

The Protest of Literature: The Voices of the Iranian Revolution as Representative of a Comparative Literary Analysis

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Abstract

“There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard” ~ Arundhati Roy. Literature acts as a quiet form of activism because it works to reveal the voices of the silent and dissolve restrictive social frameworks. This paper shows the relevance of literature as a protest against singular voice, affecting social change through a parallel examination of the current Iranian revolution against the Islamic Republic, led by Iranians in Iran as well as in the diaspora. Through the lens of formalism, gender studies, and Gayatri Spivak’s Subaltern Theory, a comparative analysis of *Howl* (Allen Ginsberg), *Recitatif* (Toni Morrison), *Sally Heathcote: Suffragette* (Mary M. Talbot), *M. Butterfly* (David Henry Hwang), and *Americanah* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie) highlights oppressive structures that marginalize characters within the stories, making literature a mechanism of amplifying voice. I propose that without literature, under-represented voices would remain silenced and be driven out by “empowered” structures of society.¹

Introduction

Literature has long been an offspring of thought and change through the agency it awards its characters and the opportunity to cascade their voices. In an evolving social landscape of inequality and marginalization lay those unable to overcome their indifference to the ignorance of oppression. Therein lies the essence of literature that encompasses the amplifying of the unheard and ignored voices of society. Although factors based on culture and region exist, any individual can become voiceless. The literature reviewed in this research stems from Honors English 110, a Composition, Literature & Critical Thinking course that introduces threads of literary theories and genres to discuss their applications amongst each text. During the course, I exhibited the strong connection of literature’s purpose to real-world social conflicts with the trending persistence of voicelessness amongst each text.

In Iran the “Women Life Freedom” Movement reflects an ongoing protest of voicelessness that parallels the purpose of literature. On September 16, 2022, Mahsa Amini was brutally beaten by Iran’s moral police, who were “disciplining” Amini for not adhering to the Islamic hijab requirements.² Women in Iran have historically faced significant limitations on their freedoms, including restrictions on their ability to dress as they please, work outside the home, and participate in the political process. However, the killing of Mahsa Amini has sprung movements of inclusivity across the globe, to a scale that one could characterize as revolutionary. On top of exposure through literature, social media and technology has uplifted the people of Iran seeking to empower agency and hold accountable the atrocities of the Iranian regime. In this study, interviews conducted with prominent members of the Iranian Diaspora put into real-world perspective the purpose of amplifying voice, as seen in the discussed literature.³ Through these interviews, key insights into Iranian Diasporic activism are

¹ This project was presented at the 2023 Bay Honors Consortium at Stanford University. As a synthesis to the depth of this paper, the following link directs to the slideshow. [Bay Honors Consortium, Stanford University - The Protest of Literature: The Voices of the Iranian Revolution as Representative of a Comparative Literary Analysis](#)

² Formed in response to the murder of Mahsa Amini, the [Iranian Diasporic Collective Group](#) (IDC) rally’s members of the diaspora to “amplify the voices of people inside Iran who want an end to this dictatorial regime and the establishment of a secular, democratic system of governance that respects women’s rights as human rights, freedom of movement and expression, and protects the environment and Iran’s resources” (Iranian Diaspora Collective 2023).

³ Interviewees cited in paper include Maz Jobrani, Manijeh Moradian, Taravat Talepasand, Shohreh Nikzad, Abbas Milani, and Persis Karim. The dataset consists of over 15 diasporic Iranians—many of which opted for redaction.

revealed to amplify the voices protesting the regime. Moreover, activism within Iranian Diaspora acts synonymously with power of literature and its ability to inspire social change. *Howl*, *Recitatif*, *M. Butterfly*, *Sally Heathcote: Suffragette*, and *Americanah* surface the stories of marginalized characters whose voices have been subverted in society. In each piece of literature, protagonists reclaim their agency, rejecting the construct of singular voice. Focusing on the protest within literature affirms the need for society to deny generic societal frameworks that marginalize those with a subaltern voice, revealing the common between literature and the Women Life Freedom Movement to amplify the voices of the underrepresented.

Methodology

Formalism

The methodology of this study applies various literary theories to analyze the dataset. Formalism emphasizes the aesthetic qualities and formal elements of expression in a text, and when applied to individual forms of protest, it can help us understand how authors and diasporic Iranians convey messages and amplify their voices. Formalism's primary purpose is to "communicate to auditors a message, or information, by references to the world existing outside of language" (Abrams 103). Amongst the reviewed literature, authors apply different textual aesthetics which draws attention to their message. Furthermore, the theory of formalism provides a system of structure that explains each diasporic Iranian's purpose. It is noteworthy to mention that many interviewees are not cited in this paper due to fear of punishment by the Iranian regime as well as privacy concerns.¹ Amongst the cited interviewee set, the categories: 1) Comedy & Entertainment 2) Art 3) Accademia 4) Diasporic Connection encompasses the form each diasporic Iranian uses to uplift and cascade voice to amplify the Women Life Freedom Movement.⁴

Gender studies

Gender Studies, on the other hand, examines the representation of gender roles in a literary text. Applying Gender Studies reveals the ways in which authors and activists employ their voices to protest to cascade and amplify voice. Gender Studies focusses on "opposition to masculine desires and enterprises" by overcoming "pervasive patriarchal biases of civilization" that limit voice (Abraham 90). This paper contests gender-based hegemony by showcasing the power of form and unity amongst literature and the Women Life Freedom Movement. Furthermore, the power of literature and the diasporic Iranian community prevails the voices of those impacted by the oppressive frameworks and amplifies voice, bringing solidarity to the movement.

Gayatri Spivak's Subaltern Theory

To explore factors that contribute to voicelessness in society, renowned literary critic Gayatri Spivak introduces the Subaltern Theory in her acclaimed book, *Can the Subaltern Speak?* which refers to the subaltern voice as a "development of strategic, artificial, and 'second level' consciousness" within literature (Spivak 73). The subaltern voice is a post-colonial structure that implicates an inability to voice, which works against the purposes of the literature to as a space for voice to be heard. Spivak asserts that the Western academic field is limited by its paradigm, making subaltern voices in society unable to stand up in unity to be heard (Spivak). Spivak argues that factors including gender, class, caste, region, and religion can prevent individuals from being heard. However, in this paper, I reveal literature has the innate power to break these paradigms and enable voice through its rhapsody of form.

My dyad thesis approach explores the intersection of literature and Iranian diasporic protest. Firstly, how does literature serve as a protest for the voices of unheard characters to inform change? An application of formalism, gender studies, and Spivak's Subaltern Theory, reveals the purpose literature serves to uplift the

⁴ Interviewees, Abbas Milani and Persis Karim, represent the Diasporic Connection. Milani is the Hamid and Christina Moghadam Director of the Iranian Studies program at Stanford University and Karim is Neda Nobari Distinguished Chair and director of the Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies at San Francisco State University. As leaders, Milani and Karim collaborate the Iranian diasporic community to connect voices and amplify the Women Life Freedom Movement.

marginalized characters of each story. Then, it becomes relevant to investigate how members of the Iranian diaspora parallel the protest of literature by amplifying and uplifting the voices of the Women Life Freedom Movement. An analysis of the forms reflecting the Women Life Freedom Movement stresses the importance of the Iranian Diasporic community. The dyad approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the common threads between literature and Iranian diasporic activism.

Literature Review

Literature is a powerful tool for change that provokes thought and upwardly progresses society. This paper presents literature with non-linear and heavily multilayered storylines that protest persisting social issues. The array of literature provides a deeper understanding of how each character seeks liberation from a limiting identity and how the text liberates that identity. The five pieces of literature analyzed all pertain to different categories (poetry, short story, play, graphic novel, and traditional novel), showcasing literature's versatile ability to serve as a protest for voice. Immersing into the literary analysis, reveals each author's purpose to amplify the characters in their narratives. Similarly, the work produced by the Iranian Diasporic community awards agency to the people of Iranian seeking liberation from the regime. Each text's ability to uplift voice coupled with the activism occurring in the Iran Diasporic community highlights the purpose of literature to inform change.

Allen Ginsberg's, Howl

In *Howl*, the speaker's voice represents the reality of a group of individuals in society—left unheard and ignored. Throughout the poem, the speaker in the text remains anonymous/unknown but begins by stating, "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked" (Ginsberg 1). The bold fashion sets the stage for a group of voices facing apparent blindness from society. Furthermore, there is a direct parallel between formalism and the subaltern voice. Through formalism, each literary structure incorporates hidden meanings. In *Howl's* footnote, the speaker shouts, "The typewriter is holy the poem is holy the voice is holy the hearers are holy the ecstasy is holy!" (Ginsberg Line 7). The anaphora of "holy" and mystic tone of the speaker reflects an intention to convey a meaning that attributes "holiness" to the subaltern voice. Ginsberg relays activism through a post-structuralist form of literature to illuminate a protest of normalcy.⁵ The forefront of religion and emblematic social "punctuation" limits individuals who do not conform, leaving them unheard. The dominance of figurative social frameworks creates images of unitary identity, othering the select members of society. Founded upon acceptance, *Howl* is an optimistic message to readers that regardless of conformity, you are accepted.

Toni Morrison's, Recitatif

Toni Morrison's short story, *Recitatif*, describes a relationship between two daughters, their mothers, and a disabled orphanage employee named Maggie in New York. Morrison omits all racial markers in the short story to leave interpretations of race to the reader and uncovering racialized assumptions they may develop. In one instance, Protagonist Twyla states, "Maggie was my dancing mother. Deaf, I thought, and dumb. Nobody inside... And when the gar girls pushed her down and started roughhousing, I knew she wouldn't scream, couldn't-just like me and I was glad about that" (Morrison 36). Morrison provides a space within literature by giving voice to characters who are unable to "scream" or be heard. Through the absence of identifiers concerning race, gender, and class, each character is enabled accessibility of their voice by readers. The enigmatic form of the text works to overcome preconceived notions about characters and makes their voice available to readers.

Moreover, an emphasis on gender and disability reveals the subverted voices within the text. Morrison's ability to portray each character in such senses brings to light the amplitude of inequality experienced by each

⁵ In short, post-structuralism "presupposes a 'center' that serves to organize and regulate the structure yet itself 'escapes structuralism'" (Abrahams 238).

character. Specifically, the depleted voices of Mary and Maggie deny them any social acceptance. Twyla remarks to Maggie, stating, "What if she wants to cry? Can she cry?" (Morrison 8). The metaphorical attribution of mutual marginalization becomes apparent through Twyla's seemingly imitative curiosity regarding Maggie's inability to cry. Furthermore, Twyla subverts her agency by focusing on the livelihood of Maggie and Mary—her mother. Twyla does not feel remorse for them, rather she relates to Maggie's subaltern voice and states, "I knew she wouldn't scream, couldn't-just like me and I was glad about that" (Morrison 37). Morrison employs Twyla's affirmation of interconnectedness with Maggie to help readers conceptualize the inequality they share. Spivak holds the post-colonial ideal that symbolizes the loss of solidarity in feminine figures like Maggie and Twyla. Spivak writes in *Can the Subaltern Speak* that "women are at the issue, one whose minimal predication as indeterminate is already available to the phallogocentric tradition" (Spivak 82). The organic excellence of feminine figures—like Maggie and Mary—is depleted by the normative definition of who is respectable in society. Morrison chooses to highlight the voices of Twyla, Mary, and Maggie to epitomize the value of the subaltern voice. In *Recitatif*, the power of literature surfaces their shared struggle regarding gender inequality, limited solidarity, and disability. The text invites readers to consider how characters lose agency in their voices, making Morrison's purpose as an author to amplify their stories into society—similar to the Iranian diaspora. *Recitatif* brings attention to the unattended, relaying a message to readers that disparages any bounds upon marginalized characters.

David Henry Hwang's, M. Butterfly

In the form of a play, David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* presents the life of a French diplomat, Rene Gallimard, consumed with attraction to an exoticized Chinese woman, played by Song Liling, a man. In one instance, Song Liling describes the impacts of his identity to Rene Gallimard. It reads "It's not a question of whether I'm a man or a woman, but of how I can be both and still retain my dignity as a human being" (Hwang II.1.45). Song challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes by suggesting that gender identity is a fluid and complex concept that can coexist in multiple forms. The play challenges norms in society and gives voice to the under-represented to delve past the context of movements and into cultural trends that reveal a pattern of voice in Western identity that dominates and exoticizes Eastern identities.

In *M. Butterfly*, Rene Gallimard's overpowering persona toward Song Liling represents the cultural hegemony within Western affection for the East. Song asserts that "the West has sort of an international rape mentality toward the East," while continuing to enable Gallimard's unfathomable persona (Hwang 62). Therefore, Song represents an oppressed version of the Orient, as he conforms to Gallimard's western rape mentality. Furthermore, the inclusion of meta-textuality through allusions to the opera *Madame Butterfly* accentuates the Western cultural hegemony that dominates the East. Therefore, it reveals a pattern of voice in Western identity that dominates the oriental Eastern.⁶ The purpose of Hwang's metatextual literary structure stands as a representation of the lost voices in the world today. Researcher and playwright Dorinne Kondo affirms that "*M. Butterfly* subverts and undermines the notion of unitary identity based on a space of inner truth and the plentitude of referential meaning" (Kondo 6). Kondo's assertion regarding a rejected unified truth emboldens the protest of singular identity seen within *M. Butterfly*. Furthermore, literary critic, Mari Yoshihara, conducted an extensive analysis of the alluded opera *Madame Butterfly*, reasoning with the arguments of Kondo and outlining the cultural norms of West and East seen in *M. Butterfly*. Yoshihara affirms that "cultural hegemony operates in ways much more complex than a one-directional flow of power from the west to the rest" (Yoshihara 998). *M. Butterfly* represents a recurring trend in seeking agency between the East and the West that fuels the hegemony of one's voice—seen most prominently between Rene Gallimard and Song Liling. The complex nature of Hwang's play intends to inform readers about an othered trend of cultural hegemony that

⁶ Described through the lens of formalism, "meta-textuality" refers to intercourse within the text that "makes strange the world of everyday perception and renews the reader's lost capacity for fresh sensation" (Abrams 103).

extends across the globe. Moreover, the endeavors seen in activism of the Women Life Freedom Movement alludes to the thrashing of barriers that subvert voice.

Mary M. Talbot's, Sally Heathcote: Suffragette

Mary M. Talbot's graphic novel, *Sally Heathcote: Suffragette* highlights the struggles and sacrifices of the women's suffrage movement in Britain during the early 20th century. The graphic novel brings to life the stories of the suffragettes who fought for women's right to vote, many of whom were marginalized and ignored by the male-dominated society of their time. Talbot's ability to showcase the suffragettes and their tenacity alludes to a protest of dominant male hegemony.

In the displayed illustration, Talbot celebrates the bravery and determination of these women protesting for women's rights and sheds light on how their contributions have been left unnoticed in mainstream historical narratives (Talbot 73). The agency within the British Women's Suffrage movement is much like the efforts reflected in the Iranian Diaspora to amplify the voices of protesters in Iran and break past Western narratives of Iran.



Figure 1: Talbot 73

The significance of the suffragettes' evolving voice represents the agency needed to instill change in a society driven by hegemonic masculinity. Through the lens of gender studies, the overarching message of *Sally Heathcote: Suffragette* calls for a necessity of persisting agency to enhance change. As the Women's Freedom League "demand[ed] that [they] be given human rights," the unequal structure of power between the Suffragettes and the parliament becomes evident (Talbot 112). In any regard, the arrogance in the deputation of the prime minister further conveys the persistence needed to make a change. The perseverance demonstrated by the women's voting rights campaign represents the manipulation of patience to alarm Britain's arrogant parliament. *Sally Heathcote: Suffragette* emphasizes the persistence needed to dissolve unitary culture, especially that of hegemony against women. Once again, actuating change upon customary hegemonically masculine culture is reflected in literature, aligning with objectives of Women Life Freedom Movement. The graphic novel is an act of reclaimed literary protest for a reconciliatory women's rights movement that has persisted in society.

Chimanda Ngozi Adichie's, Americanah

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Novel, *Americanah*, employs a protest of voice for Ifemelu, a young black female immigrant who moves to the United States to attend college. In the story, Ifemelu's blog serves as a way for her to assert her agency and reclaim her narrative in a society where her voice and experiences as a Nigerian immigrant woman are often silenced or ignored. In one instance, Ifemelu states, "The only reason you say that race was not an issue is because you wish it was not. We all wish it was not. But it's a lie. I came from a country where race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black, and I only became black when I came to America" (Adichie 418). Ifemelu's blog gives another form of voice for Ifemelu to be herself. Specifically, by incorporating the blog into the novel, Adichie employs metatextuality to challenge the narratives of the dominant culture and rouse the voice of characters demeaned by society.

The inclusion of the blog is also relevant to the Iranian Diaspora and their protests for instilling agency amongst marginalized voices. Specifically, the process of engaging with social media amplifies voice and exposes oppression, and thus, Adichie's work invites readers to understand the various methods we can use to catalyze change. Ijeoma Ngwaba, an author of the peer-reviewed journal, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, of

the Western identity. Ngwaba asserts that “[Ifemelu’s] voice, in essence, is not that of a rejected, subjugated and dehumanized people but rather a voice of emancipation” (Ngwaba). Ifemelu’s emancipated voice becomes evident through her blog, where she shares her guide to those who attempt American assimilation. Ifemelu directs her blog toward non-American Blacks, stating that “when you make the choice to come to America, you become black. Stop Arguing. Stop saying I’m Jamaican or I’m Ghanaian. America doesn’t care” (Adichie 273). Adichie’s incorporation of Ifemelu’s blog parallels the meta-textuality of *Madame Butterfly* in *M. Butterfly*, informing readers of an ongoing literary protest. Furthermore, the hegemony of voice seen among both pieces of literature speaks to different contexts of inequality that marginalize Song and Ifemelu.

The Protest of Literature

Howl, Recitatif, Sally Heathcote: Suffragette, M. Butterfly, and Americanah protest the frameworks of singular voice by exposing cultures—impelled by a hegemonized voice—to inform societal change among readers. The reviewed literature of this paper represents only a minority of the lost voices in society. Each of the five literary pieces retained different approaches to highlight and inform the value of the subaltern voice. Literature is the champion of the subaltern voice, bringing light to their undermined value in society. Without literature, the voices of marginalized characters would persist unheard, as the “empowered” individuals of society compel unitary cultures. Individuals must immerse themselves in literature to promote equity for all voices, overcoming the singular voice to dominate social narratives. By applying the lens of formalism, gender studies, and Spivak’s subaltern theory each author brings to the light stories of subverted characters within their stories. Therefore, literature overcomes Western paradigms that limit voice and strengthens their agency within society.

The Diasporic Voice

With an understanding of the reviewed literature comes the relevance of the Women Life Freedom movement stemming from the murder of Mahsa Amini. Amini’s killing has re-ignited a global movement for inclusivity and change. Literature reflects the need to reject generic frameworks that restrict voice and demonstrates the power of diverse forms of protest that uplift individuals seeking to catalyze societal change. Through each piece of literature, the author’s purpose to augment the voices of the underrepresented is evident. Now, the forms of expression amongst the Iranian Diaspora are discussed to reveal their purpose in uplifting the agency within the Women Life Freedom Movement. This segment is called “The Diasporic Voice”. During the interviews, each interviewee is inquired with a questionnaire concerning their Iranian identity. Interviewees discuss their role in amplifying voice by employing various forms of creativity, scholarliness, and advocacy.ⁱⁱ

Comedy & Entertainment

The first “Diasporic Voice” is Maz Jobrani, a renowned Iranian comedian with over one million followers across his social media platforms.⁷ Jobrani During the interview, Jobrani discussed the implications of Iranian Identity in America and how his development as a Comedian has had such a profound impact on uplifting voice. He states, “I do talk about my background in my comedy quite a lot” and “words I use and say, amplify the voice of the Iranian people... to help bring attention to their struggles” (Jobrani 2023). Through the form of comedy and entertainment, Jobrani is informing change, parallel to the purposes of literature.

⁷ Learn more about Maz Jobrani’s influence through the following hyperlinks that direct to his various social media platforms: [Instagram](#), [Youtube](#), and [Twitter](#).



Figure 2: Maz Jobrani.
IMDb.
<https://www.imdb.com/na>

Jobrani's ability to incorporate the voices of the Women Life Freedom Movement within his form of comedy exemplifies his ability to uplift the movement. While discussing the impacts of the Iranian regime, Jobrani describes how they "mistreat their own people, mistreats the young people of Iran, women of Iran, religious minorities, and the LGBTQ+ community" (Jobrani 2023). Despite the diversity of the audiences Jobrani caters to, the relevance of his Persian identity persists in his efforts to uplift the movement, stating that "my culture has been a large part of what I talk about on stage" (Jobrani 2023). Through forms of entertainment and comedy, Jobrani amplifies voice and applies the capacity of his platform to expand the "feeling of being heard" amongst the movement (Jobrani 2023). In this paper, the overarching theme of voice persists outside of literature and into the ability of diasporic Iranians to cascade the voices of those oppressed by the Iranian Regime.

Art

The next diasporic voice is Professor Talepasand, an artist and Professor at Portland State University. Growing up in Portland, Oregon, Talepasand's exposure to the Iranian community was minimal. Talepasand describes the impacts of her childhood, stating "It was a very confusing [time] trying to negotiate parts of me" (Talepasand 2023). However, Talepasand's childhood experiences motivated her to investigate and embrace her Iranian heritage. With a group of Iranian friends, Talepasand grew her passion to apply creativity to ignite her inner activism. Through the "privilege of platform," Talepasand maintains the ability to amplify the Women Life Freedom Movement (Talepasand 2023). As seen in the image, Talepasand has designed a billboard to further protest for the Women Life Freedom Movement.



Figure 3: Taravat Talepasand. 2022.
<https://www.taravattalepasand.com/installation>



Figure 4: Shohreh Nikzad. 2023.

Talepasand also spoke about how "Technology has been able to connect the movement with a younger generation of Iranians" (Talepasand 2023). This is evident in her Instagram page which displays her works of art that renounce the Iranian regime, hoping to further educate the new generation in the diaspora about the horrors occurring against protesters in Iran.⁸ Talepasand's vibrant personality and empowering art continue the fight for equal rights and freedom in Iran. Diasporic Highlight: Art. Shohreh Nikzad, a California-based artist, is yet another amplifier of voice through her art. Nikzad states "My art represents women of different paths of life but all together. I see my art as a portrayal of Zan, Zendegi, Azadi" (Nikzad 2023).

⁸ Visit the following link to Taravat Talepasand's Instagram to stay informed with her efforts as an amplifying voice of the Iranian diasporic community: [@artistvat](https://www.instagram.com/artistvat).

Academia

As a representation of the form of academia, an interview conducted with Professor Manijeh Moradian of Barnard College at Columbia University reveals her purpose as an academic. Professor Moradian erases dominant narratives about Iran as they are constructed by making available histories, perspectives, and ideas. As a diasporic Iranian, Moradian describes her passion for uplifting the movement, stating she “[is] inspired by the fact that women's liberation is at the center of this national opposition and desire for a different government” (Moradian 2023). She wants [the people of Iran] to win against all the odds and wants to do everything [she] can to support them” (Moradian 2023). Moradian further uplifts the protesting voices of Iranians in her recent book *This Flame Within*. Professor Moradian informs change and stands as another amplifier of voice in the Iranian diaspora.

On top of academia, Moradian’s purpose to uplift the Women Life Freedom Movement stems from her time in Iran. Growing up in Washington D.C, Moradian describes the impact of Western culture—after the 79’ Iranian Revolution—that hindered her sense of being Iranian stating that “it really felt like I didn't have access to an Iranian identity or community for a very long time” (Moradian 2023).⁹ To overcome western barriers towards Iranian heritage, Moradian “bought a one-way ticket,” and sought to “undo the effects of racism, assimilation, disconnection, and the feeling like [she] wasn’t allowed to claim to be Iranian” (Moradian 2023). Moradian has since been a guiding voice in revealing the purposes of protest that are resident towards the Iranian regime. Amongst Moradian’s efforts to amplify the Iranian of the Women Life Freedom Movement, she has appeared on [Democracy Now!](#), [ABC](#), and other widely broadcasted media outlets. Professor Manijeh Moradian’s involvement in reiterating the desire for freedom sheds light upon the voices of those residing in Iran and the diaspora, advancing progress in the Women Life Freedom Movement.

The Diasporic Connection

By now, the emphasis on form in uplifting the voices of those protesting the Iranian regime is evident. Here lies another form of protest that continues to drive the Women Life Freedom Movement: The Diasporic Connection.

Abbas Milani, the Hamid and Christina Moghadam Director of Iranian Studies at Stanford University, stands as yet another leader within the Women Life Freedom Movement through his ability to network and cascade prominent voices within the movement. During our interview, Milani discussed the growth of the Women Life Freedom Movement and attributes it to the evolving “landscape for Persians in America” (Milani 2023). Throughout his career, Milani has appeared and published across leading media outlets ([New York Times](#), [CNN](#), [C-Span](#), etc.) and academic journals concerning Iran-U.S. relations, problems of democracy, and pre-revolutionary culture in Iran. Milani’s devoted involvement to Iranian studies also aims to renounce the Iranian regime’s “anti-LGBTQ, anti-women, and anti-rationalist culture [that] must be attended” (Milani 2023). To reclaim a lost Persian narrative, The Hamid and Christina Moghadam Iranian Studies program at Stanford University continues to host events that highlight prominent diasporic voices and their efforts to in bringing solidarity to the Women Life Freedom Movement.ⁱⁱⁱ

Diasporic Highlight: *Woman, Life, Freedom: A Retrospective* with Marjane Satrapi and Abbas Milani. On the one year anniversary of Mahsa Amini’s death, Marjane Satrapi, an acclaimed Iranian novelist and cartoonist,

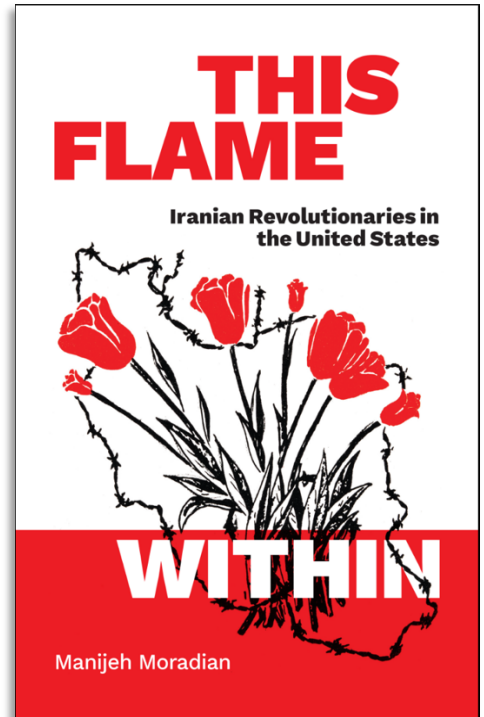


Figure 5: Manijeh Moradian. November 2022.

⁹ The 1979 Iranian Revolution and 1979-81 Hostage Crisis, marks a time that unleashed severe anti-Iranian hostility.



Figure 6: Stanford University. 2023.
<https://sgs.stanford.edu/events/woman-life-freedom-retrospective-marjane-satrapi-and-abbas-milani>

discusses with Abbas Milani the “the fight for women’s rights in Iran, and the new book [Woman, Life, Freedom](#)” (Stanford 2023). The event is one of many that The Hamid and Christina Moghadam Iranian Studies program hosts, providing a space for diasporic voices to be broadcasted.

In parallel plight to preserve and showcase Iranian voices, Persis Karim, the Neda Nobari Distinguished Chair and director of the Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies at San Francisco State University (SFSU) continues to collaborate with diasporic voices through programming and her own experiences.^{iv} As a diasporic Iranian, Karim’s involvement in the Women Life Freedom Movement resides in academia. Growing up, Karim describes how the impacts of the 1979 Iranian Revolution resulted in a life-long pursuit of comparative literature. Through forms of literature such as the Persian Language and Iranian history, Karim developed an “impetus for doing literary study in the Iranian [diasporic] context” (Karim 2023). Furthermore, Karim has become a leader within the Iranian Diasporic community by binding scholarly perspectives from

diasporic Iranians and collaborating their voices. Karim states “for me, it’s always been about how do we represent a culture that has been so maligned in the media and so underrepresented. The Women Life Freedom Movement is an opportunity for us to build on who Iran and Iranian young people are and their aspirations” (Karim 2023). As the director of the Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies at SFSU, Karim’s mission within literature enables a platform that amplifies the agency of the Women Life Freedom Movement. Karim states that she “feel[s] like one of the reasons that art and literature are especially important right now in the Woman Life Freedom movement is to give voice to the stories and experiences of everyday Iranians” (Karim 2023). Therefore, through Iranian diasporic programming, Karim networks and cascades voice to uplift the Women Life Freedom Movement. At SFSU, the Center for Iranian Diasporic Studies has cultivated several venues that showcase activism within the Women Life Freedom Movement. In the past year, dozens of works by diasporic Iranians were published in their blog and a “40 Years & More” Conference along with month-to-month events/seminars have been held.¹⁰ The structure of both diasporic studies programs enables a landscape that further broadcasts the agency of the Iranian people to inform change in the Women life Freedom Movement.

Conclusion

All this to say: Use your voice. Through literature and the Iranian Diaspora, many different paths exist for amplifying the voices of those protesting for change. By applying formalism, gender studies, and Spivak’s subaltern theory to each text, the voices of marginalized characters are amplified. Through each storyline, the sense of voicelessness amongst unitary social constructs was dissolved, as the experiences of marginalized characters (Twyla, Song, Ifemelu, and others) were brought to light. The Iranian Diaspora also offers instances where various forms of expression amplify protesting voices in Iran. It is my intent to inspire you to apply your voice as a catalyst for change and to recognize the endless possibilities for amplifying underrepresented voices—as seen in the agency of literature and the Women Life Freedom Movement.

¹⁰ “40 Years & More” marked the anniversary of the 1979 revolution by emphasizing forty years of diaspora in all its complexity. Panels and speakers shared exciting new research on diaspora communities, and the conference showcased literature, art, film and media as well as celebrated with music, food and fashion” (San Francisco State University Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies 2023).

Additionally, forms of creativity, academic scholarship, and advocacy have been methods of amplifying the voices of the Iranian Revolution, all to inform and actuate change. Diasporic Iranians are splicing their passion with activism to bring a greater sense of solidarity to the Women Life Freedom Movement. Through the Diasporic Connection, leadership seen in Abbas Milani and Persis Karim underscores the importance of cascading voice to uplift agency in the Women Life Freedom Movement. Furthermore, amongst each interviewee, a strong passion existed to liberate those under the regime and to provide further voice to the Women's Life Freedom Movement of Iran. Through literature and the Iranian Diaspora, this paper advances the amplifying of those using their voice to inform change. The forms of authors, literary genres, and interviewed diasporic Iranians divulges agency, cultivating platforms for voice to be heard and the change to progress.

Women Life Freedom

Zan Zendegi Azadi

زن زندگی آزادی

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Endnotes

ⁱ Honoring interviewees opted for redaction:

- [redacted]. *The Protest of Literature: The Voices of the Iranian Revolution as a Representative of Comparative Literary Analysis*. Interview by Arya Shadan. Canada College, 13 Feb. 2023.
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- [redacted]. *The Protest of Literature: The Voices of the Iranian Revolution as a Representative of Comparative Literary Analysis*. Interview by Arya Shadan. Canada College, 13 Mar. 2023.
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- [redacted]. *The Protest of Literature: The Voices of the Iranian Revolution as a Representative of Comparative Literary Analysis*. Interview by Arya Shadan. Canada College, 16 Mar. 2023.

ⁱⁱ Interview Question Set:

- a. Where were you born?
- b. How old are you?
- c. i) If born in Iran, how has the Iranian government impacted your identity/voice?
- d. ii) If born elsewhere, do you feel the urge to cascade the voices of Iranians uprising against the regime? Why?
- e. What has been your experience as an Iranian in America regarding your Iranian identity?
- f. Are their parts of Iranian culture you do not participate in as much? And why

ⁱⁱⁱ Visit <https://iranian-studies.stanford.edu/> to learn more about the Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program in Iranian Studies at Stanford University. The center hosts prominent voices in the activist diasporic community in “every field to understand the intricacies of modern Iranian society, and the interplay between economics, religions, ideologies, and political cultures that together shape Iran’s character and behavior” (Hamid and Christina Moghadam Program).

^{iv} Visit <https://cids.sfsu.edu/>, the official site for the Center for Iranian Diaspora Studies at San Francisco State University, and <https://www.instagram.com/iraniandiasporastudies/>, the official Instagram for the program to stay up to date on events related to the Women Life Freedom Movement and celebrating Iranian heritage, literature, and activism.