

Hadis Najafi

Iran's gender apartheid is not only a cultural phenomenon borne out of the Revolution of 1979, but it was also enshrined into the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In addition to Islamic (Shia) theocratic influence, this Constitution also esoterically envisioned a social hierarchy dominated by the supremacy of Persian culture, creating multiple and compounding intersections of oppression. For example, whereas women with Azerbaijani Turk backgrounds often express a greater degree of discrimination relative to Persian women, Baloch women face the triple of oppression of gender, ethnicity, and against their Sunni religion.

This constitutionally driven gender inequality affects all areas of social life for women in Iran, institutionally and legally placing women in a lower social status to men. Iranian judicial law, for instance, states that a woman's testimony is worth half of that of a man. Additionally, Iranian law requires that married women receive the written consent of their husbands before they can procure a passport. This makes it so that a woman cannot leave the country without approval from her spouse. Other examples of how the agency of women is restricted can be seen in the laws concerning inheritance and employment. According to Article 907¹ of the Civil Laws of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a son's share of an inheritance will always be twice that of the daughter. Article 1117² states that a man is allowed to prohibit his wife from seeking employment to retain the integrity of the family unity. Such laws contribute to a grossly unequal system that many are now calling a gender apartheid. It is therefore necessary that the Constitution be radically re-written to meet the demands of a modern and inclusive society.

It is no surprise that women from non-Persian ethnic backgrounds are disproportionately affected by the gendered laws and regulations of the Islamic Republic than the Persian majority. And looking at the victims of the latest round of protests, non-Persian women constitute the largest share of victims of state violence.

Hadis Najafi, a 23-year-old Azerbaijani Turk, was mortally wounded in a barrage of six bullets that struck her abdomen, neck, heart, and hand by members of Iranian security forces in the city of Karaj on September 21, 2022. She died shortly thereafter in Karaj's Qaim Hospital. Her murder was one of several examples of state enforcers deliberately shooting live rounds directly at protesters, as seen in the footage and photos released on social media by protesters. Najafi's mother and sister have gone on record stating that when her corpse was handed over to her family, a visible bullet wound could be seen on her face.

¹ https://www.usb.ac.ir/FileUpload/7242_2017-3-8-12-27-22.pdf

² https://www.usb.ac.ir/FileUpload/7242_2017-3-8-12-27-22.pdf

It is not known whether Hadis Najafi had any prior involvement in feminist or women's rights movements in Iran, though her social media included videos of her expressing her Turkic identity, itself an act of resistance in Iran. Najafi posted videos on Instagram and TikTok of her partaking in viral trends, dancing to Turkish and Azerbaijani pop songs without her hijab. In her final Instagram story, she exclaimed, "I am going to the protests with excitement. A few years from now, I want to look back and feel happy that I attended the protests and everything has changed since then."

The hijab is used as a tool of repression and compliance for women in Iran and is mandatory in public. Hadis Najafi, 23, was a part of the new generation of Azerbaijani Turk youth, conscious to both gender and ethnic struggle in Iran. She enjoyed sharing videos about fashion and styling her hair on social media, all without wearing the hijab. Her Instagram bio stated in Turkish, "if there's another me, replace me." A TikToker shot dead while protesting for women's rights, Hadis Najafi has become a symbol for Azerbaijani resistance in Iran.

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