Feminist Counter-Geopolitics: Knowledges, Practices, and Spaces of Activism in Iranian Diasporas

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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN GEOGRAPHY

YORK UNIVERSITY

TORONTO, ONTARIO

June 2024

Abstract

In the face of growing state authoritarianism, particularly targeting feminist and women's rights activists in Iran and forcing many to leave the country, the question of whether and how feminist activism outside the country's national border negotiates and contests political structures of gendered violence and displacement is of growing importance. This dissertation explores how knowledges, practices, and spaces of activism in Iranian diasporas across selected European and Canadian cities create alternatives to state political structures. The present research was conducted between December 2021 and June 2023 and employed different qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews with 39 activists, academics, artists, policymakers, and diaspora community members whose work intersects with feminism, women's rights, and gender-based violence. I draw upon the concept of feminist counter-geopolitics, discussing what knowledges, practices, and spaces constitute them. By focusing on feminist activist experiences as the focal point of analysis, the dissertation questions the lack of attention to activism in diaspora in critical, feminist, and urban geopolitics. I examine how activist knowledge of gender and sexual-based violence changes as they cross national borders and illustrate the challenges and opportunities of translating knowledge in a transnational context. Despite significant obstacles in materializing these knowledges such as economic hardships, political kinships among activists provide important sources of material and emotional support for activists. Furthermore, I show how, despite the dominant logic of Iranian nationalism, transnational solidarities among activists in diasporas resist such exclusionary discourses in the context of the 2022 Woman, Life, Freedom uprising. I discuss how such knowledges, practices, and spaces illustrate intimate geopolitics that challenge the state-centric understanding of geopolitics, pointing toward emancipatory aspects of feminist counter-geopolitics.

Acknowledgement

I am most indebted to those across continents who supported me in this journey. Completing this dissertation would not be possible without the rich stories, experiences, and insights of activists who have faced and overcome great challenges and difficulties to create feminist knowledges, practices, and spaces. I profoundly appreciate the trust and dedication of those who participated in this research.

My deepest gratitude extends to Professor Alison Bain for her knowledge, generosity, and patience in supervising, guiding, and supporting me since I joined York University in 2019. Our many meetings and conversations were a significant source of inspiration, and I learned immensely from her in many ways.

I sincerely thank my committee members, Professor Jennifer Hyndman and Professor Amar Wahab, whose careful revisions, comments, and feedback were key to conducting and delivering the research. Special thanks to Professor Ranu Basu for chairing the oral defence and offering her insightful comments. Many thanks to Professor Banu Görkariksel and Professor Nergis Canefe for their comprehensive feedback as external and internal examiners. Their stimulating questions and critical comments were invaluable.

I can not express how much I appreciate my family's unconditional love and support, Maman, Baba, and Nima. Thank you!

I am extremely grateful for my friendship with Linn Biörklund, my peer in the Geography Program and writing partner. Our Pomodoro writing sessions and thought-provoking conversations were key to keeping up with my writing routine and developing ideas. I learned a lot from Daniel Rosenblum, who has been a supportive friend in many ways since the days we studied and travelled across Europe. Thank you for carefully and critically reading each

chapter multiple times. Special thanks to Kiana, Faezeh, Chan, Biftu, and Ray for sharing constructive insights and feedback through different research and writing stages.

My gratitude extends to my friends and families, near and far: Rose, Noemie, Negin, Ali, Azin, Arefeh, Marziyeh, Viven, Carli, Hasti, Hiba, Alireza, Neda, Mitch, and Deidrick. I would not have made it through without their support and kindness. I also thank comrades and friends in CUPE 3903, especially Elham, Karl, Aidin, and Saeedeh, who made picketing during cold strike days tolerable and even fun sometimes.

I gained invaluable insights through years of working as a teaching assistant in the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change and Liberal Arts & Professional Studies at York with knowledgeable and experienced faculty members: Professor Ranu Basu, Joe Mihevc, Ellie Perkins, William Jenkins, Valerie Preston, Jossef Mensah, Richard Anderson, and Sylvia Peacock.

My sincerest thanks to the kind support of the members of the Geography Program at York, especially Yvonne Yim, Tricial Fuller-Davidson, Steven Tufts, Patricia Wood, and Peter Vandergeest. I am also thankful to the Centre for Refugee Studies, Michele Millard and Jennifer Hyndman for sharing the space to work. Thanks to the CITY Institute, Professor Linda Peake and Araby Smyth for creating conversations and sharing their insights during the 2023 AAG Conference. The panel discussion was extremely helpful to my thinking and reflection on the topic of urban geopolitics.

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1. Introduction: Feminist Activisms in Iranian Diasporas across Europe and Canada

On a summer day in June 2022, I scheduled an interview with a feminist student activist in Tehran. I got to know her through her friend, also a feminist activist research participant residing in Paris at the time of our interview. When she picked up the call, she sounded stressed and rushed. She had just learned that, among many others, her friend had been arrested while participating in the Pride Parade in Turkey by the police. We cancelled the interview and decided to wait until I returned to Iran in a few days. The friend was released. A few weeks later, she and I were sitting in a café in Tehran, talking about her activist experiences since she was a high school student until now. Little did we know that in two months, many fellow feminist activists would be targeted by state security forces and imprisoned in the wake of the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising. On October 2, 2022, I saw her friend in person for the first time at a protest in Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto. She was holding photos of her other activist friends, who were arrested in the aftermath of the uprising. Some of them remain in prisons in Iran.

Authoritarian political structures in the so-called "Middle East" have disproportionately targeted women and feminized bodies. In the Iranian context, the state's persecutive measures against activists who fight against patriarchal social and political systems have pushed many to leave the country. Since the 1979 revolution, Iran has experienced multiple waves of transnational migration from the country, resulting in what has been described as "the alternative map of Iran" (Mohabbat-Kar, 2016, quoted in Cohen & Yefet, 2021, p. 690). While an increasing body of geographical literature has examined the lived experiences of migrants and diasporas, the multiplicities and complexities of their activism in the context of

political authoritarianism and transnational migration have yet to be explored in a sustained and in-depth way. Such scholarly geographical analysis adds further depth to migration and diaspora perspectives while also providing a more nuanced understanding of transnational activism, which seeks to counter political structures that enforce violence and displacement. To address these inquiries, this dissertation examines experiences of activists (the majority of whom are cis-women) who have migrated from Iran to the UK, France, Germany, and Canada, exploring if and how their activism contests and provides an alternative framework to dominant political structures that perpetuate state violence and forced migration.

The research examines activist knowledge, practices, and spaces across selected cities in Europe, the United Kingdom, and Canada (e.g., Toronto, Montreal, Manchester, London, Paris, and Berlin). Activists were not only asked about their experiences in Iran but also about migration trajectories and experiences that intersect with their activist lives. Data was also gathered concerning the mobilization of knowledges on gender and sexuality-based violence as well as opportunities and challenges in translating such knowledges across national borders and linguistic differences. Further, the dissertation focuses on how activists mobilize multiple resources in contesting geopolitical structures that perpetuate state violence and displacement. The data I collected about activisms in diasporas reveals the important role of intimate social and political connections among activists, some being cultivated before leaving Iran, in mobilizing resources and providing emotional support. Furthermore, interviews with activists involved with NGOs highlight the important role played by governance state forces in determining access to financial resources and influencing ways in which activists receive public recognition for their work. Moreover, the dissertation focuses on multi-national urban contexts and the opportunities they afford to create and develop bonds of transversal activist solidarities beyond the specificities of national identities.

I put different bodies of scholarly literature – critical and feminist geopolitics, migration and diaspora studies, and urban geopolitics – in dialogue in order to theorize activist knowledges, practices, and spaces in diasporas. Feminist geopolitics constitutes the basis of this work, specifically in its relational perspective to notions of space and scale. Attending to how activists mobilize knowledges and resources and cultivate solidarities across national borders and identities provides insights into how geopolitical structures centred upon state authoritarian and (forced) displacement are negotiated and destabilized. Feminist geopolitical scholarship engages with transnationality, migration, and mobility and offers a capacious analytical framework to capture how borders are experienced, negotiated, and contested by those who cross them. I incorporate migration and diaspora studies, focusing on the geopolitics of mobility, state-bordering practices, and diaspora geopolitics so as to interpret the political power of states and diasporic activist contestations and negotiations. Finally, I draw on urban geographical scholarship about the political potentialities of cities in order to push feminist geopolitical scholars to centre cities in their theorizations of the contentious, multi-scalar politics of activism. Together, these analytical perspectives and bodies of literature provide a framework to answer three central research questions:

1) How, and with what challenges and opportunities, is knowledge surrounding sexual and gender-based violence created and translated across national borders by activists?
2) What resources are selectively available for activists to use to contest geopolitical structures of state violence and displacement?
3) How should geographers theorize and care for feminist solidarities, including their temporalities and spatialities in response to state-led gender-based violence?

Addressing these questions within the analytical frame of the doctorate permits a multi-layered analysis of the interconnected, uneven, and dynamic geographies of feminist activism

in a transnational context. Further, these considerations reveal how feminist activism creates discursive and political spaces, which are also subject to increasing state control and governance while also remaining sites of feminist defiance and contestation of patriarchal political structures.

Beyond a Singular Conception of Iranian Identity: Diaspora Geographies

Transnational and migration perspectives have provided productive debates about diaspora politics and how they uphold, negotiate, and contest nationalist discourses and politics at home, largely through engaging with questions of who does (not) belong to the nation and how to define territorial homeland. Diaspora experiences, Hall (2015, p. 235) notes, are not defined "by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by *hybridity*" (original emphasis). Accounting for such hybridity, in this dissertation, I use the phrase "activists in Iranian diasporas" to refer to those who cross and reside outside the Iranian national borders. I intentionally avoid using "Iranian diaspora activists" to disrupt a homogenized category of "diaspora" and "Iranian-ness" (see Chapter 3). Using the "Iranian diaspora" in a singular format signals the exclusion of those who lived in state-defined Iranian national borders but do not identify with or relate to Farsist-Iranian nationalism (see Torkameh, 2022). What this terminology does not properly capture are the ways in which national identities are increasingly defined and constructed by state power and oppressive measures against the racial "other," often non-Fars nationalities, including Kurdish, Arab, Azeri, and Turkish peoples who live within Iranian national-state borders. Further, using diaspora plurally accounts for the diverse diaspora geographies where different strategies to cultivate new temporary or permanent homes are implemented by those who travel across borders. The term diasporas also better captures the multiple and dynamic experiences of

migration, which account for a variety of reasons why people decide to leave the country, including both push and pull factors, representing socioeconomic and political diversities among migrant populations. I argue that while the term "Iranian diaspora" as an identity may signal upholding a binary view between those in and out of Iran's national borders, "diaspora geographies" problematizes such a reductive narrative and dualist approach. Characterizing diaspora as diverse, heterogeneous, and dynamic geographies rather than a singular identity deepens scholarly appreciation of how it is shaped by and is shaping politics at home. Such dynamics are examined in this dissertation through the experience of feminist activists in diasporas.

Transnational Migration from Iran: Historical Overview of Activism Across Borders

It is estimated that 7 million Iranians have left the country since the 1979 Islamic revolution (Nasirpour et al., 2022). The first large wave of emigration took place in the first year of the revolution, during which 500,000 people left Iran (Gholami, 2016), residing predominantly in the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Germany, Turkey, Sweden, and Malaysia. A second, smaller wave of emigration began in 1995. While many high-skilled migrants continued to leave the country in the post-revolution era, raising concerns over the issue of "brain drain," during this later wave, a considerable number of labour migrants left the country for Western countries and economic centres in Asia, such as Japan and Singapore (Gholami, 2016). By 2001, a significant jump in the number of asylum seekers and migrants was observed due to "economic crisis, lack of opportunities, poor human rights record, and political tension between the reformist and hardliner factions" (Gholami, 2016, p. 84). While economic degradation and human rights abuses continue to be the main driving forces for transnational migrations of Iranians, the emigration rate increases during political upheavals. The third wave of emigration occurred after the controversial 2009 presidential election of

the conservative candidate, Ahmadinejad, which was followed by a massive crackdown on dissidents, including feminist and women's rights activists (Nasirpour et al., 2022), pushing many of them to leave the country to flee state persecution.

Demographic data gathered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic shows that as of 2020, among Iranians living outside of the country's national borders, 47% (1,905,813) were in North America, 29% (1,184,552) in Europe, 14% (557, 786) in Arabic and African countries and 10% (389,107) in Asia and Oceania (Secretariat of the Supreme Council of Foreign Affairs, 2020). Various phases of emigration since the Islamic Revolution owing to social, economic, and political changes in Iran have led to increasing diversity amongst the diaspora population, including in their political views towards the Islamic Republic. The relatively unified oppositional view against the Islamic Republic, predominantly represented by Pahlavi supporters and leftist groups such as People's Fadaian and People's Mojahedin, who left the country in the early years of the Islamic revolution, has gradually been replaced by more diverse and less fraught views on the Iranian state. Thus, the increasing socio-political heterogeneity of those in Iranian diasporas signals a shift from what Cohen and Yefet (2021) observe as an "exilic" space characterized by the "opposition" groups towards a "diasporic" space that constitutes a range of diverse political subjectivities and ideas. More recently, studies have identified an increase in the migration of women from Iran, revealing what scholars have referred to as the "feminization of migration" (Gabaccia, 2016; Hofmann & Buckley, 2013). A recent study by Seifi (cited in VOA, 2023) on Iranian migrants shows that where women once migrated as "dependents of men", many single women or women with their children make this journey alone. Importantly, there are a variety of social, economic, and cultural reasons behind women's increasing migration. The feminization of migration is importantly associated with state discriminatory policies against

women, which has been predicted to intensify after the 2022 protests due to social and political restrictions on women (VOA, 2023).

During the Woman, Life, Freedom Revolutionary uprising in September 2022, large diasporic populations mobilized in solidarity with protestors in the country. The uprising emerged after the state killing of Jina (Mahsa) Amini by Morality Police for not observing a "proper" hijab. Immediately after her death, protests erupted first in her hometown, Saqquez, developing in multiple cities across and later out of the country against state aggression targeting women and girls. Many of the cities where Iranian diasporic mobilization took place were in Europe (e.g., Paris and Berlin) or in Anglosphere nations (e.g., Toronto, Montreal, Los Angeles, New York, London, and Sydney, among many others). What caught the attention of international media and their audiences was the scale and transnational character of the uprising, wherein participants sought to make the Iranian state accountable for discriminatory policies against women and human rights violations. Through leveraging national and international institutional power, many activists in diasporas, specifically feminist and women's rights activists, achieved relative success in putting the Iranian authorities under international pressure (see Chapter 6). Such collective mobilization, particularly evident during times of political upheaval in the country, exposes the active participation of those in diasporas in influencing foreign and international policies toward the state, the transnational character of feminist activism, and the role of activists in diasporas in influencing the political landscape of the country.

Such collective mobilization in response to state violence against women necessitates critical consideration of "how people negotiate geopolitics on the ground can challenge the top-down territorialization of state space and open new opportunities for examining political autonomy and resistance relationally" (Mitchell & Sparke, 2020 p. 1048). Such historical moments

particularly raise questions and concerns about the ways in which those in Iranian diasporas, in the context of this research feminist activists, cultivate geopolitics that may resist and counter state power. In doing so, how do power relations among multiple individual and institutional actors manifest in diasporic contexts and create a dynamic and contested landscape for feminist activists?

In discussing transnational feminist activism, I build on Iranian feminist scholars who discussed gender dynamics among political groups outside of Iran. The question of women and the place of gender equality on the political agenda, particularly among Marxist and leftist groups before and after the 1970 Islamic revolution, is a contested topic which has increasingly been attended to by Iranian scholars (Moghissi, 2016; Mojab & Gorman, 2007; Moradian, 2021). Through a historical analysis, Moradian (2021) studied Iranian women's activism among anti-shah groups before the 1979 Islamic revolution. She focuses on the Confederation of Iranian Students (National Union) or CISNU, a transnational coalition of Iranian foreign students predominantly in Western Europe and North America, and its largest affiliate in the US, the Iranian Students Association (ISA) to discuss how they initiated a women's committee in 1960 and 1970s "to address the problem of 'male chauvinism' and 'to promote women's leadership in the movement'" (Moradian, 2021, p. 108). Importantly, Iranian feminist scholars have shed light on how gender dynamics shape power relations among political groups outside of Iran and the tension around gender within the wider diaspora community, which is my focus of analysis in Chapter 6 of this dissertation. Attending to feminism and gender dynamics is particularly important in light of WLF, during which feminism and women's rights have come to the centre of opposition activism, bringing forward the issue of sexism among political groups.

The grassroots and transnational character of feminist activism in the Iranian context can also be traced back to the 2000s when the *One Million Signatures Campaign* [OMSC] was active. The OMSC was "launched in August 2006 to collect one million signatures in support of a petition addressed to the Majles [parliament] asking for the reform of current laws discriminating against women" (Stachursky, 2013, p. 196). From the outset, the campaign was characterized as "transnational" (Sameh, 2014) as those in diasporas actively participated in gathering signatures, distributing information about the campaign, publicizing the campaign on the Internet, and engaging in debates about strategies and methods. Based on her observation of activists living in Southern California who engaged with the campaign, Sameh (2014, p. 183) notes that the campaign effectively overcame issues related to transnationality in the era of war, neoliberalism, and Islamophobia, formulating novel opportunities for transnational feminist solidarity. Although the campaign did not achieve its goal and many activists were captured and detained by Iranian authorities (prior to being forced to migrate), the horizontal, democratic, and expansive networks it created marked a significant step towards cross-border grassroots feminist activism.

In 2009, widespread persecution of activists and dissidents who participated in the Green Movement, protesting the alleged fraudulent presidential election of conservative candidate Ahmadinejad, led to a mass emigration of journalists, bloggers, activists, and lawyers, among them prominent feminist and women's rights activists and campaign members (Nasirpour, 2022). Nasirpour (2022, p. 736) explores the impact of accelerated emigration on the activities of the *Feminist School*, the alleged "intellectual wing" of the Iranian women's movement, which was founded as an online platform in 2008. She observes that the activities of school members who left the country resulted in increasing government pressure on activists who remained in Iran, thereby giving rise to internal friction and demobilization of

feminist activism. The state's surveillance of feminist activisms in online spaces, which proliferated since the Green Movement with the advent of social media, namely Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, led many activists in diasporas to limit their interaction with those in Iran in order to avoid risks to their safety. In the face of accelerated transnational migration in response to state authoritarianism, it is still crucial to explore how feminist activists in diasporas articulate and perform politics that negotiate and challenge geopolitical structures characterized by state violence and displacement. Given the relatively recent Women, Life, Freedom uprising in response to the state's gender-based violence, there is much room to investigate the influence of transnational diasporas on feminist activist knowledges, practices, and spaces.

Chapters in Overview

To address the three research questions posed above, each chapter interweaves answers, beginning first by establishing a conceptual framework that is then animated in subsequent chapters through empirical examples. Chapter 2 theorizes resistance to geopolitical structures that are rooted in state violence and displacement. It draws on feminist counter-geopolitics and positions it in a transnational context, which foregrounds notions of (im)mobility and migration in relation to the state's bordering practices and questions of national security. Further, I show how incorporating an urban geopolitical perspective on feminist counter-geopolitics helps to better account for the role of cities in the 'whereness' of activism.

The methodological framework augments this transnational feminist perspective by accounting for and questioning power dynamics between researchers and research participants, often embedded within Global South/Global North binaries. Chapter 3 explores the intimacies of transnational feminist research, considering emotions, relationships, and reflections that shape the process of knowledge production. I argue that an intimate approach

to transnational feminist methodologies provides a more nuanced and politically relevant understanding of changing power dynamics in the face of political uncertainties and the safety risks they pose to individuals.

This research was carried out through multiple qualitative research methods, including semi-structured interviews, document and media analysis, and (visual) ethnography, from December 2021 to June 2023. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with twenty-four activists, researchers/academics, artists, and event organizers whose works intersect with feminism, women's (human) rights, and gender-based violence. Document and media analysis was also used to supplement data provided by informants focusing on the temporality of activism in relation to changing socio-political conditions. In addition, visual ethnography was undertaken through photographic and video footage of place-based activism in Toronto in the light of the Woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising.

The dissertation positions the co-constitutive character of intimacy and geopolitics in discussions of feminist activism. It asks how intimate home spaces facilitate knowledge and resource mobilization and how intimate relations build into political organizations and solidarity-making. I foreground the concept of intimate geopolitics in order to explore the role of intimate relations, practices, and spaces in feminist activism. Given the intimate ways in which the personal and political lives of activists shape one another, adopting an intimate lens to geopolitics in the context of feminist activism is crucial,

With a focus on activist perspectives as the basis for theoretical intervention, the three empirical body chapters of this dissertation unpack different facets of feminist counter-geopolitics constructed through transnational activisms. Chapter 4 examines counter-geopolitical knowledges, illuminating challenges and opportunities associated with translating ideas and theories across national borders. Chapter 5 explores how activists

mobilize multiple resources, exposing the role of governance forces of institutional power in shaping activist practices in diasporas. Chapter 6 uses the city of Toronto as a case study of transnational solidarities and radical care practices. Together, these chapters challenge the idea that geopolitics are merely practiced by state power and reveals how activists' knowledge, practices, and spaces produce politics that seek to reconfigure state power.

By analytically centring intimate geopolitics in my dissertation, I provide a much-needed theoretical and political intervention at a time when authoritarianism has accelerated at a global level to problematize the view that geopolitics is made only by state power. Drawing from Pain and Staeheli (2014, p. 345), by "rotating the usual lens of analysis" to stretch intimacy around its others, "the public, the global, the geopolitical", conceptual space is made to think and act toward subverting patriarchal and misogynistic social and political structures. Such an intervention contests the meaning of the geopolitical by exposing how intimate spaces, practices, and relations cultivated through transnational activism formulate alternatives to geopolitical structures that create and maintain state violence and displacement.

2. Feminist Counter-Geopolitics: Intimate Geopolitics in a Transnational Context

Introduction

Patriarchy and misogyny increasingly define state authoritarianism and geopolitical structures in the so-called "Middle East[1]." In the face of the increasing criminalization and suppression of feminist and women's rights activists, many are pushed to leave their home country. Given the growing population of feminist activists in diasporas, it is necessary to ask what kinds of politics are created as bodies, knowledge, ideas, and emotions move across national borders. How do such politics reinforce, resist, and counter authoritarian state power, not only at home but in diasporas? What does feminist counter-geopolitics look like in a transnational context? I address these questions in this chapter by placing critical, feminist, urban geopolitics, and critical migration and diaspora studies in conversation with each other. In doing so, I focus on the meanings of, and conceptual interrelations between, geopolitics, the intimate, scale, mobility, and the urban in the context of transnational feminist activism by drawing on the notion of counter-geopolitics. I propose the concept of the *urban intimate* as a framework to explore further the connection between the "little and big things" of geopolitics (Thrift, 2002; Sharp, 2021) and to continue to challenge the idea that politics is only produced at national and global scales as per theorizations of counter-geopolitics.

As an alternative spatialization of politics, counter-geopolitics illuminates the ways in which geopolitics "can be extended and made plural across multiple scales" and provides an understanding of politics that encompasses formal and informal arenas (Secor, 2001, p. 191).

[1] Eurocentric perspectives inform what is understood as the "Middle East". The term positions Europe at the centre of the world map, signifying lands which provide access to resources and military opportunities (Payind and McClimans, n.d.).

For Secor (2001, p. 208), the concept questions the idea that politics is only formulated at the global scale; rather, political articulations and contestation take place simultaneously at multiple levels and in diverse spaces. Within transnational contexts, geopolitics is multi-scalar but also intimate, putting it in dialogue with the lived and embodied dynamics of mobility, migration, and diaspora, often at the spatial scale of the urban. This chapter conceptualizes counter-geopolitics as a theoretical framework to examine in the following chapters various knowledges produced by activists in diasporas, the challenges and opportunities they face in using and mobilizing resources, and the transnational solidarities they create through lived intimacies within cities.

In what follows, first, I discuss feminist counter-geopolitics, primarily through an intimate geopolitical perspective in feminist literature, and how theorizing intimate geopolitics provides a framework to think about scale relationally. I then unpack intimate geopolitics in a transnational context, focusing on the geopolitics of (im)mobility and homemaking practices by migrants and those in diasporas. Next, I turn to urban geopolitics in order to discuss the possibilities of reconceptualizing the intimate by expanding its boundaries to the urban scale. In using feminist counter-geopolitics as the primary conceptual framing of this research, the present chapter demonstrates how an intimate lens provides a crucial analytical framework for understanding the dynamics of feminist activism in diasporas across home, city, national, and international scales.

Conceptualizing Feminist Counter-Geopolitics

Building on a Foucauldian appreciation of the power/knowledge nexus in discourse (Dodds & Sidaway, 1994), critical geopolitics resists and questions "Geography as imperial truth, state-capitalized knowledge, and military weapon" (Tuathail, 1996, quoted in Hyndman, 2004, p. 310). As Dodds and Sidaway (1994, p. 516) discuss, power/knowledge functions

geopolitically through establishing knowledge, boundaries, rituals, and subjects to define the field and the world. Through a deconstructive approach, critical geopolitical perspectives problematize common sense knowledge and practice of war, peace, and security by sovereign states and individuals (Dalby, 1991; Hyndman, 2004; Sparke, 1998). Tuathail (1996, p. 92) writes that critical geopolitics questions "the 'is' of 'geography' and 'geopolitics,' their status as self-evident, natural, foundational, and eminently knowable realities." A critical geopolitical approach, thus, provides an analytical framework to unsettle ideas on how geographical world divisions and global imaginaries inform and legitimize foreign policy, revealing knowledge/power dynamics within geopolitics.

Drawing on critical geopolitics, as well as feminist international relations and transnational feminist studies (Hyndman, 2001), feminist geopolitics emerged in the 2000s as a body of scholarship that prioritized a gendered, embodied analysis of geopolitics (Dixon, 2016; Dowler & Sharp, 2001; Hyndman, 2001, 2017; Massaro & Williams, 2013). Given critiques against disembodied accounts of critical geopolitics (Hyndman, 2004), feminist geopolitics offers intersectional analyses of geopolitics, which include women's experiences but also everyday spaces of other gendered, racialized, classed, and sexualized bodies and groups (Massaro & Williams, 2013). By doing so, feminist geopolitics reveals how geopolitical practices take place in a wide variety of spaces outside of formal political spheres, such as in the more intimate, everyday contexts of homes, workplaces, and refugee camps. In this way, feminist geopolitics is distinct from critical geopolitics "by adding a potentially reconstructive political dimension to the crucial but at times unsatisfactory deconstructionist political impulses" (Hyndman, 2004, p. 309) and foregrounding the lived experiences of women's bodies and the centrality of bodies to politics.

A particular focus on bodies and bodies' politics is also evident in the discussion of affect in critical geography and geopolitical literature (Pile, 2010; Thien, 2005). Thrift (2002) notes that embodiments are crucially important as both vectors of power and performative sites. Although embodied geopolitics identifies the gendered implication of the masculinist position of geopolitical agents and elites, it also provides a framework to make visible experiences of various subordinated groups and individuals within geopolitics, helping us to understand how their practices create geopolitics at smaller scales (Williams, 2011). As a framework that facilitates rewriting geopolitics through everyday experiences and actions, feminist geopolitical scholarship engages with embodied geopolitics, prioritizing experiences, subjectivists, and practices that are unrecognized within dominant state power and geopolitical narrations (Dowler & Sharp, 200l; Williams, 2011).

By recentering political inquiry "to the fleshy matter of the body" (Clark, 2017, p.1), feminist geopolitics expose the differentiated vulnerabilities of bodies to state power, as well as their agency to resist and counter it. In framing the body as the centre of analytical and political projects, feminist theoretical approaches provide an analytical tool to critically examine the meaning of security and securitization by asking whose security matters (Hyndman & De Alwis, 2004). As Hyndman (2015, p. 1) writes, securitization facilitates a political agenda to create consent and capacity for militarization and security measures by state forces. Securitization is a process through which "regular politics" shift into security areas by employing rhetorics of threats and emergencies (Campesi, 2011; Hyndman, 2015).

In questioning taken-for-granted understandings of security among other geopolitical concepts, critical and feminist scholars have used notions such as "anti-geopolitics" (Routledge, 2003; Tuathail, 1996), "alter-geopolitics" (Koopman, 2011), "subaltern geopolitics" (Sharp, 2011; Cheong, 2019; Sidaway, 2012), and "counter-geopolitics"

(Marshall, 2014; Öcal & Gökarıksel, 2022; Secor, 2001) to capture alternative ways of imagining and doing geopolitics. For Routledge (2003, p. 236), anti-geopolitics is an:

> ethical, political and cultural force within civil society – i.e, those institutions and organizations which are neither part of the processes of material production in the economy, nor part of state-funded or state-controlled organizations (e.g. religious institutions, the media, voluntary organizations, educational institutions, and trade unions) – that challenges the notion that the interests of state's political class are identical to the community interests.

Assuming a "permanent independence from the state," anti-geopolitical struggle encompasses anti-hegemonic struggles against material (military and economic) geopolitical power of the states and global institutions as well as representations by economic and political elites that are employed at the service of states' geopolitical interests. As Sharp explains, the subject of anti-geopolitics is positioned completely *outside* the state and its institutions. Thus, the concept of anti-geopolitics is limited in its account of political subjectivities, identities, and spaces that do not fully fall in or outside of the state. Instead, Sharp (2011, p. 217) formulates subaltern geopolitics as "neither dominant nor resistant," explaining that an absolute distinction between the two is impossible, as examining only one of them epitomizes such dualist geopolitical conceptions rather than questioning them. Instead, subaltern geopolitics highlights postcolonial emphasis in rendering visible voices and subjectivities of those marginalized within Western politics and captures ways in which the subaltern rework geopolitics from below.

Feminist perspectives within critical geopolitics also explore how geopolitical knowledge and practices in everyday space counter geopolitical attempts of territorialization by nation-states (Öcal & Gökarıksel, 2022, p. 152) while resisting othering discourses of West versus East in foreign and international relations. Such attention to seemingly mundane everyday spaces exposes the ordinary geographies of state politics and global institutions, which shape the

lives of ordinary citizens and point to the persistence of living amidst the hegemonic state power. This emphasis on the everydayness of geopolitics builds upon critiques that critical geopolitical scholarship remains at the level of discourse rather than moving on to theorize the possibilities of life beyond sovereign power (Hyndman, 2004). According to Öcal and Gökarıksel (2022, p. 154), counter-geopolitical positions involve contesting state-imposed territorial practices with the purpose of building autonomous spaces that include diverse and unique voices and identities[2].

Similarly, Secor (2001, p. 208) proposes that feminist counter-geopolitics questions the idea that politics is only formulated at the global scale; rather, political articulations and contestation take place simultaneously at multiple levels and in diverse spaces. By attending to how geopolitics can be theorized in everyday spaces, counter-geopolitics highlights the potential blurring of the binary "public and private, global and local, formal and informal', revealing how they often merge and overlap into each other and shape political life (Secor, 2001, p. 193). Such an emphasis on the everydayness of geopolitics provides a deeper understanding of the entanglement of lives, bodies, and subjectivities within the state political structures.

In Öcal and Gökarıksel's (2022) and Secor's (2001) accounts of feminist counter-geopolitics, political possibilities of resisting state power are explored in relation to religious practices and discourses. Given that states in Southwest Asia have increasingly incorporated religious discourses as a strategy to create and maintain political and social structures characterized by patriarchy and misogyny, feminist scholars have questioned the political potential of religious

[2] Within this framework, they illustrate how practices engaged by German-Turkish-Sunni Mosque communities in Germany, through everyday acts of resistance against geopolitical narratives and policies by Turkish and German states, function to maintain their autonomous transnational space.

discourses as a useful feminist strategy to fight against systematic gender-based violence and promote women's rights (see for example, Kynsilehto, 2008; Moghadam, 2002; Mojab, 2001; Seedat, 2013). In the Iranian context, Mouri and Batmanghelichi (2016, p. 334) argue that the conceptual domination of Islamic feminism over academic debates in the post-1979 revolution era has resulted in the silencing of many voices from secular women activists[3]. Similarly, Moghithi and Mojab (2023, p. 14, author's translation) argue that the religious perspective on feminism as a conceptual and political tool for activism is limited, as it risks silencing "efforts that fall outside the realm of religion and undermines the possibilities of convergence between women regardless of their religious beliefs". Building upon such critiques, counter-geopolitics, in its present focus on religious discourses to oppose state power, provides a partial understanding of state repressive strategies that rely on and incorporate such discourses. Given these limitations, I argue that an approach to feminist counter-geopolitics beyond religious/secular divides provides more opportunity to explore the emancipatory, multi-scalar and intimate strategies of feminist activism. I now turn to the notion of "the intimate", as discussed within critical and feminist geopolitics literature, in order to discuss how it challenges scalar hierarchies.

The Intimate within Counter-Geopolitics

The word intimate derives from the Latin word *intimare* meaning "to impress or make familiar" (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006, p. 447). The concept of intimacy has been used within critical geopolitical literature predominantly to examine the ways in which everyday entanglements are embedded in geopolitical constellations of power. Pain and Staeheli (2014, p. 344, 345) argue that intimacy does not simply involve dimensions of life that take place in

[3] I have further explored this in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

the proximate distance limited to the self and few known others; rather, they posit, the intimate is linked to geopolitical power at multiple scales in reciprocal ways. They theorize intimacy in terms of three intersecting elements: intimacy as spatial relations (from proximate to the distant), intimacy as modes of interaction (from personal to global), and intimacy as a set of practices (across interpersonal, institutional, and national realms) (Pain & Staeheli, 2014).

Definitions of intimate geopolitics derive from a view of intimacy as a relational concept. Smith et al. (2016, p. 258) argue that intimate geopolitics involves the remaking of territories through bodies. They write that while bodies are vulnerable to state-bordering practice, they challenge the state's control of territories, producing territories at a smaller scale. They draw upon Puar (2007) to account for the intimate ways that sexualized and racialized bodies become incorporated within the nationalist framework, calling attention to the mutual constitution of bodies and territories. The accelerated speed of global connections and networks" alongside the political, technological circumstances of biometric borders, drone strikes, insurgency and targeted killings," Smith et al. (2016, p. 258) argue, makes it evident that bodies are subject to state violent forces. Nonetheless, as they emphasize and I discuss further below, the body remains an active agent in (re)making territories and (re)drawing borders.

Mountz and Hyndman (2006, p. 447) describe the link between the intimate and geopolitics as the "global intimate," offering a feminist critique of the assumed salience of global/local binaries by questioning a disembodied and masculine conception of the former. To reclaim the global through the intimate, they argue, is to consider how the intimate is inseparable from the global. The intimate and the global, they write, are "neither separate spheres nor bounded subjects. Rather, they constitute places such as the border, the home, and the body"

(Mountz & Hyndman, 2006, p. 448). In further providing a framework to capture the local and global dynamic, Pain (2015, p.66) engages with "intimacy-geopolitics" to show how intimacy "stretches and reaches around its others those who are none intimates, the public, the global, the geopolitical and turns inside-out," with the hyphen "signalling the supposed divide and the actual leakage between them." This conceptual framing of intimacy points toward a non-hierarchical understanding of scale (Pratt & Rosner, 2012) as global/local and geopolitical/intimate fold into one another (Pain & Smith, 2008), demonstrating that scale is "a leaky category that remains fluid, contingent, and overlapping" (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006, p. 450).

The leakiness of scale is closely linked to the articulation of "glocalization" within economic and political geography literature, which opens room to theorize how global and local scales constitute one another. In formulating the glocal, Swyngedouw (1999, p. 70) writes that the diminishing role of national states in regulating socioeconomic and class practices in the post-war era implies a re-articulation of political scales "downward to the regional or local level, upward to the EU, NAFTA, GATT, etc.; and outwards to private capital." In such formulation, the scalar constitution of modern capitalism is read as "produced, contested and therefore malleable arenas and products of political-economic relations" rather than a given feature of social and political life (Brenner, 2009, p. 3). Specifically, Brenner (2009) focuses on the scale question as an urban question, explaining how the urban scale functions as a local level of global circuits of capital but also as a strategic coordinate through which multi-scalar restructuring of the national state is taking place. While economic and political geographers have extensively focused on the urban in formulating re-scaling processes, within feminist geography literature, less attention has been paid to the role of cities and urban life in the theorization of scale, especially in this case through an intimate lens, which I

discuss in the subsequent sections of this chapter by focusing on the concept of urban intimate.

In problematizing the notion of scale through intimacy-geopolitics, feminist geopolitical scholars have discussed how nationalist discourses and practices by political elites shape intimate spaces and (reproductive) relations within them. Smith (2012, p. 1511) shows this in examining how reproductive women's bodies and babies are inscribed in geopolitical and religious projects and discourses in Ladakh, India, describing how territorial logic manifests through prenatal campaigns and a ban on cross-religious marriages. In reflecting on ways that reproductive bodies become tools for geopolitical interests, Smith argues that national territory and sovereign power are constructed and preserved through the subjugation of bodies and the materiality of everyday life. Feminist scholars have insisted that state power produces a spatial order wherein women and feminized bodies are positioned as tools for the biological and cultural reproduction of the nation (Gerodetti & Mottier, 2009; Kevin, 2005; Sharp, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1996). The nation, Mayer (2004, p. 165) notes, is always in the process of becoming, shifting, and changing through negotiations and contestation between actors with different levels of access to power. Thus, an intimate perspective on national discourses and practices offers opportunities to read geopolitics in mundane space and scales of everyday life.

As an intimate site of geopolitics, the body has been a central focus of analysis in feminist geopolitical scholarship (Bartos, 2020; Little, 2020; Pain & Staeheli, 2014; Sharp, 2023; Smith, 2012; 2020). In these perspectives, women and feminized bodies, in particular, are considered both objects and subjects of geopolitical power (Hyndman, 2004). Clark (2016, p. 1188) explains that the working of intimate geopolitics through governmental investment in gendered development positions women within development frameworks, constituting the

national body, while "further entrenching what appear to be private forms of identification in a very public forum." Development projects and security interventions by states expose "geopoliticizing life," as Clark describes, which disproportionately target women's bodies, their social and political status, and reproductive work.

The body, the psyche and emotions constituting intimate spaces are central to understanding "intimate war" (Faria, 2017; Little, 2020; Massaro, 2015; Pain, 2015). Pain (2015, p. 66) uses the notion to locate war in a broader continuum of gendered violence[4] beyond the state-centric approach to security and emphasizes how gendered (in)security at different scales influence one another (Peterson,1992; Williams & Massaro, 2013). The concept of intimate war as tactics performed through emotional, psychological, and physical registers to maintain power and domination provides a framework that works against considering war as a socially, politically, and spatially separate phenomenon from intimate violence (Pain, 2015, p. 66). This reconceptualization of war builds on critical and feminist geopolitics in dismantling hierarchical views on the scale, a central feature of the formulation of feminist counter-geopolitics in this research. Additionally, the notion of intimate war creates openings for intimate geopolitics that are mobilized across national borders, exposing the structural nature of gender-based violence across such boundaries. Attending to the mobilities of intimate war, as described by Faria (2017 p. 589), "situates outbreaks of violence…within a more complexly layered account of war and hope". Building on Katz's formulation of countertopographies (theorized and developed at greater length in Chapter 4), Faria (2017, p. 577) illustrates "how violence/resistance is produced through geographically rooted but

[4] Pain here builds on Cockburn (2004), who articulates three such continua. "First, gender links violence at different points on a scale, from personal to international (for example, from sexual violence to stealth bombing). Second, gender makes any distinction between war and peace or prewar and postwar meaningless, as gendered violence and other inequalities persist from one to the next. Third, gendered violence runs through social, economic and political spheres, as gender relations permeate each domain" (Pain, 2015, p. 66)

connected patriarchies, racisms, and other structural violences", and how it is experienced, embodied, and contested by "refugee women across sites of flight, displacement and resettlement." Intimate war, therefore, marks the situated yet connected structures that perpetuate gender-based violence experienced and faced by migrant women, such as post-traumatic stress, poverty, unemployment, limited access to health care and housing, and domestic violence (Faria, 2017), during and after resettlement, exposing how gendered violence is produced and endured at multiple scales and sites.

Although war is often seen as a phenomenon that takes place between nations, Mayer (2004) uses the notion of embodied nationalism, highlighting how women's bodies turn into sites of power contestation and war. Focusing on "rape as a war tactic" in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the early 1990s, she notes the Bosnian war occurred (primarily) "at the corporal and intracorporal scales", as women's bodies were intimately involved in it (Mayer, 2004, p. 162). Thus, centring women's bodies in the discussion surrounding war and violence unsettles a static model of scale while challenging an essentialist understanding of the nation and nationalism.

While women's bodies are variously subject to state power, they produce politics that resist and counter states' gender-based violence. In other words, bodies are not only objects but also subjects of geopolitical power. As a site of "lived experience, through which the self is made," Smith (2012, p. 1520) writes, "the body is susceptible to disciplinary action but never completely so." Bodies continuously seek to resist and contest the domination of state power. Thus, the intimate is politicized in that the body's inclination toward surviving and living provides political capacities to undermine forces that take their agencies away. As Smith (2012, p. 1513) notes, embodied knowledges acquired through experiences of pain and loss and their deployment against geopolitical narratives about women's bodies and their reproductive capacities signals "the forever-incomplete territorialization of the geopolitical

body." In the context of this research, I built upon a feminist geopolitical discussion on bodies' resisting and emancipatory potentials, highlighting the importance of embodied and situated knowledges of feminist activists about gender and sexual-based violence as the basis for enacting transnational feminist praxis. As I argue further in Chapter 4, these knowledges constitute an essential facet of counter-geopolitics, which can be created in intimate and everyday spaces such as activists' homes.

Critical perspectives on geopolitics illuminate the defying character of intimacy-geopolitics in the everyday spaces of homes. These spaces scholars have shown are sites in which geopolitical power is consolidated, resisted, and contested (Brickell, 2012; Jackman & Brickell, 2022; Shim, 2016; Wilkins, 2017). Such debates are closely linked to the substantial feminist debate on the geographies of home (Blunt, 2005; Blunt & Varley, 2004; Brickell, 2012; Wilkinson, 2014). In her conceptualization of the geopolitics of home, Wilkins (2017, p. 1549) treats the home as a "site of vulnerability and potential" wherein gender stereotypes surrounding women's domesticity and reproduction are undermined and reworked. The geopolitics of home signifies the interconnection between women's daily experiences of geopolitical structures and forms of activism that emerge within the home to resist them. Brickell (2014, p. 1269) shows such interconnections between home and geopolitics through an intimate lens, arguing that "the fate of women's everyday lives belongs simultaneously to the global and local." While feminist geopolitical scholarship has attended to the multiple ways in which the everyday lives of women in their homes may defy patriarchal structures of states and geopolitical power, less work has been conducted on political subjectivities and practices that proactively seek to subvert these violent patterns. Attending to more persistent political practices, such as those pursued by feminist activists, and avoiding romanticizing everyday practices of survival as transformative of geopolitical structures can provide further

insights into understanding how geopolitics can actively be made from private and intimate spaces such as homes—a point which I address in this research by exploring counter-geopolitical practices by feminist activists in their homes. In Chapter 5 of this dissertation, I built upon conceptualization of home as a "crucial site of and influence upon geopolitics" (Wilkins, 2017, p. 1552), providing evidence of how activists involved in the One Million Signatures Campaign in Iran use home space as a strategic site of care and kinship, within the country's hostile political environment. I further show how home spaces and intimate relations they forged between activist members of the campaign played a key role in activating transnational feminist solidarities many years later in the context of the Woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising across diasporas (see Chapter 6).

Understanding the geopolitics of home brings attention to the ways in which intimate ties of kinship are also the terrain of geopolitical contestation. As a life-making practice, the efforts to maintain kinship by families separated across national borders, as Jacobsen (2023, p.1303) describes, make "visible the intimate and often hidden ways that the violence of protracted separation is materialized" and shows the significance of kinship in resisting borders and their violence. Put differently, persistent struggles by migrants to maintain kinship traverse multiple scales and geographies and navigate across local/global and intimate/geopolitical registers. Such struggles are captured in "geopolitics of living," which, as Jacobsen (2023, p. 1318) argues, provides a framework to examine "how strategies and practices of life-making are co-constitutive of geopolitics, rather than merely responses to it". While the state's power to protect its borders increasingly makes life-making practices that seek to maintain intimate ties difficult, the desire to care for one another provides possibilities to overcome forced separation.

Exploring intimate geopolitics at borders, Wilkins (2017, p. 1557) highlights that digital media is an essential tool for migrants to maintain kinship connection, creating a sense of continuity between home and host countries and negotiating the everyday challenges of living. Jacobsen (2023, p. 1311) builds on a similar discussion, describing that migrants use digital media as tools for "geopolitical act of living" in response to displacements and separations forced by the state, which reshape familial ties within the ongoing condition of war and bordering. Thus, intimacies maintained through digital media across vast distances and national borders often provide openings to read the geopolitics of living as an everyday form of resistance.

The fragile yet powerful character of intimacy-geopolitics, Askins (2014, p. 354) shows, can also be traced in reciprocal care among individuals, which highlights the co-constitution of the local, national, global and public and private space. A "care-full geopolitics," Velez (2020, p. 339) argues, refers to global care practices directed toward humans and nonhuman subjects impacted by state power. Despite such optimism on the political potential of care to subvert dominant geopolitical structures, feminist scholars approach the recent turn toward care cautiously, arguing that preoccupation with the ethics of care should not result in dismissing ways in which power structures uphold oppressive systems (Held, 2006 cited in Bartos, 2020, p. 265)) and the underlying relations and structures that "enable caring and non-caring agencies to exist in the first place" (Bartos, 2020, p. 266). Rather, Bartos (2020, p. 266) suggests that in practicing care for one another, attendance to multiple forms of injustice can offer more political and radical pathways to social change. Nonetheless, by conceptualizing care as a form of intimate geopolitics, it is possible to unpack the inseparability of the intimate and geopolitics in order to understand better the political potentials of intimate spaces, practices, and relations that are caught within state structures.

So far, political potentials of the intimate within critical geopolitical, Sharp (2021, p. 992) argues, has largely remained confined to small-scale spaces, highlighting that "the focus is most often on examples where (powerful) geopolitics is imposed upon (weak) bodies, rather than on (powerful) bodies actively making geopolitics". Such consideration highlights that the potential of the intimate is rendered ambiguous, and the question remains to be answered about how the intimate can be *scaled up* in its ability to contest state sovereign power. In exploring such possibilities, transnational perspectives provide a framework that enables us to position intimate geopolitics beyond the territorial confines of nation-states and explore their potential to contest their domination. Thus, adopting a transnational perspective which accounts for the geopolitics of (im)mobility and bordering practices offers a better understanding of the ways in which geopolitics can be made from below.

Transnational Perspectives: Geopolitics of (Im)Mobility and Homemaking

Transnational perspectives on geopolitics necessitate paying particular attention to the ways in which national territorial and bordering practices shape power geometries. In considering "power geometries" (Massey, 2012) that shape (im)mobility, scholars highlight that people's abilities to move within and between nations are conditioned by governmental regulations and policies that render certain bodies a threat to national security (Cresswell, 2006; Hyndman, 2012). Drawing on Massey's (2012) "politics of mobility," Hyndman (1997) writes that "geopolitics of mobility" involves juxtaposing states and intergovernmental control over people's places with their own capabilities to survive and ensure safety (Hyndman, 2012, p. 249). The implication of power geometries in shaping people's mobility is also explained in Ashutosh and Mountz's (2012) account of "the geopolitics of im-mobility." Geopolitics of immobility, they show, "hinges on the unequal relations between states and migrants" and problematizes "romantic interpretations" of the transnational

movements and paths. In studying the navigation of national borders by migrants and refugees, geopolitics of (im)mobility signifies strategies used by institutional power and migrants, as power geometries are reinforced, negotiated, challenged, and resisted by a wide variety of institutional and individual actors. Despite the imposition of power over people's mobility by the state, Ashutosh and Mountz (2012, p. 352) emphasize that people on the move remain "authors" of their own personal journeys as they navigate geopolitical hierarchies.

Intimate perspectives on mobility and migration provide a more nuanced understanding of how transnational migration regimes are differently inscribed on migrants' bodies, psyches and well-being. In exploring how migrants and refugees navigate national borders, scholars have shown the intimate encounters and embodied experiences of migration regimes that are implemented through subtle and overt governmental policies and measures. Loyd et al. (2018, p. 1) explain that transnational refugee regimes and individualization of geopolitical relations shape what they call "geopolitics of trauma" through "mental health diagnosis and health provision." The protracted refugee status and documentation requirements through which applications are processed create sites of ongoing trauma for refugees. Thus, screening and documentation practices by states and international organizations create geopolitics of trauma functioning through resettlement determination processes (Loyd et al., 2018). According to Tyerman (2021, p. 466), attending to the way that borders are embodied in everyday life exposes "globally intimate" injustices" and violence. Such an intimate view on borders exposes bordering as a performative practice that brings nation-states and their institutional power into existence within the geopolitical world order, which, as Tyerman argues, violently creates racialized inequalities of identity, wealth, power, and precarity. States' bordering practice, increasing particularly since the outbreak of COVID-19 as a

strategy to prevent the spread of the virus from elsewhere, reinforces asymmetrical power geometries through securitizing and surveillance of national borders.

Despite multiple ways in which bordering practices are implemented by state institutional power, there are efforts and tendencies that give rise to political spaces and sites of resistance to overcome the challenges of living and surviving (Wilkins, 2017, p. 1551). Critical migration scholars have increasingly paid attention to the various strateiges of refugees and migrants who challenge the dominating power of bordering (Brambilla, 2021; Campos-Delgado & Côté-Boucher, 2022; Shachar, 2019). As Biorklund (2023) notes, bordering practices *from below* generate affective geographies and transformative spaces of solidarity. Migrants and refugees persistently seek ways to negotiate the assertation of bordering through intimate acts of survival, such as making art and cooking food, and as such, intimate spaces, relations, and practices become political tools to unsettle and dismantle violent bordering practices. While borders are often experienced as oppressive and violent, practices of everyday survival and living while waiting, Biorklund (2023) shows, reveal multiple and diverse forms of political subjectivities and actions. Similarly, Ashutosh and Mountz (2012, p. 335) argue that the geopolitics of migration are created daily by state practices, but migrant agencies and strategies to move and settle also shape transnational journeys within the regulatory state's channels and policies. As such, bordering from below provides a conceptual space to see politics formulated by migrants in encountering top-down policies as everyday, intimate forms of solidarity and resistance.

Bordering practice from below, which can emerge in homemaking strategies by migrants, cultivates spaces where emotional and material support are provided. Ni Mhurchu (2021, p. 404) notes that migrant efforts to construct a home as a significant site of geopolitics show how borders are both traversed and inhabited through attachments, loss, hope and fear. He

suggests that home is conceptualized as an intense site of otherness and belonging that connects and disconnects across local, national, and transnational scales through various kinds of relationships and reciprocities which constitute migration journeys towards making a home and creating belonging (Ni Mhurchu, 2021, p. 407). He further reflects that migrant efforts to build homes and attachment are "created and sustained through mobility rather than merely ordered by mobility" (Ni Mhurchu, 2021, p. 421), demonstrating the complexity of how lives and desires are linked to borders beyond reducing them to mere objects of state-imposed orders, structures, and hierarchies. Thus, the intimate construction of homes and belonging is a process through which one positions oneself among people and places, which, as Sarah Ahmed et al. (2003, quoted in Ni Mhurchu, 2021, p. 421) point out, showcases the ways that "homes are formed in a relationship to movement." In this way, the theorization of homemaking through movement problematizes static understandings of scale and borders by revealing the interconnections and co-construction of local/global and intimate/geopolitical. In the context of this research, I built on discussions surrounding the critical importance of homes for activists in diasporas[5] in creating a safe space and a non-judgmental environment where they can share past experiences and reflect on future aspirations. Drawing on the practices of Tasht Collective, a group of activists and artists from Iran, Kurdistan, Armenia, and Turkey in Montreal, in Chapter 5, I illustrate how the intimate space of homes serves as a critical site in which connections could be developed at a deeper level, acting as resources that enable activists to make political claims and build transnational solidarity through artistic performance.

[5] Further below I discuss terminologies surrounding diasporas, migrants, and refugees.

Building further on bordering from below, critical feminist and migration scholars have also paid attention to the transformative spaces of solidarity cultivated by those who cross borders, which cut across racial and national identity categories (Biorklund, 2023) and Global North /Global South divisions. Mohanty (2003) proposes a feminist model of solidarity based on "the One-Third/Two-Thirds paradigm" rather than Western/Third World, North/South, or local/global categories, which allows teaching and learning about connections and distance between women and marginalized communities beyond such binaries. Rather than articulating activism with a focus on what disconnects cultures and nations, the One-Third/Two-Thirds feminist solidarity, she proposes, demands posing questions about connections between women's movements across the globe. Such articulation provides a helpful framework to frame resistant agencies beyond one nation and culture (Mohanty, 2003, p. 523). In this way, as a feminist approach to solidarity, the One-Third/Two-Thirds model transforms notions of insider/outside, embedded within the division between local and global, through accounting for similarities and differences as well as distances and proximities.

Solidarity has been extensively studied by Iranian feminist scholars (Nasrabadi, 2014; Rahbari et al., 2021; Sameh, 2014; Varma & Shaban, 2024), particularly focusing on the transnational character of solidarity-making among women across borders. Examining the topic of veiling in Iran, Rahbari et al. (2021, p. 114) argue that although transnational solidarities with Muslim women in Iran present crucial political opportunities across different national, cultural, and religious contexts, at times, "solidarity with Muslim sisters" have been centred upon the idea that Muslim women need support and help from their "emancipated" sisters in the West (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Bracke, 2012).

Building on such discussions on the contested character of feminist solidarity elsewhere, I highlighted the transnational character of solidarity-making by feminist activists in Iran. I argued that "rather than defining feminist solidarities based on unified national and racial identities, feminist solidarities developed through 'the everyday places and practices in which people engage across ethnic and cultural boundaries' (Oosterlynck et al., 2013)" (Lashkari, 2023, p. 211, 212). Using digital media platforms to connect with women and activists across national borders through hashtags and reaching out to one another, activist practices of cultivating feminist solidarities signal a shift from the "spatio temporal register of the nation state to what diverse populations do, learn and collectively engage in here and now" (Oosterlynck et al. (2016, p. 765). Transnational solidarities forged by activists in diasporas, as I will explore further in Chapter 6, constitute an essential facet of feminist counter-geopolitics, which formulate alternative ways of belonging and living together between migrants and those in diasporas.

In my use of the term "migrant," I draw on critical migration scholars who question taken-for-granted state labels and terms created to "manage" displacement and migration (Hyndman, 2001; Weima, 2022). Similar to national borders, categories such as migrants and refugees bear the state displacement lexicon (Weima, 2022). The ways in which they are defined are shaped by systems of power increasingly characterized by colonial and racist logic (Brankamp & Daley, 2020; Mayblin, 2014). As Weima (2022, p. 17) notes, "these terms are [all] spatial in their definition" functioning to uphold imaginaries of space as static and non-political containers (Massey, 2005). Nevertheless, researchers also use the same terminologies and categories (critically) to enter the conversation, about dominant geopolitical systems of bordering. The challenge, however, is how to subvert such terminologies to formulate more progressive alternatives (Bakewell, 2021; Weima, 2022).

In the context of my research, while almost all activist participants are those who migrate from Iran to Europe or Canada, I often use the term activists in Iranian diasporas rather than activist migrants (for discussion on the use of the term diaspora, see Chapter 1). During interviews and informal conversations, activist participants described highly differentiated experiences of migration and, in some cases, transition from one migration status to another. For example, some of the research participants who initially left Iran as refugees spent a couple of years in a transit country such as Turkey, eventually settling and becoming citizens in Europe or Canada, while others left the country as international students or skilled workers. The variety of migration trajectories and statuses, which are shaped by personal decisions and political conditions, reveals that "migrant" and "refugee" labels, while formal categories in public discourse and academic literature, are extremely heterogeneous, encompassing hierarchical structures and categorization of human lives under hegemonic nation-state systems (Weima, 2022). The figure of the migrant broadly encompasses international students, skilled workers, or refugees, and research participants fit into and identify with these categories differently. In taking into account the multiplicities of knowledges, practices, and spaces that activists in diasporas mobilize in contesting patriarchal systems of state power, migrant and refugee categories fall short and lack precision. The latter is even criticized by some scholars and activists for perpetuating a victimized discourse that renders people on the move as powerless subjects. While identities, experiences, and trajectories that are shaped by and through transnational migrations constitute an integral component of this research, the legal status of activists is not the primary analytical focus in empirical chapters (however, I do discuss how differentiated lived experiences associated with these legal categories shape access to resources and practices of solidarity in Chapter 5 and 6). As elaborated in the first chapter, for the purpose of my research, the term activists in Iranian diasporas offers a more inclusive description without

narrowing diverse experiences of crossing borders to a unified, homogenized identity category.

Diaspora Geopolitics: Making Geopolitics from Above and Below

In further exploring transnational perspectives on the ways that geopolitical structures are made and remade, a growing body of literature has focused on diaspora geopolitics (Carter, 2005; Harris, 2020; Hyndman et al., 2022; Popescu, 2005). Diaspora, according to Clifford (1997, 251), articulates "alternate public spheres, forms of community consciousness and solidarity that maintain identifications outside the national time/space in order to live inside, with a difference". Studies of diaspora geopolitics have shown that political practices in the diaspora instigate contestation around national identities and territories. In this discussion, diaspora geopolitics are considered hybrid, complex, and dynamic practices that rework and dismantle essentialist views on identities and subjectivities. Carter (2005, p. 61) explains that an understanding of the geopolitics of diaspora is an integral part of critical geopolitics, which seeks "to break down both the conceptual borders that imagine nation states as discrete from each other, and the imaginative distinction between foreign/domestic or inside/outside the nation-state." Diaspora geopolitics, thus, captures contradictory spatial and political transformation through de- and re-territorializations, shedding light on displaced dwellings by individuals and communities (Clifford 1997 cited in Carter, 2005, p. 61).

Hyndman et al. (2022, p. 424) use diaspora geopolitics, referring to everyday practices and protests associated with power relations in distant geographies that could cause human rights violations, displacement, and war. They deploy the term diaspora geopolitics to shift the conversation from state-centric discourses that securitize diaspora subjects to the "politics-at-distance" among those who fled violence themselves, yet witnessing it from afar (Hyndman et al., 2022, p. 426). The understanding of diaspora geopolitics from below, through everyday

survival and protest, provides a useful framework to analyze multiple, intersecting violent structures of political power as well as knowledges, practices, and spaces that negotiate and contest them.

As Popescu (2005) writes, diaspora geopolitics influences and redraws the mental and spatial boundaries of the same and the other, which may contest or coincide with state power. Despite various ways in which the concept of the diaspora can deconstruct the nation and national states (Dirlik, 2004), diaspora geopolitics also functions in such a way to reinforce state power and proliferate nationalist discourses. Whether through grassroots mobilization or engagement with state power, diasporic engagement with politics is inherently geopolitical in that it reworks the geographies of territorial homelands and identities (Harris, 2020). As such, it is crucial to pay attention to the multiple ways that diaspora geopolitics takes place in different forms and how they may contest, rework, or reinforce state power. In this research, I examine diaspora geopolitics through knowledges, practices, and spaces created by feminist activists who live in the UK, Germany, France, and Canada. In Chapter 5, I show that while activist practices formulate alternative imaginaries to hegemonic state discourses of national identities and territories, they are not entirely detached from such power structures. I draw on the concept of governance feminism to show how financial needs and incentives inform activist strategies in defining projects that promote or align with state interests and agendas, reinforcing top-down power structures. Under such a governance model, activists with technical knowledge of governmental procedures often have higher access to financial resources within the state institutional framework.

Existing literature on diaspora geopolitics has predominantly focused on foreign policy and international politics (Abraham, 2020; Ho & McConnell, 2019; Gamlen, 2019; Popescu, 2005). Yet, the experiences of those disproportionately impacted by the violence of war and

exile, such as women in formulating geopolitics from below, are often absent in these studies. Faria (2017) does so by focusing on South Sudanese refugee women and their experience of domestic and state-sanctioned violence in the US diaspora. Using an intimate geopolitical lens, she shows how their everyday practices of resistance, such as pursuing education, work against patriarchal power structures at the family and state levels. As she discusses, these "small acts" (Pain, 2014) of resistance work against structures that reinforce gender-based violence; however, whether such resistance extends to a larger scale is unexplored. Following Sharp's (2021, p. 992) call to pay attention to ways that intimate spaces and practices of the everyday serve to constitute the geopolitical at putative scales, in the next section, I delve into urban geopolitics literature to explore how the urban can function as a putative scale of geopolitics and to examine how such an inquiry might expand discussions of intimate and diaspora geopolitics.

Urban Geopolitics: Approaches to the Urban Intimate

Studies of urban geopolitics began as scholars sought to examine "spaces and practices that emerge at the intersections of urbanism, terrorism, and warfare" (Graham, 2004, p. 52). An important focus of urban geopolitical studies, particularly in the post-9/11 context, has been on the militarization and securitization of urban space (Rokem et al., 2017) and processes of "city killing, place annihilation, and urbicide" (Graham, 2004, p. 52). Such focus provides a deeper analysis of cities and how they are impacted by violence and material damage (Rokem et al., 2017, p. 253). A later strand of research in urban geopolitics focused on urban conflict in ethno-nationally contested settings in relation to urban planning, architecture, networks, and infrastructure through which conflict is experienced (Rokem et al., 2017, p. 253). Here, the urban is predominantly conceptualized in the context of explicit manifestations and expressions of militarization, war, and conflict, leaving aside more subtle, micro-scale

conditions and practices that shape urban politics and conflict within cities and within and between nations (Fregonese, 2017, p. 2).

Considering the existing gap in urban geopolitical literature, Rokem and Boano (2023) have recently made a methodological call to empirically broaden the field by bridging political geography and urban studies. These bodies of scholarly work create openings to account for political practices that produce claims to belonging and citizenship and link the city to the state and geopolitical practices through notions such as the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1968) and urban citizenship (Baubock, 2003; Holston, 2001; Wood, 2014; Gordon, 2007). From a feminist geographical perspective, Wood (2014) describes urban citizenship as an inherently agonistic analytical and practical domain, nesting in a diverse landscape of changing urban structures and dynamic political discourses. Such an agonistic domain, as Mouffe (1999) highlights, constitutes the primary task of practicing democratic politics as the very condition of existence, which can manifest through urban solidarity practices that cross lines of identity tied to state territorial practices and formulate alternatives to its political discourse.

As Wood (2014) notes, urban citizenship, however, is not synonymous with activism. Urban citizenship signifies the emancipatory character of urban life and politics; however, it is also tied into disciplinary governance structures. Since the 1980s, governance has been a key debate in urban studies (McCann, 2017). The focus on urban governance within this literature examines a wide range of actors, institutions, and motivations that shape and define urban policy, agendas, problems, goals, opportunities, and challenges (McCann, 2017). Governance beyond the state has been characterized by horizontal networks of the private market, civil society, and other institutions, which operate from the urban/local level to a transnational scale (Swyngedouw, 2005). Although rescaling of state power through urban governance may signal opportunities for democratic practices at grassroots levels, as Swyngedouw (2005,

p. 1991) notes, governance is Janus-faced; the shift from government to governance is also associated with "profound restructuring of the parameters of political democracy … leading to a substantial democratic deficit". The urban, thus, is strongly associated with governance through setting certain rules for urban citizens. As Magnusson (2013, p. 23) asserts, urbanism both homogenizes and liberates. Debates surrounding urban citizenship and governance within political geography and urban studies literature highlight the contested terrain of power in urban contexts among local and national states and civil society, revealing the multi-scalar and ever-changing character of urban geopolitics.

Just as urban citizenship and governance provide a framework to expand the realms of urban geopolitics, a focus on the built environment and urban transformations influenced by geopolitical powers provides a deeper understanding of the relationship between urban and geopolitics. Bădescu (2023) demonstrates this in his study of the ways in which power contestations at regional and global levels reconfigure built environments in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Belgrade, Serbia. His work unveils a contested power dynamic that signals an emergence of new allyships beyond the West and East divide. The remaking of urban spaces in both cities showcases the influence of different actors at national and international levels with their geopolitical interests and alignments. While in Belgrade, urban projects reveal an emergence of new geopolitical relations with the Middle East, in Sarajevo, the construction of religious buildings exposes competing forces of political power. Such a focus on urban materialities shows how urban spaces are protagonists of geopolitical power and key sites of muti-scalar geopolitical forces (Bădescu, 2023, p. 1775).

Building further on the material realities of urban geopolitics, Fregonese (2017) focuses on the embodied and lived experience of urban conflict. In her studies of urban geopolitics in Beirut, Fregonese (2017, p. 9) examines the embodied effect of urban conflict and argues that

an atmospheric approach to urban geopolitics provides a deeper understanding of the techno-military character of urban geopolitics, which pays attention to bodies and their senses through an "anti-geopolitical eye" (O'Tuathail, 1996). She argues that urban geopolitical analysis means an examination of everyday aspects of conflict, which involves knowlegdes and practices of survival. With such attention to everyday sensitivities and lived experiences of geopolitical conflict in the urban context, space is made to study embodied and more intimate aspects of urban geopolitics.

An embodied perspective on urban geopolitics not only paves the way for examining how geopolitics scales down to cities, but it also contributes to feminist geopolitical projects in questioning and redefining taken-for-granted meanings of war, peace, and conflict, typically embedded within Global North/Global South hierarchies. In the Canadian context, Laliberte and Saad (2017, p. 240) show how policing of refugee and migrant bodies exposes urban geopolitics as part of the multi-scalar processes of displacement and militarization. The formation of the Canadian national identity, they observe, relies on the systematic policing of racialized and othered bodies in urban spaces. Such an embodied account of "ordinary urban geopolitics" in the Global North context provides a useful framework to unpack mobility and segregation as they take place across a variety of cities (Rokem et al., 2017, p. 255). Adopting such a framework in Chapter 6 of this dissertation, rather than focusing on state practices, I outline the urban geopolitics of WLFTO by focusing on practices of transnational solidarities between activists in the multi-national urban context of Toronto. These *transversal urban solidarities*, as I call them, which are rooted in intimate relations between feminist activists before and after leaving Iran, formulate alternative discourses to nationalist practices of solidarity. As I discuss further in the chapter, transversal urban solidarities

provide a useful conceptual framework to account for the intimate dimension of urban geopolitics and to expand the realm of the intimate to encompass the urban (Massaro, 2015).

Examining urban geopolitics in the Canadian context can not be divorced from debates surrounding settler colonial histories and geographies. In particular, situating urban geopolitics in settler-colonial societies where urban spaces are subject to colonial forces demands sensitivity to geopolitical structures that undermine Indigenous sovereignty. Here, perspectives that attend to the ways that place-based urban policies create and perpetuate neo-colonial structure (Saberi, 2017) help to account for urban geopolitics in settler colonial cities. As Laliberte and Saad (2017, p. 239) note, discussions of urban geopolitics need to attend to structural racism and exclusionary patterns that are central to the urbanization processes. They highlighted such patterns by observing Indigenous reserves that were created to "spatially confine First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples away from urban areas (Razack, 2002)" including sites that bear the marker of whiteness and progress. As they argue, although the politics of urban space can indeed contest the settler and militarization discourses and practices, it is imperative to examine how urban spaces are characterized by colonial legacies and nation-building projects. In highlighting the challenges that urban politics create against racist, colonial, and authoritarian power structures, I examine activist practices through solidarities, which involve the cultivation and development of reciprocal connections and affinity bonds (Arampatzi, 2017, p. 2161). Building on the previous discussion on transversal solidarities, in Chapter 6, I show how such solidarities take shape through long-term engagement across anti-colonial, anti-racist, feminist, and queer activist communities to fight against interconnected structures of state violence, displacement, and colonialism. In the context of this research, the political potentials of such long-term commitments became particularly evident in the aftermath of WLF, during which activists

involved in the Indigenous Liberation movement gathered in solidarity with feminist activists against religious and authoritarian political structures in Iran. In this chapter, I further show how the multi-national context of the City of Toronto provided a distinct urban context in activating and developing transnational solidarities and formulating alternatives to heteropatriarchal, religious and white supremacist, and settler colonial states.

Paying attention to urban solidarities and the ways in which they emerge from intimate spaces and relations in activist communities builds on feminist debates on intimate geopolitics and addresses the existing gap between feminist and urban geopolitics (Fregonese in Rokem et al., 2017). As Massaro (2015, p. 373) observes, within feminist political geography literature, intimate space often implicitly equates to private and domestic spaces – that is, women's spaces and experiences. This tendency disregards ways in which intimate spaces, practices, and relations can create geopolitical practices and discourses beyond the confines of private and domestic spaces of bodies and homes and manifest in the larger scale of cities. Thus, broadening the spatial conception of the intimate (Massaro, 2015) helps to locate the urban within the intimate geopolitical continuum, illuminating further the entanglement of the public and private and the leakiness of the scale. Following on the theorization of global intimate (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006), I propose *urban intimate*, as a conceptual framework to explore further the connection between the "little and big things" of geopolitics in the urban context (Thrift, 2000; Sharp, 2021) to challenge the idea that geopolitics is only produced at national and global scales. As I explore in Chapter 6 of this dissertation, considering the political potential of intimate practices and relations as they unfold in the urban context and how they scale up to the city level pushes us to rethink and refocus on the urban as a scale and space where intimacy and geopolitics meet.

The urban geopolitical framework provides insight into feminist geopolitical "rescaling" projects (Hyndman, 2004; Boyce et al., 2020) to broaden the perspective on diverse geopolitical practices "from below", however, possibilities of formulating emancipatory politics, as mentioned earlier through the discussion of urban governance, are always conditioned by institutional power that shapes social, political, physical, and cultural landscapes of cities. Despite the ways in which urbanization processes are shaped by "uneven geographies of militarization, humanitarian aid, and resource distribution" (Laliberte & Saad, 2017, p. 240), attending to urban geopolitics from an intimate perspective signals the political potentials of feminist counter-geopolitics and, in doing so, offers horizons to "alternative spatialisation, of lived politics in the city" (Secor, 2011, p. 208). A feminist and intimate approach to urban geopolitics, thus, unearths counter-geopolitical practices that resist, contest, and formulate alternative politics to geopolitical structures characterized by state violence and forced displacement.

Conclusion: Revisiting Intimate Geopolitics

Conceptualizing feminist counter-geopolitics centres upon the understanding that the intimate and geopolitics are an "indivisible continuum" (Sharp, 2021). As discussed in this chapter, feminist scholars show the entanglements of the intimate and geopolitical spheres in deconstructing a hierarchical notion of scale. They insist that the intimate space of everyday is not just a target of state violence, war, and displacement but also encompasses knowledge, practices, and relations that challenge and reinvent geopolitics. Building on feminist geopolitical insights, throughout this chapter, I have illustrated how the intimate becomes political and how it creates emancipatory potential from repressive state structures that perpetuate gendered violence and displacement. In this chapter, I have also explored critical and feminist literature which takes into account everyday intimate practices of homemaking

and kinship building by migrants and those in diasporas, unsettling theoretical views that are centred upon static models of nation-states and their bordering practices.

The body of feminist geopolitical literature that exposes the mutual construction of the intimate and geopolitics is fast growing. However, there is still much room to explore how "these intimate practices serve to constitute the geopolitical as a presence at other putative scales" (Sharp, 2021, p. 992). Within feminist geopolitical literature, the urban is often absent in conceptualizing the intimate as filled with political possibilities that contest the patriarchal state structures. As Sharp (2021, p. 992) speculates, "perhaps because of a fear of grand theorizing or falling into the same God's-eye position that critical geopolitics has been critiqued for", a focus on embodied and everyday spaces of geopolitics has resulted in shifting attention away from coarser geopolitical scales. Feminist geopolitics' formulation of intimacy-geopolitics, therefore, benefits from consideration of emancipatory politics beyond individual bodies and homes by considering cities as an intimate sphere where "little and big" geopolitics converge (Thrift, 2000; Sharp, 2021). Cities and urban space provide important sites and resources through which geopolitics is made and contested. As argued by Paasche and Sidaway (cited in Rokem et al., 2017, p. 260), "concepts of city and geopolitics […] belong together as categories of theory and praxis". Knowledges, practices, and spaces that are constituted in and through the urban can both produce and contest geopolitical reasoning at global and national scales (Secor, 2001). In this chapter, I highlighted the theoretical implication of (re)centring the urban within feminist geopolitics by proposing the "urban intimate" as a conceptual framework that emphasizes the entanglement of the intimate and geopolitics (Pain, 2014). Such a theoretical approach, at the same time, addresses the gap within urban geopolitical scholarship that reduces cities as objects of violence and material damage (Rokem et al., 2017), instead opening space for exposing "other geopolitics"

(Fregonese, 2017; Lacoste, 1982) that contest the state-centric approach to geopolitical discourses and practices.

Counter-geopolitical practices against top-down territorialization and state politics expose autonomous space populated by diverse and unique voices and identities (Öcal & Gökarıksel, 2022, p. 154). Conceptualizing and exploring feminist counter-geopolitics and their political implications in negotiating and contesting authoritarian and patriarchal state structures is the main focus of this dissertation. This chapter provided the theoretical framework to account for feminist counter-geopolitics and the implication of the intimate in counter geopolitical knowledges, practices, and spaces. As argued through this chapter, this framework takes seriously the multi-scalar nature of geopolitical discourses and practices beyond the nation-state and sheds light on multiple spaces and scales at which geopolitics is enacted outside the formal realm of politics. This multi-scalar view on geopolitics underpins feminist counter-geopolitical knowledge, practice, and spaces, which I will examine empirically in the remainder of this dissertation. The study of feminist counter-geopolitics theorizes how politics and knowledge are not produced authoritatively at the global and national scale (Secor, 2001) while emphasizing the political potential of the intimate in contesting, reimagining, and moving beyond state structures that perpetuate gender-based violence and displacement.

3. Intimacy within Transnational Feminist Methodologies

Introduction

> [The Woman, Life, Freedom movement] has forced [those of us] outside to change. Things do not go back to what they were. I always say. I do not know what will happen […], but whatever happens, we do not go back to what it was before Jina's death. A significant event has happened. (Interview, October 9, 2022)

In this opening quotation, Shahrzad, a well-known feminist artist and activist who left Iran in the early years of the Iranian 1979 revolution, shared her insights about the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising and the radical change it introduced in the political landscape in and out of Iran. I knew Shahrzad through her artwork before the interview but met her in person for the first time during a rally organized by Feminists for Jina (see Chapter 6) in Nathan Philipps Square in Toronto. During our conversation, which took place in a café in downtown Toronto after one of her theatre shows about Kurdish women's activism in Iran, Syria, and Turkey, she expressed her hope for fundamental changes while explaining concerns about the challenges of building and sustaining solidarities between activists across national borders. The uncertainties surrounding political conditions in the aftermath of WLF deeply informed the process through which this research was carried out. The killing of Jina Amini by the Morality Police, followed by an unprecedented mobilization against the Iranian state within and beyond the country's national borders, changed my relationship with participants, providing the opportunity to build friendships and organize together while also creating ethical concerns associated with safety and security of feminist activists.

In this chapter, I detail a transnational feminist methodological framework that can account for and question power dynamics between researchers and the researched, typically embedded within Global South/Global North hierarchies. By doing so, I discuss my position as a feminist researcher, a migrant, and an international student (whose mobilities are

conditioned by travel policies and visa requirements), gradually shifting toward a more insider status through engagement and collaboration with activists during the research process. Within a feminist methodological framework, there is, however, a tendency to reduce the question of epistemology to positionality at the risk of obscuring feminist knowledge production as a political act (Peake, 2017). I argue that incorporating an intimate perspective within a transnational feminist methodological framework emphasizes praxis by centring intimate relationships between different actors and researchers and providing a space to reflect on ethical considerations associated with the safety of research participants in the face of political uncertainties and state violence. Donovan and Moss (2017, p. 4) elaborate that writing intimacy into research consists of accounting for connections and attachments to research subjects in order to support a wider political agenda. For them, the manifestation of intimacy in feminist research includes "gathering intimate information about research participants, generating data through telling personal stories and exploring the realm of the intimate among researchers and research participants". Such an approach provides robust tools to build on feminist insights beyond individual experiences and emotions by recognizing intimate interconnectedness between entities, subjectivities, and identities.

In this chapter, I adopt an intimate perspective to discuss research methods in order to explore the implications of power and politics and discuss intimate emotions, relationships, and reflections that shaped my research trajectories. In what follows, I describe feminist and transnational methodological works through an intimate perspective. Next, I apply this framework to my research methods, accounting for the intimate relationships that emerged between activists and myself in the light of WLF solidarities. Following this, I delve into intimate reflections to "go beyond mere navel gazing exercises that reduce questions of identity to a list of markers" (Sotoudehnia, 2017, p. 33) and its implication for ethical

consideration. I conclude by arguing that employing intimacy as a feminist methodology offers opportunities for deeper engagements with the research to generate knowledges that are politically and academically meaningful for gender emancipatory futures.

Building upon Transnational Feminist Methodologies

Feminist methodology, according to Moss (2002 cited in Sharp, 2005), involves the research design, data collection and analysis methods, and dissemination of research findings. Within the feminist methodological framework, much emphasis is placed on addressing power dynamics between the researcher and research participants. Focusing on how power dynamics shape knowledge production, feminist geographers have drawn on the notion of "situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988, quoted in Peake, 2017, p. 3) to acknowledge "not only the partial and situated nature of all knowledge production but also its embodied nature, grounded in real bodies". Such an emphasis on the situatedness of knowledge within feminist methodologies rejects the idea that knowledge is universal. Instead, it is always already partial. It is shaped by the researcher's positions within social, political, economic, and cultural relations and invariably influenced by their perspectives, experiences, skills, and resources. The researcher, thus, is not separate from "the field," an ambivalent place where power dynamics between researcher and research participants are continuously made and remade (Nast, 1994).

Attending to dynamics of power is particularly important when working within a politically charged field of research and collecting data about sensitive topics. In the context of this research, in engaging with activist research participants, I often introduced myself as a feminist researcher and ally. I did so, as I thought this could convey a message about my position in support of feminist agendas and create a sense of trust when meeting (in some cases) a stranger to talk about sensitive issues and sometimes emotionally charged topics

such as imprisonment and exile. However, as I discuss further below, the dynamics of power in relation to the insider/outsider statute changed throughout the research process in light of political changes in Iran.

Similar to feminist scholarship, transnational methodologies further "contest long-standing configurations of power between researcher and researched, subject and object, academics and activists across places", which often is embedded in the hierarchies of the Global North/Global South (Browne et al., 2017, p. 1377). A transnational perspective on feminist methodology critiques the ways in which national borders and identities are essentialized, and their political implications are taken for granted within research processes. Browne et al. (2017, p. 1381) elaborate that such methodological perspectives create possibilities to move beyond comparative research that often requires a particular conception of "objectivity" by critically reflecting on how methods and knowledges may be formulated outside of gendered and normative dominations, often to serve powerful elites in the West. In other words, a transnational feminist methodology not only provides a critical approach toward essentialist gender, sexual and racial identities but also offers tools to question the Global North/South binaries. It works between local and global by enabling a cross-national analysis that is locally grounded yet globally relevant. Knowledges that are generated through such methodologies dismantle the imposition of norms and values associated with the Global North (Browne et al., 2017, p. 1391) and instead facilitates analytical linkages across diverse geographies.

Such analytical linkages can be made by taking into account "lived contradictions of in-between-ness" (Tungohan & Catungal, 2022, p. 4) by migrants, refugees, diasporas, and people on the move. My status as a migrant, a former Erasmus Master's student, and a temporary resident and international student in Canada had important implications for the

research and accessing research participants in different countries. Visa procedures made it difficult to travel to and meet with activists in Europe. Several months after the beginning of my fieldwork, I was granted a Schengen visa to participate in two conferences in Spain and Greece, during which I met some activists who later introduced me to their activist friends in Toronto and Montreal. As a "footloose researcher" (Miraftab, 2004; Nagar, 2002), having the opportunity to participate in international conferences facilitated relative transnational mobility to meet activists in Europe, providing access to participants who otherwise could be difficult to connect with.

Despite the political implication of transnational feminist methodologies to account for dynamics of power within the field through reflecting on the researcher's positionality and mobility, "constant self-reflexivity" has been critiqued for risking a self-absorbed methodological approach (Patai, 1994, cited in Miraftab, 2004, p. 597). Peake (2017) argues that feminist scholars need to be wary of reducing questions of epistemology to positionality and reflexivity that came to dominate parameters of the debates surrounding feminist knowledge production in geography. Such reductive tendencies, she argues, obscure "feminist knowledge production as a political act" and detach it from "questions of praxis" (Peake, 2017, p. 5). Following this critique, I argue that layering intimacy onto a transnational feminist methodological framework attends to praxis by focusing on changing relationships between different actors and researchers and ethical considerations that are (re)made in the face of political uncertainties.

The Intimate within Transnational Feminist Methodologies

The emergence of emotional geography in the past two decades has provided opportunities for feminist scholars to discuss affect and emotion in relation to research and unpack how intimacy is written into research (Donovan & Moss, 2017). Intimacy as a methodology

situates emotions as a crucial element of understanding the ways in which power and politics shift between and among subjects in the research process. It provides a space for emotions and feelings to emerge and manifest in the research process in relation to violence and resistance. As such, an intimate approach to methodology builds on arguments made by feminist scholars where they discuss "attention to emotions in research has the potential to reinvigorate feminist practices of reflexivity" (Laliberté & Schurr, 2016, p. 73). Zaragocin and Caretta (2021) maintain that the study of emotion by feminist geographers is important as it disrupts the history of knowledge production and research as disembodied and objective. As such, attending to how emotion surfaces throughout the research process and writing reveal the researcher's personal and political attachments, providing them with opportunities to reflect deeply on their positionality within the field. Such reflection on emotions through an intimate methodology, therefore, can serve as an effective tool, particularly within an uncertain, politically charged research field, revealing a source of empowerment and vulnerability for feminist researchers.

The implication of complex and intense emotions in my research through the data collection process was particularly evident in the aftermath of Woman, Life, Freedom when participating in solidarity rallies and protests in Toronto. Shortly after Jina's death, the Iranian state brutally imprisoned, executed, and murdered protesters, which created an atmosphere of anger, fear, and helplessness not just within the country's national borders but outside of them as well. I often experienced contradictory feelings of rage, hope, and sadness, similar to many members of diaspora and activist communities, and we shared and confirmed these feelings in conversations and interviews (see Chapter 6). The intensity of these emotions often surprised and overwhelmed me. They drew me back to my own experiences of gender-based violence as a woman in Iran, including confrontations with the Morality

Police. When footage of police brutality against women went viral across multiple media platforms, I was reminded of being approached on the street by the Morality Police and my ever-present fear of being arrested for wearing "improper" clothes.

The emergence of intense emotional responses and collective "survivor guilt", which I also observed among my friends in Toronto, blurred how national borders manifest within the field. However, I questioned the deep sadness and rage I felt, particularly in the first few months of WLF, because, as a researcher in the "safe" diaspora, my vulnerability could not be compared to those fighting in the street and sacrificing their lives. Such overwhelming emotional responses in the face of unprecedented state brutality and enormous resistance made it impossible for me to easily distinguish and navigate between my multiple positions and roles as a researcher or a member of the Iranian diaspora community when participating in solidarity rallies or engaging with activist communities. To be able to carry out the research, however, I deliberately sought to rationalize my feelings (Rosenberg, 2019) in order to detach them from the "research", understanding that I needed to create some emotional distance from the field by slowing down the research. Nevertheless, similar to many others within diaspora communities, I often find myself being distressed and concerned for the safety of my loved ones in Iran, including families, friends as well as feminist activists, some of whom I met when I lived and did fieldwork in Iran.

The uncertainty surrounding Iran's political condition, particularly in the aftermath of WLF, following the state's violent measures against dissidents, and recurrent protests and resistance continue as I am reaching the end of my research. Almost every week, there is news of activists being sentenced to long- and short-term imprisonment. In September 2023, Niloofar Hamedi and Elahe Mohammadi, two reporters who published the news of Jina's death, were sanctioned to 6 and 7 years in prison. Sepideh Gholiyan, a 29-year-old activist, was forced

back to prison only a few hours after being released. Such uncertainties create far more serious consequences for those under the daily and direct scrutiny and discipline of state violence and atrocities than for many of us in diasporas. Yet, intimacies developed through this research since September 2022 have resulted in emotional responses to such news from Iran, creating much burden on me and many others in diasporas, along with a sense of responsibility and urgency to act.

Acknowledging such connections and attachments, Donovan and Moss (2017) elaborate, is how intimacy is written into research and can help to support a wider political agenda. For them, the manifestation of intimacy in feminist research includes "gathering intimate information about research participants, generating data through telling personal stories and exploring the realm of the intimate among researchers and research participants" (Donovan & Moss, 2017, p. 5). As I discussed in Chapter 2, if intimacy is understood as sets of spaces, practices, and relations that range from proximate to the distant, writing intimacy signals "ways that individuals not only reveal the concrete, individualized self but also exhibit particular characteristics that inform a set of experiences collectively (after Linke, 2011)" (Donovan & Moss, 2017, p. 11). Put differently, an intimate methodological approach provides robust tools to build on feminist insights beyond individual experiences and emotions by recognizing the interconnectedness between entities, subjectivities, and identities.

Adopting intimate methodologies in a transnational context necessitates paying attention to intimate reflections and relationships in the research, allowing feminist researchers to construct knowledges that are relevant to broad feminist political agendas. Intimate reflection enables the researcher to confront the "messiness" of one's position within the field (Sotoudehnia, 2017, p. 37). Building on Kobayashi (2003) and Kohl and McCutcheon (2015),

Sotoudehnia (2017) notes intimate reflection assists the researcher in acting reflexively, particularly in dealing with conflicting experiences encountered throughout the research. It also provides a way to recognize the relationships and connections with research communities shaped before, during, and after the research and its implications on the research. As Massaro and Cuomo (2017, p. 61) discuss, while intimate relationships with research participants may enhance access to the field, the status of an "intimate insider" can also compound complexities associated with transitioning from the field to academic life and vice versa. Before discussing intimate reflections and relationships in this research, I provide details about specific research methods employed for data collection and analysis. I elaborate on the strengths and limitations of each and how they triangulate to reinforce findings and insights.

Methods: Document and Media Analysis, (N)ethnography, and Interviews

Between December 2021 and June 2023, I employed qualitative methods, namely document and media analysis, ethnography of public events in Tehran and Toronto, nethnography (Kozinets, 2019) of activists' social media accounts and online events, and semi-structured interviews with feminist activists, academics, and artists, whose work intersects with women's rights and feminism. The consent form, initially obtained from York University in December 2021, was forwarded to research participants before the interview unless they preferred verbal consent, possibly as a more convenient way than going through the bureaucratic language of the form, which could be unfamiliar to some participants. Fieldwork research took place in two phases: before and after the WLF uprising. While the supposed period of fieldwork was one year, starting from December 2021 to December 2022, given the outbreak of the WLF uprising in September 2022 and its significant implications for the research, I extended the data collection period and renewed ethical approval to conduct

further interviews and ethnography. No other ethics protocols were required as the research did not involve accessing institutional and organizational data that were not publicly available.

Document and News Media Analysis

Document and news media analysis began in September 2021 and continued through the fieldwork period. Like other qualitative research methods, document analysis is a systematic procedure that makes meaning and creates knowledge through data collection and interpretation (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is often considered a relatively convenient research method in that, unlike ethnography and interviews, it does not involve issues associated with accessibility to the research community or a physical site. In the context of COVID-19, this method was particularly useful because my mobility was conditioned by travel restrictions. Being cost-effective and having fewer ethical concerns are among other strengths of document analysis (Morgan, 2022). In my research, I conducted a document analysis of organizations in which activists were involved. Some of these documents were available online on organizations' websites, while some were emailed to me by activists themselves after interviews.

In the aftermath of WLF, additional data, notably documents issued by various collectives and groups, helped provide insights into group alliances and political positioning with respect to the uprising in Iran. I collected 23 online documents and categorized them into "Open Letters" (5), "Pamphlets" (1), "Statements" (11), "Manifests" (1), and "Petitions" (5), plus 7 paper documents including "Pamphlets" (2), "Statements" (3), "Petitions" (2), which were distributed during public events in Toronto. The method was used in order to gather supplemental information about activism in Toronto in the context of transnational solidarities in Iranian diasporas. However, the majority of the data was not directly about

feminist activism but rather pertinent to the broader diaspora community. The most useful material was online statements and letters written by feminist academics and activists in diasporas, which I used in Chapters 4 and 6.

In the context of changing socio-political dynamics, combining the document analysis method with news media analysis offers a more effective way to capture multiple perspectives and a holistic picture of different activist trajectories and experiences. Together, document and news media analysis methods can transgress time and space boundaries, providing insights about events and places that are difficult to access by researchers. Document analysis in my research was complemented by news media analysis, including mainstream Western and Iranian print media, namely *Keyhan*, *Shargh*, *New York Times*, and *Wall Street Journal*. While waiting for my ethics approval and before interviewing activists, I conducted some preliminary background research on these news media outlets using keywords such as "Woman", "Iran", and "Feminism" and saved relevant articles to an NVivo database[6]. Although the cursory analysis of print media articles helped to contextualize feminist activism in its national and transnational context, given the limited space of Ph.D. research, I decided to focus more on ongoing activist practices and use these data as a background study rather than the focal point of analysis. News media analysis, however, was not limited to the primary stages and continued throughout the research. Additionally, I followed news on Farsi Television news channels in the diaspora, including VOA, BBC Persian, and Iran International, which represent the most popular news channels among Iranian audiences. Together they provided important insights to understand the geopolitical

[6] A total of 2200 articles were collected. To conduct a cross-sectional analysis, a code set was developed , including 13 broad themes: art and culture, civil and gender rights, political contestation, culture and religion, family and reproduction, health, military, political participation, representation, socio-economic, sport, women's administration and policies, criminal incidents.

context in which feminist activism takes shape and the key issues it is seeking to engage with and respond to.

(Visual) Ethnography of Online and Offline Events

Ethnography is a way to attend to the "affective, intimate, and bodily politics" of subjects (Faria, 2020, p. 1095), spaces, and events and to connect them with broader social, political, economic, and cultural landscapes. I conducted ethnography from December 2021 to June 2023, focusing on online and offline events and occasions relevant to feminist and women's rights activism. While the research is focused on activism in the diaspora, I also conducted ethnography in Iran between June and August 2022 to have a better understanding of changes within the country's political environment and implications for relationships between activists in and out of the country. Daily commuting in Tehran during the two-month visit revealed to me the social and political changes in the country, notably the increasing visibility of women without or with loose hijab, as well as the presence of the Morality police in public spaces. It was during this time, in July 2022, when Sepideh Rashnou, an Iranian writer, was arrested after a video recording went viral on social media in which she refused to put on compulsory hijab on a city bus in Tehran. Observing the politicization of hijab through women's daily resistance to claim their bodies and public spaces was significant in shaping the discussion in my research and gave a better understanding of the centrality of mandatory hijab in feminist activism.

Conducting ethnography was also essential in collecting data on place-based feminist activism in Toronto in the aftermath of the WLF uprising. Emerged solidarity networks in response to the uprising (see Chapter 6) created spaces where multiple actors came together, providing opportunities to observe contestations, coalitions, and negotiations that took shape between individual activists, groups, and institutions. Ethnography of public events in the

context of WLF solidarity offered important insights about connections, belongings, modes of interaction, and power dynamics among various political and activist groups of the Iranian diaspora, and resources activists have access to and use during political mobilization.

Further, I conducted a nethnography of the online activities of feminist activists, particularly on Facebook and Instagram. Nethnography is "ethnography adapted to the study of online communities," which presumably provides a faster, simpler, and less expensive method than traditional ethnography, focus groups or interviews (Kozinets, 2002, p. 61). Nethnography was focused on online activities such as content production and interaction with social media users through comments, sharing posts, etc., and offered insights into activists' strategies in using these platforms for educational purposes and networking. To collect such data, I followed activists' social media accounts on Instagram, joined Telegram and WhatsApp group chats and channels, and added them to my Facebook friend list. Of these social media platforms, some are larger in terms of the number of followers, while others are smaller, more private, and often used for individual or group networking. Social media analysis was particularly useful for collecting data about the activities of feminist individuals or groups with whom I did not have direct access and could not conduct interviews. In many cases, my emails or messages via Facebook or Instagram remained unanswered. Social media analysis provided important data on online activism, as many activists use social media platforms, either through personal or public accounts, as a primary activism tool for knowledge dissemination and network development (see Chapter 4). Almost all data derived from social media accounts were gathered from public accounts. Otherwise, permission was obtained from account holders. Other social media platforms for nethnography of events included Zoom and Google Meet. Having a York University email account was essential, particularly

to receive information about and gain access to semi-public events held by and for academic communities.

While nethnography provides profound insights into the use of digital media as an activist tool, and I have discussed them in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, digital activism is not the primary focus of this dissertation. There has been a growing and rich body of literature by Iranian feminist scholars in communication and media studies who focused on how activists have utilized digital tools and platforms to challenge patriarchal social and political norms, as well as challenges and opportunities in doing that (Batmanghelichi & Mouri, 2017; Malekpour, 2021; Shojaee, 2016; Tafakori, 2021). In the Iranian context, cyberfeminism, Batmanghelichi and Mouri (2017) have argued, enables feminist and women's rights activists outside the country with access to diverse feminist discourses and materials to contribute to debates surrounding gender equality and feminism in Iran. In this dissertation, I build on these important discussions by Iranian feminist scholars to discuss how digital platforms and social media have provided significant tools to mobilize knowledge across borders, enhance activist recognition, and mobilize transnational solidarities in the context of the Women, Life, Freedom uprising.

I adopted visual methods in the ethnography of public events by using photography and video as research data. Visual ethnography provides an intimate method of data collection and analysis in its ability to capture human experiences within abstract social, political, and economic systems by focusing on bodies, emotions, and senses. In this research, photography brought important insights, as taking pictures revealed a more nuanced, emotional connection of research participants in response to unfolding events in Iran. For example, when attending events in public squares in Toronto, I collected photos of participants chanting, dancing, and singing together, holding and demonstrating deep emotions of anger, sadness, and hope

through their bodily movements and facial expressions.[7] Some activists had not discussed this profound emotional attachment with me and had also withheld their connections with some of the arrested activists during interviews, perhaps because they intended to protect their privacy or were uncomfortable sharing these personal feelings and experiences with me. However, participating in and photographing these public events in solidarity with activists helped me better appreciate the emotional dimensions of activism in diasporas, which I discuss in Chapters 5 and 6.

Further, visual ethnography of political rallies and protests in cities draws attention to people's routes, mobilities, and their representations and meanings, revealing important perspectives on how urban spaces are made and contested (Pink, 2008). Visual ethnography of WLF solidarity rallies across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) helped me to understand participants' use of space, materials, and symbols and revealed spatialized aspects of activism that could not be captured merely through interviews and media analysis. While participating in WLF-related events and developing my understanding of solidarity spaces, I took photos representing locales and events which seemed to be significant to diaspora communities and political groups, collecting and organizing them based on insights drawn from field notes and interviews (see below). Photos were sorted based on dates; the specific public space they were held in (e.g., Nathan Phillips Square, Mel Lastman Square, Dundas Square, Richmond Hill Public Library, and Queen's Park); specific groups or institutions (e.g., Feminist for Jina (FFJ), Association of Flight 752, University of Toronto, York University, and Ontario College of Art & Design University). In taking photos as a data source, I particularly focused on the use of symbols, banners, and flags present within solidarity spaces and the ways they

[7] While photos were taken in public spaces where photography was not restricted, I tried to take photos in a way that participants' faces were not recognizable. Accordingly, in selecting them, I chose ones in which individual faces were not visible in the photos so as not to invade individual privacy.

represent the group and individual ideologies and identities, the physical characteristics of urban public spaces in which groups organized their events, and the population size of participants and the kind of interactions and activities occurring in each event.

Occasionally, I video-recorded these events to capture slogans and songs, which provided further information about diaspora identities, aspirations, and belongings. A range of songs, anthems, and slogans could be heard during public events in Toronto, including those created by artists inside the country in the wake of the uprising. The selection of songs and slogans and whether they were played or chanted by activist groups and organizers revealed important information about their political positioning. For example, activist members of FFJ refused to put on a song which included "man, homeland, prosperity" during their events, which was often played at other rallies, revealing their view against promoting patriarchal nationalism represented in the verse (See Chapter 6 for further discussion about "man, homeland, prosperity" dispute). Thus, video recordings added a significant depth to interviews, as they showcased how activists differently understand the political meanings and implications of nationalism and gender relations in the context of WLF.

Semi-Structured Interviews: Unexpected Entry Points and Personal Stories

As a method of data collection, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to ask questions about particularities of events and practices in a given socio-political context and enable a flexible conversation with research participants (Secor, 2010, p. 199). The flexible nature of semi-structured interviews, in particular, allows for a more fluid, conversational interaction, which helps in making a better contextual understanding of experiences and insights that are shared by interviewees. I interviewed 39 people, including 24 activists, two artists, six academics/researchers and seven event organizers (the latter only with those in Toronto for accessibility reasons, as I happened to be in the city when the WLF took place)

whose work and activities intersect with feminism and women's rights. These categories, however, are not mutually exclusive. Activists variously self-identified as feminist and women's rights activist-researcher, activist academic, and activist-artist. All research participants (except for one researcher working on freedom of speech on digital platforms) currently live or previously have lived in Iran and could speak Farsi fluently. Thus, all interviews, except for one, were conducted in Farsi, which I later translated and transcribed into English.

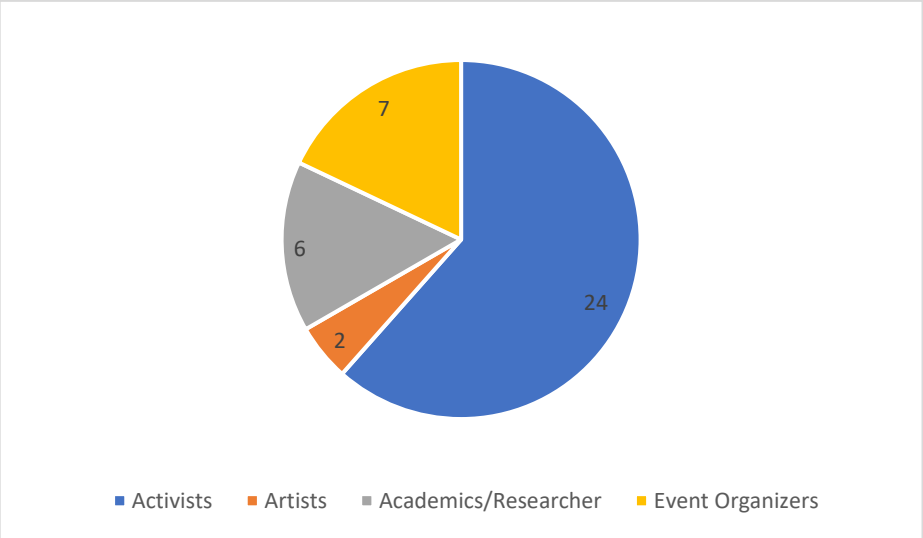

Figure 3-1 Roles and Activities of Research Participants.

While I sought to include diverse activist experiences and perspectives across generational divides, I did not aim for a representative balance in terms of activists' ages, as this was outside of the scope of my research. Rather, my focus was to have a larger number of participants in each diaspora city. However, throughout my fieldwork, I had less success hearing back from more senior activists, possibly due to the smaller number of pre-established connections. Thus, the majority of activist participants in this research are those who were born after the 1979 revolution and who left the country during and after the 2009 Green Movement. While interviews with younger activists often oriented toward more casual

dialogue and conversations, during interviews with senior activists, I often found myself in a learner position being taught about the rich experiences of activists' involvement with past events, such as the One Million Signatures Campaign, during which I was a secondary school student with no knowledge and experience yet of feminist activism.

My understanding and engagement with feminism and feminist ideas before leaving Iran in 2016 were predominantly shaped by my lived experience as a cis-woman encountering various forms of social, political, cultural, and economic gender-based discrimination and violence. During my Master's studies as an Erasmus student in Europe, I began to familiarize myself with queer and feminist Western literature. More serious engagement with feminist activism in the Iranian context, however, began in the aftermath of *the Girls of Revolution Street Campaign* in 2018 through reading Iranian feminist literature and following relevant news. However, it was only during WLF and in the context of the PhD research that I became directly connected with activist communities. While I do not identify myself as an activist, given that I do not have long-term experience and dedication to such work as much as many of the research participants do, as I discuss further below, developing intimate connections with some activist communities has brought insider perspectives to the research which I did not anticipate before beginning my fieldwork.

Out of 39 semi-structured interviews, 30 were conducted via Zoom and Skype and the rest were conducted in person while sitting in a café, at participants' homes, or in my studio apartment on the York University Campus. However, I met the majority of research participants in person before the interview during different public events, protests, and rallies and decided to schedule online interviews for more convenience and flexibility. Interviews taking place in homes or cafes often felt less formal and seemed to facilitate the formation of greater trust and sharing. The length of interviews varied from half an hour to three hours,

depending on the research participants' level of engagement with questions and relevant experiences to research questions. Interview questions for activists mainly revolved around their experiences of activism in and out of the country, as well as the challenges and opportunities they face in different geopolitical contexts. While interviews often began in a more structured format prompted by questions I had prepared, the flow of the interview was influenced by participants' unique experiences and willingness to cover or go more deeply into a particular topic. For example, queer-feminist activists, many of whom themselves identified as part of LGBTQI communities, often discussed the intersection and dynamic between queer and feminist activism. Similarly, Kurdish and Afghan activists more often spoke critically about the racial dynamics across activist groups. After conducting interviews, participants often provided complementary information such as online links to pieces of relevant news, social media posts, contact information of potential research participants, and archived documents, images, and videos, which we discussed during interviews via email, Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn.

Except for event organizers, all of whom are based in Toronto, other research participants are in various countries, predominantly in Europe and Canada (Table 3-1). As I further discuss below, I stopped conducting interviews with activists in Iran after the beginning of the WLF uprising due to security concerns for myself and the research participants. The geographical location of four activists is either unknown or anonymized for similar reasons of personal safety. Additionally, I conducted two interviews with activists outside Canada and Europe, which is the geographical focus of this research, who live in Australia and the US. The reason was to learn about their specific experiences of being involved with the One Million Signatures Campaign and the Me_Too_Movement_Iran (see Chapters 4 and 5), which were brought up during prior interviews. Their insider perspectives were essential for a more

nuanced analysis of these two important cases of past and contemporary feminist activism. The majority of activist participants in the research are based in large European and Canadian cities, including Toronto, Montreal, Berlin, London, Manchester, and Paris, except for two activists who live in Hanover and Hamburg[8].

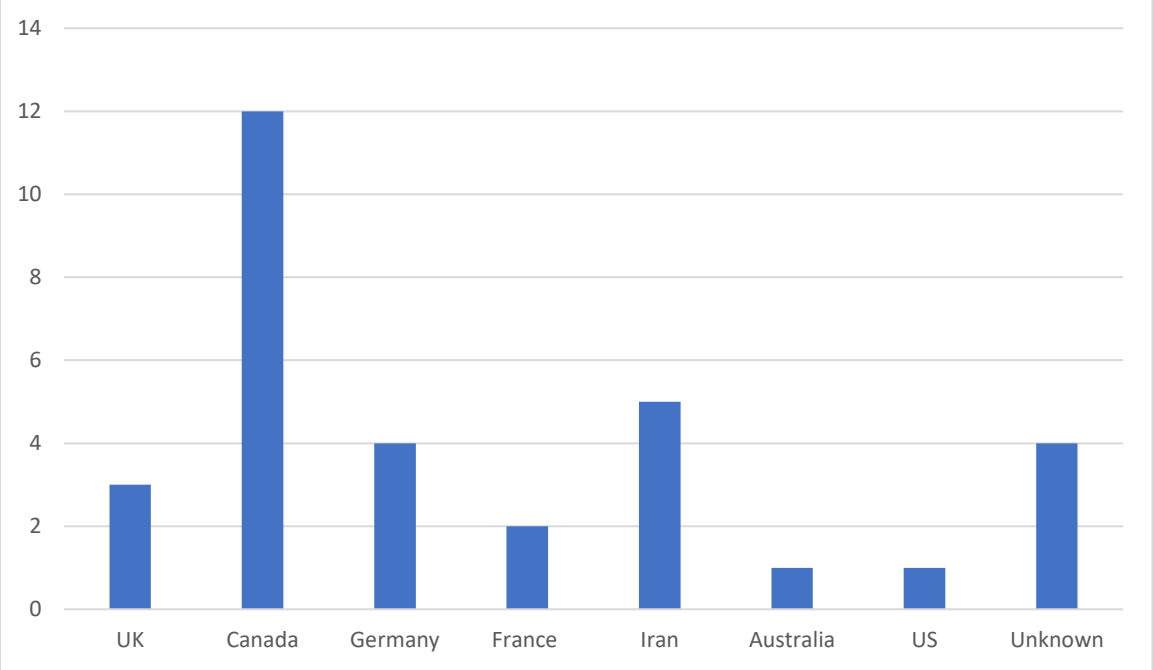

Table 3-1 Participants (excluding event organizers) Countries of Residence

Research participants, both those in and out of Iran, belong to and work with various academic institutions, organizations, campaigns, and groups. Academic institutions with which some research participants are affiliated as students and researchers include the University of Tehran, Allameh Tabatabaie, King's College London, York University, Concordia University, and the University of Toronto. Research participants are variously involved with organizations, collectives, and campaigns focusing on women, human, LGBTQI, and migrant rights, as well as gender, sexuality, and racial-based violence. Some of

[8] Relatedly, one shortcoming of my research is that the experiences and insights of activists living in medium or small-sized cities were less visible in the dissertation (see Introduction Chapter).

these organizations include Spectrum, ILGA-Europe, Miglom, and Kurdistan Human Rights Network and groups and collectives such as Harraswatch, One Million Signatures Campaign, Stop Honour Killing Campaign, Kurdistan Azadî Jinanî Komelgaya (Kjar), and Article 19. Interviews with activists engaged with these organizations provided essential data about the institutional landscapes in which activism takes place, challenges and opportunities in accessing resources, and social relations and political affiliations across activist communities. Conducting interviews with activists who have experience in activism both in and out of the country -- that is, the overwhelming majority of participants -- helped trace changes in their activities and strategies as they crossed borders and navigated different geopolitical contexts. Their transnational insights revealed the complexities of activism in diasporas in terms of difficulties associated with language barriers, challenges of settling in a new country, and emotional and financial struggles of migration, as well as opportunities such as relative social and political freedom, new language and connections, and exposure to social and political activism in Europe and Canada.

Connecting with activists variously located in countries across Europe and Canada, however, was one of the most important challenges of my research. A variety of recruitment methods were used, including personal connections, reaching out via social media, and snowball sampling to overcome this. In the early stages of my research, I was concerned about the inability to get in touch with activists in Canada because of COVID-related regulations imposed only four months after I arrived in Toronto, which made getting in touch with activists less likely. Although restrictions were gradually lifted a few months after the start of my official fieldwork period, access to research participants remained limited to only two activists in Toronto, one of whom I knew through a personal connection and the other through reaching out on Facebook. Given that as a “newcomer” to Canada, my network with

Iranian activists and communities was limited, I reached out to two queer and feminist activists in the UK and France, with whom I collaborated previously through publishing part of my Master's thesis research[9] in their online journal, hoping that they would introduce me to other activists in Canada. They played a key role in connecting me with other activists in Germany, France, and the UK, as well. In the aftermath of the WLF uprising, I developed more connections with activists based in Toronto, many of whom I met during public events and protests (discussed further below). After introducing myself and telling them about my research project, we often exchanged phone numbers to schedule online or in-person interviews or, in some cases, met a couple of hours later when the event was over, in a park or a cafe.

For more heterogeneity among research participants, I used different contact channels. I aimed to have "multiple entry points" since relying solely on snowballing through one contact could make research less representative (Clark-Kazak, 2011; Weima, 2022). Contacting people online via my personal Facebook and Instagram accounts was part of the strategy. Additionally, I would often start conversations while participating in events in Toronto and Tehran. For example, in an event organized at Nathan Philips Square, I recognized a well-known feminist artist from Montreal (whose quotation opened up this chapter) and approached her, introducing myself and asking her whether they were interested in participating in my research. She confirmed, and we decided to meet after one of her theatre shows a couple of days later. Such unexpected entry points due to WLF combined

[9] My Master thesis entitled "Queer Space: Inclusive or Exclusive? A Comparative Study of Two Public Spaces in Tehran and Madrid" involved examining how urban changes influence social relations of inclusion and exclusion in queer public spaces.

with snowball techniques continued throughout the research and helped me get in touch with activists I could not otherwise.

Getting to know activists through a friend and former classmate when I was a Master's student in Europe was another unexpected way to contact activists. A couple of months before the formal beginning of fieldwork, I was asked by my friend, now a Ph.D. student in Germany, to translate a short text from English to Farsi for a feminist conference she was part of. During the initial phases of my fieldwork, I reached out to her to ask if she knew activists from Iran who might be interested in participating in my research. She later provided me with the contact information of an activist in Germany who is part of the Women's Transnational Democratic Platform (see Chapter 4). Later, through snowball sampling, I was provided with more connections with activists in Europe. Getting connections with people through pre-existing intimate relationships helped build trust and mitigate suspicion because activists contacted through these connections came to know me as a student, talking to activists for research purposes. Further, these unexpected entry points helped me to begin to understand transnational and dynamic networks among activists and academics (see Chapter 4) in diasporas that made possible such unpredictable encounters.

In August 2022, I received a Schengen visa for two weeks to participate in a three-day conference organized by the Association of Iranian Studies (AIS) in Salamanca, Spain, presenting part of my research conducted up until that point. I met one of my initial contacts for the first time in person, who also was presenting their research at the conference. With their help, I got to know a few Iranian scholars whose work intersects with women and gender studies. I asked for their contact to talk later, hoping they could connect me with more activists. However, a few days after I arrived in Toronto, the WLF uprising began in Iran, significantly changing my research plan. It was during this time, and when I thought I was

reaching the end of my fieldwork, that I witnessed the global mobilization of the Iranian diasporas, feminist activists included, in response to the state's targeted violence against women in Iran. Getting in touch with feminist activists via email or social media became less likely, given that many were preoccupied with different activities, including organizing rallies, writing statements, and engaging with media to spread the word in the early days of the uprising (see Chapter 6), However, as I described above, growing opportunities emerged to meet them in person during public events in Toronto.

Although the research is focused on *Iranian* feminist activism, I was not comfortable asking people about their national background or racial identities. Direct questions about participants' racial and national identities could be received as inappropriate and intrusive because of discriminatory discourses that disproportionately target activists whose perceived and real national and racial identities are weaponized by the state and some opposition groups to portray them as outsiders and, therefore, threats to national security (see Chapter 6). The politicization of racialized identities, as a state strategy to criminalize activism, however, is an important topic which requires further study. I did not ask about racial identity; however, some participants self-identified during the interview. During an interview, an activist participant explicitly demonstrated their opposition to essentializing national identities and categories. When I asked Mahsa, who is a feminist-queer activist in Paris, whether by using "our society" they are referring to the Iranian society, they responded:

> We do not relate to nationality at all because we do not have anything to do with borders. That is why I am saying Farsi-speaking because if you say Iran, where to situate diaspora? Now, our work is in Farsi, but in the future, with more resources, we also like to work in Kurdish and Azeri, for example […]. But we do not say for Iranians. (Interview, June 2, 2022)

To avoid reducing the heterogeneity of activists' racial and national belongings and identities, rather than using "Iranian activists", instead, I use the phrase "activists in Iranian diasporas."

As such, I did not intentionally seek to diversify the profile of research participants based on national and racial identities. Without such intention to seek out activists from "other" national backgrounds, I got in touch with an activist from Afghanistan through a member of the Women's Transnational Democratic Platform, an online platform established by some Iranian and Kurdish activists in Europe (See Chapter 4). The member provided her with my contact information and asked her whether she was interested in participating in the research. Through the same platform, I was also introduced to an activist member of the Solidarity Party of Afghanistan in Germany, who agreed to an interview via Zoom.

The political (and possibly financial) affiliation of activists is a sensitive yet important topic that I struggled to bring up throughout the interviews. The perceived or real political affiliation of activists with organizations and political entities in Europe and Canada has increasingly become the basis of widespread criticism and even threats, particularly used by the Iranian state to delegitimize feminist activists in diasporas. Although information about some activists' affiliations with groups and organizations is publicly available online, asking direct questions about their affiliation could be perceived as suspicious and result in misleading information, given the common fear of the state's surveillance of opposition political activities and sensitivity of the data for these groups. Nevertheless, some research participants openly discussed past and current affiliations throughout interviews.

To address security concerns when interviewing activists who did not know me personally, I clarified my role as a student and an independent researcher with no affiliation to any organizations except the University at the beginning of each interview. By doing so, I sought to address the concern that information exchanged during interviews would be disclosed without their consent. Further, research participants contacted via social media had access to more personal information about me through my Instagram, Facebook, or LinkedIn profile.

While I occasionally share links and content relevant to my research, I often use social media accounts for personal purposes sharing posts which contain photos with my friends and family and places I lived in and visited. Having access to such information by research participants could potentially impact their decision to participate in the research and provide them with more information about my personal and academic life.

Given the securitized context of feminist activism, particularly subjecting activists in the country to state surveillance, I asked prior to and after conducting the interviews if they preferred to remain anonymized. Besides, before starting the interview, I emphasized that they should feel free not to answer questions that they thought could expose them and result in safety issues for them and their community if publicized through the research. Further, to prevent potential security risks, the auto-delete function of messaging apps for coordinating interviews with activists in Iran was activated to ensure our chats were not traceable. Each participant was provided with my contact details such as email and phone number, often the same communication channels we used to connect in the first place, that could be reached in case they changed their mind about what had been discussed and whether to disclose certain information.

One significant risk of pre-designed research questions is the risk of unintentionally touching on sensitive or traumatic experiences (Weima, 2022, p. 118). Careful considerations, thus, need to be taken during interviews so as not to put pressure on participants to discuss unpleasant, possibly traumatic topics they do not feel comfortable sharing. In the process of obtaining informed consent, it was indicated that participants would not necessarily be asked about personal accounts of their lives, including emotionally difficult topics which they may not wish to discuss; however, occasionally, activists refer to their experiences of being imprisoned or encountering the Iranian state's security forces. At the beginning of each

interview, I emphesized that we could move on to the next topics in case participants were not willing to answer a particular question and tried to avoid direct questions on topics that could be triggering or upsetting. However, the initial prompt of semi-structured interviews asking about their activism in Iran often surfaced in reference to difficult personal experiences of gender-based violence, state persecution, and (forced) migration.

As I discuss further below, developing intimate relationships with research participants, particularly in the aftermath of WLF, often resulted in sharing personal stories during interviews, including experiences of imprisonment and confrontation with stare security forces, shaping individual migration trajectories. Negin, an activist participant in the One Million Signatures Campaign, initially travelled to Canada intending to return to Iran. Still, they had to change their decision and remain in the country:

> When I came out of the country, and the 2009 uprising took place, I could not go back afterwards because I was part of the committee of human rights report, even though I was here [in Canada]. Because of our connections with those in prison, we could disseminate information during the uprising about prions' conditions, those who were killed and tortured, etc. The government went after all members of the group. During this time, 9 people were captured, 2 or 3 were hiding, and someone else and I have been gotten out. And they saw that the website was still working because we decided to keep it up, no matter what. It was there that I received some serious accusations and could not go back to Iran (Interview, November 29, 2022).

Eventually, Negin stayed in Toronto, beginning to engage with activist networks in Canada, namely the Indigenous resistance and labour union (See Chapters 4 and 5). Thus, for some activists, staying out of the country was a strategic choice to continue activities they could not pursue otherwise. Despite such security threats, another activist I interviewed decided to go back to Iran after years of living in Europe. Upon arrival, she got arrested, and her passport was confiscated at the airport. The Iranian state's persecutive measures, informing personal stories of activists' migration and decisions to stay away or return to the country, attest to the

geopolitics of (im)mobility (Ashutosh & Mountz, 2012; Hyndman, 2012, see Chapter 2) and the hardening of borders (Bloch, 2018) for those perceived as threats to national security.

Through different recruitment strategies and multiple entry points discussed above, the personal stories of activists varied greatly, making it impossible to claim that I have reached a "saturation" point with the research sample (Weima, 2022, p. 112). Neither, achieving saturation is easy in studying activism, which overlaps with individual life experiences, even as they are situated within broader social and political structures (Weima, 2022). However, with respect to knowledges, practices, and spaces of activism in diasporas, such as difficulties in translating knowledge and ideas across national borders, financial challenges of activism, the critical importance of political kinship and emotional support, and opportunities to cultivate feminist solidarities in multicultural cities, insights and experiences of activists largely converged, shaping the structure and claims of this dissertation. In what follows, I further elaborate on the intimate methodological frame of the research, besides gathering personal stories, by focusing on intimate relationships developed through the research and how they unbound the research field in the context of WLF.

Woman, Life, Freedom: Intimate Relationships and Unbounding the Research Field

Research processes are inevitably shaped by the intimacies of researcher-participant interactions. For Massaro and Cuomo (2017), pre-existing intimate relationships with research participants enhanced access to research communities while also compounding complexities on how to represent themselves to their academic and research communities. Borrowing from queer theorist Taylor (2011, p. 8), they identify as "intimate insiders", which designate researchers who have pre-existing "close, distant, causal or otherwise" friendships evolving into informant relationships (Massaro & Cuomo, 2017, p. 60). As they elaborate:

> Our research participants are enmeshed in our personal and non-academic lives, and as long-time residents of these communities, our field sites are also our homes. Our already-established membership in our field sites not only enabled our access to research participants and spaces typically closed off to outsiders, but it afforded us privileged institutional and cultural knowledge that shaped our project design, analysis and findings (Massaro & Cuomo, 2017, pp. 60, 61).

They explain, at the same time, being an intimate insider creates further struggle in transitioning from the field and academic life (Staeheli & Lawson, 1994; Sharp & Dowler, 2011) in ways that necessitate conscious effort to maintain boundaries with research participants, to detach themselves from familiar space (Sharp & Dowler, 2011). In the context of my research, I do not claim to be an intimate insider, given the size of the community and geographical diversity of research participants; however, longer-term friendships with activists that grew throughout and after my fieldwork bring similar challenges and opportunities in terms of the ways in which the line between academic and personal lives blurs and how to navigate across these lines ethically.

A few weeks after the beginning of WLF, one of my research participants, an activist scholar in the UK, put me in touch with one of the members of the FFJ, a transnational network of feminist activists in Iranian diasporas, which I joined a few months later. Through the network, I got to know many other activists, some of whom I am still intimately connected. My engagement with the network since the WLF includes helping in organizing online and offline events, joining in informal gatherings at home, frequent online meetings, and connecting through social media and sharing online resources. The WLF uprising, thus, changed not only the research field in significant and unpredictable ways but also changed my positionality through building more intimate relationships with activists beyond the researcher/informant dynamic.

The uncertain political conditions following the uprising and the Iranian state's aggressive measure of imprisonment, torture, and execution created intensified emotional responses across diaspora communities. Feelings of hope, fear, and anger created solidarity spaces through frequent protests, rallies, and gatherings and reinforced bonds of trust and care among activists (see Chapter 6 for a detailed discussion on solidarity spaces of WLFTO), some of which lasted to this day. In continuing to interview activists, I added questions to previous ones, focusing on their views and experiences linked to the uprising. As a flexible data collection method, semi-structured interviews are compelling when the research field is subject to profound social and political changes. Further, given the nature of the protest, as the first "feminist revolution" in the country, the method facilitated conversations where activists could reflect on the past, present and future of feminism and feminist activism in the Iranian context. Before September 2022, less often, activists reflected on the emotional challenges associated with activism in terms of the state's persecutive measures (either targeting them or their loved ones in Iran). Nevertheless, expressing and reflecting on such emotions during interviews took place sometimes, but not always, in the aftermath of the uprising, as activists were witnessing the state's increasing brutalities toward citizens and fellow activists in Iran (see Chapter 6).

Beyond formal semi-structured interviews, as intimate relationships with some activists gradually developed, I occasionally heard personal stories during casual conversations over lunch or coffee. Similar to Massaro and Cuomo (2017), I also faced the common ethical challenges associated with intimate ties with research participants. This "unbounding" of the research field blurs the line between researcher and research participants, making it difficult to distinguish which encounters are taking place within "the field's time/space", necessitating careful contextual considerations to avoid unintentional exposure (Massey, 2003; Weima,

2021). In addition to such concerns, collaborations with activists in the aftermath of WLF revealed to me the limitations and partiality of interviews. For example, during my engagement with FFJ, I learned about the challenges associated with dividing tasks and addressing differences of opinion about group strategies, which were discussed less often throughout interviews. For example, difficulties and negotiations associated with building coalitions and writing statements in response to political and social events seemed less frequent topics in interviews, but it was only when I became engaged with activist work that I had a better understanding of these challenges in volatile political situations.

As already mentioned, following WLF, diaspora communities organized many public protests, discussions, and rallies in Toronto and elsewhere (see Chapter 6). Participating in and conducting an ethnography of weekly events between September and December 2022, became an important part of my research routine and helped me better understand different inter-group dynamics in the city. The coming together of different political groups and activists, such as monarchists, liberals, and socialists, could manifest in the form of mistrust, fearing the risk of exposure and being spied on. During one demonstration in Nathan Phillips Square in Toronto, I was called by one rally participant "a Mujahed supporter" for refusing to hold the "Lion and Sun" flag, which is often used by monarchists and Pahlavists. A few minutes later, I was asked by one of the organizers to clarify my political position. After telling him I only refused to hold the flag, he was easily convinced, stating that such instances of accusations are happening frequently during rallies. In another instance, during an event organized by FFJ, marshals and the police confronted a monarchist supporter as he aggressively interrupted a speech by a university professor and feminist Marxist activist. Whereas in the early days of the uprising, solidarity brought those in diasporas closer, in subsequent months, suspicion and mistrust across political groups and communities became

more evident, manifesting in verbal or even physical violence toward those who were perceived to deviate from "the revolution's goal."

Taking an intimate methodological perspective reveals the ways in which political uncertainties make or break trust among different actors and researchers. As Donovan and Moss (2017) note, "writing intimacy is about finessing connections, awareness and attachments to things including each other in order to support a wider political project in a manner that resonates with what we find in our research". Building further on intimacy within transnational feminist methodology, in what follows, I critically explorintimate reflections as a methodological tool, particularly in a securitized environment.

Intimate Reflections and Ethical Reconsiderations

As I have discussed so far, an intimate feminist methodology attends to the multiple and changing relationships between different actors and the researcher that evolve and emerge through different stages of conducting qualitative research. Building on the discussion of intimacy as methodology, Sotoudehnia (2017, p. 33) writes intimate reflections "can enable geographers to act reflexively and go beyond mere navel gazing exercises that reduce questions of identity to a list of markers". To challenge such normative exercise, Sotoudehnia practices intimate reflection to frame uncertain and shifting "layers of sameness and difference" (Valentine, 2002, p.122) that researchers often experience. Following this practice, I reflect on my position as a migrant student and the ethical considerations I had to take into account in relation to participants' security.

My position as a student studying in a foreign country undoubtedly could inform participants' decision to share certain information with me. In particular, the research topic on feminism and women's rights could create a sense of suspicion when conducting interviews in Iran. Yoshihama and Car (2002, p. 98) observe that suspicion around their feminist agenda has

pushed them to consistently negotiate multiple interests by local actors within the research field. In the Iranian context, such suspicions are also relevant, given the Iranian state's discourses, which render feminism a threat to national security. In the past, researchers working on women's rights and feminism have been arrested by security forces upon arrival in Iran ("Iran: Canadian-Iranian Professor Detained in Tehran: Dr Homa Hoodfar," 2016)

In addition to my physical appearance, my online presence likely influenced participants' decisions to be interviewed. As mentioned earlier, I used my social media to contact some activists. Such connections made before and after the interview offered research participants more information about me. While I mainly use Facebook and Instagram for personal purposes, I have shared a few articles I wrote in Farsi, which reflect my political position. Despite my attempt to clarify my role as a feminist researcher, given the politically charged environment surrounding activism, increasing in the aftermath of the WLF uprising, mitigating misunderstandings and misconceptions about one's "true position" (Weima, 2021, p. 109), nonetheless, is not always achievable.

Biswas (2023, p. 1126) writes, "in moments of uncertainty. ethical judgment of the researcher should be a central guiding force while figuring out what flexibility looks like in the field." In other words, ongoing reflection on ethics is an inseparable part of research in an uncertain political environment. Fluri (2015, p. 238) notes the question of "whose security is of concern and to whom" (Hyndman & DeAlwis, 2004, p. 235) is an important inquiry within places embroiled in political conflicts where "security is distinctly spatialized and considerably contentious." While my position as a student without a security record meant that I could travel to Iran with minimal risk to my safety, many activists I talked to could not easily travel to Iran without such risks. Feminist activists in diasporas are often framed within the state media as agents of foreign states, pursuing political agendas that go against national security.

Preliminary interviews and conversations with activists gave me insights into the heightened securitized environment surrounding feminist activism in the past couple of years. Activists who were more familiar with security conditions in Iran often shared with me strategies and tips to minimize safety risks. Before my travel to Iran, during an interview with an activist who was imprisoned in 2015 for her feminist activism, she expressed concerns about security issues that conducting research with feminist activists could create: “It is very dangerous to go to Iran, see some activists... They [state authorities] would say you are a spy who came here to see activists and then go back; you do not know them. They are very sick” (Interview, June 9, 2022). Similar inputs shared by other participants informed my decision to take a more cautious approach in contacting activists to reduce the risk of state surveillance, including contacting only those whom I knew through a mutual friend or connection and using the auto-delete function to remove histories of chats on WhatsApp and Telegram.

In the aftermath of WLF and the state’s heightened persecution of feminist activists, I stopped contacting activists in the country entirely for research purposes, not to risk their safety. Taking into account state online surveillance of activists' social media accounts and the security risks that reaching out through these platforms could create informed my decision to limit research participants to those in diasporas. The five already-made interviews with two activists, one artist, one policymaker and one researcher in Iran, along with informal conversations throughout the research, shaped my understanding of political dynamics in Iran; however, given the shifting political conditions and ethical implications for the research, they are not central to my analysis.

Such reconsideration due to uncertain political circumstances, which demands refining the research focus and methods, showcases ethical dilemmas in navigating these highly securitized environments. As Shesterinina (2018, p. 192 cited in Weima, 2022) highlights, the

kinds of vulnerabilities that are created and involved in the research participation are not always certain and ensuring the safety of research subjects demands "consistent reassessment of risks and benefits during and after fieldwork." Such unclarity and different perceptions of risks associated with research emerged as a topic of some interviews and informal conversations with activists. While conducting research in Iran, I was advised by one research participant not to interview a researcher who works in a state-affiliated organization as it could create security issues for me. I met the researcher during the conference "The Islamic Regime and the Question of Hijab[10]" at the University of Tehran, where I studied as an undergraduate student between 2011 and 2015. Despite her advice, I decided to conduct the interview; however, to minimize the potential risks of security issues, as a safer strategy, I put on a hijab while interviewing via Zoom—a decision I questioned later in light of the shift in the political meaning of hijab for me as well as many others in the aftermath of Jina's death.

The inclusion of activist experiences and insights from within the country could enrich the research. However, it could also mean less space for unpacking the diverse experiences and perspectives of those in diasporas. Further, limiting interviews to only activists in diasporas did not necessarily mean excluding the experience of activists in Iran. Although some activists in diasporas have spent decades outside the country, their networks and activities are far beyond isolated "diaspora" activism. The breadth and depth of transnational connections between those in and out of the country, primarily through communication technologies (see Chapter 4), unsettle the rigidity of borders dividing activists into "domestic/diaspora." This is a dichotomy that state authorities seek to discursively reinforce as a way to demonize and

[10] "نظام اسلامی و مسئله حجاب"

delegitimize activism outside national borders. Besides, in highlighting various experiences in diasporas, *flashbacks* shared by activists from their time when they were still in Iran contribute to a methodological approach in transnational feminist studies, which problematizes a binary view of domestic/diaspora activists while considering the power geometries imposed by the state's bordering practices.

Conclusion: Navigating Uncertainties through Intimate Methodologies

In this chapter, I have shown how adopting intimacy as a methodology provides a more nuanced understanding of changing power dynamics among research subjects, particularly in working in a context of political uncertainty. Intimacy as a methodology can be useful as an analytical tool to critically examine the ways in which epistemology is often narrowed down to positionality in feminist scholarship, which risks obscuring feminist knowledge production as a political act (Peake, 2017). In doing so, this chapter discussed the opportunities and challenges of conducting research in the face of intense state scrutiny and violence. Furthermore, an intimate methodology reveals the ways in which intimate relationships are (re)made between research subjects and how this necessitates further reflections on research ethics, particularly when it comes to participants' security.

Adopting an intimate methodological framework presents numerous challenges, as discussed in this chapter, including emotional burdens for both the researcher and participants, navigating between the researcher's multiple roles and positions, and ethical concerns associated with participants' privacy and safety. But it also offers opportunities for feminist researchers to engage more deeply with activist communities and to cultivate feminist knowledge as politically and academically meaningful for gender emancipatory futures. In working with uncertainties, intimate methodologies attend to the complex and dynamic layers and negotiation of power that materialized during the research process. These positions offer

an examination of power and politics that is embodied and situated yet extends itself beyond individual positionalities and emotions for feminist political advocacy. Activating and revealing these intimacies as an important component of research showcases the political character of research, particularly in a geopolitical context where the state enforces violence, imprisonment, and displacement.

4. Countertopographies of Knowledge and the Politics of Translation

Introduction

Since the 1979 revolution, a growing number of feminist activists have left Iran due to political repression and the state's persecution, many of whom reside in European and North American countries. Their engagements with social and political movements in diasporas while maintaining connections with activists and communities in Iran through digital and social media platforms have important impacts on the ways in which knowledge and ideas are produced and travel across national borders. To discuss processes of knowledge production and translation by activists in diasporas, in this chapter, I use Katz's (2001, p. 1229) notion of "countertopographies" as politics that "maintains the distinctness of a place while recognizing that it is connected analytically to other places along contour lines that represent not elevation but particular relations to a process". Building on feminist and Marxist insights relating to exploitation and oppression, countertopographies imagine oppositional politics based on situated knowledges linked through contour lines (Katz, 2001, p. 1230). These contour lines are essential to feminist counter-geopolitics, as they facilitate dialogue and conversation across geographical borders and identity differences. Cultivating countertopographies underscores embodied and situated knowledges of activists about multiple, intersecting forms of geopolitical violence and patriarchal structures constructed in and through intimate spaces and relations as a basis for enacting feminist praxis in a transnational context.

Yet, there are important challenges in cultivating feminist countertopographies. While activists' engagements with academic institutions and socio-political movements in diasporas provide immense opportunities for mobilizing knowledge and building solidarity, issues associated with translating ideas, theories, and concepts across geographical borders have

resulted in the epistemic dismissal of feminist critiques against state-led gender-based violence. I draw on feminist perspectives on the "politics of translation" that capture movements of theories, texts, capital, and bodies across North/South geographies along with the mobile epistemologies they create (Alvarez et al., 2014, p. 3). I show how the conceptual domination of Islamic feminism that marginalizes critiques of the Islamic Republic's misogyny calls for a more nuanced analysis of the politics of translation in problematizing how Islamic feminism translates into the Iranian geopolitical context. I conclude by positing that a feminist politics of translation necessitates more serious engagement with translating feminist knowledge and ideas produced in diverse geographies, including the Global South, and calls for consideration of creative means of activism and knowledge creation, such as cultural tools and artistic expressions.

In what follows, I conceptually frame countertopographies within the geographical literature and provide an overview of feminist scholarship on the politics of translation in order to show how countertopographies are shaped by travelling bodies, theories, and knowledges across geographical borders and linguistic differences. In the empirical section of this chapter, first, I examine activists' embodied and situated knowledge of gender and sexuality-based violence, focusing on how such knowledges are mobilized across national borders. Such a focus shows how a topographical perspective reveals the significance of these knowledges built in and through intimate spaces and relations by feminist activists in Iranian diasporas. Second, I focus on the entanglement of translation and travelling theories with knowledge production and mobilization. I identify challenges associated with translating feminist theories and ideas, particularly the problematic conceptual domination of Islamic feminism, which has resulted in the epistemic dismissal of feminist critiques against gender-based violence by the state. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how such challenges in bridging feminist theory

and practice can be addressed through implementing feminist politics of translation that attend to “multiple feminisms” (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010), including those existing and emerging in the Global South.

From Situated Knowledge to Countertopographies

Building upon critiques that question unlocatable and unaccountable claims to knowledge, Haraway (2016, p. 581) famously asserted that “feminist objectivity” equates situated knowledges. These knowledges are cultivated through the vantage point of the subjugated, that is, from below spaces of power, “establishing the capacity to see from the peripheries” (Haraway, 2016, p. 583). As a critique of enlightenment epistemologies, situated knowledge is characterized by embodied, partial, and accountable views, which make possible the acceptance of subjectivity in producing all kinds of knowledges (Peake, 2016). However, as Haraway (2016) acknowledges, there is a danger of romanticizing and appropriating the standpoint of the “less powerful” when claiming to see from their view. Attending to risks associated with assuming knowledge at a single point of the subject position, Katz (2001, p. 1230) notes that situated knowledge “only gets us partway there”. For Katz, situated knowledge alludes to a location in abstract relation to other places, resulting in the politics of space and place, which remains mainly indifferent to material conditions. Thus, “the politics of extension and translation”, she asserts, often easily get reduced to situatedness, an issue that must be addressed through historical and social examination in three-dimensional spaces (Katz, 2001, p. 1231).

In addressing the shortcomings of situated knowledge, Katz (2001, p. 1229) builds upon Marxist and feminist insights to conceptualize “countertopographies”. She uses the metaphor of topography to imagine “a politics that maintains the distinctness of a place while recognizing that it is connected analytically to other places along contour lines that represent

not elevation but particular relation to a process". *Doing* topography, according to Katz (2001, p. 1228), is to carry out a nuanced exploration of material conditions, ranging from the scale of the body to the global level, to understand better how they construct and relate to each other, aiming to advance collective struggles against exploitative and oppressive systems of political, social, and economic structures. Katz's formulation of countertopographies reveals how all knowledges are situated, partial, and embodied, anchored in particular material and political conditions, yet connected through contour lines across space. Thus, countertopographies are constitutive of situated knowledges rather than negating them.

Geographers draw upon the notion of countertopographies to study diverse experiences of migrants and asylum seekers (Jayne et al., 2023; Mountz, 2011), women (Jayne et al., 2023; Pratt & Yeoh, 2003), youth (Katz, 1998), workers (Dixon, 2012; Jayne et al., 2023), and activists (Bain & Podmore, 2021; Smith, 2021; Wright, 2009). Smith (2021), for example, maps countertopographies through art and theatre by providing a perspective on globalization and neoliberalism from the vantage point of less privileged groups, such as working-class women in the Global South. Others have taken a methodological approach to unpacking the potential of countertopographies to produce knowledge that facilitates social and political transformation. For example, Mason (2015, p. 497) conceptualizes countertopographies as a means to discuss how participatory action research (PAR) "can jump scale to inform theory". Geography scholarship, thus, showcases the political potential of countertopographies both as a methodological tool and a political project (Postar & Behzadi, 2022) in overcoming the rigid divide between activists and academics and capturing the "kinship of theory and practice" (Wright, 2009, p. 380).

While a diverse range of scholarship theorizes countertopographies from a transnational perspective, it does so mainly through national comparison, leaving the countertopographies of migrant and diasporic experiences and their use of online spaces underexplored. Yet, Jayne et al. (2023, p. 1) use countertopographies to capture migrant experiences and struggles across various sites within and between nation-states. A range of spaces, such as kitchens, villages, neighborhoods, workplaces, and dormitories, and social media, play an essential role in shaping countertopographies and capturing how gendered relations are reinforced, negotiated, and redefined through diversity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of everyday lives (Jayne et al., 2023, p. 23). Considering social media as a constitutive space of countertopographies, they further demonstrate how "digital countertopographies" provide essential communication tools, enabling the sharing of diverse emotional registers and digital co-presence among migrants. Countertopographies, thus, provide a conceptual tool to consider within transnational and migration studies the role of often-unaccounted online spaces in the experiences of migrants, diasporas, and refugees.

While Katz refers to "politics of translation and extension" in theorizing countertopographies, she does not elaborate on the challenges and opportunities associated with translation across geographical borders and linguistic differences. In the next section, I review works by Latin American feminists on the politics of translation, which provided important insights into complex ways in which knowledge, ideas, and theories travel (or not) across borders. Considering such complexities is vital in order to understand how countertopographies are cultivated by activists in Iranian diasporas.

Politics of Translation in Feminist Literature

The question of translation has increasingly become pertinent in the context of interconnected and heterogeneous histories and geographies of migration and displacement (Clifford, 1997,

cited in Costa, 2006, p. 62). It constitutes a space from which to examine power asymmetries across geographies, people, and languages and analyze knowledge production and institutions through which ideas and theories travel (Costa, 2006). As a "hidden set of power relations" (Min, 2016, p. 8), translation involves a highly complex process of travel and transfer across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Min, 2016). The notion of cultural translation is used to signal that all processes of interpretation and dissemination of ideas, concepts, and theories are necessarily caught in power relations across a variety of borders and hierarchies (Costa, 2006). For Alvarez et al. (2014, p.1), translation is politically and theoretically indispensable to feminist alliances and epistemologies. In the context of feminist politics in Latin America, they elaborate on the politics of translation, using the metaphor of translocas as a framework that captures movements of theories, texts, capital, and bodies across North/South geographies along with the mobile epistemologies they create (Alvarez et al., 2014, p. 3). Translocal translations, as Blackwell (2014) argues, are key steps to building feminist coalitions, solidarities, and movements, particularly for marginalized actors in their national context. Thus, a feminist politics of translation that attends to diverse scales of violence, repression, and activism constitutes a critical facet of countertopographies of knowledge, which inspires a politics where "scale jumping" is mandatory (Katz, 2001).

One pertinent question when it comes to the politics of translation is the social, political, and institutional means through which knowledge, ideas, theories and concepts travel (Alvarez et al., 2014; Min, 2016). Said (1988 cited in Harding, 2019, p. 611) uses the notion of "travelling theory" to discuss what happens when theories move across time and space from one context to another. The ways in which theories within social science and humanities travel, Said argues, are never unimpeded and always impacted by conditions of "resistance" and "acceptance" (Frank, 2009; Said, 1983). Thus, travelling theories open up critical

discussions on whether and how theories "gain or lose in strengths" (Said, 1983, p. 226) as they move across time and space. In Clifford's (1989, p. 2) words, when theory travels from the West, a powerful site of knowledge and science, it becomes "increasingly contested, cut across, by other locations, claims, trajectories of knowledge articulating racial, gender, and cultural differences". In the context of transnational feminism, as Alvarez et al. (2014, p. 325) argue, "theory brokers" including actors such as academics, international and national organizations, women and feminist NGOs, and grassroots organizations and communities, play important roles in deciding whether and how certain theories travel, exerting power over the process of translation.

Countertopographies of Embodied and Situated Knowledges

Countertopographies of knowledge that are fostered by activists cover a range of topics in illuminating and criticizing gender and sexual-based violence, such as sexual harassment in public spaces, domestic violence, queer and trans-phobia, discriminatory laws against women (e.g. lack of the right to divorce or to abortion), and gender-based state violence. The focus area of activists may change based on socio-political conditions. For example, Razi, a human and women's rights activist and the founder of the StopHonor Killings Campaign, described her activist journey in Iran:

> Throughout my activist life, my activities were in response to the conditions. For example, regarding women's rights to the body and hijab at the beginning of the revolution, I was among those who participated in anti-hijab protests. Although I was not as experienced as I am now, I realized it is one of the fundamental women's rights being taken. As the government became more powerful, attacks on us became severe. At some point, my activism was focused more on raising awareness and organizing women's groups for debate around these issues. Why should women have certain rights? At some point, we emphasized women's legal rights such as civil rights and Islamic punishment… Later, activism for LGBT rights became part of my activism. At any point, I focused on a specific topic (Interview, July 6, 2022).

Thus, the focus area of activists is not fixed, and they may prioritize working on certain issues at a given time. Activists' life trajectories and experiences are also often influential in deciding the direction and focus of their activism. The majority of activist research participants asserted that migration influenced their activism in significant ways as they settled into a new environment. These influences are often shaped by language skills, social and political networks, and institutional links (discussed below). As such, countertopographies are evolving and changing, shaped by the personal and political lives of individuals as they move across borders.

Research participants acknowledged how getting involved with ongoing socio-political movements in the host countries (e.g., Indigenous Resistance, Arab Liberation, Black Lives Matter, LGBTQI activism, or labour union activism) has impacted their knowledge of sexual and gender-based violence and, in turn, their activism. Long-term engagement with grassroots movements and activist networks is pivotal to what some research participants described as a shift toward a more "radical", "progressive", and "diverse" approach in their feminist activism after migration. For example, Sahar, a former member of the OMSC, explains that getting to know and collaborating with leftist activists in Europe and Canada, where she has lived, impacted her activism in profound ways:

> After getting out of the country and becoming familiar with social and political movements, the focus of my activities became more diverse. My leftist perspective was much bolder […]—specifically, police abolishing, Palestinian liberation, and issues faced by Arab countries. There were opportunities to learn, which were impossible in Iran (Interview, December 3, 2022).

Research participants often recounted how the prevailing securitized environment surveilling feminist activists in Iran necessitates protective measures in their strategies and tactics. Some explained that activism, particularly on topics perceived as "sensitive," such as women's sexuality and issues faced by queer and LGBTQI communities, took place in private,

informal spaces. Sahar recalls: “Within our study group in Sari[11], once we went to Babolsar[12] to the house of one of the folks’ fathers, and we held a workshop about sexuality. But we could not publicize it” (Interview, December 3, 2022). Within a hostile social and political environment, the intimate home spaces and relations between some activist members of the campaign create a safe space for facilitating knowledge mobilization “to build the necessary activist toolkits to change that environment” (Bain & Podmore, 2021, p.1514).

After leaving Iran, the relative socio-political freedom in the diaspora allowed some activists to focus more openly on issues faced by LGBTQI communities and queer-feminist activism, often perceived as “red lines” or “dividing” topics under the country's conservative social and political environment. Kamran, a former campaign member now residing in Berlin, explains:

> In a country where you do not have any opportunity for queer activism, the women’s movement and feminism are the closest options to you […] After leaving the country, since I came out, my efforts became focused on making the connection between feminist and queer activism more explicit (Interview, May 30, 2022).

Kamran’s rationale for focusing on queer-feminist activism after leaving the country was a recurring theme among research participants, particularly queer-identified activists. Zeynab, also a former campaign member, shares how, after resettling in Sweden, they started working on the issue of queer and biphobia:

> I went to Sweden and studied for a Master's in gender studies. I got in touch with queer communities there. There was a space to think more about my sexual orientation, and I felt I could be active. However, something that pushed me to decide to work on bisexuality was that I knew about biphobia. I had read about it, more in theory, but had not experienced it much. I encountered biphobia. I had a German friend who gave me a book on the lives of American bisexuals. Reading those stories influenced me to work in this area. The first thing I published was the translation of the book’s introduction (Interview, May 21, 2022).

[11] A middle-sized city in Northern Iran.
[12] Also, a middle-sized city in Northern Iran.

Zeynab further details that after deciding not to return to Iran, they started networking and focusing more seriously on the issue of queer and biphobia among Farsi-speaking communities: “It was during this time that the idea for launching *Donjesngara* [means bisexual in Farsi] and Spectrum with Mahsa [pseudonym] came up.” Spectrum is a non-profit organization in Paris, France working on gender equality and education through multiple projects, including Dojensgara website, which covers content such as rights to sexual and mental health (feministspectrum.org). As Mahsa, the co-founder of the non-profit, a queer-feminist activist and the Executive Board Member at the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA-Europe), emphasized, one of the most essential parts of their work in Spectrum is awareness raising and education (Interview, June 2, 2022). The discursive and political reframing towards LGBTQI inclusivity and queer feminism by activists in diasporas introduces an important shift in Iranian feminist activist discourses, making visible diverse knowledges and practices that could only manifest within intimate spaces, such as activists’ homes when they were in Iran. As the above insights show, activists’ embodied knowledges (Smith, 2012) of LGBTQI criminalization and queerphobia constitute an important facet of their activism, pushing for more diversity and inclusivity in feminist activist discourse and practice.

In addition to social and political ties which inform countertopographies of knowledge by activists in diasporas, feminist activists and researchers involved with academic institutions outside of Iran have also played a key role in knowledge production and mobilization processes. *Iranian Women's Research Foundation*[13] (IWSF) exemplifies one of the most sustained collective efforts by academics and activists in diasporas to encourage and

[13] بنیاد پژوهش‌های زنان ایران

document women's work on gender equality (Shahbazi, 2018). IWSF is a non-profit research foundation established in 1989 in the U.S. by three Iranian academic activists, namely, Afshana Najmabadi, Golnaz Amin, and Shahla Hairi, who provided a space to communicate ideas surrounding topics relevant to Iranian women (Ghorashi & Tavakoli, 2006, p.95). Further, the foundation aims to establish and sustain a transnational network among academics and activists. The first two IWSF-organised conferences were held at Harvard University, and conference papers were published in the quarterly magazine *Nimeh Digar* (transl. from Farsi as the Other Half). From the third year onward, Golnaz Amin, the Foundation's executive director, held conferences with local committees in different cities in the U.S., Canada, and Europe (Shahbazi, 2019), including "Los Angeles, Berkeley, Denver … Paris, Stockholm, London, [and] Berlin" (Ghorashi & Tavakoli, 2006, p. 95). The committee comprises women who have activist experience and were forced into unwanted migration. Activists are invited to participate in conferences with the organizers' intent to encourage activists to do research (Shahbazi, 2019). As such, the foundation provides opportunities to mobilize knowledge across activist and academic communities in diasporas.

Possibilities to mobilize knowledge through developing ties with activists involved with social and political movements and establishing connections to academic institutions are often higher in larger, first-tier cities such as Berlin, London, Toronto, and Paris (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of resourceful cities). Nonetheless, activists in smaller cities in Europe or Canada also seize opportunities to mobilize knowledges across academic institutions and civil society. For example, the *Women Making Herstory* (WMH) 1994-2014 project was initiated in Malmo by journalist and activist Parvin Ardalan, a leading women's rights activist and one of the founders of the OMSC.In launching the project in Malmö, she collaborated with the Feminist Dialog network (a non-governmental organization founded by

Iranian feminists living in Sweden and other countries), Malmö Museums, ABF (the educational section of the Swedish labour movement), and the Living Archives research project at Malmö University (Women Making History, n.d.). The project aims "to rethink and see how gender, ethnicity, class and race have shaped the image of immigrant women in the historiography of Malmö [especially] through immigrant women's own voices" by holding workshops and meetings, conducting interviews, creating digital history archives, and organizing exhibitions (Women Making History, n.d). The first meeting of WMH in 2019 involved a breakfast meeting at the Museum of Movements (MoM), the first national Museum for Democracy and Migration in Sweden (artistsatriskconnection.org), to discuss solidarity, dialogue, and organization across generations (Womenmakinghistory, 2020). The transcript of a YouTube video shared on the project's official website explains the idea behind the project: "When arriving to Sweden, we all began our journey from zero: the immigrant women's experiences directed us towards the topics". The video continues to describe the project's goals as follows:

> To discover and learn new ways of collaborative researching and communicating. To combine activist methods and knowledge with institutional, educational and social methods. To use the interview methods with a feminist perspective for the multilingual interviewers …. To begin collecting and archiving the immigrant women's stories as a social and collaborative work as well as increasing social awareness. To break the norms by avoiding to reproduce stereotypes. To make the grassroot committed women, the ambassador (Parvin Ardalan, 2019).

The book *Women Making Herstory* was published based on these collective and collaborative methods of research and communication, and by 2018, it was used for the second year in a row as a textbook in the Cultural Sociology Department at Linnaeus University (Womenmakinghistory, 2018). Thus, WMH provided a platform for activists, artists, and migrant women in Malmö to gather and create connections with each other by using institutional spaces of the museum and the university. Providing such platforms is important

not only for migrant women and activists to develop their connection for social and political purposes but also for creating an alternative narrative of the city's history that comprises women's embodied and situated knowledges and experiences of migrations. Further, the creative and collaborative methods of producing such knowledges by activists in the diaspora, including the intimate practice of eating together in the museum, facilitate dialogue and enhance mutual understanding between institutional actors, civil societies, and migrant communities.

For activists in Iranian diasporas, academic institutions, as the example above illustrates, may provide spaces and resources that can connect them to women activists and migrants from different national backgrounds. Being part of transnational activist networks helps activists learn from each other's experiences, insights, and strategies. Many activists I spoke to who are involved in academia as students, researchers, or faculty members emphasized that universities played a role in influencing their strategizing, political perspective, theoretical views, and networking[14]. In addition to creating a space where activists and academics could establish collaborative ways of knowledge production and mobilization, as will be shown in Chapter 5, academic institutions become important sites for cultivating political kinships among activists and academics, constituting an essential resource for activism.

The possibilities of performing transnational feminist praxis (see below) in weaving theory and practice with activist and academic communities in Iran, however, are highly determined by the hegemony of academic institutions that marginalize, if not outright mute, critical activist voices. Institutional hegemony over debates surrounding women's studies is, for example, exercised by the *Women and Family Research Institute* in Iran. In 1999, the

[14] This also includes universities providing access to funding for research, workshops, talks, and activism through grants, as highlighted further below.

institute was founded with the aim of "defining a systematic view of religion on the topic of women and family, enhancing research and religious expertise and responding to theoretical needs and defending the realm of [religious] belief in this field" (Women and Family Research Institute, 2022). In 2013, due to the increase in research activities and the development of the office, the name of the office was changed to Women and Family Research Center by the Management Center of Women's [Islamic] Seminary[15]. Eventually, in 2019, the research center was upgraded to the Women and Family Research Institute, the first official [religious] seminary research unit. When asked about his views on the role of activists and academics in knowledge creation processes, one of the members of the institute shared:

> There should be a distance between activism and research. If there is no distinction between the two, we should cry for both research and activism. Researchers should not be in activist positions, and vice versa. This, however, might cause misunderstanding. I do not mean that researchers should not be curious about what is going on in the field. Changes that take place in the field must be studied. But [researcher's] insights must be deep enough to distinguish between what is *worthy* of a research inquiry and what is not. They must have analytical thinking of what is going on in the field, which can not be expected of an activist. But when research is *degraded* to activism, with no scientific knowledge, the result is what we see on Instagram pages (author's emphasis) (Interview, July 19, 2022).

Alexander and Mohanty (2010) describe how "power/knowledge matrix" creates insiders and outsiders, determining those who know and those who cannot know. The power/knowledge matrix in Iran is directly informed by the intimate connection (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010) between academic institutions and the state functioning to establish religious ideologies about the role of women in families and societies. The intimate relationship between the two is

[15] مرکز مدیریت حوزه‌های علمیه خواهران

evidently reflected in the state's coercive measures in attacking academic communities during the Woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising.

Since the beginning of the uprising, university students and professors in Iran have become the target of the most severe security and judicial threats and pressures. The security forces arrested hundreds of students. Moreover, many professors in universities who participated in or supported the protest have been fired, suspended, or forced to retire (Centre for Human Rights in Iran, 2023). Although the state's coercive measures to maintain authority over the academic institutions they fund may present important challenges in knowledge mobilization across activist and academic communities, digital spaces and social media platforms provide alternative tools to overcome these barriers. In the next section, I discuss the important role of "digital countertopographies" (Jayne et al., 2023) in facilitating transnational feminist praxis, as well as the challenges activists face in cultivating these topographies.

Digital Countertopographies and Transnational Feminist Praxis

> We literally have to think ourselves out of . . . crises through collective praxis . . . (Alexander and Mohanty, 1997, cited in Peake, 2016, p. 833)

Digital spaces and social media platforms are essential for implementing transnational feminist praxis employed creatively by activists to create educational content, hold online conferences, share ideas and information, and expand networks with each other and broader communities. Importantly, digital countertopographies facilitate teaching and learning from activist strategies and tactics across geographical borders. Inspired by Harassmap, a project by a group of Egyptian activists focusing on sexual harassment, a group of Iranian activists launched the Harasswatch website in 2017. In addition to publishing articles and news on topics relating to feminism and women's rights in Iran and elsewhere, the website includes a map of Iranian cities which illustrates reported everyday cases of sexual harassment in public

spaces (Figure 4-1). The aim is to “make visible the experience of sexual harassment through people’s own narratives,” thus enhancing public awareness and education around the topic (Harasswatch, n.d.).

Figure 4-1 Online Mapping of Sexual Harassment Cases across Iranian Cities (source: Harasswatch, n.d.).

The chief editor of Harasswatch, Ghoncheh, a feminist activist residing in Paris at the time of our interview, explained that before launching the website and the map, she interviewed activist members of Harassmap to gain their insights and learn from their experiences. “They had a long experience, and much research has been conducted. […]. They had a lot of challenges similar to ours. In terms of security issues created by the government,” Ghoncheh explains (Interview, June 9, 2022). Unlike Harassmap, however, the group decided not to collaborate with the state and police forces in working against sexual violence:

> Because we are dealing with a government that says if you are not putting on hijab, it is your fault if you are being harassed […]. So, we made it clear on the website that it is not our view to make certain parts of the city more policed (Interview, June 9, 2022).

The above case highlights how the “activation” of situated knowledges (Haraway, 2016) of those who are often deemed passive targets of violence plays a key role in building topographies to counter sexual harassment, police violence, and discriminatory legal systems

against women. Building on Katz's insistence on inferring "analytic connections in relation to specific material social practices" across countertopographies, Lock-Swarr and Nagar (2010 cited in Peake, 2016, p. 834) assert that "feminist politics of connection" enables analytical and practical collaboration through establishing transnational feminist praxis. Enacting feminist praxis is possible through weaving theory and practice that aims for a radical change of approach in knowledge production (Peake, 2016). Feminist politics of connection, performed by Harasswatch members, disavows a situated knowledge in isolation from other places. Rather, it creates and sustains contour lines of knowledge through transnational channels of communication and dialogue.

Given the strategic importance of digital spaces and social media platforms for feminist activists, they have increasingly been the target of cyberbullying and cyberattacks by state-affiliated and hostile individual users, creating challenges for knowledge production and mobilization. Kiana, one of the holders of Me_Too_Movement_Iran social media accounts, observes that "content manipulation" is a strategy used by individuals, including public figures who were exposed for sexual abuse, to delegitimize the Iranian feminist movement and activism. To prevent such manipulation and further attacks on feminist activists, Kiana explains, at times," If I have a critical opinion [about certain activist practice], I try not to say it publicly but through direct [messaging]. Because usually, my experience is that [the critique] is being used somewhere you did not intend to" (Interview, July 12, 2022). While social media platforms provide an important site for knowledge mobilization and conversation, Kiana's insights show that a hostile environment against activists can result in self-imposed censorship by activists.

In 2022, a widespread attack against social media accounts owned by Iranian feminist activists took place with the aim of lowering their engagement rate (Interview, June 24,

2022). Subsequently, international and regional human and women's rights organizations released statements urging Meta, the owner company of Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp, to take necessary steps to protect the cybersecurity of Iranian feminist activists (Khatsenkova, 2022). However, as explained by one of the members of Article 19, an international human rights organization focusing on freedom of speech in cyberspaces, in addressing cyberattacks against Iranian feminist accounts, Meta's resources are not as efficient as they are in moderating English and European-language content. She explained that often, the same level of precision does not apply to Farsi contents:

> A feminist activist might receive threats in English, and the platform will remove them immediately. However, if they come in Persian, it is quite cumbersome and difficult for the platform to remove them. Often, they might not have the proper resources to assess those language nuances (Interview, June 24, 2022).

A few days into those attacks, some feminist activist account holders strategically privatized their social media to prevent fake users and bots from overwhelming their accounts. Alimardani and Elswah (2021) describe how the lack of measures and resources to moderate content on social media platforms has resulted in platforms' biases. Within Facebook's organizational structures, almost all European countries and Israel have their own designated public policy head, whereas the Middle East and North African (MENA) countries, with all their linguistic, cultural, political, and religious difference, are grouped under one management system. They describe that "while Facebook maintains a broad 'MENA' office in Dubai, they have a country-specific office in Israel with their own public policy director" (Alimardani & Elswah, 2021, p. 70). Such discriminatory and unfair measures against people in these countries, or as Alimardani and Elswah suggest, "digital orientalism" create important challenges for anti-authoritarian activism in MENA. Further, as the above example demonstrates, it makes social media platforms ineffective in addressing online harassment

against activists. Nevertheless, cyberattacks and platform biases are not the only challenges in cultivating countertopographies of knowledge. In the following section, I provide evidence further showing the complexity of knowledge production and mobilization across geographical borders and linguistic differences. By discussing issues associated with translation and travelling theories, I show how epistemic dismissal has resulted in marginalizing Iranian feminist critiques against gender-based violence by the state in diasporas.

Challenges of Translation and Travelling Theories

Some of the challenges in knowledge mobilization across communities are associated with difficulties in finding common ground for communication and dialogue, which are linked to differentiated access to institutional resources and academic languages. Divisions across communities in privileging activist voices that demonstrate more familiarity with academic feminist literature undermine opportunities for having an inclusive space for knowledge mobilization and conversations. Saeedeh, an activist artist in Toronto, reflects on social hierarchies based on academic affiliations of activists:

> Imagine you are constantly reading the latest published articles. I cannot talk using articles. Those who are using the article to amplify their voice, when I challenge their ideas, then the discussion is cut off from their side. People are more important than theories (Interview, June 12, 2022).

Saeedeh's experience exemplifies how power dynamics can take root within activist communities functioning to silence those voices deemed "non-academic" and unworthy of attention or validation. It also highlights that academic versus non-academic knowledge binaries and articulations undermine opportunities for conversation across communities. Difficulties in establishing common grounds for dialogue are also a result of diverging interpretations around specific terms and concepts. Mahsa, a feminist-queer activist in Paris,

highlights that the term "intersectionnalité"[16] is fraught among some activist communities as it is assumed to promote religious ideologies within feminist debates that tend to justify discriminatory laws against women in Muslim-majority societies by adopting a relativist approach to women's rights. The divergence in interpreting ideas highlights the critical question of translation across social, political, and cultural differences. As Min (2016, p. 9) argues, translation involves processes of transcoding and acts of communication which have to do with linguistic competencies but more so "knowledge/power" relationship which authorizes certain ways of "knowings" above others.

In the Americas, Alvarez et al. (2014, p. 30) observe that one of the recurring issues for hemispheric dialogue is the ability to "translate concepts that resist appropriation". In considering the politics of translation, they argue, the concern is not only the appropriation of terms and discourses but also the social and political relations that inform them. In the context of Iranian activism, translating ideas that incorporate religious perspectives in feminist discourses, such as intersectional feminism, is even more contentious and politically charged due to the state's propaganda in promoting Islamic views on feminism and women's rights. Thus, rather than representing a progressive discourse, Islamic feminism for many Iranian feminists and women's rights activists signals de-politicizing, if not co-opting feminist ideas. Contentious debates, and at times divisions, across communities on the political implication of Islamic feminism in the Iranian context highlight the complexity of translation processes across geopolitical differences. Mouri and Batmanghelichi (2016, p. 334), for example, argue that the conceptual domination of Islamic feminism over the heterogeneous field of activism in the Iranian context resulted in "political and epistemic

[16] During the interview, Mahsa used the term in French pronunciation.

violence, silencing the speech and actions of Iran's secular feminists and women's rights defenders". Such epistemic violence, they argue, manifests in "a palpable silence and mutual distancing between Iranian activists and feminist scholars residing in America and Europe." (Mouri & Batmanghelichi, 2016, p. 334).

The problematic domination of Islamic feminism over activist discourses that marginalizes feminist critiques against state-led gender-based violence was raised during interviews, particularly by research participants who are closely engaged with ongoing academic debates. Zeynab, a feminist, queer academic activist in Manchester, observes that within academic communities, there is often the assumption that talking about religious patriarchy in Iran results in promoting Islamophobia; thus, "secular Iranian women and activists are being silenced both in Iran and here." Kamran, an academic activist in Berlin, echoes that the "relativist tendencies" that characterize religious approaches to women's rights and feminism can be "dangerous as they de-emphasize the issue of dictatorship" in the Middle East (Interview, May 30, 2022). These comments highlight "the need to understand theories neither in terms of fetishized mobile objects or free-floating fields of transfer" (McCann, 2011, p. 122) but to consider how their political meaning changes drastically in different social, political, cultural, and institutional contexts. Whereas Islamic feminism may provide powerful critiques of white feminism and Islamophobia in Western academic and political discourses, in the political context of religious extremism, such as in Iran, they turn into discursive tools for the anti-imperialist state's propaganda at the service of misogynistic and patriarchal forces.

The problematic conceptual domination of Islamic views on Iranian feminism was raised by some Iranian feminist scholars during the Woman, Life, Freedom Revolutionary uprising. In a letter titled "Listen to the Voices of a Feminist Revolution in Iran", signed by more than

2000 Iranian and non-Iranian academic activists, including Sara Ahmed, Angela Davis, Judith Butler, and Jacques Rancière, they urged the international community to join the transnational solidarity in support of women and marginalized groups in Iran. They address the broader academic and activist communities around the world, encouraging them to break their silence about what is happening in Iran. The letter reads:

> A so-called progressive but neo-orientalist approach has […] led to an epistemic and political dismissal of Iranian feminist and queer resistances. Their multi-layered oppression and struggles remain unrecognized, and they are rendered invisible unless they link their struggles to Western issues or see themselves through that neo-orientalist gaze (Listen to the Voices of a Feminist Revolution in Iran, 2022)

Here, taking a full solidarity stance with Iranian women and activists who resist and fight against the Islamic Republic's misogyny by progressive academics and activists in the West is deemed a *risky* task, for it may feed into racist, Islamophobic, xenophobic discourses of the far right. The collective reflection reveals the complexity of translating "progressive" feminist ideas from place to place; to be a *progressive feminist* requires sensitivity to geopolitical contexts.

Further, critical considerations of travelling theories point toward "the materiality of knowledge production in the transnational field" (Min, 2016, p. 7). With knowledge increasingly commodified under capitalism, researchers and academics are increasingly under pressure to create knowledge that is profitable in the market (Min, 2016, p. 7). Knowledge production and translating theories from one place to another, therefore, are determined to a large extent by theory brokers (Alvarez et al., 2014; Min, 2016). Within the competitive neoliberal environment to produce and market knowledge, the risk of "appropriation of radical women of color and transnational feminist projects" becomes a serious concern (Mohanty, 2013, p. 987). Thus, further research in the future can provide a better understanding of the relationship between activism and institutional policies in producing

knowledge and funding research on topics of feminism and women's rights in the Global South.

Radical Sites of Knowledge and Feminist Politics of Translation

Dilemmas in addressing the gap between feminist theory and practice for implementing transnational feminist praxis point toward the need to rebuild conversations between activists and academics. As Pratt and Yeoh (2003, p. 164) argue, opening diverse channels of communication between people and places "make[s] the whole notion of 'travelling' more than a unilateral movement" and disrupts the entrenched hierarchies of knowledge and place.

Interventions made by activists in destabilizing the binaries of knowledge/practice and academia/activism have effectively worked against epistemic dismissal that renders activism against state-led gender-based violence invisible. *Kurdistan Azadî Jinanî Komelgaya* (KJAR), The Free Women's Society of Eastern Kurdistan, exemplifies one such intervention. Founded in 2014 by a group of Kurdish activists in East Kurdistan, located in the Western part of Iran (Figure 4-2), the organization aims to achieve "democratic unity among women of the Eastern Kurdistan based on the notion of a democratic nation" (KJAR, 2019, p.4). KJAR's organizing structure consists of "social, political, economic, diplomatic, culture and art, media and publication, education, legitimate defence, legal, and ecologic committees" (KJAR, 2019, p.8). The education committee, specifically, operates according to the "democratic, ecological and women's freedom paradigm" where members organize educational programs, plans and activities with the aim of theoretical and cultural interventions (KJAR, 2019, p. 9). During the interview with the spokesperson of KJAR's Diplomacy Committee, she explained that practical knowledges of Kurdish women activists, in contradistinction with knowledges created in formal academic and educational systems, constitutes an essential tool for mobilization against oppressive geopolitical structures:

> Zaynab Jalalian is someone who might not have an academic education as such, but in prison, she is being talked about as a school of thought. She has become a source of education for many women to become more confident. That is why Iran's authorities are so scared of her and do not allow a single meeting with her (Interview, July 26, 2022).

Figure 4-2 Kurdistan Region (source: The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2024).

Zeynab Jalalian, whose name was mentioned by other research participants as well throughout interviews, is sentenced to life-long prison by the Iranian government. She is highly praised by activists for the impact she has made on feminist and women's movements in and beyond Iran and Kurdistan[17]. This de-investment in academic identities should not come as a surprise in developing radical praxis to fight against geopolitical dominations. For Alexander and Mohanty (2010, p. 41), breaking the "epistemological contract" that "consigns the hierarchy of space and positions only those at the top as capable of producing and disseminating that knowledge" helps to map "radical sites of knowledge" in addressing the contradiction between knowledge that is generated in classrooms and academic institutions versus those created by grassroots mobilizations. In their discussion of Aboriginal, First

[17] According to The Kurdistan Human Rights Network's report published in 2023, "in the 16th year of her imprisonment in the central prison of Yazd, despite suffering from oral thrush, pterygium, poor eyesight, asthma, kidney and digestive problems, due to the opposition of the Ministry of Information, she is denied access to medical services and her eyesight is seriously damaged" (radiozamaneh.com, 2023).

Nation, and Indigenous activism, Alexander and Mohanty (2010) argue that when travelling within the academy, disappearance in colonial and imperial geographies manifests as negligible numbers. However, they assert that mapping the colonial spaces of containment and exile creates the possibility for a deeper understanding of subjects positioned by the state as outsiders to the nation. KJAR's practice of knowledge production exemplifies the power of these radical spaces for countering colonial forces of the Iranian state against the Kurdish people. Embodied and situated knowledges that emerges from in-between sites of nation-state borders (Figure 4-2) are important activist tools to resist epistemic violence and patriarchal systems of geopolitical structures in the region.

To disseminate knowledge beyond Kurdistan and provide opportunities for exchanging ideas between activists across national borders, KJAR members created the *Women's Transnational Democratic Platform* in collaboration with other activists in diasporas, which is active on WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and Telegram. The platform includes activists from diverse national backgrounds, including Baluch, Afghan, Fars, and Kurdish women. They gather to share diverse knowledges, experiences, and insights as they fight against distinct yet interconnected patriarchal structures across the region, including gender apartheid, national oppression, and religious prejudice (Interview, July 26, 2022). The founder of the *Social Association of Afghan Justice Seeker*[18] (SAAJS) and one of the participants in the platform explained that the platform is important for bringing together women and activists from multiple nations in the region:

> When I talk about my pain as an Afghan woman, maybe you can understand it better than a European woman. In Iran, you have that Morality Police. The Taliban does not have that yet. But wants to take this

[18] The association was established in 2007 by the collective efforts of the families of the victims of three decades of war in Kabul and registered with the Ministry of Justice. The association aims to amplify families' voices and establish justice in the country (saajs.org).

> model from the Iranian Regime. So, we see that the Taliban is learning from the Iranian regime. If we, as intellectual women, do the same, I believe it can become really powerful (Interview, August 3, 2022).

These digital countertopographies, thus, help activists to talk across worlds (Nagar, 2002), particularly among those who share a common context of struggle (Mohanty, 1984), by facilitating connections between situated knowledges across multiple geographies of the region. Such transnational spaces of knowledge production and mobilization serve as important tools to expand spaces of radical knowledge in countering the state's colonial power.

Transnational feminist praxis is highly intertwined with the question of translation and how feminist discourses and practices travel across a wide range of spaces and borders. Alvarez et al. (2014, p. 3) argue that the politics of translation point toward and inspire mobile epistemologies in relation to diverse subjects. The manifestation of mobile epistemologies is evident in the adoption of Islamic feminist discourses by activists when they were in Iran. Reflecting on their activist experiences before leaving the country, Zeynab recalls that for them, as well as many activists who did not believe in nor practice Islam, integration of religious discourses allowed them to remain active in formal political spaces and institutions such as universities while ensuring some levels of protection against state's persecutive measures. "We were [in a way] playing roles; there was a backstage and front stage," Zeynab explains. They further delineate the front/backstage:

> In our group work, it was important for us to minimize expenses and pressures and to keep connections with society. Therefore, we were using different discourses. In fact, we were discussing this amongst ourselves… [for example] We were talking so much less about sexuality. However, this did not mean we believed in these discourses. Amongst us, discussions were usually very different. Usually, people did not have taboos on sexuality-related topics but were concerned that the way we talked [about issues] may have impacts on the group we were working with as a whole. (Interview, May 21, 2022)

Thus, the political context directly informs mobile epistemologies and impacts the ways in which activists translate knowledge from backstage to frontstage and vice versa. The differentiation between frontstage and backstage activism, given the securitized environment surrounding feminism, is nothing new. In his discussion of front and back regions of everyday life, Goffman (2002) writes that front stage and backstage can be defined as places where impressions are intentionally contradicted and plural. Goffman (2002, p. 54) notes that as certain secrets are hidden from the frontstage and actors are out of character backstage, naturally, the transition between the two stages is invisible to the public audience. For Goffman, despite being hidden, the backstage still plays a key role in the process of "work control"; in other words, while it is not often visible, its importance can not be neglected. Zeynab's example of the plurality of activist discourses reveals the multiplicities of activism stages; maintaining them is necessary for protecting activists' safety, where authoritarian political structures show limited tolerance to feminist activism.

In implementing politics of translation, political and intellectual engagement with "multiple feminisms" (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010), including those situated in the Global South, provide immense opportunities to overcome the current gap in feminist theory and practice in the context of Iranian feminist activism. In the aftermath of Woman, Life, Freedom, the first Farsi issue of the Kurdish journal *Jineoloji*, a journal focusing on the Kurdish women's movement and activism, was published in September 2023 by a group of feminist and women's rights activists and academics. Attending to heterogeneous feminist activisms rooted in diverse geographies of the region allows knowledge to be mobilized within more expansive geographies of counter-geopolitics.

Further, the act of translation itself consolidates political bonds between feminist activists and academics across the world. In 2023, Silvia Federici, the Italian feminist researcher and

activist, announced in a video published on Harasswatch Instagram and YouTube accounts her support for Sarvenaz Ahmadi, an activist and translator of the book she wrote, *Revolution at Zero Point* to Farsi. In the video, Federici calls for the release of Sarvenaz and others who were arrested for their activities and participating in Woman, Life, Freedom and calls on feminist activists elsewhere in the world to support political prisoners in Iran (Harasswatch, 2023).

Needless to say, feminist politics of translation is not limited to text-based scholarship, and it extends to cultural and artistic works as well. In November 2023, in the aftermath of the WLF uprising, images went viral on social media depicting some women in Iran who dressed as handmaids in the famous TV show *The Handmaid's Tale*, based on the 1985 novel by the Canadian author Margaret Atwood[19] (Figure 4-3). The performance of these women, by strategically and creatively adopting cultural means familiar to a global audience, effectively directed global attention toward the Iranian state's misogyny. There are numerous other cases inside and outside of Iran where creative expression and artistic labour were used as tools for cross-cultural communication and raising awareness about the WLF revolutionary uprisings, including dancing, singing, performing, painting, and street art. Such efforts artfully render activism visible, raising global attention to the state's gendered-based violence and feminist resistance in Iran by using alternative means of translation besides texts, serving to offset epistemic and political violence of the state's structures.

[19] Among other things, in writing the novel Atwood took inspiration from the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran (Guillemette, 2017)).

Figure 4-3 Performative Activism in Tehran (source: The symbolic protest of a woman dressed as the characters of "The Handmaid's Tale.", 2022).

Away from the state's direct persecution, activists in Iranian diasporas also adopt creative means to raise public awareness of issues faced by women in Iran. On the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, on November 25, 2022, three months after the killing of Jina Amini by Morality Police in Tehran, some women and activists in multiple cities across diasporas performed the dance "Rapist Is You" while singing the Farsi translation of the song (Figure 4-4).

Figure 4-4 The Performance of the Rapist is You in Berlin (source: Feminists For Jina, 2023).

The performance touches on issues of systematic gender-based violence. Also known as "A Rapist in Your Path" (Spanish: Un violador en tu camino) (Serafini, 2020), the performance is based on a Chilean feminist piece. For the first time, "Un violador en tu camino" was

performed at Plaza Aníbal Pinto in downtown Valparaíso, Chile (BBC News Mundo, 2019). The videos later went viral across the world and were adopted in many countries, including Argentina, Mexico, Colombia, France, Spain, and the United Kingdom (BBC News Mundo, 2019). The Farsi version of "Un violador en tu camino" was performed first by an anonymous group named “Shourzanan” in March 2021. Amidst Jina’s uprising, it was performed in cities such as New York, Stuttgart, Berlin, London, California, and Seattle. Similar to the original version, the Farsi adoption "introduces the police, judges, legislators and security forces and the government of the Islamic Republic as the perpetrators of sexual violence against people” (feminists4jina.net). Samaneh Savadi, one of the performance organizers in London, observes:

> The feedback we received on the day of the performance was reflective of the fact of how much we need to stand and explicitly state that the rapist is you, the police, the IRGC, the supreme leader. We are not to be blamed for this systematic violence that targets us…the performance provided a way for our feminist movement to join the global voice against rape (Nezakati, 2023).

Many scholars have demonstrated ways in which radical street performance claims political voice and provides creative means to expose unjust social and political structures, even in a politically restrained environment (Cohen-Cruz, 1998; Ganjeh, 2022; Garlough, 2008; Lacy, 2006). More broadly, the coming together of art and feminism, as Dastarlı and Cin (2023, p. 4) suggest, can create conversations to talk about and reveal how “the experiences of groups whose standpoints and epistemic contributions” are often neglected in order to establish counter-narratives to dominant gender discourses. When seeking to mobilize knowledge, art and performance often provide more accessible and playfully engaging tools of communication between activists and audiences than other mediums. Applying Katz’s countertopographies to the performance, Smith (2021, p. 136) argues:

> political or popular theatre, grounded as it is in the experiences of subaltern men and women, enables resistance in the sphere of cultural politics as it theatrecalises situated knowledges that are usually overlooked and circulates them globally via the touring of plays … in disparate locations. Popular theatre has been central to the kinds of mobilisations Katz is advocating, because it is employed by low socio-economic communities throughout the global South as a form of empowering participants to resist the inequalities outlined.

In the case study of this chapter, as explored further in Chapter 5, performance facilitates knowledge mobilization across wider communities in more accessible ways and consolidates transnational bonds of solidarity between activists across borders. Another significant performative expression in the context of WLF solidarities (the focus of Chapter 6) was the act of cutting hair, demonstrating support to women in Iran who are subjects of state violence for showing their hair in public space and not observing "proper" hijab. The act of cutting hair by women as an expression of grievance,[20] is rooted in Kurdish culture, which was performed during Jina's funeral by her relatives in her hometown, Saqquez. After going viral on social media, the performance was adopted by WLF protestors first across other Iranian cities and then beyond national borders in diasporic cities (Figure 4-5). Raha, a gender equality activist and LGBT+ advocate participating in the haircutting performance explained:

> As a trans woman, having long hair is a significant part of feminine expression. Yesterday [during the performance], I had the feeling from Iranian women that my identity is not denied, and we [women] share a mutual pain. It was a great feeling of empowerment for me (Interview, September 20, 2022).

[20] For further discussion of the symbolism of cutting hair, see Andresen (1980). Drawing on Rapunzel's fairy tale, Andersen (1980, p. 71) highlights "castration, loss of the mother, and reparation" as three symbolic meanings of cutting hair.

Figure 4-5 Cutting Hair in Solidarity with Women in Iran, in Toronto (source: author).

The intimate and embodied performance of cutting hair provides an effective means of communicating and solidarity-building across geographical borders, diverse identities, and linguistic differences, which was facilitated through social media platforms. As the above examples show, feminist politics of translation not only entail the movement of bodies, texts, capital, and theories (Alvarez et al., 2014) but also is enacted through movements of images and art across digital spaces. Wright (2009, p. 384) notes that countertopographies constitute novel ideas and geographies to think deeper about spaces of resistance. As patriarchy and misogyny increasingly characterize political power structures in Iran and elsewhere, cultivating these creative geographies through feminist politics of translation is vital in the prospect of feminist counter-geopolitics that stretches well beyond national borders.

Conclusion: Doing Topographies Beyond Local/Global Activism

Transnational countertopographies of knowledge are constructed by feminist activists in the diaspora across online/offline and formal/informal spaces, building upon diverse embodied and situated knowledges of intersecting forms of gender and sexual-based violence. These topographies are constructed by translating feminist scholarships, using collaborative methods of knowledge production, and engaging with place-based social and political movements, shedding light on interconnected structures of patriarchy and misogyny in a

transnational context. Countertopographies of activism, thus, provide opportunities to create analytical and political links between activists embodied and situated knowledges so that connections between places that are "made artificially discrete by virtue of history and geography" are made (Katz, 2001, p. 1229). As such, "doing topographies" by activists serves as a critical strategy for creating a dynamic space of conversation across borders and differences, constituting a critical facet of feminist counter-geopolitics.

However, the practices involved in building countertopographies are not easy nor straightforward; numerous challenges are associated with translating ideas, theories, and concepts across geographical borders and linguistic differences. In the geopolitical context of Iran, where the Islamic Republic has exploited Islamic discourses as fuel for anti-imperialist propaganda, the political potential of Islamic feminism as a tool for activism presents one important challenge in the translation of ideas across the academic and activist spheres. Such challenges, along with those associated with linguistic differences, call for a feminist politics of translation that is attentive to the social and political relations that "produce location and situated knowledge" (Costa, 2014, quoted in Alvarez et al., 2014, p. 1). Activists' interventions, particularly in the aftermath of the WLF revolutionary uprising, through consolidating transnational dialogue and using creative means of activism, such as art and performance, exemplify growing efforts in working against epistemic and political violence that welcome and amplify voices of multiple feminisms (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010).

Wright (2009) emphasizes the challenges of interpreting the politics of activism along local/global binaries. Building on Pratt's (2004, p. 165) assertation that there can be "no predetermined destination' or intrinsic geography to the social mapping of activism", Wright notes countertopographical activisms instead "continually negotiate the intimate experiences of the global" (Wright, 2009, p. 384). This proposition allows us to consider the political

significance of feminist activists' embodied and situated knowledges of intersecting forms of oppression and violence that are created in and through intimate spaces, practices, and relations. Cultivating (digital) countertopographies that encompass a feminist politics of translation provides opportunities to go beyond a dividing view that narrows the state's misogyny as a "local" issue and Islamophobia as a "global" one. Through this lens, translation means unsettling the binary divisions across local/global and practice/theory by revealing the role of situated and embodied knowledge as an essential facet of feminist counter-geopolitics.

5. Politics of Resourcefulness: Beyond Governance Feminism?

Introduction

Feminist activists in Iranian diasporas use multiple resources to contest patriarchal and authoritarian structures of violence and displacement. In this chapter, I present how the politics of resourcefulness provide a useful analytical framework for examining diverse resources that activists use across cities in Europe and Canada, illuminating counter-geopolitical practices. This chapter follows MacKinnon and Derickson (2013, p. 255), using resourcefulness as a concept to "animate politics and activism that seek to transform social relations in more progressive, anti-capitalist and socially just ways." In contrast to resilience, resourcefulness involves problematizing issues of redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 1996; Young, 1990), where alternative social relations are materialized (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013, p. 255). I use the notion of resourcefulness to illustrate how activists in diasporas draw on multiple resources, including social capital, economic resources, technical knowledge and expertise in governmental procedures, and media to contest patriarchal structures of authoritarianism and displacement. I concpetualize resourceful activist practices as a constitutive element of feminist counter-geopolitics, as they provide opportunities to mobilize knowledge and foster solidarities across activist communities. These practices reveal the intimate geopolitics of feminist activism that is often invisibilized, particularly among political refugees and student activists, and provide possibilities in taking steps toward eradicating patriarchal and authoritarian structures of violence and displacement.

As activists utilize intimate relations and spaces for mobilizing material resources and emotional support, they create political kinship rooted in their homes. An intimate perspective in feminist activist practices provides insights into the ways in which the intimate and geopolitics shape each other, shedding light on the geopolitics of homes. In this chapter, I

build on geopolitical literature (Brickell, 2012; Shim, 2016; Wilkins, 2017), which highlighted "the home as a crucial site of and influence upon geopolitics" (Wilkins, 2017, p. 1552). I expand on this scholarship by showing how intimate relations and kinship networks among activists are sustained and take root beyond the confines of the home in social media platforms, enhancing organizing capacities by activists in diasporas. Thus, intimate relations cultivated and maintained in activist homes and digital platforms create political possibilities which often remain underrecognized in studies of activist practices.

Opportunities for enacting resourceful feminist practices are limited, as they take place within a governed landscape that greatly influences access to resources. I draw on the concept of Governance Feminism (GF) (Halley et al., 2018, 2019) to show ways in which governing forces at national and international levels result in unjust social and political dynamics that determine activists' access to financial resources and levels of recognition within media and across communities. Halley et al. (2019, p. xiii) define governance feminism as the complex ways in which feminists and feminist ideas become incorporated into "state, state-like, and state-affiliated power … international organizations, NGOs, and private corporations". In the context of activisms in Iranian diasporas, I argue that the possibilities of enacting resourceful feminist practices fostered within intimate spaces and relations are undermined by governance structures, manifesting in feminist expertise "that is deeply invested in neoliberal, project-based, nine-to-five-style forms of civil society work" (Hamzić, 2019, p. 417).

To develop the argument, in the first two sections, the geographic literature on the politics of resourcefulness and feminist literature on governance are reviewed to build the theoretical frame for the chapter. The third section describes the resourceful practices of feminist activists, focusing on social capital and political kinship as essential activist resources. The impact of governance structures on resourceful practices is then analyzed in terms of

financial resources and recognition. The chapter concludes by positing that accounting for unequal social and political relations across and within communities and making collective efforts to address them as part of the everyday practice of activism signals a hopeful opening toward resourceful feminist activism beyond the confining forces of governance.

Politics of Resourcefulness in Activism

Focusing on the capacity of activist communities, geographers have discussed multiple ways in which various resources are leveraged to exert social and political changes (Bain & Podmore, 2021a; Derickson & Routledge, 2015; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). MacKinnon and Derickson (2013, p. 255) use the notion of resourcefulness as a framework that problematizes issues of redistribution and recognition to formulate politics and activism that seek to offer possibilities for creating and upholding alternative social relations. In contrast to resiliency characterized by the domination of state and capitalist modes of social and political relations, MacKinnon and Derickson argue that resourcefulness provides a progressive, socially just, anti-capitalist framework to mobilize politics and activism. In elaborating on the "politics of resourcefulness," MacKinnon and Derickson (2013, p. 264) explain that the concept is "scale-specific" in its focus on the need to create potentials at the level of community while also "outward-looking" through paying attention to implementation and maintaining connections across space (Cumbers et al., 2008). In other words, politics of resourcefulness facilitates the formulation of an "expansive scalar politics" that addresses local issues and advocates for structural changes (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013).

Rather than viewing resiliency and resourcefulness as mutually exclusive, Bain and Podmore (2021) show how combining the two provides an analytical perspective to understand diverse activist practices and collective mobilization. Bain and Podmore (2021a, p. 1505) illustrate this by drawing on Katz's formulation of countertopographies which consist of resilience,

reworking, and resistance, and augment “resiliency by hyphenating it with resourcefulness in order to signify the complementarity of these concepts”. Building on geographical perspectives on resourcefulness that take into account uneven geographies of activism, in this chapter, I explore challenges and opportunities in enacting resourceful activism and how feminist activists in Iranian diasporas use multiple resources, including social capital, organizing capacities, emotional support, financial resources, and representational resources, and media, in their ongoing efforts to counter patriarchal structures of political authoritarianism.

The framework of resourcefulness provides important insights into how activists mobilize various resources for their purpose. However, access to such resources is conditioned by governance structures at local, national, and international scales, which inform unequal geographies of activism. Governance feminism, manifesting in the proliferation of activist expertise, provides insights into discussing challenges and opportunities faced by activists toward more socially just practices of activism.

Governance Feminism (GF) and Feminist Expertise

Governance is a capacious term describing the ways that decisions are made, power is exercised, and society is steered (Griffin, 2012; Treib et al., 2007). It operates through the deployment and production of discourses and disciplinary surveillance that shape the parameters of social norms and cultural values (Walters, 2012). As a means of control, governing arrangements involve a wide range of actors engaging in complex interactions and relations at multiple scales (Griffin, 2012). These actors include public and private bodies functioning in local, regional, and national governments, grassroots organizations, individual political elites, scientific experts and activists, and private interest groups (Griffin, 2012).

In the context of feminist activism, Halley et al. (2018 p, ix) coined the term "Governance Feminism" (GF) to capture "every form in which feminists and feminist ideas exert a governing will within human affairs." Drawing on Foucault's seminal work on governmentality, they argue that GF consists of various ways "feminists and feminist ideas conduct the conduct of men." It is exercised through ways in which feminist knowledge and practices are incorporated into "state, state-like and state-affiliated power" as well as private international organizations dedicated to health, security, development, NGOs, and private corporations (Halley et al., 2019 p. xii, xiii). Further, GF describes the ways that feminist expertise is incorporated within institutional and legal frameworks, including those developed in international criminal law aimed at prosecuting sexual violence and regulating sex work (Otto, 2019, p. 202). Given the complex and dynamic ways in which feminism is installed within institutional power, GF provides a useful analytical framework to account for achievements in advancing feminist agendas on the one hand and failures to reach such aspirations on the other hand (Otto, 2019).

Observing catalysts and consequences of governance feminism, Hamzić (2019, p. 417) notes that feminist expertise often divides activists with "those harboring a will to govern clearly in favor of this new market of opportunities." She argues that "feminist expertise" as a "mode of bodily and discursive discipline" is also deeply invested in "neoliberal, project-based, nine-to-five-style forms of civil society work" (Hamzić, 2019, p. 417). Such tendencies toward activism have increasingly replaced collective political actions against unjust socio-political relations (Saigol, 2013, cited in Hamzić, 2019, p. 417), signalling the rise of feminism as an industry with governance as one of its main characteristics. Building on critical debates on feminist expertise, this chapter examines feminist activist practices in Iranian diasporas within governance forces of institutional power.

Enacting Resourcefulness: Social Capital in Cities

Social capital as a web of connections among individuals, including social networks and norms that generate trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 2000, p. 19), constitutes an important activist resource (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Social capital of activsts is dependent on a variety of factors, including their socio-economic and migration status, geographical location, and communication and language skills, among other factors. Activists who know languages other than Farsi and English, as well as the spoken language of the countries they live in, often have more nationally diverse social networks. For student activists, universities provide a valuable institutional context within which social connections with other feminist academics and activists are expanded, often developing into collaborative political action. For example, Sahar, an activist and graduate alumnus of the University of Toronto, describes: "After graduation, I stayed in touch with my supervisor who now is my friend, and we often organize together. She deeply influenced my research and activism during and after my studies" (Interview, December 3, 2022). As discussed in Chapter 4, affiliations with universities, at times, result in social hierarchies among activist groups. However, as Sahar's experiences show, academic institutions also provide a space for cultivating non-hierarchical social relations and networking.

Importantly, diaspora mobilization in response to socio-political events in Iran influences social networks among activists, often resulting in their expansion. For example, in the wake of the recent revolutionary uprising of Woman, Life, Freedom, followed by widespread diaspora mobilization, not only were new connections built aiming to take collective actions, but the existing ones among those who used to work together while still in Iran were rebuilt, which I discuss further below.

The capacity for networking also depends on the socio-political landscape of the city in which activists are residing. Sahar, an anti-capitalist and abolitionist feminist activist who has lived and worked in a couple of cities across Europe and Canada, observes that possibilities to develop networks and take collective actions by activists within Iranian communities with a leftist political view are relatively limited in Toronto compared to cities in Europe and New York:

> I think in Toronto, there are fewer [Iranian] activists with feminist, anti-colonial, and anti-imperialist views. Whereas New York in general, has a more progressive political environment. There is no doubt about Berlin. London, with that population, obviously has more activists engaged with feminism. In my opinion, these cities are not comparable to Toronto. (Interview, December 3, 2022)

Sahar further describes the political environment in Berlin provides a dynamic space for meeting like-minded feminist, leftist, and queer activists and opportunities for networking. Inevitably, cities' *potential* for expanding social and political networks among activists with feminist, leftist, and progressive approaches is informed by national and local government policies in admitting and accommodating migrants, refugees, international students, etc. It can be speculated that the larger presence of Iranian political refugees in Europe, feminist activists among them, due to migration policies and geographical proximity with Iran, is among the reasons why the social and political makeup of activist and diaspora communities is perceived as more radical and anti-system in comparison to Canada. While the potential for networking and organizing among Iranian activists is possibly more limited in North American cities, the strong legacy of BLM and Indigenous movements in these cities offers important opportunities for building transnational coalitions and solidarities based on principles of anti-colonialism, anti-capitalism, and anti-racism, as illustrated in the next chapter.

The perception that Berlin, in particular, is among the informal global ranks of resourceful cities with a higher potential for building progressive, anti-capitalist activist networks is also echoed by Kamran, who has lived and worked there for several years. He explains that from his experience in comparison to other European cities, in Berlin, the presence of "experienced leftist women and feminist activists is stronger and more visible." He elaborates, "I do not think that all [political leftist] groups and movements have a feminist view or are very sensitive to the issue of gender equality, but Berlin, I think, is better than other places" (Interview, May 30, 2022). Such reflection showcases the uneven geographies of feminist activism in terms of networking and organizing capacities influenced by local, national, and transnational migration policies.

Activists often draw on the social networks they have built with other activists for political organizing and actions. Negin, a leftist feminist activist, recalls that during the WLF uprising, activist friends with whom they had organized rallies protesting against pipeline construction in Toronto helped to do a banner drop in the AGO:

> With my Iranian artist friends, who were less politically active before (WLF), we wanted to do a banner drop in AGO. We created the banner and all, but they never had done action such as this. I messaged my Canadian anarchist friends, asking them we will do this. Are you down to join? And they said yes. So, they came, and we did it with their help (Interview, November 29, 2022).

Figure 5-1 Woman, Life, Freedom Banner Drop in AGO (source: Anonymous, 2022).

As activists who have lived in Toronto longer are more familiar with site-specific situations for political actions in the city, these close social ties are essential activist resources. Further, as discussed in the next chapter, intimate relations between activists cultivated through long-term engagement with social and political movements signal the potential for building transversal solidarities within and between cities.

Social networks among activists sometimes provide opportunities to mobilize financial resources. For example, Leila, an activist-scholar member of the Afghanistan Solidarity Party in Europe, explains that after the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan, they organized protest demonstrations with some Iranian activists in Hanover and collected money to be sent to Afghanistan to provide informal, underground education for girls who could no longer go to school under the Taliban's rule. Further, social networks are essential for emotional and psychological support to combat feelings of isolation, particularly for those with families at home. Shahrzad is a Montréal-based, award-winning, multidisciplinary artist, performer, and activist who arrived in Canada as a political refugee shortly after the 1979 revolution. She explained that the social networks of feminist activists and artists were not only essential sources of artistic inspiration but also of emotional support. Such kinds of support were particularly important as she gradually began to feel alienated from Iranian diasporas in Montreal due to what she saw as political disengagement and lack of awareness of what was happening in Iran. Shahrzad said:

> At some point, I realized I did not have much in common with the Iranian community. My focus was to delegitimize the Islamic Republic in the diaspora. I wanted to tell people about my past. Every person has a history; we did not just come here for no reason. I have a past, and this past is full

> of stories. I need these stories to be told and heard (Interview, October 9, 2022).

Shahrzad recollected that the idea of forming the Tasht Collective with Kurdish, Armenian, Turkish, and Lebanese activist and artist friends in Montreal first emerged from a gathering of friends in 2014 while sharing a meal together at her house. In the following days and months, they discussed writing a play based on their mutual experiences as women and as activists in the Middle East, which eventually went on stage in Chicago, Montreal, and New York. In a published book chapter, *Beyond Women Words,* they reflect together on how weaving together personal and family histories as shared ones from their home countries was a way "to explore individual and collective stories of loss, dispossession, war, genocide, and exile" (Arshadi et al., 2018, p. 262). As Shahrzad explained, the idea of the theatrical production emerged from realizing activist women's commonalities: from mundane daily reproductive tasks such as washing and cooking to their political aspirations and hopes.

These intimate relations within the social networks of activists, essential for those who are disproportionately impacted by the geopolitical violence of displacement and emotional burdens of forced migration, work against negative feelings of isolation and loneliness by providing emotional and material support. In addition to establishing a safe space and a non-judgmental environment in which activists explore and share their past experiences and future aspirations, the intimate space of homes functions as an important site where connections could be developed to a deeper level, acting as a resource that enables the collective members to make political claims through artistic performance. Such activist performances, constituting an essential facet of feminist counter-geopolitics by making visible embodied experiences and intimate knowledge of authoritarian and geopolitical violence, reveal the importance of home spaces as sites of geopolitical contestation (Brickell, 2012; Shim, 2016; Wilkins, 2017).

The geopolitics of home also touches on the critical role of safe spaces in feminist activism. Drawing on Bowstead (2019), Bain and Podmore (2021b, p. 135) note that safety "is multi-layered and relational: it is achieved through boundary work, differing rationales and practices, and affords varying degrees of autonomy and freedom." In this sense, safety is understood not as an archived state but rather as an ongoing process and an advantage that many social groups and communities may never have (Bain & Podmore, 2021b, p. 135). Bain and Podmore (2021b, p. 140) further elaborate on "more-than-safe spaces," which seek to address the uneven distribution of resources and foster opportunities for community self-determination. Although the relative invisibility of these safe spaces is a survival strategy, it also signals the limitation of activism within an unsupportive social and political environment (Bain & Podmore, 2021b). In the context of activism in Iranian diasporas, safe spaces exist in multiple online and physical platforms, and through the experience of activist participants, I argue that they are essential and crucial resources for feminist counter-geopolitics.

Intimate relations and safe spaces are also built through social media platforms, predominantly among younger-generation activists who are often more skillful in using digital tools and spaces. Parisa, a feminist-queer activist and artist in Toronto in her 20s, explained that much of her social networks were developed through her social media account on Instagram:

> I met many people online, and they became like my family here. We see each other once every two weeks at least. We support each other in whatever we are doing. For example, we recently helped Ahmad [psydonym] with the Persian drag show (Interview, May 25, 2022).

As the use of digital tools has become an integral part of activism and shaping intimate social, political, and emotional connections, they also inform what Koch and Miles (2021) refer to as "stranger intimacy." Digital technologies have forged intimate virtual connections between individuals previously unknown to each other, raising important questions about

how information communication technologies connect people in the privacy of homes and cars as well as public spaces of cities. Stranger intimacy offers a conceptual tool for describing "how unknown others engage in interpersonal relations of sharing space, knowing, caring, providing and befriending one another" (Koch & Miles, 2021, p. 1389). In their formulation of stranger intimacy, Koch and Miles (2021, p. 1389) emphasize that intimacy is not necessarily narrowed to romantic or sexual connection; rather, the framework incorporates "the willingness to engage in conversation with unknown others where meaningful stories, experiences and inner feelings are exchanged." Thus, digital intimacies provide opportunities for establishing close connections between activists in diasporas, creating a safe space and feelings of being at home with non-biological families while simultaneously facilitating collective organization and actions.

Furthermore, the formation of family-like relations between activists, as indicated by Parisa, showcases existing kinship networks among activists in diasporas. As feminist scholars emphasize, connections and networks that demarcate kinship categories go beyond familial frameworks and create innovative approaches to family roles (Comaroff, 1987; Tsing & Yanagisako, 1983). According to Haraway (2016, p. 2), "making kin as oddkin rather than, or at least in addition to godkin and genealogical and biogenetic family troubles important matters, like to whom one is actually responsible." Thus, "political kinship" as an alternative framing of familial relations encompasses acknowledging situated historical and local priorities and urgencies (Haraway, 2016) and considering political context and specificities (Ooryad, 2020). This fluid configuration of kinship allows for going beyond narrow categories of identities and fostering politics at an "affective, emotional and performative level" (Bauer et al., 2020, p.278). Political kinships turn into powerful resources for activism that target multiple, intersecting structures of political violence while formulating politics that

introduce fundamental change in the normative capitalist social relations (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013, p. 255).

Research participants recalled memories of the critical role of political kinships in providing material and emotional support when they were still in Iran. Activist members of the One Million Signature Campaign recollected memories of meetings and workshops held at "campaign mothers' homes," a term referring to senior and founding members of the campaign. As Sahar, a rather junior activist member at the time, explained: "We often did our work in houses of campaign mothers. Because we were a bunch of kids without anything of ourselves… sometimes during workshops they cooked for us Istanboli polo[21]" (Interview, December 3, 2022). The collective intimacies of cooking and eating together throughout the campaign's meetings helped to establish a safe, resourceful space imperative for feminist activists to resist the burdens of doing feminist activism within a hostile and securitized environment in the country (Figure 5-2). In this way, the intimate spaces of activist homes contributed to the cultivation of kinship bonds that could not be wrought through formal spaces of meetings and workshops alone (Milligan, 2018). The collective intimate-geopolitical practices taking place in these home spaces signal what is necessary beyond the concrete tasks of the campaign by "generating new ways of living together, of creating human friendships, [and] of re-igniting that sense of community" (Milligan, 2018, p. 50). As I further explore in Chapter 6, in the wake of the Woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising in 2022, kinship networks that were cultivated throughout OMSC were foundational for activating Feminists4Jina, a transnational feminist network in diasporas aiming to echo the feminist voice of WLF in Iran and mobilize activists outside the country.

[21] A traditional Iranian dish made with rice and tomatos.

Figure 5-2 OMSC Meeting at Home in Iran (source: The Strongest Movement in the Middle East Is the Iranian Women's Movement, 2008)

The Challenges of Project-Driven Activism

In enacting resourceful feminist practices, there are inevitably challenges. Research participants commonly discussed financial shortages as a key challenge. For some activists with limited or no access to private financial resources, seeking grants and funding is a strategy to maintain their activities. While opinions around receiving money for activism among research participants are often contested, concerns are often raised about activists' dependence on external funding and its implications for their activities. For Saeedeh, activism is not a "job":

> [those who receive money] are doing certain things because it is their job. Why should we applaud them? […] What does feminist activism even mean, then? They are saying things because they were told to do so according to the budget they receive. What does it have to do with me? (Interview, June 12, 2022)

Echoing the critical view on the involvement of financial incentives within activism, for Faezeh, a student feminist activist in Tehran, financial ties between activists and organizations in diasporas to pursue specific projects undermines mutual trust between activists in and outside the country and the potential for collaboration: "Honestly, as long as money is involved, collaboration is not easy. It is important to determine whether someone is independent or not. Maybe one thinks it is only a simple organization I work with, but I

would disagree" (Interview, June 26, 2022). These reflections reveal some of the different ways in which project activism can undermine the possibilities of networking and building trust among activists.

In discussing the everyday lives of grassroots political activists in the UK, Chatterton and Pickerill (2010) critically observe an increasing divergence between "project activism" and frontline activism, exposing very different class relations. They build on Mayer (2003), arguing that activist projects are often characterized by neoliberal governance, self-discipline, and individualist approaches, which are dependent on securing grants (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010, p. 487). Nevertheless, the concern remains as to whether activist *autonomy* can be separated from individual livelihoods and financial interests (Chatterton & Pickerill; Peet & Watts, 2004). Diverging positions of Iranian activists on project feminism reflect similar concerns in other geographical and political contexts surrounding the possible dangers of co-option and appropriation of activism.

In seeking government grants, activists and organizations they work with are often pushed to define projects in such a way that fits with a governmental framework. Sara, an activist, author, speaker, and co-founder of Migloom in Berlin, an organization that focuses on enhancing migrants' political participation in Berlin, observes the emergence of a competitive environment among NGOs in Berlin in the aftermath of civil war in Syria in 2015 which was followed by significant waves of migration to Germany. Sara explained, "The German government announced a huge budget; suddenly, everybody started defining a project for migrants and refugees. Regardless of what NGOs were doing before, everybody turned to refugee projects because money could be made from them" (Interview, June 3, 2022). Sara critically observes how top-down governance policies work to define the "problem" of refugees and ways to address it through "integration." Thus, access to economic and political

power is determined by the government's position in deciding the best practices and policies to accommodate migrants. Whether activists and organizations are willing to resist a state-imposed framework, therefore, largely depends on their ability to secure funding outside government structures.

The top-down structure of governance, where national governments influence feminist activists and organizations they work with through financial incentives, is also observed by activists in Toronto. Niloofar, an international development consultant with a focus on children, women, education, and refugee rights, explained that rather than being actively involved in decision-making processes, organizations working on issues faced by migrant women are in a "recipient-donor" relationship with the Canadian government (Interview, August 8, 2023). As Niloofar further observes, such top-down dynamics are not unique to organizations run by Iranian activists. After the return of the Taliban to power in 2022, followed by increasing waves of migration to Canada, despite initial attempts made by government officials, the engagement between them, civil societies, and academics for more democratic decision-making surrounding migrations remains at a surface level (Interview, August 8, 2023). Similar concerns are raised by activist members of the *South Asian Women's Centre* in Toronto, an organization run by and for South Asian women. The executive director of the centre describes a disconnection between communities and the government; "they [the government] rarely meet with us [because] they think they know it all" (Interview, August 8, 2023). Importantly, this 'know-it-all" position signals GF mechanisms, as activists and organizations are confined by governmental frameworks, which produce exclusion and uphold power dynamics between civil society and the state.

The process through which project activism is a routinized strategy in seeking financial resources illustrates important facets of governance feminism. The adoption of a government-

defined framework by activists and organizations they work with highlights the importance of economic power in shaping the governed environment in which activism takes place. Such a hierarchical model of governance forecloses opportunities for policymakers to learn from activists' insights, experiences, and knowledge gained through direct connection and deep engagement with grassroots communities and migrant women. Further, expertisation of activism through defining projects in competition for grants undermines opportunities for networking, collaboration, sharing other resources, and productive connections across activist communities. Thus, expertise tendencies of project activism highlight how feminist activism may not be liberatory if, rather than transforming material and political conditions, they simply reinscribe dominant discourses (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010; p. 487). The limitations of project activism point toward the necessity of a critical engagement with governance feminism by all actors for a more "responsible governance" that accounts for multiple compromises and contradictions as well as "cost and benefits guided not only by political vision but political constraints" (Cohen & Gruber, 2019, p. 106).

The above examples highlight the limitations of GF and the ways in which financial resources are often available to activists with technical knowledge of governmental procedures through writing successful proposals and grant applications. While the centrality of this technical knowledge in maintaining activism points toward technocratic tendencies in activism, they provide tools for activists to rework dominant and unjust governance structures; as MacKinnon and Derickson (2013) assert, resourceful communities require some basic technical knowledge and skill to transfer such knowledge. In the wake of the WLF uprising, drawing on such skill sets, feminist activists in diasporas, among other actors, participated in the UN's forum urging the organization to rework its policies and measures in relation to the Islamic Republic. In December 2022, they appealed for the UN's support,

demanding that the organization remove Iran from the UN Commission of Women for using excessive force to suppress protests (CNN, 2022). Thus, activists effectively leveraged technical knowledge of UN organizational procedures to hold the state accountable for its atrocities and delegitimize it at the international level. Such resourceful practice of activism in the diaspora signals opportunities to create positive changes within the institutional and legal system at the international level to counter misogynistic state structures.

Recognition and Expertise Activism

The proliferation of feminist expertise under an increasingly governed landscape is also associated with issues of recognition, further undermining the potential for practicing resourceful activism. Organizational policies to recognize individual activists with awards are one factor in determining the extent to which activists receive recognition at the national and international levels. Razi, one of the founding members of the OMSC, is a recipient of Quadriga Award, an annual German prize offered by Netzwerk Quadriga GmbH (a Berlin-based non-profit organization) given to individuals and groups committed to innovation and pioneering through economic, political, and cultural activities. In discussing the implication of organizational policies in awarding activists, she critically observes that such policies can be divisive, as individuals rather than collectives and groups are put in the spotlight:

> At some point, there were lots of debates about these prizes… At times, it has resulted in conflicts, competitions, and tensions… nevertheless, they were short-term. It does not have a positive impact, in my view. Because activists [who are awarded] become popular while making others invisible (Interview, July 6, 2022).

The above reflection highlights that organizational policies in awarding activists can be a double-edged sword since it can only make some activists visible while rendering others invisible. As explained in Chapter 4 and earlier in this chapter, relative invisibility in intimate home spaces is a protective strategy by activists in the country against state surveillance. For

many activists, invisibility means working below the radar to make a change. Thus, while being visible can result in wider recognition and network extension, it can expose activists to the state's persecutive threats. For example, Narges Mohammadi, a prominent women's rights activist and lawyer, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2023 while in prison in Iran (Gillett, 2023). However, in the absence of direct threats by state authorities in diasporas, visibility concerns may be replaced by competition over who receives wider recognition for their activism.

Yet, as MacKinnon and Derickson (2013; p. 265) elaborate in considering different aspects of resourceful activism, recognition "promotes a sense of confidence, self-worth and self- and community-affirmation" which can be leveraged to mobilize and introduce novel resources. Thus, recognition is a key facet of resourceful activism, closely linked to financial resources, social capital, and organizing capacities. Importantly, expansive social and political networks of activists, providing them opportunities to connect with political elites, play a significant role in their public recognition. The importance of such connections in activists' recognition is particularly evident at times of political upheaval. During the Woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising, a group of Iranian women and women's rights activists met with Emmanuel Macron, the president of France. Later, one of the activist participants in the meeting stated on her Twitter account, "I asked France President Macron for his support for the ongoing Iran Revolution. He promised to meet with the coalition group of Iranian opposition figures soon". This reaching out to Western politicians is not specific to the recent WLF uprising and took place at other times as well; however, given that women were at the forefront of the protest in Iran, feminist and women's rights activists in diasporas at this time played more active roles in leading coalitions and mobilization. However, such a demonstration of alliance with the Western government raises concerns over the kind of

"support" expected from them and whether it can lead to a democratic future in Iran. Such questions are particularly pertinent given that the French government and police forces came under heavy media scrutiny for the mass arrest of protesters only a few months after Macron met with Iranian feminist activists[22]. Further, the undemocratic process through which a few select activists in the diaspora talk on behalf of the revolution reveals the ways in which activism is increasingly professionalized, whereby a small group takes the lead in a top-down way, (un)intentionally reinforcing unequal social and political relations (Cumbers et al., 2008; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013; Mason & Whitehead, 2012).

The unequal social and political relations across activist communities are further evident within intergenerational dynamics, where senior activists are more likely to receive recognition at the international or community levels. Nasim, a feminist activist in Hamburg, highlights such dynamics: "I am often being told I need more experience. I mean, there is this mentality that because they [senior activists] are older than you, they must know better" (Interview, June 22, 2022). Because of such negative encounters, Nasim and other Iranian and Afghan activists created the *Youth in Exile Group*. In explaining the idea behind the group name, Nasim stated, "We chose the name deliberately to insist that we oppose those who are restricted to their own beliefs and are not willing to change." In this account, intergenerational dynamics have resulted in the under-recognition of activists deemed to be less experienced, undermining the possibility of collective activism across generations.

Despite generational divides experienced negatively by some activists, many also shared how inter-generational collaborations have provided powerful activist strategies. The example of the campaign's mother, elaborated earlier in the chapter, in providing a safe space for junior

[22] The unrest was triggered by the death of a 17-year-old who was shot during a traffic stop in the Paris suburb of Nanterre (Security in Paris After Nights of Protests, 2023).

activists, showcases such inter-generational collaboration. In their discussion of LGBTQ2S activisms in Canadian suburbs, Bain and Podmore (2021b) write that inter-generational collaboration creates "alternative forms of sociality and mutual support." As they write, such collaboration means "not only to co-produce activities and events, but also to build a supportive, coherent, and meaningful sense of community" (Bain & Podmore, 2021b, p. 139). Thus, collaborative activism across generations is essential in mobilizing resources, providing emotional and material support, and exchanging knowledge in socially and politically hostile environments.

Misrecognition through verbal communication and intentional misgendering was raised by one research participant with a non-normative gender identity. Such experiences expose queer-phobic tendencies among some activist communities, distinguishing individual activists based on gender identity differences. Accidental misgendering, however, can be linked to language differences and the language skills of activists. In Farsi, female and male pronouns are not differentiated; thus, misgendering by activists less familiar with specificities in languages other than Farsi, which assign different pronoun for multiple gender identities, is likely to be accidental. Whether intentional or unintentional, for activists with non-normative gender identities, repeated acts of misgendering may undermine a sense of personal recognition, welcome, and safety within spaces of activism.

Other research participants reflect on the way in which issues of recognition are associated with activist political identities. Saeedeh, a queer artist and activist in Toronto, observes this among some activist communities: "I had a close friend who was a queer feminist and then became a queer lesbian. The way they talked about everyone was as if Khomeini was talking about every non-Muslim" (Interview, June 12, 2022). The perception that identifying as a "queer lesbian activist" represents a more radical position than a "queer feminist activist"

highlights the problematic approach to identity politics adopted by some activists. As Saeedeh's experiences show, in reducing activists' diverse experiences and positions to narrow identity categories, politics of identity may fragment communities and manifest in discrimination against activists who do not share the same political/sexual identities.

In differentiating between the politics of identity and politics of recognition, Fraser (2000, p. 114) proposes seeing recognition as a status issue, that is, "examining institutional patterns of cultural value for their effect on the relative standing of social actors." Accordingly, misrecognition refers to social subordination in the sense of being denied participation in social life. Thus, the politics of recognition in the status model is "no longer reduced to the question of identity"; rather, it refers to politics that address subordination by acknowledging the misrecognized as full members and participants in society (Fraser, 2000, p. 113). Pursuing politics of recognition as a collective responsibility by activists, therefore, signals pathways to address discrimination based on activists' identities along political, gender identity, and age differences, building toward more resourceful feminist activism.

Misrecognition, as it relates to individuals' social and economic capital, not only limits equal opportunities for activists' participation but also results in what one research participant describes as a "mafia-like environment" where expertise feminism proliferates. As Mahsa, a feminist and queer activist in France, explains, such an environment, created by few individuals presenting themselves as leaders, inevitably leads to misrepresentation within mainstream media. Observing the issue more explicitly among queer activists, they explain:

> [these leaders] create a political structure so that they become the token…someone according to whom the Iranian LGBT movement is known …there are preoccupations about making a movie or taking a picture with that person. Or inviting this person. However, their efforts have their limits because they can only be applied to their own community… when they are invited to BBC or wherever their analysis is

> purely political and generalist. But what does it have to do with me as a member of the community? Absolutely nothing[23] (Interview, June 2, 2022).

Mainstream media both expose and reinforce power dynamics that determine who is recognized as an expert on feminism. The policy of diaspora Farsi news media, most notably BBC Persian, Voice of America (VoA) and Iran International, in giving activists and political analysts a platform is inevitably biased due to their political and financial ties with the UK, the US, Saudi Arabia, and Israeli governments. Given such overt biases in guiding conversations and interviews with activists in such a way to pursue the media's political agenda (for example, Iran International is publicly known to receive funding from Israel and Saudi Arabia), one research participant stated that when invited, she decided not to participate in their programs, instead choosing to be visible and active on social media platforms (Interview, July 12, 2022).

The increasing use of social media as a tool for activism has effectively countered the domination of mainstream media over activist discourses. As I discussed in the previous chapter, social media platforms are essential tools for knowledge mobilization across national borders; however, as media studies scholars have shown, the implication of the growing use of these platforms on feminist activism is contradictory and complex (Brown et al., 2017; Mao, 2020; Megarry, 2018; Mendes, 2015; Mendes et al., 2019; Turley & Fisher, 2018). Levels of success in using social media platforms to reach a broader audience by feminist activists is an important determining factor in the extent to which they receive public

[23] In an online panel organized by Feminists for Jina, Laya Hooshyari, a researcher and leftist feminist activist, extends the discussion of recognition among activists across gender divides, focusing on the role of men in leftist groups and as feminist allies (Feminists For Jina, 2023). She argues there is a tendency among political groups to rely on male figures as a leader, providing them with unconditional support. These circumstances, she argues have resulted in the creation of cults, dividing activists into antagonist rivals. Such observation was also echoed by Sara, an activist research participant in Berlin, explaining that there is an obvious lack of tolerance among multiple leftist groups (Interview, June 3, 2022).

recognition. In the context of Iranian feminist activism, Zangeneh (2019) argues that orientation toward “representing trauma and suffrage of the historically oppressed” has been the central focus of some activists in the diaspora within social media platforms. A tendency that reveals the domination of the neoliberal economy over activist spaces. Activism under neoliberalism, Zangeneh (2019, p. 19) argues, is narrowed down to the “narration of oppression for domestic and foreign customers” instead of analytical and political efforts to demolish the material basis of collective suffrage, a task that, according to Spivak (1999; 2009) is assumed by native informants. When activism becomes part of an economic project for financial circulation, “narratives of individual suffrage have a better chance of achieving budget” (Zangeneh, 2019, p. 18). Under dominant neoliberal economic and political governance structures, where “competition to represent is a substitute to organized efforts for structural changes”, social media becomes a platform to represent pain and suffrage for enhancing audience and funding opportunities. Such debates surrounding the question of representation, however, are not unique to the Iranian context. In the context of Muslim women's activism in Sweden, Muftee and León (2022, p. 569) highlight representation as a “doubled-edge process”, arguing that “entering into the mainstream societal institutions means having to relate to the process of othering and position oneself in relation to controlling images.”

Despite their function under neoliberal governance mechanisms centred upon expertise activism, the role of social media tools in giving platforms for marginalized groups to be their voice is significant. As scholars in media studies have shown, social media is a powerful tool in countering hegemonic discourses that strengthen and perpetuate oppressive structures across multiple axes of difference (Hooman, 2022; Tayebi, 2013). The growing visibility of several feminist collectives, particularly since the beginning of the Woman, Life, Freedom

revolutionary uprising, within social media depicted tremendous diversity of feminist activism in the country. Amplifying the voices of Baluch women, the Dasgoharan collective, a group of activists from Sistan and Baluchistan, a historically marginalized province in Iran, gained widespread visibility after launching their Instagram account in October 2022. They introduce themselves in their Instagram account as:

> Women who have been active in different parts of Sistan and Baluchistan province for many years … we have exposed misogyny…written about child marriage… promoted the mother language… participated in educating marginalized women and children… we have been incapable of making our voice heard within national and foreign media…but today are different days. Desgohari days. So far, we have not been active on social media platforms…we name ourselves Desgoharan. Degoharan follows the woman, life, and freedom path… through our sisterhood with women of other nationalities in Iran: Kurdish, Lur, Arab Fars, and so on. There is still a lot to learn on this path (Desgoharan, 2022)

Desgohri, in the Baluchi language, refers to "a social tradition among Baluchi women for empathy, companionship, support, and sisterhood". The widespread recognition of Baluchi's feminism beyond provincial, regional, and national borders, gained through Instagram, provides opportunities for Iranian and global audiences and feminists to learn about the rich history of activism against patriarchy and misogyny in the province and the significance of political kinship among them. Further, the collective uses its platform to expose intersecting and disproportionate structures of oppression and exploitation that women in Baluchistan have endured and contested throughout the years. Baluch women, they note, have been subject to "national/ethnic and classicist/religious oppression. On top of that, as women, we were considered as *namus,* not only by our fathers, brothers and husbands but also by our tribes as well as by the religious system and the state". This articulation demonstrates the ways in which multiple forms of patriarchal violence rooted within social, economic, political, and cultural structures have resulted in the misrecognition of activism, rendering Baluchi women invisible within mainstream media. Nevertheless, leveraging social media

platforms helped these activists to have their voices heard beyond the region, effectively exposing multi-layered structures of patriarchy as well as long-standing activism against them.

It is worth mentioning that the use of digital tools for activism purposes in gaining recognition or knowledge mobilization, as discussed in Chapter 4, depends on their knowledge of how these platforms work and how to effectively navigate them, which may intensify generational divides. Schuster (2013) observes that in the context of New Zealand, there is a generational divide in the ways in which activists engage in feminist politics, arguing that online activism is a key form of political participation for the younger generation. Schuster (2013, p. 8) writes that although online activism provides opportunities for more widespread engagement, it can also result in exclusionary structures, often creating a generational divide across feminist and women's rights activist groups. Similarly, in the context of activism in Iranian diasporas, activists from younger generations draw more heavily on online platforms and digital tools, using them for networking and content creation. However, it is unclear whether digital platforms can facilitate networking among activists and reduce the generational gap between activists, or as Schuster (2013) suggests, such kinds of participation by the younger generation remain hidden from public audiences and activists from earlier generations.

The contradictory and multiple ways social media provide opportunities for more resourceful practice of feminist activism, on the one hand, or reinforce top-down governance mechanisms, on the other, call for a larger inquiry that explores the intersection of media and feminist geopolitics. Emerging studies within popular geopolitics (Dittmer & Dodds, 2008; Dittmer & Gray, 2010; Sharp, 1993) illustrate the complex relationship between power, audience, representation, and geopolitics (Dittmer & Gray, 2010). Thus, scholarships that

engage with feminist and popular geopolitics provide potent insights into an understanding of activists' impact on audience subjectivities (Dittmer & Gray, 2010).

As the above cases demonstrate, issues of distribution and recognition faced by activists are entwined and cannot be addressed separately. Zeynab, a feminist, queer activist, and the co-founder of Spectrum, a non-profit organization in Paris working on gender equality and education, highlighted the existence of "unhealthy" competitions over "power, resources, and audience" between some feminist and queer activist groups in Europe. They observe, "It can [manifest] in bullying behaviours. Or it is sometimes spreading rumours about other groups or … spreading false information, even threatening sometimes" (Interview, May 21, 2022). In taking concrete steps toward resourceful activism that addresses the unjust distribution of material resources and related disadvantages it creates for leveraging tools of social change by groups and communities, MacKinnon and Derickson (2013, p. 263) build on Spivak's assertion that building and maintaining the drive to social justice is achieved through everyday practice. An awareness of unequal social and political dynamics of power and collective effort to address them within communities as part of the everyday practice of activism signals a hopeful opening toward resourceful feminist activism beyond the confining forces of governance.

Conclusion: Possibilities of Resourceful Activism

Activists in diasporas use multiple resources to contest patriarchal and authoritarian structures of violence and displacement. Intimate relations and political kinship between activists provide opportunities for resourceful feminist activism that is based upon needs and priorities that are developed at the community level rather than being determined by governmental needs and requirements (MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013, p. 263). As illustrated in the practices of Tasht Collective, safe and intimate home spaces turn into places

where individual and group support are provided and opportunities are created to make political claims beyond the confines of the private sphere. In these ways, intimate spaces signal possibilities of cultivating an “expansive scalar politics”, an important characteristic of resourcefulness that takes into account the need to create capacities at community levels as well as foster the link across space (Cumbers et al., 2008; MacKinnon & Derickson, 2013). Thus, intimate relations and political kinship, as shown in this chapter, play a critical role in practices of feminist counter-geopolitics not only by providing emotional support in combating feelings of isolation for activists in diasporas but also by building capacities for organizing and networking.

Studies of home and activism illustrate the intersection between home and geopolitics (Wilkins, 2017). As Brickell (2014) shows, activists’ homes are sites of consciousness-raising and political mobilization for change. Thus, the geopolitics of home reveal possibilities that exist in intimate spaces to live alternative visions of life to those created under patriarchal and authoritarian structures of violence and displacement. Through this lens, political kinships in the home space are re-evaluated as forms of intimate geopolitics attentive to activists' emotional and material needs.

By considering home as an intimate geopolitical space, political kinships emerge as important tools for feminist activists in the diaspora that stretch over time and space. In this chapter, I provided examples of OMSC members cultivating kinship networks within the homes of the campaign's mothers, creating close connections under hostile and securitized political environments in the country. As shown in the next chapter, these kinship networks, maintained by activists after leaving the country throughout the years, were vital in activating Feminist for Jina, a transnational feminist network created in the wake of the WLF revolutionary uprising in 2022. Here, political possibilities of intimate home spaces and

relations and digital intimacies manifest as transnational solidarities and mobilization against state-led gender-based violence.

Challenges in enacting resourceful practice are associated with governed landscapes where diaspora activism takes place. Governance structures, manifested in feminist expertise, shape unjust social and political dynamics that determine activists' access to financial resources and levels of recognition. Project feminism, where financial needs and incentives inform activist strategies in defining projects that fit with the governmental framework, exemplifies a top-down mode of governance feminism, resulting in a competitive environment for seeking grants and budgets. Under such an environment, activists with technical knowledge of governmental procedures and communication skills are better able to access external financial resources. While these grants and budgets benefit activists, particularly those with limited financial resources, dependence on such resources raises concerns about co-option and appropriation of feminist activism within governmental structures.

The possibilities of enacting politics of resourcefulness are further conditioned by governance structures, which determine the extent to which activists receive recognition, from whom, and how it is manifest. These structures, closely linked to the geopolitical interests of foreign governments, manifest in policies taken by Farsi-speaking mainstream media in diasporas. Further, the extent to which activists receive recognition increasingly depends on the effective use of social media platforms in reaching larger audiences. Attending to the role of mainstream and social media in activists' levels of recognition raises further questions about the ways in which these platforms can be utilized in such ways that rather than promoting market-oriented activism that seeks more audience, offer tools for more resourceful activist practice by giving space to marginalized and heterogenous feminist voices. The emergence of multiple feminist collectives in diasporas and their increasing visibility on social and

mainstream media platforms since the beginning of the Woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising signal positive changes away from governed feminism toward a more resourceful activist practice that “strengthen the footholds for transformative feminist change” (Otto, 2018, p. 221).

6. Zan. Zendegi. Azadi.: Transversal-Urban Solidarities in WLFTO

Introduction

Following the killing of Jina (Mahsa) Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish-Iranian by Iran's Morality Police for not observing "proper" hijab, the revolutionary uprising of "Woman, Life, Freedom" (WLF) turned global attention to gender-based violence by the Iranian state. In a couple of months after Jina's death in September 2022, a large population of Iranians—both within the country's national borders as well as those in diaspora across the world—came to the streets of their cities to protest against the brutality of Islamic Republic targeting, in particular, women. Comprising a diverse population of Iranian refugees, migrants, and citizens, including feminist activists, Woman, Life, Freedom in Toronto (WLFTO) emerged as a critical site within transnational geographies of diaspora solidarity mobilization. In this chapter, I analyze WLFTO—the experiences, insights, and practices of feminist activists across the Greater Toronto Area—as an urban terrain of transnational solidarity. I draw on critical urban studies literature that focuses on urban solidarity, showing how urban solidarity spaces (Arampatzi, 2017) involve a spectrum of transformative practices by diverse actors as well as different sets of compromises, negotiations, and consensus (Özdemir, 2022, p.1). Transnational migration perspectives in urban studies, in particular, have used the notion of urban solidarity to discuss practices by institutions, civil society activists, and migrants and illuminate multiple interactions between key actors (Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021). Building on this literature, I posit WLFTO within the broader global solidarity network of Iranian diasporas that shapes and is shaped by multiple contesting feminist practices and discourses. In the wake of (arguably) the first feminist revolution in Iran, I examine spaces of feminist counter-geopolitics within the GTA and the ways in which knowledge and resources are

mobilized in interaction with wider diaspora communities and institutional networks they are involved with.

This chapter begins with an outline of the historical and geographical trajectory of Iranian migration and the gradual formation of residential settlements in the GTA. An emerging body of urban scholarship focuses on practices of solidarity-making that take place in the context of growing transnational migration and multiculturalism (Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021; Oosterlynck et al., 2016; Özdemir, 2021). I rely on this literature to map geographies of solidarities across urban spaces. Next, drawing on activist practices by members of *Feminists for Jina*, an emerging transnational network of Iranian activists in the diaspora, I conceptualize transversal-urban solidarities, highlighting how they resist and work against nationalist discourses of solidarity while creating more inclusive and progressive political spaces. As the rise of nationalist discourses among some diaspora opposition communities marginalize feminist, queer, and Kurdish dissident voices, activist practices of transversal-urban solidarities wrought within the multi-national urban context of Toronto provide alternative spaces to continue destabilizing heterosexist and racist logics of nationalism. Nonetheless, there are important challenges in sustaining transversal solidarities, which can be addressed through radical care. Building on Gokarıksel et al. (2017), Dowler et al. (2019, p. 36) explain that radical care is shaped by a "politics of discomfort," which avoids flattening diverse experiences of vulnerability and violence. Rather, radical care is "fluid, evolving, and responsive to experiences of different vulnerabilities," providing opportunities to advocate for and identify transformative solutions with longer-term perspectives (Dowler et al., 2019, p. 36). I argue that adopting such a radical approach to care is essential in helping those of us in diasporas to think and act beyond reactive, short-term responses to the manifestation of political violence. Radical care takes a step further towards sustained efforts

by community members in proactively fighting against structures that create and maintain violence and vulnerability.

Historical-Geographies of Iranian Diasporas in the GTA

From the early days of the WLF revolutionary uprising, diaspora solidarity mobilization in Toronto was among the most visible within news and social media. To a great extent, the centrality of the GTA within the emerging global Iranian diaspora solidarity network was because leading board members and the spokesperson of The Association of Families of Flight PS752 Victims (AFFPS752V) acting as the main organizer of global solidarity rallies, live in Toronto. The association was established in 2020 in the aftermath of the shooting down of the Ukrainian flight PS 752 by Iranian authorities, resulting in the death of 176 passengers and crew aboard. The mission of the non-profit organization, which is established by families of victims across the world, is "to unite the grieving families, keep the memories of the passengers alive, and most importantly seek justice" (ps752justice.com). Its role as the main coordinator of global solidarity rallies relies on the non-partisan character of the association and focus on "seeking justice", which has mobilized many political groups and dissidents. Further, the fact that the association included citizens of Ukraine, Canada, Britain, Sweden, Afghanistan, and Iran contributed to its networking capacity to mobilize the diaspora across national borders.

A variety of push and pull factors contributed to the increasing migration of Iranians to Canada, such as religious and political persecution by the Iranian State on the one hand and, on the other, relatively favourable social and economic conditions in Canada. Table 6-1 illustrates that the number of Iranian migrants to Canada jumped significantly in the first decade following the 1979 revolution. The growing trend of migration persisted in the following decades. Between 1990 and 2000, 41,220 Iranians emigrated to Canada, coinciding

with the relative political freedom enjoyed in the reformist era. The steady increase in emigration during this time can be attributed to economic and social opportunities that made Canada an attractive place for Iranians. Migration rates gradually grew between 2001 and 2010, standing at 52,340 in 2010 (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2021). During this period, the political repression of dissidents following the Green Movement of 2009 was a contributing factor to the growing number of Iranians in Canada. By the 2020s, the number of Iranian migrants increased more than sevenfold compared to the 1970s, reaching 70,390 in 2021.

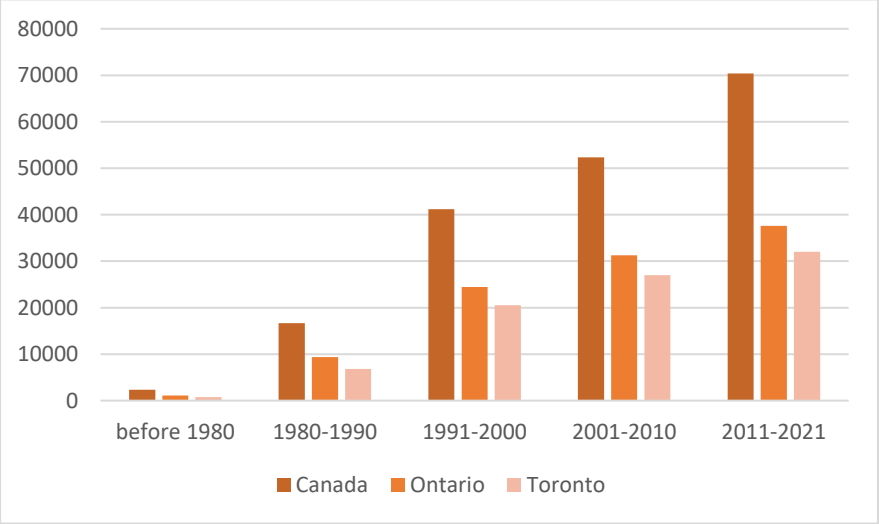

Table 6-1 The Number of Iranian Immigrants to Canada, Ontario, Toronto (source: Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2021).

A similar trend of increasing migration is evident in Ontario and Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA). Ontario, particularly the metropolitan area, is among the most popular destinations for Iranian migrants to Canada. According to the 2016 Canadian census, a total of 97,110 Iranians reside in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), 46 255 in the Greater Vancouver Area and, 23 410 in the Greater Montreal Area, with the rest located in other cities across the country. Due to vast employment opportunities, GTA has become a key destination for immigrants, including Iranians. In 2021, the majority of the Iranian immigrant

population in Toronto (CMA) was admitted as economic immigrants through worker, business, and provincial nominee programs. As Table 6-2 shows, one-fifth of immigrant-status Iranians in Toronto were refugees, including protected persons in Canada or dependants abroad and resettled refugees, while family-sponsored and other immigrants stand in third and fourth place, respectively.

	Refugees	Economic	Family-Sponsored	Other
Toronto CMA	17040	54735	13960	635
Percentage	20	63	16	1

Table 6-2 Legal Status of Iranian Immigrants (source: Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2021).

Figure 6-1 shows the geographies of Iranian settlements across the GTA. The majority of Iranian immigrants live in areas stretching from North York (one of the six administrative districts of Toronto) through Markham to Richmond Hill (two peripheral municipalities within the GTA). By electoral districts, according to Statistics Canada (2016), most Iranians reside in Richmond Hill (11,190), North York (19,685), including in Willowdale and Don Valley North neighbourhoods, Thornhill (5465) and Markham-Thornhill (2005). Towards the south, Don Vally West and East are populated by approximately 5,000 immigrants born in Iran. As will be shown in the next sections, Richmond Hill and North York, with the most substantial Iranian communities, turned into key sites of solidarity mobilization amidst the WLF revolutionary uprising. In this chapter, I elaborate on the ways in which the urban residential/commercial concentration of Iranian communities informs the urban solidarity spaces of WLFTO.

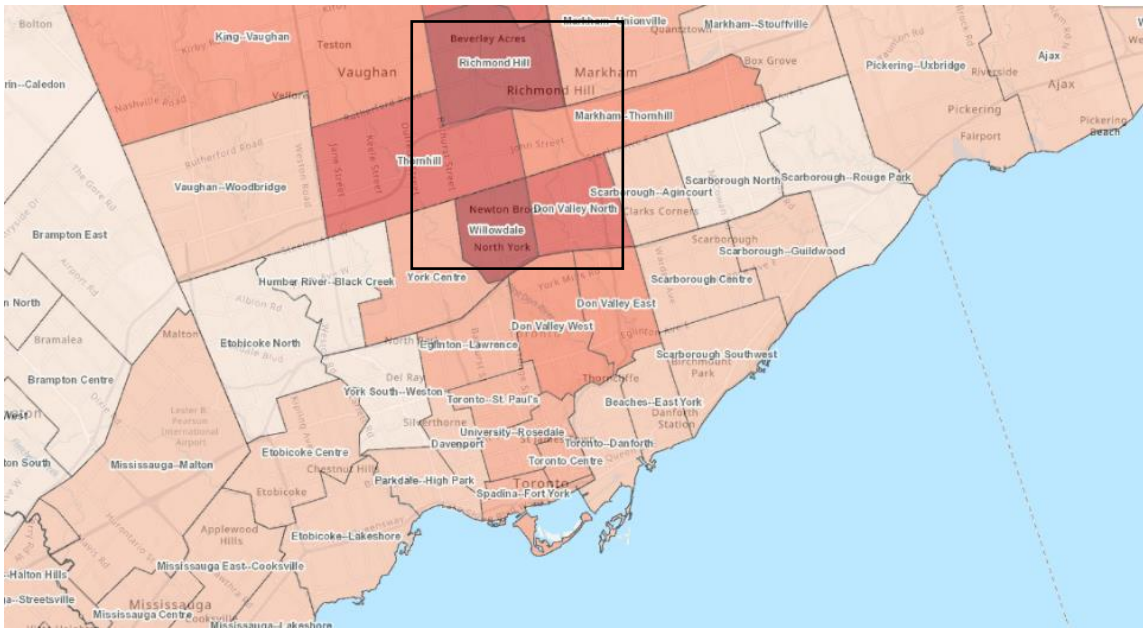

Figure 6-1 Spatial Distribution of Iranian Immigrants across the GTA (source: Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2016), author's elaboration.

Transversal and Urban Solidarity

Solidarity is a central theme in feminist, political, and geography literature, and it is defined and understood in various ways. Within geography, scholars argue that it captures "an ongoing production of relations between different sites and places (Featherstone, 2012) that not only does not rely on existing shared identities but, in fact, is in itself a process of constructing identity in a place (Massey, 2004)" (Rahbari, 2021, p. 107). Such conception of solidarity is linked to "politics of location" for feminist theorists (Rich,1984) who reject a universal and normative subject of feminism by recognizing the diversity of women's experiences and issues across geographical contexts (Rahbari, 2019, p. 108). Feminist solidarity provides a useful pedagogical strategy for "feminist cross-cultural work" in order to construct a truly universal notion of feminism rather than colonization (Mohanty, 2003, p. 518). For Mohanty (2003), what anchors the idea of feminist solidarity is a focus on relations of mutuality, shared interests, and co-responsibility, where differences and commonalities exist in relation to and tension with each other. Relatedly, as an alternative to identity

categories, “transversal solidarity” encompasses “difference by equality and while continuously crossing collectivity boundaries, [it] is bounded by sharing common values” (Yuval-Davis, 2016, p. 12). Feminist transversal solidarity, thus, signals a move away from identity politics, shared victimization, and universal categorization of womanhood to formulate emancipatory politics for marginalized individuals and groups, notably those along racial, class, sexual, and gender lines (Mohanty, 2003; Rahbari, 2021).

In light of growing transnational migrations in the past few decades, solidarities have often been theorized in the multi-racial and multi-cultural contexts of Western societies. These practices of solidarities vary from place to place, reflecting differences and nuances in regional geopolitical contexts, local discourses around migration, and national legal structures, among other factors (Bauder, 2021; Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021; Oosterlynck et al., 2016). Scholars show that cultivating transnational solidarities among multiple institutional actors, grassroots communities, and activists can create political subjectivities and redefine collective identities by negotiating or transforming social norms and institutional structures (Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021; Siim & Meret, 2021).

Solidarity has also been discussed in the urban context shaped through different relationships and interactions with evolving strategies and actors, such as communities and institutions, who instruct multiple and contesting forms of politics (Arampatzi, 2017; Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021; Özdemir, 2022). Urban geographers have importantly shown urban solidarities to play an essential role in times of political crisis, which often entails top-down process of governance as well as bottom-up formulation of urban solidarities against powerful elites (Arampatzi, 2017; Özdemir, 2022). As Arampatzi (2017, p. 2156) describes, urban solidarity spaces involve “the spatial practices of solidarity and struggle that unfold at the territorial, social and economic levels” and provide an understanding of how people and communities

deal with and address crises. Thus, urban solidarity manifests and results from negotiation and struggles between multiple actors, signalling possibilities toward alternative modes of co-existing in the city (Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021; Özdemir, 2022). This builds upon the understanding of cities as political sites populated with spaces and subjectivities with capacities to transform oppressive and exploitative socio-political structures. Urban solidarity is characterized by ambiguous and contradictory dynamics shaped by involved institutional, civil, and autonomous actors (Kreichauf & Mayer, 2021), revealing geopolitical constellations of power that are inseparable from the urban.

In addition to the political implications of urban solidarities, care networks also characterize some of the solidarities that are wrought in cities. Feminist and political studies have traced the diversity of care networks in tactics and scope, from providing economic support through financial resource sharing and carrying out collective reproductive labour to offering emotional and psychological support. They often aim to sustain a sense of community among activists involved in political movements and collectives, particularly essential for socially and economically vulnerable individuals (Arampatzi, 2017; Katsikana, 2021). However, "affective labour of social reproduction and other practices of collective (and self-) care and well-being within activist communities" is highly gendered such that they are often assumed to be the role of women, feminized and queer subjects (Katsikana, 2021, p. 93). Thus, while gendered practices of care may sustain progressive movements and activism, they can also uphold internal unequal structures that revolve around the masculine figure of a leader and the feminine role of caregiving. Importantly, this has been traced through feminist ethics of care that question normative gendered and power dynamics within solidarity networks.

Feminist Perspectives on Care

Care is understood as "a type of engagement with the world that is both rational and affective" (Till, 2012, p. 10). According to Tronto (1993, quoted in Till, 2012,p.11), it "includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it." In feminist literature, "ethics of care" is considered a political project that captures how people belong and relate to each other such that it refuses to confine categories of belonging (Yuval-Davis, 2016, p. 4). However, Yuval-Davis (2016, p. 8) argues that care practices may facilitate, instead of challenging, the uncontested functioning of the neoliberal world order, which relies on care at multiple geographical scales. Ethics of care from a feminist standpoint is, thus, a departure from traditional understanding of care work as women's responsibility under heteronormative construction of masculinity and femininity. Care ethics question neoliberal principles of individualism and competition by characterizing all social actors and relations as responsive and responsible (Lawson, 2007; Staeheli & Lawson, 2005). Such a conception of ethics of care correlates with a feminist ethos that there is no divide between personal and political lives. Relatedly, Martha Nussbaum (2001, p. 403) advocates for an approach to collective care and compassion that operates at the interpersonal and institutional levels. As such, feminist interventions in understanding care provide insights to consider the political potential of ethics of care in fighting against normative capitalist and patriarchal structures.

Feminist geographers also challenged the notion of care as something restricted to the private realm and discussed caring arising "out of a sense of responsibility towards […] different and distant others" (McEwan & Goodman, 2010, p. 103). The ways in which feminist ethics of care and geographies of responsibility construct each other are linked to the relational conception of space as discussed by Massey (2004), where she outlines politics of

connectivity “based on the mutual constitution of distant places, through which we may feel a sense of responsibility for places to which we are not directly connected” (McEwan & Goodman, 2010, p. 103).

In urban geography literature, Till (2012, p. 5) argues that “place-based ethics of care” are significant ethics and politics that can potentially enhance democratic features in urban life. In her observation of “activist and artistic projects in cities across the US, Colombia, and South Africa, Till (2012, p. 6) presents how caring for places and those who populate them provides pathways toward establishing more socially and environmentally just cities. Place-based ethics of care enable an alternative model of cities where they “may be understood as ‘wounded’ yet as also providing environments of care”. Such attention to the political implications of care ethics in cities reveals how urban spaces are infused with multiple forms of values rather than properties of the capitalist market with exchange values. As Till (2012, p.3) shows, while geographies of displacement, war, and violence continue to structure urban social and political relations, intimate practices of caring for one another still emerge. She suggests that artistic practices enable place-based ethics of care that are tied to a sense of active citizenship and radical democracy with important implications for urban planning, policies, and agendas. As such, even under intensified structures of urban governance, ethics of care among activists and communities may hold transformative potential.

In the following sections, I argue that a diverse network of solidarity emerges in the WLFTO context in ways that involve feminist activism in the diaspora and impact the ways in which activists develop strategies for building networks and resources. First, I discuss the geopolitical context of Toronto, examining its role within transnational solidarity networks and how it influences the experiences of activists in Toronto. Second, I focus on what I call transversal-urban solidarities practiced by participants in the Feminists for Jina (FFJ)

network, which was activated by a group of diaspora activists in and out of Toronto. A variety of collectives, groups and networks emerged in the wake of the WLF revolutionary uprising[24] in and out of Iran, however, FFJ exemplifies a unique feminist network in its geographical reach and transnational character operating across diverse diaspora cities, particularly in Canada, the U.S. and European countries. I further elaborate on the challenges faced by activists dealing with precarious living conditions, namely students, in sustaining and participating in solidarity space, highlighting the importance of radical care practice at community and institutional levels.

Geographies of Solidarity: Woman, Life, Freedom in Toronto

The woman, Life, Freedom revolutionary uprising emerged in September 2022 after the state killing of Jina (Mahsa) Amini by Morality Police for not observing a "proper" hijab[25]. Immediately after her death, protests erupted first in her hometown, Saqquez, developing in multiple cities across and later out of the country against state aggression targeting women and girls. Iranian diasporas mobilized in solidarity with protestors in Iran across many countries, notably in cities with a substantial population of Iranian immigrants, citizens, students, and refugees, such as Berlin, London, Paris, Toronto, Los Angeles, and New York, creating a dynamic geography of transnational solidarity. As observed by many research participants, WLF solidarity mobilization was unique in scale and character in comparison to previous oppositional mobilization against the Islamic Republic. Negin, a feminist activist in Toronto, compares diaspora mobilization in the context of WLF versus the 2009 Green

[24] Other examples include Tanide Collective, Jina Collective, Tawar Collective, Bolandgoo (Say it Out Loud), Zan, Zendegi, Azadi Collective, Feminista Thüringen, etc.

[25] The Iranian authorities stated that Jina had a heart attack and fell into a coma before being taken to hospital, however, his father denied the claim, holding the police responsible for her death. ("Three Killed in Protests Over Iranian Woman Mahsa Amini's Death in Custody," 2022).

Movement: “A big change took place this time, and that was the global rally. No one can disregard the rally. And I think that marks a shift in the influence of the diaspora on Iran’s political landscape” (Interview, November 29, 2022). The global rally in solidarity with Iranian protestors was organized by the Association of Families of Flight PS752 on the first of October, two weeks after Jina’s death. The call was made by Hamed Esmaillion, the Toronto-based spokesperson of the association, on his personal Instagram account:

> Our hearts beat outside of Iran in the streets of those cities and villages. We also want the fall of the disgraceful government of the Islamic Republic. There is no fear anymore. We will conquer the streets of the world on the first day of October at 2 p.m. "for the liberation of Iran". The time has come.

The call brought a large population of the Iranian diaspora across 150 to their streets, expressing their grievances against the Islamic Republic's atrocities and showing solidarity with protestors. Given that the Internet was shut/slowed down by the Iranian state, diaspora solidarities played a crucial role in countering the state’s measures to censor dissident voices in the country, raising awareness about protests in Iran at an international scale.

Accommodating a large population of Iranian migrants and diasporas, Toronto soon emerged as one of the strategic cities within the transnational geographies of WLF solidarity. The global solidarity rally in Toronto, the largest one among other cities with an estimated 50,000 participants (Feinstein, 2022), took place in Richmond Hill, a peripheral municipality in the south-central York Region, part of the Greater Toronto Area. Initially, the rally was planned to take place in downtown Toronto; however, as Dundas Square was already booked for other events, it was relocated to Richmond Hill. Two key reasons can be estimated for selecting Richmond Hill. First, a large concentration of Iranian residents in “the ethnoburb” of Richmond Hill would ensure greater participation of Iranians. Second, the route along Yonge Street, a major north-south arterial route, and the assembly point outside the Richmond Hill

public library is vast enough to accommodate a large group of people. In addition to rallies coordinated at the global scale, often called for by the Association, multiple other public events and rallies took place across the GTA in the following months after WLF broke out. While large-scale rallies took place in Richmond Hill, some public events occurred in other public spaces, notably Mel Lastman Square in North York, with a substantial population of Iranian residents, and Nathan Phillips Square, Dundas Square, Queen's Park in Downtown Toronto, where there is a large presence of Iranian students and universities namely University of Toronto, OCAD University, and Toronto Metropolitan University, among other key public and media institutions such as the City Hall and CBC building (Figure 6-2). While demands by participants and event organizers were multiple, both long-term and short-term, ranging from regime change, referendum, and law reform, they often converged in opposing the state's atrocities against protestors and calling out gender-based violence in Iran.

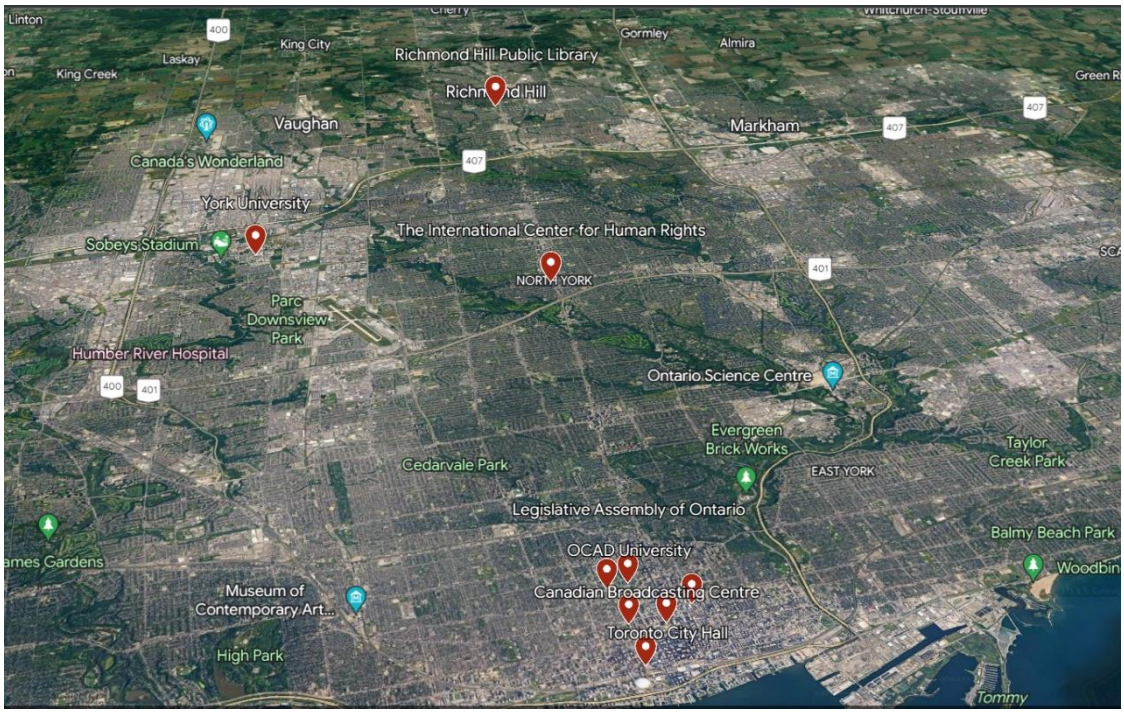

Figure 6-2 Spatial Distribution of Institutions Involved in WLF in the GTA (source: Google Map).

Given that WLF was perceived by many as the first feminist revolution in Iran, what was common in the majority of solidarity events was the centrality of demands around Iranian women's rights. As such, WLF diaspora solidarity opened up a discursive space by placing state-led gender-based violence at the center of oppositional mobilization. Thus, it marks a shift within the dominant discourse of the opposition since the 1979 revolution that tends to sideline women's demands and the issue of gender inequality. Revolutionary feminist claims from the streets of Iran made it ever more evident that freedom will not be achieved without dismantling the oppressive collusion of patriarchy and the state.

While diaspora solidarities inside and outside of Toronto were effective ways to bring international and public attention to ongoing protests in Iran, the ongoing concerns are the ways in which solidarities and demands made by participants are represented, interpreted and appropriated according to geopolitical interests, political agendas, and individual biases. Such concerns were specifically relevant to the Canadian diaspora, given that Canada is often described as a "safe haven" for Islamic Republic political elites, where they can easily travel to, buy assets, and make investments as a form of money laundering activity (Zanganehpour, 2022). Immediately after the global rally on the first of October, Pierre Poilievre, a Canadian Conservative politician who was an invited speaker at the end of the rally, tweeted, "#MahsaAmini Enough talk, Liberals must act now. Sign our petition to list the *Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps* (IRGC) as a terrorist group & support Iranian people in their fight for freedom against this murderous dictatorship" (Poilievre, 2022). Similarly, in a CBC interview, Melissa Lantsman, the conservative deputy leader, criticizes the liberal government for their lack of action in putting the IRGC on the terrorist list:

> So either they [liberals] believe nobody is a human rights abuser in Iran or they are not doing anything. […] There is a list that we can go over right now. So, the fact that they are not doing anything suggests that they are not

> taking this seriously. […]The government is not looking at this. This is also a regime that shut down a plane […] where over 15 Canadians have died. If that is not a terrorist group, I am not sure what qualifies it (CBC News, 2022).

Within the mainstream media, taking sides with Iranian protestors and supporting Iranian women would translate into putting IRGC on the terrorist list and imposing restrictive migration policies for Iranian authorities and their relatives. In this context, the conservative party's approach to foreign policy in supporting those measures appeals to many Iranian communities in Toronto.

Transnational solidarities as a collective space and practice emerged in response to the state's atrocities and aimed predominantly to mobilize the diaspora and international communities against the Islamic Republic. In the aftermath of Jina's death, the Iranian state increasingly became the mutual enemy against which "the opposition" had to fight. Having a monopoly over the Farsi-speaking media and other financial resources within the diaspora, some opposition groups—most notably Monarchists—sought to dominate the political space of the opposition by presenting Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last ruling Shah before the 1979 Revolution, as the leading figure for mobilizing national solidarity against the state. Monarchist supporters increasingly employed the rhetoric of Iranian nationalism and national unity (discussed further below) to legitimize the silencing of diverse voices and assume power over the emerging discursive and political space of the diaspora. In some cases, Iranian feminist and women's rights activists in the diaspora, such as the *Iranian Women's Organization*, supported nationalist solidarity discourses of monarchists by participating in the *Loyalist Coalition Forces Front*. In the following section, I argue that while nationalist discourses characterized some solidarity spaces of WLFTO, feminist interventions introduce an alternative practice of solidarity that works against the top-down political practice by adopting a transnational and intersectional approach. These bottom-up solidarity-making

practices, what I call *transversal-urban solidarities*, create a more progressive and inclusive space for collective mobilization cultivated through long-term commitments and connections between activists in diaspora cities.

Feminists for Jina: Transversal-Urban Solidarities

> To the World Leaders: Iranian Women Do Not Need You to Save Them. They Only Need You to Stop Saving Their Murderers! (Banner seen in Nathan-Phillips Square, 2022).

In the midst of WLF, contested debates among feminist activist communities around engaging with foreign governments in pursuing policy measures such as cutting diplomatic ties with Iranian authorities grew when some prominent feminist activist figures began meeting and negotiating with Western political leaders. These approaches ignite criticism and raise concerns about risking foreign interventions, perpetuating rescue narratives by the West, and creating fear of "another" war in the Middle East in the name of women's rights. The debate touches on a long-standing topic among feminists surrounding *femonationalism.* Femonationalism refers to "feminist and femocratic nationalism", defined by Farris (2017), as the ways in which feminist themes and ideas are exploited by political elites and nationalist campaigns to perpetuate xenophobic and racist politics under the banner of gender equality. The term recalls Puar's (2006) notion of "homonationalism," which describes discursive tactics in foregrounding "a collusion between homosexuality and American nationalism." Similarly, Farris (2012, p. 187) uses femonaitonalism in identifying attempts made by "European right-wing parties, among others, to co-opt feminist ideals into anti-immigrant and anti-Islam campaigns". Similar to homonationalism, femonatinalsim provides a critique of nationalisms, particularly state nationalism and the political elite's use of women and LGBTQI rights to propagate their political agenda against the nation's "enemy". In the context of WLF, practices of femonationalism re-surfaced on multiple scales, which demands

further exploration (see, for example, Rahbari, 2021). Nevertheless, the ways in which the proliferation of right-wing political discourses in the West and Iranian nationalist diaspora opposition, on the one hand, and the rise of religious extremism in the "Middle East" and misogyny of the Islamic Republic, on the other, feed each other can not be dismissed in the discussion of femonationalism.

In addition to state institutions, academic institutions also take on an active role in influencing WLFTO solidarity discourses by providing spaces for collaborations, participation, conversations, and engagements between activists, scholars, politicians, and Iranian communities. Many feminist activist-academics in Toronto used the networking capacities of academic institutions, namely the University of Toronto, York University, Toronto Metropolitan University, and OCAD University, by organizing and participating in events related to WLF for knowledge mobilization and developing solidarity networks. *The Elahe Omidyar Institute of Iranian Studies*[26] at the University of Toronto took on a prominent role in coordinating online and in-person events across the diaspora from the beginning of the uprising, relying on its widespread networks with cultural, art, academic, legal, government, and humanitarian actors through individual and institutional links. For example, on January 14, 2023, the institute held "Woman, Life, Liberty: Iran's Democratic Future" hybrid symposium participated by panellists including Iranian scholars, activists, and lawyers in Canada, the U.S. and Europe.

The role of academic communities and institutions within diaspora spaces of WLF solidarity in influencing discourse is important. Western academic institutions hold a powerful position, among other institutions and initiatives, in having access to "know-how" resources

[26] The institute is sponsored by Roshan Cultural Heritage Institute and "is committed to supporting educational and public programs that highlight the richness, diversity and beauty of Persian culture" (roshan-institute.org).

(Arampatzi, 2017). Further, they are often perceived as "reliable" alternatives to institutions with robust financial and political ties with foreign governments and political groups, enabling them to create a more "independent" space for collective participation and knowledge mobilization. In organizing solidarity rallies, one of the student activists observed, "We realized that people trust easier when they see the name of the university on rally posters. […] That is why we decided to use university name on them" (Interview, December 5, 2022). Still, the "neutrality" of academic institutions and communities is questioned when taking into account the expansive networks they are involved with, comprising actors with diverse ideological, financial, and institutional belongings to sources of political power.

Embedded in such complex relations of power within dynamic networks of institutional, collective, and individual actors, Feminists for Jina emerged as an "independent" network of feminist activists across diaspora countries (Feminists 4 Jina, n.d.). The network presents an example of widespread efforts by diaspora activists for grassroots mobilization in the aftermath of Jina's death. FFJ was activated by a group of Iranian feminist activists in the diaspora who previously worked together in Iran, including in the context of the One Million Signatures Campaign (see Chapter 1). Many founding members are among immigrants and refugees who were forced to leave Iran due to the state's crackdown on activists after the campaign and the Green Movement of 2009. With the rise of WLF, many gathered, online and in-person, to reconnect and activate a transnational network.

> "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" Revolution has strengthened our determination to unite in order to achieve our goal of equality and freedom, and to fight alongside the people inside Iran and other feminist liberation movements for making a better world. By making new connections and reviving older ones, we have gathered from different geographies in order to imagine a different world, especially a different Middle East (Feminists 4 Jina, n.d.).

Feminists for Jina-Toronto chapter is one of the city chapters within the transnational networks activated by a couple of feminist activists in the city (Figure 6-3), who knew each

other from prior activist experience in Iran. As Sahar, one of the members, explained, the main reason she was convinced to participate in the network was the memory of positive experiences shared among activists during the campaign. After reconnecting, she noticed, "We were apart for 15 years, but many of us have followed a more or less similar political approach. And I think that is because we had a common base. The theoretical and practical foundation" (Interview, December 3, 2022). Despite disconnection between activists due to geographical distance after migration from Iran, intimate political kinships, which were cultivated many years ago (see Chapter 5), played an important role in activating feminist networks across borders in the midst of the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising.

Figure 6-3 Feminists for Jina Cities and Chapters (source: Feminists 4 Jina, n.d.)

Shortly after WLF broke out in Iran, FFJ activists organized a demonstration in Nathan Phillips Square, Toronto, along with 33 other cities in the diaspora. The call for global feminist actions (Figure 6-4) reads, "Jina (Mahsa) Amini was murdered; Jina's body is a living wound of entangled discriminations, a wound on my body, on ours. An open wound on the body of the street" (*Feminists 4 Jina*, n.d.). As recalled by Sahar, for organizing the event, she relied on the support of activists she has worked with in Toronto:

> For years, if there were going to be a protest, folks would come asking me to manage marshals for Palestine, Indigenous, alternative pride, and so on.

> So, the day this happened, I did not need to build a network. I remember I had only six days. The only thing I did was message the group that would help organize this protest. And you know, because information about Iran is not very clear or critical, people are curious and want to know. So, everyone said they were in (Interview, December 3, 2022)

Sahar's experience shows the role of intimate relations between activists in facilitating the building of transnational solidarities in Toronto. Such experiences illustrate the ways in which political kinship is rooted within activist networks and connections involved in multiple collectives and movements, which enables solidarity mobilization during urgent political crises. These forms of transnational feminist networks, at local and global scales, illustrate the ways in which intimate practices and relations are increasingly vital to feminist counter-geopolitics through formulating bottom-up practices of feminist politics.

Figure 6-4 Call for "Feminist Day of Action" by FFJ (source: Feminists for Jina, 2022).

Figure 6-5 FFJ Demonstration in Nathan Phillips Square (source: author).

These place-based solidarities involved the cultivation and development of reciprocal connections and affinity bonds (Arampatzi, 2017, p. 2161) between activists in the GTA. They take shape through long-term commitment and engagement across collectivities boundaries to take action and come up with solutions to multiple but intersecting and shared forms of oppression and exploitation. During the same event, The No Pride in Policing Coalition (NPPC)—an "antiracist queer and trans group formed to support Black Lives Matter – Toronto"— read their statement of solidarity with WLF (Figure 6-5):

> Heteropatriarchal, religious supremacist, nationalists, white supremacists, settler colonial governments continue to wage war against the body of women, trans women, Black, Indigenous and racialized women, queer and trans women. We witnessed the overturning of Roe versus Wade in the U.S, the ongoing surveillance, violence and killing of Black and Indigenous women by police here in Canada and elsewhere globally, the rise of white ethnonationalism fascism, and racism has escalated the heteromasculine impulse resulting in increased management and control of women's bodies across the globe.
>
> But we say our bodies are our choice. Kurdish and Iranian women have risen up and are flooding the streets of Iran in defiance of violent police attacks with all intentions of bringing the government down. [….] Women in Iran are a force to be reckoned with […] particularly those of us as women who refuse the capitalists hetero patriarchal religious supremacist

> racist and fascist state (NPPC Solidarity Statement at the Women, Life, Freedom Rally on October 2, 2022, n.d.)

Thus, transnational WLFTO solidarities were constructed by acknowledging the intersectional nature of feminist struggles and reinforcing alternative ways of relating to others (Arampatzi, 2017; Featherstone, 2012) beyond national identities. Evidently, the national, racial, and cultural diversity of the city of Toronto played a key role in enabling transnational connections that feminist activists employed as a strategy for solidarity-making.

As members of FFJTO rebuild their connections within and beyond Toronto, they practice what Yuval-Davis (2016, p. 12) describes as "transversal politics" or "cosmopolitan dialogical politics." Transversal politics are a form of belonging beyond national divisions and identity categories. Participants in transversal politics, Yuval-Davis argues, engage with "other" belongings to collectivities across boundaries and borders; however, they do not act as their representatives but rather as advocates of shared values and ideals. Yuval-Davis (2016, p. 13) describes the ways in which *Southall Black Sisters* in London practice transversal politics in defending women against domestic violence while at the same time opposing those who sought to resolve domestic abuse caused by migrant men by deporting them from Britain – "Racist solutions should not be the answer to sexist problems". In Yuval Davis's (2016, p. 13) formulation, transversal politics involves building a mutual epistemological approach to a specific condition rather than taking the same political actions. It is bounded by sharing common values through embracing difference "while continuously crossing collectivity boundaries". Collins (2017) builds on these discussions, arguing that when combined with intersectionality, as pursued by African American feminists, transversal politics provide a better understanding of political oppressions and tools to fight against them. Collins (2017, p. 1470) further elaborates, positing that rather than "subordinating one's issues into some greater good, as suggested within prevailing understandings of solidarity,

remaining rooted while shifting constitutes a viable if not essential political option." Thus, an intersectional approach to transversal politics allows solidarity participants to engage with "other's" resistance while simultaneously making links with "their own" struggle. For Collins (2017, 1470), intersectionality, when "coupled with Yuval-Davis's framework of the rooting and shifting of transversal politics, potentially facilitates thinking through coalition politics within a context of intersecting power relations". Therefore, intersectional solidarity sustains transversal politics as an alternative to identity-based solidarity, enabling participants to acknowledge multiple yet intersected forms of oppression and exploitation and to build coalitions across differences.

In the context of WLF, transversal politics are facilitated within Toronto's multi-national urban environment. When a call for solidarity is made in such a politically, nationally, and culturally diverse urban space, transnational links between activists, communities, and collective can be consolidated when driven by a desire to learn from each other's perspectives and experiences, and, in so doing, create a "learning laboratory" (Arampatzi, 2017) through which knowledge and information are mobilized across collectives. Thus, WLFTO fostered transversal-urban solidarities, a place-based collective action that transgresses ideological belongings and identity categories in pursuit of mutually defined goals and strategies. Within the WLFTO transversal-urban solidarities framework, the fight against state-led gender violence is essential, yet only one facet of the transnational feminist struggle. In order for this solidarity to occur, the specificity of gender-based violence in the Iranian geopolitical context must be recognized while transnational geopolitical forces that sustain it are not abandoned.

In juxtaposition to transversal urban solidarities, as discussed earlier, are nationalist solidities. The symbols of nationalist solidarities are, indeed, present during rallies; for example, some solidarity rally participants concentrate on the Iranian character of the revolution by

emphasizing the Lion and Sun flag (Figure 6-6) and describing it as a revolution (only by) Iranian people (Figure 6-7)

Figure 6-6 The Lion and Sun Flag in Nathan Phillips Square (source: author).

Figure 6-7 WLF Banner in Yong Street, North York (source: author).

Other mediums, such as sound and music, were also used for chanting slogans and anthems[27] centred upon Iranian nationalism (Figure 6-8). These forms of auditory media seek to present WLF as a revolution made by the "Iranian people", confining its geographies to nation-state borders while disregarding the Kurdish origin of the uprising and its transnational significance.

Figure 6-8 The Use of Large Speakers during Solidarity Rallies (source: author).

Within mainstream diaspora politics, WLF is often projected through Iranian nationalism, which can marginalize certain groups from solidarity space due to the systematic oppressive nationalist discourses surrounding gendered, sexualized, and racial others. By framing WLF as an Iranian revolution, nationalist ideals and values are reinforced, which are resisted and confronted by feminist and queer activists. These discourses collapse multiple and heterogeneous national, sexual and gender identities, subjectivities, and expressions as part of one unified Iranian identity while utilizing solidarity as a temporary tool for political transition and political means of mobilization against the mutual enemy. Thus, even though

[27] While both Farsi and English slogans could be heard during protests and demonstrations, in North York with a large population of Iranian residents, Farsi was the predominant language, whereas, in Nathan Phillips and Dundas, English chants were used more frequently.

opposition to the Islamic Republic comprises an important facet of mobilization among political groups, including feminist, socialist, queer, and Kurdish activists, their activism is caught in discourses of national unity by select political elites who seek to present their version of national solidarity as the only viable alternative to the current state in Iran. Shayan (Interview, October 30, 2022), a queer activist, reflects on heterosexism embedded in exclusionary nationalist discourses, particularly mirrored in the ”Man, Homeland, Prosperity” slogan, which is occasionally chanted during WLF protests and rallies: “It carries bullying and threatening meaning. You can see all your traumas in the slogan and how under patriotism, patriarchy has ruined so many lives”. Several feminist and queer scholars (Domosh, 2005; Kuntsman, 2008; Mayer, 2004; Militz, 2020; Puar, 2006) have critically observed nationalism as an inherently heteropatriarchal project enabling sexuality-based discrimination and violence justified by discourses of patriotism. As Mayer (2004, p. 153) explains, employing gender and sexuality as analytical categories provides an important framework for understanding the process and power relations through which the nation is constructed.

Importantly, the exclusionary character of nationalist discourses becomes evident through labelling those who are critical of diaspora opposition as separatists or traitors. Recalling an encounter with some rally participants, Sharhzad, an activist-artist whose work focuses on Kurdish women's movements, explained she was accused of being a separatist: “This is a game played by loyalists. They are afraid of the unity that is forming in Iran. Because there is a strong awareness forming in this unity that never existed before, this separatist discourse does not function anymore”. Such experiences are not unique to Toronto. Social media analysis reveals that stigmatizing behaviours prevailed among some opposition groups against Kurdish activists, targeting them for pursuing separatist agendas and risking national

unity and geographical integrity. Sahar, another feminist activist, reflects on how such a problematic conception of solidarity centred upon a unified Iranian identity as a means for making a revolution has become a source of frustration and disengagement among some feminist activists with broader diaspora opposition: “I think one of the main challenges for us [feminist activists in Toronto] is to unsettle this fast-food perspective to revolution. That the revolution should take place fast” (Interview, December 3, 2022). These critical insights signal how WLFTO is partially characterized by discriminatory discourses maintained by associating solidarity with a unified Iranian national identity and excluding subjectivities and identities that deviate from it. Such diverging approaches to solidarity (i.e. national versus transversal) echo Tuck and Yang's (2012 quoted in Mott, 2016, p. 7) observation that solidarity “is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.”

Transversal-urban solidarities operate locally and globally by maintaining connections between activists across cities, countries, and continents. Such dynamic transnational connections between cities in which the FFJ network is activated problematize the binary of local/global activism. While adhering to the group’s values and principles against “war, execution, prison, torture, discrimination or femicide,” cities have autonomy in making decisions about implementing strategies and actions based on their distinct socio-political landscape. Such relative autonomy is informed by distinct socio-political landscapes in cities, partly shaped by national migration policies, as discussed in Chapter 5. Sahar describes how the FFJ network varies in terms of the number of activists across countries and continents due to such policies toward Iranian immigrants and refugees:

> We have folks from Beirut and Melbourne. We do not have anyone from South America or Russia. The reason is that the majority of folks, if they were not migrants, were refugees. Where would refugees go? Europe and

> North America. So, one reason why the majority of Femisnits4Jina are in Europe is that Europe, at the time, accepted a lot of political refugees. The reason for Europe's centrality to the political diaspora, especially the left, is its approach to accepting refugees.

As I argued in the previous chapter, geographies of activism across diasporas and, in turn, transversal feminist solidarities are heterogeneous and impacted by migration policies at national and international levels.

Given the "urgent" need for national solidarity at a time ripe for political transition. transversal solidarities are perceived as politically irrelevant by diaspora opposition groups whose primary goal is "regime change." Nevertheless, many feminist activists refuse the labour to integrate into solidarity discourses that perpetuate heterosexist and queerphobic tendencies under the guise of national solidarity: "It takes much energy. Because you have to deal with loyalists. Or convince the orthodox left, that women and queer issues are important. We need to choose our battle based on our time and energy" (Interview, November 29, 2022), states Negin, one of the network members. Such a position resists the utilizing feminism for geopolitical purposes by "the opposition". Under a transversal approach to solidarity, feminism is not an additive to opposition politics. Instead, it interrupts geopolitical logic and questions uncritical solidarity that seeks to obscure prefigurative and radical feminist practices. Such interventions showcase the potential of transversal-urban solidarities, which captures how grassroots activists and communities resist and counter the violent domination of nationalism and state forces.

Transversal-urban solidarities work to establish and create a transnational network through local connections, reworking nationalist discourses that perpetuate geopolitical domination. FFJTO disengages from heterosexist and racist solidarity discourses and, instead, cultivates transversal-urban solidarities by countering political approaches that tend to depoliticize feminism. Under this framework of solidarity, the prefigurative, intersectional and

transnational nature of feminist activism is preserved and materialized as a form of "scale jumping" (Mayer, 2004) that is practiced at scales that are finer and larger than the nation (Hyndman, 2004). These emergences of counter-geopolitics further reveal the importance of intimacy – practices cultivated through kinship networks during the OMSC campaign as well as newer transnational connections in the host countries – in undermining the dominant geopolitical narrative by state and political elites. They mobilize diaspora activists across multiple cities outside the country, creating potential for transformative knowledge, practices, and spaces that further disrupt the geopolitical logic of nationalism. In the following section, I build on transversal solidarities by delving into how they may or may not be sustained through radical care by activists, communities, and institutions they are involved with in Toronto.

Sustaining Solidarity Through Radical Care

> Do we actually care to create a sustainable network? Or do we expect everyone just to come and work? There should be principles (Interview, November 29, 2022).
>
> Those who have not done much political work are often looking for results. One of my challenges is to explain social and political change as a process that takes time. Our activities should not be dependent on whether or not people are on the street. So when they are not, it means it does not exist anymore (Interview, December 3, 2022).

While solidarities provide immense opportunity for mobilization among feminist activists in Toronto, there are challenges in sustaining solidarity networks. As discussed in Chapter 5, emotional burdens present an important challenge for activists living apart from families and communities in Iran. The critical importance of emotional support is more evident during times of political crisis, particularly for those with intimate ties with activists in the country who are under constant state threats of persecution. Sahar, a member of FFJ, describes enduring a "double life" in diasporas as "a hard reality" experienced by activists:

> We [activists] always have to define a boundary between the life we have here to survive to pay rent, to finish our studies, worrying about tuition fees, […]. On the other hand, the country is on fire. Half of those we know are going in and out of prison every day.

The experience of living a double life as an activist in exile is echoed in the words of Maryam al-Khawaja, a Bahraini human rights activist, describing the challenges of activism after fleeing Bahrain:

> Being an activist in exile involves many levels of struggle. First and foremost is the struggle of being on your own. Especially for those who have been working on the ground. You have suddenly lost your family, your community, and all your support. Hardship is easier to endure when you are going through it with others. This solitude tends to be accompanied by survivor's guilt. Most activists who survive when others do not, who avoid prison while others are incarcerated, and who can move freely when others cannot know this feeling very well. You feel guilty all the time, and that guilt drives your everyday life… There is a constant need to be connected, and I feel an anxiety about losing that connection. It almost becomes as if you are living in two worlds at the same time – and those worlds rarely meet (Al-Khawaja, 2017).

Being in diaspora/exile provides certain levels of protection. However, separation from one's own family and community can also carry with it feelings of guilt by those who survived, fearing for the safety of loved ones. While not under direct security threats, as Khawaja describes, activism in exile is accompanied by feelings of helplessness— "knowing that a loved one might be tortured right at that moment, and knowing that you cannot do anything to stop it from happening" (Al-Khawaja, 2017).

There are, however, limited ways to show emotional support to activists captivated by the state. A year after the beginning of WLF, 27 feminist activists wrote collective notes to be sent to Elaheh Mohammadi and Niloofar Hamedi, the two journalists who published the news of Jina's death and have been imprisoned ever since. Such collective acts of care, however small the gesture might be in seeking to provide emotional support in facing state aggression and brutality, are integral to sustaining feminist solidarities across borders. In almost every

event held in Toronto, the pictures of those executed or imprisoned by the Islamic Republic were present to commemorate their immense bravery and sacrifices. These acts of collective care towards those being targeted by the most severe forms of state violence, as Hyndman (2017, p.38) puts it, provide "responsible relative representation … of loss, pain, and destruction without further fuelling conflict" and resist the domination of metric and measure of violence over loss, suffrage and trauma.

Reflecting on emotional burdens as well as economic precarity as a challenge for long-term organizing was echoed by other activists in Toronto, as well. Student activists are among those whose activism is constrained by economic precarity. Negin, a student activist at York University, highlights precarious living conditions, particularly among students, as a determinant factor in undermining the sustainability of activism:

> [Activism] is a full-time job. With FFJ, there are tasks that include content production, event organizing, connecting across cities, and developing the network. And all are volunteers. But there are limits. At some point, someone would say [I have this issue to deal with]. I will be back in a month. Or I [for example] would say I have to finish my thesis [laughs] and leave for a month. You know this is not sustainable. It is the question of sustainability. The sustainability of the movements we aim to build is very important (Interview, November 29, 2022).

The question of sustainability in feminist solidarity further points toward the critical importance of collective care. Geographers have made a call for radical care which is centred upon intersectional and non-dominant forms of care (Dowler et al., 2019; Lugones, 2010), recognizing "different bodily experiences while being mindful of a commonality of vulnerability that stems from national or institutional policies and politic" (Dowler et al., 2019, p. 35). Radical care, as Dowler et al. (2019, p. 36) explain, is informed by feminist geographers' work on "politics of discomfort," which avoids flattening diverse experiences of vulnerability and violence (Gokarıksel et al., 2017). Rather, a radical care practice is "fluid, evolving, and responsive to experiences of different vulnerabilities as well as

advocating/identifying transformative solutions." Such practices go beyond reactive, short-term responses to the manifestation of institutional and political violence; instead, they include sustained efforts by community members in proactively fighting against structures that create and maintain vulnerability. Radical care in this context has been proposed as a practice by academic communities and institutions; however, through observation of public events held at universities, I argue that radical care can potentially have political implications for wider communities in sustaining solidarity spaces.

Practices of care manifest within WLFTO through institutional efforts as well as community initiatives. In an email circulated by York University titled "Supports available for International Students from Iran", *International Student and Scholar Services* provided information for accessing financial and wellness support for Iranian students and staff in light of the news of violence against women and university students from Iran (personal communication, Woo Kim, October 8, 2022). Care practices are also rooted in the capacity of Iranian students to collectively leverage their bargaining power in pushing universities to take supportive measures for those in Iran. For example, students at some universities demanded that university administrations extend application and registration deadlines for Iranian students or exempt them from tuition and application fees, as many did not have access to the Internet due to the state's restrictions throughout protests. While such care practices at institutional levels are occasional, short-term responses to address urgent issues, they signal communities' potential to care for those in proximate and distant geographies.

Institutional care also touches on the discussion of caretaking by the state. The idea of state practice of care can be a divisive debate among different feminist positions about the state; "Is the state inherently patriarchal and disciplining, or can it be liberating and create recognition of care?" (Dahl, 2010, p. 153). Bringing care from the private to the public sphere

of the state pertains to the contested topic of professionalization among feminists (which was discussed in Chapter 5), typically referring to the monopoly of knowledge (Dahl, 2010, p. 160). While for some, professionalization of care enhances the quality of care, for others, it has a deteriorating effect, as practical knowledge is replaced by theoretical and academic knowledge (Dahl, 2010). One example of the state practice of care for Iranian protestors was a political sponsorship initiative by some feminist activists in Europe. Political sponsorship[28] takes place when members of parliament choose a political prisoner and leverage their power to free them by contacting the ambassador and the government in charge of the prisoner (Ferris, 2023). Although the facilitation of political sponsorship by feminist activists was criticized for being inefficient in protecting protestors' lives from execution, I argue that such efforts can not be ignored as an important contribution of activists in diasporas in the WLF context.

Practices of radical care that account for power relations across solidarity groups can potentially play a vital role in overcoming normative hierarchies within academia, which facilitates collaboration between progressive feminist academic and activist communities to maintain and develop solidarity networks. Niloofar, a feminist academic activist at York University, observes panels organized by some universities in Toronto as important efforts for networking and knowledge mobilization among diaspora communities. However, she critically observes, "I do not see much constructive conversation […] We [panellists] went up there and spoke. But I think a moderated conversation is important […]. There are many well-educated Iranians [here in Canada]. How come we still do not have this?" (Interview, August 7, 2023). Overcoming such normative hierarchies within activist and academic

[28] کفالت سیاسی

communities facilitates solidarity-making, where knowledge is mobilized in a reciprocal way across different communities.

Given security concerns, cultivating care practices through mobilizing material resources and finding safe channels for financial support for those in Iran[29] are increasingly challenging. In a public event organized by student activists at the University of Toronto titled “Iranian Revolution and the Academic Community”, participants, including students, university professors and staff, and activists discussed practical, long-term strategies to provide support for Iranian student applicants who face difficulty in accessing their academic records or are expelled due to participation in protests (field notes, November 2022). In addition to security concerns and limited institutional resources, as one activist participant and a member of FFJ observes, there needs to be a more collective effort on the part of activist academics with wider access to institutional and financial resources for mobilizing activists and communities in Toronto: “We are very dispersed. […] We have so many well-established Marxist-feminist and leftists. How come we do not have an institute for like-minded students and scholars to share ideas and produce knowledge?" (Interview, November 29, 2022). Such reflection echoes feminist scholars’ views that “without power as a resource,” ethics of care fall short in exerting socio-political transformation; at best, they remain a utopian image (Yuval Davis, 2016, p. 8).

Given the unequal access to institutional and economic resources, implementing radical care is an important way to address challenges associated with the labour of activism that may drain individual energies in the long term. Although transnational connections among FFJ members have been largely sustained through various digital platforms, home spaces also

[29] Such issues became more central as the posibility for nation-wide strikes was growing throughout protest.

play a key role in sustaining solidarity among activists in Toronto, providing resourceful and safe spaces for mutual care and support (Muftee & León, 2022). Much like earlier examples of safe spaces in activists' homes during OMSC (see Chapter 5), radical care sustains feminist solidarity in socially and politically hostile environments. In these micro scales of intimate homes, solidarity is not merely a political tool for overthrowing the current state. Instead, it provides an alternative to the heterosexist and racist logic of nationalism, which obscures gendered, sexualized and racialized Others through national unity discourses.

Intimate connections revived and created among feminist activists in diasporas in the wake of the WLF uprising provide opportunities for implementing radical care, which Hobart and Kneese (2020, p. 2) define as essential yet often neglected strategies to address precarity. Nonetheless, care, according to Hobart and Kneese (2020, p. 2), must be addressed through caution because "it can be used to coerce subjects into new forms of surveillance and unpaid labor, to make up for institutional neglect, and even to position some groups against others, determining who is worthy of care and who is not." In the context of feminist activism, radical care seeks to contest or disengage with systematic inequalities and, in doing so, practice feminist politics of discomfort by reworking normative social and political structures and neoliberal values that perpetuate vulnerability and precarity. Unlike the neoliberal imperative of self-care, as Inna Michaeli (quoted in Hobart & Kneese, 2020, p. 5) describes, radical care implies an understanding of a self which is positioned in a specific time-space embedded in violence and vulnerability. In the spatio-temporal context of WLFTO, such an understanding further materializes as a feminist approach to care that refuses to "ground its ontological base in membership in specific national, ethnic or religious communities" (Yuval-Davis, 2016, p. 11). Cultivating radical care within transversal solidarities ought to confront the dominance of nationalism by exposing the underlying oppressive nature of such

discourses, which is blind to the intersectional matrix of power that creates violence and vulnerability.

As such, the critical role of radical care in sustaining feminist solidarities illustrates the importance of intimate spaces, relations, and practices in unsettling a state-centric understanding of geopolitics. It is crucial to consider the political power of care in asking ourselves: How did mutual feelings of pain, rage, and hope that helped us find each other in these dispersed geographies make us care radically for each other and *Zan, Zendegi, Azadi*? Elaborating on place-based ethics of care, Till (2012, p. 12) argues that the "moment of the wound" is unfolding; it is "neither singular nor inevitable." As WLF solidarities have mobilized feminist activists, practices of radical care must be taken seriously in the future of feminist counter-geopolitics such that they are performed as everyday, collective practice at institutional and community levels to address the diverse and multiple needs of individuals, groups, and communities.

Conclusion: Intimate-Urban Geopolitics

In the wake of the WLF revolutionary uprising and the urgent call for national solidarity in the diaspora, transversal-urban solidarities present transnational, intersectional and place-based alternatives to exclusionary racist and heterosexist discourses. Cultivating transversal-urban solidarities, exemplified in practices by feminist activist members of FFJ, works against discourses that understand solidarity primarily through a unified Iranian national identity, exclusive of racial and queer "other". While such discourses arguably dominate the political space of the diaspora, WLFTO solidarity spaces also foster practices and discourses beyond the confines of nationalism. Oosterlynck et al. (2019, p. 777) argue that "understanding of solidarities has been limited by framing it almost exclusively in the spatio-temporal register of the national state with fixed territorial boundaries and perceived

historical continuity". Increased national and cultural diversity in Western societies, however, necessitates a renewed approach to solidarity one "that can be found in the here of relational places and the now of instantaneous acts and practices between very different people" (Oosterlynck et al., 2019, p. 777). As shown in this chapter, within the emerging geographies of diaspora solidarity, transversal-urban solidarities formulate more diverse, politically relevant, and inclusive spaces, serving as an essential component of feminist counter-geopolitics in opposing exclusionary diaspora politics and signalling pathways toward emancipatory futures.

Massaro (2015) argues that intimate urban geopolitics provides insight into urban contestation, securitization, and conflict by focusing on the everyday and revealing resistance against geopolitical violence that annihilates spaces, networks and livelihoods. She writes that much of feminist geopolitics literature "implicitly equates intimate spaces with private or domestic spaces, that is, women's spaces and experiences" (Massaro, 2015, p. 373). This tendency disregards the political potential within the urban to foster transformative geopolitical practices, modes of solidarity making, and ways of caring for one another. However, if we "broaden the spatial conception of an intimate space" (Massaro, 2015, p. 373), it becomes possible to better understand the role of cities as sites of transgressive solidarity-making and care-taking practices that work against and beyond the geopolitical logic of nationalism. Through an intimate urban geopolitics lens, activating intimate past and present relations between activists who share similar epistemological approaches to emancipatory futures allows for building transversal solidarities to create space of counter-geopolitics. By expanding the realm of the intimate to encompass the urban, as Massaro suggests, room is made to see the political potential of intimacy in formulating transversal-

urban solidarities, which in turn shape spaces for practice and knowledge of feminist counter-geopolitics.

However, there are ways in which spaces of transversal-urban solidarity are foreclosed to activists dealing with precarious living conditions. Activists with less access to institutional and financial resources, such as students, confront more challenges in participating in solidarity spaces. Given the ways in which precarity conditions the sustainability of feminist activism, it is essential to consider the political implication of radical care across activist and wider diaspora communities. While occasional and short-term institutional and community initiatives in catering to the urgent needs of communities are critical in times of crises, such care practices must be pursued as long-term strategies and everyday actions if WLF solidarities are to be sustained. It is not easy to predict the future of solidarity spaces in Toronto and elsewhere because of the changing and dynamic geopolitical contexts at home and in the diaspora. However, the Iranian state's increased aggression against dissidents since the beginning of the WLF revolutionary uprising and restrictive migration policies by the Western government, particularly targeting international students[30], present some of the ways in which sustaining solidarities across borders are challenged within an increasingly precarious environment for immigrant and student activists.

[30] Canada's federal government recently stated that there will be "a cap on the number of international students to ease the pressure on the housing market" (Tunney, 2023).

7. Conclusion: The Intimacies of Feminist Counter-Geopolitics

Feminist counter-geopolitics occurs at various spatial scales, from the intimacies of bodies and homes to the public spaces of cities and the public spheres of nations, regions, and the globe. A defining characteristic of counter-geopolitics is the relational understanding of these spatial scales as non-hierarchical and intimately shaping each other. This dissertation traces counter-geopolitics by foregrounding feminist subjects whose activisms contest patriarchal systems of socio-political structures.

In this concluding chapter, I rethink the concept of counter-geopolitics and theoretical debates I put forward in Chapter 2. I consider how the concept can be re-conceptualized through the experiences of feminist activists whose lives are intertwined with geopolitical structures of state violence and displacement. I also put previous chapters in dialogue with each other and with the key concepts that anchor my theoretical framework, including notions of intimacy, the geopolitics of (im)mobility, state-bordering practices, and urban geopolitics. By emphasizing the potential of intimate relations, practices, and spaces in contesting and negotiating geopolitical structures that create and sustain state violence and displacement, I build on the theorization of feminist counter-geopolitics. Under the framework of this dissertation, the lens of intimate geopolitics provides an important conceptual frame through which to theorize minor and major scales of feminist activism as co-constitutive rather than hierarchical. In this concluding chapter, I further unpack the concept of intimate geopolitics that has tied previous chapters together and argue that although activist efforts to negotiate and contest dominant geopolitical systems are often rendered invisible within mainstream and public discourses, counter-geopolitics provide immense potential in contesting geopolitical structures of violence and displacement.

In the context of accelerated transnational migration from Iran, there is a need to understand how feminist activism persists even after activists have left their home countries through facilitating transnational bonds of solidarity, sisterhood, and care. Within critical and feminist geopolitical scholarship, there is much room to explore further the complex ways activism in diasporas continues to play important roles in shaping the geopolitical landscape in home and host countries. In embarking on this task in this dissertation, I have shown that contrary to some views (Bayat, 2024), diasporas play an active role in formulating progressive and emancipatory political discourses and practices. Taking into account the dynamic and complex character of activism in diasporas in relation to politics at home provides a means to disrupt discourses of diaspora/domestic dichotomy – favoured and propagated by Iranian authorities – which treats diaspora activism as predominantly a monolith shaped by foreign state power and interests. As I discussed, a focus on political kinships nourished in intimate home space and their manifestation as a form of transnational feminist network reveals how diaspora geopolitics take place outside of the state framework. Such an analytical focus fills the existing gap in feminist geopolitical literature that has neglected the experiences of activists in diasporas, revealing the limitations and potential of their efforts in contesting dominant state power in a transnational context. Within feminist geopolitical and transnational studies, exploring how those who left their home country continue their activism in diasporas demonstrates that diaspora geographies are more than scattered and isolated spaces but rather complex and interconnected terrains of geopolitical manifestations and contestations.

To unpack how counter-geopolitics materialized in Iranian diasporas, in Chapter 3, I discussed the methodological approach to collecting and analyzing data. Specifically, I detailed methodological design and analysis, focusing on intimacy within transnational

feminist methodologies. I did so by theorizing intimacy methodologically, which builds upon transnational feminist scholarship to account for intimate relationships and reflections as critical components of conducting qualitative research. This inquiry enabled me to unpack my changing positionality and relationship with research participants through more intimate engagement with activists during and after the WLF uprising. Furthermore, an intimate methodological approach enabled reflection on the potential changing security risks that research may exert on research participants in a surveilled research field riddled with political uncertainties. Mobilizing and exposing these intimacies as an important component of research reveals the politically charged nature of research, particularly in a geopolitical context where the state enforces violence, imprisonment, and displacement.

I used qualitative research methods, including document and media analysis, semi-structured interviews, and (visual) ethnography, to address the research goal of examining knowledge, practices, and spaces created, performed, and cultivated by feminist activists in Iranian diasporas in confronting geopolitical structures of state violence and displacement. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 each focused on a different aspect of feminist activism across select European and Canadian cities by re-orienting the focus of geopolitical inquiry away from state-centric approaches. In Chapter 4, I addressed the ways in which transnational migration of activists impacted activists' knowledge of gender and sexual-based violence and what specific challenges and opportunities emerged in implementing cross-national conversations and dialogues. It further detailed the ways in which activists' involvement with ongoing social and political movements in Europe and Canada influenced their approach to feminist activism, often characterized as becoming more intersectional, in seeing multiple axes of violence and discrimination across gender, sexuality, class, and racial differences as overlapping rather than exclusive. Particularly, I examined how activists' embodied and

situated knowledges of gender and sexuality-based violence has shaped and manifested in their activism. Digital spaces such as social media platforms provide an important tool for mobilizing this embodied and situated knowledges among a wide audience in and outside of the country. While transnational migration of activists, along with the accelerating use of social media, has provided immense opportunities for mutual learning and teaching between activists across national borders, there are challenges in translating ideas, knowledge, and theories, which are associated with ideological, linguistic, and disciplinary differences. As I showed in this chapter, different levels of language proficiencies at times undermine the possibilities of finding common ground in conversations. Further challenges in knowledge mobilization across feminist academic and activist communities are particularly evident when it comes to the political potential of Islamic feminism, which is closely tied to debates surrounding the exploitation of Islamic discourses by Iranian authorities in pursuing their interests and propaganda.

While critical debates about the domination of Islamic feminism have been long-standing among feminist and women's rights activists and scholars, with the outbreak of Women, Life, and Freedom, such debates re-surfaced at a larger scale, reflected in a collective statement by many feminist and political activists and scholars in highlighting the epistemic dismissal of Iranian state gender-based violence. I argued that a feminist politics of translation, increasingly pursued by activists in the past couple of years through utilizing creative means of knowledge mobilization (such as performance), collaborative methods of knowledge production between academics and activists, and translation of feminist works from diverse national contexts (including and in particular those situated in the Global South), have effectively facilitated processes to bridge the current gap between feminist knowledge and practices.

Taking into account the intertwined nature of knowledge and practice in feminist activism, in Chapter 5, I extend the discussion by focusing on practical and material facets of counter-geopolitics. Drawing on the concept of resourceful activism, in this chapter, I answered how activists in Iranian diasporas mobilize resources. I built upon the discussion surrounding resourcefulness, theorized as an alternative to a capitalist mode of material distribution, by showing how activists draw on intimate relations and spaces as crucial resources, exemplified in cultivating political kinships in home spaces. Political kinship is a crucial component of counter-geopolitics, encompassing the mobilization of shared resources such as food and safe spaces. As shown in this chapter, political kinship networks facilitate addressing material needs as well as providing emotional support that mitigates feelings and experiences of alienation and isolation by activists in diasporas. Safe spaces of activists' homes, where kinship is most evident, provide opportunities for further exploration of mutual experiences related to state violence, war, and exile, as well as imagining and working toward shared hopes and aspirations. I further discussed how the possibility of cultivating political kinship and collective organizing, are influenced by the socio-political landscape of cities where activists reside, which itself is shaped by transnational migration policies at national and international institutional levels. Activists' insights reveal that, for example, Berlin and, more broadly, European cities are perceived as more resourceful in terms of capacities for organizing among radical, queer, leftist, and feminist activists than North American cities due to the higher presence of political refugees and prominent feminist activists. These examples of uneven geographies of activism in terms of kinship-making and networking reflect the power of nation-states in shaping activist practices through migration and refugee policies.

Further in this chapter, I discuss the challenges of enacting resourceful activism, explaining how governance forces dictate access to financial resources. Such forces manifest through the

professionalization of activism, which creates an environment where activists are put in competition for governmental funding resources through defining projects. Such an environment undermines opportunities for networking and connection-building across communities. Thus, rather than transforming material and political conditions, expertise tendencies of project activism impose and incorporate hegemonic discourses of institutional power (Chatterton & Pickerill, 2010). In determining power dynamics among activists, governance feminism is also closely tied to the ways in which activists receive recognition within mainstream and social media, such as TV news channels and Instagram. Incorporating media analysis into feminist geopolitical scholarship exposes the complex implications of mainstream and social media on feminist activism in diasporas. Such analysis at the intersection of popular and feminist geopolitics provides a better understanding, for example, of ways in which racialized activists are often rendered invisible and how to address the lack of representation across some activist communities.

Building upon these discussions on challenges and opportunities in mobilizing knowledges and resources in a transnational context by feminist activists, in Chapter 6, I focused on the spatial character of feminist counter-geopolitics with a case study of solidarity-making in Toronto in the wake of Woman, Life, Freedom. The chapter answers my research questions about how we should theorize feminist solidarities, including their temporalities and spatialities, and how we take care of these solidarities. I argued that the multinational character of the city makes Toronto a relatively resourceful urban space[31] to cultivate transnational solidarities. In such a nationally diverse urban context, emerging transversal solidarities in the aftermath of Woman, Life, Freedom effectively expose intersectional

[31] However, it might be less so compared to cities such as Berlin, for the stronger presence of anti-racist, progressive, and radical activism (see Chapter 5).

structures of gender-based violence while facilitating bonds of feminist friendship and sisterhood among activists. At the same time, WLFTO made visible solidarities emerging through Iranian nationalism, which centres upon a unified national identity. Contrary to the nationalist formulation of solidarity and drawing on Yuval Davis' view on transversal solidarity, I argued that feminist transversal solidarities provide crucial and progressive political tools for those in diasporas as they enable possibilities to address racist discourses of Iranian nationalism evident in dominant solidarity practices. Under a transversal approach to solidarity, feminism is not an additive to opposition politics, but instead, it interrupts geopolitical logic and questions uncritical solidarity that seeks to obscure prefigurative and radical feminist practices. By observing practices of solidarity by activist members of Feminists4Jina in Toronto, I showed that *transversal-urban solidarities* manifest as politics that function simultaneously at the urban and global levels, creating affinity bonds among activists through shared political visions.

This chapter also illustrates obstacles in sustaining solidarities cultivated in the aftermath of Jina's death. Continuing the earlier discussion about activist resources, activism is increasingly conditioned by socioeconomic precarity that activists in the diaspora are faced with, which makes taking care of solidarities a challenging task. A radical approach to care, as feminist geographers have shown, exposes disproportionate experiences of violence and, by doing so, works against structures that create and sustain vulnerabilities. Despite difficulties in addressing disproportionate experiences of injustice and precarity, such as those faced by international students, and accounting for different individual capacities for long-term activism, these historical moments of collective mobilization reveal the power of feminist counter-geopolitics. They push us to think and act on the question of how alternative

feminist futures can be imagined and built through transversal solidarities by activists across global geographies.

Together, these chapters provide a novel perspective on feminist activisms in Iranian diasporas within interconnected and dynamic geographies. While the geopolitical structures of state violence and displacement inform limitations in activism and dictate (im)mobilities across borders, these chapters revealed how counter-geopolitical knowledges, practices, and spaces provide opportunities to assert feminist agencies and subjectivities against dominating state powers. In addressing the lack of sufficient attention to transnational feminist activisms in geopolitical studies, this dissertation provides a space to understand how, despite significant challenges, feminist activists extend the realm of geopolitics to contest and negotiate patriarchal state structures.

Multiscalar Character of Feminist Counter-geopolitics

Feminist counter-geopolitics are certainly limited in scope and scale of impact. Often, they merely interrupt, rather than radically reconfigure, the political structures of state power. These activisms are impacted by state power and governance structures which restrict possibilities of more radical and larger-scale feminist activisms. However, as I have shown, political kinship and intimate relations cultivated during OMSC and the ways they sustained through time and space and re-emerged in the context of WLF reveal the potential of feminist counter-geopolitics and showcase how intimacy and geopolitics co-construct each other. Thinking of small and large scales of activism as co-constitutive, intimate social and political relations need to be considered crucial components of long-term activism and collective mobilization and as a manifestation of counter geopolitics that increasingly resists domination of state power.

As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, although at first, kinship among activist participants in the OMSC might be perceived as only existing at the individual level and small social circles, they eventually led to the creation of an extensive transnational network. These dynamics between small and large-scale feminist activism are evident in the activist practices of FFJ, which works simultaneously at the urban and global levels. Conceptualizing counter-geopolitics through such instances of scale jumping illustrates the diversity of feminist activisms, revealing a fluid understanding of scale. Taking into account such diversity in the scale of activism further reveals the power of intimacy as spaces, relations, and practices to disrupt dominant geopolitical structures across a wide range of temporal and spatial displays. While some of these intimate geopolitical spaces and practices manifested at individual or community scales, some extend into larger scales, stretching beyond national and regional boundaries. The multi-scalar nature of feminist counter-geopolitical, thus, forces a re-imagination of the meaning of the intimate to understand how counter-geopolitical knowledge, practices, and space resist and contest the domination of state power in a transnational context.

The analytical power of a multi-scalar approach to explore activisms in diasporas is evident in how it can expand our understanding of intimate geopolitics by highlighting the significance of interpersonal relations and emotional connections in critical geopolitics. These chapters do so by showcasing the critical role of emotional support in the lives and activism of those in diasporas. For activists who do not use external funding resources, the personal networks they create and sustain over many years play a significant role in enhancing emotional well-being while facilitating the mobilization of material resources to formulate politics outside of top-down institutional frameworks. As grassroots activism often takes shape through personal networks of friendship and political kinship to preserve

activists' autonomy, particularly in the aftermath of Jina's death, future research must explore further the ways in which activist mobilization occurs outside of the state framework and institutional power. Paying attention to the intimate aspects of activism in this dissertation highlighted the emotional burden and sometimes isolating character of activism in diasporas, especially for activists with emotional and social ties to those in Iran. As I have shown in Chapter 6, such burdens particularly increase during times of political upheaval and the state's intensified persecution of activists in Iran.

This dissertation's illustration of how activism takes place at multiple scales reveals the dynamic, everyday practices of defiance across communities, organizations, and digital spaces as well as cities, the latter of which is often dismissed in the analysis of geopolitical resistance. Taking into account the important role of cities in feminist action not only pushes the limits of feminist geopolitics to consider activisms that took place at the urban level but also contributes to urban geopolitical literature in further theorizing cities as potential sites of geopolitical defiance. Thus, this research has shown how paying attention to multiple scales of activism, particularly the urban, makes an essential intervention in feminist geopolitics to synthesize the small "p" with the larger "P" of the political (Hyndman, 2004). Indeed, the two are inevitably inseparable, as I have shown by highlighting the critical role of embodied and situated knowledge and intimate home spaces in creating counter-geopolitics. This relative approach to scale builds upon feminist geopolitical literature, which has examined the intimate as sites of geopolitical manifestation and contestation.

Moving Forward…

Throughout my research, there were many moments of optimism. The critical role that activists in diasporas play in resisting and defying state power and displacement forces pushes us to imagine feminist futures beyond patriarchal and authoritarian structures of

power. At the same time, as many activists engage differently with institutional frameworks, it is difficult to predict how activism in diasporas facilitates or undermines entrenched and hegemonic sources of political power. It is essential to consider how utilizing resources available within institutional landscapes outside Iran enhances opportunities for collective organizations and long-term activism. For example, suppose feminist scholars and activists involved with academic and research institutions prioritized educational programs and research projects that centred around radical and transnational feminism. How, then, could knowledge mobilization be accelerated across academic and activist communities so as to contribute to feminist, anti-racist, and anti-capitalist movements at a global scale? Collaborative methods of knowledge production and mobilization, as feminist activists and academics have long advocated for, provide powerful tools for feminist praxis that push back against patriarchal and misogynistic social and political structures.

The scholarly project of continuing to deconstruct the meaning of geopolitics remains ongoing. While the present research pushed against the conventional understanding of geopolitics at the national and international scales through attention to activisms that are cultivated in seemingly mundane spaces of homes and cities, much work remains to focus on feminist activist experiences that are based outside of urban cores of metropolitan areas, namely middle and small-sized cities and suburban/rural areas. Further, the dissertation falls short on activisms in non-Western diaspora geographies, a gap that feminist geographers around the world have increasingly paid attention to and worked on. Although the analysis of this dissertation is not grounded in diasporas of the Global South, notably in transit countries for migrants from Iran, such as Turkey, it is crucial to question and address how feminist activists and scholars participate in building a genuinely transnational politics which refuses

to centre the West as the geographical and ideological reference point of feminist knowledge and practice.

Given the Iranian state's growing hostilities and aggression since September 2022, along with the intensification of geopolitical conflicts and humanitarian violence in the region and across the world, holding onto an optimist position is increasingly difficult, if not impossible. In September 2023, Armita Geravand, a 16-year-old woman, died in hospital a few days after being brutally targeted by the Morality Police in a metro station in Tehran—bearing an uncanny similarity to Jina's story just a year before. Along with intensified police surveillance of public spaces and control over women's bodies, the Iranian authorities continue their approach of criminalizing dissident and feminist activists through violence and propaganda. In November 2023, a *documentary* entitled "Newsmonger[32]" was broadcast on state-backed media. The documentary claimed that the two journalists, Niloofar Hamedi and Elahe Mohammadi, who published the news about Jina's death in a hospital in Tehran, and activist networks they are involved with outside the country, have political and financial ties with foreign states. A few weeks later, a group of feminist activists responded by issuing a statement calling out such false accusations of criminalizing feminist activists and journalists, particularly targeting activist participants in Harasswatch (see Chapter 4). They wrote, "From the misogynistic and anti-feminist view of the authority, whoever lives a feminist life is a spy, and thus dangerous" (Harasswatch, 2023). While the Iranian state's propaganda, in rendering dissidents and activists as agents of foreign powers, has become a conventional state strategy to justify violent persecutive measures, it simultaneously exposes authorities' weak positions and fears in facing the power of feminist bonds of solidarity and sisterhood

[32] خبر چین

among activists across borders. As such, despite the accelerating aggression of the Iranian state, feminist activists' efforts continue to expose the fragility of the patriarchal and authoritarian systems of state power.

At the same time, the intensification of state authoritarianism in Iran since the Women, Life, Freedom uprising has also created divisions and divergence among wider activist communities in diasporas. While radical, anarchist, and queer feminists increasingly invest in grassroots communities for collective mobilization, some activists have shown interest in a top-down approach to political changes. Such approaches, which manifest in activists' lobbying with political elites, in some cases even advocating for more militant interventions, are often only concerned with toppling the current state in Iran. Coupled with the polarization of power in the region in the past couple of years, activists from different political and ideological positions have moved in conflicting directions toward pursuing anti-authoritarian agendas in Iran, the implications of which remain to be seen. Such diverging and, at times, contradictory approaches among feminist activists in diasporas complicate the question of what a feminist future may look like and how counter-geopolitics can materialize as geopolitical landscapes at national, regional, and global levels continue to be characterized by authoritarianism and militarization.

This dissertation has illustrated the complexities and dynamics of feminist activism in diasporas, which offers opportunities for feminist resistance and solidarity. However, it has also shown the necessity for a significant collective effort to implement a more inclusive, safe, and radical space to confront geopolitical structures that perpetuate state violence and displacement. As argued earlier, civil society organizations and activists involved in them could adopt policies which ensure the inclusion of under-represented groups and make further efforts to enhance collaboration and resource sharing rather than getting involved in

unhealthy competition over funds and media representation. Furthermore, well-established feminist activists and academics with access to institutional resources can play a key role in facilitating knowledge mobilization that breaks the "epistemological contract" (Alexander & Mohanty, 2010), instead developing "feminist politics of connection" which enables analytical and practical collaboration between academics and activists through establishing transnational praxis (Peake, 2016).

In the geopolitical landscape of state violence, displacement, war, militarization, and genocide, the question of the meaning of feminist counter-geopolitics is an open-ended one. Although grassroots mobilization and organization in diasporas have played a role in exposing and destabilizing state structures of power, the precarious living conditions of some activists in diasporas, such as social and economic challenges faced by international students, make the labour of activism much more difficult. Under such circumstances, it remains crucial to consider how feminist activism in diasporas helps us to question the dichotomy of the intimate and geopolitics through foregrounding experiences and insights of those who live through and challenge the patriarchal exercise of power on a day-to-day basis. The ways in which activists in diasporas cultivate political kinship and build into intimate geopolitics provide alternative meanings of geopolitics. As such, the seemingly mundane character of intimacy becomes significant; it turns into intimate geopolitics, a political way of activist life which seeks to destabilize the patriarchal and authoritarian power structures. The persistent confrontations between authoritarian states, governance structures, and nationalist forces, on the one hand, and feminist networks of solidarity, kinship, and care, on the other, expose the power of such invisible and evolving intimate relations in theories and practices of feminist geopolitics. To account for the political significance of feminist solidarity and care is to rethink the meaning of intimacy and geopolitics simultaneously. As mentioned earlier,

although intimate spaces, practices, and relations often are only visible at more minute scales and spaces, the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising revealed how they can burst into massive feminist energy, introducing radical changes at the individual, local, national, regional, and global scales. Recognizing the political potential of intimate spaces, practices, and space in today's harsh geopolitical conditions offers an important analytical and political perspective into how we see the violent nature of states and borders and counter-geopolitics that formulate emancipatory alternatives. Although imagining a feminist future under such conditions is increasingly difficult, illuminating the rich experiences of activism in diasporas provides insights into how feminist counter-geopolitics resist and create an alternative to geopolitical structures which perpetuate violence and displacement.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your activism. When did it begin?
2. How do you frame and describe your activism?
3. How did your activism change before/after migration?
4. What are the challenges and opportunities you faced as an activist in diaspora?
5. What are the main resources (financial or otherwise) you use in your activist work?
6. Do political changes in Iran have an impact on your work? If yes, how?

Appendix B

List of participated events in Toronto

Toronto Event	Organizer	Date	Location
1.	The 519	10th of Sep	519 Church St
2.		19th of Sep	Queen's Park to Canadian Broadcasting Centre
3. Light a Candle in the Memorial of Mahsa Amini	York University Community of Iranians (YUCI)	22nd of Sep	York University, Vari Hall
4.		22nd of Sep	Convocation Hall to Spadina metro station
5. Spreading Awareness	Sahar Golshani	23rd of Sep	Dundas Square
6.	Pamenar Cafe	29th of Sep	Pamenar Cafe
7.	Sahar Golshani		Dundas Square
8. Freedom Rally for Iran	Call by Hamed Esmaeilion	1st of Ocb	Richmond Hill
9.	feminists4jina	2nd of Oct	Nathan Philips
10. Be the Voice of Iranian Protestors	University of Toronto	6th of Oct	Sydney Smith Building to Queen's Park
11. Solidarity Protest for Iran	Iranian Youth Organization	8th of Oct	Queen's Park to Harbour Front
12.	Socialist Fight Back		
13. Children of Fire	Aluna Theatre	9th of Oct	16 Ryerson Avenue
14.			Dundas Square (pedestrian)
15. Support the Iranian		15th of Oct	Queen's Park to Nathan Phillips

Revolutionary Movement			
16. Lay Down Bloody	Iranain Youth Organization	16th of Oct	Dundas Square
17. Women, Life, Freedom	OCADU Iranian Student Association	17th to 24th of Oct	OCAD University
18. March for Iran and Afghanistan	OCADU Iranian Student Association	17th of Oct	OCADU to Sydney Smith Hall and Queen's Park
19. The Revolution is Here	University of Toronto: Students for a Free Iran [UTSFI]	27th of Oct	Sydney Hall to Queen's Park
20. The Time is Now: March in Solidarity with Iran	Iran Lovers	5th of November	Queen's Park to Nathan Phillips
21. در چهلم زاهدان	4164717138	9th of November	Mel Lastman Square (5 p.m)
22. Gathering for Zahedan	Iran Lovers	9th of November	Mel Lastman Square (6 p.m)
23. The Time is Now. In Solidarity for Bloody November in Iran	Iran Lover. to	15th, 16th, and 17th of November	Mel Lastman
24. Memorial and Call for Action		18th of November	Nathan Phillips Square
25. The Silent Massacre of November 2019	The association of families of flight PS752 victims	19th of November	Richmond Hill
26. Gathering for Kurdistan	Iran Lovers	24th of November	Mel Lastman
27. International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.	feminists4jina	26th of November	Queen's Park
28. Gathering for Iran	Iran Lovers	29th of November	Mel Lastman
29. PATCHING SEAS OF WAR: CONVIVIAL CULTURE & THE JOY OF DEFIANCE	Jackman Humanities Institute New College Women and Gender Studies Institute Ontario Institute for Studies in Education	2nd of December	William Doo Auditorium New College 45 Willcocks
30. Toronto stands united against tyranny	Salman Sima	3rd of December	Mel Lastman
31. Protesting for the children of Iran	Iran Lovers	5th of December	Dundas Square

32. Dignity, Freedom and Justice for All	The Association of Families of Flight PS752 Victims	10th and 11th December	All across the world
33. Women-led protests in Iran	Yara Leadership Society (Yara); EU2022.CZ; Tirgan	10th of December	The Royal

Online Events	Organized/Sponsored/ Collaborated by	Date
1. Woman, Life, Freedom	GWSS AGITATE@ UMN AGITATE	30th of Sep
2. The Present is Female: #MahsaAmini, Women's Leadership and Iran's "Feminist Revolution"	NC Consortium for Middle East Studies UNC Centre for Middle East and Islamic Studies UNC Persian Studies and Duke University Middle East Studies Centre	3rd of Oct
3. Women, Life, Freedom: The Case of Mahsa Amini and Morality Police in Iran	Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)	4th of Oct
4. #MAHSAAMINI & IRAN'S FEMINIST REVOLUTION	The Rethinking Iran Initiative at The Johns Hopkins' School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)	30th of Sep
5. Women, Life, Liberty: Mahsa Amini, the Women's Movement, and the Future in Iran	University of Toronto Elahé Omidyar Mir-Djalali Institute of Iranian Studies in collaboration with York University's Department of History and the Iranian Women's Organization of Ontario	5th of Oct
6. In Her Name: Women Rising, State Violence, and the Future of Iran	Jadaliyya	30th of Sep
7. Moral Policing and Rebelling Bodies in Iran Today	The University of Chicago Centre for Middle Eastern Studies	5th of Oct
8. Iran feminist protests: Transnational 9. connections and solidarities	The Canada Excellence Research Chair (CERC)	11th of Oct
10. What is Transnational Feminist Solidarity Today? A dialogue with and of Iranian feminists	British Society for Middle Eastern Studies	17th of Oct
11. Women's Movement in Iran	Toronto Book Club	23rd of Oct
12. "Iran's Protest Movement"	Indiana State University History Department	1st of November
13. How was 'Women, Life, Freedom' in Iran: From Protest to Revolution??	School of Social Science and Nottingham Law School	2nd of November
14. Women, life, freedom. A roundtable on Iran	Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities	15th of November

	Buffett Institute for Global Affairs Middle East and North African Studies Program	
15. Art of the Global Protest: Iran 2022	The CWU Office of International Studies and Programs, the Office of Inclusivity and Diversity, the College of Arts and Humanities and the Museum of Culture and Environment. The Department of World Languages and Cultures and the Department of History	18th of November
16. Woman, life, freedom. A teach-in for families, K-12 teachers, and higher ed. Faculty to support young people's learning on current social movements in Iran	University of Minnesota, Department of Organizational Leadership, Policy and Development, and Northwestern Colloquium for Global Iran Studies	20th of November
17. Iran: What Next as the Revolution Continues? A conversation with expert analysts from Europe, the U.A.E., and the U.S. (cancelled)	Center for Middle East Development, Burkle Center for International Relations, Near Eastern Languages and Cultures, Department of Public Policy	28th of November
18. States of Power: Gender and Protests in Iran	Middle East Center University of Washington	28th of November
19. Social Movements Lab #8: Woman, Life and Freedom in Iran	Red May TV	1st of December

Appendix C

Informed Consent Form

Date:

Study Name: Fundamentalism and Imperialism in the Middle East: The Case of Feminist and Queer Urban Activism in Tehran[33]

Researcher name:
Maryam Lashkari (principal investigator), PhD. Program in Geography, York University.
Email Address: maryamlk@yorku.ca

Purpose of the Research:
The primary objective of this research is to understand how feminist and queer activists in Tehran use urban public spaces for their rights claims. First, it explores how virtual and physical forms of feminist and queer activism interact with each other; Secondly, what are the similarities and differences between diasporic and non-diasporic feminist and queer activism; And lastly, with the increasing popularity of social media, how do diasporic and non-diasporic activism inform one another. Research methods include analysis of newspapers, policy documents, websites, online ethnography of activists social media accounts and semi-structured interviews with feminist and queer activists. The outcome of the research and results will be used as part of my dissertation, academic articles, conferences and presentations.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:
Participants will be asked to be interviewed for about an hour via an online platform of their preference including Skype or Zoom, or via phone call.

Risks and Discomforts:
I do not anticipate any emotional or social risks from your participation in the research. If a particular question around an individual or organization's activism involves confidential information or personal experiences which you do not feel comfortable sharing, you may ask not to answer the question or stop the interview at any point without any consequences.

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:
The findings of the research provide a new perspective on the dynamics involved in feminist and queer activism at different local, national and international levels which potentially can have strategic implications for feminist and queer activist organizations and groups.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

Confidentiality:
Individual and organization's information will not be shared with others and will be kept confidential to the fullest extent possible by law. The collected data of this study will be stored electronically on the

[33] See the Methodology Chapter for discussion about changes in the research plan.

researcher's password-protected laptop for five years. All electronic files will be deleted and hardcopy files will be shredded on 01/09/2028.

All information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research.

The interview will be audio recording along with taking hand-written notes. If you are not comfortable with the interview being recorded, only hand-written notes will be taken.
Your data will be safely stored electronically on researcher's password-protected laptop, and in a cabinet in my locked office at York University and only the researcher will have access to this information.

Collected data will be stored for five years after the research is finished on September 2028.

Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

The data collected in this research project may be used – in an anonymized form - by members of the research team in subsequent research investigations exploring similar lines of inquiry. Such projects will still undergo ethics review by the HPRC, our institutional REB. Any secondary use of anonymized data by the research team will be treated with the same degree of confidentiality and anonymity as in the original research project.

This study will use Zoom and Skype to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). Further, while York University researchers will not collect or use IP addresses or other information which could link your participation to your computer or electronic devices without informing you, there is a small risk with any platform such as this of data that is collected on external servers falling outside the control of the research team. If you are concerned about this, we would be happy to make alternative arrangements (where possible) for you to participate, perhaps via telephone. Please contact the researcher for further information.

Recordings (audio/video) will be saved in a password-protected file to research team members' local computers, not the cloud based service

Please note that it is the expectation that participants agree not to make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting / data collection session.

Questions About the Research? If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at maryamlk@yorku.ca or my supervisor, Dr. Alison Bain at abain@yorku.ca. You may also contact the Graduate Program in geography at geog_grads@yorku.ca.

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I_____ consent to participate in “Fundamentalism and Imperialism in the Middle East: The Case of Feminist and Queer Urban Activism in Tehran” conducted by Maryam Lashkari. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____ **Date** _____
Participant

Signature _____ **Date** _____
Principal Investigator

Additional consent (where applicable)

1. **Audio recording**

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

Signature: Date:

_____
_____

Participant Name: _____

2. **Consent to waive anonymity**

I, _____, consent to the use of my name in the publications arising from this research.

Signature: Date:

_____
_____

Participant Name: _____