Women, Life, Freedom

Bahar Hashemian Esfahani,

Iowa State University, USA

Keywords: digital printing, women's rights, freedom for Iran, Mahsa Amini

The objective of this design was to explore the role of apparel design as a medium for communication, portraying the Iranian women's revolution against social injustice and violations of fundamental women's rights. We aimed to: a) explore how draping techniques, patternmaking, and Computer-Aided Design (CAD) could be employed to symbolize the resistance of Iranian women, and b) raise attention to human rights issues in Iran by using a garment to represent both the pain experienced and the hope for freedom for the Iranian people. The inspiration behind this design stemmed from Iran's Azadi Tower, which signifies "Liberty" (See figure 1). The design aims to portray the resilience of Iranian women who are fighting for freedom, rallying under the Women, Life, Freedom banner. This movement gained momentum following the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who got killed by the Morality Police due to an improper hijab in Iran.

Iranian women use "bad-hijabi" which means not wearing hijab properly as a way to escape from the restrictions of mandatory hijab and feel more authentic to themselves (Bayat & Hodges, 2022). On the other hand, fashion is being used as a form of protest and resistance, with designers utilizing the runway to express dissent against the current global political climate, which is marked by the emergence of far-right, authoritarian, and political movements (Titton, 2019). Throughout history, fashion has been linked to numerous social movements, ranging from the sans-culottes in 18th-century France to the mini-skirts

Figure 1. Azadi Tower, Tehran, Iran, From "Azadi Tower" by H. Hosseinpour

of the 1960s, and the modern-day feminist movement has conveyed messages that extend well beyond mere appearances or visual appeal (Polyzoidou, 2021).

Fashion designers can also use their expertise to create clothing that reflects the values and message of environmental, political, social and economic issues. Designer Zhang (2014) and (2015) highlighted environmental issues prevalent in certain cities in China, aiming to draw public attention to the problem of pollution with her designs named "Pure" and "Hope", respectively. In 2019, designer Aurora James created a collection of "Tax the Rich" dresses, which were worn by celebrities and activists to protest income inequality and demand fair taxation policies (Levine & Boniello, 2021). In 2020, fashion brand Collina Strada created a line
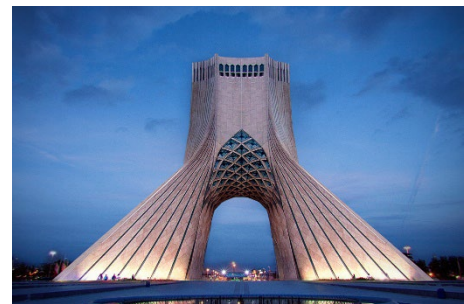
of face masks with messages such as "Vote" and "Black Lives Matter" to support the Black Lives Matter protests and encourage people to stay safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The name of this design, "Women, Life, Freedom," came from the slogan of the Iranian to support women and women's rights. The design was draped on a half-scale size 8 dress form, which helped to minimize patternmaking and fabric waste due to the large amount of fabric required and the complicated design. After the initial draping and pattern modifications, the patterns were digitized and converted to the full size of a size 8 dress form using Lectra Modaris software. This allowed for the engineering of the print patterns in Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. The cotton fabric used for this design to the fact that in Iran, it is customary to wrap the body of the deceased in a white cotton shroud before burial symbolizing purity and equality. This practice signifies a final act of respect and dignity for the deceased.

Figure 2. Woven pieces in a half-scale dress form

The woven pieces at the front of the garment (see Figure 2), inspired by the Azadi Tower (see Figure 1), mimicking the hair of women placed in the middle of Azadi Tower which is connected to the map of Iran (see figure 3) to bring freedom for Iran. The transformation of black dye to white represents the journey towards light, freedom, and liberation from darkness and oppression. Iranian women and other women around the world started cutting off their hair to show their sadness regarding the tragic death of Mahsa Amini, who was killed simply because her hair was not properly covered. The woven design also symbolizes the unity of diverse ethnic groups, including Kurds, Turks, Balochs, and others who have come together after many years which is so impressive. The design prominently features the map of Iran, with Kurdistan province (see figure 3), the city where Mahsa Amini lived, highlighted to represent the starting point of the revolution, and accompanied by the chant "Women, Life, Freedom" in response to her death. The shape of the front top piece mimicked the shape of the map of Iran. Using the combination of painting and beading in red color to depict bullet holes to symbolize the violence that occurred during the revolution leading to killing of people. Utilizing dip-dyeing and splashing red color on this design conveys the message of protest and the shedding of the blood of more than 300 innocent people ("Iran general acknowledges," 2023), including women, men, and approximately 58 children ("At least 58 Iranian children 2022"). The wire was utilized to securely support around the map, allowing it to stand firmly when attached to the bodice. This design makes a significant contribution to future research by demonstrating the potential of apparel design as a form of visual communication for

Figure 3. Kurdistan, Iran

social and political movements. It highlights the effective use of symbolism, contextual elements, and sustainable design practices. Further exploration and analysis of similar design approaches in diverse cultural and political contexts can expand our understanding of how fashion can be utilized to raise awareness, promote activism, and advocate for human rights issues globally.

References

Bayat, F., & Hodges, N. J. (2022). "Just say no" to compulsory hijab: exploring the motivations and meanings of bad-hijabi in Iran. *Breaking Boundaries*. https://doi.org/10.31274/itaa.13284

CBS Interactive. (2023, January 4). *Iran general acknowledges more than 300 people have been killed in protests sparked by death of Mahsa Amini*. CBS News. Retrieved May 2, 2023, from https://www.cbsnews.com/news/iran-protests-over-300-people-dead-general-says-after-mahsa-amini-death/

Guardian News and Media. (2022, November 20). *At least 58 Iranian children reportedly killed since anti-regime protests began*. The Guardian. Retrieved May 2, 2023, from https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/nov/20/iran-protests-children-killed-reports-mahsa-amini

Hosseinpour, H. (photographer). (2014), *Azadi Tower*, https://www.behance.net/gallery/36600569/azadi-tower

Kurdistan province. (2023, May 24). In Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurdistan_province

Levine, J., & Boniello, K. (2021, September 18). *AOC's 'tax the rich' dress designer Aurora James owes debt in multiple states*. New York Post. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://nypost.com/2021/09/18/aocs-tax-the-rich-dress-designer-aurora-james-is-a-tax-deadbeat/

Polyzoidou, S. (2021, July 25). *How Social Movements & Activism influenced fashion?* TheCollector. Retrieved April 2, 2023, from https://www.thecollector.com/how-social-movements-activism-influenced-fashion-history/

Titton, M. (2019). Afterthought: Fashion, feminism and radical protest. *Fashion Theory*, *23*(6), 747–756. https://doi.org/10.1080/1362704x.2019.1657273

Zhang, L., (2014) "Life of Earth: Pure", *International Textile and Apparel Association Annual Conference Proceedings* 71(1)