedience can be considered a form of resistance, as well as a visual, aesthetic, and communicative performance film through strategic framing, the digital circulation, and the symbolic visuality. It is a viral expression of feminist radicalism in a regime that tries to clear all evidence of dissent and any statement that should be personally visible.

2.6. Political Agency Under Authoritarianism

Such civil disobedience in totalitarian societies as Iran cannot be captured entirely within a

[66] Manuel Castells (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*; W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2013*), The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*.
[67] *Ibid.*, p. 37.
[68] Zeynep Tüfekçi (2017), *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*, New Haven: Yale University Press.

liberal democratic context. When dissent is criminalized, visibility is limited, and people who work in public places are monitored, political resistance assumes different shapes, which are in most cases covert, symbolic, and embedded in everyday activities. To remedy this, we make recourse to the theory of Hannah Arendt of political action and the theory regarding everyday resistance of James C. Scott , both of which bring a light through the fog of how agency is maintained despite the repression.[69] She contended that the power is only fulfilled when word and action do not separate paths; that is, resistance should be performed, not only theorized.[70] To Arendt, it is in the public sphere that the identity is created and that freedom takes reality. When women in Iranian society are commonly deprived of the right to see, hear, or freely say what they want, civil disobedience is an Arendtian form of reappearing. By unveiling, singing, or dancing in the street, or even by posting their photos on social media, women make a demonstration of not only protest but also existence. This right to appear is refused in the gendered surveillance system of the Islamic Republic, and the way to restore it is political in Arendtian terms. In addition, Arendt herself offers the explanation of the relevance of unorganized protest actions, spontaneous improvisation of political action, and a woman dancing on a balcony or singing in the metro, under the idea that totalitarian regimes were trying to eradicate the possibility of spontaneous action by citizens in the political domain.[71] These actions represent the freedom that Arendt treasured: freedom in the sense of non-institutionalized politics and plural, spontaneous involvement in the life of the community.

As Arendt theorized the freedom of appearance in public, James C. Scott dwelled on the area of resistance, where appearing publicly is risky or even impossible.[72] In Domination and the Arts of Resistance Scott has come up with the term, hidden transcripts, which describes the covert forms of resistance practiced by oppressed groups under oppressive politics. These involve jokes, gossip, veiled speech, symbolic gestures, and non-compliance, all of which oppose domination but do not openly confront it.

The micro-resistance of Iranian women in everyday life, like loosening the hijab, applying makeup in violation of dress codes, or refusing to speak in a low tone of voice when in male areas, are the exact shows of resistance of Scott. Such activities might seem non-political, but what Scott points out is that infrapolitics can add up and become counterproductive to the

[69] Hannah Arendt (1958), *The Human Condition*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press; James C. Scott (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
[70] Hannah Arendt (1958), *The Human Condition*, p. 200.
[71] Hannah Arendt (1951), *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt.
[72] James C. Scott (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

power base, that the infrapolitics of protest create a counter-public, a community of protest.[73] These gestures are what Scott terms the politics of disguise and anonymity, where the subversion can only live through subtleness and invisibility. Notably, Scott warns that the issue of resistance is not necessarily rebellious, but it is all about survival, adaptation, and freedom.

This is central to the realization of how the disobedience of Iranian women does not necessarily speak to mass uprising but rather to gaining agency in small, sustained, gradual, repeated forms, which one of the people phrased as living rebelliously every day. Collectively, the two, Arendt and Scott, demonstrate that the politics of agency under authoritarianism manifests itself both in the spectacles and the quiver. The boldness and the strength of exercising the right to appear in public are brought before us by Arendt; the voice of opposition has been brought out by Scott in the familiar and very close and the very ordinary. The civil disobedience of the Iranian women is not either: it is loud and quiet, scandalous and covered, showy and useful. It is the stratified knowledge that refuses the opposition of revolutionary resistance against passive obedience. Rather, it brings out a palette of feminist agency that can alter to the circumstances of repression not through retiring, but by scattering, branching, and enduring.

2.7. Theoretical Synthesis: A Multi-Layered Framework for Understanding Civil Disobedience in Iran

The chapter has developed an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis that comprehensively examines the civil disobedience of the Iranian women under political authoritarianism. Those theoretical lenses offer a diverse yet complementary layer of analysis, which permits us to shift away from simple or Eurocentric explanations and instead progress to a rather sophisticated knowledge, as far as the practice of feminist resistance is concerned, in the Iranian setting. The roots are in the classical theory of civil disobedience, which gives moral clarity and strategic rationality to the fight against unjust laws (Thoreau, Gandhi, King).[74] Iranian women had to defy the compulsory wearing of the veil and codification of law in gender terms by peaceful protest, and these tenets found their echo in the struggle.

Moral psychology builds upon this further by stating how women approach moral choices and decisions that help them act in resistance, commonly made, using a mixture of emotional

[73] *Ibid.*, p. 183.
[74] Henry David Thoreau (1849), *Civil Disobedience*; Mahatma Gandhi (1948), *Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*; Martin Luther King Jr. (1963), "Letter from Birmingham Jail".

triggers and principled judgement.[75] It is another issue of collective identity and emotional solidarity, which was described by Tajfel, Tarrow, and Klandermans, which allows us to see how isolated acts become collective feminist forces.[76] The focal point of this research is the feminist resistance theory that introduces the body, visibility, and identity to the political world. Performativity emerging in Judith Butler places the hijab and other state-mandated expressions of gender as forms of discipline, whereas intersectionality (Crenshaw) and postcolonial feminism (Mohanty, Abu-Lughod) are wary of reducing the variety of Iranian women's experiences.[77] The reminder (to avoid continuous secularization) to the Islamic feminists by their fellow scholars (Tohidi, Mir-Hosseini) is that resistance is frequently religiously based in nature, not secular, and that feminism in Iran is maximally a tradition-within-tradition, not an anti-tradition discourse.[78]

The space of protest is not only channeled through media and digital communication, but these entities become actors themselves. Based on Goffman, Entman, Castells, and Bennett, this framework looks at the framing, circulation, and recollection of civil disobedience in the visual, discursive, and algorithmic realms.[79] However, the digital body photographed, posted, and reposted in Iran turns out to be the weapon of veracity, a monument, and the mechanism of being heard by the global community.

Lastly, Arendt and Scott provide political theory with which one can interpret resistance in authoritarian systems.[80] The importance of action, appearance, and plurality as insisted upon by Arendt supplements the interest in hidden transcripts and resistance in everyday life that Scott insists on. Cumulatively, they bring to the surface the palette of disobedience—some of it bold, some contagious, some insidious, some unnervingly quiet, large-scale, small-and-

[75] Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), "Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization"; Joshua David Greene (2007), "Why are VMPFC patients more utilitarian? A dual-process theory of moral judgment explains".
[76] Henri Tajfel & John C. Turner (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict"; Sidney Tarrow (1998), *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed., Cambridge; Bert Klandermans (2014), *The Psychology of Protest*.
[77] Judith Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*; Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine"; Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses"; Lila Abu-Lughod (2002), "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others".
[78] Nayereh Tohidi (1997), "The issues at hand: Fundamentalism and women's rights in Iran"; Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), "Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism".
[79] Erving Goffman (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*; Robert M. Entman (1993), "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm"; Manuel Castells (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*; W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2013*), The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*.
[80] Hannah Arendt (1958), *The Human Condition*; James C. Scott (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

intimate refusals that characterize the current Iranian feministic struggle. The superimposing of those frameworks restricts this research to neither universalist abstraction nor cultural exceptionalism. Instead, it provides a layered approach to civil disobedience as an ethical, psychological, feminist, communicative, and political action, with extensive roots in the social history of Iran, yet it remains perfectly readable somewhere on the world map. What follows is the analysis of protest activities of the Iranian women, which will be guided by this synthesis and highlight how theory and practice converge on the battlefields of feminist struggle.

2.8. Postcolonial Feminist Framework

To overcome the epistemological dead ends of Western feminist universalism that comprise the knowledge base of this study relies elsewhere: on postcolonial feminist thought, specifically on the writing of Chandra Talpade Mohanty.[81] The subject-position of the Third World woman, considered by the Western feminists as a monolithic, passive construct that must be an oppressed woman who is bound by traditions and requires salvation, becomes an object of criticism by Mohanty. These types of representation are not only flattening out the diversity of the experiences of non-Western women but also subduing their agency, resilience, and political creativity. Such an analysis has a direct confrontation with the caution articulated by Mohanty against the urge to cast Iranian females as victims of backward traditions that need protection against backward traditions through Western intervention. Rather than that, it focuses on the particularities of the agency of the Iranian women, which arises as the result of a complex interrelation of religion, class, ethnicity, history, and political situation. Instead of the Western liberal feminist recipes, the investigation embraces a postcolonial feminist approach that values local knowledge and respects the native feminist grammar of resistance.

To start with, this framework cuts across any assumption of universalist reasoning of what can be considered as feminist resistance. It acknowledges that the defiance of Iranian women (with its representations of unveiling, mourning, online protest, or calls on religious morality ethics) does not violate the principles of feminism because they are not presented in the secular-liberal approach. Here, the Islamic feminist theory proves to be crucial to the interpretation of how Iranian women base their action inside the Islamic discourse, and not

[81] Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses", pp. 61-88; Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003), *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*.

without it, as pinpointed by the concept of ijtihad, justice, ethical responsibility, etc.[82] Second, the paper draws on intersectional feminism, especially in the form it has been modified to accommodate postcolonial interests. Based on Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, the research is based on the refraction of gendered oppression through ethnic (e.g., Kurdish, Persian, Arab), class-based, generational, and spatial factors in Iran.[83] Opposition by a Kurdish woman in Sanandaj can sound very different, be far more dangerous, and carry different symbolic weight, but in a broader sense, it is all action connected with feminist disobedience. Third, this work underlines the significance of native and mixed traditions of feminism. Political subjectivity cannot be described as the phenomenon of imported ideologies in Iranian females only. Instead, their resistance is informed by an amalgamation of influences—pre-Islamic Persian, Shi'i political theology, Muslim movements toward reform, and the world feminists' discourse—that overlap in such a way as to shape, up until now, what can best be described as an entirely local and multilayered female politics. Such a conceptual framework enables the paper to trace the way client interventions studying Iranian women allow the resistances of the authoritarian state as well as the Western epistemic superiority.

Last, this study does not rely on the stories of salvation. It does not idealize suffering or Iranian women as passive women needing to be rescued by the West. Rather, it examines strategies, intention, and extremely intelligent means through which women challenge authoritarianism through media, performance, and symbolic action. By so doing, it responds to the demands of Mohanty against feminist scholarship, which focuses on relational power, local histories, and vehement identities, and not abstract classification.

3. Methodology

The study uses a qualitative, interpretive research perspective based on critical feminist research. Its aim will be to trace how Iranian females take part in civil disobedience by means of symbolic, embodied, and digital acts of resistance, especially at the time of the death of Mahsa Amini and the emergence of the so-called "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. Instead of utilizing primary interviews that would present significant ethical and safety issues to participants since Iran has a dubious political background, the following study is based on a rich body of secondary data. These are checked media sources, scholarly journals, policy

[82] Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), "Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism", pp. 629-645; Nayereh Tohidi (1997), "The issues at hand: Fundamentalism and women's rights in Iran", pp. 305-316.
[83] Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), "Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine", pp. 139-167.

briefs, human rights accounts, testimonies, and online materials (e.g., protest videos, social media posts, and published statements of activists).

3.1. Research Design

The study adopts critical feminist interpretive research based on postcolonial feminist epistemology. It works in an interpretive paradigm, which focuses on contextual meaning-making and acknowledges that all knowledge is contingent, situated, and informed by power. Unlike positivist traditions that concern themselves with objectivity and generalizability most heavily, this approach focuses on depth and specificity and the politics of producing knowledge. Such an approach is essential in the endeavor of testing the power orders that have been instituted within discourse, law, and media and to have a feminist attitude towards gendered power arrangements and creating palpitations to the subaltern voices of the Iranian women. The research analyzes a symbolic, discoursal, and visual resistance through publicly posted and digital resources, rather than through direct contact with participants, which would be inadmissible in the case of the authoritarian regime. In doing so, it pays attention to expressions and the emotional and performative dimensions of protest, especially in those situations where the political process is not institutionalized or organized.

3.2. Analytical Framework—Multi-Method Approach

The research design is multi-method qualitative and is made up of four forms of analysis related to each other. It is centered at Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as conceptualized by Teun van Dijk that is being used to look at the framing, contestation, and mediation of resistance through various channels of interaction.[84] In these respects, CDA may be applied especially well to the realities of how language and narrative forms preserve or resist authoritarian authority, and that may be most especially relevant to the representation of gender. The thematic analysis, visual analysis, and narrative analysis are also used to provide evidence to the discourse analysis.

According to Braun and Clarke, thematic analysis is a six-stage process that helps to discover surface-level themes as well as latent ones using a variety of sources, such as statements made during a protest, social media captions, and digital testaments.[85] Visual analysis utilizes the approach to visual methodology offered by Gillian Rose in order to posit the analysis of

[84] Teun A. van Dijk (1993), "Principles of critical discourse analysis", pp. 249-283.
[85] Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), pp. 77-101.

protest imagery as a particular mode of political communication.[86] These involve a keen concern with composition, affect, symbolism, and positioning of viewers. Employing narrative analysis, the paper will investigate personal testimonies and digital expressions found within social media to discover common forms of storytelling, affect, and identity and understand how Iranian women express self and opposition using the same linguistic grammar as well as visual grammar.

3.2.1. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) Procedures

Based on the three-dimensional model by van Dijk, the CDA process is a stepwise developmental process that includes three interrelated phases.[87] The initial step is dedicated to textual analysis, implied as the systematic study of such linguistic elements as the choice of words, metaphors, pronouns, and sentences. This includes the recognition of the binary us/them, moral/immoral, and legitimate/illegitimate, as well as the absence of voices and the overall silence in the discourse. The second stage is focused on the discursive practice analytic category, which is based on the analysis of how texts are made, circulated, and consumed in certain social frameworks. These also encompass the study of intertextuality, the identification of how one set of text constructs and addresses other sets of text, as well as audience positioning and effects of diverse discursive strategies. The third stage is analysis of social practices that relate discourse to larger structures of power and ideological constructs. This step seeks to understand how discourses help sustain social relations and resist existing relations as well as examine the material impacts of discourse on social reality. With the help of this in-depth methodology, the discussion demonstrates how language reflects as well as constitutes the power relations in the context of resistance of the Iranian women.

3.2.2. Thematic Analysis Procedure

The second stage is focused on the discursive practice analytic category, for which Braun and Clarke define thematic analysis as a six-step procedure with the aid of which explicit and festering themes can be found through a variety of sources, including protest statements, the captions of social media, and digital testimonies.[88] Comparing with the six steps of the framework provided by Braun and Clarke, here the data are familiarized by reading several times through all the textual materials in the original languages: Persian, English, and

[86] Gillian Rose (2016), *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (4th ed.), SAGE Publications.
[87] Teun A. van Dijk (1993), "Principles of critical discourse analysis", pp. 249-283.
[88] Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke (2006), "Using thematic analysis in psychology", pp. 77-101.

Turkish.[89] The stage is characterized by the initial observation of possible patterns and topics of interest and translation checks with back-translation methods to secure accuracy and cultural sensitivity. The second step is the initial code generation, in which one does systematic coding of interesting features on the whole dataset.

These involve the use of inductive codes arising out of data, deductive codes based on theories, and the application of feminist and postcolonial analytical lenses. The third stage is concerned with theme development, and this entails compiling the codes into possible themes, developing thematic maps that depict the relationship between themes, and conducting frequent team meetings to define theme boundaries. The fourth stage is theme review, which implies testing themes on both coded extracts and all data. This involves polishing of themes to attain internal consistency and external uniqueness with the assessment of peer review and outside check. The fifth phase is theme definition, in which each theme is clearly defined and named, subthemes are identified where desired, and descriptive narratives of the themes are developed. The last stage is the production of reports in the form of a selection of interesting examples of each theme, combined with theoretical background and obvious argumentation between themes and research questions.

3.2.3. Visual Analysis Procedures

With the help of visual methodology provided by Gillian Rose, the visual analysis makes use of protest imagery, where the visual method is perceived as a specific form of political communication.[90] This style is characterized by a great focus on composition, affect, symbolism, and the positioning of the viewers. Based on the three-site model of visual analysis made by Rose, the methodology will look directly at several dimensions of visual material in a methodical way.[91] The first place is concerned with production by studying who produced the image, when, in what place, and for what purpose. This is a combination of thinking about such technical details as camera angle, lighting, and composition, as well as exploration of purpose and audience. The second location analyzes the picture itself by its compositional structure of color, space, light, and expressiveness. This incorporates the semiotic study of signs, symbols, and codes and their cultural meaning and content analysis of what is present, what is omitted, and how people are framed in the visual message. The third location is focused on audiencing, with emphasis on written analysis of the circulation of images and reception by various audiences. This includes research on alternative meanings by

[89] *Ibid.*
[90] Gillian Rose (2016), *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (4th ed.).
[91] *Ibid.*

diverse audiences and an analysis of the possible social and political implications of images. Under this in-depth visual approach to the methodology, the analysis shows how an imagery of protest can be seen as political comms and is able to serve the purpose of resistance narratives.

3.2.4. Narrative Analysis Procedures

The paper analyzes individual testimonies and online performances on social networks by applying the narrative approach to identify general tendencies of storytelling, emotion, and subject formation as well as to learn how Iranian women construct the discourse of agency and resistance through linguistic and visual repertoires. Based on the structural analysis and thematic analysis of narrative and voice used by Riessman, different analytical strategies are used to interpret the way the story works politically and personally, in terms of structure and theme.[92] Structural analysis is a type of analysis that covers how the stories are structured and presented by identifying narrative means of plot, character, setting, and resolution.

This includes the study of how women organize events over time and temporal causation by uncovering how women can creatively produce coherent narratives of their experiences of resistance. The thematic analysis is concerned with content by asking what the story is about, what the common themes are that are exhibited in different stories, and considerations of moral stance and identity building on personal narratives. Conducting a performative analysis, research questions look at what may be achieved in terms of social and political accomplishments through the lens of how stories create identity and agency. This involves analysis of both audience effects and social effects of the specific narrative decisions. In such an extensive study with regard to narrative analysis, the study indicates how Iranian women approach narrative as a method of resistance and building themselves as identities in a repressive environment.

3.3. Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The time range of the research is 2010-2024; however, the main period of the research is 2022-2024, during which the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement came to the foreground due to the death of Mahsa Amini. All data mined were only from sources that were publicly available; there was no requirement to consult any direct actors. The inclusion criteria entailed that only works that have been produced in English, Persian, or Turkish; published or distributed during the period between 2010 and 2024; must contain verifiable and credible

[92] Catherine Kohler Riessman (2008), *Narrative Methods for the Human Sciences*, SAGE Publications.

sources and must have had an explicit connection with the focus areas of investigation embodied protest, digital activism, or feminist resistance. Exclusion criteria automated the habitual removal of sources that could not be validated independently; material that presented ethical dangers to those named and was written entirely on opinions rather than an empirical basis; materials not written in one of the linguistic abilities of the researcher; sources that occurred in languages whose triangulation proved impossible; and those that vanished before they could be verified.

The systematic search guaranteed that the chosen materials were of high standards regarding academic trust and ethical commitment. Each of the four types of sources was chosen because of a certain methodological reason that speaks about the all-round character of the studied process. To present the study in the context of the academic discourse, scholarly sources in the form of 45 peer-reviewed articles were chosen to give theoretical framing to the study. These sources were thoroughly peer-reviewed, making them of quality and credible. The wide spectrum of the interdisciplinary research, including political science, gender studies, media studies, and Middle Eastern studies, denotes the complex nature of the research topic. Twelve publications of human rights reports of internationally recognized organizations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Iran Human Rights were selected due to the delivery of independently verified material regarding resistance activities against the repression by states. The sources are much more systematically documented than in other sources and are important in providing evidence of state reactions to resistance activities.

To represent a variety of interpretations and prevent the bias associated with the use of a single source, media presentations, comprising 78 reports, were chosen among the media sources based in different parts of the globe and backed by diasporas. Persian-language sources like *BBC Persian* and *Radio Farda* are also included to access the cultural context that may not be noticed by purely English sources, and global sources have better contextual backgrounds. The purpose of the selection of digital artefacts based on 156 items (exactly) is to select unfading forms of resistance and offer direct access to the voices of women and self-representations. The attention to viral posts and hashtag activism embodies the network character of new resistance and how individual efforts are relayed into mass movements in the process of online amplification.

3.4. Data Analysis Process

Considering that conducting research on resistance in Iran is a politically sensitive topic, the data analysis was conducted in four successive and linking phases that aimed at objective

rigor and ethical conduct. The initial phase was familiarizing and organising data, which took three weeks, wherein during the time the sources were classified chronologically and thematically and read several times in Persian and English so that one could gain context. At this stage, the analytical memoranda were created to designate the arising thoughts and possible theoretical links. Processes were chronological mapping of resistance activities between 2010 and 2024; categorization based on themes of resistance such as embodied resistance, digital resistance, and symbolic resistance; bilingual reading of language to attain language verification; initial recording of notes in the form of memo notes to document reflexivity of the researcher; and the generation of a primary preliminary coding framework. Such a preparatory step determined the structural organization of further analytical steps.

The second phase was dedicated to systematic coding within a four-week time frame, which was carried out using deductive and inductive methods. It resulted in such deductive codes based on theoretical concepts as performativity, counterpublics, and civil disobedience, and such inductive codes appeared through content analysis. The two-pronged technique gave it a theoretical as well as empirical when it came to data details. The occurrence of errors was reduced by using cross-checking between the replications of the English and Persian materials and considering cultural sensitivity during the coding framework. Several specific coding steps included line-by-line textual material coding, visual coding of protest imagery according to frame by Rose, temporal connecting changes in resistance strategies, intersectional aggregates of the class and ethnic and regional differences, and counter-narrative responses to any dominant thesis.[93] Such an extensive coding strategy facilitated thorough processing of all the data forms and theoretical plans. The fourth week was devoted to the work on the themes and integration of cross-method during the third stage.

Categories consisted of larger analytical codes such as embodied resistance, networked visibility, intersectional risk, religious counter-narratives, and media framing. To achieve a diachronic view of strategies of resistance, the comparison was conducted with the historical patterns of protest between the early post-revolutionary period and the Green Movement on the one hand and the post-Mahsa Amini movement on the other. The themes used in mapping as part of the integration processes involved mapping of different types of data, cross-method triangulation of patterns to ensure they are verified, mapping of various types of data against history to discover the continuities and discontinuities, cross-method triangulation of patterns per intersectional analysis to know how the different groups experience them, and member

[93] Gillian Rose (2016), *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials* (4th ed.).

checking as a consultation with Iranian scholars. The stage guaranteed robustness and theoretical grounds in finding.

The fourth step was the critical interpretation and the theoretical integration process, which took place during four weeks. The step entailed an ongoing conversation between the theory and data to analyze the ways in which the power relations, gender representations, and media organization influenced the images of resistance. Particular emphasis was laid on the search for counter discourses and agency statements resisting both the propaganda of the state and the Western feminist universalism. Procedures of interpretation involved comparing systems of state and resistance narratives, silence and absence of official discourse, resistance to hegemonic regimes of power, cultural uniqueness and universality, and theoretical syntheses of findings into existing literature.

The last stage was to guarantee that the analysis did not repeat but rather added to the knowledge base that we have. In a move to safeguard the analytical rigor and validity, a series of quality assurances was achieved in the process of the analysis. Triangulation used various sources of data, approaches, and theories to establish a result and analyze a study adequately. Peer review procedures involved sharing interim reports with the academic colleagues who had knowledge of Iranian politics, gender studies, and the qualitative methodology to assist with feedback and act as verifiers. Cultural verification This entailed analysis that was checked by Iranian scholars to ascertain the culture and cultural sensitivity. The reflexivity was ensured by the frequent analytical memos containing researcher assumptions, biases, and their changing interpretations. The comprehensive documents of analytical decisions, coding choices, and theoretical understanding during the research were well documented in the audit trail.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

The study design was given moral priority in view of the political climate of uprising being risky in Iran. The design did not directly involve interviews or involve the activists directly. All the data was derived publicly and anonymized, and the information was derived to ensure that the analysis would not harm people related to the data. Pictures that would cause offence were dealt with gingerly; there was descriptive visual data analysis in place of reproductions to prevent voyeurism or traumatic images. In addition to the anonymity and safety matters, this study had an extensive ethical approach that dealt with several aspects of accountability. The research was situated through the representation of ethics in which the agency, creativity, and faculties of the Iranian women were highlighted rather than being presented as victims of

oppression.

The strategy is also in line with the feminist desire to examine the resistance as a sense-making process that incorporates change and agency and not only just a victimizing story. The analyzing of cultural contexts of Iran and the exclusion of Western analytical frameworks that failed to interpret local meaning, and practices sustained the cultural sensitivity during the analysis. The political responsibility was fulfilled by doing anything but sensationalizing violence or trauma; what we were left to do was to concentrate on strategic elements of resistance and feminine creativity in the face of oppression. Postcolonial feminism meant prioritizing external interpretations of Iranian women over their own voices and forms of self-representation, and epistemological decolonization abided by that principle. Ethical responsibility was not just in the case of anonymity and safety but also in the framing approaches. The debate was organized in such a way that it focused not only on the Islamic Republic of Iran as being victimized by their women but also on the fact that they (women) were independent, creative, and empowered. The approach fits into the feminist inclination of the research that regards resistance as a meaning-generating process comprising change and strategic action in daily life.

3.6. Limitations and Scope

Although the research is methodologically sound, it has some critical limitations because its sources are secondary and digital. The coverage limitations imply that the study cannot accommodate offline, localized, and covert forms of resistance that cannot be documented or visible. The existence of the digital access gap and insufficient documentation might interfere with the possibility of resistance by rural and working-class women, leaving analytical holes. There are linguistic limitations that are always in the way since there may be language barriers that could block access to expressions of resistance in Kurdish or Azeri or any minority and therefore could overlook valuable intersectional aspects of resistance. Such a limitation is especially important regarding the ethnic diversity of Iran and the various experiences of minority women.

The conditions of temporal limitation can be described because of the ephemeral character of the content of digital artefacts since the posts and videos can be removed or edited, and the longitudinal analysis appears problematic and may represent a vacuity in the history. The attention to publicly available and viral content, which is the aspect of selection bias when searching coverage, may expand on more visible types of resistance and overlook covert, hidden, or coded types of dissent. Even in the areas of deep censorship and lies, mistakes in

verification regarding the authenticity and correctness of certain digital content still lead to methodological problems. Triangulation of materials between different media and between fields of study and expanded historical context increases the validity and richness of the analysis, however.

This combination of the discourse, visual, thematic, and narrative orientations into one creative theory allows the study to make a complex analysis of the resistance of women in Iran, yet on a contextual level, which is why the research illustrates a significant contribution to both feminist and political theory. The study gives in-depth information about the experiences of women resisting in Iran, though with certain scopes. The primary focus on geographic scope is the urbanized digitally connected resistance and little input of rural experiences. The time limits of 2010-2024 give modern understanding but can overlook long-standing trends. The demographic focus on the educated middle-class women who have access to digital means could not be the experience of all the Iranian women. Notwithstanding these constraints, the study leads to important insights into the ways of understanding modern forms of feminist resistance in authoritarian situations and introduces a methodologically sound way of studying politically sensitive issues based on publicly accessible sources. The methodology shows the process in which the researchers may reveal the ethical, thorough study of resistance movements without violating the safety of the participants and without compromising academic integrity.

4. Findings

Resistance by Iranian women, especially after the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022, has manifested itself in several ways: embodied well-behaved action, networked digital activism, and performance of violation of the public sphere and gender norms. Although occasionally these acts can appear to be spontaneous or personal, they exist as part of a larger, collective, and continually developing feminist awareness that years of fighting have helped to create. The findings are reported in four thematically interconnected themes, rooted in the testimony of the participants and viewed in the light of the collaborative multidisciplinary theory of the aforementioned.

4.1. Embodied Disobedience: The Body as a Site of Protest

The Islamic Republic strictly controls the physical presence of women in the streets by forbidding veiling and gender rules. As such, the female body acts as an effective expression of civil disobedience. Many protest YouTube videos and pictures show the women uncovered

in the streets; they are shown walking silently despite the police lines and circles, emerging in the marketplaces, or standing totally motionless inside of the protest of the dress code. Among the popular videos of this sort is the one that displays the story of a young girl daring to stroll the streets of the Grand Bazaar in Tehran as an unveiled woman. The text caption of the accompanying read: *"It was not that we chanted. We simply strode. I did not want them to be comfortable; I wanted them to question themselves and think, why is this normal?*".

It is a nonviolent and nonverbal performance that mirrors the existence of Judith Butler in terms of gender performativity: the act of destabilizing gender performance equates the body to a political instrument.[94] Such actions undermine the regime's moral and religious legitimacy. Meanwhile, there is another viral video, where a mother is dancing with her daughter on a balcony, with the hijab off. Its caption is: She ought to understand that happiness is resistance as well. They are analogous to the Hannah Arendt conception of action in the public sphere as the exercise of freedom and the James Scott ideas of the daily acts of defiance and the act of making oneself visible and present.[95]

4.2. Networked Disobedience: Digital Visibility and Viral Protest

Released in a tightly censored media environment, the stories of civil disobedience by the Iranian women are reportedly filmed by them and posted online and spread. By means of such sources as Instagram, Twitter, and Telegram, the actions acquire new non-geographical significance because they become general symbols. There is one video, which spreads via multiple resources, stating that a young girl is singing in a metro station alone, naked, and confident, and quite obviously emotional. It had the caption: *"They made us understand that our voices are unlawful. But I have nothing to hide now.*".

It is not just a mere aesthetic performance. It is an expression of what Castells referred to as the network society in which political agency is stretched across the digital infrastructure.[96] It is also an instance of the connective action concept developed by Bennett and Segerberg, protesting as personal and viral and self-organized.[97] The other one is a well-crafted photograph of a woman, which is staged in downtown Tehran. She used hashtags such as Woman Life Freedom and wrote, "*We are framed by them. And so that is how I frame myself. What we really are is light, angle, and truth*."

[94] Judith Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
[95] Hannah Arendt (1958), *The Human Condition*; James C. Scott (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.
[96] Manuel Castells (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*.
[97] W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2013*), The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*.

Such digital artefacts are not only an account of protest but protest itself. This is because the understanding of resistance depends on media framing, as stated by Entman and Goffman.[98] In this case, the women of Iran are publishing their own scripts, manipulating their exposure, and making their resistance archives.

4.3. Generational Shifts and Emergent Solidarity

In all these published sources of information, an essential ingredient is the generational comparative, coupled with an emerging feeling of a continuity of generations. Women who are older write reflexive posts or images that admit their silence in the past and the braveness of the younger generation. In one photo, which was shared by a woman in her 50s, there is the text: "*We whispered. They scream. I appreciate their courage.*".

This transition is an example of the theory put forward by Sidney Tarrow that protest cycles are waves of resistance that are based on the previous legacies.[99] It is also relevant to use social identity theory: the more women articulate the commonality in identity as resistors, the less is each woman driven by personal fear; collective passion is born.[100] One of the viral tweets is a snapshot of a crowd of unveiled women striding in a crowd that has been tweeted with the words, "*I was out in front. I did not arrive home as an individual.*"

These statements demonstrate how the visibility coupled with the visibility in digital space has the building role of solidarity, despite the inability to coordinate directly. They create what is known to Zeynep Tüfekçi as the networked publics—namely, decentralized but united bodies mobilizing through an emotional and symbolic convergence.[101]

4.4. Everyday Resistance and the Subversion of Norms

Other than viral protests, most acts of resistance are reported in everyday life: talking loudly in a mixture of groups, breaking dress codes in classrooms or offices, or facing authorities with eye contact. Those gestures are less obvious, but they are most often mentioned in social media and testimonies made publicly via human rights reports. One of the anonymous digital posts was, *"When there are men, I do not talk in a lower voice. I cannot fade away.*".

These are the daily actions that identify the theory of infrapolitics formulated by Scott: minor

[98] Robert M. Entman (1993), "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm", pp. 51-58; Erving Goffman (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*.
[99] Sidney Tarrow (1998), *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed.
[100] Henri Tajfel & John C. Turner (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", pp. 33-47.
[101] Zeynep Tüfekçi (2017), *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*.

and additive grievances and conflicts.[102] Equally, this focusses on voice and gesture as gendered action by Butler designates such commonplace practices as patterns of rearticulated resistance. Although fear has been written in lots of posts, there also are those that allude to joy, pride, or defiance. A TikTok caption on a smiling woman revealed before a mural simply was "*Still here."* This kind of linguistics is evidence of the dual-process moral explaining that Greene sees the two terms emotion and principle as self-reinforcing.[103] Even ambivalence, fear, and pride combined enhance genuineness and psychological strength of resistance.[104]

Through pictorial, written, and iconographical information, civil disobedience of Iranian women has four salient features. To begin with, it is quintessential since the oppressed groups make a reemergence of space, voice, and movement in a defiance against the control of the state, which is gendered. Second, it is connected, in which virtual movement fuels protest by attaining greater distribution, developing cross-border solidarity, and storing the forms of resistance in visual archives. Third, it is intergenerational and takes its power out of the memory of the silence of the past and turns it into shared feminist identity across the generations. Possibly, it is even daily, in tiny, everyday habitual acts that are a long-lasting method of feminist resistance in everyday life. Collectively, these findings indicate that the struggle by Iranian women is not only oppositional but also constructive, performative, and highly moral. Such performances reassert the right to be seen, heard, and not forgotten and reclaim political subjectivity in the conditions of authoritarianism and announce a revolutionary redefinition of feminist agency in the region.

4.5. Differential Resistance Patterns and State Responses

Although the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement organized mass solidarity in Iran, resistant means and aftermaths differed largely along class, ethnic, territorial, and generational lines. This part discusses the way in which a socio-political location of Iranian women influenced the models of their civil disobedience and the way these actions were adjusted by the state.

4.5.1. Class-Based Variations in Resistance

The demonstrations after the death of Mahsa Amini displayed a significant difference between upper-middle-class women and working-class and rural or ethnic minority ones in their conduct toward the resistance. The urban women in the upper-middle classes, especially

[102] James C. Scott (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.
[103] Judith Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
[104] Joshua David Greene (2007), "Why are VMPFC patients more utilitarian? A dual-process theory of moral judgment explains", pp. 322-323.

those located in Tehran, Isfahan, and Shiraz, were inclined to symbolic and high-profile resistances. These were women walking without a veil on the street, sharing scandalous pictures or videos on Instagram, or denying the dress standards required by the state in cafes, cultural places, and shopping areas.

A big number of these women could access virtual personal networks (VPNs), foreign press, and legal assistance. As a professional in Tehran wrote on her Facebook page, I have connections, lawyers. The risk is not the same as mine." Better social capital gave them a bigger ability to take the risk, and to become visible in a way that performance of disobedience became twofold: media resistance.

Working-class women, in contrast, exercised some resistance by frequent refusal, often underground and on a collective basis, in the workplace. What they did was less on record digitally, compared to two factors: the fear of being watched and a scanty use of digital tools. Most of the women, who had to work in factories or in a service sector, just ignored hijab regulations at work. There is the publicly posted ID of one factory worker, which says that we do not choose to post videos. We simply do not wear it to the job. In this case, defiance was intertwined in the movements of everyday work routines—not as visible but just as defiant.

Resistance took place within intensified state surveillance and militarized crackdowns in which ethnic minority Kurdish women in Sanandaj and Mahabad had a fight since they were considered rural women. According to human rights reports and confirmed testimonies, there is a marked difference in the amount of coverage given to the media, and rural protests are given less attention even though they have witnessed graver cases of violence. Kurdish women were specially repressed not only through ethnic repression but also through gender repression, so their resistance was materially dangerous and ideally powerful.

4.5.2. State Repression and Tactical Adaptation

The reaction of the Iranian state was no less differentiated. The repressive measures used by authorities were discriminated by what they perceived to be visible, influential, and a social role. Professional or middle-class women were often subjected to economic coercion. Teachers, medical personnel, and others part of public employment lost the jobs or were threatened by them because their dress code was unacceptable or because they posted solidarity messages online. Schools became disciplinary places, too as students on university campuses were suspended, banned on campus or even expelled outright because they were

seen unveiled or even due to being part of campus protests. Repression on digital space increased. The government used advanced social media monitoring, blocked hash tags, and limited internet services using cell phones in spots that contained protests.

Even women who posted modest protest material with high numbers of followers online often were detained or interrogated. The means of physical force was unfairly used especially in the working-class and low-income neighborhoods such as arbitrary arrests, beatings and use of tear gas or spraying with pellet guns. The reports indicate that these places were the victims of militarization of the streets. Women responded by changing their resistance.

The upper-middle-class women changed their approach to direct social media activism towards more ambiguous resistance: wearing bright clothes and makeup, loosely worn hijab, mini-protests with silent screams through their manicure, or dying their hair: it was an almost unnoticed defiance that could be considered illegal. Using been-there-seen-those networks of mutual support that comprised the Islamic Mosque, the neighborhood, and the bazaar, working-class women posted updates and planned underground operations and aided imprisoned relatives. Young females, particularly those who spend time online, employed encoded online language, including emojis, visual metaphors, and ironic hashtags to evade detection.

4.5.3. Intersectional Resistance and Layered Vulnerability

According to this intersectional analysis, risk is multiple, and protest is unequally available. The resistance of women was by no means on the equal field; it passed through the filter of geography, class, ethnicity, and generation. As an example, some of the most aggressive types of repression were the ones that were experienced by the Kurdish women. Documented human rights show that numerous Kurdish towns were faced with deployment of the military, raiding of homes, and blackouts on the internet. In the case of such women, rebellion usually meant outlawed organizing and cross-nation solidarity with Kurdish movements in Iraq and Turkey.

The gendered resistance was heightened by cultural repression (prohibition of the Kurdish attire, language or rituals), which transformed more conventional expressions into political actions. There was also a surprising and underestimated role of the elderly women. Various elders relied on their memories of the 1979 revolution to provide moral guidance, emotional support and physical shelter to younger protestors. Their visibility and age gave them a kind of symbolic power and their houses, in other cases, served as unofficial refuges of younger

activists. According to interviews made by human rights NGOs, a few older women explained that they were not doing something new but were doing what had been brought back. They were a kind of intergenerational repetition and provided a link between past resistance cycles and present-day feminist ruled defiance.

5. Discussion

This study reveals the civil disobedience of Iranian women as not simply a response to the authoritarianism of the state authorities but a sophisticated, volatile form of political action that consists of gender, history, and the capabilities of digital media. These acts of resistance can be interpreted to provide novel findings concerning the embodiment, networking, and continued existence of dissent in an atmosphere of repression, as dictated by the theoretical concepts developed in this study.

5.1. Civil Disobedience as Embodied Moral Action

The common practice of unveiling in the street, dancing, or simply unwillingness to dress according to the requirements of the state represents the moral basis of civil disobedience that is theorized by Thoreau, Gandhi, and King.[105] Such actions are not based on lack of law but on inclination of conscience, as cited by King; he says it is a moral duty to disobey unjust laws. The fact that women have rejected the use of veiling laws is in line with the post-conventional element of moral thinking, which is promoted by Kohlberg, adhering to universalistic ethical statutes instead of complying with the authoritative decision.[106] Through the body, Iranian women also subscribe to the theory of gender performativity by Butler through dissent.[107] They challenge state discourses of femininity and obedience as their flouting of normative gender practices creates instability. By being purposely, corporeally noncompliant, such women undermine the state efforts to govern female subjectivity and re-establish their right to be seen, act, and appear in the world, where such a right is at the core of free action, as Arendt describes.[108]

5.2. Visibility and the Digital Politics of Framing

It is also emphasized in the analysis that digital media plays a pivotal role in shaping and dispersing resistance. The Iranian females sharing and recording their actions of defiance

[105] Henry David Thoreau (1849), *Civil Disobedience*; Mahatma Gandhi (1948), *Non-violent Resistance (Satyagraha)*; Martin Luther King Jr. (1963), "Letter from Birmingham Jail".
[106] Lawrence Kohlberg (1969), "Stage and sequence: The cognitive-developmental approach to socialization", pp. 347-480.
[107] Judith Butler (1990), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.
[108] Hannah Arendt (1958), *The Human Condition.*

through social media turn the individual acts of rebellion into networked flashpoints. These processes indicate the notion expressed by Castells of the network society with its growing model of power negotiation traversing the digitally mediated space.[109] In addition, the theory of connective action that was coined by Bennett and Segerberg would aid in understanding how the decentralized, personalized actions culminate in a bigger feminism movement without the development of hierarchical structure.[110] The tussle over the control of the story is also revealed in such acts. Goffman and Entman suggest that resistance has a specific meaning to the public depending on its frame.[111] Although the state media make women who have unveiled seem like deviants or foreign agents, the independent sources reformulate the idea of unveiled women by making them appear as brave icons of moral protest. Iranian women are not blank subjects of media framing; they are active creators of their own counter-narratives and annex operational power in their own representation by means of the images they create and post.

5.3. Solidarity, Emotion, and Feminist Consciousness

The results also reveal the combined effect of individual protest gestures to bring out a sense of crowd identity as well as sentiment-related unity. According to Tajfel and Turner, group identity, when shared, takes the form of a motivational factor, especially when excluded in situations where groups are involved.[112] The rise of the feminist consciousness in Iran is not only ideological but also affective; it is based on the common risks, emotions, and acts of resistance. Such emotional overtones echo the assertions by Tarrow that protest is not solely based on grievance by articulating it through emotionally charged moral shocks, like the death of Mahsa Amini.[113] Even the apparently spontaneous or apolitical gesture, including shouting in the street or the refusal to divert an eye, must be the performance with the subjectivity: the construction in accordance with the theory of everyday resistance and infrapolitics of subjectivity implanted by Scott.[114] This micro-action is a contestation of power that does not confront power directly and builds up a wider politics of resistance.

[109] Manuel Castells (1996), *The Rise of the Network Society*.
[110] W. Lance Bennett & Alexandra Segerberg (2013*), The Logic of Connective Action: Digital Media and the Personalization of Contentious Politics*.
[111] Erving Goffman (1974), *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*; Robert M. Entman (1993), "Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm", pp. 51-58.
[112] Henri Tajfel & John C. Turner (1979), "An integrative theory of intergroup conflict", pp. 33-47.
[113] Sidney Tarrow (1998), *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed.
[114] James C. Scott (1990), *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*.

5.4. Feminist Resistance in an Authoritarian-Islamic Context

Most importantly, this research study indicates that the resistance of women in Iran does not speak only the language of secular feminism but also the language of Islamic feminism. Tohidi and Mir-Hosseini are right in arguing that numerous women are employing religious terms and reasoning to counter acts of patriarchal understanding of Islam.[115] This adds some complication to the binary constructions of Islam versus feminism and resembles culturally constructed, productive resistance, which occurs within as well as against the major religious order. This result is also in line with postcolonial feminist criticisms that postulate that the agency of Middle Eastern women should not be considered through Western liberal frames.[116] An example of this was provisioned in Iran, where women are capable of political resistance without giving up religious identity, national belonging, or cultural legitimacy. This kind of feminism is not derivative but rather thickly local, rooted in the past.

5.5. Resistance as Reconstitution of Subjectivity

Lastly, the research conclusions indicate that the defiance of the Iranian women is not merely a disobedient practice but a constructive one as well: it creates new forms of being, seeing, and belonging. By fighting and rebelling against being controlled over their bodies, voices, and appearances, women reinstate themselves as political agents. This, according to the position of Arendt (1958), is a kind of action that reinstates the self as an actor in the world political arena—not just protesting injustice but acting freely. In that regard, Iranian women are not about to merely fight against authoritarianism but, instead, re-enact political life itself, generating new imaginaries of gender, citizenship, and resistance through extreme constraints.

Conclusion

The paper examines the intersectional, multidimensional, and culturally contextual character of the civil disobedience of Iranian womanhood with specific reference to the change that followed the death of Mahsa Amini and the emergence of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. The interdisciplinary theoretical framework of the research examined the manifestation of resistance in a situation in which women are disenfranchised even though they are not formally deprived of their right to political participation in the state, where there

[115] Nayereh Tohidi (1997), "The issues at hand: Fundamentalism and women's rights in Iran", pp. 305-316; Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2006), "Muslim women's quest for equality: Between Islamic law and feminism", pp. 629-645.
[116] Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1988), "Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses", pp. 61-88; Lila Abu-Lughod (2002), "Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others", pp. 783-790.

is a gendering of space, where speech and visibility are the tightly policed territory of theocratic power, and where all of these issues are complicated by communal and transnational ties. The theoretical framework is informed by the classical bodies of civil disobedience theory, postcolonial and Islamic feminism, digital media theory, and politics of embodiment. This multi-theoretical strategy simply did not contribute to the traps of Western feminist universalism and permitted the reading of resistance as the one that is not only ethically situated but also culturally grounded. The present analysis showed that the resistance of the Iranian women is not spontaneous and peripheral. Instead, it is a very calculated, tactical, and versatile kind of civil disobedience that has included unveiling, dancing, singing, silence, coded digital communication, and mass mourning. Being dislocative of state law as well as normative gendered expectations, these acts become performative statements of autonomy. They also carry Butlerian gender performativity into totalitarian territory, and they are examples of conscience-based resistance a la Thoreau reenacted upon the body. The example of Iran supports this vision of Arendt too; a woman, who is seldom represented in political life, can express her political subjectivity by her very presence and voice. The nature of digital media as the mediator of the responsible relationship between shared memory and networked movements was also key to the changes behind this naturalization of individual acts to a collective one. It does not involve any formal leadership or organizational infrastructure; nevertheless, women have built a decentralized feminist archive with the help of social media, hashtags, imagery, and testimonies—demonstrating Castells theory of the network society and Bennett and Segerberg's theory of connective action, and at the same time showing the limitations of digital surveillance and censorship in states with high levels of authoritarianism. Such technologies not only magnify but also threaten; they develop new publics, and they provide new opportunities for state power.

One important contribution of the current study is its consideration of the differential resistance and state response. The study highlighted the absence/differences in resistance tactics and risks that exist widely by the differences in classes, region, race, and age. The urban working class and rural women tend to use embodied, in many cases unrecorded, forms of resistance, whereas symbolic, media-savvy resistance is used by upper-middle-class women. This is a compound violence that particularly targets Kurdish women because of their gender and ethnicity as minorities. Old women are in their role of intergenerational mediators, who mobilize the memory and provide a place for younger activists with shelter and moral legitimacy. Such disparities justify the existence of intersectional feminist solutions that favor

an uneven distribution of power even within collective movements.

The same study has highlighted the cultural hybridity of feminist opposition to Iran and demonstrated that protest is not merely secular or religious, Western or local, but is a hybrid of Islamic reformist morality, Persian cultural history, and international feminist unity. Though the works by Mir-Hosseini, Tohidi, Mohanty, and Crenshaw were theoretical, they informed how to reject Orientalist representations, yet they helped to understand how Iranian women develop a hybrid feminism, indigenous to and responsive of their respective contexts. The monopolization of religious values by the Islamic Republic and the exclusivity of the West over modern feminism are broken by this form of resistance.

Finally, the study has its contribution to various disciplines. It invokes the civil disobedience theory to shed off the liberal and Western-centric frameworks and to appreciate the embodied, symbolic, and networked forms of resistance deployed in authoritarian environments. It challenges the feminist theory not only to be skeptical of its epistemic premises but also to focus on decolonial and intersectional frameworks that take into consideration cultural specificity. It provides authoritarianism studies with a perspective into how the resistance under repression does not cleanly fall away but is channeled instead into aesthetic, digital, and ordinary modes. And in the case of Iranian studies, it makes the rise of feminism at the moment a part of the general historical resistance and the creation of a completely new vision of politics in the digital world. The political defiance of the Iranian women is not a side note to political protest—it is the reshaping of political protest itself. In their everyday embodiment of courage, symbolic resistance, and viral expression, these women regain their voice, appearance, and political subjectivity. They are not merely a cause of change, but of change itself, of differently thinking about how it is possible to state your resistance, to show yourself, to be alive in the time of authoritarian regimes in the twenty-first century.

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