

## **Transnational feminist solidarity with the Woman\*, Life, Freedom uprising in Iran**

*For Iranian journalist [Sepideh Gholian](#), a specialist in labour laws and an activist for the cause of trades union rights, and who has been imprisoned in Iran since 2018. During her time in jail, she has reported on the conditions of women in prison, via letters and verbal accounts. A militant with the movement Woman\*, Life, Freedom, she was sent back to prison on March 21st 2023 just four hours after her release from a previous jail term. Her courage and determination is an inspiration to feminists the world over, and serve to underline the level at which resistance is now situated.*

On September 16th 2022, Jina Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman, died in Tehran after she was beaten by Iran's morality police. Her murder led to a popular uprising that shook Iran, and which was relayed around the world. Originally a political slogan used in Kurdistan, "Woman\*, Life, Freedom" became the rallying cry for the street protests in Iran what was an insurrectional, vital, and protean elan that requested nothing and demanded everything.

Over the months, and in face of bloody repression, the insurrection has become constantly transformed. From it has emerged an extraordinary network of solidarity, including spontaneous demonstrations from district to district, local inhabitants who leave their front doors open to offer protection to fleeing demonstrators, strikes by shopkeepers, and nighttime demonstrations in front of prisons in protest at executions. Trade unions, in a historic joint statement, demanded decent working conditions, an end to ecocidal policies, to nuclear arms and to privatisation of natural spaces, but also demanded political equality for women, for ethnic minorities and for the LGBTQIA+ population – who were "at the forefront" of the revolution [2]. For the Iranian feminist revolution is a total revolution.

The issue is not whether or not to wear the hijab. In the context of Islamophobia in France, it can never be explained too often that it is for women to decide for themselves. What is at stake with the Iranian law requiring women to wear the headscarf is the control and subjection of all bodies by the state, with the aim, of a minority, to monopolize resources.

The Islamic Republic governs by use of gender apartheid and state racism. It keeps its hold only through the furious deployment of a policing system that is adapted to the racial character of the populations that it seeks to constrain. All of these techniques are instilled in the global colonial economy. Lives don't count: that reality was apparent in France in June 2023 with the murder by a police officer of Nahel, a teenager, during a traffic stop, and the bloody repression of the movements of revolt that ensued. We find it at every level: from the Mediterranean coast, where the pushbacks of migrant boats have transformed the sea into a cemetery, to working-class areas in Europe, and also to Mayotte and French Guiana, Brazil, Palestine, Sudan, Lebanon, Afghanistan and Iran.

The heart of the feminism which we champion is the fight against this continuum of violence and de-humanisation which is at work in capitalism. For as long as we do not assert our voice, feminism will remain monopolized by views that legitimise this order. That was the case in the past year; Western powers have had only praise for the "courage of Iranian women", while rolling out the red carpet for a liberal, Islamophobic and transphobic<sup>[3]</sup> feminism which took

care to separate the fight for women's rights from those others that are against all the forms of oppression that are opposed by the revolutionary uprisings in Iran. In their international power games, these same Western governments benefit from the destabilisation of the Islamic Republic by the Iranian street protestors, while abandoning them to an alarming wave of executions, arrests and torture. It has never been clearer that the emancipation of peoples is an inexistant issue on the scene of world affairs. Which is why a feminist silence is not an option, and ignorance is not an excuse.

While it is impossible to order the paths of revolutions, it nevertheless remains essential to proceed with the exchange of knowledge and know-how that come from local movements of resistance, to maintain concrete networks of solidarity, weaving together the threads of a people mobilised at a global level. It is urgent to learn from the endurance and methods of the "Woman\*, Life, Freedom" movement, and to lend support to the Iranian comrades in face of the oppression. Because what we are up against here, like over there, are, in different forms, the apparatuses of states in the hands of radicalised sections of the bourgeoisie, whose arguments, religious or secular, are increasingly at pains to conceal a similar and competing capture of riches, and the exploitation of all that is living.

Today, after having lived through a year of social struggle, in France like in Iran, we, activists of different organisations, linked together by anti-capitalist feminist preoccupations, know just how exhausting the struggle is in the current balance of power. This exhaustion is an integral part of government techniques used against peoples. We are collectively thrown into climate chaos, our futures compromised by catastrophes, our present lives suffocated by stress, repression, racial profiling, poverty, illegality, bodies worn out by work, and a lack of care and consideration. It has never been so clear that all the talk of law-and-order, which is served up daily by the media owned by a reactionary oligarchy, in fact designates the security of golf courses; security for capital, to the point that the world dies.

That observation must not let us to lose sight of the fact that it is not only necessary, but also possible, to organise our forces and to change the course of events. The curve is tight, not easy, but it is doable. And we begin by affirming that from our position it consists of urgently taking European feminism out of a state of denial, for it to confront and keenly combat its colonial history, and to direct our actions towards solidarity and transnational reflection.

The Iranian revolution does not content itself only with opposing the deadly policies of the Islamic Republic. It maps a project for a post-capitalist society, one that stands in solidarity and brings emancipation. It is a lesson of a movement, of political and theoretical reinvention, and that is why the combat of Iranians is that of feminists and all those engaged in struggles the world over. Woman\*, Life, Freedom.

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[1] ["Femme, Vie, Liberté : déclaration des revendications minimales des organisations indépendantes syndicales et civiles d'Iran"](#), February 15th 2023.

[2] Katayoun Jalilipour, ["LGBTQIA+ people are at the forefront of Iran's revolution – they should not be forgotten"](#). *Gal-Dem*, December 23rd 2022.

[3] A symposium was held in Nantes in April 2023 centred on womens' rights and support for Afghan and Iranian women. The organisers, the Comité Laïcité République, withdrew their

invitation to Marguerite Stern, a former member of the feminist activist group Femen, who is known for her transphobic positions.

<https://www.ouest-france.fr/pays-de-la-loire/nantes-44000/apres-la-polemique-autour-de-marguerite-stern-le-colloque-sur-le-droit-des-femmes-a-nantes-annule-f699f7ec-d395-11ed-8669-5c45fd74f594>

[https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2023/04/05/a-nantes-la-venue-de-marguerite-stern-a-un-colloque-annulee-apres-des-menaces\\_6168322\\_3224.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/societe/article/2023/04/05/a-nantes-la-venue-de-marguerite-stern-a-un-colloque-annulee-apres-des-menaces_6168322_3224.html)