

The Woman, Life, Freedom Movement is About More than Women

By Megan Churchill

When I first heard of the “Woman, Life, Freedom” movement, I thought it was just for women. Dr Fariba Parsa writes that it isn’t.

In her book *Fighting for Change in Iran: The Women, Life, Freedom Philosophy Against Political Islam*, Dr. Fariba Parsa writes of the origin of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. The movement began in 2022 from the death of a young Iranian woman Mahsa Amini, who died in custody of Iran’s “morality police”.

While the movement was born from the death of a woman, Parsa writes that the Woman, Life, Freedom movement isn’t just about women’s rights; it’s about the rights of the vast majority of citizens of Iran.

In her book Parsa describes the way ethnic minorities in Iran face discrimination and marginalization from society, and she writes that ethnic minorities are marginalized in Iran regardless of their gender. The Persians make up roughly 60% of Iran’s population and hold political and societal power. Parsa writes that the Azeris, the Kurds, the Arabs, the Balochis and the Turkmen, together make up roughly 40% of the population in Iran, and each of these groups are marginalized in society as they have restricted access to education, low political representation, and few socioeconomic opportunities.

The marginalization that ethnic groups in Iran face made me reflect on the fact that women’s freedoms and opportunities within a country are often indicative of the way a country treats all groups of people who hold less power. Just as women are marginalized in Iran, so too are ethnic minorities. Ultimately when adding together: the women, the ethnic minorities, and the religious minorities in Iran, the vast *majority* of citizens in Iran face discrimination and marginalization from society.

Parsa writes that when Mahsa Amini was killed in 2022 at the hands of the morality police for improperly wearing her hijab, she was discriminated against in a way that many citizens of Iran could be. She writes, “The killing of Mahsa Amini involved all three types of discrimination: discrimination as a woman, as a Kurdish minority, and as a member of the Sunni Muslim minority.” Parsa writes, “The Islamic state committed all three kinds of discrimination against one Iranian citizen, Mahsa Amini, who could’ve been any citizen in the country.”

Parsa writes that today men in Iran increasingly recognize that the Islamic regime is harmful to them. She writes, “A majority of men in Iran today understand that the Islamic regime harms both genders.”

Parsa writes that because they recognize this, men are a part of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement in Iran and are working towards a secular democracy for the country. Since 2022,

when the movement began, Woman, Life, Freedom protests have drawn hundreds of thousands in crowds. Woman, Life, Freedom protests have spread from Iran to Afghanistan, to countries in South Eastern Europe, and to the U.S.

As support for the Woman, Life, Freedom movement has grown, it seems Iranian citizens are increasingly aware of the discrimination they face under the Islamic Regime. The movement that began with the death of Mahsa Amini – one Iranian woman – has become a movement that should remind us, when freedom is denied to any group it is denied to us all.

Megan Churchill is a graduate student at George Washington University studying global gender policy in international affairs. She is passionate about reporting and fighting for women's rights. She plans to continue working in communications for women's rights organizations.