

## BUILDING JUSTICE PODCAST



### CRISJ Building Justice Podcast

#### Season 2, Episode 17: Local and Transnational Feminist Activism in Iran

**Moderator: Sahar Razavi**

**Guests: A. Marie Ranjbar**

**Please note:** This transcript may be imperfect. Please contact Sahar Razavi directly should you have questions.

#### **Music lyrics:**

Company under construction, the function, justice for the human family we demand it. Justice, true freedom, equality is a must. Thus, decolonization of the planet. So bust this. People be the power now we're Building Justice. Pulling out divinations, now we're Building Justice. Welcome the planet to the Podcast, "Building Justice," "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Building is to add on, or to do away with.

Welcome to Building Justice, a podcast by Sacramento State's Center on Race, Immigration and Social Justice. CRISJ

0:32 We explore critical issues affecting our communities with the hopes of creating a healthier and more just world. I'm Sahar Razavi, assistant professor of political science and director of the Iranian and Middle Eastern Studies Center here at Sac State. And I'm here with Dr. Marie Ranjbar, a professor of Women's and Gender Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

Today, we'll be talking about the challenges Iranian women face as they engage in local and global activism around issues of gender equity. The conversation also touches on the ways that even supporters of feminist causes

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- sometimes reinforce the obstacles Iranians face in their struggles for justice.

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- I'd like to thank our listeners who are tuning in, as well as my colleague and friend,

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- Professor Monicka Tutschka, for inviting me to bring this discussion to the podcast.

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- We are delighted to welcome you to this conversation with Dr. Marie Ranjbar. Our esteemed guest,

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- Dr. Ranjbar, is a feminist political geographer with the Department of Women and Gender Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder.

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- Since 2012, she has conducted research in Iran that examines the political conditions that make it challenging for Iranian citizens to

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- speak openly about human rights and how activists strategically frame rights narratives as a means of political mobilization,

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- both locally and transnationally. As our listeners may know,

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- nationwide anti-government protests have been taking place in Iran for more than two and a half months

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- following the death of 22 year old Mahsa Jina Amini in the custody of Iran's Guidance Patrol or Morality Police,

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- as they are called. She had been detained for allegedly improper hijab or head covering, which is mandatory for all women to observe in public.

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- We want to talk today about the historical and social context of these protests,

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- as well as the ways that women's bodies have served as a site of contestation across different generations and successive regimes in Iran,

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- which has been happening for at least a century. What kinds of activism are Iranians engaging in right now?

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- How are they resisting state control? And what spaces do you see people able to carve out organizing outside of the purview of the state?

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- Thank you so much, Sahar, and thanks so much for inviting me to this podcast Building  
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- Justice. It's really a delight to be here. So as you mentioned, we're now entering into our third month of protests in Iran.  
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- And at this point, we have over 18,000 protesters that have been arrested, hundreds of people killed, including 64 children.  
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- And now we've begun to see sentencing of protesters to death.  
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- So it really is a really important time to continue talking about what's happening  
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- in Iran and to keep the global spotlight on protesters within the country.  
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- And so, as you mentioned, this recent uprising, which is a feminist uprising, emerged following the very tragic death of Jina Mahsa Amini,  
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- a 22-year-old woman from the Kurdish region of Iran, who was visiting Tehran with her brother when she was arrested by the,  
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- quote unquote, Morality Police and died a few days later.  
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- And this moment is really different from previous iterations of social movements and mass protests,  
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- including that this is very clearly a feminist uprising.  
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- This is the first time that we see the centrality of women's rights as essential to protesters demands,  
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- as really encapsulated by the protest slogan “Jin Jiyan Azadi,” a Kurdish slogan that refers to “Woman, Life, Freedom” that now has attained global visibility.  
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- And we've also seen really important symbols of women's empowerment and liberation,  
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- including the burning of hijab and the cutting of hair, not as anti-Islamic acts,  
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- but rather as resistance against symbols of authoritarian power, specifically the hijab,  
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- as an important marker of power for the Islamic Republic that was established in 1979.  
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- And so we really do see mass resistance to an ideological,  
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- politicized form of Islam that has been historically and in the present moment imposed on women's bodies.

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- And so the other thing that's really remarkable about the type of activism that Iranians are engaging in with right now is

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- that it's very intersectional and it's attentive to state surveillance and police brutality along the lines of gender,

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- sexuality, age, and ethnicity. So again, we're really seeing all genders uniting around the centrality of women's rights.

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- We see solidarity across different ethnic communities.

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- These protests began in the Kurdish region of Iran

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- but we've seen nationwide solidarity amidst government crackdowns and across not only different ethnic communities,

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- but also across rural and urban areas, which is again different from previous mass protests in the country.

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- We also see the average age of protesters around the age of 25.

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- Many of those who are being detained are under the age of 20.

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- And we can certainly talk about the human rights implications of that. But looking at sort of intergenerational solidarity as young Iranian women are

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- advocating for radically new features that exist beyond the Islamic Republic.

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- And then finally, the scale of these protests is really unprecedented, not only from within Iran,

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- as the protests have occurred and emerged across 159 cities at this point,

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- but also gaining global visibility and solidarity with solidarity protests across Global North and Global South countries.

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- All in support of the revolutionary demands that Iranian protesters are making calls for revolution

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- and radically new futures and political possibilities that exist beyond the Islamic Republic.

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- Yeah, I don't know about you, but I've been extremely moved by not just the tenacity, the courage of people in the streets –

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- we both know it's not easy at all –

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- there are a lot of barriers to participation.

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- People know that the repression that they face, the punishment that they might receive is extremely dire.

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- It's very stark, I think, in a lot of Western contexts,

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- maybe people from outside the outside of Iran, they might not immediately understand that in authoritarian or autocratic kind of contexts,

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- protests don't usually last very long. They do happen, certainly,

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- but they don't usually last very long because the state's response is it just it raises the stakes so high that it's really difficult for people.

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- But here we see people in the streets over and over again. We see the expansion, the escalation of this movement.

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- And now it's expanding out. We have a three-day strike this week.

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- And as you said, you mentioned that the protesters are so young, they're under 25, even under 20.

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- And those are usually not the people who are the merchant class, who own the shops,

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- who manage the banks that they are now closing down for this three-day strike.

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- So to me, I don't know. Do you think that this strike and the new developments this week,

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- does this represent an expansion of the sectors of society that the movement is cutting across?

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- Do you think that, I mean, what do you see as the trajectory of this moment?

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- Yeah, Sahar, that's such an important question. And I think that also speaks to how intersectional these protests are in this moment also.

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- I'd like to really center class in this moment and how people are united around class.

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- And so, of course, for those that are familiar with Iranian politics,

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- we know that there have been waves of different forms of civil disobedience and resistance from the state.

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- So we see, for example, the 2009 Green Movement, which was widely criticized as being a sort of upper and middle class movement that was confined to major urban areas and really didn't have support amongst other areas of Iran and across the working class.  
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- And then we see mass protests that rise up in 2017, 2019 that were really based on economic grievances and uniting working-class as well as middle-class Iranians who have really suffered from economic mismanagement, corruption from the government, as well as negotiating sort of punitive US and EU economic sanctions around the country that has resulted in collectively currency devaluation and crippling of certain economic sectors, inflation, huge employment and. Exactly. Exactly. And spikes in food costs and fuel costs. That were the impetus for those uprisings that were, you know, very brutally put down. And we think about Bloody Aban and in November 2019, we see 1500 protesters that were basically murdered by the state within a span of three days. And so so this moment is really remarkable in that we've seen solidarity strikes, primarily high school, university age students that continue a three month end to hold protests demanding not reform, but actually revolutionary change from the government.  
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- And, yes, this this three day strike is remarkable.  
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- And I'm sure like me, you've seen images of, for example, the bazaars in Esfahan that are completely empty. Yeah, completely empty. The bazaar class stepping in. in solidarity, university professors and teachers joining in with the solidarity strikes. In October, we had oil and energy sector workers also uniting.  
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- And I think that this really does pose a huge challenge to the regime because it's they're already suffering, again, from economic sanctions.  
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- And I think that these economic strikes are, you know, these economic strikes, as you are really well familiar with  
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- were also the nail in the coffin for the Pahlavi monarchy during the 1979 revolution.  
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- So and so I think that this really is a remarkable moment.  
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- And I just want to briefly engage with your incredibly important point about what it means to protest under an authoritarian regime.  
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- We see a mass amount of human rights abuses in this moment.  
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- The previously mentioned over 18,000 protesters arrested perhaps even more.  
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- It's really hard to get accurate information out of Iran right now. And we see the targeting of schoolchildren.  
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- So not just protests at the site of universities,  
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- but also the sites of schools with school-age children being sent to what are effectively psychological reeducation centers for their activism.  
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- Within schoolyards,  
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- we see the detention of a teenager's as young as 14 years old in detention centers and being exposed to torture and sexual abuse.  
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- And there's a really disturbing CNN report that came out in late November about what sexual assault and torture in prisons look like.  
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- And also importantly, it's not just the killing of protesters, which is in the hundreds,  
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- but there's also the maiming of protesters by rubber bullets and metal teargas canisters.  
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- Right. And they're not afraid to shoot those tear gas canisters right at  
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- people's faces. Exactly. At close range.  
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- Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And so I think, you know, we're really in the midst of a humanitarian crisis.  
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- The U.N. Human Rights Council just approved a fact finding mission that, of course, the Islamic Republic is not cooperating with.  
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- But just to underscore, as you said, Sahar, the incredible bravery of Iranians that continue to take to the streets,  
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- irrespective of this incredibly violent crackdown on anyone in public space and of course,  
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- the surveillance that is taking place in both public and private space.  
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- That's right. And the state, Montazeri, when he was asked to clarify about the supposed abolition of the morality police,  
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- he said, "we are going to continue with our societal surveillance just as we have been doing."  
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- I want to also highlight as we're talking about the treatment of prisoners inside of Iran,  
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- there's been a long history under the Shah with the SAVAK and then in the Islamic Republic in the last 43 years,  
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- there's a history there of really just gruesome types of treatment.  
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- And I don't know if you've heard, but I've seen I've seen and heard even fairly close people in my circle,  
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- people who are detained, even if they are released,  
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- I mean, you talked about being maimed, right? I mean even if they're released and they're not physically scarred,  
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- we've had reports of several quite, quite a few young people who have killed themselves after being released  
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- and there are questions about what kind of treatment they, what kind of psychological  
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- torture they may have been subject to inside of prison when they were detained  
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- that would have prompted otherwise not at risk people to come out and end their lives like that.  
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- So, of course, as you said, the Islamic Republic is not cooperating with the fact finding mission and the  
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- investigations probably are going to be stonewalled at every turn to the extent possible,  
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- to the extent that the I.R. can do that. I mean, I've said this before, and I think we've talked about this before,  
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- that any time there's a challenge to the state, in any state, they have two options.  
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- They have to adapt to that challenge, either by yielding in order to pacify the protesters.  
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- They co-opt or they relent a little bit, or they crack down harder.  
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- They repress. They unleash more violence.  
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- They draw on the coercive apparatuses of the state even more  
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- and they make it even more difficult for people to participate.  
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- And I think that what we're seeing right now is the latter, which is completely consistent with the history of the government of Iran.  
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- But I just wonder, I'm very concerned for what is going to happen next,  
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- because if that is the tack that they have chosen to take, there's still a lot more violence that could be unleashed.  
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- And I'm very worried about what's going to happen to people.  
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- I mean, it's absolutely terrifying. And I know both of us are part of the Iranian diaspora,  
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- have deeply suffered from not being able to reach our families and in the midst of an Internet  
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- blackouts and when different apps go down and even when we are able to reach our relatives,  
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- I'm sure you've had this experience with relatives of not being able to speak freely about what's happening.  
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- Right. And so it's absolutely a state campaign of terror.  
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- And to your point about, you know, what is happening to detained children, you know,  
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- it's absolutely a failed regime when we see the securitization of not just universities,  
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- but also schoolyards and the horrific treatment of young girls and boys in detention centers,  
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- it's really hard to believe that this is happening in this moment.  
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- And I and I, I just want to underscore your point about what those threats actually look like.

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- So on one hand, we see Internet blackouts as a way to prevent information from leaking out into global media.

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- And so that's one tactic for sort of protecting the regime.

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- But another thing that we've heard from human rights organizations that are miraculously able to still do their work,

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- both within Iran and outside of Iran,

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- from those that have been detained, that have escaped the country, is that the state is basically threatening families.

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- They won't release detained children, teenagers, adults, unless the families agree to secrecy.

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- We see a number of forced confessions that are being put out by the Islamic Republic through state media,

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- which I urge listeners to not retweet or recirculate, but that that's another tactic that the state has used.

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- We know from firsthand accounts from within Iran and those that have

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- escaped from Iran, that they're moving around,

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- detained Iranians from different detention centers so that their families are not able to find them, which is institutionalized disappearances.

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- That is also happening right now. And it's deeply worrying.

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- And we can certainly talk about international community responses to the crisis.

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- And then in response to some really important points that you bring up, Sahar, are about how the regime can respond.

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- I mean, it's part of the Islamic Republic's playbook to crackdown brutally in a time of mass protest and to sort of wait it out.

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- And as you began our conversation,

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- it is remarkable that we're going into the third month of people continuing to protest on the streets throughout the country,

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- not just the major urban centers. And I think one of the reasons and I'd be curious to hear your thoughts,

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- I think one of the reasons that people continue to go out en masse despite these incredibly horrific

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- tactics by the regime to clamp down on any form of dissent is because we know what's going to happen if people stop protesting,

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- it's going to go back into a period of brutal repression.

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- We saw this after the Green Movement. We saw this after Bloody Aban.

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- We also see that reformist movements have failed within the country.

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- The regime had plenty of opportunities to make even the most minor of concessions, after the 1999 student-led protests, after the Green Movement,

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- when protesters really contorted themselves to ask for reform through using the language of the regime.

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- And in response to that, the regime imprisoned Green Movement leaders or other reformist leaders.

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- Many of them are still in house arrest or in exile, or tortured activists.

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- Right. That continue to live with the scars of torture that you've already mentioned.

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- And so I think for protesters on the streets, as well as for many of us observing from the diaspora at this point,

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- there is no option other than asking for revolutionary change,

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- because this regime has shown time and time again that it refuses any form of reform to even observe the most basic of human rights,

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- whether that's socio-political rights or basic demands for bodily autonomy.

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- I totally agree. I think that that's one major reason. I saw this interview with national soccer hero Ali Karimi a few days ago.

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- He used this phrase “na pas, na pish,” which means basically there’s no putting this back to the way that it was before.

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- There's no going back to what it was like before. If they don't push through this moment and really win some transformational kinds of change,

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- then their conditions are going to become so much worse after this.

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- People on the streets know that. The other thing that I would add to that is the 1979 revolution was not that long ago.

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- People know what it takes to get rid of a government that they don't want.

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- People in Iran are well aware of the history there.

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- It's very recent history. I know 1979 feels like a long time ago to a lot of people, but in the grand scheme, that's I mean,

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- people who were adults already then are still around now and participating in some of these protests.

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- So at that time,

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- it took one year of sustained street protests as well as additional years of organizing prior to the 1979 final departure of the Shah.

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- So I think people are aware of what it takes. They have this awareness “na pas na pish,” and additionally,

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- there are really deep traumas that have been inflicted on people's families

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- as a result of the consolidation of power by the clergy in the early 1980s.

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- That period, that 1979, 1980, 81, 82 period was extremely bloody.

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- This was – a lot of people talk about the revolution like it was an overnight overturning and that

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- Khomeini kind of descended from the Air France flight and just took his place in Iranian politics.

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- But it wasn't. It was a period of extreme turmoil and tumult.

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- And in that time, a lot of people were you know, people my age have cousins, aunts, uncles who were detained, tortured, executed.

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- There's just across a huge swath of society,

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- there are, I think, there's these deep kinds of wounds and trauma that are fresh in people's minds and in their hearts.

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- And so a lot of the wounds and the pain and the grievance are deeply personal.

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- And I think that's also what's driving some of these protests, just this overall anguish about what people have been through.

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- You've probably seen when you go to Iran, people have pictures of family members that were lost,

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- that were executed, framed, you know, 10 by 12 or whatever, framed pictures up on the wall.

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- They're there on the wall for decades.

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- These are people that are, these are brothers and sisters and children and cousins and people that you love.

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- And that's, that doesn't go away.

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- And then the people that they hold responsible for that are the ones who are currently trying to get them to go back into their homes.

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- So I think that, as you pointed out,

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- there are differences that make this wave somewhat distinct and perhaps explain why it's escalating and gaining momentum.

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- But I think also there are reasons that there have been wave after wave after wave of protests up until now.

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- Which brings me to another question that I wanted to ask you.

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- Obviously, it's so important for us to talk about what's happening right now, but I want to provide a little bit more of historical context.

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- You've written about and researched this extensively as well, so I wanted to get your that your take on this.

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- There has been a long history of the successive regimes across different forms of government

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- trying to build this symbolic figure of the Iranian nation on Iranian women's backs.

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- So with this Morality Police, this iteration of a of a patrol that can enforce these codes, these dress codes, you know, what is the purpose of those?

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- If you could share with our listeners, what's the purpose of that as far as the state is concerned?

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- In other words, people ask me, why does the state care?

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- Why would the government care what women wear in public?

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- Right. Why would the government even be interested in this kind of question?

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- So if you could contextualize that a little bit for folks listening in, that would be great.

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- Absolutely. Yeah. And Sahar, I just want to underscore some of the previous points that you that you just made.

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- And then we can certainly talk about gender nationalism,

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- because I think in a lot of these conversations about what happens next, multigenerational trauma isn't centered.

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- And I think one of the reasons that this moment is so remarkable is because we see for the first time since 1979,

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- people calling for revolution and not reform. And that is so important precisely because of all the points that you just made.

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- You know, our parents or grandparents lived through the trauma of the revolution,

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- lived through the trauma of a brutal eight-year war between Iran and Iraq.

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- The revolution which left Iran very vulnerable to external influences.

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- You know, lived through the sort of bloodshed of dissidents in the wake of the newly established Islamic Republic.

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- And I know that we've talked about this privately, but I'm sure for many of us, we know people in our families or our friends or colleagues in Iran.

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- That haven't taken to the streets in previous reformist movements because of the fear that a revolution might bring a worse form of governance, right,

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- which is sort of a common refrain in Iran. The Pahlavis were terrible but the Islamic regime is worse.

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- Right. And so there is a deep fear that stems with through that trauma, both you know internal and external conflicts.

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- And so for people to take to the streets en masse and again call for revolutionary

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- change for really the first time en masse since in the past 43 years is really remarkable.

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- And I think this moment does feel different.

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- And to this point about there's no going back again when a regime attacks its own children.

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- I think that that really is such a red line, despite the other horrific human rights atrocities that have happened over the past four decades.

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- And so even if the regime doesn't fall like within the next few months,

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- it has lost tremendous legitimacy
- That's right
- to the point that even with this sort of sort of contested narrative,

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- the quote unquote abolishment of the Morality Police – no one is negotiating with the state anymore.

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- The state has no more legitimacy. Right. They're not calling for concessions or reform.

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- It's it's calling for, you know, for revolutionary change.

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- So I just wanted to really underscore the importance of thinking about trauma and memory in this moment and sort of situating that.

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- But to move to your really important question about gender and nationalism,

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- as we both write about, Iranian women have always been at the forefront of political activism in Iran.

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- Historically, we can think about their activism in the Constitutional Revolution, in the 1950s

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- nationalist movements, and uniting across ideological lines leading up to the 1979 revolution, which, as you rightly noted,

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- doesn't come out of nowhere, but comes out of decades of coalitional organizing and strikes similar to this moment,

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- which again builds directly on previous iterations of social justice movements. And the history of Iranian women's activism,

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- in particular, we can think about advocating for different forms of bodily autonomy,

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- specifically in regards to state-enforced veiling and unveiling both pre- and post-revolution.

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- So I think we're sort of primed to think about the Islamic Republic as violating bodily autonomy

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- but as you rightly note, this also happens under the Pahlavi monarchy.

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- So as one example for listeners, we can think about the 1936 Unveiling Act,

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- which was passed by Reza Khan, and it involved the forced unveiling of women in public space.

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- And at the time it was really traumatic.

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- It was a largely conservative society throughout Iran and sometimes women were forced at bayonet point to unveil.

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- And even though the stated goal of the Unveiling Act was to increase women's participation in public space,

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- it often had the opposite intended effect, with women being afraid to leave their homes for fear of encounters, right, with police.

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- And importantly, that was, of course, framed by Reza Khan as part of a modernizing project.

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- And so it wasn't just women's bodies that were surveilled, although they were in very particular ways.

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- But that also was passed in tandem with the strong encouragement that Iranian men

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- leave traditional dress behind and dress in basically Western European clothes.

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- And so this was a sort of discursive, sartorial, modernizing project that was really pushed by the Shah.

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- And I think there's some interesting parallels with the 1979 and 1983 Veiling Acts that were you know,

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- there was first a decree in 1979 under Ayatollah Khomeini,

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- but in 1983, we see the Veiling Act, which required women to wear, quote unquote, proper hijab in public space.

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- And I think what's important is that for both the 1936 Unveiling Act and the 1983 Veiling Act is that women were  
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- left bereft of any choice and it curtailed their bodily autonomy through the state surveillance of women's clothing  
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- and these acts also that disciplined women's bodies through these ideological discourses of women's clothing either representing Iran as a secular,  
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- modernized nation under the Pahlavis or as an Islamic and anti-imperialist nation under the Islamic Republic.  
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- And I think in both of these cases, we can see how the state enforcement of women's clothing really lays bare the violence against women.  
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- Right. And I think this is one of the reasons that the death of Jina Mahsa Amini had such a forceful impact on Iranian society because  
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- of the near universal experience of what it means to have your body policed in public space and the possibility of torture,  
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- assault, or death for the most minor infraction of violating these hijab laws, especially paradoxically or ironically,  
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- when these acts are being defined through the discourse of women's protection,  
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- right, which is the classic patriarchal move. Right.  
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- Absolutely. It's really a difficult situation for people when they're trying to break free of these edicts of the state  
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- but at the same time, there's this long history of them being kind of I don't want to say used,  
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- but really the state has exploited what they see as a vulnerable group of people,  
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- right?  
30:41
- I mean, why is it so important for the state to police and enforce these codes around women's dress, but not so much men's dress?  
30:41
- As you said, they strongly encouraged, say, western dress and they banned traditional hats for men,  
30:53
- for example, but weren't, they weren't out there knocking off people's hats with their bayonets.  
31:00

- Imagine being an Iranian woman in 1940 and having your chador, your covering, forcibly removed by a soldier in public.  
31:06
- I mean, I think often the kind of psychological damage of that kind of state control of your body in public is ignored by people who  
31:16
- are having debates at the level of abstraction or ideas about what the symbolic meaning of covering or not covering is.  
31:28
- Yeah, absolutely. And I think that's why it's really important to think about this feminist uprising as being so intersectional,  
31:37
- because it is, you know, religious women, some of whom decide to wear a hijab and some of them that decide to go without.  
31:46
- And secular women who are uniting against a patriarchal elderly cleric that is completely out of touch with the lives of most Iranian people  
31:54
- and who are violently imposing a particular nationalist symbol on the bodies of women as one of the key pillars of the Islamic Republic.  
32:07
- And, you know, remarkably, we see a members of the [family of the] Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, speaking out against him.  
32:19
- I know his sister released a letter this week condemning his brutal repression of Iranians, again advocating for the most basic of human rights.  
32:28
- We saw a niece of Khamenei last week get arrested in part because of a video that she released that was condemning  
32:39
- the Islamic Republic, their brutal repression of protesters and civil society in the name of Islam.  
32:47
- And so I think there is, you know, again, the sort of burning of hijab and different forms of state symbols are not anti-Islamic per se,  
32:54
- but again, are against the sort of weaponization of Islam in order to protect an authoritarian regime that has deeply failed its people.  
33:03
- And I think in this moment, Sahar, it's really important for us to rethink what transnational solidarity looks like because,  
33:14
- you know, for the first time that I remember, and I'm curious to hear your thoughts, these protests in Iran are being narrated  
33:22

- I mean, there is sort of the run-of-the-mill Orientalist readings of this  
33:33
- as unfree Middle Eastern women who are, you know, oppressed by Islam.  
33:39
- But increasingly there is coverage in US media about how this really is about bodily autonomy and this is about police brutality and state violence.  
33:44
- And I think that US audiences perhaps maybe for the first time are able to really hear these demands from Iranian  
33:53
- girls and women because we are experiencing both a national and a global rollback on women's socio-political rights.  
34:00
- So within the US we are continuing to grapple with the fallout in the wake of the fall  
34:06
- of Roe versus Wade and what reproductive justice and bodily autonomy look like.  
34:12
- We, of course, have, you know, an ongoing movement for Black lives and other critiques of police and state surveillance of racialized  
34:17
- communities that I think in some ways parallel policing and surveillance of racialized areas of Iran,  
34:27
- like Baluchistan, like Kurdistan. And so I think that increasingly because we have our own struggles within the Global North with these issues,  
34:36
- this uprising is much more legible for US audiences.  
34:44
- And I think also remarkably in the US we're used to reading feminism and feminist  
34:49
- activism as moving somehow from Global North to Global South or from West to East.  
34:56
- But really, the Iranian protesters are turning this on their head and of course, they're supported by history.  
35:01
- But in this moment, we see Iranian girls and women that are modeling  
35:07
- I think for US women what radical feminist resistance looks like in this moment of,  
35:11
- again, not just a Global North or Global South rollback on women's rights,  
35:19
- but really globally and calling for revolutionary change and demanding that women's rights are at the center of any form of revolutionary change,  
35:23

- which, as we know from history, nationalist movements routinely put women's rights on the backburner.

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- And this time we see Iranian girls and women saying, uh-uh, not again, we've already been through this.

35:38

- We've learned from our elders and we deserve a government that not only reflects our interests,

35:42

- but will prioritize our human rights first and foremost,

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- which is incredibly remarkable, especially as you've said many times in conversation, in the wake of incredible violence.

35:54

- Absolutely. For me, this kind of juxtaposition of Iranian women and this feminist-led moment, feminist uprising,

36:02

- the juxtaposition of that with these Western discourses around women's rights,

36:11

- it really brings to mind these the similarities between what's happening in Iran and what is happening here in the United States.

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- I don't, it hasn't been talked about as much

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- but just recently, a few months before Amini's killing in police custody, we saw that Iran has actually passed an extremely draconian law

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- around abortion and reproductive access. So

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- in the wake of that

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- then when Lindsey Graham here in the United States proposed a 15-week abortion ban, in his speech about it, he actually invoked Iran more than once.

36:43

- He said, you know, we're going to do this and we're going to protect women and we're not going to be like Iran.

36:55

- And I thought it was so silly because, first of all, Iran's abortion laws are now pretty much exactly what you're asking for,

37:00

- Lindsey Graham. So what are you talking about,

37:10

- "We don't want to be like Iran"? And secondly, even if they weren't,

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- what does that have to do with you rolling back people's access to reproductive care here in the United States?

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- What does that have anything to do with Iran?

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- Why would you even bring that up in this context, even if it did support your point? But it didn't support his point at all,

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- because, in fact, what he's going for is exactly what Iran has already done.

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- This also, it brings to mind another key point that I wanted to bring up in this conversation,

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- and that is this kind of double bind that we've talked about. Women in Iran and feminist activists in Iran are so often caught between a rock

37:45

- and a hard place where they're trying to fight against oppressive systems at home.

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- But also they are quite aware that in doing so,

37:57

- they could potentially do so in ways that maybe inadvertently reinforce the Western imperialist kind

38:00

- of interventionist approach to Iran in a region that remains quite hostile to Iranians in many ways.

38:08

- So how, is there a way for us to get beyond this binary framing of imperialist versus authoritarian or the Western gaze versus, you know, Islamophobia

38:15

- in order to really get back to centering the voices of women fighting for their liberation from systemic oppression and state violence?

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- Yeah. I think that's such an important question.

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- And it keeps coming up for me as I hear friends and colleagues ask, you know, what can we, what can we do in this moment and how can we show solidarity?

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- And I mean, I just keep coming back to – it's really important to center the voices of Iranian

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- girls and women and what they're demanding and what they're asking for.

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- And we've heard very clearly, consistently over the past three months a few key demands,

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- which is 1) a radically new form of governance that centers women's rights and 2) wanting international solidarity,

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- but not Western intervention. And I'm sure as audience members are well aware, Iran borders Iraq and Afghanistan,  
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- two countries that have been completely devastated by forms of Euro-American imperialism that  
39:19
- was waged in part through this discourse of saving Muslim women or saving Middle Eastern women.  
39:26
- Right. And in fact, those conflicts have made the lives of girls and women arguably much harder.  
39:32
- And so we really have to continue to come back to what Iranian protesters are demanding in this moment.  
39:40
- But as you rightly note, there is this very long imperial history where Iranian women and Middle Eastern women more broadly,  
39:46
- women from Muslim majority societies have been read as unfree,  
39:54
- as lacking agency, have been used as sort of the poster children for quote unquote liberation,  
39:58
- which is code word for US military intervention or European military intervention.  
40:05
- And so I think we have to be really careful about how we show solidarity in this moment.  
40:11
- And so in addition to supporting the demands that protesters continue to make and keeping the global spotlight on them as they continue to endure  
40:19
- horrific abuse and violence is really thinking about how the international community can show up in this moment outside of an imperial gaze, right?  
40:28
- And so I think that looks like having accountability for human rights abuses,  
40:36
- whether that's through the UNHCR excuse me, HRC or other mechanisms, recalling ambassadors,  
40:41
- Iranian ambassadors that are at embassies throughout the world, targeted sanctions,  
40:50
- which of course is very different from the broad-based sanctions that the US has imposed on Iran off and on over the past 40 years.  
40:56
- And also thinking about for those of us that are based in US universities,  
41:05
- how do we show up at this moment for Iranians protesting? So that can look like expanding

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- scholars-at-risk programs showing support for Iranian students and contingent faculty,

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- many of whom have been retraumatized through state suppression of civil society and protesters,

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- and doing things that really refute military intervention,

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- but at the same time can support the demands as Iranians really figure out how they're envisioning new forms of governance.

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- Because, again, this uprising is leaderless.

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- They haven't coalesced behind any particular ideologies

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- and I think they need time to figure out exactly what this next chapter of Iran's history looks like.

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- And I think that we can certainly support by trying to hold this regime accountable for

41:55

- for the murder and maiming of peaceful protesters and civilians within the country.

42:00

- That's really excellent. I'm so glad that you laid out for folks what does it look like?

42:07

- What does this solidarity look like in a way that's supportive without being interventionist?

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- I think I get a lot of questions from people, from people in the community, from students.

42:19

- I get a lot of questions about what can be done to support the people on the ground there,

42:23

- because people feel very far away and not just geographically, but they feel very limited in their ability to connect with people there

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- and that's quite by design, right?

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- That's quite by the design of the state.

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- They don't want the community, they don't want the broader society to be connected to the international community,

42:40

- to people abroad who may help them in various ways. So I don't think people can be blamed for feeling disconnected.

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- But at the same time, I think that's why it's all the more important for us,

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- those of us who have ideas and perhaps background knowledge about what could be done to support protesters in Iran to come forward with those.

42:56

- So thank you for that. Thank you for those ideas and suggestions. Those measures can be extremely effective.

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- And at the very least – so they're effective in two ways.

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- One is that they pressure the government of Iran in in really broad ways and they bring attention

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- from the international community in ways that have been shown to be effective in the long run.

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- But also, I think, crucially, they convey to Iranians

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- inside of Iran that people are supporting them, because so much of this kind of movement is emotional and psychological

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- in addition to logistic, right? I mean, so much of a movement like this requires people to risk a lot to be in the streets or to

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- shut down their businesses or to organize with each other in very vulnerable spaces.

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- It requires energy, and that energy requires a feeling of being supported.

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- It requires a sense of solidarity, that you haven't been abandoned.

44:02

- You haven't been left alone by the broader community and the world.

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- So I think with the World Cup ending a lot of Iranians, now that the national team has been eliminated,

44:09

- I think a lot of Iranians are nervous that the spotlight is going to leave what's happening there.

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- But you may have seen already, just this morning I saw the news that Time Magazine has named Iranian women as their person/people of the year.

44:21

- And I think that there there's a lot of potential here for a continuing spotlight, a continuing elevation and amplification of Iranians' voices.

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- I always have a hard time when I hear people say something, use a phrase like, "I want to give them a voice."

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- You don't have to give them a voice. They have a voice. And they are using it extremely creatively, effectively, and at great risk to themselves.

44:45

- So just amplify that voice.

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- So as, you know, we could have a whole other conversation about who is doing this kind of “giving them a voice,” engaging in that kind of rhetoric and why.

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- But we'll have to leave that for maybe another podcast episode. Absolutely, and just briefly, just briefly, to add on to what you're saying, Sahar,

45:04

- because I really appreciate you focusing on isolation as a tactic of the regime.

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- And I do, again, just want to come back to how intersectional this movement is in this moment.

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- You know, that both the Islamic Republic and the Pahlavis have used tactics

45:23

- of forced assimilation and divide-and-conquer throughout Iran's many different ethnic groups.

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- As listeners may be aware, Iran is an incredibly diverse country and not just made up of Persians, but also Azeris, Kurds, Baluchis, Lors, etc.

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- and the government has sort of isolated some of these places, including Baluchistan and the Kurdish region

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- and so really fighting, I think Iranians within the streets are really fighting back on that divide-and-conquer technique happening right now

45:56

- and so it's really important for us to not take up this discourse discourses by the regime of counterinsurgency and so forth,

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- which I think can be really damaging to the movement. But also to underscore something that you have implied,

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- which is the deep isolation that Iranians have felt over 43 years of global isolation from the international community

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- and to make sure that listeners make a distinction between the regime and government and the Iranian people.

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- Iran is often talked about as one of the most pro-American populations in the Middle East

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- and I think for those of us that are part of the diaspora or have been to Iran,

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- you'll know how desperately most Iranians want to be integrated into the global community.  
46:41
- And this is why we see so many of Gen Zers reaching out through their own platforms on social media and being able to voice clearly, and, as you said,  
46:47
- effectively and creatively what their wants and needs are which include being part of sort of this international community,  
46:57
- which has this full life has been denied to them both within the country and in terms of how they're able to move through the world or not.  
47:04
- And so I think that that's also one of the key demands that protesters are making, to finally not be seen as citizens of a pariah state,  
47:12
- but to be proud of their country once again and to be able to engage freely with other people in the world.  
47:22
- And to that end the thing that we can do most to stand in solidarity is to continue  
47:29
- to put the spotlight on these brave Iranians that continue to take to the streets,  
47:33
- as you mentioned, at great risk to themselves and to their family and to their colleagues.  
47:38
- Absolutely.  
47:42
- Well, on that note of deep solidarity with Iranian protesters, I am sad to say that we are coming to a close in terms of our time here.  
47:43
- I really want to thank you for taking the time to talk to me today and to have this conversation.  
47:53
- I'm so grateful that we have the opportunity and the platform to have this  
47:57
- discussion and bring it to people who are interested in learning more about this.  
48:00
- Maybe we can continue this conversation in other ways.  
48:05
- If you would like to come back to the podcast in the future, I absolutely will be happy to make that happen as well.  
48:08
- Thank you, Sahar, and to the Building Justice podcast. It was an absolute pleasure talking with you.  
48:14
- So thank you. Thank you for listening.  
48:19

- We hope our ongoing conversations spark understandings, empathies, and motivation to join the struggle for a better future for all.

48:23

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- and guests and does not necessarily represent the views or opinions of Sacramento,

48:38

- State or CRISJ.

### **Outro Music Lyrics**

No more penalties and no more wars. Based on the actions. Now, time for "Building Justice," "Building Justice." Time for building justice, justice.