

# Bonus Episode: Women For Iran

## SPEAKERS

Kiana, Vicki, Marcelle Kosman, Hannah McGregor

*(Witch, Please Theme Music plays) (Dance of the Priestesses by Victor Herbert Orchestra)*

**Hannah McGregor** 00:10

Hello, and welcome to another Witch, Please Patreon bonus interview. We have a very special double interview for you today. Wait, normally at the beginning of this I say who I am. I'm Hannah. Marcelle, who are you?

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:28

I'm Hannah. I'm also Marcelle.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:33

Yep. It's, you know what, it's confusing. But honestly if you're a Patreon supporter, you probably should know what our voices sound like at this point.

**Marcelle Kosman** 00:42

Confusing, but on brand.

**Hannah McGregor** 00:45

Yeah, confusingly on brand and on brandingly confusing. So our guests today are Kiana and Vicki. So Kiana reached out to us via Twitter, asking if we could have a conversation about the ongoing protests in Iran. And we also connected with Vicki, who is actually zooming in right now from Tehran in Iran. And they're gonna chat with us about the ongoing protests. Thank you so much, Kiana and Vicki, for joining us.

**Kiana** 01:22

Thank you for having us.

**Vicki** 01:23

Thank you for having us. I'm so glad to be here.

**Marcelle Kosman** 01:26

Why don't we start, Kiana, can you tell us about the organization that you reached out to us to talk about?

**Kiana** 01:35

Yes, so me and another woman who we were protesting together in the UK, since the beginning of the protests, which was when Mahsa Amini that 22 year old Kurdish girl was killed whilst in custody of the morality police. We met during the protests, and we realized that we have the same goals, you know, we want to hold UK government accountable for, you know, supporting, make sure they support Iranian people and not continue supporting the Islamic Republic regime, which is the sort of thing they're kind of doing, and raise awareness and make sure everyone knows what's going on and kind of give our point of view as Iranians to people here in the UK. So yeah, that's what our organization basically does. And you know, we have leaflets, posters, we go on, like shows like yours to do interviews, we have a radio show. We organize protests. So yeah, anything that can raise awareness.

**Marcelle Kosman** 02:46

And I'm so sorry, can you tell us what your organization is called again?

**Kiana** 02:50

So it's Woman for Liberty of Iran, but we just call it Woman For Iran for short, because that's quite long.

**Hannah McGregor** 02:55

Amazing. So you just gave us a lot of background information. And I'm going to ask if we can, like, pause and go back for anybody who is listening right now, who has not been following the story. I mean, I hope everybody listening is at least aware that

there are major protests happening right now in Iran. But can we talk a little bit more about Mahsa Amini and why it was that her death sparked this particular moment of protest?

**Kiana 03:27**

Yeah, I think that would be a really good question for Vicki to answer because she can give perspective from inside of Iran.

**Vicki 03:34**

So for the past, like 40 years, I think, the protests against hijab started right at the inception of the Islamic Republic. And people have been protesting this for a very, very long time. But what really led to this, as a lot of analysts and experts have called the powder keg moment, was the death of Mahsa Amini in custody of the morality police. So the morality police has existed in Iran for the past 40 years in different shapes and forms and under different names, and they have constantly rebranded and given themselves different names and operated under names like the gender law patrol or something colloquially known as committee. And later on, gasht-e-ershad which means the guidance patrol and later again, rebranded to morality, safe like, moral safety police, in Farsi.

**Hannah McGregor 04:39**

All of these names are so sinister.

**Vicki 04:44**

Yes. And like a lot of people are saying like the next one might be something like modesty police or modest control or like, stuff like that. So they have enforced mandatory hijab with violence for 40 years and they just kept getting away with it because people had like, quote, unquote, more important concerns about like... At first it was the Iran Iraq War, and then like economic issues, and then there were economic issues, and again, economic issues and all of that. But then I think what really led to people like this being very important in people's psyche, was that the police introduced

this new law that if a woman was unveiled in a car, that car would get fined. And if that transgression was repeated three times, they would confiscate their cars, put them in government parking lots. And the only way to get your car back from the government was if you attended, like, morality and guidance classes from the police.

So yeah, and that was like a very big issue in Iran. So what happened was that this is a very patriarchal society. And that would mean that a lot of property and assets are owned by men, mostly. So most of the cars getting fined and confiscated were owned by the men in the family. So now men were punished for transgressing on hijab laws. And for the first time in a very long time, they were, you know, they understood how much of an inconvenience it is and how unfair it is that we have to get punished for something we don't believe in. And I think like that, along with closing down businesses that allowed women to attend like without hijab, like cafes, and restaurants, or fining and confiscating cars from gig worker drivers, like from the Iranian version of Uber, which is called like snap and tapsee, all of these really just, they pitted women and men against each other, essentially, and try to financially reprimand and punish people for transgressing on hijab laws.

**Hannah McGregor** 06:53

I'm sure, financially incentivizing men to attempt to reinforce the laws themselves.

**Vicki** 06:59

Exactly, like do the work for them and police women, so they could protect their livelihoods, let's say. But that led to a lot of tensions, especially on social media and women were starting to be very conscious of not wearing the hijab and trying to unveil as much as possible. Then, at the beginning of summer, around the beginning of July, I think, there was this video of this chadory woman. Chadory is the Islamic Republic uniform and preferred form of hijab. It's very long black fabric that is meant to be worn

above a headscarf and then long shirt dress and long pants and socks, and all of that, so chadory women are sometimes seen as supporters of the regime. And we have seen videos of them constantly arguing with or cursing at women who they don't, or they believe to be immodest, let's say.

So this video surfaced of this chadory woman bad mouthing and arguing with this girl out of frame that was supposedly not wearing the hijab, and they were on a bus, passengers were arguing with her saying, like, it's none of your business let her go and stuff like that, as she was also filming this argument. And then this video went viral, and people were very upset over the situation and the next day or like the day after a girl was arrested called Sepideh Rashno. And she was believed to be the woman out of frame and the video and what had happened was definitely that this woman who was filming had reported her to the authorities and she was promptly arrested. And when people expressed concerns over her whereabouts, and like the reason she was arrested after a week or so she appeared on TV, very emaciated with this like sickly face that, you know, showed signs of possible torture.

And she gave out this forced confession, confessed to her crimes and said like she was agitated by outside forces and stuff like that, to do these things or say these things that was revealed that she said on Twitter, like she had expressed anti government sentiment so that really enraged the public, that forced confession video really enraged the public and a lot of feminists organized this movement of appearing without the hijab on the streets, like completely without hijab, not just like removing the headscarf, but like going out with a jean, like a pair of jeans and a T shirt or something you would bear as a normal woman who doesn't want to wear the hijab. And then they started sharing videos of themselves doing so and that led to **[inaudible name]** arrest, she had shared a video of herself unveiled walking around the streets, and she was arrested and remains arrested to this day.

And she has been moved to a psych ward, she has been moved to a psychiatric hospital without her family being permitted to visit her at all. So all of that really had people very focused on the issue of hijab. And, you know, it wasn't like we were waiting for a moment to just explode over it, because it's this outward appearance of the gender apartheid regime that we have been living under for the past 40 years. And Mahsa's death really broke that illusion of safety because we all wear the hijab, even though we didn't believe in it, because we thought it would keep us safe from the government. But seeing Mahsa's photos moments before her arrest, seeing how covered she was and how much she was complying to this rule really broke that illusion that you could stay safe from their violence, because this is a way for them to make money through those fines, through filling up their vans, and, you know, taking women from the streets like basically stealing women off the streets. So they can like, do their job and get paid for filling up those vans and stuff like that. And seeing the brutality that Mahsa endured really just enraged people. And that was the moment that we were all just, we were like enough is enough. We cannot tolerate this any further.

**Hannah McGregor** 11:27

Wow, I didn't know so much about the lead up to Mahsa's death. And it's and it's so clear that it was, you know, a trigger point for something that had been fomenting for some time.

**Vicki** 11:42

Exactly, because for a very long time, people just didn't, people viewed it as this frivolous demand, this frivolous concern that like, I mean, like wear the hijab, we have like bigger issues, it's okay, like, just comply. So you should stay safe. And this is not our biggest concern and stuff like that. Some people are still like that, like throughout this protest, a lot of people have been like hijab is not our concern, we want the regime gone, and with the regime gone, hijab will be gone. But a lot of us understand that hijab is the key to understanding the level of control this government

wants to like, put over women and just people in general, and they want to like financially gain from it even and it came out today, that a member of the parliament has suggested to freeze Iranian women's bank accounts if they don't comply with the hijab. Like they're trying to be as harsh as possible. And they will not stop because this is something that they won't ever compromise on, as we've seen and has been established.

**Marcelle Kosman 12:50**

So when we were chatting over email ahead of time, Kiana, you had mentioned that this is an issue that a lot of women, if I'm remembering correctly, I wish I had looked it up, that this is an issue that a lot of women outside of Iran are reluctant to talk about. And that really spoke to me because I remember when we first started talking on the Witch, Please team about having a conversation about this, I was also really nervous about talking about it, because I feel like, as a non-Iranian, as a non-Muslim woman, I don't know how to engage respectfully and meaningfully in this conversation. And so I was wondering if you wanted to talk a bit more about that, and what it is that, what women like us could do that would be meaningful, and that would be helpful and respectful of this issue.

**Hannah McGregor 13:46**

Yeah, the tricky piece of context I would just add there for non-Canadian listeners is that Canada, Quebec, in particular, has had a history of, I mean, many places in the West have a history of anti-Muslim sentiments and anti-Muslim laws. But in Canada, it has taken the form of refusing, like services, refusing public services to women wearing the hijab, which is a sort of political forced unveiling. And so a lot of the shape that organizing takes in Canada is insisting on women's right to wear the hijab if they choose to. And the understanding that forced unveiling is also still forcing women to do things with their bodies based on the government's belief that they have the right to control women's



bodies. So yeah, I would love, Kiana, to hear about sort of navigating how to protest across cultures.

**Kiana 14:55**

Yeah, so yeah, I think the important thing is to realize that, you know, the movement, the protests to help women be able to wear the hijab is so connected to the same movements in Iran that's asking to let women not wear the hijab, you know, it's once you start focusing on the hijab itself, or like, you know, the piece of cloth, you realize that it's about woman's choice, or, you know, the person's choice to wear whatever they want. That is the main thing. Yeah, so, um, I've noticed that a lot of, you know, feminists and, you know, progressive people in the West that tend to speak up about different issues really quickly, have not been speaking about what's going on Iran as much and, you know, through these past few months, I've kind of started to understand why that is.

And the reason is, it seems to be because of, you know, the colonialism and the racist and xenophobic history that is in the West, people are, you know, people on the left are trying to kind of avoid falling into those kinds of discourses. So, what they do instead is, they move so far from it, that they just can't kind of address the situation anymore.

**Hannah McGregor 16:18**

Yeah, what they do instead is nothing.

**Kiana 16:21**

Exactly, yeah. And, and I think it's also related to a topic that you've discussed in one of your episodes, like Orientalism, you know, in the past, and still, you know, Orientalism tends to view people from regions like Iran in a negative light. So, you know, to kind of deviate away from that, people tend to kind of go to the very opposite side, which is still othering people, which is still othering Iranian women and Iranian people. But this time, they're saying that, Oh, everyone from Iran is good. So you know, all the



men from Iran are also good, because, you know, they're not, they're not, you know, murderers, and rapists and all that. So they must be good.

They can't, surely they can't be, you know, doing those things that they are imagined to do by, you know, Orientalism. So when you tell these people that Oh, like, you know, women are being raped in prison, women are being murdered, then they're like, Oh, why are you You know, you're basically being racist, and you're, you're being like, you're falling into the trouble of the West, you're like, spreading Western propaganda. And when we kind of argue with them, and tell them, you know, we are Iranian, we've seen these things with our own eyes. You know, I've seen people get beaten up in the street by the police for, you know, just peacefully protesting. You know, a lot of Iranian people have lost family members to the government.

What tends to happen is people, if they don't know anything, in person, they like, call me a bot. They say, I'm like, Western propaganda bots, or, like, people I know, in person, sometimes they block me because they just can't say anything after, you know, I say, I'm an Iranian person, and like, this is our experience. But it just affects their kind of worldview so much that people, you know, this doesn't have to be Western propaganda, bad things are happening, that they just, you know, they just prefer to end the discussion there. And yeah, so I think it's important to, instead of, you know, othering us in any sort of form, just understand that we're all human, and that women's rights, you know, women's right to, you know, choose to walk wherever they want, or leave the house without permission of their husband, or go to work or leave the country or all the things that, you know, people in Iran, women in Iran can't do. This is not about cultural differences or things that, you know, people say, to kind of excuse that behavior. This is about, you know, when you realize that we're all human, and we all need to have these rights, then you'll also be able to

fight for them with us, you know, by our side, instead of kind of just watching or feeling bad or not knowing what to do or worrying by worrying about saying the wrong thing. You know, once you can strip it back. I think, you know, everyone can kind of fight this battle together.

**Hannah McGregor** 19:04

Yeah, thank you for that. Perfectly said. I'm wondering, Vicki, I know that there has been a lot of misinformation coming out of Iran, you know, government misinformation that then gets repeated in the Western press. So I wonder if you can tell us a little bit about sort of what things are like on the ground right now?

**Vicki** 19:23

Well, protests are still happening. And what people have been more focused on right now are nationwide strikes. And on the other hand, this is the good news, or the bad news is that the government already has started giving out death sentences to protesters. And so far 11 people have been given death sentences and many more are sure to come because I think it's around like 20 or so people have been accused of crimes that are punishable by death in Islamic Republic laws, such as waging war against God and corrupting the earth.

And these could mean anything. Honestly, you know, whatever the government deems corrupting earth or waging war against God, in this case like, because the Supreme Leader has this godlike status. And Iran really operates like this, like a cult or mafia. And what they're trying to do is scare people from joining the protests. What they're trying to do is that the strikes have really like, bamboozled them, because they either want to like forcefully close down the businesses that have gone on strike or forcefully open the businesses that have gone on strike, which doesn't mean anything, like they're very confused on what to do, and they keep threatening dissidents. But at the same time, they're rolling back, or saying stuff like the morality police are no

more and stuff like that, to fool the media, but morality police is the Islamic Republic itself, and the laws are still in place.

And even if that sort of patrol rebrands again, we still have, like university guards posted at the entrance of every single university, making sure that female students, you know, go to classes with the quote unquote, proper attire, and they would be barred from going to those classes or in every single workplace, there's this kind of guard that makes sure that women are dressed the way they should be, and stuff like that. But so far, a lot of us have started unveiling, a lot of us have stopped, just, you know, appearing the way they want us to do because what Mahsa's death showed us is that no matter how much you cover up, just because of being a woman and being out there, you will be punished for it and you will be taken because they have this like sort of quota to fill and they have to fill up their vans.

And where I live, and what I've heard from most other cities, is that anti riot forces are posted. Instead of the morality police there are now the execution patrols posted in every single street and like busy places that might see protests happening or squares and in schools right now, they're using schools to park their cars and gather their forces and stuff like that. So we see a lot of these scary black big vehicles and these like, what we call them, cockroaches, cockroaches dressed like police forces and stuff like that. They definitely look like cockroaches. I don't know if you've seen any footage of the protest.

**Hannah McGregor** 22:43

Calling the police cockroaches rules.

**Kiana** 22:45

Yeah, they were like anti riot gear with like, you know, the whole shebang.

**Vicki** 22:51

Yeah, that looks like the exoskeleton of a cockroach. So they're everywhere. And sometimes they just like patrol the streets on their motorcycles shouting stuff like I don't know, if I should say like, it's Haydar Haydar, which is like a call to the first imam of Shia, which is supposed to like give them strength, or you know, they're going through the streets trying to have this show of power. And what happened during the World Cup was that when Iran scored goals against Wales, the police forces started dancing in the streets, which was such a bizarre and absurd show of, I don't know, like patriotism or something. And we were all very amused by it. Because essentially, like FIFA, like the football team of Iran doesn't really have any support among the people because they didn't say a word in support of the protesters, and they bowed their heads to the president days before they went for Qatar.

And so the team didn't have any sort of support. And in fact, people came to the streets and celebrated when America scored goals against Iran and Bonn. And which is such a bizarre thing to, you know, root for the team of a different country. Like we had videos from Kurdistan who are under so much military pressure, and they're setting fire to people's houses over there in Kurdistan, and they are getting the worst of it, honestly, but they were like out dancing in the streets when America won the match against Iran.

And these are the stuff that are happening. The regime doesn't really have any kind of support among people. Everyone is very much discontent with how they're doing stuff and everyone is very much in danger, especially those detained and there's a new hashtag: #stopexecutionsinIran, which tries to name people who have been convicted and sentenced to death or are sure to be in the near future. So this is what's happening. It's a very strange time to live in. And it's very bittersweet, because it's like, we're starting to get our power back. But they're also retaliating in full force, and minorities are getting the worst of it.

**Hannah McGregor 25:16**

Yeah, yeah, of course. So, perhaps we can conclude, Kiana, by hearing a little bit more about what folks who are not on the ground in Iran can do to support the people and the protesters.

**Kiana 25:33**

Yeah, sure. So yeah, Iranian people, you know, inside Iran have been fighting so bravely, and we kind of take our guide from them. And the diaspora has been kind of watching people inside of Iran, what they're doing. And also listening, you know, I listen to all my friends and family and what they want us to do. So we've created different resources that people can use, you know, there is a link tree on our page, women for Iran. And it has a lot of different actions that you can take. So, email templates to send to your MPs or representatives, wherever you are.

Petitions to sign, all that kind of thing, there's resources. And yeah, if you basically just go through it, and you just basically do a few clicks for each, and then it makes a massive difference. And then apart from that, just sharing on your social media, you know, every few days at least, just like post something about Iran, just so you keep the conversation going in trending, because we've seen from the Islamic Republic regime that when, when there is attention on them, they are more fearful to kind of take drastic actions like mass execution, they have a history of doing mass executions, 1000s of people at a time. But once there is international attention on them, they just normally don't tend to do that.

So as long as, you know, there is a tension on them, which you know, is just normal people can do by just sharing our social media or things like that we're helping the people inside Iran. So that's really important. And I think the most important thing for people to know is that this is not about reform, this is about a revolution. This is a you know, full fledged revolution, and people

will not stop before that's reached, because there's a lot of misinformation actually coming from inside, as in, like the government, the regime themselves. And they want to kind of portray this as reform for their survival, because as long as they say that it's reform, the other, you know, world, governments will have to continue kind of trading with them and dealing with them and you know, giving them more money.

But what we're asking is to stop, we're asking, you know, UK, US, Canada, governments to stop giving them money, stop dealing with them, because this money will go to oppressing people and killing people, basically, because you know, it once you accept this as a revolution, then there's no, you know, and that this is a terrorist state that's occupied Iran, there's no need to, you know, deal with them, or even like, speak with them, you just need to support the Iranian people by stopping any sort of money going in. There was a good sentence that said, we don't want the world governments to support us, to help us, we want them to stop helping our oppressors. Which is, yeah, what we're trying to do here.

Yeah, and I just wanted to add a final thing about, you know, why there is so much, you know, hesitance about kind of sharing and supporting and kind of thing, especially from the leftists because the Iranian government themselves are kind of using this wave of, you know, trying not to be colonialist or like racist, they are actually utilizing that for their benefit. You know, they actually pay academics, they pay politicians, you know, lobbyists to actually kind of advance this agenda for them that like, if people speak up in support of Iranian people, then you know, they are actually being like colonialists/

**Vicki 28:52**

Because they I think for like, since their inception, they have painted themselves as this like anti imperialist force in the region. But what they in fact, have shown with their dealings with China

and Russia, Turkey, and Assad's regime is that they want imperialism for themselves. You know, I think it's time for people to recognize them as this oppressor force, with imperialistic ambitions in the region. And any sort of money you give this government and any sort of negotiations you have with this government, go towards oppression of people in Iran, fomenting wars in the region. And as we've recently seen, helping Russia, for example, to bomb Ukraine, you know, so they have the most powerful, autocratic, authoritarian allies in the region, but somehow they have, you know, painted themselves as this anti-imperialist force.

But what is very important for people to realize is that since their inception, they have executed every single leftist, every single socialist, everyone who has done their power, and that's how they have solidified their power in the region and have complete and utter control and grasp over every single matter of every single Iranian citizens life. So we want the negotiations to stop, because we have seen when they succeed, what happens. Nothing, absolutely nothing like, JCPOA went into effect a few years ago, and people flooded to the streets in celebration, because we thought that like with the partial lifting of the sanctions, like our lives would be so much different, but it wasn't and then it led to the 2019 protests, when the government just started shooting at people who were protesting gas prices and egg prices and shutting down the internet and all of that.

So that's just empowering this government, any sort of negotiation is empowering this government. And my final thought is that don't let them fool you. And I'm very happy that we're finally part of the narrative because our experience has been one of exclusion, not being seen, not being heard. And the only time we were on the news is what it was because our government or supreme leader or our president had done something vile or said something horrible or denied the Holocaust or denied that gay people existed in Iran, or they had opened fire on protesters and stuff like that.



But Iranian women were never seen and never heard either inside or outside of Iran. So I think what we really have accomplished, and what I thank you for is like giving a platform to Iranian women, listening to them, and having their experience as part of the narrative of the general fight against oppression, and the general fight against patriarchy. That's been amazing. And that's been very heartwarming, seeing all the support coming from all across the world. And it's just been just moving. Seeing all of that.

**Marcelle Kosman** 32:02

I really want to thank both of you, as well for, you know, the very real risks that you're both taking in connecting with us and in sharing your experiences with us and in helping to clarify so much of the misinformation that is circulating, and that is preventing us from really understanding what's happening. And I'm so grateful. Thank you.

**Hannah McGregor** 32:28

Yeah, yeah. And just for the time and the generosity of everything that you've shared with us today.

**Vicki** 32:36

Thank you so much for having us.

**Kiana** 32:38

Yeah. Thank you so much. This has meant a lot to us. So yeah, thank you.

**Vicki** 32:42

It's just amazing to have a platform. Because it's just like so many years of being not heard or listened to or not seen at all, ever. This is just amazing. And thank you guys.

***(Witch, Please Theme Music plays) (Dance of the Priestesses by Victor Herbert Orchestra)***

