"Love and hope": a path toward a radical change in Iran

By

Raziehalsadat (Razi) Falasiri

Supervisor: Dr. Dilyana Mincheva

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Introduction

Iranian history is deeply intertwined with the collective yearning for democratic change, social justice, and enhanced economic well-being. Iranians have demonstrated incredible resilience and determination since the dawn of time in their quest for a more democratic and participatory form of government. They have consistently pushed for political reforms that empower individuals, uphold civil liberties, and encourage open dialogue since the time of Cyrus the Great, who established one of the world's first human rights declarations, to the constitutional revolution of the early 20th century. However, as Shahram Khosravi states, this hope has been constantly "interrupted, suppressed, and deferred" (15). To provide a brief overview of a significant period in Iranian history, a series of secular and religious movements emerged in response to widespread corruption, unjust wealth distribution, and limited political liberties in 1977. This eventually led to the downfall of the Shah, who was the monarch of the Pahlavi Dynasty, and his removal from power in 1979 by Islamic groups.

The Iranian Revolution's triumph at that time can be attributed, in part, to its utilization of modern media platforms, such as audio cassette tapes, which greatly facilitated widespread mobilization among the masses (Sreberny xviii). After the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, various regressive gender and cultural norms were implemented including temporary marriage, the return of easy divorce for men, and polygamy[i] (Afary 265), predominantly impacting Iranian women. The most obvious manifestation of these changes was the compulsory requirement for all women to wear the

hijab in public, which had a visible impact on their bodies (Sedghi 201). The Islamic dictatorship used a variety of surveillance techniques to exert control and maintain power while working to create a new, morally upright social order.[ii]

One of the major social upheavals and displays of discontent in Iran's Islamic regime's history is the Green Movement, which took place in 2009. The nation and the world at large were drawn in by its effects, which reverberated throughout Iranian society. The Green Movement emerged as a crucial moment that contested the status quo and demanded change as millions of Iranians protested peacefully. The young generation harbored widespread discontent with Ahmadinejad's conservative rule and rallied under the powerful slogan "Where is my vote?" Their primary demand was the removal of Ahmadinejad, the president of Iran at that time, from office, as they believed the elections had been fraudulent. However, according to Dabashi, the significance of the Green Movement extends beyond a mere reaction to the contested elections. It encompasses a broader political significance, rooted in a long history of dissent and resistance within Iran. As such, Dabashi views the Green Movement not solely as a momentary response to the Iranian government, but rather as a civil rights movement deeply connected to the country's historical legacy of opposition and struggle (20). Although the Iranian government forcefully stopped the protests by using security forces, making arrests, and censoring information, it has had a lasting impact on Iranians. They still remember it and hope for a fair and democratic society, even within the boundaries of the Islamic regime.

Following the unsuccessful Green Movement, there have been several uprisings in Iran marked by the government's acts of violence against dissatisfied citizens and political

prisoners, which perpetuate ongoing debates in society and elites' gatherings surrounding the effectiveness of the Islamic Government. The Woman, Life, Freedom Movement stands out as one of the most significant and impactful movements of its kind in recent times. On September 16, 2022, at the time of the presidency of Ebrahim Raisi, the tragic murder of Mahsa (Zhina) Amini became a focal point for widespread dissatisfaction among the Iranian population, particularly among women, regarding the enforcement of strict dress codes and the treatment of individuals by the morality police. The Islamic Republic's strict social and cultural norms are enforced in Iran in large part by the morality police. Their main duty is to make sure that the country's rigorous dress code is followed, especially in relation to the hijab that is required for women. They also keep an eye on and enforce other moral codes, such as regulations for behavior in public areas, limitations on social interactions between unrelated (male and female) individuals, and bans on actions that are thought to be at odds with Islamic ideals.

The case of Mahsa Amini attracted a lot of interest within the nation as well as abroad. She had been arrested by the morality police for allegedly breaking the hijab laws, and while being jailed, she was hurt brutally, which finally resulted in her death. This event sparked outrage and deepened the existing discontent surrounding the enforcement of such regulations. Iran-wide protests occurred in response to Mahsa's death, with women prominently leading the demonstrations. Her murder by a group claiming to protect Islamic principles has been seen as a representation of Iran's long history of discrimination against women and gender equality. Despite harsh repression, the murders of at least 537 individuals ("At Least 537 Killed in Iran Protest Crackdown, Rights Group Says"), and the

detention of thousands of demonstrators, the countrywide campaign for freedom has endured specifically by women leading the charge against the Islamic Republic and its misogynistic rules.

Women and girls have stood against these restrictions by cutting their hair short, removing their hijabs while walking on the streets, and posting about it on social media. As the protest continues, men, boys as well as other Iranian minorities such as Kurds, Jews, Sunnis, and even representatives of the LGBTQs community have joined this feminist uprising to demand freedom, justice, and change in the tyrannical political system. Thus, these protests weren't just a reaction to that specific tragic event; they also served as a forum for larger discontent about issues of gender inequity, a lack of personal freedoms, the enforcement of traditional societal values, and political and economic instability. Iranian citizens express their opposition to the government through various forms of protest. They engage in acts such as shouting slogans against the government, singing songs that criticize its actions, and even women defying the mandatory wearing of headscarves, which is a symbol of dissent. Simultaneously, they carry the weight of mourning for their loved ones who lost their lives during protests. This combination of resistance and grief is a powerful expression of their discontent. They take to social media platforms to share their experiences and encourage others to join them in breaking societal taboos. They aim to find solidarity with like-minded individuals and create awareness about their cause.

Accordingly, to express their rage and to draw attention to their cause, protesters have also turned to social media. Mahsa Amini hashtags in English and Persian have been trending on Twitter since her passing on September 16 with more than 289 million

messages ("Why Iranian"). In addition, a lot of Instagram and TikTok influencers promoted the demonstrations and raised awareness around the current Iranian feminist uprising. In this social movement like any other, emotions play a significant role. Emotions motivate action and aid in the difficult, drawn-out process of social transformation. This social revolt offers a glimmer of hope that, motivated by Victor Hugo's dictum that "to love is to act," the fundamental problems of underrepresentation and misrepresentation in the public arena may be resolved by action that brings people together. Along with their courageous resistance and struggles with regimes' policies on the streets, there have been numerous pictures and clips of the protesters kissing, embracing, and dancing in public on social platforms.

I would like to focus on these viral visuals spreading love as well as hope and trace their role in strengthening this social movement. Hence, this research will examine visual content captured during protests in Iran, focusing on the use of affectionate and collectively motivating actions by the protestors. These actions include dancing, hugging each other, and distributing flowers and sweets to bystanders. These gestures serve as a form of defiance against the Islamic regime and aim to uplift the spirits of fellow protestors. These acts of resistance are part of a larger array of counteractions employed by Iranian protestors in response to the harsh reactions of the security forces. To conduct this research, I will analyze videos and pictures sourced from public accounts on Instagram[1], that have been widely shared.

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[1] According to McMaster Ethics Boards policies, public Instagram data is not subject to further ethics clearance.

The analysis will be carried out using philosophical, semiotic, discourse analysis, and critical theory methodologies. By applying these approaches, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the symbolic meanings, cultural significance, and socio-political implications behind these scenes captured during the Woman Life Freedom protest in Iran. My goal is to observe and theorize the role of public demonstration of affection and intimacy during the current Iranian protests. I consider these illicit gestures of public love and hope powerful assets in strengthening this social movement. However, my analysis will aim to conceptualize the extent to which viral activities such as free embracing, fists bumping, and dancing are effective in advancing huge political unrest within the framework of a strict conservative society with highly functional religious police and associated state bureaucracy capable of suppressing and undermining resistance.

Literature Review on Social Media and Online Protests

Jose van Dijck his book, *The Culture of Connectivity: A Critical History of Societal Media* studies the progressive formation as well as societal effects of online platforms. The book is a practical introduction that focuses on how social media has changed from its beginnings as a way to link people to its current position as a possible platform for interaction, business, and cultural expression. He also brings up the recent concepts of "liking" and "sharing," which are strong ideological ideas with an influence that extends beyond Facebook itself to every corner of society and has a profound impact on the fundamental nature of sociality (67). He is referring to the critical role of the new

generation and how they nowadays find it impossible to conceive managing their social life without Facebook at the core of it (23). My case study also benefits from this emphasis as social platforms seem to be a unique domain of teenagers in Iranian protests and many other contemporary ones.

Mahmood Monshipouri in *Democratic Upheavals in the New Middle East: Youth, Technology, Human Rights, and US Foreign Policy*, likewise, emphasizes the crucial role played by younger generations in the Arab Spring and how proficiently they utilized modern technologies to plan and organize their protests. Monshipouri claims that the use of modern technologies by young people was vital in organizing and coordinating protests in the region. These resources allowed teenage protestors to exchange knowledge, plan demonstrations, and spread their message to a larger audience. Monshipouri also highlights the position of new digital technologies in providing an opportunity for young people to evade censorship and government control of traditional media channels, which were predominantly under the grip of authoritarian regimes. This made it feasible for them to speak with one another and spread knowledge in ways that were previously inconceivable. In a part of the book, Dijck claims that a user's ability is nothing in comparison to the power possessed by the platform's designer, which I do not find convincing enough as he doesn't provide the reader with concrete examples. On the other hand, Monshipouri contends that modern technology " are crucial to organizing, instigating and sustaining nonviolent movements". He does, however, point out that these technologies by themselves cannot end authoritarianism (16).

In their article "Gatekeeping and Citizen Journalism: The Use of Social Media During the Recent Uprisings in Iran, Egypt, and Libya," Sadaf R. Ali and Shahira Fahmy explore citizen journalism and its reliance on social media for sharing information, images, and videos of riots. They also discuss the challenges faced by traditional media outlets due to strict press regulations. Ultimately, social media allows citizen journalists to report on events in real time, bypassing conventional gatekeepers (Ali and Fahmy 57). The point that they bring up about spreading the news and information on the ongoing protests, I believe, is one of the most challenging and at the same time precious endeavors of activists under strict censorship. Ali and Fahmy suggest that citizen journalists feel pressured to adhere to the standards of media platforms because their content must undergo screening before publication. She contends that gatekeeping practices still uphold the existing policies in terms of news reporting from conflict areas and that citizen journalists may skew their narratives in order to conform to dominant media sources (65). Making a connection with my case study, it is important to note that the ongoing protests in Iran are utilizing the same techniques and despite what the general public may think, these online protests require a considerable amount of skill, creativity, and vigilance.

Marwan M. Kraidy's book *The Naked Blogger of Cairo: Creative Insurgency in the Arab World* examines how new media and artistic expression have influenced Arab upheavals. Kraidy concentrates on the actions of people who used art to confront oppressive governments in the Arab world, like the "naked blogger" Aliaa Magda Elmahdy in Egypt, the street painters in Tunisia, and the Syrian singers. He examines the debates that result from activism in art as it changes society. Kraidy takes into account the significance of

internet availability for political protest while also admitting that it is not an all-encompassing phenomenon through in-depth examinations of events in Tunisia, Egypt, and Syria. The difficulties of revolution are brought into focus in Kraidy's work, along with the significance of comprehending how modern media and artistic expression influence political uprisings.

The book's focus on the power of art and creative expression as tools for political change is directly related to my study as it concentrates on the visuals and viral images that spread love and hope among Iranian protesters. These visuals, which include protesters kissing, embracing, and dancing in public, serve to strengthen the social movement by bringing people together and creating a sense of community. In both cases, art and creative expression are seen as important tools for resistance and social change. The use of viral images in the Iranian protests and the artistic activism described in Kraidy's book demonstrate how creative expression can serve to inspire and mobilize people in social movements. Moreover, both studies highlight the importance of these creative expressions in strengthening social movements and ultimately leading to political change.

Zeynep Tufekci explores the vulnerability of networked protest movements in her book, *Twitter and tear gas: The Power and Fragility of networked protest*, emphasizing how easily dictatorial governments and outside entities may manipulate social media sites. Because of their fragmented structure and weak administrative capabilities, the aforementioned members of the movements may fail to engage in persistent political action and bring about significant reform. According to Tufekci, in response, governments and other dependent organizations launch misleading information that works as a new kind of

censorship. "These techniques allow to impersonate someone so realistically that a layperson cannot detect the fake" (Kübler 361). She also underscores the significance of planning procedures and differentiates current movements from older ones, noting that modern movements have the capacity to grow and fall quickly. Tufekci argues how movements' paths are influenced by both the internal structure of movements and the distinctive features of digital technologies.

Evgeny Morozov's book *The Net Delusion: How Not to Liberate the World* questions the notion that the internet is the world's ultimate liberatory force and contends that "cyber-utopianism" has produced a "net delusion" (6). Morozov gives various instances of how autocratic governments have improved their information distribution and monitoring procedures by utilizing modern media. He underlines that having an unquestioning faith in the ability of current technologies to resolve all social issues is risky since it ignores the real reasons for these problems and they do have a two-fold nature. Consequently, Morozov calls attention to a lesser-known aspect of internet activism, which is that it can be utilized by people who do not support political and societal reforms. Thus, the internet increases governmental authority, and activists are more vulnerable to Internet monitoring. The author insists on the idea that the internet has no inherent democratic effects and that its results are very unpredictable and dependent on local socio-cultural circumstances.

I have benefited from Morozov's critical analysis of current instances of online activism since it provides a more complex viewpoint. He contends that media representations of a few loud activists who are "extremely unrepresentative parts for the

whole"(268) are responsible for the West's exaggerated hope in the revolutionary potential of the internet. By putting his point of view into action, Morozov challenges the notion that social media sites like Twitter had a big impact on the 2009 "Twitter Revolution" in Iran in the essay "Iran: Downside to the 'Twitter Revolution'". He asserts that the Twitter protesters are "untypical" and "tiny" portions of the Iranian people (12). Additionally, Morozov points out how posts and Twitter accounts that disseminate "misinformation about the venues and times of the protests" as well as the response from government officials can slow down and disrupt the internet, creating an unstable environment for online activists (13). Overall, Morozov's insightful critiques of "cyber-utopianism" and the suspicious overrated investment in the power of the Internet urged me to adopt a more critical viewpoint on the contribution of the Internet to the advancement of democracy and political reform. In fact, his texts serve as a reminder that the effects of the internet vary depending on culture and that it is ignorant to think of technology as a sole enormous liberatory power.

Methodology

This paper will utilize two complementary methods of analysis. The first approach involves a philosophical framework that draws inspiration from various authors and thinkers. One such influential idea is Rebecca Solnit's concept of "authentic hope," which emphasizes the importance of genuine and meaningful hope in transformative actions. She presents a bold argument for hope as a commitment to action in a world where the future is still unknown and unpredictable. Solnit also makes the case that radicals have a long, underappreciated history of groundbreaking victories, that the benefits of our actions aren't

always instantly obvious, directly recognizable, or even measurable, and that frustration and despair are predicated on unwarranted confidence in what will happen next.

Additionally, bell hooks' work on "Love as the Practice of Freedom" provides valuable insights into the relationship between love and liberation. hooks concurs with the viewpoint that people are best able to change society in ways that advance the common good by choosing love and using it as the moral basis for politics (6). Moreover, the philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, particularly his perspectives on love and hope, will be explored. Inspired by Kierkegaard's notion of the knights of faith, the protestors in Iran will be referred to as "freedom fighters" in this study. The concept of freedom they strive for is closely intertwined with courage, which serves as a prerequisite for attaining this freedom. Love and hope play vital roles in fostering and sustaining the courage necessary for the pursuit of liberation. According to Kierkegaard, one can do all naturally impossible things in faith. Mountains metaphorically refer to obstacles that impede people to go on without calculations which are in ethical existence, the realm of calculation, probabilities, or improbabilities (*Fear* 46).

The second approach employed in this study involves multimodal discourse analysis and semiotics, which extend beyond the analysis of textual content to encompass other forms of communication, such as audio-visual sources. This methodology recognizes the importance of examining both written material and visual images within a discourse, as articulated by Arthur Berger's description of this approach. Berger explains that discourse analysts work with texts that incorporate both written material and visual imagery (341). This acknowledgment underscores the understanding that meaning comprehension requires

not only the analysis of language in the text but also the examination of other semiotic resources like visuals, gestures, sounds, and more. These elements operate both independently and interdependently on multiple levels within a multimodal text (Fei 195).

Susan Sontag also contributes to this discussion, highlighting the role of photography in providing new knowledge, a deeper understanding of the world, and its potential to drive change when viewed as more than just tools for recollection. In her book *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Sontag has raised crucial matters that align with the central focus of my paper. She argues that the audience bears the ultimate responsibility of comprehending the depiction of someone else's suffering, particularly considering the challenges of capturing the genuine essence of pain through photography (32). Sontag's perspective sheds light on the complexities involved in presenting images of human suffering to viewers. She emphasizes the active role of the audience in engaging with these representations, as they must strive to grasp the deeper meaning and context behind the images. According to Sontag, the true essence of a person's pain can often be elusive and difficult to capture accurately through the lens of a camera (23). The same question will be asked in this paper while seeing the images of joy in the context of a revolution.

This perspective brings up two questions, as they delve into the complexities of human experience, the challenges of empathy, and the necessity of understanding in various contexts. Firstly, as it is mentioned in the previous paragraph, she prompts me to consider whether we can genuinely comprehend the depth and significance of suffering. It raises uncertainties about the limitations of our understanding and the complexities involved in comprehending the multifaceted nature of a condition. Similarly, there comes the question

that whether the Western viewer can truly comprehend and appreciate the dimensions of joy and affection within the context of an Islamic theocracy. The second question posed is can we afford not to understand? This question emphasizes the importance of actively seeking understanding and engaging with the political moment. It urges us to consider the consequences of remaining ignorant or indifferent to the social and political realities surrounding us. By highlighting the significance of comprehension, Sontag challenges us to recognize the ethical and moral responsibilities that come with being informed and aware citizens. Ignorance, in this context, is presented as a potential liability, raising concerns about the implications of failing to understand the world in which we live.

Furthermore, viewers often find the subjective nature of photography concerning, particularly when it comes to photos depicting atrocities. They yearn for an unadulterated glimpse into the raw reality of these images, devoid of any perceived artistic manipulation or bias (Sontag 23). Photographs intentionally captured with less polish and gloss are often seen as more sincere and authentic, as they appear to present a truer representation of reality. These qualities resonate with the visuals I have selected for my work, as they also strive to capture the essence of genuine and unfiltered moments. The naive kind of framing in these videos indicates that the individuals recording them did not set out with the intention of becoming viral or making news. These videos capture a non-premeditated and spontaneous image of citizens who witness events from a citizen journalism perspective. There is no cinematographic perspective; instead, these videos are amateur recordings captured by individuals who happened to be present and decided to document the moment on their phones, sharing them on platforms like Instagram.

Gillian Rose, likewise, believes that geographers do not perceive visual representations of places, spaces, and landscapes as direct reflections of reality. Instead, they recognize that the meanings conveyed by an image are constructed through complex social processes and sites of signification (283). This process is inherently intertwined with power relations. As noted by Hopkins, the act of signification is inherently ideological because it involves selecting certain meanings while excluding others, and the social conventions that facilitate the sharing of these meanings are framed by ideology (58). This theoretical perspective gives rise to a different set of methodological inquiries. Rather than assessing the accuracy of an image in replicating the real world, the focus shifts to understanding how an image functions to create a particular representation of the world. Rather than evaluating the representativeness of an image, the emphasis lies in exploring its significance. Instead of being preoccupied with detecting bias, the aim is to elucidate how specific social power relations structure the meanings conveyed by an image (58).

In essence, Rose's viewpoint challenges the notion of visual representations as objective and neutral depictions of reality. It recognizes that images are imbued with underlying social and ideological influences that shape their meanings and interpretations. Gillian Rose adds that the three interconnected components of image analysis are producers, texts, and audiences. Producers refer to the individuals and equipment involved in creating the image, texts refer to the image itself, and audiences refer to those who view the image. Meaning is produced at each of these nodes and can be understood through three registers: social, aesthetic, and technological (284). This perspective helps me to have a

critical examination of the ways in which images participate in constructing and reinforcing particular narratives, ideologies, and power dynamics.

The Significance of Social Media

Social media platforms are created and designed with specific functionalities, and individuals employ them to engage in diverse social activities both in their personal and work-related contexts. Millennials heavily rely on social media as a means to share updates about their lives, which may be perceived as a waste of time by older generations. But it is an integral part of millennials' existence and they find it difficult to envision life without social media, as it has become deeply ingrained in their daily routines (Ching et al 531). This widespread access and use have also sparked a renewed interest in studying youth participation, particularly in the realm of political engagement, which is mostly evident in Western democratic countries (Kirby et al 731). However, like their global counterparts, the younger generation in Iran, including Generation Z, actively utilizes social media platforms for various purposes. While they are not devoid of political interest, their mode of expression and participation in politics differs significantly from previous generations. They are more inclined towards online political engagement rather than offline forms of participation (Ching et al 538).

Additionally, According to Monshipouri, social media, help ordinary citizens become more aware of their government's wrongdoings and ask for a change in the dictatorship that had been in place for years in Egypt (78). So is the case in Iran, where

citizen journalism reports on all crimes and misdeeds of the current system. To support this argument, Sadaf R. Ali and Shahira Fahmy highlight the challenges faced by traditional media outlets in Iran when reporting from regions with strict press regulations. Nevertheless, social media empowers citizen journalists to report on unfolding events in real time, bypassing the need for traditional gatekeepers (57). As a result, social media emerges as an informative platform that effectively opens the eyes of Iranians to the realities of their government and sparks questioning among them. Similarly, bell hooks encourages self-reflection, facing internalized negative beliefs, and acknowledging the truth of one's personal and collective reality in this part:

> Whenever those of us who are members of exploited and oppressed groups dare to critically interrogate our locations, the identities, and allegiances that inform how we live our lives, we begin the process of decolonization. If we discover in ourselves self-hatred, low self-esteem, or internalized white supremacist thinking and we face it, we can begin to heal. Acknowledging the truth of our reality, both individual and collective, is a necessary stage for personal and political growth. (9)

Another important point to be addressed here is the fact that the functionalities and tools available for creating and sharing content on social media platforms are regarded as semiotic resources, as they play a crucial role in facilitating communication between individuals (Poulsen 703). An example that gained notoriety is the modification of Instagram's news feed algorithm in March 2016. Instead of displaying posts in reverse chronological order, the new algorithm prioritizes posts based on the level of social interaction they received. The underlying technical algorithm behind this feature reflects a

view of socializing that is influenced by popularity and popularity-driven dynamics (Poulsen 705). Thus, the technology utilized to emphasize popular posts on social media platforms significantly shapes the nature of social interactions within the medium. The social media system actively encourages and rewards this specific form of interaction, urging users to participate in such social activities. Furthermore, the new algorithm reinforces social mechanisms that enhance "the social status of already popular individuals, including celebrities and politicians who possess cultural and social capital" (Bourdieu 1979).

I have selected Instagram as the focus of my study due to its widespread usage among Iranians from diverse backgrounds, making it the most popular social media platform in the country. Additionally, during the Woman Life Freedom Movement, Instagram remained accessible without filtering, unlike other platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Furthermore, the technology employed by Instagram allows users to share their photos within Instagram's own social network or on other platforms like Facebook and Twitter. Each platform offers distinct forms of interaction, leading to different possibilities for interpersonal communication. Instagram, with its hearts, emojis, and visually-driven dialogue, elicits a predominantly emotional response. The technology itself highlights and amplifies the interpersonal aspects of communication, framing social media interaction as a form of management. According to Poulsen and Kvåle, as users, we act as administrators, selecting and deciding which users and feedback we wish to engage with. Consequently, Instagram serves as a semiotic technology that not only facilitates meaning-making but also governs the exchange of meaning (712).

Scholars such as Van Dijck has highlighted the role of social media in fostering feelings of engagement within online communities (134). He argues that "social media platforms have unquestionably altered the nature of private and public communication" (71). They have the ability to activate and maintain connections that may have otherwise remained dormant, proving vital for mobilizing the networked publics. In recent times, platforms like Twitter and other social media have had a significant impact on various political occurrences, ranging from the Arab Spring to the outcome of the US presidential election. The prevalence of online social networks has made them a common medium for discussing and exerting influence on political events. Following his victory in the 2016 US presidential election, Donald Trump, in his first interview, attributed his success to Twitter, stating that it helped him secure victories in races where his political opponents had invested much more money. Many analysts and observers agreed that Trump's distinctive style of communication played a crucial role in his primary win and subsequent election as president, enabling him to directly connect with voters using his own voice (Brady, William J., et al. 7316).

However, it is important to note that online activity alone does not guarantee impactful outcomes. While social media can potentially disrupt established hierarchies and create momentum for a movement, it is a process that may take time to accumulate and manifest (Papacharissi 4). In essence, social media platforms provide a means for individuals to connect and engage with others who share similar interests, causes, or goals. These connections, often referred to as latent ties, can be crucial for mobilizing collective action within networked publics. By utilizing social media, individuals can activate these

latent ties and form online communities that have the potential to drive social change. Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that the mere presence of online activity does not automatically translate into tangible impact. Disruptions to established power structures and hierarchies, facilitated by social media, can indeed challenge the stability of those in power. However, the accumulation of such disruptions and the sustained momentum they generate often require time and concerted efforts from the online community.

Analysis of Visuals

The first group of videos I am investigating related to the protests in Iran is the series in which protestors offer their free hugs to people passing by on the streets regardless of their sex, age, dress code, and beliefs. [iii] What I find particularly noteworthy about this gesture is not only the expression of love and support during such troubling times but also the affirmation of equality and the call for unity. According to bell hooks, love is crucial for our endeavors to liberate ourselves and the rest of the world from oppression and exploitation. If we do not adequately recognize the significance of love in liberation movements, we will be unable to establish a culture that rejects dominant power dynamics. A culture where there is a widespread rejection of dominance is necessary for successful liberation campaigns (7). In an Islamic and patriarchal system where women and men have historically been placed in opposing roles, this particular action stands out as both heartwarming and perplexing. It involves individuals actively challenging a form of dominance by breaking societal taboos. Such actions demonstrate a willingness to defy the established norms and expectations that perpetuate gender inequality, say, and restrict

personal freedoms. bell hooks' puzzlement about the systematic support of black women and men for each other "who spend a lifetime working to resist and oppose one form of domination" resonates with the same kind of relationship in the Iranian context; hooks believes that happens with an "ethic of love" (8).

Kierkegaard believes that through faith, we provide ourselves with the notion of existence that we are not born with. It is not something that can be acquired through tradition or inherited from previous generations. Instead, faith provides individuals with a "second beginning" and necessitates a deliberate act of will. In other words, faith allows individuals to transcend their predetermined roles and identities, embracing a new sense of self (*Fear* 69). I equate Kierkegaard's concept of faith with freedom, as it involves casting aside the principles and constraints that hold one back and confine them. This freedom is not merely about breaking societal taboos, but rather about liberating oneself from the limitations imposed by external expectations. It requires courage to take the risk of venturing into the unknown, embracing uncertainty, and defying the conventions that restrict personal growth and fulfillment. Ultimately, Kierkegaard suggests that love and faith are closely intertwined. Love, as an expression of faith, encompasses hope and the belief that one's actions will not lead to disappointment or shame (*Works* 234). By embodying love and faith, the freedom fighters challenge the prevailing power structures and patriarchal systems. These actions are transformative expressions of personal freedom and courageous defiance striving for a more equitable society where every human being is recognized as fundamentally human and incomparable to others. M. Scott Peck discusses the concept of love and its profound impact on society in his book, *The Road Less Traveled*:

> Everyone in our culture desires to some extent to be loving, yet many are in fact not loving. I, therefore, conclude that the desire to love is not itself love. Love is as love does. Love is an act of will-namely both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love. (68)

Peck emphasizes that love is not merely a desire or feeling but an active choice and intention that manifests through actions. In the Islamic doctrines followed in Iran, there are strict rules regarding physical contact between women and male strangers, including the prohibition of hugging. However, in the videos referenced, women choose to defy these social norms by discarding their headscarves and embracing their male counterparts. This act of physical affection goes against the established rules and carries immense significance within the oppressive environment of Iran. As Peck cited, we can see that the women's actions reflect a genuine act of love. They consciously choose to express their affection and connection to male strangers, going beyond the societal restrictions imposed upon them. Their actions demonstrate a willful decision to challenge the existing norms and assert their autonomy. Peck's idea that love is not merely a desire but an act of will aligns with Kierkegaard's insight and the courageous choices made by these women. They actively choose to express love in a society that restricts their freedom and imposes gender-based boundaries. Their decision to embrace their male counterparts symbolizes their defiance of the oppressive environment and their pursuit of genuine human connection.

Furthermore, women offer their embrace to individuals who wear the hijab. Despite assumptions that they might be reluctant, most of them welcome the embrace. This act symbolizes a shared understanding that everyone has the right to their own beliefs and choices, something that the Islamic government fails or doesn't want to comprehend. These hugs serve as a powerful demonstration of unity among individuals of different genders, religious and non-religious ones. It is precisely the display of solidarity that the government has feared for a long time. hooks shares a similar perspective, emphasizing that individuals can most effectively bring about positive societal transformations by embracing love and utilizing it as the ethical foundation for political actions (5).

In addition to the popular trend of offering free hugs, there was another viral activity where individuals distributed flowers, chocolates, and candies by fist bumping people on the streets and even police officers.[iv] While we are aware of the distressing news regarding the arrest, torture, and loss of young protestors, there are others who strive to nourish our spirits and serve as a reminder that humanity, love, and hope are enduring. Whether they are physically engaged in combat against the Islamic regime or fostering love and hope from another perspective, they deserve to be recognized as freedom fighters. Love, which surpasses faith and hope, encompasses the work of hope and maintains hope for others as an act. Love itself is fortified and sustained by this hope for eternity and reciprocates by treating others with love (*Works* 234). Hope, as an expression of love and one of its outcomes, possesses the ability to revolutionize our relationships. It holds a transformative power. Hope is not merely a sentiment; it is a relational approach, an action, and a practice. The individuals who partake in these activities of embracing and offering sweets have

stirred the goodness within their fellow protestors and restored their connections. In Kierkegaard's thought, that is a hope for the goodness of others. Seeing goodness in everyone is the act of God and that's what love and faith demand:

> This is what it is to hope for all things. But *lovingly* to hope all things signifies the relationship of the loving one to other people, so in relation to them, hoping for them, he continually holds possibility open with an infinite partiality for the possibility of the good. That is, he lovingly hopes that at every moment there is possibility, the possibility of the good for the other person. This possibility of the good signifies ever more glorious progress in the good, from perfection to perfection, or rising from a falling, or a rescue from being lost, etc. (*Works* 238)

One of the qualities of love is the ability to see more, there is an expansion of your vision and intelligence. Only the eyes of love can hope and see the possibilities. As soon as one begins to love, they see things that no one else will see. To hope is not just to see them but to sustain that vision. The knights of faith discipline themselves to keep us seeing possibilities and hope continuously. In fact, to hope is to discipline, nurture and sustain that vision.

Solnit highlights the importance of hope in sustaining activism and social movements. She argues that hope is not a one-time feeling but a continual process that can fuel and inspire us in times of struggle. It keeps us motivated and resilient, even when progress is slow or setbacks occur. Authentic hope, therefore, is an essential ingredient in

creating and sustaining meaningful social and political transformations. Rebecca Solnit's concept of authentic hope is a call to action rooted in a realistic understanding of the world. It encourages individuals to confront challenges, recognize their agency, and engage in collective efforts to create positive change. It is a hope that is grounded in awareness, resilience and a commitment to social justice (34). In contemporary philosophy, the work of Ernst Bloch provides a significant contribution to the philosophy of hope. Bloch saw hope as a fundamental human longing for a better future. He believed that hope is not merely a psychological state but a critical dimension of human existence. Bloch's "concrete utopia" concept suggests that hope is fueled by our ability to envision and strive for a more just and equitable society (qtd in Solnit 38).

The type of hope practiced by these individuals goes beyond wishful thinking, in Kierkegaard's perspective. Hope is not a self-centered concept; it is rooted in love. The freedom fighters believe in the unimaginable, embracing hope not only for others but also for themselves. It encompasses the happiness and growth of everyone, emphasizing the idea of boundlessness and absolute worth. Hope directs attention to the potential goodness within another person. Although this goodness may not have fully manifested, one can perceive the dormant possibilities within them. As depicted in the videos, the act of fist bumping and exchanging small gifts transcends social boundaries and encompasses individuals from diverse backgrounds and walks of life. It is a powerful demonstration of unity and solidarity, as people from all walks of life come together in a shared gesture of kindness and connection. Regardless of their differences in terms of social status, ethnicity, or beliefs, these individuals find common ground through these simple acts of interaction

and generosity. It serves as a reminder that compassion and human connection have the ability to bridge gaps and bring people together, fostering a sense of belonging and shared humanity.

By engaging in these gestures, people break down barriers and emphasize the fundamental similarities that unite them, highlighting the universal need for love, understanding, and hope. It showcases the capacity of small acts of kindness to transcend societal divisions and inspire a sense of unity and collective spirit among individuals from diverse backgrounds. Hope possesses the unique ability to perceive what others may not see, expanding one's vision—a result of love. Additionally, as Solnit asserts, being hopeful is a risky endeavor as it requires trust in the unknown, the possible, and even in the face of discontinuity (6). It entails assuming a different persona, one that risks disappointment and betrayal, considering the significant letdowns experienced in recent years. By offering candies and flowers, these freedom fighters demonstrate their unwavering belief in the absence of impossibilities and embrace the risks associated with standing together, even when the simplest act of giving up could prevent arrest or execution.

I would like to bring up a new perspective to the virality of these visuals in social media and their effectiveness. Tufekci believes that "the internet allows networked movements to grow dramatically and rapidly but without a prior building of formal or informal organizational and other collective capacities that could prepare them for the inevitable challenges they will face and give them the ability to respond to what comes next" (xii). Some share similar thoughts concerning the current movement in Iran. The Islamic regime has established its legitimacy by emphasizing high religious and ethical

standards. And, when considering alternatives, it becomes unclear what options exist. Could it be a liberal state, a democracy, or a secular national Iranian state? Perhaps a different kind of Islamic state? The lack of a clear alternative makes it challenging to envision the future, and there is a possibility that the current movement may not succeed. Additionally, older generations are hesitant to actively participate or contribute to this movement.

My counterargument to this assertion would be that networked movements by their very nature are decentralized and adaptable, enabling them to respond to problems in real time without being constrained by the red tape of formal organizations. These movements often start in response to specific causes or events. They may not have set structures, but they can use technology and social media to mobilize quickly and gain support. Moreover, formal organizational structures have not been necessary for numerous historically successful social movements. For instance, a grassroots activity played a significant role in the American Civil Rights movement, which was mostly coordinated by decentralized networks of local organizations and individual activists. The Arab Spring uprisings were also largely managed with the same medium and process.

Howard and Hussain also believe that in the realm of regular political and social engagements, online actions have the potential to link unstructured groups of people and facilitate the emergence of interconnected communities, both real and conceptual (62). These collectives are set in motion and maintained through a sense of inclusion and unity, even if those sentiments are fleeting. The communicative capabilities of social media platforms, therefore, awaken what Arendt might describe as the intermediate connection of

public. They also encourage various modes of self-expression and interaction that often contribute to the liberation of individual and collective imaginations (Poulsen & Kvåle 703). Solnit beautifully implies that history is complex, non-linear, and often shaped by unexpected forces or gradual transformative processes rather than straightforward cause-and-effect relationships:

> Sometimes one person inspires a movement, or her words do decades later;
>
> sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal, and change comes upon us like a change of weather. All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope (35).

In our globally interconnected world, the movement in Iran has gained visibility thanks to social media, despite the government's attempts to suppress it. However, the government's efforts cannot fully withstand the power of social media in spreading awareness. Eventually, the state will need to engage in negotiations with the younger generation who do not accept the impossible.

To Sontag, photographs, have a profound impact on us. They not only capture our attention but also have the ability to "haunt us" (71). Images possess a greater potential to evoke strong emotions compared to verbal statements. In fact, photographs can make a war or crisis feel more real to people, as demonstrated by the mobilization of protests against the Vietnam War and the attention drawn to the war in Bosnia through media coverage (81).

These examples highlight the significant influence photographs have in shaping our focus on catastrophes and crises, determining what captures our concern and ultimately influencing how we evaluate these conflicts. Sontag emphasizes that public attention is directed by the media's use of images, which are employed to incite and stimulate political and social action. Therefore, by all that has been said social media has had a significant effect on perpetuation of this movement.

The proliferation of visuals featuring people kissing, singing, and dancing together is another remarkable phenomenon that has taken social platforms by storm in the Iranian demonstration. This third group of visuals has captivated the attention of online users and sparked widespread discussion.[v] It is important to note that the media has played a pivotal role in not only amplifying the voice of the protestors but also in disseminating uplifting and inspiring videos and photographs. Among these visuals, the images and clips of people dancing hold significant symbolic value, representing hope and optimism amidst challenging circumstances. The act of dancing, traditionally associated with joy and celebration, takes on a deeper meaning within the context of the Iranian demonstration. It becomes a form of peaceful resistance, a defiant expression of hope and unity in the face of adversity.

In the framework of revolutionary expression, Marwan M. Kraidy explores how the human body functions as a tool, medium, symbol, and metaphor (5). The term "creative insurgency" is used by Kraidy to describe the union of activism and artistic expression that defines revolutionary expression. Kraidy offers instances from Egypt to show how female bodies have symbolic meaning in the nation's "revolutionary struggle" (158). *The Naked*

Blogger of Cairo draws attention to naked images online to denounce rigid standards and disparate treatment of sexuality. Kraidy reconsiders how the modern body participates and modifies conversation in a digitally connected world through artistic formats by drawing on the historical context of the Arab upheavals and the contemporary context of our digital existence. Likewise, the body of Iranian women through the act of dancing is both an artistic and courageous expression of defiance.

The widespread dissemination of these dance visuals through various social media platforms has contributed to their impact and reach. They have transcended geographical boundaries, resonating with people across different communities and cultures. By sharing these images and clips, users not only show solidarity with the Iranian protestors but also participate in spreading messages of hope and encouragement. The power of these visuals lies in their ability to evoke emotions and inspire action. They provide a counterbalance to the often somber and distressing images associated with protests and social unrest. In a time when tensions and uncertainties prevail, the images and clips of people kissing, singing, and dancing together become a beacon of hope, reminding individuals of the transformative power of unity and collective expression.

Besides solidarity, Iranian images and clips depict pain as well. They have been spread like wildfire by lots of accounts of ordinary people and celebrities which transfer this essential message that the Islamic regime does not represent Iranian people. Iranians have a culture of love and compassion in contrast with the government which has no sympathy. It echoes Solnit's quote that "belief can be more effective than violence. Violence is the power of the state; imagination and nonviolence are the power of civil

society" (46). Similarly, hooks believes that "a culture of domination is anti-love. It needs violence to keep going. To choose love is to reject the culture's core values (42). Accompanied by street rallies, Iranians express their hopeful vision for a brighter future through fearless and uninhibited dancing, boldly challenging conservative individuals and even police officers. As captured in the video clips, women joyously dance without wearing hijabs, often spinning around a central point. This form of dancing symbolizes their autonomy and daring spirit.

Moreover, it is worth noting that these dances are performed both individually and collectively, each carrying its own distinct message. The individual performances showcase women who have discovered their inner strength and convictions, shedding the burdens imposed by patriarchal norms, and promising unwavering support for years to come. On the other hand, the collective dances call for unity, love, and mutual care among Iranians. These clips capture a multifaceted narrative of empowerment, defiance, and solidarity. They demonstrate the courage and resilience of individuals who refuse to be silenced or constrained by societal expectations. By showcasing their freedom of expression through dance, Iranians strive to challenge the conservative norms imposed upon them, while also fostering a sense of togetherness and compassion within their community. Mansoureh Ganjian, Hasmah Zanuddin, and Jatswan Singh in "A Constructivism Approach to Media Affection: How Media Effects on Social and Collective Behavior" also refer to the Iranian Green movement in 2009 where the collective action and unity played a significant role. They indicate that it is reasonable to assume that individuals naturally gravitate toward prominent social groups in order to establish their identity according to the values upheld by the group (512). They

then engage in collective actions alongside fellow group members with the aim of improving their circumstances (Festinger 514). In fact, the formation of a collective identity poses a challenge to the existing societal norms and gives rise to collective behavior and social transformations in order to attain a more favorable social identity (512).

Most of these visuals are accompanied by a song "Baraye"- For in English- which became an unofficial anthem for this movement.[vi] The Grammy-winning Iranian singer, Shervin Hajipour, was arrested due to this song. Despite the risk of imprisonment, Hajipour won the Best Song For Social Change award at the 2023 Grammy Awards. This song gained immense popularity, with over 40 million listens in less than two days. The song resonated with Iranians protesting against the country's hijab rule, expressing their fear, desires, and demand for freedom. The song begins with: "For dancing in the streets", "for the fear we feel when we kiss." The lyrics list reasons young Iranians have posted on Twitter for why they had protested against Iran's ruling theocracy. The song ends with the widely chanted slogan in the Iranian protest: "For women, life, freedom" (Sharmadown)

A notable subject that needs to be acknowledged here is that in the Iranian context, the understanding and interpretation of images depicting joy, hugs and dances in the Iranian movement differ significantly from that of a Western perspective. For the Western gaze, these images represent beauty, joy, and the encompassing freedom they bring. However, within the context of Iran, representation takes on a different meaning. As an Iranian myself, I possess a distinct perspective that allows me to see and feel things that others may not comprehend. In line with Susan Sontag's contemplation, one must question whether we can truly grasp the full understanding of an image. Similarly, when confronted with images

of suffering, Sontag prompts us to reflect on whether we can genuinely comprehend the depths of that suffering by simply watching it.

Rose, likewise, points out that "different kinds of media produce different kinds of audiences" (290). Despite the invitation extended by images and their accompanying texts, it cannot be guaranteed that the audience will respond in the intended manner (Morley 27). This notion has been extensively explored and substantiated in various significant works in the field of cultural studies. These studies have shed light on the complex dynamics between images and their reception, highlighting the multifaceted nature of audience interpretation. They have convincingly argued that the meaning attributed to an image is not solely determined by its visual content or the messages it conveys, but rather by a complex interplay of individual experiences, cultural backgrounds, and social contexts (Morley 27).

In this context, the act of understanding an image becomes an intricate process that goes beyond mere visual perception. The audience brings their own subjective lens shaped by personal beliefs, values, and prior knowledge to the interpretation of an image. As a result, the intended message conveyed by the image may be subject to diverse interpretations and may not necessarily align with the original intent of the creator. An example of this can be seen in the contrasting reactions of Iranian viewers compared to those who are unfamiliar with the cultural context. Iranian viewers express feelings of sadness and use crying emojis when encountering visuals depicting dancing and hugging. However, individuals who lack familiarity with the Iranian context might respond differently to the same images.

The existing structures of power, such as gender, race, class, and ideology, can shape how individuals interpret and respond to visual representations. The audience's position within these power dynamics can either align with or challenge the intended meaning of the image, further complicating the process of understanding. Thus, the audience should not be considered passive but there are some questions to be considered like: "Is more than one interpretation of the image possible? How actively does a particular audience engage with the image? Is there any evidence that a particular audience produced a meaning for an image that differed from the meanings produced at the production or text nodes? How do different audiences interpret this image?" (Rose 292)

As a result, these visuals shed light on various significant issues that may not be immediately apparent to casual observers. They reveal underlying layers of meaning, including the ongoing struggle for gender equality, the presence of policing, and the concealed elements embedded within the images, which hold particular significance for Iranians. The way individuals in these clips dress, whom they dance with, and where they dance all become matters of concern for Iranians. Following the viral spread of these videos, many of the dancers who participated in protests, such as the Ekbatan girls and a couple, [vii] were identified and subsequently detained. As a result of these videos and the subsequent detainment, a new trend of group and individual dances in public supporting those in prison gained popularity on Instagram, but this time the dancers' faces were blurred or they wore masks to avoid being identified. [viii] All these aftermath actions reveal the complexities of living under a system that tightly regulates personal conduct and behavior.

The policing including surveillance, censorship, and social control mechanisms, limits individual freedoms and restricts expressions of dissent.

When it comes to the visual content I've used, most of the images and footage were sourced from Iran International, a Persian language news agency based in Washington, D.C. that targets Iranian viewers. Due to restrictions imposed by the Iranian government, no other agencies within Iran are permitted to disseminate news about the protests and the government's oppressive actions. As a result, it falls upon the Iranian diaspora community to take on the crucial responsibility of sharing such news, as individuals within Iran risk detention or arrest for spreading information that contradicts the government's narrative. As a politically aware Iranian, I can acknowledge that these images hold a deeper and more complex meaning, which may not be immediately apparent to a Western viewer who might perceive them as a celebration of toppling the regime. It evokes both bravery and sorrow, as the awareness of the immense repercussions faced by those involved in these seemingly trivial acts clashes with the Western viewers' perception of their absurdity. Susan Sontag's point about the importance of considering the context in which a photograph is seen aligns with the Iranian understanding of these images (93). These images are not solely about political upheaval but embedded within a multifaceted reality encompassing cultural expressions, personal narratives, and individual experiences.

However, Sontag also acknowledges the challenge of ensuring reverent viewing environments that allow for a genuine response to these images. She highlights that those who have not experienced similar circumstances might struggle to fully grasp the depth and complexity of what is being depicted (98). In the case of the Iranian movement, this is

particularly relevant, as the experiences, emotions, and aspirations of the participants may be difficult to fully comprehend without an intimate understanding of the Iranian context. Therefore, when Sontag states, "We don't get it," it resonates with the Iranian perspective, suggesting that there may be limitations in truly understanding the profound meaning and intricacies of these images without a direct connection to the experiences and cultural backdrop of the Iranian people.

Conclusion

A psychoanalytic examination unveils the image of projection and its significance in the context of these widely shared images on Instagram, particularly by young people. The circulation of these visuals indicates the presence of a collective psyche that clings to the necessity of hope. Moreover, these images serve to unify the dispersed Iranian Diaspora, creating a shared vision of an imagined community longing for an ordered, peaceful, democratic, and just future. Embedded within these images is a collective projection of hope, resonating with the aspirations of the younger generation who eagerly anticipate the end of theocracy. They become vessels for the dreams and desires of these young Iranians, embodying their unwavering hope for a transformed society. Marie Hansen in "What is protest? Feminism, psychoanalysis and methods of social change" explores the same concern as she focuses on the influence of third-wave feminism's deconstruction and its implications for psychoanalytically informed activism.

Alongside this sense of hope, there exists a certain melancholy that is uniquely felt by Iranians. The images evoke a bittersweet sentiment, as happiness and fulfillment seem perpetually deferred. Each eruption of resistance and joy is accompanied by melancholic despair, a reminder that the struggle continues and that the ultimate resolution is yet to be realized. This melancholic undercurrent signifies an awareness of the ongoing challenges and uncertainties faced by Iranians. It serves as a poignant reminder that despite moments of resistance and glimpses of happiness, the struggle for change persists. The images capture this complex emotional landscape, where hope and melancholy coexist, reflecting the nuanced reality experienced by Iranians. The book "Melancholy Acts: Defeat and Cultural Critique in the Arab World" by Nouri Gana begins by recounting Mohammad Bouazizi's suicide in Tunisia, which is seen as the catalyst for the Arab Spring. It explores various acts of self-immolation as melancholic forms of protest in the Middle East. The author's engagement resonates with the protests in Iran, which carry the memories of prison, torture, and death, but also encompass love and hope. It is this duality of the protest, to be hopeful and to be melancholic at the same time that I would like to acknowledge. This melancholic sentiment, in fact, has played a defining role in the Iranian context and the broader Middle East since the Green movement's failure to bring about change.

José Esteban Muñoz calls the aspiration for the new world as "queerness", "a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present". Queerness gives us the impression that "something is missing" and that the present world "is not enough (1). Concerning the concept of queerness, Muñoz believes that it is performative. This state is not being but rather doing (1). Similarly, Kierkegaard

elaborates on the idea of moving mountains, which is impossible for those who have no faith, "by faith I do not renounce anything; on the contrary, by faith, I receive everything exactly in the sense in which it is said that one who has faith like a mustard seed can move mountains" (*Fear* 41). Thus, one can do all naturally impossible things in faith. Mountains metaphorically refer to obstacles that impede people to go on without calculations which are in ethical existence, the realm of calculation, probabilities, or improbabilities (*Fear* 46). Iranian protestors, the freedom fighters, have chosen to love, to hope, and to be queer against all odds. Only the eyes of love can hope and see the possibilities. As soon as the protestors begin to love, they see things differently. To hope is not just to see them but to sustain that vision by sharing their pure emotions, ecstasy, and pain on the streets and social media.

Hope, love, and courageous actions are intertwined in this protest. What might be a disruption in this relationship is fear. As David Graeber indicates, the world's leaders are fundamentally obsessed with preventing social movements from expanding, flourishing, or offering alternatives, and with making sure that anybody who challenges the status quo of power is never, under any circumstances, viewed as having won. To achieve this, a massive apparatus of armies, prisons, police, different types of private security companies, police and military intelligence apparatus, and propaganda engines of every imaginable variety must be built. The majority of these apparatuses do not directly attack alternatives but rather spread a culture of fear, jingoistic conformity, and simple despair, which makes any idea of changing the world seem like a wishful fantasy (3). Of the benefits of the Internet is that social platforms and togetherness prove to be great facilitators. The ability to overcome

fear was made feasible by the sense of community created in public and internet settings. As a result, through interpersonal communication and sharing with others, fear is vanquished, even temporarily. The images and clips of protestors who are sharing love contribute to distress and fear reduction. In fact, a hybrid public space of emancipation known as the space of autonomy is created by the connection between free speech on social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter and through in-person gatherings. According to Castells, "this space of autonomy became a key component of all movements studied and contributed significantly to their success in enacting institutional change" (6).

Thus, sometimes, a single person or their words can start a movement, while other times a small group can inspire millions of people with the same outrage or ideals, leading to significant change. The common factor in these transformations, according to Rebecca Solnit, is "hope" and "imagination." Solnit also reminds us to understand that the world can be unpredictable, but it is essential to hold onto hope for our own dreams to come true. Being without hope is not normal. Hope has to be created. If we really want to comprehend this situation, we must first realize that over the past thirty years, a sizable bureaucratic apparatus for the instigation and maintenance of hopelessness has been built in Iran. This enormous machine is primarily intended to eliminate any sense of potential alternative futures (Graeber 3).

Likewise, as a woman who has been raised and lived in Iran, I know, we, Iranians, have been torn between the two contradictory poles of hope for change and its impossibility. We have been educated for years that the current condition we are living in

is the best possibility. But the system could not kill our emotions; we have gotten used to dreaming and imagining other ways of being in the world, and ultimately, we imagine a new world. At the time I am writing this paper at least 109 protestors have been given death sentences so far in Iran after being accused of "waging war against God" and/or "corruption on earth" by simply protesting against the Islamic Regime (Kaur). But, Iranian protestors, freedom fighters, still believe in hope as the most powerful weapon. Students at the University of Tehran created an inspiring model, a bird which is hung with a note attached to it that "hope will not be executed".[ix]

Endnotes

[i] These kinds of marriages are are legally allowed via religious justification. The permission for polygamy is mentioned in the Quran in Surah An-Nisa (Chapter 4), Verse 3, which states: "And if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry (other) women of your choice, two or three, or four; but if you fear that you shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then (marry) only one..." Temporary marriage, also known as Mut'ah or Sigheh, is a practice within Shia Islam that allows for a limited-duration marriage contract between a man and a woman. This form of marriage is distinct from permanent marriage, which is the more common and enduring form of marriage in Islam. Temporary marriage is rooted in the teachings of the Shia branch of Islam and is based on certain verses from the Quran, as well as the practices of Prophet Muhammad and his companions. Shia Muslims who support temporary marriage believe that it serves as a legitimate solution to fulfill certain human needs, such as companionship and physical intimacy, in cases where permanent marriage is not viable or preferred (Rizvi 21).

[ii] The application and interpretation of Islamic rules vary across different regions worldwide. In the case of Iran, there are diverse objections and disagreements regarding the practice of Islam there. These dissenting views arise not only from other Islamic countries but also from Muslims and several religious leaders within Iran itself.

[iii] Iranintltv. "Free Hugs." *Instagram*, 6 Nov, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CknNv2RsR1_/?igshid=ZmVmZTY5ZGE=

Iranintltv. "Free Hugs." *Instagram,* 8 Nov 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/CktJB6Yoeps/?igshid=ZmVmZTY5ZGE=

Iranintltv. "open arms for sympathy." *Instagram*, 10 Nov, 2022,

https://www.instagram.com/tv/CkyVcWWvngw/?igshid=ZmVmZTY5ZGE=

[iv] Iranintltv. "Thank you for making the city beautiful with your hair." *Instagram*, 7 Nov, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/reel/CkqBfPDvvtI/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Iranintltv. "Presenting flowers and sweets." *Instagram*, 12 Nov, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/Ck2zXq1MpfJ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

[v] Iranintltv. "A duet dance." *Instagram*, 12 Nov, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/Ck25V_nsc04/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

Iranintltv. "Kissing on the street." *Instagram*, 26 Oct, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/p/ClACFELvdwq/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link

88tania46darbadar. *Instagram*, 26 Nov, 2022 https://www.instagram.com/p/ClJnmyeslyO/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA%3D%3D

[vi] Youtube. "Baraye Shervin Hajipour" 10 october, 2022
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LY_U5QfeQQc
[vii] Tavaana. 29 January, 2023
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[viii] Iranintltv. 18 march 2023,
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https://www.instagram.com/reel/CqqQIvUMCu0/?igshid=MzRlODBiNWFlZA%3D%3D

[ix] bahar.ghandehari "The most powerful weapon" *Instagram*, 14 Dec, 2022,
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