A COLOGE A E TUOLEAE

IRAN'S EXILED JOURNALISTS ON THEIR STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRATIC CHANGE

Edited by Marcus Michaelsen

ELECTION FALLOUT

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The 2009 presidential elections and the surrounding events represent one of the most dramatic moments in contemporary Iranian history. The massive demonstrations over the official election results soon evolved into a broad protest movement demanding civil rights and political change, confronting the Islamic Republic with a significant crisis. When the Iranian regime responded with widespread repression, journalists were among its main targets – many were arrested, or pressurised, and some are still in prison; more than 100 have left their country in the biggest exodus of journalists since the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

In this book, 12 Iranian journalists, exiled after the election crisis, deliver poignant accounts of the events and their personal experiences during those days. In their articles they describe the agitation during the election campaign and the initial protests as well as the period of repression and arrests that followed. Others analyse the key moments of the protest movement or reflect on their life and work in exile. All authors hail from a new generation of professional journalists deeply involved in the struggle for reform and the democratisation of Iran's Islamic Republic. Their writings not only provide records of the turbulent developments after the elections, but also attest to a political culture that cannot fail to change their country.





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Marcus Michaelsen September 2011

Marcus Michaelsen

"How easy to become a journalist, how hard to be a journalist until death!"-The title of a commentary written in spring 2008 by Mohammad Qowchani, editor-in-chief of several successful Iranian publications which, one after the other, were eventually closed down. Qowchani laments the difficulties of being a journalist and editor who arrives at his office every morning not knowing if his paper still exists or not. Qowchani is of a generation of Iranian journalists who had entered the field with ease and mostly at a young age due to the sudden escalation in the appearance of publications under the reformist president Khatami after 1997. Then, given the intensified restrictions on the press during the first term of Ahmadinejad's presidency, he and his colleagues found it increasingly hard to pursue their professional activities. In the article the passionate editor complains that his father was still expecting him to find a "decent" occupation, such as in the government or administration, without understanding that he had actually found his calling. He then describes his dream of growing old as a journalist, experienced and respected, and ultimately ending his days still practicing journalism. He could never have foreseen that this simple wish would become even farther beyond reach in the turbulent aftermath of Iran's tenth presidential elections, and that "dying as a journalist" would then evoke completely different images! A few weeks after the poll, Qowchani was summoned before court, along with nearly a hundred other defendants, accused of plotting to overthrow the Islamic Republic.

ELECTION AND PROTEST

WHEN THE IRANIAN AUTHORITIES ANNOUNCED the victory of incumbent president Ahmadinejad in the elections of 12th June 2009, hundreds of thousands of people in Tehran and other major cities took to the streets to protest against what they perceived as massive electoral fraud. During the ensuing weeks and months, the protests against the rigged elections evolved into a broad social movement–the "Green Movement"–no longer merely demanding a recount of the votes but a realisation of fundamental civil and political rights. The Iranian regime, however, responded with large-scale repression. During the first weeks of protest, thousands of people throughout the country were arrested. Prisons and improvised detention centres provided sinister locations for the beating, torture and sexual abuse of peaceful demonstrators. Although figures are obviously a matter of contention, it has been established that at least 40 people were killed during the June crackdown. This number more than doubled by the end of that year.

Although obviously surprised by the extent of the protests, the regime nevertheless appeared well prepared for suppressing any contestation from Ahmadinejad's opponents in political circles and in civil society. Proceeding along what seems to have been a carefully devised plan, security forces arrested the key figures of the reformist parties, politicians and campaigners supporting the two opposition candidates Moussavi and Karroubi, critical intellectuals, civil society activists, and journalists from as early as the first hours after the poll. Some of these arrests were even executed with warrants that had been issued before Election Day.

In August 2009, the regime staged a series of Stalinesque show trials in order to depict the unrest as a Western conspiracy against the Islamic Republic. Subjected to mistreatment and psychological pressure, a number of defendants were forced into confessions admitting their involvement in a "velvet revolution" against the Islamic Republic. According to the twisted portrayal of official propaganda, the transmission of information via newspapers, websites, blogs and social networks equalled a significant threat to national security. Consequently, journalists became a major target for the regime's repression of dissent.

JOURNALISTS UNDER SIEGE

AT LEAST 30 JOURNALISTS AND REPORTERS WERE ARRESTED within the first weeks after the election, among them renowned authors like Ahmad Zeydabadi, Jila Bani-Yaqoub, and also Mohammad Qowchani. In the following six months, more than 100 journalists spent brief or lengthy periods of time in custody. In the run-up to the festivities for the 31st anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, 11th February 2010, which both opposition and regime parties perceived as a kind of showdown in their months-long conflict, Reporters Without Borders announced that 65 journalists and bloggers were being held in prison-an unprecedented figure in the recordings of the advocacy organisation.

With many newspapers being shut down and the constant pressure from the judiciary and security agencies, work and life in Iran became impossible for independent journalists, and many chose to leave the country. By the end of 2009, about 50 journalists had fled into exile, and since then this number has more than doubled. A significant number of these journalists had to exit the country clandestinely through the frontiers towards Turkey and Iraq. Entrusting their lives into the hands of smugglers, they exposed themselves to great dangers and hardships. On the other side of the border, most journalists had to wait for months, under surveillance from the local police and still within the reach of Iranian agents, before being issued a visa for a European country. Finally in exile, these journalists had to cope with a new environment, administrative issues like residence and work permits, as well as the distance not only from their family and friends but also from the society and public their profession was actually dedicated to.

This wave of migration is certainly the biggest exodus of journalists since the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The systematic persecution of an entire profession will cause tremendous damage to Iranian journalism, which, despite all restrictions, has achieved impressive progress in the last 15 years. From the mid-1990s, and especially after the election of the reform-minded president Mohammad Khatami in 1997, an easing up of the political atmosphere allowed for the emergence of numerous newspapers and magazines. With great enthusiasm, writers, mainly young people, pressed into the offices of the new publications to engage in journalism. They were part of the "Third Generation", as those born shortly before or after the revolution of 1979 are called in Iran. Unlike their parents who had followed the utopian ideas of revolution or their elder compatriots shaped by the years of war against Iraq, this young generation believed neither in ideology nor sacrifice. Striving for individual and political liberties, they took key words like civil society, participation, pluralism and tolerance, which Khatami and the reformists frequently used in their discourse, very seriously.

In pushing the reformist agenda, the press gradually touched on political taboos and the media became a battlefield for the competing political factions. The reformist newspapers engaged in a continual struggle with the conservative judiciary as papers that had been banned would swiftly reappear under a new title (see also the article of Reza Veisi in this volume). With over a hundred print publications closed down between 1998 and 2003 as well as hundreds of jobless journalists, the political conflict that was held on the shoulders of the press has certainly left its scars. However, by frequently changing publications and roles young journalists have quickly assumed responsibility and gained experience. As the reformist government appeared increasingly unable to fulfil its promises, journalists withdrew somewhat from political circles and sought to play their role as critical observers. Also, the constant surveillance of the censors meant that a degree of pragmatism was required in order to keep the publications on the newsstands. Rather than publishing politicised opinions, the papers concentrated their efforts on keeping the public informed. Last but not least, the closure of publications pushed journalists onto the internet where news-websites and weblogs became an exercising ground for sharpening skills of argumentation and analysis.

These experiences have shaped a new generation of professional and committed journalists in Iran. Their situation deteriorated severely after Ahmadinejad won the presidency in 2005. Even highly experienced publications like the daily Shargh or the women's magazine Zanan, which had for many a year shrewdly circumvented the "red lines" of the regime's censorship, eventually fell victim to suppression and had to close down for good. Along with civil society in general, Iran's journalists endured four years of increasing repression, and then pinned their hopes for change on the presidential elections of 2009. The election coup dashed these aspirations. In addition to

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arrests and exile, more publications were banned and websites filtered. The judiciary pronounced drastic verdicts on journalists, condemning some to huge sums of bail, others to a ban on writing, or to long prison sentences. Courageous and principled figures like Ahmad Zeydabadi and Abdolreza Tajik are still behind bars. Many journalists were forced into alternative occupations to assure their survival and that of their families.

A CRISIS WITHOUT PRECEDENT

YET, THE POST-ELECTION CRISIS REPRESENTS not only a turning point for Iranian journalism but also for society as a whole and for the political system. The power grab of Ahmadinejad's supporters in the Revolutionary Guard and around Leader Khamenei's office has provoked a crisis of historic proportions. Undoubtedly the events have had traumatic effects on so much of the population insofar as people felt completely stripped of their right to have the slightest say on the direction their country was heading in, reduced to nothing more than the backdrop for a pre-designed power play, and eventually exposed to escalating violence-hence the massive outbreak of popular anger. Never in the 30 years since the revolution has the Islamic Republic seen so many people take to the streets, and never have the fractures within the political elite been so evident or the regime's crisis of legitimacy and authority run so deep. Although the current rulers seem to have reinforced public order, their power is far from consolidated. The regime appears still nervous, reacting with harsh brutality to every manifestation of dissent. Tensions within the ruling elite that transcend all state institutions persist, while economic problems and discontent within the population are thriving.

Admittedly, the Green Movement has also suffered severe blows. Key activists and hundreds of supporters have been jailed or exiled, the principal leaders have been cast into complete isolation, and most communication outlets are banned or blocked. Various critics see the movement further weakened by its feeble organisational structure, a so far unconvincing outreach to the lower classes of society, and an agenda that seems too broad and too hesitant. In reaction to the political upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt, however, the movement proved in February 2011 that it was still able to rally thousands of protesters in Tehran and other cities after a year of relative silence. The rejection of the current rulers now stretches from members of the revolutionary elite like Moussavi, Karroubi and even the Khomeini family, to the traditional clergy as well as the opposition exiled after the Islamic Revolution. Above all, however, the strength of the Green Movement lies in the political culture it has fostered; a culture based on open debate, solidarity, tolerance and non-violence. The ideas that have been articulated after the election crisis are deeply rooted in Iranian culture and society as they revive recurring themes of a struggle for civil rights, government accountability, and social justice that go back to the Constitutional Revolution at the beginning of the 20th Century. This poses a significant threat to a regime which has shown remarkable contempt for its population while pursuing the installation of a purely autocratic system forged on a simplistic interpretation of religion, nationalism and blind allegiance.

WITNESSES TO HISTORY

THE ARTICLES IN THIS VOLUME APPROACH the controversial elections and their consequences from various angles. All the authors are journalists who have been working for different newspapers and publications within the more progressive sectors of Iran's press. Many of them were also active in civil society, supporting reformist politics, or contributing to the election campaign. Forced to leave the country during the months after the election due to persecution and repression, every one of them responded with great interest to the invitation to write about their respective views on the events. And so, Ali Kheradpir, Asieh Amini, and Arash Ghafouri vividly describe the election campaign during spring 2009, the expectations and hopes circulating among the people, and the first days of protest. Shahin Nourbakhsh provides an insight into the unfolding of the election coup within the offices of Iran's biggest reformist party, the Mosharekat. Babak Chafouri Azar and Mohammad Reza Yazdanpanah analyse the evolution of the Green Movement after summer 2009 and the central role that the opposition candidate Moussavi assumed in formulating goals and the identity of the struggle for reform and democracy. Vahid Pourostad and Farnoush Amirshahi deliver poignant depictions of the situation of political prisoners and their families, having to deal with the inhumane and unlawful conditions of detention. Reza Veisi and Arash Hassan Nia portray the extraordinary efforts Iranian journalists

have put into pursuing their profession over the years and what it now means for them to work in exile. Finally, Fahimeh Khezr Heidari and Maryam Mirza take their departure from Iran and their life in exile as a starting point for reflecting on the profounder consequences the course of the events have had on their lives and those of their peers.

By assembling the writings of these journalists, this book pursues several goals. First of all, it seeks to document the election crisis through the perspective of individuals who actually lived through the events. These are not academic analysis or the observations of outsiders on the political situation in the Islamic Republic, but the personal accounts and viewpoints of people who were and still are deeply involved in the evolution of their home-country, Iran. Written between August 2010 and February 2011, the articles expound the atmosphere of the turbulent weeks and months that the authors and their entire country had witnessed shortly before. The elections of 2009 and their aftermath definitely rank among the most decisive moments in contemporary Iranian history-a turning point that has had immediate effect on the lives of the authors. As committed journalists, they not only skilfully report on the different angles of the crisis but also reflect on its various consequences so that their articles provide accessible first-hand insights into this history in the making.

COMMUNICATING FOR CHANGE

ANOTHER CENTRAL AIM OF THIS COLLECTION is obviously to draw attention to the threatening conditions that journalists and consequently the overall exchange of information and opinion currently face in Iran. The Iranian protest movement of summer 2009 gained worldwide attention by its apt use of new communication technologies. The news blackout that the regime created through shutting down newspapers, blocking the internet, and deporting foreign correspondents, was partly compensated for by the citizens themselves. Amateur videos that spread over the internet have documented the extent of the protests as well as the atrocities committed by security forces. Twitter and social networks served to mobilise international public opinion. This citizen journalism proved exceedingly effective during the moments of crisis. In the long run, however, it cannot compensate for the professional treatment of information and an informed debate. The constant coverage of a country's social and political evolution, the critical observation and discussion of political decision-making, and the investigation into hidden truths and underrepresented issues-in short, the fundamental democratic functions of the media-can only be fulfilled through responsible and qualified journalism, regardless of whether it unfolds via the traditional media or online.

Many of the journalists who left Iran after the election crisis have been absorbed by different media reaching out to the Iranian public from outside the country's borders. Along with numerous Iranian websites and blogs, foreign news organisations producing Persian language programmes seek to diversify the increasingly one-sided information landscape inside the country, circumventing censorship and information blocks. The exiled journalists thereby follow a long tradition of émigré journalism that originated prior to the Constitutional Revolution of 1906 when papers created in European or Turkish exile played a decisive role in circulating political opinion and liberal ideas in Iran. By giving a voice to politicians and civil society activists who are now suppressed by the regime, these journalists provide a significant contribution to the struggle for democratic change in Iran. Nevertheless, journalism from exile can only be a temporary solution, a survival strategy for a profession that needs to be in intimate contact with the society it is dedicated to in order to attain its full potential for supporting progress and development.

Ultimately, this book does not seek to provide an outlook or analysis on the direction the Islamic Republic might be heading towards. The recent events in North Africa and the Middle East underline the futility of such predictions. At the conception of this project, the Green Movement appeared to be a spearhead within the region, a phenomenon particular to Iran and its distinctive political and social framework. Since then, however, political overhauls in Egypt and Tunisia, followed by uprisings in countries like Libya, Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen have shown that previously inconceivable changes are actually happening at a fast pace. The possible results of these happenings, therefore, range from civil war to a successful consolidation of democratic institutions. It is against this background that our collection of articles fulfils one last purpose. Aside from the actual topic, each article conveys the political aspirations of these journalists who, as active members of civil society and representatives of the younger generations, have committed their lives and energies to upholding fundamental civil and human rights. In the West, the impressive evolution of Iranian civil society has long been neglected by a focus on the conflict surrounding the nuclear programme or the populist positions of the hot-headed president. Iran's authoritarian rulers, on their part, can no longer afford to restrain the ambitions of the coming generation. The ideas that these authors express underscore the democratic political culture that has taken deep roots in Iranian society, and this appears to be the most promising asset for a peaceful transition to democracy. So, in a way, they provide an outlook for the future, strengthening the conviction that growing old and experienced as a journalist in Iran will no longer remain merely a distant dream.



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interests include Iranian politics and media in development and democratisation.





















IRANIAN SOCIETY ENTERED A PROB-LEMATIC STAGE, BUT IT CONTINUED TO SURVIVE.

Ali Kheradpir

A STEP FORWARD

In developed countries elections are a routine task for political parties. However in autocratic countries, where there are no parties in the true sense of the word, the election process is a very complicated matter. Eighteen years after the founding of the Islamic Republic in Iran, a country with a young population, the people striving for progress found that the only way out of the political deadlock and the only way to create a social breathing space was to ally with the reformists and vote in the elections. 2nd Khordad, the 23rd May 1997 [Khatami's election to the presidency] was a civil upsurge; it was non-violent and did not transgress the laws of the absolutist system, though it was directed against that same autocracy. The younger generations rushed to Seyyed Mohammad Khatami and his associates in the hope of narrowing the chasm between themselves and the world beyond the Middle East. The young people who applauded during Khatami's speech on 2nd Khordad were not envisaging setting up nightclubs and discos, or legalising the sale of alcohol under the Islamic Republic. Instead, they wanted to take a step forward by applauding rather than by making religious blessings.^{o1}

The boys did not want to have their arms dyed in the streets for the crime of wearing tee shirts or short sleeve shirts. The girls wanted

^{an} Under the Islamic Republic, clapping hands as a gesture of affirmation was considered to be a western habit and was replaced by traditional religious blessings whenever the public agreed with a speaker. The young generation, however, broke with this symbolic taboo during their support for Khatami (Editor's Note).

not to always have to wear black, and to be allowed to wear white, green or blue. They wanted to be able to go with their friends to the mountains and enjoy themselves without fearing the consequences.

When the young people of Iran voted for Khatami and put their faith in the government reformists, they were not scheming for sexual liberation or the abolishment of the mandatory veil. They had learned years ago that in order to make changes they must first accept the reality of their circumstances, and also be able to correctly analyse them.

In the autumn of 1998, during Khatami's first term, a number of political and cultural dissidents were killed, and in 1999 military and paramilitary forces attacked Tehran's student dormitories. Despite these incidents, and the fact that it was impossible to guarantee that Khatami could in fact succeed in responding to the needs of Iran's young people, in 2001 he once again emerged victorious in the elections, gaining a second term. Those who had voted for the reformists four years previously knew how much the authoritarians feared the possibility of power being seized by reformist ideas, and how troubled they were by their popular support, particularly amongst the younger generations and the well-educated.

Between 23rd May 1997 and 12th June 2009, however, there was a break of four years. On 24th June 2005, to the complete astonishment of Iran's political society, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the mayor of Tehran, won the presidential elections.

Although it is not inconceivable that the elections were rigged, the fact is that the competition between Ahmadinejad as the perceived champion of society's lower class and Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as a symbol of wealth and power, caused many people to refrain completely from voting. The lower and even the lower-middle classes, who did not harbour good memories of Hashemi Rafsanjani's previous presidency and his programme for economic modification, either chose to boycott the elections or to vote for his rival.

Regardless of the amount of support that came from the regime, or of how likely it is that electoral fraud was committed, the majority of votes for Ahmadinejad undoubtedly came from among the lower and economically weaker layers of society. The abstention of reformist voters was based on their discontent at the outcome after the eight years of opportunity which had been given to Khatami and his comrades. Their nonparticipation certainly played a role in bringing Ahmadinejad into office. Still, even if their supporters had not boycotted the election, it is not certain that the reformists would have had the strength to mobilise the people, particularly the younger generation, to be present at the ballot boxes.

The first four years of the Ahmadinejad government raised tensions between Iran and the rest of the world; a complete contrast to Seyyed Mohammad Khatami's moderate approach and behaviour in interactions with the West. Additionally, those years served to intensify the anxieties of the Iranian middle classes. High living costs, economic inflation and rising unemployment laid the basis for heightening the public's discontent, along with a social situation and ever-tightening restrictions on who was permitted to participate in the political sphere that resembled the pre-Khatami era.

As newspapers were repeatedly shut down and the market for literature steadily declined, piles of books were gathering dust in the Ministry of Guidance whilst waiting to be issued licenses. Artists, cinematographers, and researchers despaired as they were unable to continue their work, thus paralysing Iran's cultural society.

Ahmadinejad came to power under the promise of exposing the "economic mafia", but never did uncover any such threat, and instead just kept removing technocrats from key ministry positions. The ratification of UN Security Council resolutions for an economic boycott continuously impacted the lives of Iranian citizens. Contrary to its claims, the Ahmadinejad government did not have a solution to combat the sanctions. The temporary solutions it employed resulted in increasing the government's expenditures, thus leading to constant budget deficits and an emptying of foreign exchange reserves.

Although the people of Iran showed less interest in the newspapers that were still published in those years, they made efforts to keep themselves informed. The Voice of America's broadcasts in Persian became a part of people's lives, especially those of the middle and upper classes. Students, educated and cultural people got their news through the internet, bypassing the barriers of filtering, and reading reliable Persian-language websites, most of which had been set up abroad.

The drive and determination to obtain information continued. The government successfully limited the interaction between Iranians and the world outside our geographical borders and even our access to foreign news, cultural, and political sources. Still, it never succeeded in completely severing this connection. Iran's photojournalists were often open to charges of espionage whenever they had connections outside the country, but they still managed to keep in contact with their colleagues in credible journals and websites abroad and were able to work with them. Many Iranian journalists were also able to maintain relations with reporters from the Persian section of foreign radio stations by email or telephone.

Foreign language classes were full of young people who either wanted to apply for emigration or hoped to keep in contact with the free world by learning another language, especially English. Iranian society entered a problematic stage, but it continued to survive.

THE GREEN MOVEMENT AS A CONTINUATION OF THE 2ND KHORDAD MOVEMENT

THE IRANIAN PEOPLE'S GREEN MOVEMENT WAS A CONTINUATION of the 2nd Khordad Movement. The quest for progress, democracy, and social and political freedom in Iran since the Revolution of 1979 cannot be thought of as only having started after the 12th of June 2009.

Khatami came into office in 1997 when the group defending the ideas of Seyyed Ali Khamenei as Leader of the Islamic Republic favoured Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nouri. To vote for Khatami was to say 'No' to Khamenei and the authoritarian faction.

During its eight years in office the Khatami government was not able to compete with the authoritarians as much as it should have, or rather, as much as it was expected to. Neither did it succeed in passing structural reforms in the country's political system. It did, however, achieve some small victories. A fresh breeze blew through Iranian cinema and energised it. A large volume of literature on the humanities, particularly politics and philosophy, was translated into Persian and made available to the public. Many newspapers were published and, during their brief existence, entered the fight with the reactionaries to snatch away the veil that covered the truth. Weak and fragile NGOs were founded and attained the right to exist. Student meetings, discussions, and statements once more gave meaning to 'the student movement'.

These trends came to be a way of life for the people of Iran. A return to the ways of the past seemed impossible. And so, Ahmadinejad's four-year-term was a great shock for those who did not want to choose anymore between the lesser of two evils. In the absence of an opposition able to attract a majority of votes and in a period where the conditions needed to provoke a revolutionary uprising did not exist, the course of political and social change once again reminded the people of the importance of a step by step movement for reform. Pressure from below and bargaining from above became a tactic derived from the common sense of a nation determined to lessen its distance from the free world. These were a people who never expected to be shot at in the streets for the crime of protesting against Ahmadinejad's dubious claim to the presidency.

This is neither the writing of a seasoned political analyst nor of a political activist. I am only relating events which I witnessed not long ago. I aim to portray the enthusiasm of a people who wanted to take a step, just one step, so that their true face would be seen by the world, but who saw their own blood spilled on the streets of Tehran; people who were beaten with batons for gathering around the graves of those who had lost their lives, and were thrown in prison. I write about a people who wanted nothing but freedom, and about days unlike any that I have witnessed before.

FREEDOM DOLED OUT BY THE GOVERNMENT

TOWARDS THE APPROACH OF SPRING 2009, at every gathering with any intellectual undercurrent the subject of discussion was the upcoming June elections. Iran's middle class was anticipating the next four years of a country in a critical political and economical situation. While economics experts were speaking of the rising level of inflation and unemployment, the government's figures not only contradicted them, but went so far as to lay claim to commendable accomplishments. The people struggled daily with the high prices, unemployment, and administrative chaos while they listened to the foreign media talk of economic boycotts and their effects. And still, the government continued to dismiss it all as lies.

The experts who were talking to the journalists closely linked to the reformist movement and accusing the government of faking statistics were not associated with the foreign opposition but were mostly figures who had held positions of responsibility either in the Khatami government or in other previous governments. In contrast to the elections of four years previously, the students and young people

THE PEOPLE STRUGGLED DAILY WITH THE HIGH PRICES, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND ADMINISTRATIVE CHAOS WHILE THEY LISTENED TO THE FOREIGN MEDIA TALK OF ECONOMIC BOYCOTTS AND THEIR EFFECTS.
active in the political or social spheres decided to participate and vote. There was one goal in sight: Ahmadinejad had to go!

Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, with the support of the people close to him, once more announced that he was going to run in the elections. Previously, it was widely believed that there was too strong an agreement between Khatami and Mir Hossein Moussavi for the latter to declare his candidacy when Khatami was already running. However, when Moussavi then announced his candidacy, it was in fact Khatami who retreated. Khatami was still that same figure who in 2001 was commonly considered as not overly eager to continue in his role as president.

When Moussavi entered the elections, Khatami's followers gave him their support, despite having previously vocalised many reasons as to why Khatami was the more prepared for the position. This substituting of the candidates did not cause divisions; the majority of Khatami's votes went to Moussavi. It was only Mehdi Karroubi's presence which split the reformists' votes.

Mehdi Karroubi was the only person who, in a letter addressed to Seyyed Ali Khamenei, had the confidence to mention Khamenei's son Mojtaba and openly accuse him of manipulating the elections four years earlier. The letter was banned from publication in the press, but was made public through internet media. In May 2009, Karroubi refrained from destroying Moussavi's image. During a televised debate, he spoke gently and sensitively. The Moussavi-Karroubi debate was not a competition between the two, but rather a discussion over the elections. Still, Karroubi's questions showed his astuteness when he asked Moussavi, "Are you ready to follow this road to the end?"

By founding the National Trust Party and publishing a newspaper of the same name, Karroubi had chosen a separate path and diverged from the reformists who supported Khatami. By running for president, it seemed as if he was offering himself for further humiliation at the hands of the authoritarian rulers who had mockingly declared in the last elections that he had received fewer votes than the number of his supporters in his home province.

From the very beginning it was clear that in this presidential race Mohsen Rezai, the secretary of the Expediency Council, was only a very marginal contender. Mir Hossein Moussavi's presence in these elections after years of silence, however, created a huge stir amongst the population. The response which his candidacy roused was to a level that Iranian intellectual circles had predicted only to be possible if Sheikh Abdollah Nouri, the reformist government's interior minister, were to run. In the end, Nouri did not enter the elections, and in the midst of the commotion amongst the reformist parties concerning Moussavi, no one put him forward.

Moussavi, who was the prime minister appointed by Ayatollah Khomeini during the Iran-Iraq war, was not a figure who stood out in the memories of the young population of Iran. The younger generation of his support base had been children during the war years. Moussavi's clear criticisms of Ahmadinejad and his policies during the campaigning season, along with the widespread propaganda backing him from the Participation Party and the Organisation of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, and, importantly, his public appearance together with his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, all contributed to his positive public image.

Moussavi was often referred to as a painter and his wife as a sculptress. The younger population thought of him as someone who had successfully steered the country through the years of war, and who had a positive attitude towards Khatami's reforms. He spoke calmly and was firm in his statements. He was not close to the Revolutionary Guards and the powers that be. He was emerging from his long silence. Moussavi was a candidate who was capable of winning a majority against Ahmadinejad, while Karroubi, despite his association with figures such as Cholam-Hossein Karbaschi, Mohammad Ali Abtahi, Abbas Abdi, and Emaddedin Baghi, did not have the support among the masses to secure a high vote and be elected to power.

With the multitudes of young people dissatisfied and frustrated by Ahmadinejad, Moussavi was portrayed as a symbol of change in the 2009 elections. In contrast to the 2nd Khordad elections, the people were unrestricted in their campaigns for their candidates. During the 1997 elections, in many schools carrying a poster of Khatami would result in a conflict with the education official. The principals, supervisors, and teachers would only speak openly of the candidate close to Khamenei. This time, however, the middle schools and high schools were full of students who brought pictures and brochures from Moussavi's campaign.

In June 2009, the streets of Tehran, especially in the north of the city, erupted in spontaneous carnivals in which the even the most

expensive cars drove around decked out in green ribbons and pictures of Moussavi. My office was in Jordan Street/Africa Boulevard and every afternoon I watched these scenes and saw how the police forces did not intervene.

At night, the city's main squares were filled with young people pouring out into the streets and eagerly celebrating the approach of the day when Ahmadinejad would relinquish the presidency. These street gatherings gradually spread from the north of the city to the south. Still, in the south and east of Tehran, supporters of Ahmadinejad's government who wanted him to stay in office appeared with his pictures and the flag of the Islamic Republic, right across from the gatherings of Moussavi's supporters in an attempt to drown out the voices of their rivals. The groups of Ahmadinejad's supporters were well-orchestrated. While the gatherings of young people supporting Moussavi were always festive in appearance and continued day and night in the city's principle squares and streets, there was no one there giving them instructions about what to say and what not to say, no one gave orders about when to move and when to stop. On the other side, however, it was the local mosques' Bassij organising the crowds of Ahmadinejad's supporters. Those in charge of coordinating the groups of Bassij and of the people whose hearts belonged to Ahmadinejad did keep trying to prevent fights from being started by their own forces. However, when discussions erupted between the two sides, the likelihood of violence on their part increased. Debates between the two groups became impossible when Ahmadinejad's supporters began to twist the truths about the last four years of the government's rule. From this point onwards, the two groups were reduced to standing and facing each other and chanting their slogans.

The run-up to the elections was unlike anything that the generations that grew up after the 1979 revolution had ever experienced. On these nights the police left the campaigners alone. It was as if a breeze of liberty was blowing through the streets. The cries and slogans that resounded were voicing demands which did not conflict with the Constitution.

However, the previous year's message from the Leader of the Islamic Republic, addressed to Ahmadinejad's cabinet, was not forgotten by the people. It had stated that they must consider planning for the years ahead. It was brought to attention by people like Mostafa Tajzadeh, who said in a campaign meeting that on the eve of the elections news had arrived that the personnel in the Ministry of the Interior had been changed. Alongside the fraction-by-fraction steps towards liberty, he seemed certain that we were on the verge of witnessing some serious events take place.

For the first time in the Islamic Republic's election history, candidates debated with each other in the American style; publically before the people. Heated words were exchanged about the country's current policies on a platform provided by the media whose head is selected by the Leader. Prior to this, no one had dared to utter a word about the corruption of the sons of Hashemi-Rafsanjani and Nateq-Nouri in front of the Iranian government's cameras. But now Ahmadinejad, in order to escape from being cornered, referred openly to these affairs, though, of course, he was not pushed by the Leader or any judicial institution to answer for this.

The televised debates caused an immediate reaction. The slumber that had characterised these years was left behind and people exploded out into the streets. The enthusiasm over the elections was at its peak. News arrived from other major cities such as Shiraz and Esfahan telling of an agreement made between the middle class and the younger generation to expel Ahmadinejad from power.

THOUGH THE SMILE WAS KILLED, HOPE REMAINED ALIVE

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS were to be held, it became impossible to send SMS messages using mobile phones. The day of 12th June dawned. The voting stations throughout Tehran were crowded with people. I passed by and looked into a number of them. One mosque in south-east Tehran serving as a voting station used the excuse of holding presidential elections to compel the voters to cast their ballots for the elections of the Assembly of Experts at the same time, since these two elections were being held simultaneously.

By the afternoon, several voting stations had announced that they were short of ballots. They had told the people that they had to wait for more ballots to arrive, and this waiting dragged on and on. I contacted people outside the country. In Dubai, only Ahmadinejad's candidate code was pasted on the wall above the ballot boxes. This move made by the Islamic Republic's embassy led to protests by the voters. From Switzerland, we heard that Iranians were participating in the elections in unprecedented numbers. Iranians from Strasbourg, France had gone all the way to Germany to vote. Students living abroad, from Malaysia to Europe, were active. The Iranians outside of our borders were allied with such determination that news of it reached us here. News arrived from the provinces that a number of voting stations had stopped accepting votes before the announced time. The ballot station officials stated that this was due to a shortage of ballots.

In the afternoon, reformist websites gradually began to be filtered, and this was while the voting was still in progress. It was evening when my colleagues told me that one of Moussavi's campaign offices had been attacked by armed plainclothes militia. Together with some friends I went to Qaitariyeh where the campaign offices were in a new and modern building. An hour earlier, plainclothes militiamen had attacked and thrown teargas into the building.

The campaign staff had grabbed two or three of the men and turned them over to the police. Of course, the police released them a short distance away. Armed men had fired into the air in the street opposite the building. When we arrived in front of the building, the police were still there. People were calm and had gathered out of curiosity. I saw one of my colleagues, a religious-looking man, who was rumoured to have once been a Bassij. I approached him and asked, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I heard that they were attacking the campaign office." He was from south Tehran and still firmly believed in the goals of the 1979 revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini. He had also voted for Moussavi.

SMS service was still cut off. Many of the polling stations were refusing to accept more people with the excuse that they had no more ballots. We were only a few hours away from the legal end to the voting period.

That night, news arrived that Moussavi wanted to hold a press conference. This seemed strange. There had been no prior announcement of this meeting, and it was 11 pm by this point.

I went to the place where Moussavi was due to speak. The domestic and foreign press had swarmed there and the street outside was crowded with members of the public. The chamber was filled to at least three times its capacity with journalists on their feet. Photographers were milling around, searching for a view of the table in the middle of the chamber. When Moussavi entered, commotion filled the room. His voice could scarcely be heard. I did not manage to see his face. Eventually, silence was established. Moussavi spoke of how his election observers had been expelled from around the ballot boxes and of how the Ministry of the Interior had broken its promise to extend the voting hours. He said that since the previous night when sms service was cut off, neither the National Telecom nor any other institution would respond to questions about the matter. He stated, "I am definitely the winner of these elections."

Moussavi also alluded to the movements which were in the process of disrupting the elections. By the time I left, the crowd in the streets had swollen. It was difficult for cars to pass through and groups surrounded those who had come from the meeting, pressing them to relay what they had heard. Everything that the people had seen from the previous night up until this moment steadily increased their anxiety. Moussavi's speech, too, had added to this. His declaration that he had definitely won the elections led his audience to believe that he had been shunted aside. I had not yet arrived home when the media close to the government declared that Ahmadinejad had won the elections. It was a victory which Seyyed Ali Khamenei hastily congratulated him for, before it had even been confirmed by the Guardian Council.

On the morning of 12th June, when Ayatollah Khamenei cast his vote before the television cameras, he had assured the public that there was no fraud involved and that the elections would be sound. Ahmadinejad's face was also worth remarking on. It was the face of one defeated; the face of someone who has lost self-confidence. Khamenei's message at the ballot box was addressed solely to Ahmadinejad.

What took place was a coup against the will of the people. According to what the government itself admitted, and, of course, attempted to use to its own advantage, the level of participation in the elections was unprecedented. For so many years, the Islamic Republic's propaganda mechanisms had tried to bring the people to the ballot box to give the West the impression of a system based on democracy. This time it was the people who, even more so than in May 1997, wanted their vote to depict social reality; the voice of a nation demanding freedom, democracy, development, and progress. This time, the Islamic Republic no longer wanted the people to come to the ballot box. The show of freedom before the elections in the streets and on official television had gone far enough and continuing it would be very dangerous for the regime.

THEY TOOK BACK THEIR VOTES WITH SILENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND MARCHES.

THE OTHER FACE OF THOSE WHO TRY TO GIVE THE WORLD ADVICE

THE PEOPLE DID NOT STAY IN THEIR HOMES. They took to the streets the very day after the elections. The action that the people initiated in the streets of the Iranian capital and the confrontation that they were met with in response have not been reported in the media by anyone but themselves. The nights before the elections took place, they had declared that they would not be silent in the face of fraud, and they were not. They took back their votes with silent demonstrations and marches. They no longer wanted to be a propaganda tool for foreign consumption. They demonstrated their own identities as separate and distinct from the regime; identities that the small minority that held control seemed to have taken into captivity. If they had boycotted the ballot box, the Leader's preferred candidate would have been in charge. And if they participated in the elections and said, "No", it would nevertheless still be the choice of the Leader and the Revolutionary Guards which would prevail.

The people of Iran, for all their differences of opinion in political discussion, had and still have one universal demand, and that is that Ahmadinejad must not be considered the representative of the Iranian nation as he did not come to power through the will of the majority of the people. The non-violent struggle for this and, progressively, for an open political atmosphere continues, even after the coup of 12th June and the merciless repression. Wounds and tears have been inflicted on a people whose glimpse of freedom and democracy was the chance to vote for a candidate who had passed through the filter of the Guardian Council. The people's protest was met with violence starting that very 13th June, and this violence was officially endorsed with the Friday prayers sermon made by the Leader on the 19th June.

On the 21st June, bullets were fired into the same throngs of people who were pictured lining up for the ballot boxes so that the government could use the photos as propaganda to make a show of democracy in Iran. Those who lost their lives after 12th June did not all think alike, but they did share this belief; that they had to utilise the right to vote and participate in their fate. They wanted to be citizens of today's world. They were prepared to die to tell the world the reality of Iran behind the image of Ahmadinejad preaching to the world from the United Nations as if he were a prophet. I will never forget the sight of that believing ex-Bassij colleague of mine in one of the post-election street demonstrations. He carried a black placard over his head in one corner of which was a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini and on which was written, "Kill us. Our nation will be even more awakened." These were the words with which Khomeini had addressed the Shah.

Indeed, everyone became an ally of the movement according to their own ideas. Those who believed that the system of the Islamic Republic had deviated from its true path stood in the same front line as those who considered the entire 30-year history of rule by a religious regime to be the absolute embodiment of oppression. Reformists and opponents of the Islamic Republic's intellectual foundations joined together not to put an end to the ruling regime, but rather to take back their votes with the slogan, "Death to the dictator!"

The time from 13th June to the day of Ashoura of 2009 [27th December] has left a heavy imprint in the memory of Iran's society, striving for change. Every day of this period could be reviewed and analysed hour by hour. What is important is that every one of these days, under scrutinising examination, has lifted the veil which the face of the authoritarians in Iran was hiding behind. This minority group has not even honoured its own ideology, the Shiite faith, and did not refrain from killing Muslim citizens on the noon of Ashoura.

The authoritarianism in the Iranian regime has resorted to arms and, in terms of Iran's future and its impending political evolution, it is the sole threat to the Islamic Republic. Today, in addition to the Revolutionary Guards and numerous security forces, every mosque is a base for Bassij militiamen. In every neighbourhood arms have been distributed to the repressors. Since 9th June 1999 and the attack on the student dormitories the number of anti-riot units has increased. The people of Iran are under military siege. When these military forces confront the people, their aim is not to disperse or arrest demonstrators, but to eliminate them.

Contrary to the rumours amongst Iranians, the repressive forces did not employ Arabs in addition to Bassij and plainclothes forces, but only Iranians themselves. Exploiting class differences and economic divergences between the residents of the capital, the villages, and towns in border provinces, they recruit youths for the anti-riot forces. They constantly acquire tools for repression from China and put them

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in the hands of people who use it to wreak their personal vengeance. Youths who have been raised in deprivation take revenge for their differences on the city folk involved in protests.

FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

THE ELECTIONS OF 2009 WERE VERY COSTLY for both sides of the conflict. The regime as well as the nation was harmed during this historic event.

The prisons were filled with the reformists' leaders, the staff of the electoral campaigns, critical journalists, human rights activists, and street protesters. The cogs that turn the mechanisms of execution seemed to be using any excuse to turn faster. At the same time, pictures of the youths who lost their lives in the streets of the capital were seen in the farthest reaches of the world. The government became increasingly isolated in the international arena; officials travelling abroad were bombarded with questions. The police, anti-riot, and plainclothes forces were constantly kept at the ready and then witnessed the nightmare of an uprising of a million people. The Leader of the Islamic Republic became aware of the extent of contempt against him when, under the shadow of his rule, his picture was torn to pieces in the streets. The result of all this will manifest itself in the long run.

On the other hand, the further we examine Iranian society and look into its contemporary history, the more we find that Iran is becoming politically pluralist. In fact, one could scarcely raise a single banner and keep everyone under it for more than a moment without pointless squabbling. To define freedom and its limits, and to understand 'national interest' and its scope, both concepts which represent the ultimate desires of the Iranian nation, would be exceedingly complicated. This complexity is reflected in the divergent activities of the different groups and circles, but when we consider the slogans they use we can see a more simple approach to the situation and perhaps more agreement between them.

And so, the struggle for democracy in Iran has a long road ahead. Not just because of the plurality of opinions and conflicting ideas, as it is because of such variety that democracy gains its meaning, but rather because the key points of this intellectual diversity are far too broad for all of the demands to be met in a way that could be put into practice.



Ali Kheradpir, born in 1979, had been working as a journalist for seven years before he had to leave Iran at the beginning of 2010. He wrote for the dailies Ham-Mihan, Kargozaran, Etemad-e Melli, and several others. He left Iran in January 2010 and is now living in France, working for euronews.





I REMEMBER WELL HOW HEAVY THE ATMOSPHERE SURROUNDING US WAS IN THOSE DAYS WHEN WE HAD NO CERTAINTY ABOUT WHOM OUR CANDIDATE WOULD BE.

Arash Ghafouri

SETAD 88-IRAN'S GREATEST CAMPAIGN IN SUPPORT OF MIR HOSSEIN MOUSSAVI

In mid-June 2009 Ali-Reza Alavi-Tabar, a prominent reformist political thinker, came to one of Iran's major cities to give a speech in support of Mir Hossein Moussavi. Looking over the crowd, he said, "If the reformists had had a campaign team like Setad 88 during the 2005 presidential elections, they certainly would have won." Setad 88 had organised Alavi-Tabar's speech and had been working throughout Iran, mobilising the people and gaining support for Moussavi. This campaign team's activities were so successful that their widespread programme received a broad welcome in all the cities and townships in the country.

It was near the end of 2008 when 88 young reformist activists from various cities in Iran signed a declaration. Calling themselves the "National Youth Campaign Organisation Supporting Khatami (Setad 88)", they stated their support for Mohammad Khatami as a candidate in the upcoming presidential elections. '88' was also a reference to the coming year in the Iranian solar calendar, the year of the elections, and, in the opinion of these young people, the year in which Iran had to be saved from the perilous course it was running. At that time it was pretty much certain that then-president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and Mehdi Karroubi, a reformist opposition leader, were going to run for office. There was also talk of Mir Hossein Moussavi possibly taking part in the elections. Then, the former chief commander of the Revolutionary Guards and current secretary of the Expediency Discernment Council, Mohsen Rezai, and the mayor of Tehran and former chief of police, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, within their respective private circles both expressed an interest in running and even took the first steps towards organising their campaign teams.

Mohammad Khatami's supporters, however, could not be completely sure that he would run. Previously Khatami had said that under no circumstances would he participate in the elections. The reformists did not have any other candidates whom they thought would be able to pass the obstacle of being declared qualified by the Guardian Council and yet also have the capacity to gain a high number of votes. Former Prime Minister Mir Hossein Moussavi was certainly an appropriate candidate and rumours about his participation were circulating, but he was also expected to have participated in the 1997 and 2005 elections as the reformists' candidate but in the end had not stood.

Meanwhile, Mehdi Karroubi was struggling with problematic relationships with the progressive reformists in the Participation Party and the Organisation of Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution and even with some prominent members of Khatami's office. Also, the reformists did not think that he would be able to defeat Ahmadinejad. Mohammad Khatami's younger brother and former general secretary of the Participation Party, Mohammad-Reza Khatami, was one of the potential reformist candidates for the presidential elections, but because out his outspokenness he had little chance of passing the hurdle of gaining the approval of the Guardian Council.

These factors led to a number of the reformists, particularly members of the Participation Party and the Mojahedin of the Revolution and some from Mohammad Khatami's office, pleading insistently with Khatami to come to Iran's rescue and change the current climate by agreeing to run in the tenth presidential elections. If Khatami did declare his candidacy, the primary competition would be between him and Ahmadinejad. They would overshadow the other candidates and some, like Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, would probably not even run. Ahmadinejad recognised Khatami as his sole rival and repeated on various occasions that he considered him to be the only member of the opposition who could pose a threat to his chances of re-election.

So, these circumstances were the background to these 88 people deciding to organise a youth-led election campaign for Khatami throughout the various provinces of Iran, under the assumption that he would accept the invitation to run for office. At the same time 22 young Khatami supporters formed a team whose aim was to persuade Khatami to participate in the elections and they created an internet campaign to invite him. It operated under the name, "Petition for an Invitation to Khatami." But Setad 88 had already made the assumption that Khatami would participate and had organised provincial support for him amongst the youth. These campaign teams consisted of young people from reformist parties supporting Khatami, civil society activists, and journalists who had all in some way supported reformist candidates in previous elections and were involved with Khatami and his office.

Setad 88 made its first public announcement with a statement signed by the 88 founding members. It then formed separate campaign teams in the country's 30 provinces, each with 88 members. These then elected their leadership by majority vote, which would consist of a central council of 12 to 15 people and a provincial secretary. The same electoral methods also spread from the provinces to the townships, so that in most of the country's major townships, groups of 88 or more had been set up. Two months before the elections, the number of these township teams had reached 233. Campaign teams were set up among various groups and layers of society, such as journalists, guild activists, and clerics, each still composing of 88 people. In Tehran, however, due to the importance of the vote and the large number of votes expected to be cast, 22 separate teams were organised; one for each of the municipal districts. Of course, the number of members in each district was far greater than 88.

In the meantime a sequence of events unfolded which ultimately led to these newly-established teams offering their support to Mir Hossein Moussavi. Early in the winter of 2008, Khatami had firmly stated that between himself and Moussavi, there should only be one reformist candidate, and that he would focus all his efforts on persuading Moussavi to agree to run for president. At this point, Moussavi was standing aside. According to rumour, he was wavering about his decision as to whether to run and was still waiting to see how the country's conditions would develop in the months ahead before announcing whether or not he would run. From Khatami's point of view, it was important that Moussavi make his decision quickly because the election season was approaching and he would have to organise his staff and begin to make campaign trips to the various provinces. Khatami repeatedly emphasised that the reformist candidate had to be chosen by the beginning of 2009 at the very latest so that the campaign team could implement the electoral logistics properly by the following spring. What with Mir Hossein Moussavi's early refusals to announce his candidacy, Khatami was put under a lot of pressure from his supporters and by widespread public opinion. Seeing that time was running out for him to organise a campaign and actively participate in the elections, he decided to announce his candidacy.

When Khatami announced his candidacy, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who had no intention of running against him, dissolved his own campaign. Simultaneously, the government supporters' attacks against Khatami intensified. The government and some influential figures within the regime were worried about Khatami participating in the elections, since they believed that he was capable of winning. So, they thought it would be to their benefit to encourage Moussavi to run instead.

There was also the fact that Moussavi was not as well known among the younger reformists and political activists who had become active after the first decade since the revolution. The only image the public had of him was that of a prime minister beloved of the Imam [Khomeini] early in the revolution. This was how the members of Setad 88 had perceived him as well. Although there were people in Setad 88 close to Mir Hossein Moussavi's office, including the chief of his youth staff, even they preferred Khatami as their electoral candidate, since, as Khatami's deputy and advisor, Mohammad Abtahi, put it, Mir Hossein Moussavi was "like an unopened melon; people don't have much information about what's going on inside."

Khatami's electoral campaign organisation was headed by his trusted colleague Mohammad Reza Aref, who had been his first deputy when he was president. As well as the work done by the young people supporting Khatami, particularly in Setad 88, the early stages of implementing his campaign in Tehran and various provinces had already been planned out. It was then that Moussavi announced that he would participate in the elections, less than a month after Khatami had. This was something which was hard for any of us, especially the young reformists, to have foreseen at first, and it took us all by surprise.

The government's supporters and the media opposed to the reformists tried to draw attention to the divisions among the reformists

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and pretty much declared that the reformists had split their own votes. Also, they ignored the statement that Khatami had previously made saying that between he and Moussavi there would only be one candidate. As the chief of Setad 88's campaign and planning office and the person in charge of organising the first staff conference in late winter 2009, I remember well how heavy the atmosphere surrounding us was in those days when we had no certainty about whom our candidate would be. Khatami was due to participate in our conference and to speak to the young people who supported him, but he decided to pull out. Owing to the conditions created by Moussavi declaring his candidacy, Khatami announced that he would bow out of the elections, despite the insistence of most of his aides and advisors. He then beseeched his supporters to join with Moussavi and support him.

Khatami's retreat and his request that we support Moussavi put Setad 88 in the most delicate situation in its history. The campaign had been formed around Khatami and all the members, despite all their differences arising from membership in various parties and even their activities in civil society, considered their mutual support of Khatami to be their most important common ground. Even in its foundational meeting, which was held towards the end of the winter of 2009, this point had been made clear and explicit. Some members had repeatedly declared that this campaign was only valid with Khatami's participation and that without him it would be meaningless. Despite the fact that Khatami had encouraged all his supporters to back Moussavi, Setad 88 put the matter to a vote among all the members nationwide, and didn't reach a decision until after holding separate meetings with Karroubi and Moussavi. Finally, all the provincial chiefs assembled in Tehran for a conference. We were joined by representatives from Moussavi's and Karroubi's campaign organisations, Ali-Reza Beheshti and Abbas Abdi. The outcome of the vote was that we would support Moussavi, and we plunged into electoral campaign activity under the title "National Youth Campaign Organisation Supporting Khatami and Moussavi".

Although this support did create divisions within our organisation, and some members ultimately withdrew from activity in it, it placed all its provincial capacity at the disposal of Moussavi's provincial campaign teams, while in Tehran Province, too, Moussavi's youth campaign organisation was a team of Setad 88 members.

Setad 88's organisational power, which had reached the various social layers and the youth throughout the entire country before any other campaign team, enabled us to hold joint programmes on a broad level. This is one of the features which distinguished the June 2009 elections from previous elections under the Islamic Republic of Iran, as during the other elections the most important role was always played by the candidates' main campaign organisations. During this electoral race, however, some of the major campaign initiatives would never have been realised without Setad 88's involvement. Moussavi's central campaign organisation, presided over by Qorban Behzadiannejad, and the reformists' central campaign team supporting Moussavi, ran by Mohsen Aminzadeh, a top-level advisor to Khatami, played their classic roles in supporting and leading Moussavi's electoral campaign organisation around the entire country. But it would have been impossible to implement several major programmes, such as the observation of the anniversary of 2nd Khordad and an event which became popular in the electoral calendar as "the human chain", without Setad 88's planning.

Setad 88 concentrated on four major activities in its schedule after they gained the approval of the central council. The first was commemorating the anniversary of 2nd Khordad [23rd May] in 88 of Iran's townships, including Tehran and the centres of the biggest provinces and townships. In Tehran, Setad 88 worked alongside the main reformist campaign organisation supporting Khatami as well as the youths active in the campaign supporting Khatami and Moussavi. In the townships, too, the primary role was played by Setad 88. As well as speeches in Tehran from Khatami and Zahra Rahnavard, and in Isfahan, where Moussavi went for a provincial trip, leading reformists and prominent political activists spoke in 86 different townships on that day. Throughout the country the event was met with a vast reception from the people and, together with Moussavi's supporters, they celebrated the anniversary of the presidential elections of 23rd May 1997 when Khatami won and the reformists took power in Iran. This event was held before the official start of the electoral campaign and was in fact the final phase of the entry into the competition.

The second programme which Setad 88 put great emphasis on was campaigning in the city squares. To do this we identified which were the most important squares in Iran's cities and held street

MOUSSAVI'S SLOGAN, 'EACH CITIZEN A CAM-PAIGNER' WAS TRULY THE KEY SLOGAN WHICH TOOK THE ELECTIONS OUT OF THE CLASSIC URBAN CAMPAIGN PATTERN.

festivals there in support of Moussavi from dusk until far into the night. Campaign materials were passed out and discussion sessions and debates between supporters of the different candidates were organised. Sometimes we would arrange for prominent reformists to be present so that they could mingle with the people and speak with them about Moussavi. It was during one of these sessions that the prominent reformist intellectual Ali-Reza Alavi-Tabar made the statement about the importance of Setad 88 which is quoted in the beginning of this article. Throughout the campaign this programme was called the "phase of promoting the electoral campaign".

Setad 88's third event, which was accompanied simultaneously by another plan called the village campaign programme, was the "human chain in support of Mir Hossein Moussavi", and was our proudest achievement. It took place on the 8th June, five days before Election Day. A human chain covering 88 kilometres (though not, of course, joined together) was to be organised along specific courses throughout the country. At 4 pm, Moussavi's supporters would stand side-by-side along the street sides and each hold up a 50 cm green ribbon as a symbol of unity and solidarity and demonstrate in the form of a linked chain. Because of its vast popular reception, it turned out to be the biggest demonstration of Moussavi's supporters.

In Tehran, this chain extended 18 km along Vali Asr Street, one of Tehran's major streets, and held up the city's traffic so much so that it was impossible to travel that afternoon. This event unfolded in various ways in other cities. In Mashhad, the security forces stationed themselves in front of the Setad 88 office there to prevent the chain from being organised and a team of policemen linked arms to form a human shield facing Setad 88 to stop its members from leaving their office. In Arak, the commander of the region's police force contacted the chief of the township's Setad 88 and warned him not to go ahead with the demonstration. But in many townships, such as Isfahan and Shiraz, a chain was organised. The chain became a symbol of the widespread support for Moussavi, particularly in Tehran, where the city was taken over by Moussavi's supporters, and seemed proof that his vote for president was more or less secured. This event was the final phase and a milestone in Setad 88's campaign to stir the people to vote for Moussavi.

The other of Setad 88's central initiatives was the plan to organise campaigns in the villages throughout the country. Though a lot of

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work was put into the project, it was never fully realised, due to the heavy expenses and some lack of coordination. The plan was to register every village in the country, which together hold 30 per cent of Iran's population. Then, the reformist youth were to campaign for two weeks in the squares of most of these villages in order to convince the villagers of the benefits of voting for Moussavi. Moussavi's campaign organisation fully understood the importance of this programme. I personally contacted them twice and it had been confirmed that the plan should be carried out during the final days at any cost. However, in the end it was impossible to implement the plan on such a vast scale in that limited time, and so it was done on a very restricted scale. This programme was one of the campaign office's initiatives aimed at confronting the lack of contacts and exchange, something which in communication studies is called "the spiral of silence theory". In general, the villages were seen to be supporting Ahmadinejad and the only way to confront this was to create an initial public voice of opposition so that the villagers would be mobilised to vote for someone who could address more of their needs.

Every campaign programme, particularly in elections, needs a specific campaigning package which portrays and symbolises the candidate. Setad 88's planning and campaigning department set up its campaign package with pictures and designs of Moussavi and Khatami and used these symbols in all its programmes. A combination of three very specific photographs was used. The first pictured Moussavi with his hand on his chest, which showed his humility before the Iranian nation. In his various interactions with the Iranian people, Moussavi would unknowingly put his hand to his chest, so we used photographs of him doing this in the Setad 88's campaign packages. Another of the campaign's images pictured Moussavi holding the hand of his wife, Zahra Rahnavard. This was particularly significant because of the importance of Rahnavard's presence as Moussavi's companion, especially amongst women. The third was one of Mohammad Khatami with open hands. We thought of this photograph as an apt symbol of society's reception of Khatami's reformist ideas and used it in most of our campaign designs along with the image of Moussavi with his hand on his chest.

The campaign team also produced many films and clips of Moussavi's provincial trips and his support there which were distributed in bulk, mostly as CDs but sometimes also as DVDs. At the same time we produced songs supporting Moussavi on social and popular themes and spread them throughout society.

When the elections were held and the post-election events occurred, one of the charges made against me, many of my friends in Setad 88, and many other organisations supporting Moussavi was that we tried to instigate a "velvet revolution". This was a narrow-minded idea which arose from the short-sighted thinking of some people who intended to excuse their own velvet coup. I do not deny that the huge efforts made by Moussavi's campaign organisation may well have played a part in inciting the people towards public activism. Moussavi's slogan, "Each citizen a campaigner" was truly the key slogan which took the elections out of the classic urban campaign pattern and ensured a platform for any people who had the ability and training to use it. One day a young man contacted me offering Setad 88 the use of six songs from a collection composed by himself and his friends as a sign of protest against the current situation so that they could be spread around the country. In the same way the photograph of the killing of Neda Agha-Soltan, a young girl whose martyrdom was turned into a symbol for the struggle of the Iranian people, was broadcast all over the world through an unknown individual's mobile phone camera.

My friends and I played a very meagre role in the 15th June demonstrations which pales into insignificance when compared with the great and vast presence of the people, and we played no organised role in any of the protests after the election. Along with the people of Iran, we had become experienced in coming out into the open and demonstrating against our country's situation. Still, I had never imagined it possible that the elections would go so much in Ahmadinejad's favour. Nor had I imagined it possible that the people would protest on such a massive and broad scale against those who had stolen their votes. These elections provided an opportunity for all Iranian people to participate in determining their own fate. It was a show of force which, although not yet proven successful, has a radiant future ahead of it since it embodies the wishes of the entire Iranian nation.

During the 2009 elections all of my knowledge about assembling a commercial advertising campaign in a political context and about political communication was put to the test. I have no regrets about what I did during the elections and I hope that one day the political atmosphere in Iran will allow me to be freely active in my country, so

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that I can once again put my new experiences into practice. At the same time, I am happy to have fully participated in my country's democracy-through a ballot with Moussavi's name on it. Of all my experiences of democracy and my pro-democracy activities, voting for Moussavi is the thing I am most proud of.



Arash Chafouri, born in 1979, initially studied industrial engineering, but developed a personal interest in journalism. He started working for reform newspapers like Hayat-e Now, Jomhouriyat, Eqbal and Etemad-e Melli. He was also member of the Iran's biggest reform party, the Mosharekat, and its media and informa-

tion committee. During the campaign for the presidential elections of 2009, Arash Ghafouri was head of the planning office for the reformist youth's campaign supporting Moussavi (Setad 88). He is now living in Boston, USA.





I REALISE THAT I AM WITNESSING A COUP TAKE PLACE.

Seyyed Shahin Nourbakhsh THAT ILL-FATED AFTERNOON...

Dedicated to Sohrab Arabi and the other martyrs of the Green Movement

It is less than 24 hours after the presidential elections, and I am sitting outside the meeting hall of the Islamic Iran Participation Front Party. I am waiting for a chance to speak with Dr. Mohsen Mirdamadi, the party's secretary general. The political committee meeting is over and its members are gradually leaving the building. The secretary general is signing letters and I'm waiting for him to finish so that I might seize the opportunity to talk with him. There are less than 15 people left in the building. Without warning, two plainclothes militiamen holding walkie-talkies enter the hall. One of them shouts, "No one move! Sit still!" The second demands, "Which one of you is Mirdamadi?" They must have never even seen a newspaper if they are unable to recognise the secretary general of the Participation Front Party. As he speaks, the man shows his weapon to the crowd. The secretary general rises, introducing himself, and asks the men for their identification cards and warrants to enter the Party headquarters, as the law requires. In response they shout insults and try to drag him outside.

In an attempt to defend the secretary general some young party members begin to struggle with the aggressors. A commotion ensues and a flood of plainclothes militiamen enter the building, descending like a wave of destruction. In the midst of the conflict I hear Mirdamadi say, "The law states that you must present identification cards and a judge's order so that we can know who you are." They respond with continued abuse and physical aggression. Mirdamadi is dragged out in front of the building's entrance. The youths who were trying to stop the men gather there too, and struggle further. I get forced out of the building by the pressing crowd. The street is blocked by security forces and several cars are parked there. The street is packed with men holding walkie-talkies, but all their attention is focused on the conflict surrounding the secretary general.

Suddenly, my eyes fall on Mohsen Safai-Farahani, the vice secretary general, who has also been arrested and put inside a car with private license plates. I turn and look behind me. The scene is appalling. The violence with which Dr. Mirdamadi is being dragged into the car is indescribable. My instant reaction is to think: "This is a coup d'état." My whole body freezes as I watch the scenes of conflict and I feel a cold sweat settling on my forehead. I am unaware that at this moment other arrests are taking place. I want to get word out to my other friends and am determined to escape from the fray. I do not even manage to take one step before someone behind me grabs my shirt. I turn and see a skinny youth. Threateningly, he presses his weapon against my stomach and grabs my mobile phone. He turns and marches me back to the party headquarters and into the hall where others are being held. I still do not know who the men who attacked us are. Are they Revolutionary Guards? Are they from the Ministry of Intelligence, or the prosecutor's office? Or could they be members of the quasi-military groups which the government often utilises to repress, and riot, and kill? The government will organise these groups and then after their mission is accomplished will declare that they had formed spontaneously and had no relationship with the government whatsoever. Endlessly, all that I can see before my eyes is the scene of the secretary general's violent arrest and I realise that I am witnessing a coup take place.

Two hours pass and they bring us to Evin Prison and blindfold us. They now create a file for each of us arrestees. As well as my young friends who had been arrested in the party headquarters, I can identify a number of well-known political activists and journalists, despite my eyes being covered. Behzad Nabavi, Ahmad Zeidabadi, Abdollah Momeni are amongst those present. I hear one of the attackers shout, "We got Khatami, too!" I freeze. I don't know whether he means the ex-president Mohammad Khatami or Dr. Reza Khatami, the party's former secretary general. I later realise that Dr. Reza Khatami had

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been arrested that night and had been detained for 24 hours. Given the psychological conditions that we were put under that night, the thought that Mohammad Khatami himself might have been arrested, or even that we prisoners might be massacred did not seem too farfetched.

THIS IS JUST ONE OF THE NUMEROUS INCIDENTS that took place over the past year. Iran witnessed some momentous and horrific events; actions which the reformists have called a complete coup d'état against the popular government carried out in utter disregard for the law. These events, more than any other episodes which occurred in previous years, reveal a divergence from the principles of the Islamic Republic.

In order to make a rational and theoretical study into the roots of this divergence, one would undoubtedly look back to the early days of the Islamic Revolution and reflect on the history of the past 30 years. I am, however, a member of the "Third Generation". I was born after the Revolution, and I consider political events in terms of the years around 1996. These are the years of the fifth parliament, followed by the presidential elections of 1997, which resulted in the formation of the reformist government presided over by Khatami. When the reformist movement in Iran began it was the first time that I felt my social and political needs were completely understood. The reformists recognised my discontent at the situation in Iran, and tried to ensure that my demands were addressed. Up until that point, no opposition to the Islamic Republic, nor to the regime, had been able to offer such understanding. The 2nd Khordad, the day of Khatami's election victory, changed my life in every way. It led me to professional political and social action which became my world. It created in me a passion for the humanities and political science which ultimately led me to party activism and a career in journalism. My entire life had been spent under the shadow of the government of the Islamic Republic, haunted by the sinister events which come hand-in-hand with "revolution". With this background, I considered parliamentary reform and efforts towards gradual change to be a logical and effective movement.

During President Khatami's terms in office, the main goals of the reformist movement were "To vigorously push for the increasing presence of democracy within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran's system's parameters; to mobilise and strengthen social forces

UPON MY RELEASE, I WITNESSED THE TURBULENCE IN THE STREETS AND THE POWER OF THE PEOPLE'S PROTESTS.

towards democratising social life; to observe the human and civil rights of the people; and to fortify and strengthen a long-lasting and solid parliamentary party system."⁰¹

These goals were being strived for within a system which emerged as a result of a revolution. While I do not believe that revolution or rapid social and political change can ever guarantee the realisation of democratic demands, we did believe that the Iranian Islamic Revolution had been a genuine revolution with admirable goals, even though it rapidly diverged from them. Given the way in which political power is structured in Iran, and the recurring tendency for those at the highest levels of power to create an absolute dictatorship, the objectives of the reformists could only be attained through a fully planned and peaceful political movement. This movement needed organisations and organisation-building, so our party was formed to support these activities and to enhance the power of the individual.

Before the coup d'état of last year, which effectively turned the government into a monarchic political system, Iran's political institutions could be divided into two groups: the democratically elected, and the appointed, i.e. those institutions controlled by the Leader, Ali Khamenei. At this time the reformists' efforts were concentrated towards ensuring that the elected institutions contained members that supported democracy and freedom. The experience of the Khatami government and the sixth Majles [the elected parliament from 2000-2004] had shown that the presence of reformists in these offices supported the organisation and strengthening of civil institutions and facilitated the formation of new ones. For this reason, the reformists planned to be represented in the presidential, Majles, and municipal elections, and to do so through legitimate and legal means.

^{ca} Document of "Political and Organisational Strategic Deliberations" of the Islamic Iran Participation Front Party. Presented to party members on the 11th congress of the Participation Front in autumn 2008, this document was to provide strategic orientation for future activities. When leading party members were accused of having plotted a "velvet coup" against the regime of the Islamic Republic after the election crisis in June 2009, the Participation Front's internet platform Nowrouz published the document in order to provide the public with an insight into their planned activities and to counteract the allegations of the hardliners. See (in Persian): http://norooznews.biz/news/13718.php (Editor's Note).

Iran's political, economic, and social situation had suffered greatly during the first four years of the Ahmadinejad government. The upcoming 2009 elections then seemed a timely opportunity for the reformists to return to power and save the country from collapsing. The reformists had no intention of changing the regime by using illegal means or by overthrowing the system, and this was the approach with which they entered the electoral competition.

In the meetings preparing for the electoral campaign, the reformists made a grave analytical error. Based on past experiences, they agreed unanimously that the government would not be able to commit electoral fraud on an election of more than two or three million popular votes. They concentrated their efforts on encouraging the public to vote, thereby creating a large margin of votes so as to eliminate the possibility of a rigged election. However, they had underestimated the lengths to which the government was willing to go in order to defend its position. The government was determined to remain in power no matter what the cost, and committed electoral fraud on a scale far greater than the reformists had imagined possible. Not only this, but they instigated the bloody killing and repression of those people that protested.

When I consider the past and look back over the events of these recent years I can see that the perspective and positions taken by the reformists were acceptable and patriotic. The policy of reform is the least costly, the most reasonable, and the wisest means of political and practical action for achieving results. Human history is constantly marked by stories of selfish and overbearing rulers who drag their people into destruction and destroy the efforts of those members of society who have struggled for progress. This harsh fact does not mean, however, that the actions and efforts of that society's forwardthinking academics, intellectuals, and politicians, and those of the reformists were in vain. Today, thanks to the efforts of the reformists, the distinction between right and wrong is clearer than ever. The coup-makers are disgraced in Iran, their inhumane methods and adventurist policies are widely considered to have been detrimental to national interest, and general public awareness of the political situation has greatly improved.

Despite the heavy toll that recent events have taken on the country, the current social situation in Iran fills me with confidence

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that we will see qualitative steps towards democracy and modernity being made before too long. The Green Movement represents the ethical and human aspects of the Iranian nation, and is a movement as diverse and expansive as the Iranian people. With the determination of the people this movement could one day achieve the as yet unattained goal of constitutionalism in Iran.

I WAS FREED AFTER 24 HOURS OF DETENTION in Evin prison, and emerged utterly unaware of the developments on the outside and of the public's response to what had taken place. That same day most party members, including the secretary general, were temporarily released from prison. However, two prominent members Dr. Abdollah Ramazanzadeh and Dr. Mostafa Tajzadeh, were detained.

Upon my release, I witnessed the turbulence in the streets and the power of the people's protests.

The next day, while gradually recovering from the shock of my sudden arrest, I learned that two of my friends had been taken into custody again. I called my family from a public phone and learned that the security forces had just moments before appeared at my home in order to arrest me. I could not understand why they had come after me, given that only one day had passed since my release. In any case, after seeking advice from some friends, I decided that my best course of action was to not return home. I immediately left Tehran and began an underground existence which lasted for about a month. After one month on the run, I left Iran for Lebanon.

I have now been living in this country with my Lebanese wife for over a year. I have spent the entire year practicing journalism and media activism for the Green Movement. Although this period of exile-living in a completely different cultural and social atmosphere, far away from my family and friends-has been very painful and exhausting, I have not once regretted what I am doing or what I have done in the past. I have no interest in recalling my arrest and interrogation. My short-lived imprisonment is not worth mentioning-insignificant in comparison with the horrors which the Islamic Republic subjected others in prison to, and meaningless when compared with the resistance shown by my imprisoned friends who have spent a year in custody. But I believe that all the activists and journalists who, like me, were forced to leave the country after the elections, have a serious obligation to be active in the media and journalism. In fact, I believe it to be the most relevant way in which we can support those living in Iran who continue to struggle. This time I have spent living in Lebanon, a Middle Eastern country in parts of which the Islamic Republic has been greatly influential, has shown me how important it is that information concerning the situation in Iran is made widely known. People outside of Iran must be made aware of the character of the current government and its discordance with the people's aspirations. A regional plan to achieve this spreading of knowledge should be devised.

I very much hope that the Iranian reformists, in addition to the role that they are playing in Iran's transition into a democracy, will become a voice for advocating moderation in the whole of the Middle East.



Seyyed Shahin Nourbakhsh, born in 1983, was a member of the reformist party Mosharekat where he held several positions, including working with the media and on the information committee. He studied political sciences and worked as a journalist for the newspaper Towse'eh as well as for several reformist web-

sites. He is now living in Beirut.




REVOLUTION AND WAR CARRY THE STENCH OF VIOLENCE AND BLOOD.

Asieh Amini

I AM NOT A MILITANT, BUT I HAVE ALWAYS FOUGHT!

"I shall not vote!" I had made this decision solemnly, and up until one month before the elections, I was certain I would keep to it. There were many reasons why I was adamant I would not vote, the most important being my distrust of the government controlling the elections. I was sure that under no circumstances would it relinquish its power.

The widespread repression of civil society and social activists had shown that hostility and resistance to the reformists was not being restricted to the political sphere alone. The Ahmadinejad government and its supporters in the Revolutionary Guards, the Leader's office, the religious seminaries in Qom, and the various intellectual bases of the religious extremists known as the Principalists, who held Iran's primary economic and military resources in their grip, would never again let power slip out of their hands and into those of their rivals, the reformists.

It is necessary to explain that even during the elections for previous terms I had not believed that our votes could bring about the establishment of democracy, even with the reformists' victory. As long as undemocratic relations exist in our patriarchal culture, while discriminatory laws and the Iranian regime's political structure continue to exacerbate inequality, it is almost laughable to hope that a president alone could successfully establish democracy. Nevertheless, because I believe that it is impossible for there to be democracy without the participation of the people and civil society, the only possible nonviolent path that we could choose was for the reformists to take power. Like many others I am sickened by war, violence, our country's isolation in the international arena, the constant violations of human rights, the widespread repression, and the negative consequences of violent political overhauls. The only way to move forwards from political, social, and cultural underdevelopment and to attain equal rights is by the development of civil society and by criticising and challenging the structures of socio-political inequality. These activities are only possible under a government with a relatively good relationship with civil society, and, despite all the criticisms we had of them, the government formed by the reformists did have such a relationship.

Revolution and war carry the stench of violence and blood. The only way towards political development and an open atmosphere for civil society is gradual change. If I am honest, I had no hope in the reformists themselves or in the political activists inside the government. Rather, my hope was in us. "Us" meant civil society; it meant the media; it meant the dissidents who had been suppressed over the years. One might have hoped that the progress of political and cultural development could eventually smash these boundaries and give a chance for conscious criticism to arise. Of course, this was still a distant dream! But in any case, I, and many like me, thought that this way was far preferable to political deadlocks, and to war and revolution.

However, the Principalists' actions during the previous elections for Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first term, in which we were certain that fraud had taken place, as well as the suffocating four years of Ahmadinejad's presidency with its widespread socio-political suppression, had shown us that it is pointless to participate in elections when we know in advance what the results will be. And so, up until one month before the elections, my belief was that I should not vote.

CHANGE OF MIND

WE IRANIANS ARE A PEOPLE WHO CHERISH RELATIONSHIPS. Face-toface contact is still one of the most effective media in Iran. To find out whether a story is true or to learn about public opinion, it is enough to head for the nearest street in your neighbourhood. In taxis, buses, queues in the bakery-everywhere-you can participate in people's conversations and talk about the most important issues of the day. The issue might be the football World Cup, the serial killings, or the presidential elections. And so, although the chattering about and analysing of the forthcoming presidency had begun two or three months before the candidates were announced, as the elections drew nearer I was amazed at how the people seemed more intent on voting than ever. The reason was clear. Discontent, whether economic, social, or political, had reached unbearable levels. The conditions under which the Iranian people were suffering were worsening daily, and the people wanted nothing but change.

This general feeling deepened after a televised debate between the candidates served to intensify the electoral rivalry. The debaters' bold and public criticisms of one other seemed to have lifted the dam of political censorship which usually prevented the people from saying what was truly on their minds. Society's public atmosphere also became freer for the greater criticism and the expression of people's true feelings. As a result, during the final month before the elections everyone living in Iran, particularly in the bigger cities, witnessed a public enthusiasm, energy, and excitement. The people were constantly speaking of a change of circumstances. Even in the days leading up to Mohammad Khatami's victory in 1997, when he was elected president with an unprecedented 20 million votes, society's public atmosphere was not as critical of the current conditions as it was at this time.

It was during this period that my deliberations led me to a different conclusion. The only thing which could prevent electoral fraud was an extremely large turnout by the people. A huge turnout! A turnout which would guarantee that the results could not be altered through any level of fraud. I saw the people's determination to achieve this. I saw that the city no longer had a north or south. There were so few supporters of Ahmadinejad compared to those who opposed him that one could be certain that no amount of fraud could achieve his victory! And so I determined that I, too, would vote.

WOMEN'S COOPERATION

THE ZEAL AND ENERGY COURSING THROUGHOUT SOCIETY over the months leading up to the elections, together with the prospect of hope felt by the people, persuaded many social and civil activists, such as women's rights activists, to use this opportunity to express themselves in the public arena. They called on political activists as well as the general public to stand by their demands for change. And so, a number of women's rights activists called a private meeting in order to discuss this opportunity. I was amongst those women invited to attend. In previous years, many coalitions had been organised by women so that they might discuss and address their needs together and alongside one another. Yet I felt that the intellectual, ideological and political diversity amongst the women who were sitting next to each other for this coalition and working together to advance one specific demand, that is, gender equality, made this very unique.

From the most leftist to the religious and secularists; from the reformists to the civil, cultural, and artistic activists; the poets and the cinematographers and the political activists; every group was represented in this coalition. This in itself was a victory for us as activists in the women's rights movement, because it proved that the awareness which women had worked to raise over the course of these years had borne fruit and that there was a meeting of minds among women of various groups and professions who together, regardless of their ideologies and political tendencies, sought to eliminate discrimination against women.

One of the points discussed in the course of these meetings was that as we were pursuing equal gender rights, we ought to focus solely on this issue and it would therefore not matter to us which presidential candidate implemented the changes we required. One of the reasons for this proposal was to respect people's diverse political inclinations. For example, if someone wanted to vote for Moussavi or Karroubi or Rezai or even Ahmadinejad, but still pursued women's rights, she should be able to participate in this coalition. Even if she chose not to vote at all, she should be able to express her expectations of the candidates.

The coalition's first official statement was published on 25th April 2009, about six weeks before the elections. Following this, a number of well-known figures from the women's rights movement were selected to express the coalition's demands of the presidential candidates in a press conference. They stated two specific demands which they expected to be met. One was a change in the clauses in the Constitution in which there is discrimination between men and women. The other was adherence to the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The name of the coalition was the "Women's Coalition to Express Demands on the Occasion of Elections."

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THE CROWD WAS SO IMMENSE THAT SOMETIMES I COULD NOT BREATHE.

The coalition drew a lot of attention to women's demands for equal rights. At that time, many foreign reporters had come to our country to cover the Iranian elections. The publication of the statement and our press conference led to us being constantly approached by these reporters. One of the networks that showed an interest was the BBC.

Maziar Bahari, who was arrested after the elections and spent 118 days in prison, was in charge of preparing the BBC-programme "Panorama", and he came to our house to hold an interview. In this interview, he asked me who I would vote for. I answered, "We vote for women's rights", and explained that our slogan in the Women's Coalition was that we would vote for our demands to be met and that we had agreed that we would not announce support for any of the candidates. The film of this interview was broadcast by BBC International just before the elections.

EXCITEMENT AND HOPE

ALTHOUGH AS MEMBERS OF THE WOMEN'S COALITION we decided not to publically declare our preferences towards any of the candidates as a campaign activity, both in our homes and in gatherings of friends, we had many private discussions about whom to vote for and not vote for. I decided to vote for Moussavi, and some of my friends chose Karroubi.

In my opinion, Moussavi was the only one of four candidates who could stand up to Khamenei, the Vali-ye Faqih. For me, it was exceedingly important that in the past he had not been willing to pay any price to stay in power. Although he had been silent and withdrawn for 20 years and had not spoken out about the dictatorship, his own past, or that of others, he had shown that he was willing to challenge the Vali-ye Faqih, and this was for me the most important factor. In addition, I considered his economic programme to be more reasonable and just than those proposed by the other candidates.

GREEN NIGHTS

THE PASSION AND EXCITEMENT SHOWN BY THE PEOPLE during the campaigns for these elections seemed unprecedented. Everyone who had lived in Iran during the past 30 years agreed that there had never been a time like this before! The people very soon turned the candidates' colours into public symbols which covered the cities according to the people's support for their respective candidates. Moussavi's colour was

green, Karroubi's, white, Rezai's, blue. Ahmadinejad had at first chosen red but then chose the three colours of Iran to represent his campaign.

The people went out into the streets in droves and with expert skill devised poems, slogans, and songs about every issue which were recited, chanted, and sung. Iranian folk songs with lyrics about the politics of the day were on everyone's lips. News about Ahmadinejad's free distribution of potatoes in some deprived regions which, it was said, was done for his political campaign, led to people skewering potatoes on kebab sticks as a sign of protest and ridicule and taking to the streets, carrying them in marches shouting, "We don't want a potato-government!" sws messages were filled with politics. Everyone's mobiles picked up dozens of messages every day, from slogans and jokes to news and rumours.

For me, this whole experience was a mixture of anxiety and hope. Anxiety because, given all the suffocation, repression, and restrictions, how was it that all this freedom was suddenly being given to the people the night before the elections, and what was lurking behind all this unbelievable joy? And hope because all of this energy and passion and will shown by the people could surely never be quelled or dominated over again, and come what may, the people would certainly not relinquish these demands that they had expressed so clearly.

During the two weeks before the elections, after 10 pm my nine year old daughter would go to sleep and, asking her father to stay at home with her, I would go out into the city by car with my friends. All night long the main streets and even the side streets were filled with people who had attached pictures and symbols of the candidates to their heads or to their cars and were singing national songs, having political discussions and arguments, or dancing and celebrating. These scenes were incredible for me as a journalist having worked for 16 years in that country and in that city amongst the people. Towards morning, we would usually abandon the street's heavy traffic and return home.

12TH JUNE

I DON'T WANT TO SAY TOO MUCH ABOUT THE DAY of the elections or about how the entire city, so filled with tremendous excitement and suspense, was at the same time so frighteningly quiet. We kept visiting different parts of the city by car. In every place, the same hidden apprehension, that same anxiety, that same hope! I don't want to repeat how obvious it was which candidate the vast majority of people intended to vote for! I don't want to say how during the days before the elections news arrived from the provinces and even from the villages reporting that Moussavi was leading by many votes. After all, in my opinion, anyone could easily obtain news about Iran's turbulent elections, through text or image, and see what was happening.

The night we were awaiting news of the results, I was so excited that I could not stay home with my husband and child, and so went to a relative's home where many of my family members had gathered. We all had our phones in our hands. Everyone with a friend or acquaintance who might have fresh news got it from her and relayed it to the others. Someone said that the difference in votes was so great that the Leader had indirectly conveyed his congratulations to Moussavi in advance. This report did not strike me as sounding true, but we enjoyed listening to every rumour which gave us hope.

We learned that Moussavi announced in a press conference that he was now legally the president. But why take this unusual measure? Why at 11 pm, when the counting was not yet completed and when on television they were little by little releasing figures that contradicted this statement? It was about 2 am when I spoke on the phone with a famous Iranian reporter, who was arrested after the elections and is now in prison. I had been in contact with him all throughout the previous day and we had been exchanging reports. But this time he said with certainty, "Go, sleep. It has been decided that Ahmadinejad will be introduced as president tomorrow."

Astonished, I said, "What?!"

"I have just been told that all the newspapers which had predicted headlines announcing Moussavi's victory have been stopped during night and told to change those headlines! This means that it has definitely been determined that Ahmadinejad will be president and not Moussavi. There could be no other reason for this intervention."

THE WEEK AFTER THE ELECTIONS

THE NEXT DAY, THE MOMENT THE RESULTS WERE ANNOUNCED, I learned from one of my friends that Mir Hossein Moussavi was going to speak about the results of the elections in Ettelaat's hall. I went along there with one of my relatives. Security forces had blocked the street in front of the newspaper's office and police cars had been parked around it. The crowd was scattered, not concentrated in one place, but the streets around Mirdamad Street were teeming and it was obvious why those people milling around the streets were there. The crowd gradually started chanting slogans and singing. News arrived that people were gathering around Vali Asr Square, too, and were heading north up to Vanak Square. We decided to head for Vanak Square. When we reached Vali Asr Street and the upper part of Vanak Square, word murmured through the crowd that there had been a clash between the people and the security forces on the south side of the square. The crowd was so huge that it filled the entire street and square. We stayed out in the street until it was almost night and we returned home, like the entire city, anxious and excited. Our hearts were beating far from calmly in our chests.

Our protests took a more serious turn the next day, on Sunday. Once again, we went to Vanak Square and to Vali Asr Street. Once again, the crowd was extremely large, even bigger than on the day before. From the previous day's experience, we had learnt to wear sports shoes so as to be able to walk a long distance and in certain, quite probable circumstances, to run. We took along a small backpack and a bottle of water.

THE BIG MONDAY!

THAT DAY, THAT BIG DAY which doubtless saw one of the most important events in my life, Karroubi and Moussavi were also there. Many others also came. The crowd was so immense that sometimes I could not breathe. We decided that we should go from Revolution Square to Freedom Square. As we approached Sharif University, I saw Karroubi stood on the roof of a van which was moving slowly along with the crowd. I could not even guess how many of us there were. I felt that half the people of Tehran were gathered in this street! Later, some of my university friends made a calculation based on the size of the streets and squares and, using engineering equations, pictures, and films, estimated that between three and four million people had gathered in the streets in protest.

What was most astonishing was that everyone was absolutely silent! The people had learned from the previous days that it was best to march in silence to maintain peace and security and to demonstrate peaceful protest. And so, Monday was the impressive high point in this silent protest. Due to heat stroke, thirst, and asthma, I could not make it to Freedom Square. Just before reaching the Square, I was able to exit the march through a side street and get home by taxi. It was night time when I learned that there had been a clash in Freedom Square and that the people had been shot at from a Bassij base and several were killed.

The same night we heard that Tehran University's dormitories had been attacked and five students had been killed. Anxiety, excitement, and violence threatened to engulf us all. Worst of all, there was no way to give or receive information. During those first days, the Persian-language channels of the BBC and Voice of America were the most important news media covering the events in Iran. But how much could one rely on them? No one knew! We needed the truth, not its reflection in the media, but we had no way to get it.

BLOODY SATURDAY

OUR STREET DEMONSTRATIONS CONTINUED for seven days and seven nights until that Friday when Ayatollah Khamenei threatened the people in the Tehran Friday prayers, warning that if they continued the protests, they would be dealt with. Those who were familiar with Iran's Leader's words and their effects know that this speech was in fact a license to shoot. But on Saturday, I, like so many others, returned to the streets. This time, though, events took a different turn.

We decided that we would go from Revolution Square towards Freedom Square. My friends and I were around Navab Street when we suddenly saw a mass of people running towards us at great speed. Everything happened so quickly that I could not turn and run with the crowd. Just then, my hand was separated from my friend's and one of the officers in black, whose clothing was like that of the plainclothesmen, caught me on the sidewalk, like an animal in a trap. I pressed back against the wall of a shop along the sidewalk so that his truncheon would not hit me. But his first blow hit my head and the second landed on my shoulders. I collapsed senseless to the ground out of pain and shock and saw the officer raise his hand once again. Suddenly, my friends, who must have seen what was happening, and the bystanders on the sidewalk rushed towards me. The rush of a large crowd in our direction freed me in an instant and the officer jumped onto his comrade's motorcycle and they sped off. My head was dizzy and my vision had blacked out. The Leader's order to shoot was serious. They had been beating with the intention of killing. My friends took me under their arms and dragged me away.

The crowd was enormous and the sound of gunfire intensified by the minute. My head ached and I was finding it hard to breathe. In this condition I was a burden to my friends, as they could not run well and escape because of having to holding me up. For that reason, I released my hand from theirs and threw myself into the first side street along the road before Behboudi Street. I was not able to walk, so I went into the first alley on my hands and knees. The sounds of the people's slogans and shouting and gunfire came closer. The people were fleeing and the shooting continued. A thick smoke darkened the entire sky. Just then, when I was practically dragging myself along the ground, I saw an open door and a man stuck his head out. I asked him to help me. He quickly opened the door further and let me in. There were many others who took refuge in this house after me, two of whom were severely wounded. It occurred to me that I should record this moment as part of the evidence of a crime, and so I took out my mobile to record images and sounds.

Over an hour and a half later, I left that house. I was worried about my husband and my friends. I was not well. I had to go to the bathroom. I needed clean water. There were no open shops and I could not find a safe spot. Finally, I got a lift towards Sattar Khan Street in a car with a free seat. The traffic was very heavy and the streets were almost blocked. I could tell how angry the people were from the prolonged blaring of their horns. From the muttering I heard from passers-by I learned about similar catastrophes in the other streets of the city.

At that point, I still did not know that two or three streets away from where that truncheon had hit my head, a girl named Neda Agha-Soltan had been shot and that many other compatriots, even in that same street where I was, had not escaped from the officers with their lives. I still did not know how many protesters had been arrested and carried off to the terrifying prisons. I only saw smoke in that bloody dusk and heard the aggravated car horns and felt my head ache. I left the car and had to walk the long distance to my house. It was 9 pm when I reached home. Everyone was anxiously waiting for me.

AFTER THE BLOODY EVENTS

I WAS LAID UP AT HOME FOR TWO OR THREE DAYS. My neck was extremely painful and my family and I were worried. Moreover, terrifying news was arriving from all sides. We heard that they were grabbing the wounded from the streets. A friend who had a gash in his forehead described how whenever he tried to get to a hospital, he would find that the entire hospital was filled with Bassij plainclothesmen who were attacking the wounded. He finally had to resort to visiting a dental clinic, where they bandaged his head. We also heard some rumours which we couldn't be certain were true. For example, that the shots which they fired at the people contained plague microbes and that someone who had been shot, say, in the hand receiving a minor wound would suffer a severe case of the plague and die of a high fever. We heard that there was a large number of dead, wounded, and missing. Still the clashes continued and the people kept pouring out into the streets every day. I asked one of my doctor friends to visit me at home. After examining me, he said that the club had hit the hard part of my skull and I was lucky. He also looked at my injured neck and he prescribed a painkiller for it.

The Ministry of [Islamic] Guidance repeatedly sent messages to my husband's mobile via sMs and to the home's fax machine telling him that he had no right to take pictures of any of the ceremonies. This was the order which was being sent to all news photographers. But my husband and I kept sending reports and pictures and even some films via those problematic internet connections to our friends outside Iran to be used by the media so that the world would know what was going on in our country. In those days, I used three different pen-names to post articles on the website Roozonline. Our journalist friends and many political activists were arrested during those very first days. The situation was so terrifying that we could not even phone our friends and ask how they were. We constantly expected news about who was being arrested and, naturally, many of my friends and relatives were worried that I, too, would be arrested.

WOMEN'S ROLE

TWO WEEKS HAD PASSED SINCE BLOODY SATURDAY. Day and night, the foreign Persian-language television stations were broadcasting hours of footage of fire and blood. The image of Neda's death in the street had been shown on many global television networks and had shocked the world. But not a word was heard from the families of those who had been killed. Who were these people? They had been killed, and so why were their families silent? Had it been decided that the tragedy of the eighties was to be repeated? Had it been decided that again people should die and their bodies be buried in silence? Had it been decided that repression and suffocation would once more reign over us? We had no answers! These unanswered questions once more brought us women together.

This time, though, we were a small group whose members knew each other intimately. I sat for an hour in the home of one of my friends and we shared our experiences over those two difficult weeks with each other. We decided to break our silence as women's rights activists. One member suggested that we hold a symbolic funeral on the thirtieth day after Neda's death. Another said that we should find the families of the victims. Another suggested that we hold a service for the fortieth day after the death of all the martyrs. In the end, we decided that each of us would follow up a group of those killed and try to identify them and give their families solace and comfort. We would then encourage them to speak out about their murdered relatives and to not allow the atmosphere of terror and threats to dominate us, or we would try to get permission for us to publicly protest in their name.

Suddenly, news arrived that the son of one of the women's rights activists was amongst those killed. His body had been returned to his mother 27 days after his death. He was Sohrab Arabi, the son of Parvin Fahimi, one of the activists in the group Mothers of Peace. At 8 am, along with a large group of activists, I was in the Behesht-e Zahra Cemetery, right across from where they wash the corpses. The burial of Sohrab's body was the first burial in which we participated. That same night, we sent reports and pictures of this ceremony to the media and published it on the internet. One of my friends also had an in-depth interview with his mother in which she spoke about how devastated she had been during those past three or four weeks. I edited this interview and sent it to Roozonline. It was the mourning mothers' first word of protest.

Three days later, we learned that Neda Agha-Soltan's mother had gone to visit Sohrab's mother to console her. We asked if we could see her and, a day or two before the thirtieth day after Neda's martyrdom, a group of women's rights activists headed for Neda Agha-Soltan's home.

WE HAD NO ANSWERS!

Let's leave aside what transpired there and what words were exchanged. The result was that Neda's mother decided to hold a fortieth-day-service for her daughter herself, and all that remained was for us to ask that she grant permission for us, too, to invite the people to participate in this ceremony. She held a grand and beautiful ceremony, but this grief-stricken mother was not given permission to be present at her daughter's gravesite and mourn.

THE MOURNING MOTHERS GROUP

ONE OF THE RESULTS OF THE WOMEN'S MEETINGS, during which we discussed how to get the voices of the victims' families out to the people, was the organisation of a group called the Mourning Mothers. We organised this group so that the blood of the martyrs of these protests would not be trampled and forgotten. We decided that on every Saturday we would go to the park nearest the place where Neda was killed at the same hour that she died in the street. We were to dress in black as a sign of mourning and carry pictures of the martyrs and speak to the people about them. From the very first week, this activity was met with such an aggressive police presence that it reached the media sooner than we expected. After that, things even reached the point where 70-year-old women who were with this group were beaten. After Neda's Fortieth, our task became more difficult. The anniversary of the day when the students were bloodily suppressed on 9th July 1999 was approaching and students usually held memorials for the protest. Many of our friends and colleagues were in prison and we had had no news of them. Many of these arrests took place in the middle of the night.

Not a night went by in which I could lay down my head in peace. Many times a night I would imagine officers pouring into my house and taking me away in front of my terrified nine year old daughter. Of course, this nightmare had been with me for years, ever since I was a volunteer activist following the cases of women and girls who had been condemned to stoning and execution. But now this nightmare had come true for so many! We stayed in the homes of friends and acquaintances until the death of one of my close relatives in northern Iran gave me an excuse to go there and spend two weeks out of sight.

But this didn't solve anything. I returned to Tehran and suffered those same fears and anxieties once again. About two weeks after 9th July

and the widespread arrests in the streets, one of my husband's former colleagues who was among those arrested was set free and she came to our house. She described her interrogations and those of the women who shared her cell. She said, "We were 36 women in one cell and about half of us were interrogated about you."

I asked, "What did they ask?"

"Everything. They said to write down everything we knew."

"Did they also ask about other women?"

"Yes."

She then mentioned the names of several women who were not close friends of mine. I didn't even know how I was connected to them. This woman was convinced that the government intended to attack me and, indeed, intended to attack anyone who continued protesting and was influential. She suggested that I abandon my house. But where was I to go?

CONFESSIONS

AS I HAVE SAID, MAZIAR BAHARI HAD INTERVIEWED ME for BBC television before the elections. He was arrested several days after the elections took place. His arrest worried me deeply because I had consulted with him a great deal about a documentary film which I had intended to produce. We had met in my home as well as in a café during the days before the elections. I was worried that he had been arrested for filming, because I was also present in those films. I was worried that they were bugging his phone, because I had called him many times about the documentary film and this film itself could have caused terrible problems for me...

And then suddenly I saw Maziar on the television, with his face sunken and his body emaciated. They had forced him to speak against civil society, himself, and the role of foreigners and foreign countries and their relationship with civil and social activists. I watched Maziar appear on the television like a lifeless statue and I wept until my face was drenched with tears.

Later, when I was in Sweden, he sent me a short message after his imprisonment was over, which ended up being one of the most important reasons for my decision not to return to my country, at least for a while. He advised, "Wherever you are, stay put and don't go back to Iran!" I later found out that he had been interrogated repeatedly because of me and that they had extracted confessions from him under torture against me and many of the civil activists.

INDICTMENT

SEVERAL MONTHS BEFORE THE ELECTIONS I had been invited to Stockholm for a poetry festival and I had also a visa for my daughter to accompany me.

When the first indictment by the Tehran prosecutor was issued to the public it was the first time that I was confronted with the question of whether I should stay in Tehran and Iran and continue. In that indictment it had been written that the Activists' Foundation, of which Sohrab Razzaqi was the manager, was "one of the tentacles of the velvet revolution in Iran." I had been the editor-in-chief of this foundation's civil society news website for over a year and had held this post until its office was closed and sealed off.

I made an appointment with Sohrab Razzaqi. I told him that I was to travel to Sweden the next week and that it was unclear what should be done after that; perhaps I would return and perhaps I wouldn't. My point was that if I was able, I would obtain a one-year scholarship to a university and stay away from all the commotion for a year until things settled down and I could return home.

STOCKHOLM

MY STAY IN SWEDEN, despite the warm support of my friends there, held one great difficulty: my being at a loss as to what to do. Should I return? Should I become a refugee? Should I stay there to see what would happen? A year's scholarship to study in Holland was prepared for me with the help of one of my friends who was a discreet activist for human rights in Iran. This scholarship was related to women's journalism and fitted in completely with my field of study and profession. But unfortunately, my visa to Holland was greatly delayed and time passed very quickly.

And so, upon the advice of another friend living in Norway, I found a scholarship there that supports writers. Their response, considering the plentiful documentation which was available as well as the support of PEN International and PEN Sweden, was clarified very quickly. Norway agreed that I would settle there with my family, as a guest writer. Now, writing these memoirs, it has been over a year since I left my home and homeland and about nine months since I moved to the city of Trondheim. My husband joined us after four months.

I do not know what tomorrow will bring. My plans for the future are still unclear. But I am certain that the road which we travelled was the right one. I have been a poet, a journalist, and a writer. I worked non-stop day and night to save the lives of those condemned to death and stoning. I spent hours writing and planning for equal rights and greater freedom. I have gone to prison. I have been interrogated. I have been insulted and beaten by the police. But I have never considered myself a political militant. "Militant" means something else. No, I am not a militant. But I have fought hard all these years!



Asieh Amini, born in 1973, is a published poet, journalist, and human rights activist. She is one of Iran's most vocal defenders of the rights of minors and of women sentenced to stoning and execution. After having started her journalistic career in 1993, she wrote for several reform newspapers and online publications. In

2009, Asieh Amini received the Hellmann/Hammett-Award of Human Rights Watch for her activism and her contribution to reporting on the human rights situation in Iran. She lives now in Trondheim, Norway.





EVERYTHING POINTED TOWARDS A VERY TURBULENT DAY LYING AHEAD FOR IRAN.

Babak Ghafouri Azar

PLAYING ON THE ENEMY'S FIELD THE REGIME'S BRUTAL CRACKDOWN ON THE GREEN MOVEMENT IN THE WINTER OF 2009-2010

During the waning hours of 12th June, a small and distinct group, hidden from the people of Iran, orchestrated events that have impacted so many lives in this country more deeply than we could have ever imagined. The impact has been so great that it has rocked the entire system of the Islamic Republic, confronting it with its most significant challenge of the last three decades. The events surrounding the tenth presidential elections of Iran have undoubtedly propelled the lives of Iranians to a new stage. Since these incidents, so many have experienced drastic political acts firsthand, and so many now consider the government in a new light. In one form or another, every possible price was paid, from the loss of life and property, to psychological traumas. No lives were left unscathed.

Because these events are so fresh and their impacts still resonating, they cannot yet be precisely or completely analytically judged, nor can their long-term effects be spoken of. But one can still form a concrete picture of the current situation through an alternative re-reading of the incidents, particularly the events of Ashoura and what followed. From an analytical point of view, this article focuses especially on the episodes of the winter of 2009-2010, which are to be considered as the turning point in the general course of events. Ashoura was the last time the opposition to the government made their presence known on the streets and saw their most violent conflict with the current regime established in Iran; a conflict which, contrary to predictions, ultimately ended in the regime's favour. While hoping to present an impartial report of the events of the winter of 2009-2010, concentrating on the two important days of Ashoura and 11th February, this article will provide a perspective on the impact of these events on the Iranian people's protest movement.

It is necessary to note that in writing this article, in addition to the author's eye-witness observations as a journalist present on the scene, certain and indisputable events have been confirmed by independent sources.

IRAN ON THE EVE OF THE WINTER OF 2009-2010

SIX MONTHS AFTER THE CONTROVERSIAL PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, the events surrounding it were still at the forefront of the country's thoughts. Although the Ahmadinejad government had been established in Iran as the tenth government after the Islamic Revolution and was functioning as such, its legitimacy was constantly challenged by the six months of persistent resistance by the protesters. Although the regime was able to curb the vast wave of demonstrations, such as those held on 15th June and on Qods Day [18th September 2009], the visible presence of protestors on religious and national occasions continued. The protestors used the religious and national celebrations in the same way that the regime had for the past 30 years; as occasions to display its strength and popular support. This tactic presented the government with the most challenging situation it had yet faced.

Throughout the autumn of 2009, there was a palpable feeling that both sides wished to end the struggle in its open, public form. It was as if both sides wanted the course of events to be determined as soon as possible and for destiny to be set. The reopening of the universities, some of the most powerful and enduring centres of opposition to the regime, was considered a victory for the Movement. The incidents in Tehran and Sharif Universities during the last days of September, just one week after they were opened, confirmed this claim.^{ax} Yet still, it seemed as if the government had completely predicted these events, and was executing a well-devised strategy for coping with them. For both sides, their experiences of confronting each other and responding to each other's moves had clearly developed step by step, as if each time entering a new stage.

⁶¹ Students in several Iranian universities used the occasion of the opening of the academic year to protest again against the election and the government of Ahmadinejad (Editor's Note).

During the second half of summer, the regime had successfully withdrawn permission for the protesters to gather in the streets except during a few special occasions, such as Qods Day. They expected that by continuing this policy and by taking control of the universities and preventing the students from getting out they would succeed in silencing the public appearances of the protest movement. This tactic, however, did not achieve the desired results on 4th November.⁹² Despite the heavy presence of government forces in the streets around the procession site, and the protestors being prevented from entering the grounds of the ceremony, there were relatively widespread clashes in the surrounding streets which led to new arrests. Another noteworthy point in these clashes was the opposition's extreme slogans, which were openly aimed at the Leader of Iran's Islam Republic.

The publication of the news about the clashes of 4th November actually took both sides by surprise. From the protesters' side, successfully keeping the protest movement alive on the streets was considered an important accomplishment, and caused great excitement amongst the opposition. The government, on the other hand, seemed to turn its attention to strategies of harassment and further agitation.

The month of November had not yet come to a close when a new wave of arrests began, chiefly targeting student activists. As December approached, an important time for student protests in Iranian history, the country's political atmosphere became perceptibly more and more volatile. Muttered warnings began to circulate. For example, in the statements issued by political parties, the radicalisation of the atmosphere was considered to be to the advantage of the regime.

On the 7th December a new round of conflicts began. The government, with a well-structured plan, dispatched its paramilitary forces within the universities and tried to enforce its objectives for this day, despite violent clashes with the students. All the while, protesters outside the universities, faced with the heavy presence of countless security forces, succeeded in organising scattered demonstrations, and clashes again took place.

Alongside reports from the world's news agencies about Tehran's Student Day demonstrations, student sources and non-governmental websites reported that demonstrations were held in many state and

⁰² The anniversary of the US-Embassy takeover in Tehran (see timeline at the end of this book).

private universities in Iran's cities, large and small, including Tehran, Isfahan, Mashhad, Ahvaz, Shiraz, Tabriz, Kermanshah, Arak, and Shoushtar. The siege of Mir Hossein Moussavi's office by Bassij forces was another important event that occurred that day. The police officially confirmed that during the course of the 7th December demonstrations, 204 people had been arrested in Tehran.

Although the clashes outside the universities were less violent than those of 4th November, they provided suitable ammunition for the key orchestrators of the regime's confrontation with the movement. The regime's first move in the final scenario for counteracting the street protests of the Green Movement was to televise a film of unknown origin on the night of 7th December, showing the burning of a picture of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, supposedly by opposition students.

During the preceding months, the leaders of the Movement had been trying to evade the accusation that they were vying for a complete change of the regime by demonstrating that they differentiated between the method of rule of the revolution's first leader from that of the current one. Now, they were immediately forced to react. An hour after the broadcast, Mehdi Karroubi wrote a letter of protest to Ezzatollah Zarghami, calling the national television's actions an attempt to "sow division and to clearly and blatantly insult the founder of the Islamic Revolution." Mir Hossein Moussavi called the tearing up of the picture during the events surrounding 7th December "a suspicious and destructive act." The Society of Militant Clerics, along with the leaders of the Movement demanded permission to organise a march in support of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Despite these reactions, the regime still tried to benefit from the situation and to satisfy the social groups who supported it. Meanwhile, the Movement's leaders were faced with protests from the radical wings within the Movement who actually demanded abandoning the entire system of the Islamic Republic. This tension continued with prolonged student protests which began the day after 7th December and continued. The general atmosphere around the country actually returned to the politically heated days of the early summer.

Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, an important figure within the system, who had backed the Movement during the course of the events that had unfolded after the elections, stirred up the situation even further by delivering a critical speech in Mashhad. He reiterated what he had said during the sermon he delivered at Friday prayer on 17th July, in which he had criticised the way the Revolutionary Guards and the Bassij had handled the people. He also said, "If the people wish, we shall rule, but if not, we shall leave." This speech was met with this reaction from the minister of intelligence: "The system's integrity is now being challenged and threatened from within, so much so that influential people who should be defending the system and the Velayat-e Faqih have stood against the Leadership."

In an attempt to discover what percentage of the population could be relied upon for support, the regime organised a protest march after the Friday prayers of 18th December. The march was not very well attended, but less than a month later the regime used this same strategy with more success in a protest against the events of Ashoura. Amidst all these struggles, an unexpected event occurred which seriously impacted the entire situation: the death of Ayatollah Montazeri.

Ayatollah Montazeri, the most prominent and, in a way, the most important "Source of Emulation" allied with the Movement and opposed to the regime, died suddenly on the dawn of 20th December in Qom. This news came as unexpected for both sides of the conflict, and both knew that it would have an important impact on the present situation and on the future of the Movement. Nevertheless, the decease of a well-known and prestigious supporter, one whom the regime had openly wished to confront directly, turned out eventually to have been to the advantage of the ruling system. The main challenge was organising the burial service. The Leader met this problem by firstly offering a message of condolence in which, although Ayatollah Montazeri's opposition was mentioned in passing, his scholarly status was commended. So, permission was granted for a burial service to be held for him, and this presented an opportunity for the opposition to make a full show of force in the same way that they had on Qods Day.

Despite all precautions, it cost the government dearly when large numbers of protestors gathered in the important city of Qom, Iran's religious capital and a traditional city which supports the clergy and the system. The echoing cries of "Death to the dictator!" in Qom were intolerable, and so permission was given only to hold the ceremony of burying his body and the rest of the programme was cancelled. Although the protest leaders attending the ceremonies were met with attacks on their cars and the places they were staying, Ayatollah Montazeri's death seemed in the short term to have proved to the Movement's advantage. In the long term, however, it proved to be very much to its disadvantage. It was under these circumstances that Iran entered the winter season that this year began with the traditional month of Moharam.

WHAT HAPPENED IN IRAN DURING THE WINTER OF 2009-2010?

THE WINTER OF 2009-2010 IN IRAN arrived with the religious month of Moharam, a month in which, according to the beliefs of the Shia sect, Imam Hossein, the Shiites' third Imam, was martyred along with his companions in an uprising against the ruling oppressor. Ashoura, an important day on the Shiite religious calendar, has historically always been considered as a symbolic starting point for uprising against oppression. Throughout his struggles with the Pahlavi government, Ayatollah Khomeini always utilised this date and belief. In fact, drawing on the symbolism of Imam Hossein's uprising and the events of Ashoura played a pivotal role in the Islamic Revolution's victory.

But now the regime was itself facing a serious confrontation. From the very beginning of the month of Moharam, the approach of this date was considered to be a critical and challenging obstacle for the regime. People's feelings against the regime burned like fire under ashes waiting to erupt, as during Moharam they recalled to mind the Shiite history of war between the oppressed and the dictatorship and they remembered the crimes and events of the past six months, and made their own comparisons between the past and the present.

The government initiated preventative measures, such as the police forces demanding those in charge of the mourning processions and other citizens to give detailed information to the neighbourhood police, guides, and drivers about the programme and route of their processions before taking to the streets in order to prevent any sort of disorder or congestion. Also, 'Moharam assistants' were organised to be present alongside the processions and to help the police establish order. Similarly, the Revolutionary Guards issued a special bulletin addressed to the political leaders under their command saying that in order to stop the 'Green Moharam', "any voice" other than those in the official programme of the religious associations must be "driven out from the religious gatherings".

During that first week of winter it was evident and palpable that the people were waiting for another opportunity; an opportunity that would come with Ashoura and its street parades. The opposition's show of force during the burial ceremonies of Ayatollah Montazeri's had raised the hopes of the Movement's followers while, simultaneously, the regime continued to incite the people and enrage them. For example, just three days before Ashoura, the order was issued to remove Mir Hossein Moussavi, one of the leaders of the Movement, from his position as President of the Academy of Arts. During these same days, the regime treated the people who had participated in the mourning ceremonies for Ayatollah Montazeri in Isfahan with severity and violence.

Still, the oppositionists felt encouraged to take to the streets on the days of Tasou'a and Ashoura, believing that the regime would not resort to violence and heavy-handed tactics on such holy and revered days, as this would turn it into the role of oppressor in the story. This opportunity to benefit from the national and religious events that the regime had used to its own advantage for the last 30 years gave even more hope to the opposition. Also, these two days coincided with the seventh day after Ayatollah Montazeri's passing which, according to Iranian tradition, is a sacred day, and so there was occasion for an even larger gathering. The regime made a preliminary evaluation of the situation and delivered a warning to the opposition. For example, the commanders of the police forces told the opposition on the eve of Tasou'a and Ashoura not to come out into the streets. But behind the scenes, a different plan seemed to unfold. Those at the forefront of combating the Movement were also banking on Ashoura's religious background and connections. It seems that they intended to portray the regime's opponents as opponents of the Shia faith and religion, as enemies who would not even respect the sanctity of holy days.

On the eve of Tasou'a and Ashoura, the tense atmosphere was obvious everywhere. The members of the opposition informed each other by various means of the plans for these two days, including the first decisions for gatherings. They intended to repeat the huge demonstration of 15th June from Imam Hossein Square to Freedom Square. The propaganda of the Movement's supporters was so powerful that most people in Tehran and the provinces were aware of the Movement's plans for these two days. On the eve of these two days, the police commanders issued their final warnings. The oppositionists were feeling anxious,

THE ECHOING CRIES OF 'DEATH TO THE DICTATOR!' IN QOM WERE INTOLERABLE.

and their worries led the website Kalemeh, Mir Hossein Moussavi's main mode of communicating with the public, to warn the Movement's allies to not fall into a trap set by the regime, such as the one perpetrated against Seyyed Mohammad Khatami in the Ashoura carnival in 1997.⁰³

Two days before Tasou'a, the website, referring to "reliable information", warned about a repeat of the Ashoura Carnival and the plan to ruin the sanctity of the Moharam mourning ceremonies and then to blame this on the Green Movement. It called on the people to neutralise what it described as "a conspiracy." They were especially anxious about the regime's tactic of twisting truths about facts and taking advantage of people's religious passions.

TASOU'A

FROM AROUND 11 AM ON TASOU'A [26TH DECEMBER], in response to the opposition's first appeal, there were gatherings around Revolution Street. Although the opposition's main focus had been Ashoura, the extent of clashes that day was significant. The members of the opposition came to the area on foot or by car, and at the first opportunity began to chant slogans. Similarly to several months previously, their slogans were chiefly directed against Iran's Leader. As well as maintaining a very strong presence in the main streets, the reaction from the police was, as before, violent. This proved that they had no desire to protect the public during these days or to avoid violent confrontations with the protesters.

The most crucial event, however, took place that night. Former Iranian president Seyyed Mohammad Khatami was expected to speak about Ashoura in Jamaran, where the previous Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khomeini, had lived. This place had always been an important and revered site for the Islamic Republic. The spreading news of Khatami's presence in Jamaran turned into an appeal for all the protesters to be present at this speech, but the regime's supporters, with an apparently pre-conceived plan, stormed the site of the speech and prevented the

⁴⁹ On the eve of the presidential elections in 1997, a carnival supposedly of young Khatami supporters began in a strange way on the afternoon of Ashoura in north Tehran. According to the Shia faith, Iranians hold mourning processions on the day of Ashoura but this group danced and stomped their feet. In the following days, the media close to the regime wrote at length about Khatami's supporter's insults against religion and faith. Later it became apparent that this carnival had been organised by the opponents of Khatami in order to taint his reputation and that of his supporters. After coming to office, Khatami said that he pardoned the culprits and refrained from making a complaint.

speaker from continuing after a few minutes by chanting slogans in support of Iran's Leader. This event in the dark of night led to widespread clashes in north Tehran. The people, as before, immediately went to the site when they heard about the incident and intervened, wanting to defend Khatami. Just then, massive numbers of the security forces turned north Tehran into a battlefield by beating the members of the opposition. The regime's forces violently attacked the people using tear gas, clubs, electric shocks, and chains. The opposition members who had not made it to the main area for the speech promised to be present in the gathering the next day, on Ashoura. There were also arrests during these clashes. Everything pointed towards a very turbulent day lying ahead for Iran.

ASHOURA

FROM DAYBREAK ON SUNDAY, 27th December 2009, there was a very heavy presence of security forces in the main squares of Iran's most important cities, particularly Tehran, but this did not stop the oppositionists from going out into the streets. From about 10 am, there was heavy traffic in the streets around Revolution Street and pedestrians were heading for the main crossroads in that area. Wherever a crowd gathered, it chanted slogans. The security forces tried at first to disperse the protesters with tear gas, but the size of the crowd increased by the minute.

By noon, Tehran was practically ablaze with clashes. There were unprecedented numbers in the huge crowds of opposition supporters and people were confronting the regime's forces with more intensity than ever before. The clashes reached their peak in Vali Asr Square when the crowd seized a police kiosk and were met with extreme ferocity when the police drove a car straight into the throngs, running people over in front of everyone.

Reports spread from other parts of the city about the officers, plainclothesmen, and Bassij's intense attacks on the people. Gunfire could be heard, cars were torched, and whole neighbourhoods were destroyed, turning Tehran on the noon of Ashoura into a city at war. Foreign news agencies called the clashes of that day the bloodiest confrontations between the people and the Iranian security forces since the protests over the presidential election's results began. Associated Press officially announced that the Islamic Republic's security forces
were not able to disperse the people using tear gas, clubs, and firing into the air, and thus resorted to firing directly at the protesters. Reports of clashes also arrived from several other cities, particularly Isfahan and Najafabad. When all of the world's credible media stations reported the clashes, countries around the globe were immediately forced to take a position on the disturbances. Britain, France, America, Germany, and even Russia condemned what had taken place.

The security forces' unrestrained and extremely violent treatment of the people was unimaginable. It is still not clear why the regime's forces behaved that way. Some attribute this violent conduct to the anxiety and confusion the officers must have felt when they saw the large crowds and their fear of losing control of the situation. Others, though, consider it to have been a pre-planned strategy to radicalise the situation and to obtain the excuse needed to wipe out the Movement. The matter of the suspicious killing of Seyyed Ali Habibi Moussavi, Mir Hossein Moussavi's nephew, increases the likelihood of the second theory. He was one of eight people killed during Ashoura whose deaths the government confirmed, of course, without taking responsibility, calling the deaths "suspect." The opposition spoke of a far greater number of fatalities.

When the news of Ali Habibi's killing was published during the afternoon of Ashoura, crowds once more formed, for instance, in front of the hospital that Mr. Habibi had been rushed to and in Mirdamad Street in Tehran. Tehran's police commander denied at first that anyone had been killed, but in the afternoon he issued a statement confirming the deaths of four people and the next day the number reached eight. The government media and institutions which had maintained their silence during the first hours of Ashoura uniformly protested what they called "the desecration of Imam Hossein's Ashoura."

Iran's state television station also slated the government's opponents as a group which had desecrated Imam Hossein's Ashoura with their slogans and made a mockery of the late Imam's ideas, busying themselves with creating chaos and destroying public and private property. Fars News Agency claimed in one report that during the course of the Ashoura disturbances, the protesters had "set the Koran on fire." All this showed that they were launching the new project that the reformists had warned of. Undoubtedly, increasing the atmosphere of extremism ended up benefiting the autocrats. Warnings had previously been made about the fact that the radicalisation of the Green Movement not only reduced the likelihood of its victory against the militaries, but also its scope and expansion, and eliminated the chance that millions of people would make a show of force on the streets. In the course of the following days, the truth of these warnings became apparent. This prediction was realised in the closing hours of Ashoura. Almost all of the political activists and journalists who had not been arrested up until that point, despite their opposition to the government, were arrested then and some even sent to prison for the second time. The scope of the arrests reached the echelons of the closest associates of the opposition leaders.

The regime used the days following Ashoura to take full advantage of the events that had passed. The security forces turned Tehran into a garrison for about a week. Meanwhile, the official media constantly spoke of what they called the desecration of Ashoura. Security institutions, using a sophisticated system, started identifying ordinary people who had been active on the day of Ashoura, using pictures taken by street cameras and then subsequently arrested them. The confrontation was so violent that society was completely in shock. Every regime institution issued statements demanding a confrontation with the Movement's leaders and sympathisers. Although none of the Movement's leaders had issued any sort of appeal for people to participate in marches on Ashoura, they were the ones principally accused.

In order to confront and intimidate the Movement, the government organised a march and all government functionaries and employees were obligated to take part in it. At the same time, more and more rumours were spreading about the arrests of Moussavi, Karroubi, and Khatami. The government demonstration on 30th December was held with thorough preparations, widespread media coverage and the induction of all regime forces. Very extreme things were said against the Green Movement during it. The regime had intended to hold such a procession since the day after the elections and after it witnessed the popular protests, but it had never been able to fully assemble such a gathering. After the government demonstration of 30th December, Moussavi, who was expected to take a more extreme position following his nephew's death, published his Statement Number 17 asking the regime to grant the people's most basic wishes in order to prevent a radicalisation of the atmosphere and to not miss further opportunities. The statement did not receive any answer, despite having been welcomed by the reformists, human rights institutions, and even some figures within the system such as Mohsen Rezai since the situation was still in the rulers' favour. Although the Ashoura events were at first likened to the events of 8th September 1978, in which the Shah's intense repression of his opponents actually sped his downfall, after several days it became obvious that the regime of the Islamic Republican was better acquainted with the game of violence, and also that the people and the leaders of the Movement did not want a complete revolution.

The Movement, which had witnessed new killings, even seeing people crushed beneath the wheels of a car, was now faced with a great number of arrests. The government was in complete control of the field. Warnings accompanied by arrests continued in the days which followed. The commander of Iran's police forces said that the "period of caution" was over and that from now on "anyone participating in such demonstrations will be met with a severe and decisive response by the police." The regime officially declared that the opposition had now reached the point of overthrowing the system and that counterrevolutionary groups were taking over its activities. On this basis, the confrontation that the Baha'i minority, human rights groups, and critical journalists were met with was intensified. It was also announced that a number of foreigners had been arrested.

Between Ashoura and the beginning of February, over 180 journalists, students, and civil rights activists were arrested by the Islamic of Republic of Iran's security forces. Among them ten of Mir Hossein Moussavi's advisors prominently figured, including his senior advisor, Ali-Reza Beheshti. The pressure on the few critical newspapers that remained increased and floods of warnings poured into their offices. Even the newspaper Jomhouri-ye Eslami, whose license holder was the Leader of Iran, received a warning. Then the Ministry of Intelligence declared that Iranians were now forbidden from cooperating with over 60 named foreign foundations and organisations. Then it was heard that a number of the arrestees had been accused of moharebeh [war with God], which is punishable by death.

The rumour became a reality several days later when five people were charged with moharebeh, and the prosecutor confirmed this. When all these measures are considered together it shows that the regime had no intention of giving up easily the opportunity they were presented with. In the meantime, protesters who saw the footage of their compatriots being run over obviously felt that they were faced with a regime that would protect itself at all costs. The series of bizarre events continued.

On 12th January, a university professor who was rumoured to be working on the country's nuclear programme was assassinated. Everything about the assassination is still shrouded in obscurity. At the same time, the first session of the trials of those charged with moharebeh was held and broadcast entirely on television. During those same days, news was announced that the Iranian consul in Norway had resigned.

Iran greeted the month of February under conditions in which both sides were viewing the traditional 11th February anniversary of the victory of the Islamic Revolution processions as the final battle. There were members of the opposition who had considered the massive presence of people on Ashoura as a sign of the Movement's power and they spoke of the necessity for a strong presence in the 11th February marches and an approach similar to Qods Day. Conversely, since the regime camp considered the march on 30th December to have been a success, it was implementing a plan for a bigger march on 11th February in the hope of portraying the opposition's silence. On the eve of the march, there were again signs of the atmosphere turning radical, but the government clearly had the upper hand. Two weeks before the march, Iran's Leader warned that he would not give in to anybody. Also, the minister of intelligence made an official statement saying that two employees of the German embassy had been arrested in the course of the Ashoura events, and accusing one of Moussavi's aides of conspiring with foreign espionage security services.

And then, the shock of 28th January set in. That morning, the prosecutor of Tehran reported the execution of two people convicted in connection with the events following the elections and announced that eleven of the people arrested due to their involvement in the protests of the past months had also been sentenced to death. The two men who were executed, Arash Rahmanipour and Mohammad-Reza Ali Zamani, had previously been seen in the 'Velvet Coup' group trials of the people who had been arrested after the elections and had been forced into signing confessions. These two had in fact been arrested

before the elections and were members of an anti-government group. The execution of these men as culprits in the post-electoral events and the announcement that eleven others had been convicted bewildered many. It was clear that this measure had been taken to intimidate the opposition even further on the eve of 11th February.

By protesting over the proceedings of the judiciary of the Islamic Republic, Mir Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi condemned these executions. They considered them to have been carried out hastily and with the intention of instilling fear in order to prevent people from participating in the 11th February march. They called on the people to participate in the marches. Just then, Iran's chief of police announced, "With the help of the people and the efforts of the intelligence and security institutions, 70 per cent of the Ashoura rioters whose pictures have been published have been identified." It was an indication of the sweeping scale of the arrests that had gone so far as to publish pictures of the people and turn them into public announcements. The mass of arrests of ordinary people was many times greater than that of prominent figures. As a final warning, the Revolutionary Guard's commanders also entered the fray and said that no one would be allowed to do anything outside the official programme. The arrests continued right up to the night before 11th February. While various groups appealed to the people to participate in the marches just as on Qods Day, the atmosphere of fear and anxiety created by the regime's actions overshadowed the activities.

11TH FEBRUARY

BEFORE THIS DAY UNFOLDED, there were various speculations about its outcomes. Some people with an optimistic perspective were even forecasting that the Islamic Republic's regime would fall that day. Others called on the people to come to the podium at the crack of dawn to prevent Ahmadinejad from making his speech. Others, though, having witnessed the measures the regime was willing to take, talked of a secret plan whereby all capable forces would be dispatched to confront any eventuality. The predictions of this group came true.

From 5 am the space in front of the speaker's podium was filled with people under the Bassij's command. From the earliest hours of the morning, the security forces were stationed even in the small alleys and on the main crossings at intervals of two metres. Security forces were posted amongst the marchers, in addition to the wellequipped official anti-riot officers, who had the whole route covered and confronted the slightest movement or any sign of unrest near the marchers. Even the important buildings kilometres away from the march route, such as the National Broadcasting building, were guarded by heavily-equipped anti-riot forces. Journalists were only allowed to report on the events around the main platform in Freedom Square and were prevented from being along the route.

On the main route of the march, from Imam Hossein Square to Freedom Square, the slightest activity was forbidden. Despite the noticeable presence of the Movement's supporters, because of well thought-out preparations, the members of the opposition were forced to stand in the government supporters' area, making their ranks appear more numerous. Despite these precautions, there were limited clashes in Tehran's Sadeqiyeh Square and the surrounding area. This came about because of the appeal made by Karroubi in which he said that he would begin his own march from this starting point.

Karroubi was not allowed to be present for more than a few minutes. He and those people accompanying him were confronted most violently. Even his son was arrested for a few hours. Mohammad Khatami and Moussavi were also attacked and they too were not permitted to be present at the march. Even Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani was faced with slogans directed against him, though he was not physically attacked. More arrests followed and the beatings of the opposition throughout the clashes were, as always, brutal.

As soon as Ahmadinejad finished his speech, the government media reported the end of what they referred to as the 'Green Sedition'. They considered the people's participation in the march as a sign of their support of the system. After a short interval, the Leader issued a message of thanks. He called the marchers' participation "astonishing" and expressed his gratitude and asked the opposition to "come to their senses." The fact was, on the 11th February the regime implemented the same strategy used in the 30th December march on a vaster and fuller scale. They mobilised forces from the provinces to try to show that the desecration of Ashoura had caused people to abandon the Green Movement and come over to the camp of the revolution's supporters. The protesters would later refer to the 11th February march as an "orchestrated" march.

THE CONFRONTATION WAS SO VIOLENT THAT SOCIETY WAS COMPLETELY IN SHOCK.

After 11th February, the opposition began to evaluate the causes of their defeat, and critical factions within the Movement highlighted several factors. By organising meetings and issuing statements Moussavi and Karroubi criticised the taking over of the 11th February marches and tried to show that the protests stayed alive. For example, Moussavi said, "One cannot orchestrate a demonstration and be satisfied that everything has been settled." In this way, despite the regime media's heavy propaganda depicting the Movement's life as officially over, the continued debates and the exploration of new ways to express opposition, as well as the ongoing discussions on the internet, showed the official media's claims were false. Undoubtedly, 11th February demonstrated that the government was finally able to confront the Movement's street presence, particularly on official occasions. It also showed that the Movement had to try new tactics, as well as learning how to reach the more deprived sectors of society. These discussions continued for weeks. While some considered the traditional ceremonies of 'Chaharshanbeh Souri'⁰⁴ as a new starting point for the opposition, after 11th February the Movement's life was pretty much limited to issuing statements and publishing speeches. In the meantime, the release of a number of prisoners who nevertheless chose to stand by their positions was also an important factor indicating that the protest movement still continues.

The Iranian Green Movement collected a lot of experiences during the winter of 2009-2010, from a vigorous street presence on Ashoura to participation in the orchestrated march of 11th February, in which they actually became pawns in their rival's field. The Green Movement paid its heaviest price yet that winter and saw many of its followers imprisoned. It was after that period that many were forced to find a new life. After pressure from the government increased, the number of refugees grew alarmingly, and many lives suffered changes. That winter was doubtlessly a turning point in the life of the Movement and of Iranian society.

On the last Tuesday night before the Persian New Year (21st March) Iranians traditionally light bonfires in the streets to celebrate the end of the winter season, a tradition of old Iranian, likely Zoroastrian, origin. (Editor's Note)



Babak Ghafouri Azar, born in 1981, began working as a journalist in 2001 in the reform newspaper Hayat-e Now and has written for papers including Shargh, Yas-e Now and Etemad. He was cofounder and editor of the first Iranian online magazine, Cappuccino. In 2004, he and several other bloggers were arrested and

severely pressurised by a security section under the control of then Tehran Prosecutor, Said Mortazavi. Before the presidential elections, Babak Ghafouri Azar was head of the cultural section in the newspaper Andishe-ye Now, attached to the campaign office of Mir Hossein Moussavi. After a life in hiding, he left Iran in May 2010. He is now living in Prague and works for Radio Farda, the Persian programme of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.





THE WILL OF THE PEOPLE AND THEIR VOTE ARE THE SOURCE OF LEGITIMACY FOR POLITICAL POWER.

Mohammad-Reza Yazdanpanah

MIR HOSSEIN MOUSSAVI: CHEF OF THE IRANIAN STEW

However we define the Green Movement and whatever concepts we have in mind about it, the movement has one key principle and that is the centrality and leadership of Mir Hossein Moussavi.

The 1906 Iranian Constitutional Revolution was the first significant general movement of the Iranian people towards reaching ideals and values such as rule of law, equality, freedom, an independent judiciary, and a parliament elected by the people; in a word, a modern state. However, this historical movement was the only general social movement in Iran over the past century to have been led by a collective of individuals and political forces, coming from various regions of the country. The other broad social movements which have fundamentally changed the history of our country over the past century have always been associated with one specific individual.

Iran's oil nationalisation movement is bound up with the figure Dr. Mohammad Mosaddeq. The revolution of 11th February 1979 is meaningless without the name of Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini. Seyyed Mohammad Khatami brings to mind the reform movement that came after 2nd Khordad, the 23rd May 1997. And now Iran's Green Movement is synonymous with Mir Hossein Moussavi.

WHAT IS THE GREEN MOVEMENT?

AS WITH ALL OTHER SOCIAL AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS there are varying and sometimes conflicting definitions and ideas about the Green Movement. Iran's secular intellectuals and political activists consider it to be a non-religious and sometimes even anti-religious movement which, along with fundamental political transformations, is pursuing a complete overhaul of all of the traditional foundations of Iran's society.

In contrast to this perspective, Iran's religious intellectuals and political and social activists emphasise the religious components of Iranian society and even of Mir Hossein Moussavi himself, and although they understand this movement as supra-religious, or beyond religion, do not consider it non-religious or anti-religious.

Between these two perspectives there is a broad spectrum of opinions and definitions whose supporters propagate their own ideas about the Green Movement, depending on their particular intellectual or ideological views. As for my personal view, I believe that the Green Movement's principle definition and function is as follows: it is a broad, comprehensive, peaceful, and non-violent movement which was first formed in protest against the announced results of Iran's tenth presidential elections on 12th June 2009.

The millions who supported Mir Hossein Moussavi, the principal rival of Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, believe that the regime and the Ahmadinejad government committed extensive widespread fraud in the elections with the aim of illegally preventing Mir Hossein Moussavi from coming to power and of continuing Ahmadinejad's rule for another four year term.

The political groups, parties, journalists, and elite circles such as the student population, who are opposed to Ahmadinejad believed and still believe that the regime's course of action on the day of the elections and afterwards was not merely simple fraud during the election process, but a complete coup against the people's votes.

These groups and individuals believe that the measures used-the widespread arrests of anti-government political activists, students, journalists etc; attacks by the security forces on the offices of critical parties and their closure; the filtering of anti-government websites; the silencing of the press; and most importantly, the widespread violent and bloody repression of the protesters against the election results-took the matter beyond electoral fraud and broadened it into what can be called a coup d'état.

Perhaps it was precisely for this reason that when the public and Mir Hossein Moussavi's supporters gradually realised that what had happened after the presidential elections was not fraud but a coup d'état, the demands made by the Green Movement also went beyond what had been originally discussed. The central slogan among the Green Movement's supporters of "Where is my vote?", while maintaining its primacy as a key demand, was gradually accompanied by other slogans and demands.

Slogans like "Free the political prisoners," "Down with the Velayat-e Faqih," "Down with the dictatorship," "Hold free elections," "Equality between women and men," and other calls far more radical than "Where is my vote?" were among the demands which were gradually added to the Green Movement.

MOUSSAVI AND THE GREEN MOVEMENT

IN HIS STATEMENT 18, known as "The Green Movement's Draft Charter," issued on the first anniversary of the elections, Mir Hossein Moussavi devoted himself to expounding in detail the course taken by the Green Movement over the last year.

This statement, written some time after the inception of the movement, is exceedingly important because it depicts the movement's goals and characteristics and reflects on the ups and downs it has witnessed during its existence. Given that Moussavi's central role in the Green Movement is undeniable, even to the faction of the opposition to the Islamic Republic which is not extremely close to him or his viewpoints –and sometimes negates them–a closer look at his own definition of this movement seems necessary.

As Mr. Moussavi says in this statement,^{or}

"From the lies, fraud, and violations of the law that occurred in the elections, the question of "Where is my vote?" was born. You the people, peacefully and with utmost clarity and with no ambiguity, shouted this question powerfully and out loud in the unparalleled and historic march of 15th June 2009. Except for those blinded and deafened by ignorance, superstition, greed, and lies, everyone across the country and around the world saw and heard you. But was the response anything other than torture and murder and imprisonment, the chaining up of the prisoners' naked bodies and the attacks on the university dormitories?"

^{at} Translation taken from Tehran Bureau, 16th June 2010, with modifications. http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/06/the-green-movement-charter.html (Editor's Note).

He adds, "The atrocities in Kahrizak prison and the murders on 15th and 20th June 2009, and on Hossein's Ashoura [December 27, 2009] will surely never be erased from the nation's memory; nor should they be, because that would be a betrayal against the blood of the martyrs and the innocents. How can we forget about the shots fired directly at the people and the police cars that ran them over? But the blood and suffering has torn the veil of the totalitarians' deceit and revealed the corruption that had been concealed behind the sanctimony. These horrific events and the way in which the government treated the people served to show all strata of our nation, from workers, teachers, university students, journalists, professors, clerics, employers, bazaaris, women, men, the young, the old, and all activists in social movements, to the abased [mostazef] and the middle classes-it showed everyone where the root cause of all their problems lay."

Mir Hossein Moussavi then refers to the role that economic corruption amongst the inner layers of the Iranian regime played in forming the Green Movement,

"That our country executes more people than any other nation relative to its population is not due to the sins of the sinners, but to the flight of justice, good management, and good governance from our society. The fact that even everyday expediency and the immediate affairs of governing have not convinced the totalitarians and the government forces to cease their lying, corruption, superstition, and trampling on our Constitution and other laws is indicative of the deep penetration of these abominations into the inner recesses of the political system. It seems that they have firmly entrenched themselves in these layers to defend interests which are nurtured by hundreds of billions of dollars of oil revenues, the annual importation of US\$ 70 billion of goods, and the domination of financial and monetary institutions without effective oversight."

MOUSSAVI AND THE GREEN MOVEMENT: ROOTS AND AIMS

MOUSSAVI THEN TURNS TO THE ROOTS of the Green Movement's formation. In his view, "the appearance of various deviations from the road to achieving goals and ideals such as justice, independence, freedom, and the Islamic Republic for which the people made the glorious Islamic Revolution, and the gradually erected impediments to it-the emergence of totalitarian tendencies among some regime officials; violations of the fundamental rights of citizens; affronts to human dignity; government mismanagement; the growing economic gap and socio-economic frustrations; the evasion and violation of laws by some of those responsible for their implementation; ignorance of the national interest and demagogic adventurism in international interactions, and the gradual and painful forgetting of morality and spirituality for the sake of power-" were factors which "brought the prospect of protest to maturity among the caring and the suffering, and all the people of Iran" in recent years, to finally emerge clearly and powerfully as the Iranian people's Green Movement after the Islamic Republic's tenth presidential election in 2009.

He then explicitly calls the Green Movement a reformist movement and not a revolutionary movement for regime change,

"The Green Movement is committed to human, moral, religious, and Iranian principles and values. It considers itself as dedicated to the refinement and reform of the course that the system of the Islamic Republic has followed in the years since the Revolution. On this basis, it will concentrate its energies towards acting within the framework of the Constitution and with respect for the views and votes of the people. The Green Movement works to continue the struggle of the Iranian people for freedom and social justice and to attain national sovereignty; goals which had previously come into prominence in periods such as the Constitutional Revolution [1905-1911], the oil industry nationalisation movement [1951-1953], and the Islamic Revolution [1978-1979]."

In another part of this statement, Moussavi declares "the people's sovereignty over their own fate" to be among "the Green Movement's unshakeable principles."

He adds, "The movement considers the institution of elections to be the best way to realise this principle. On these grounds the movement will continue its efforts to safeguard people's votes until such time as free, competitive, un-vetted, and fair elections, with transparency and reliability, can be completely guaranteed. The will of the people and their vote are the source of legitimacy for political power, and the Green Movement views any arbitrary criteria for candidates or their vetting under the pretext of supervision and approval [by the Guardian Council] to be a violation against the Constitution, the right of the people to determine their own fate, and of their fundamental rights, and will struggle against it."

FROM THE LIES, FRAUD, AND VIOLATIONS OF THE LAW THAT OCCURRED IN THE ELECTIONS, THE QUESTION OF 'WHERE IS MY VOTE?' WAS BORN.

The leader of the Green Movement then explains his perspective on the relationship between religion and ideology and the movement, as well as its viewpoints on human rights,

"The first social value of the Green Movement is defending human dignity and fundamental human rights, regardless of ideology, religion, gender, ethnicity, and social status. The Green Movement supports and emphasises the establishment and guarantee of human rights as one of the most important human achievements and a result of the collective wisdom of all humans. These are God-given rights that no ruler, government, parliament, or power can annul or unjustifiably and arbitrarily limit. Attaining such rights necessitates respect for such principles as equality, tolerance, dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, and pacifism. This is possible only when the necessary environment for the free operation of independent media, the prevention of censorship, free access to information, the spreading and deepening of civil society, respect for individual privacy, the free activity of nongovernmental social networks, and the reform of rules and regulations in order to eliminate any discrimination between citizens is provided."

Referring to himself as "a minor companion of the Green Movement," he also says,

"Among the clear policies which have to be considered in this vein are the freeing of political prisoners, removing illegal limitations from and making a security issue out of the activities of parties, groups, and social movements, such as the women's movement, the student movement, the workers' movements, the social movements, etc. We must also give those who ordered and perpetrated the election fraud and the torture and killing of the protesters against the election's outcome a fair trial, and expose and try any theoreticians and supporters of violence against the people in the various layers of the regime."

IRANIAN STEW

IN HIS STATEMENT 18, MIR HOSSEIN MOUSSAVI paints a picture of the movement's roots and aims that, while demonstrating the current political situation and the Green Movement's supporters' political, social, and economic demands, is also an indicator of the conditions which drove this candidate who protested the past presidential election's results to exasperation. However much he insists that he not be addressed as such, Moussavi has now become the leader of a movement in which a great cross-section of Iranian society participates. All sorts of people are found within it.

In Iran we have a stew called 'sholeh qalamkar'. A variety of greens, spices, and sauces are used to make it and in Iranian colloquial culture it is a symbol of chaos and confusion. I find that it is not out of place here to say that the Green Movement is similar to this stew in the diversity of its ingredients.

Whether we think of the Green Movement's members and supporters as those who voted for Mir Hossein Moussavi and then attempted to retrieve their stolen votes, or consider them to be those who did not vote for Moussavi and are trying to transform this movement to one with more radical political and social demands, or whether we view them as a combination thereof -which, I believe, is a truer and more accurate portrayal-the fact is that in all three cases we are faced with a vast array of individuals with varying and sometimes conflicting social, cultural, economic, etc demands.

Among the original and the current supporters of the Green Movement, there are individuals and families who belong to the most traditional and religious social layers of Iranian society, and even to the clergy itself. They very much revere religious commandments and they try to behave in accordance with most of them. Most, though not all, of this layer were among the Islamic Republic's supporters these past 32 years. Many of them have family members who were killed or wounded in the February 1979 revolution or the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. They see Mir Hossein Moussavi as the man who was a popular prime minister for eight years, supported by Ayatollah Khomeini. They view him as the man who kept Iran's economic and social order intact during those harsh and difficult years of war.

For them, Moussavi still represents a particular reading of Islam which is called, in the discourse of Iran's religious intellectuals, "merciful Islam." It is an Islam which does not contradict with democracy, human rights, and other values of the modern world. It opposes terrorism and religious fundamentalism just as strongly as it opposes anti-religious perspectives in society and at the governmental level. Many of the women and girls who supported Moussavi before the elections, chanting slogans and marching in support in the streets and squares of Tehran were wearing the full Islamic veil, the chador. After the elections and when millions began to demonstrate against the announced outcomes, we also witnessed the presence of society's religious layers among the protesters.

But this is only one of the groups supporting the Green Movement. At the other end of the spectrum are the groups in Iranian society who take a secular perspective on Iran's political and social affairs. This faction does not believe in the role of religion and the supernatural in setting Iran's turbulent politics in order, but believe in pushing aside or eliminating religion from the political institutions in Iran.

The members of this group often lead completely different lifestyles from those of their religious neighbours. They live a completely modern existence; religious commandments have no place in their lives, they do not believe in the veil, they drink alcohol. They are strong supporters of individual and social liberties and want to re-open the bars and clubs in Iran which were shut down after the 1979 revolution. They travel to the advanced and free countries of the world and live a Western lifestyle. Their preferred political system would be one without the involvement of clerics, in which religious commandments do not play a role and which is without the Velayat-e Faqih. This faction of Green Movement supporters hopes for a secular Iran similar to that which existed under the Pahlavis.

Of course, these are the two extreme ends of the spectrum; these two groups are the diverging end points of the Green Movement. In the space between them, however, there is a large variety of individuals and social groups who raise elements of the demands voiced by either group.

As has been said, Iranian society is ethnically, racially, and especially culturally very pluralistic and variegated. In such a society, even the demands of the residents of two neighbouring villages in southern Iran will be very different. This variety has made Moussavi's irreplaceable role in creating harmony between the various viewpoints in the Green Movement very complicated.

One of Mir Hossein Moussavi's greatest accomplishments since the Green Movement began was instilling balance amidst this diversity. Naturally, this important task was extremely difficult to accomplish considering the existing contradictions. All throughout these past months, Moussavi has had to stand as the midpoint of this spectrum, in order to protect the Green Movement's internal balance. It is for this exact reason that he was sometimes compelled to take a position which inclined more towards the views of the religious and traditional supporters of the Green Movement, while at other times he veered more towards the secular side of the movement. In each case, he was met with a response from the opposing side.

I believe that the continued existence of the Green Movement, which, despite the unprecedented repression from the regime over the past year up until today, still manifests itself, as well as the prevailing consensus for Moussavi to act as the movement's leader, indicates his success in fulfilling this very difficult role. It seems that the insistence of the Iranian regime and government on continuing to employ the methods which essentially caused the Green Movement to form in the first place, as indicated in Moussavi's Statement 18, has resulted in the Green Movement surviving as the only domestic, social, and mass opposition to the faction which now rules the Islamic Republic.

In the meantime, Moussavi's duty is to be the chef of this sholeh qalamkar stew, so that out of the many ingredients, a single outcome is produced.



Mohammad Reza Yazdanpanah, born in 1982, has worked for different reformist publications and websites. He is also maintains a blog that has been filtered by the Iranian authorities. A former member of the Mosharekat-Party, he was among the initiators of the reformist youth campaign Setad 88, and an editor of the

website Mowj-e Sabz that supported the candidacy of Moussavi. After the elections he was temporarily imprisoned and had to leave Iran at the end of 2009. He now lives in Paris and writes for the Iranian online newspaper Roozonline.



































WE WOULD CALL EACH OTHER EVERY DAY AND ASK: YOU'RE STILL HERE?

Farnoush Amirshahi BEHIND THE TALL WALLS OF EVIN

The visiting hall is in a commotion. I had thought that by getting there early I would get my work underway soon, but now I see I am at the back of the queue. I don't know if it is because I am very new at this job or if it's because I have not yet recovered from the shock, but I had not fully considered how many families were eager to visit their loved ones. They must have arrived before the offices had even opened so that they would get a turn. It is not my fault. The people here have eight months head start on me. They have become fully experienced. And what an experience! As for me, it has only been ten days since I began my journey down this road that they are travelling. All this while, I have felt suspended between heaven and earth and every moment has been like a continuous nightmare carved into my mind.

It all started during the very early hours of Tuesday, 9th February 2010. Six officers poured into my parents' home and arrested Vahid, my husband. Just like that. They even had a warrant. They came at 1:30 am. They inspected everything, both at mine and Vahid's home, and at my father's. They confiscated things like our mobile phones, laptop, manuscripts, books, and in two cars took them to oblivion along with Vahid.

And now, ten days later, I am empty-handed after all my chasing and running around, trying to get news of my husband's condition and the status of his case, and am standing in the visiting hall of Evin prison.

One of my friends had joined the circle of families of arrested journalists a few days after the tenth presidential elections, and she

advised me to come to Evin. Taraneh, the younger sister of Jila Bani-Yaqoub's and the sister-in-law of Bahman Ahmadi-Amoui, contacted me during the first days after Vahid's arrest and generously shared her experiences with me. She told me, "Thursday is the day for visiting political prisoners. If you poke your nose in there, even if you are not granted permission for a meeting, you can at least find out whether they have taken Vahid to Evin." It was sound advice. If a prison officer were so much as say, "You are not permitted to visit him," it would convey a world of good news to me. I could at least then be certain that Vahid was in Evin prison. It would refute the bizarre reports that I had heard from some official or from an acquaintance that he was being kept in the Ministry of Intelligence's special detention centre on Shariati Street, or was in the hands of the police force's intelligence section.

My brother Afshin takes a blue form which says "Visitor's Request" from behind the door and is busy filling it in. At the top of the form the name of the accused is asked for, the section in which he is incarcerated, the charge against him, etc. The only information we have is the name of the accused. Vahid Pourostad. We leave the rest empty and look for the next part: name and details of the visitor, relationship to the accused, etc. We write, "Farnoush Amirshahi, wife." It is ridiculous. Only immediate relatives, such as the father, mother, wife, children, sister, and brother are allowed to visit the prisoner, provided that they are lucky and permission is granted.

Afshin fills out two forms, one for me as I stand in the ladies' queue, and the other he takes for himself and lines up with the men. He also puts Vahid's name on the list which the families have prepared to keep the queues organised. He is a blessing. I am too dizzy to set things in order quickly.

It feels as if a year has passed already, particularly since all of my efforts, official and unofficial, to get information about Vahid have been utterly fruitless. As a journalist, I tried to lobby some judiciary and political officials and Majles representatives, but I got nowhere. I shouldn't have expected much. After the tumultuous tenth presidential elections, everything changed. As well as society suffering a severe crisis and the widespread protests over the electoral results, which resulted in mass arrests and violent clashes affecting the entire country, power alliances also changed. There are now very few Majles representatives or top-ranking judicial authorities who can obtain information from

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the security forces. New forces have come to power, most of whom have military affiliations. Reformist figures, on the other hand, have virtually no place in political transactions and have become the system's opposition. Many prominent reformist figures and former Iranian officials are in prison. Those who could perhaps use their position and try to lobby prefer to keep quiet so as not to get into trouble.

Under such circumstances, the arrests and imprisonments continue and the situation worsens. From that June morning after the elections, when we awoke to learn of the incredible mass arrests of journalists, and political, party, social, legal, and civil activists, we did not spend another restful night. The situation for journalists and reporters had deteriorated. I had not yet recovered from the shock of the new period of pressure on the media and writers from the security forces during the past year and a half, as well as the Press Supervisory Board's continuing suspension of newspapers, when the widespread and all-encompassing arrests were added to it. Things reached the point where we would check our mobiles, email, news sites and blogs with dread every morning, waiting to see who had joined the vast host of prisoners. We would call each other every day and ask, "You're still there?" and would hear the response, "For the time being, yes, but have you heard that so-and-so has been arrested?!" For eight months we continued in this state of terror until our lot finally came up. Vahid was the fifty-sixth journalist to be arrested after the elections. I am now unwillingly carrying the title of a "relative of the arrested journalists".

I won't try to find out what the charges against Vahid are. If charges had been made, not only the 55 journalists imprisoned before Vahid, but also the thousands of other arrestees, not a few of whom were well-known, would have had their situations clarified, or at least their cases would have reached their lawyers. On this cold morning at the end of February, I am standing waiting in the women's queue to get news of Vahid's condition. We are all standing in line behind two small opaque sliding windows, waiting for the windows to half-open so that hands from behind it can take the visiting cards and IDs and give them to the officers on the other side of the glass. We have to stand and wait for the officers to telephone, as they put it, "the experts in the accused's case" and ask if the accused has permission for a visitor or not.

"The accused"-what a strange expression! I have heard it many times over these days. That is, since the Tuesday morning, several hours after Vahid's arrest, when I went to the Moalem branch of the Revolutionary Court to discover why Vahid had been arrested, under whose authority, and where he was being detained. When I had succeeded in passing through the crowd and turning over my ID to the person responsible for "inquiries about those accused of political crimes", he mockingly said, "Well, well, Mr. Vahid. Isn't he Houshang's son-in-law?" Without waiting for a reply, he quickly began a search on his computer. When he finished, the smile was wiped off his face. "The accused has a record. Did you know that your husband had a case against him in 2003 and was freed on bail?"

"Where is he now? Is there a case registered under his name in the Revolutionary Courts?"

"No, he is not in our system. It is way too soon for his case to have arrived, since he was only arrested a few hours ago. Come back in a few days."

Later, this dialogue between me and the old official would be repeated regularly. I accomplished nothing with my comings and goings, but I saw firsthand the many people who were coming to the Revolutionary Court from various cities to find out whether their loved ones had been arrested or if they should instead go to a coroner or to the cemetery Behesht-e Zahra. I deeply felt what a terrible torment this being kept in the dark was for the families of political prisoners. Disturbing images of all of the possibilities filled my mind. I had only been living in this state of anxiety for ten days. Alas for the relations of those arrested during the first months after the elections!

Many people, famous and ordinary, who were arrested during that time have suffered in miserable conditions. Those caught up in the mass imprisonments on a single warrant were treated in the exact same way as those who were arrested in the streets or at night in their homes. They were subjected to prolonged sentences of solitary confinement, while disturbing reports about torturing prisoners into making confessions were being published. Terrible conditions had been created and this pushed the families to do whatever they could, despite threats and limitations, from sit-ins and gatherings to letterwriting and meetings with religious figures and moderate politicians.

Conditions for the inmates of Evin changed a little when Tehran prosecutor Said Mortazavi was removed from office. At least, fewer reports of psychological and physical torture were heard, and the days of complete lack of information were shorter. However, the pressure on families did not diminish. Recently, the wife of one of the journalists was fired from the company in which she worked by order of the security guards there. She joked that she now had plenty of time to pursue her husband's case. In fact, why wasn't she there today to come and meet her husband?

I look around. I know some of the women and not others. Two people are talking about me. A young girl is saying to a tall woman of the same age, "Did you hear that Vahid Pourostad, Akbar Montajebi, Ehsan Mehrabi, and several other journalists were arrested last week?" She toys with a rose stem held in her hands and continues, "Now they have to run around like we used to have to in the beginning, trying to get information. Their situation has improved a lot now. It's impossible for anyone to understand what we went through during those first months of the arrests."

The girl looks familiar. I must have seen her before. Now I remember; it is Zohreh, the wife of Mohammad-Reza Nourbakhsh, the editor-in-chief of Farhikhtegan who had been arrested at the very beginning. I had seen them hand in hand one night when Mehdi Karroubi was scheduled to come to Vali-Asr Square to do some election campaigning. The cheerful and laughing girl of that night is now standing in line with her eyes dull. Will she see him in person today or from behind a sheet of glass? Will she be able to hold Mohammad-Reza's hands today? Does she have permission to visit him at all? I want to ask her. I go forward and introduce myself. They both greet me cheerfully. It seems that it has become the custom for the old-timers to take anyone new who comes to the prison under their wing. Zohreh says that today is their wedding anniversary and that she brought a rose so that if they allowed it, she could give it to Mohammad-Reza. My heart aches, but I smile.

The bright-eyed woman Zohreh had been talking with is the daughter of Hamzeh Karami, the editor-in-chief of the website Jomhouriyat. Despite the many hardships she suffered and undoubtedly still suffers, she is the epitome of calmness and composure. She speaks of bitter days. She describes how much her family was pressured after her father's arrest. Even the bank accounts and incomes of his two sons-in-law were investigated. She says that in the past eight months, they have not even given her father a single day's furlough. She talks about the heavy verdict given to her father, and then tells me that when the

WHAT A DREADFUL WAIT.

sentence of 16 years in prison and a permanent ban from government service was announced to Hamzeh Karimi, he had passed out. According to her, they have still not reduced the pressure on her father or their family. Even for this visit, they have had to be so patient and they still don't know if they will be able to see him this week or not, and whether it will be only from behind a sheet of glass. I heard that people like Karami have become hostages in the place of Mehdi Hashemi, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's son, in order to settle his political accounts. His daughter sighs and I forget about my own situation. I want to say something calming, but what could be said?

Someone calls me. It's Afshin, who wants to introduce me to the wife of Said Leilaz, the journalist and analyst famous in political and economic circles. Sepehrnaz has a warm voice and laughing eyes. She warmly squeezes my hand and says, "So why was Vahid Pourostad arrested?! He always minded his own business." We all laugh. Like an experienced professional, Sepehrnaz quickly begins to explain that ten days of no information is nothing. "Look, we had no word of Said for much longer than that. Be prepared not to be in touch with Vahid for another month."

I nod my head and she continues, "Have some things ready in case of emergency. For example, prepare some necessities like underwear, books, a pen, fruit, soft drinks, milk, crackers, and the like. You'll see, one day they will phone you and tell you that you have been given permission for a visit outside the designated visiting days. Remember that fruit juice, milk, and soft drinks must not be in steel containers. They must be in cardboard."

Once again, a smile settles on her lips as she recalls her own first visit of this sort, "When they phoned me and said that I could go through Evin's main gate for a visit, I was so flustered that I only managed to bring myself down there. I didn't know I could bring a few things with me. I thought they didn't allow anything here."

She is right. Political prisoners are either incarcerated in the security force's sections 209 and 240 or the Revolutionary Guard's prisons, neither of which are under the supervision of the Prison Organisation or the judiciary. Therefore, they are administered outside of the prison's regulations. I make an effort to remember everything Sepehrnaz tells me so that if I should find myself in a similar situation, I would not waste the opportunity. She has another suggestion, "Have you referred to the Tehran prosecutor?"

Yes, I have been there. One or two days after Vahid was arrested, Fakhrolsadat Mohtashemipour, the wife of Mostafa Tajzadeh, a senior member of the Participation Party and the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, who is a great supporter of the prisoners' families got straight to the point and said, "Don't waste your time going to the Revolutionary Court. Nothing will come of it. You must go to the Tehran prosecutor's office and try to get information about Vahid's status through the assistants of Abbas Jafari-Dowlatabadi, the prosecutor who took the office after Judge Mortazavi."

The very next day, I had headed for Sabzeh Square where the Public and Revolutionary Courthouses of Tehran are located. I handed over my mobile at the door and took the stairs two at a time to the second floor until I reached the Tehran prosecutor's offices. But it was not going to be as simple as I had imagined. Before the corridor to the prosecutor's staff's offices were a glass guard's kiosk and a body search gate. Getting through would not be an easy matter. On this side of the glass a large crowd was waiting tensely, hoping to meet with a member of staff on the other side. Most of them were relatives of prisoners from the eighties who had been put in jail again during the recent events. The remainder were relatives of youths who had been arrested; the father, mother, and sister of three Baha'i brothers who had been exiled to prisons in three different cities, and the parents of Ali Malihi, a student activist and journalist who, like Vahid, had been arrested before 11th February. Also among them was the mother of Hossein Derakhshan, one of the first Iranian bloggers. She was undeterred by two and a half years of running around, and must have been here I don't know how many times already. She said that she had not been able to meet with the previous prosecutor, but she had met once with Dowlatabadi. In any case, it had not done any good for Hossein. Tears filled her eyes when she spoke of her son. She said, "We have connections with high-level officials in the system because of Hossein's father's revolutionary record, but even this did no good and we have gotten nowhere. What strange days!"

I did not know how one was supposed to make contact with the people on the other side of the glass. I motioned to the drafted soldier sitting on the other side of the kiosk that I had come to pursue the case of an imprisoned relative. It was impossible for him to hear my voice. He opened the glass gate and said, "Come on in." What luck! He looked at me with sorrow. This soldier, whom I would see regularly, did not shirk from assisting me. In that short time, he had become a legal specialist. He gave me two forms. One was to request a face-to-face meeting. The other was to request a meeting with the Tehran prosecutor. He told me, "On the second form, write all the details from the instant of the arrest up until today." He then cleverly emphasised that if the accused has an elderly father or mother whose condition will decline in their son's absence, or if the accused himself has a particular illness which is cause for concern, this should definitely be mentioned. I did not hold anything back. I wrote a lengthy petition to the prosecutor and handed it in. The soldier said they would give me notice. So, I did not succeed in seeing the prosecutor's assistants or secretaries on my first try. This became possible after my insistence on future occasions. One time, I also met with Jafari-Dowlatabadi. I shall never forget the bitterness of that visit, the angry and humiliating attitude of the prosecutor who then accused me of spying for foreign media!

The prosecutor had summoned the wives of Mehrabi and Montajebi and me to threateningly warn us that if news about these journalists were broadcast on stations like the BBC, VoA, or Radio Farda, we would be dealt with. It was close to the Iranian New Year. We had hoped to be with our husbands on that occasion. But Dowlatabadi said, with that violent tone of his, that we should not have any hopes at this point for their release, as their cases are massive! So, after appealing to the Tehran prosecutor in the Revolutionary Court, who would then let a soldier direct people to the Interrogation Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court, and after some meetings with judiciary and political officials, I have finally come to this visitors' chamber. Here, I feel differently. Seeing the determined faces of the prisoners' families drives away my own despair.

I had met some of the ladies who are here during a visit to Seyyed Mohammad Khatami. That day, Khatami listened patiently and intently to every one of us and said how sorry he was that he was no longer in a position to be able to do anything. Nevertheless, the former president of the reformist government promised to do whatever he could to follow the status of journalists.

All of the journalists had been arrested for the crime of being journalists. Prolonged solitary confinement combined with harsh interrogation, sometimes accompanied by beatings, was only part of the pressure which had been imposed upon them. They were now subject to restrictions such as being denied visits and deprived of furloughs, along with deliberate delays, and threats to their families. Never before has the repression of journalists been so intense. Experts say that current conditions could only be compared to the days after the coup of 19th August 1953,^{on} but even that is not a fair comparison. According to Reporters without Borders, Iran has suddenly been turned into the greatest jail house for journalists. During this same period of several months, many newspapers and magazines were suspended. Many journalists are now unemployed or have been banned from employment. Those who are not behind bars are routinely summoned to security centres.

This is the current situation and no one can do anything about it. The people who are in prison are subject to one sort of incarceration, and those on the outside to another. Visiting days are the one satisfaction the prisoners on both sides of Evin's tall walls can have. I beg everyone, whether I know them or not, to ask for Vahid if they are going for a prison visit. The queue moves forward slowly. People's postures are very telling. Those who receive permission for a visit embrace each other with cries of joy. And then there are those who are given a negative answer, despite having a letter from the Tehran prosecutor.

Zohreh has returned from her visit. Her eyes are red. They did not permit her to bring her rose to Mohammad-Reza, but her visit was in person and their hands were able to touch once more. When she sees me, she says, "He had no news of Vahid."

This is not unexpected. If he is in Evin, he is certainly in solitary confinement and is at the interrogation stage. I pray that he is able to bear it.

After Zohreh, the wives of Isa Saharkhiz, Ali Hekmat, and Mohammad-Javad Mozaffar also return from a visit. But permission is not granted to the husband and daughters of Badrolsadat Mofidi, the secretary of the Journalists Guild Association. This has been going on for two months. They have not been able to visit her even once. Bad news about this veteran journalist's interrogations has emerged from

^{an} The coup of 19th August 1953 (or 28th Mordad Coup according to the Iranian calendar) toppled the elected government of popular Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh and was reportedly supported by the British and US-American intelligence agencies. The overthrow was followed by the re-instalment of monarchy under Mohammad Reza Pahlavi who pursued a distinctively pro-Western, especially pro-American course (Editor's Note).

the prison. It is said that she is suffering from heart trouble and tremors. Her psychological condition, too, is indescribable. They regularly move her from one place in the prison to another, from solitary to general and now, to the addicts' section set aside for female addicts and violators. Under such circumstances, visits are completely out of the question. The condition of the journalist and film director Mohammad Nourizad is no better. Two women who have come to meet him are extremely worried about him. I think that one is his wife and the other his sister. Both of them have already been taken in by the authorities. Although they were summoned to the prosecutor's office and reprimanded over having written an open letter describing Nourizad's condition, they are still determined. One of them says, "I do not curse anyone. When God has so darkened someone's heart that he can no longer see reality, he is beyond the reach of curses." My heart shakes. Nourizad was arrested in November over an outspoken letter he had written to Ayatollah Khamenei and is still in solitary confinement. They say that he is being subjected to harsh treatment. Like many others, he has not been allowed visitors. Given this, what was my situation going to be?

The closer I get to the head of the queue, the colder my hands become. Was Vahid there? The glass window opens half way. I give my ID and request card to the grim and indifferent officer. He checks the ID against me and returns it, but he keeps the card and says, "Wait till I get instructions." He puts it under the others' requests and nudges his older colleague. He reads the names one by one to someone on the other end of the telephone line, writes something on the cards, and returns them to the first officer. What a dreadful wait! My eyes do not leave their hands and mouths. My heart beats furiously. The people around me are no better off than I. We hold our breath. I grab the bars.

My card comes up. He says something into the phone. I can't hear him. I wait, and then his pen moves along the card. Returning the card to its original place, he calls in a loud voice, "Vahid Pourostad,"

I calmly reply, "I'm right here." My voice is caught in my throat. I ball my hands into a fist and my nails dig into my palms. He gives me an indifferent look and says, "He is forbidden visits."

I smile helplessly. I feel as if a ton weight has been lifted from my shoulders. I have finally received information about Vahid. He is there. In Evin Prison. I do not know in which section or cell. In other words, the officer did not give me any answers. He impatiently calls the next person and I am pushed out of line by the pressure of the others. Nevertheless, I am relieved. Where else could you find someone who is happy upon hearing that her husband is being denied visits?

Although it is noon, the hall is still in a commotion. I have to leave. I have a lot to do. On Saturday, I have to go to the prosecutor's office once more and to Evin and to run this way and that. The Majles is also in session on Sunday. I have to arrange meetings with several Majles representatives. And I have to remember to report the news to reporters and websites. I will also report on the condition of the other journalists. This is the least I can now do. They and their relatives are the newest members of my family. I have so much to do! I have found Vahid. My work has just begun.



Farnoush Amirshahi, born in 1979, debuted as a journalist in the popular Tehran daily, Hamshahri. She began writing for the literature and culture section but soon became attracted to politics and worked as the parliamentary reporter for the newspapers Yas-e Now, Hayat-e Now, and also Shargh. The closure of

this renowned paper brought her to Ham-Mihan and Etemad-e Melli where she ran a special weekly page on human rights. Her last employer, the newspaper Etemad, was closed after the presidential elections of 2009, and Farnoush Amirshahi left Iran in June 2010. She lives now in Prague.





THEY OPENED THE DOOR AND I FOUND MYSELF LEFT IN A FILTHY SOLITARY CELL.

Vahid Pourostad

EVIN PRISON, THE HEART OF IRAN

The Islamic Republic's presidential elections of 12th June were over, and I could not sleep. The prospect of Ahmadinejad being in power for four more years brought so much agitation and anxiety that sleep was impossible for me and for Farnoush, my wife. We browsed through the national television networks and the BBC following the latest polling results. At 2 am, the first electoral results were announced. The gap between votes for Mir Hossein Moussavi and those for Ahmadinejad had reached hundreds of thousands and by the early morning it was announced to have soared into the millions.

Farnoush had eventually fallen asleep at 3 am and was unaware of the announced results. When she woke up that morning and heard, she stared at me in shock. Furious, she sat down on the corner of a chair and wept.

All our hopes for better days for Iran had been dashed, and our despair worsened in the days that followed; days and months of blood and protests. Those exuberant days leading up to the elections had given way to a time marked by the continued arrests of journalists, political activists, social and student activists, and other protesters.

Night and day, our political and journalistic friends and colleagues were one by one either summoned to security centres or arrested. The first thing we did each morning was to check news sites or listen to Radio Free Europe/Radio Farda to find out which of our friends or colleagues had been arrested during the few hours we had managed to sleep. They were dark and hopeless days, during which it was exceedingly difficult for us to print any news, however brief, about the condition of our arrested colleagues. Government agents had sat in our printing plants for months, checking over the pages of newspapers. When they were printed, readers would be able to see that some of the articles had been blanked out. Those days were filled with terrible sorrow, and Farnoush and I felt like we were living through a nightmare. And then came the night of 8th February 2010.

It was a Monday night leading up to the 11th February celebrations, and a new wave of arrests had begun. That evening, I was visiting my father-in-law and had watched a sports programme until late and fallen asleep at his house. It was past 1:30 in the morning. I was not yet fast asleep when the telephone there rang. My mother-in-law, who had been startled from her sleep, gave a negative reply to an unknown man who was searching for me. When she hung up, we all felt shaken and agitated.

A few minutes later, Farnoush's mobile phone rang. It was an unlisted number, and she did not answer the phone. I looked out the window. No one was out there. But then Farnoush looked more carefully and noticed two black cars parked to the left and right of the apartment. Fruit peel had been thrown out the window of one of them. My entire body froze. I still hoped that those two calls were mistakes and that those two suspicious-looking black cars had nothing to do with us.

I was still thinking about this when my train of thought was shattered by the sound of pounding on the door outside the house at that late hour. When I opened the door, six officers came in and began searching through the whole house. While investigating, one of the officers asked Farnoush to get dressed and go with them. When her mother and I protested, a grim individual gave a signal and they stood down from this order. He was older than the rest and had been standing at the door from the beginning. This older officer, who was evidently their chief, turned to me and calmly said in my ear, "Isn't your wife a journalist?!" I looked at him and nodded my head.

"Which newspaper?"

"Etemad."

It was after 2 am when I got in one of those black cars while Farnoush and her parents looked on anxiously. Along the way, the officers asked for my address so that they could search my home.

When we got to my house, I immediately saw the bewilderment in the eyes of the six officers as they were faced with a room filled with books and newspapers. Four of them fell on the books and papers while the other two inspected the bedroom and the rest of the house. The older grumpy officer went from room to room looking for my passport. I reclined on a chair, cool and calm. The officer who seemed to be in charge of operations warned me several times that I should come and observe the inspection, but I had no such inclination. Although I gave the impression of sitting calmly, I was shaken to the core. One officer found a photograph of a group of my friends, where men and women were stood together, and showed it to the grumpy officer saying, "Look at the sort of pictures he has." I protested, "That is a picture of my wife and our friends!" I said the officer, "Please just gather the material you need from my house. It is up to the judge to form an opinion. You should just be collecting the things!" When I said this, the officer insulted me, and told me to, "Pipe down." Of course, I knew full well that what I had said was ridiculous, since in the end it was they who made the decisions and not the judge.

During the course of the investigation, the officers found a piece of paper on which I had written down the slogans that the people had been chanting in the march against Ahmadinejad. The grumpy officer's grim face suddenly brightened and he went to the kitchen and very calmly telephoned a man whom he addressed as "hajji," "Hajji, he even prepared his own slogans!" My heart sank for a moment over this baseless accusation.

The officers carried off lots of index cards which I had gathered to write my new book, along with a large quantity of CDs, a laptop, files, a telephone directory, a reporter's tape recorder, a satellite receiver, and more of my possessions. It was now past 3:30 am and the officers took me along to Evin Prison.

By 4 am I was inside Evin Prison. After assembling a doctor's file and putting me in a prison uniform, they gave me two blankets, toothpaste and a toothbrush, then blindfolded my eyes and put me into another car along with several other prisoners and sent us to Security Section 240.

We drove along various corridors while my eyes were bound, but before I reached my cell the warden asked my name. He then said, "No, you must return to Section 209. It has been decided that your interrogation should commence this very minute." I did not know what time it was, but it must have been about 4:30 am. I was put back in a car and sent to Section 209. My eyes were still blindfolded so I couldn't see a thing. An officer took charge of me. While he was escorting me up the stairs, he said into my ear, "They call me 'Seyyed'! Here, either you will talk or we will hang you by your ears!"

I was extremely tired, and my interrogation began with my face turned to the wall. First, the officer told me I had to write about my work history. I wrote part of my record: I was a member of the editorin-chief council of Yas-e Now, Vaqaye-e Ettefaqiyeh, Eqbal, Etemad-e Melli, etc. It seemed that at that moment the interrogator recognised me and then tried to moderate his behaviour.

He mockingly declared that I was being accused of collaborating with Radio Free Europe/Radio Farda. The interrogator was sat behind me, and would write down his questions and then I was made to write out my answers. In answer to the interrogator's repeated questions, in which he tried to misconstrue my relationship with Radio Free Europe, I wrote that I had merely filled out an application form a few months ago, but I had never worked with them.

He asked, "Why did you want to leave Iran, with such a record of journalism?" He also said, "Didn't you know that if you went to work for Radio Farda, you could never return to Iran again?"

I curtly replied, "What do you expect when you suspend all our newspapers and eliminate all job security and peace of mind for journalists? No man would want to leave his country forever and abandon all his credentials and attachments."

This exchange continued for hours. I think that it was 9 or 10 am when he finished. My whole body was shaking with the extreme cold and from sleep deprivation.

For an hour, I sat with my eyes bound by the exit door of Section 209 until they transferred me to Section 240. When I entered the prison they took me up and down one or two flights of stairs before they decided on a cell for me. They opened the door and I found myself left in a filthy solitary cell. I was reminded of my solitary cell of seven years ago. At the time, I was a member of Yas-e Now's editorial council. The night before the murder of the Iranian-Canadian journalist, Zahra Kazemi, was exposed, Said Mortazavi, who was then Tehran's prosecutor, summoned me to his office along with Hossein Bastani, another member of the editorial council, and sent us to the Revolutionary Guards' security Section 325 in Evin Prison. My current cell was very cold and very dirty. At that point, I still did not know what section or cell I was in. There were two filthy blankets in the cell and the dust from their shredded threads covered my head and filled my mouth. When I tried to stretch out along the cell's length, I had to slightly bend my legs. Next to the entrance was a tin garbage pail which served as a toilet and next to that was a small sink.

The next day, they brought me to the court that was based inside the prison. The interrogator explained that I was charged with "acting against the country's domestic security by collaborating with Radio Free Europe/Radio Farda and the BBC Persian". Once again, I rejected this charge.

I was taken back to my solitary cell. I did not leave that cell again for eight full days. Being in a solitary cell is like being buried alive in a grave. There was no sign of an interrogation the whole time I was in solitary, but from the sounds of comings and goings outside I could tell that all the cells were full and that the interrogations were being carried out day and night.

They moved me from solitary on the ninth day and took me to a cell which had been made by knocking down the wall between two solitary cells. There were four people besides myself in this small cell, which was in that same Section 240. Two of my cellmates had master's degrees in engineering. They had been arrested for sending sMs messages and emails about the protests after the elections. These two engineers and the other two youths, who had also been arrested for sending sMs messages, had never been politically active and could never have even imagined a day where they would be arrested and imprisoned for sending a few sMs messages and emails.

The five of us had to pass our days in this tiny cell. Because of the small space, we had to sleep clinging to one other. In the corner of this little cell was a shower which served as a bath and a tin bucket which served as a toilet, separated by a curtain. If one person had a shower, the cell would be turned into a sauna. When the small window over the cell door was opened, which made a lot of noise, it would make our whole bodies shake.

The officers would take one or two of my cell mates for interrogation every day. When they returned, their faces would be white as chalk and they would be unwell for hours. They were not political people but had protested against the election results. They had not been arrested in demonstrations or street clashes, but because their sMs messages, in which they had shared political slogans or told their friends what times the demonstrations were taking place, had been eavesdropped on. The security officers' attacks on these people's homes were just the beginning of their troubles. The officers took away their computers and obtained their email addresses and passwords during the very first interrogations. In their email accounts, any email which had to do with the elections got them into even more trouble. Even if they had erased an email or a message, the officers were able to recover all their deleted emails, pictures, and information and they had to spend hours, days, and even months in harsh isolation conditions in prison to answer for them.

Twenty days had passed since my arrest, but there was no sign of the new interrogator. Keeping a prisoner in a prolonged state of uncertainty and idleness is a kind of mental torture for which one must find a way to free one's self. I tried to leave the cell in my imagination and speak to Farnoush. I had learnt this trick during my previous imprisonment in the security cells of Section 325 in the Revolutionary Guards' prison.

After 20 days, an officer reported that I would meet Jafari-Dowlatabadi, the Tehran prosecutor. I sat on a chair facing the prosecutor. He asked for my name.

I answered, "Vahid Pourostad."

He was surprised when he heard my name. "So you are Vahid Pourostad?! Pourostad, you are very famous! You sleep, you wake, you get up, you sit down and the media mentions you! Why is it that the newspapers and websites are such fans of yours?!"

"Mr. Prosecutor, as I have been a journalist for 17 years I think that it is perfectly natural that there should be that level of coverage of me."

The prosecutor took a file from his table and began to leaf through it. He then mentioned several people's names, asking whether I knew them or not. These names included strangers and friends in Radio Farda and the BBC and journalists and politicians inside and out of the country. He stated that my crime was having collaborated with the BBC and Radio Farda. For the 25 minutes I was in the prosecutor's room, he questioned me about the situation of the press. I told him that journalism was in the worst possible condition. Censorship, suspension, and unemployment had brought journalists' patience

THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC HAS MASTERED THE ART OF TURNING PEOPLE FROM EVERY LAYER OF SOCIETY AGAINST ITSELF.

to its breaking point. He responded saying that the prosecutor only carried out a small number of the suspensions and that most of them were done by the Supervisory Board. In my opinion, his excuses were poor, as there was also a representative of the judiciary on the Press Supervisory board. Finally, I asked the prosecutor to clarify my case as it had been 19 days since the order for my interrogation had been issued.

When I left the chamber, I could not help but to instantly draw a comparison between this prosecutor's behaviour and that of Said Mortazavi, the former prosecutor, with whom I had had several run-ins. I felt that they were quite similar, except that Mortazavi knew the journalists and political activists well, but Dowlatabadi's knowledge of them was very poor. Both of them were under the influence of the security forces, and for both of them the law was mostly just for show, a mere ornament. On the whole, I did not have a good feeling about this Jafari-Dowlatabadi. But I found it interesting that he had chosen to meet with some of the accused, just so that he could hear their opinions.

When I returned to the cell, two of my cellmates had been moved. I had come to care for them a great deal and was deeply grieved by their absence.

For me, the most important outcome of my meetings with the prosecutor was the knowledge that my case was finally in motion. Days later, my interrogations resumed. They were tough and lengthy interrogations. This time round, the interrogator asked me to remove my blindfold and answer the questions face to face, both in writing and verbally. The interrogator was polite and patient, but at the same time he was firm and not lenient. Once, that same grumpy officer who had come to my house to arrest me attended my interrogation. He and the interrogator told me that the reason for this mild treatment was my record and credibility as a journalist. They then said that their treatment of us was different from the treatment they showed to the groups of "subversives" and those who had been arrested during Ashoura! At the same time, the interrogator said that I should not tell any lies as they had accessed all my emails with the BBC and Radio Farda, and these emails showed that I intended to go to Radio Farda! He also said that my emails to the BBC showed that I had maintained a lot of contact with my colleagues in the BBC and was even giving them instructions! The interrogator removed a number of emails from a large pink folder and read some of them out.

During the days leading up to the elections, I had complained to my friends at the BBC about the fact that they had not spoken with the politicians supporting Mir Hossein Moussavi, but mostly only spoke with supporters of Mehdi Karroubi. They had answered saying that Moussavi's supporters would not speak with them, but said that if someone was ready to talk with them, I should let them know. And so, when I was editor-in-chief of Yas-e Now, which had only lasted a few issues. I asked my friends if they knew any political activists whom they thought would be prepared to give an interview with the BBC, and that if so, they should give their numbers to me. A list was prepared and I handed it to one of the BBC's editors-in-chief. Three or four other emails related to several subjects of no great importance were also tucked away in the interrogator's bag, and he used all of this to suggest that I was giving the BBC instructions! Of course, along with these were some emails to Radio Farda which showed that I had passed a test with the station and intended to go and work for it.

I was interrogated for several days, for five or six hours each day, solely on the subject of these emails. I was fairly certain that the officers had gotten access to the emails from Radio Farda and the BBC, but had not obtained these emails through my mailbox. They did not seem to have many of my other emails, particularly those concerning my close and daily collaboration with a Green Movement site, which passed through that same email account. They had nothing on any of this.

The interrogator believed that the popular demonstrations were under the leadership of the BBC, Voice of America, and Radio Farda. I argued that as long as he kept this perspective without taking into account Ahmadinejad's words and actions, and those of the Ministry of the Interior officers, who had announced him as the winner of the elections within hours of the ballot boxes closing, his judgement would always be flawed.

During the various interrogations, hours were spent discussing the elections. He asked me for my opinion on the matter-had there been fraud or not? I replied that the electoral results had only been announced collectively, and that I, as a citizen, could not be content until the results from each ballot box were declared individually. I added that only when the votes for each candidate in each ballot box are announced with representatives of the candidates present to state that they agree with the results, and that ballot box's receipt is signed unanimously at the end of the elections, will there be no further room left for discussion. The interrogator asked how these demonstrations could be brought to an end. I replied that while there are differences amongst the top ranks of the power elite and the public can see these conflicts and disagreements, you cannot expect peace from the people in the streets. When Ahmadinejad refers to the protesters as dust and trash, and Mr. Alamolhoda calls them cows and goats, as he did in a speech during the march of 30th December, and when every day the newspapers Javan and Keyhan and the Fars News Agency label the protesters so obscenely, how can the protesters then be expected to calm down?

During the next few days, all my former cellmates were either freed on bail or transferred to different cells. Even the white-haired man who had fought for years and been wounded in the Iran-Iraq war was freed. They had put him in our cell for only a few nights and he was like a soothing balm to me. I also shared my cell with a 45-year-old man for several nights who had been accused of sedition. I asked him what kind of charge that is.

"It means having relations with the Hypocrites (the People's Mojahedin)."

"You mean you have relations with the People's Mojahedin in Iraq?"

"No. My brother, who was 22 in 1981, was a member of the Organisation of People's Mojahedin and used to sell its newspaper. He was arrested that year and executed in 1988. My other brother, too, was arrested during that same decade and spent ten years in prison. The families of the prisoners and the executed of that decade are a terrible sore spot for the government and they keep their slightest movements under observation. If we participate in the protest marches, they treat us with greater severity."

This man, who was not even allowed to phone his family, was also taken from my cell very quickly and thrown into solitary confinement. When I considered my cellmates and the people in nearby cells, I was struck by how much it felt as if the heart of Iran was beating here. From engineers and architects, to combat veterans and those wounded in action, to the families of those executed in the eighties, to nameless youths, to students and teachers, and even a train conductor! They were forgotten people, whose names have never been published in the media since no one even knows they exist.

For all its ineptitude, the Islamic Republic has mastered the art of turning people from every layer of society against itself. This was evident in the security cells of Sections 240 and 209. Here, the voices that I heard were not only those of the journalist Emaddedin Baghi and of Behzadiannejad, Mir Hossein Moussavi's chief of staff, who obtained medication from the prison section's doctor. They, too, were under pressure from the interrogator and in prolonged solitary confinement, but as journalists and political figures they had known that political activities in Iran could lead to threats and imprisonment. But did it ever occur to that young 20-year-old pipe layer who had merely chanted the slogan, "Where is my vote?" in the street that he would wind up in prison, where even his family would not know of his whereabouts for days?!

After 33 days, I was released from Evin Prison, hugely pained by those horrendous nights which torment me still now. The night of my release was a happy one, though. Once again I embraced Farnoush and my dearest friends and family members. But I remember that at the same time there was bitterness as I knew that this would perhaps be the last time that I would be able to embrace many of them!

The days after my release from Evin were only the beginning of my affliction; of nights in which I had to sleep haunted by the memories of my friends and even by the nameless prisoners whom I had seen. And then only if I could manage to sleep at all! Deep in the night, Farnoush and I would have nightmares about another assault from the officers. During the day, at the slightest sound of a car braking we would instinctively run to the window in terror to check outside.

The interrogator's repeated phone calls after I was freed, no matter how respectful, were like a constant black shadow following me. He frequently asked me to have a meeting with his collaborators in the Press Section. I asked, "What sort of meeting?"

"You are the author of a book and have some ideas worth considering about the press, particularly about its suspension. I want you to write a proposal about what should be done so that, as you said during your interrogation, fewer publications will be suspended."

"You mean to say that you do not know what should be done in order to for publications not to keep being pointlessly closed?! What possible impact could my ideas or this proposal have at all?!"

"No. We will take your ideas into consideration and then we will have a talk with the officials based on these proposals." I made various excuses. One day, I would tell him that I was ill, another, that I was travelling. Then, I would put him off for another month. I laughed to myself, since I understood full well what they hoped to achieve by making these requests. I had no intention of allowing such a shameful stain upon my existence! I went back to work, but after a few days the manager decided to be perfectly frank with me, and said, "They do not want to work with you any more, chief, because you have been in prison." A few weeks later I was handed written notice of my dismissal.

I felt very bitter. So many things added to this; Farnoush's newspaper was suspended and she became unemployed. Then there was my firing from the newspaper. There were no newspapers left to work for; they had all been suspended, and even if there had been a newspaper, I could no longer have found work there as a journalist. After the elections, what sort of articles would I be permitted to publish? I had nothing to do and an uncertain future, as well as the looming prospect of any number of years in prison awaiting me. The life that Farnoush and I had been forced into was one of suspended animation; full of anxieties, and nightmarish...

Sometimes Farnoush spoke with her eyes. They were filled with sadness, and nothing else. I had to leave. We had to leave. We had to make our final decision once and for all and leave Iran. But how could I flee right from under the eyes which I felt were following me? Particularly when I had the added difficulty of being forbidden from leaving the country? Farnoush had a visa ready to visit a European country, but the moment of her departure was one of the saddest of my life. Her tears were not over our separation, which would probably last for a few months, but over having to leave Iran, leaving all of the things which we had grown up with. Neither of us was able to embrace our dearest family members and friends for the last time. We had to leave without saying good-bye.

When Farnoush passed through the airport gate, I had to head for the border. It was time for my flight from Iran. It took hours to pass through the mountains. At every moment I was within range of a border guard's gun. I rode on a horse, and was thrown off the beast many a time. I felt I was on the verge of dying of thirst. They had me hide in wheat fields for hours and then I had to walk for hours in the pouring rain. My feet were blackened and my toes were covered with watery blisters. We walked the roads with difficulty. If it were not for that sweet, kind Baha'i mother and her family who cared for me for several days when I reached the UN office, I do not know what terrible fate I would have suffered.

I had just become a refugee on the other side of the Iranian border. I had to wait not several days or several weeks, but seven months. But I did not complain. I thought about the mothers of Green martyrs like Sohrab or Ashkan, or about the journalists and other political friends of mine in prison, like Bahmad Ahmadi Ommavi, Ahmad Zeidabadi, Keivan Samimi, Isa Saharkhiz, Mohammad Nourizadeh, Masoud Bastani, Mohsen Mirdamadi, Mostafa Tajzadeh, Abdollah Ramazanzadeh, Hossein Nouranizadeh, Majid Tavakkoli, Mohammad Davari, Kouhyar Godarzi, Ali Malihi, Abdollah Momeni, Majid Dari, Mansour Osanlou, Shiva Nazarahari, Bahareh Hedayat, Mehdiye Golrou, or the hundreds of other prisoners who I knew or whose voices I had heard in Section 240. I not only became more patient, but I felt ashamed, knowing that they were still in prison and their families were suffering in front of the tall walls of Evin.



Vahid Pourostad, born in 1975, has worked in various renowned Iranian newspapers and magazines. He has worked in different roles on the editorial boards of the dailies Etemad-e Melli, Yas-e Now, and Nowrouz, as well as for the news website Aftab News. He has also published several books on the situation of the press

in Iran. He was an active member of the Iranian journalists' union and was recognised as an outstanding journalist in the Tehran Press Festival of 2003. After his temporary imprisonment, he left Iran in summer 2010 and now lives in Prague working for Radio Farda.





NEWSPAPERS WERE SUSPENDED IN ONE SWEEPING MOVE BY THE JUDICIARY.

Reza (Morad) Veisi

FROM 'GUERRILLA' JOURNALISM IN TEHRAN TO EXILE JOURNALISM IN PRAGUE. THE STORY OF A REPORTER WHO BECAME EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AND AN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF WHO BECAME A REPORTER

I began my career as a journalist in 1991, working in the newspaper Salam. Ebrahim Asgharzadeh was its editor-in-chief and Said Hajjarian a member of the editorial council. The three of us were classmates in a graduate programme at the Faculty of Law and Political Science at Tehran University. I became involved with Salam at the same time as Ebrahim and Said. In fact, it was on Said's advice that I began working there. At that point, Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani was the president of Iran, and Salam was actively criticising the government's policies. My first job there was to search through previous issues of the newspaper and to expose promises which government officials had made and not acted upon.

Although I was a graduate student in political science, I did not even have a desk in the office on which to put my cup. So when I wanted to have tea I had to go the office kitchenette and drink it standing there. Still now, 19 years later, I always remind myself that I began my life as a journalist at the lowest rank, without a desk or a chair.

In 1992, they chose not to print the first editorial I had written and the newspaper's international editor threw it in the bin. I was deeply upset, but did not lose hope. A little later, I was allowed to begin reporting news, and so I did. I wrote those reports meticulously. As I was studying political science, I soon wound up in the international group. But I was still a simple news reporter, earning 10,000 tumans, about US\$ 300, per month. The Balkan war between the Serbs, the Croatians and the Muslims provided me with an opportunity to begin writing editorials. In 1993, the Rafsanjani government's Ministry of Intelligence agents arrested the editor of Salam, Abbas Abdi, for having written editorials criticising the government and he spent nine months in solitary confinement.

PRESSURE ON SALAM FROM THE GOVERNMENT, COURTS, AND SECURITY FORCES

THE PRESSURE ON THE NEWSPAPER from the government escalated. Every night we feared that the newspaper's offices would be attacked by security forces and government supporters. During that period Mehdi Karroubi, a leading figure amongst the government's opposition, came to our offices every night to calm our fears.

Under pressure from the government, the owner of the newspaper's offices gathered up our equipment and ejected us from the premises. Mohammad Moussavi-Khoeiniha, the newspaper's director, decided to suspend its publication. But the staff at the newspaper insisted that we continue publishing, despite the fact that we only had two tables to work at. At one table the editorial council held its meetings and on the other we laid out the newspaper's pages by hand. In those days it was unusual for this to be done by computer.

Meanwhile, the judiciary, headed by Ayatollah Mohammad Yazdi, worked in cooperation with the government to put further pressure on the newspaper. Various ministries, administrations, and government organisations complained about Salam. Amongst these claimants was Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, then governor of Ardebil.As a direct result, Salam was compelled to print apologies to the various administrations and to shut down for two days.

ATTACKS BY ANSAR-E HEZBOLLAH ON THE SALAM OFFICES

IN 1995, ANSAR-E HEZBOLLAH BEGAN TO LAUNCH ATTACKS on the newspaper's offices. Members of this group forcefully entered the publication hall on at least two occasions and occupied it. Hossein Allah-Karam and Zabihollah Hajibakhshi led the attacks. During the 1997 presidential elections Salam was the most stalwart supporter of Mohammad Khatami. All of the governmental organisations, however, were expecting Ali Akbar Nateq-Nouri to become president.

During this time, I was promoted from my reporter's post to being an aide to the international group. With Khatami's victory in the presidential elections, the regime's pressure on Salam increased because the Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khamenei, and his supporters considered Salam to have played a role, or rather, to have been complicit in his victory. And so the courts' pressure on Salam intensified and Moussavi-Khoeiniha, the director of Salam, was summoned before court even more frequently.

SALAM'S ROLE IN EXPOSING THOSE INVOLVED IN THE SERIAL MURDERS.

IN 1998, SEVERAL LIBERAL AND SECULAR IRANIAN WRITERS were kidnapped and murdered by the Ministry of Intelligence's agents. These murders were known as the Serial Murders. Salam began investigating the murders and played a central role in exposing those involved. The man responsible was identified as the advisor to the Ministry of Intelligence, Said Emami (Eslami). He had been the viceminister of domestic security to the Intelligence Minister Ali Fallahian during the Rafsanjani government, but when Khatami came to power he had been removed from this position and became advisor to the Ministry of the Intelligence. It later became known that the Serial Murders had been executed upon his orders. These murders, which began in 1989, had claimed 88 victims.

SALAM'S CLOSURE AND MY ARREST

AS A RESULT OF SALAM HAVING PURSUED THE MATTER, Said Eslami was arrested. Before he could be tried, he attempted suicide, but was saved by doctors. He then died in the hospital under suspicious circumstances.

It was not long after this that the Islamic Consultative Assembly, in the fifth Majles after the revolution, decided to change the press law, limiting the freedom of the press and freedom of expression. The majority of the parliament was controlled by the conservatives who opposed Khatami and were supporters of Khamenei. Salam obtained a document which showed that the Majles representatives' plan was the same one which Said Eslami had developed when he was in office to limit the freedom of the press.

At this time I was the newspaper's vice editor-in-chief and the night editor-in-chief. Then, on 7th July 1999, I printed the document in the newspaper under a banner headline, after gaining Moussavi-

Khoeiniha's consent. The next day, the Special Court for the Clergy summoned Mohammad Moussavi- Khoeiniha, as the newspaper's director, and interrogated him about the document. At 3 pm, two of the prosecutor's agents brought a warrant for my arrest to the newspaper's office and I was taken into custody.

My interrogation was carried out by prosecutor of the Special Court for the Clergy, Cholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei and two of his aides. During 11 hours of interrogation they asked me 90 questions which in fact were just the one same question: Where did you get that document? I answered that it had been faxed to the newspaper's office, but they would not believe me. I did not know it at the time but at 8 pm, while I was still under interrogation, Salam was suspended.

Two days later, students protesting the closure of Salam got into clashes with police forces and on 9th July 1999 the police forces and plainclothesmen attacked the students' dormitories. This became known as the incident of 18th Tir, or "the attack on the university accommodation".

A little later, the prosecutor accused the director of Salam and me of acting against national security. The court closed the newspaper and sentenced the director to a five year suspension from press activities. Salam was never to open again.

BECOMING THE VICE-EDITOR OF AZAD

IT WAS 1999, AND I WAS UNEMPLOYED. Said Leilaz, the editor of Azad, had sent a message to some friends of mine saying that I should come to that newspaper. I went there as an aide to the chief editor. As the editor was also the manager of the Iran Khodro Diesel car factory, he would not arrive at the newspaper until six in the evening, and so I would come in at 10 am and work as acting editor until 6 pm. Before too long, this newspaper was also closed due to pressure from the government and the judiciary.

THE AUTUMN OF 1999 AND BECOMING EDITOR OF THE WEEKLY MOSHAREKAT

SALAM WAS CLOSED. Mohsen Mirdamadi, who had been its last editor, contacted me saying, "Come and publish the weekly Mosharekat, the publication of the Participation Front Party of Islamic Iran." I accepted, although I was not a member of the party. In the winter of 2000, the elections for the sixth Majles were held. The Participation Front, as the largest reformist party in Iran, was set to win the parliamentary elections in Iran riding on the popularity of then president Khatami. The party's leaders were considering founding a newspaper. Mirdamadi was the party's most influential member despite its general secretary being the president's brother, Mohammad-Reza Khatami.

THE FOUNDING OF MOSHAREKAT UNDERGROUND

MIRDAMADI INVITED ME TO COLLABORATE WITH HIM. Although Mohammad-Reza Khatami was the director of Mosharekat, Mirdamadi was its actual manager. My new duties were to be the editor of the international group, the executive editor, and a member of the editorial council.

We did not have enough money to run a newspaper. The budget needed was about three billion tumans, roughly three million dollars. It was decided that we would economise and begin with a tenth of that figure, but we didn't even have that much. We began with 50 million tumans. We put a roof over the yard of the Participation Party and this became the newspaper's news room. Being underground, it was constantly swarming with mosquitoes.

MORNINGS AT AFTAB, AFTERNOONS AT MOSHAREKAT

FOLLOWING A SUGGESTION FROM MY REFORMIST FRIENDS, I also collaborated with another reformist newspaper, Aftab-e Emrouz. At 5 am every morning I went and worked at this newspaper. I was head of the international group and the editorialist.

A few months later, when the Participation Front's electoral list won, Mosharekat, Aftab-e Emrouz, and 14 other newspapers were suspended in one sweeping move by the judiciary. I was unemployed yet again. When I woke up the next morning, my income was zero so I had no wages for my daily expenses and I had no work for which to leave my home.

LAUNCHING ANOTHER NEWSPAPER, NOWROUZ

I WAS UNEMPLOYED FOR SOME TIME. After a while, Mirdamadi, who was now deputy president of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission of the sixth Majles, reported that a license had been obtained from the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance for a newspaper named Nowrouz. I was invited to work for Nowrouz as the head of the

OUR CHAIRS WERE COMPLETELY WRECKED BECAUSE OF REPEATEDLY BEING MOVED.
international group, the executive manager, the technical manager, and as a member of the editorial council. I was responsible for everything from hiring a typist, to computer layout, to executive affairs in publication. We had a total technical and printing staff of 35.

The judiciary began to put pressure on us. Nowrouz was published for about 18 months. The security forces, the judiciary, the police, the Guardian Council, and all of the organisations and individuals who supported Khamenei began to complain about the newspaper. We held the record number of 300 complaints made against us.

Judge Mortazavi, then prosecutor of Tehran, was behind all the pressure on this newspaper. When the newspaper was not prepared to go along with Khamenei's advice to refrain from printing the opinions and articles of the national-religious group and the Liberation Movement of Iran, it was closed and we were once more out of work.

ROUZ-E NOW: SUSPENDED BEFORE PUBLICATION

A LITTLE LATER, WE ATTEMPTED TO SET UP A NEWSPAPER named Rouz-e Now, but even its first issue was never published because Mortazavi refused permission for it to be printed. His reason was that this newspaper was exactly the same as Nowrouz, the only difference being that the words "Now" and "Rouz" had been switched around.

MY EDITORSHIP AT YAS-E NOW

A FEW MONTHS LATER, Mohammad Naimipour, a friend of Mirdamadi and a reformist representative in the Majles, obtained a license to publish a new newspaper named Yas-e Now.

I was the editor-in-chief of this new newspaper. According to the law, we were not allowed to publish a new newspaper in the offices where Nowrouz had been and so we rented another building. We loaded our tables onto a truck and carried them there along with our computers.Our tables and computers suffered the wear and tear of frequent transportation. Then, the telecom service provider complained about having been forced to move our 16 telephone lines from building to building. Also, the life-spans of our newspapers were so short that we were only able to install air-conditioning in the summer or a heater in the winter, but not both.

The judiciary stepped up its pressure. Yas-e Now was a 16-pagepublication, but the prosecutor forced me to devote 14 of them to articles which he had written against us. In order for the newspaper to not be shut down, I was obligated to print his work. However, I wrote on top of each page that these were items which had been printed on the prosecutor's orders. The next day, he phoned and asked, "Why did you say that these articles had been printed on my orders?" I was compelled to print those 14 pages again.

In the winter of 2004, the electoral competition for the seventh Majles began. The Guardian Council, which was under Khamenei's influence, rejected the suitability of many of the reformist representatives in the sixth Majles as well as reformist candidates throughout the country for running for office and did not give them permission to participate in the elections. The rejected parliamentarians staged a sit-in in the Majles. Yas-e Now gave the representatives' protest minute-by-minute coverage. Mortazavi issued an order to suspend Yas-e Now two days before the elections.

The next day, I went to Mortazavi's office along with my colleague Vahid Pourostad of the editorial council and Abdolfateh Soltani, the newspaper's lawyer. We told him that suspending the newspaper was a violation of press law. Mortazavi, who was the prosecutor, gave us a response of historic importance: "I pay no attention to the law. You want to work against Ayatollah Khamenei and I will not permit such a thing to happen."

SEARCHING FOR A NEW NEWSPAPER LICENSE

IT WAS DIFFICULT TO FIND SOMEONE who might have been able to obtain a newspaper license. The Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was under the control of the reformist Khatami government. However, most of the members of the Press Supervisory Board, which issued these licenses, were under the conservatives' control, and they were not prepared to issue a license to our group. We had to find someone who already had a license and was ready to cooperate with us.

Mostafa Khanzadi, a reformist Majles representative from Damavand, said that he had a license and was willing to work with us. We found a new building. Once more we loaded the tables and computers onto a truck and transferred the telephones to the new offices.

Our new newspaper was called Vaqaye-e Ettefaqiyeh. Mirdamadi, who was the acting editor of our newspapers and the leader of the group, told me that I should be the editor-in-chief. But I answered saying, "My duties include being head of the international group, executive manager, and technical manager, but I think it best that Behrouz Geranpayeh be the editor-in-chief, since he has a been a journalist for longer than I have." And so, I became a member of the editorial council.

From the outset, the pressure from the judiciary and the courts began again. They put the director of the newspaper under immense strain, telling him that if he worked with our group of journalists they would arrest him.

The closure of several of our newspapers one after the other had meant a serious decrease in our financial and administrative resources. Also, some members of the Participation Party wanted to intervene directly with the newspaper's affairs, as a result of which we were faced with a strike by our colleagues within the newspaper.

In the end, it was agreed that I would become editor-in-chief and that the members of the party would cease to intervene with the newspaper's affairs. But this period was also short-lived. Mortazavi, revolutionary prosecutor of Tehran, suspended this newspaper, too, after about six months of activity with an order issued by one of the judges under his command.

EQBAL, A NEWSPAPER PRINTED IN OFFICES WITHOUT A BATHROOM OR A TELEPHONE

ONCE AGAIN WE WERE FORCED TO OBTAIN a new newspaper license. It was now no longer possible for us to find one in Tehran. We learnt through one of our friends that there was a supporter of the reformists in Yazd, 500 km from Tehran, who owned a newspaper called Eqbal with a license to publish throughout Iran.

Mirdamadi negotiated with the owner, Morteza Fallah, and he courageously accepted. There was a strong likelihood that the newspaper would get closed down, and there was also the difficulty of finding a new building, since, according to the law, we could not use the building which had housed Vaqaye-e Ettefaqiyeh. We eventually made an agreement with an elderly lady and rented her house. It was an old house, about 100m2, in a narrow alley. It was at the time of the 2005 presidential elections, and we were in a rush to have a newspaper ready. At 10 am on Thursday, the lady prepared to leave her home. We went there and swept it clean. Then we brought the tables and computers, now completely worn, to the building. It had neither a bathroom nor a telephone. So, we had to start work without telephones, a toilet, fax, or even enough tables or computers. Only two of our computers had internet access. We began working and by Saturday morning, less than 48 hours later, we had a newspaper printed and published.

We did not have any money. With 200,000 tumans, about US\$ 200, out of my own pocket I bought sandwiches so our reporters could eat and work and then, late into the night, take a taxi home.

A while later we moved to a somewhat better building. Our tables and computers were loaded back into a truck and our telephones were transferred to the new buildings after protracted negotiations with the telecom service provider. I was a member of the editorial council, the executive manager, the technical manager, and the head of the international group.

The building across from us was Tehran's Intelligence Organisation building. They had us under surveillance. Our chairs were completely wrecked because of repeatedly being moved. The newspaper's staff had a right to feel discontented and uncomfortable, but there was nothing we could do to rectify the situation, as we did not have enough money. We didn't even have enough of the broken chairs. Whenever someone came late to a meeting of the headline council or the editorial council, they had to sit on a bookshelf, a windowsill, or a filing cabinet since there were no chairs left.

My colleagues referred to this kind of journalism in Iran, which was associated with difficult conditions, repeatedly moving, and the constant danger of arrest, as "guerrilla" journalism. But for all the hardships we endured, Eqbal, too, lasted only four months. It backed Mostafa Moin, the candidate supported by the reformists in the 2005 presidential elections, but it was closed after the first round of the elections and before the runoff between Ahmadinejad and Rafsanjani.

The order for its closure was again issued by Mortazavi and signed by the interrogator Mohsen Qazi. The reasons we were given for its closure were a series of accusations involving, for example, "the printing and publication of lying articles devoid of truth", and "spreading rumours to disturb public opinion and create a crisis", and "taking abnormal measures to incite and disrupt public order and tranquillity". In actual fact, Eqbal was suspended after it published a statement by the reformist candidate Mehdi Karroubi accusing Islamic Republican Leader Ayatollah Khamenei's son, Mojtaba Khamenei, of interfering with the elections. When the second round of the elections was held and Ahmadinejad won the presidency, we did not have a newspaper.

THE GOVERNMENT NO LONGER ALLOWED US TO HAVE A NEWSPAPER

IT HAD BECOME CLEAR THAT THE GOVERNMENT had no intention of giving our group permission to have a newspaper. The lifespan of our publications had decreased from eighteen months to a year, from a year to six months, and from six months to four months. They refused to give us a license. Even if we found someone who already held a license, he was no longer willing to collaborate with us due to the existing dangers. We no longer had an investor or sufficient funds. As a result, it was clear that our group could no longer have a newspaper.

I BECAME A GUEST AT SARMAYEH

AGAIN, I WAS UNEMPLOYED FOR SOME TIME. After a while, one of my former friends from Yas-e Now invited me to work with him on an economic newspaper called Sarmayeh. Its editor-in-chief was Dr. Hossein Abdeh Tabrizi, the former general secretary of the stock exchange, and a well-known economist who believed in a market economy and was critical of the Ahmadinejad government. I was invited to work as a member of the editorial council, but its managers were concerned that my record of activity in political publications would endanger their newspaper. Because of this, contrary to my experiences in the previous newspapers, I felt like a guest and not a master of the house. After a while, the newspaper suffered financial difficulties and fell three months behind in meeting its payroll. Moreover, on political terms, it strongly censored itself. I decided to leave before it was suspended. I did not go into the office again and instead stayed at home.

FARHIKHTEGAN, THE LAST NEWSPAPER I WORKED IN

ON THE EVE OF THE 2009 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, Abdollah Jasebi, the president of the Free University, decided to print his weekly Farhikhtegan as a newspaper. I was invited to participate through Kasri-Nouri, former editor-in-chief of the newspaper Iran, who had been one of my colleagues during the time when Salam was in publication. It was clear that they wanted to use mine and Kasri-Nouri's experience, but did not want to put the newspaper in danger of being closed down by the judiciary by giving the position of editor-in-chief to myself or to him. Its editor was Mohammad-Reza Nourbakhsh, who treated Kasri-Nouri and I with complete respect.

The elections were held. Ahmadinejad was announced as having won, but many people believed that there had been electoral fraud. Unrest filled the streets of Tehran. Farhikhtegan, too, was brought under regime pressure and the editor-in-chief and some of his colleagues were warned not to go into the newspaper's office since they were in danger of being arrested. I became the provisional editor-inchief, but after a few days, Nourbakhsh was arrested.

Under pressure from the government, Jasebi began to fire reformist journalists from the newspaper. A new editor-in-chief was introduced who was neither political nor well-known. I decided to resign rather than being fired.

The Ministry of Intelligence's agents also came to the building in which I lived several times and asked my neighbours about me. Many of my friends were in prison. Many members of our group of reformist newspaper editors, who would meet every Saturday, such as Mohammad Atrianfar, Behzad Nabavi, and Isa Saharkhiz, had been arrested and I knew I could have been taken into custody at any moment.

I indirectly communicated with Radio Farda, the Persian section of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in the Czech Republic, and told them that I wanted to leave Iran. I was ready to leave the country by the winter of 2009-2010. I knew that if I tried to leave by air via the Tehran Airport there was a strong chance that I would be identified, forbidden from leaving, and arrested. I went to the Iran-Turkey border and left by land following a plan which I had developed and still cannot write about in detail.

My wife and daughter also left, and their journey was marked by great psychological and physical pressure on both of them and on me. My wife's foot was broken and in a cast. They were able to get out of the country and joined me a few days later. After a three week delay in Turkey, we went to Prague.

THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF WHO BECAME A REPORTER

WHEN I WENT TO RADIO FARDA IN PRAGUE, after 19 years of journalism and having climbed every rung from simple reporter, to editor, to editor-in-chief, I was forced to start again as a simple reporter. This was hard for me, having spent years as editor-in-chief and member of the editorial council of several newspapers. The management and many of those who worked on Radio Farda were very kind, but some people treated me the way in which one might treat a novice. These difficulties were accentuated by the language difficulties in the new country, having completely abandoned home and life in Tehran, starting a new life without any means of living, fleeing from a country with only three suitcases after 20 years of independent living, and the loneliness of living in exile.

For all that, at least I was able to write more freely and was not compelled to censor myself. My journalistic story after 19 years had now gone from being a "guerrilla" journalist in Tehran to an exiled journalist in Prague. But I am still a journalist, and will always be.

The author has provided following information on some of the names mentioned in the article (alphabetical order): **Abbas Abdi** was editor-in-chief of Salam and one of the students who attacked the American embassy in 1979. He was arrested twice, once in 1993 and again in the early 2000's. He was a member of the central committee of the Participation Front, but later left this party. /// **Aftab-e Emrouz** was a newspaper associated with Sobh-e Emrouz. The latter was printed as a morning edition and former appeared in the afternoon. /// **Hossein Allah-Karam** is one of the commanders of the Revolutionary Guards. /// **Ansar-e Hezbollah** was a plainclothes militia unit supporting the Iranian regime which pressured critical groups and individuals by attacking their meetings and buildings. /// **Ebrahim Asgharzadeh** was Salam's first editor-in-chief. He was a representative in the third Majles, after which he was arrested by the Rafsanjani government's Ministry of Intelligence. He was a member of the leadership council

of the students who had attacked the American embassy in Tehran in 1979. /// Mohammad Atrianfar was a founder and editor-in-chief of the newspaper Hamshahri as well as the founder of Shargh. After the 2009 presidential elections, he was arrested and forced to make a televised confession. /// **Gholam-Hossein Ejei** was the former prosecutor of the Special Court for the Clergy, the minister of intelligence in the first Ahmadinejad government, and became Iran's prosecutor general in 2010. /// Mortaza Fallah was a journalist from Yazd. He was tried and convicted as the editor of Eqbal. /// Ali Fallahian was the vice-minister and then minister of intelligence in the Rafsanjani government. Many of the Iranian opposition leaders in Europe were attacked and assassinated during his term in office. Fallahian is close to the office of Leader Khamenei and a member of the Assembly of Experts. /// Behrouz Geranpayeh was a longstanding and experienced Iranian journalist who was arrested and tried for conducting a poll on Iranian-American relations. /// Zabihollah Hajibakhshi was a member of the Bassij and paramilitary forces during the Iran-Iraq war and is considered a leader of the Ansar-e Hezbollah. /// Said Hajjarian was the director of the reformist newspaper Sobh-e Emrouz and was one of the supervisors in the Ministry of Intelligence in the 1980s. Hajjarian was the target of an assassination attempt during Mohammad Khatami's presidency and, although he survived, he was partially paralysed and he can now only speak with difficulty. He was arrested during the disturbances which followed the 2009 presidential elections and was forced to make a televised confession. /// Mehdi Karroubi was the former general secretary of the Association of Combatant Clerics and he is now the general secretary of the National Trust Party. He was one of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's rivals in the 2009 presidential elections and became a leader of the protesters after the elections in Iran. /// Said Leilaz was a prominent economic expert and journalist. After the disturbances of 2009, he was arrested and sentenced to prison. /// Mohsen Mirdamadi was one of the students who attacked the American embassy in Tehran in 1979. He is currently the general secretary of the Participation Front Party. After the disturbances of 2009, he was arrested, tried, and imprisoned. /// Mohammad Moussavi-Khoeiniha was among the closest clerics to Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic. He was known as one of Khamenei's behind-the-scenes enemies. He is now the secretary of the Association of Combatant Clerics. /// Said Mortazavi was the most well-known judge in the press courts. He was known among the opposition of the regime as "the executioner of the press". He later became the prosecutor of Tehran. In the course of the 2009 disturbances, he was accused of being involved in the murder of three prisoners in the Kahrizak prison and was suspended from duty. /// Behzad Nabavi was a member of the central council of the Organisation of the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, one of the main reformist parties. He was vice-president of the sixth Majles and a director of the journal Asr-e Ma. /// Mohammad Naimipour was one of the students who attacked the American embassy in 1979. He was the head of the reformist faction of in the sixth Majles. /// Ali-Akbar Nateq-Nouri was the president of Iran's fourth and fifth Majles (1992-2000) and is in charge of supervising the Leader's office. He is a leader of the conservative movement in Iran and has cold and strained relations with Ahmadinejad. /// Isa Saharkhiz was a supervisor for the press in the Ministry of [Islamic] Guidance in the Khatami government. He was also a reformist journalist and the director of the newspaper Akhbar. After the 2009 disturbances, he was arrested, tried, and convicted. /// Salam (1990-1999) was the most well-known newspaper criticising the government of Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. It was close to the Association of Combatant Clerics of Tehran. This association was composed of leftist-religious clerics close to Ayatollah Khomeini who had been marginalised and isolated during Ayatollah Khamenei's era. /// Abdolfateh Soltani was a lawyer, reformist and human rights activist who was later accused by Mortazavi of being a nuclear spy and spent time under arrest. /// Mohammad Yazdi was Iran's chief of the judiciary from 1989-1999. He is close to Ayatollah Khamenei and a bitter opponent of Rafsanjani in recent years.



Morad (**Reza**) **Veisi**, born in 1969, began his journalistic activity in 1991. As is evident in his article he has worked in many well-known Iranian newspapers. Starting in Salam, an influential daily of leftist religious intellectuals who were to spearhead the political wing of the reformist movement, he later became chief-editor of

Yas-e Now and Vaqaye-e Ettefaqiyeh, two important reform papers. Morad Veisi left Iran at the beginning of 2010. He is now living in Prague and works for Radio Farda.



(RELATING TO A SPEECH OF AHMADINEJAD IN WHICH HE REFERED TO THE PROTESTERS AS "DUST AND DIRT")



IS THIS KIND OF JOURNALISM OF REAL BENEFIT OR USE TO ANYONE?

Arash Hassan Nia

PROFESSION: JOURNALIST IN EXILE

A journalist is inherently bound to his time and place. The essence of his profession is to capture and represent a moment in the history of the country for whose people he writes. To be a journalist for a country one must be amongst its people, mingle with them, sit and lend a listening ear. Bearing this in mind, one can see that being a journalist for Iran and the Iranian people whilst actually living in the heart of Europe, differs greatly from the conventional ways of practicing this profession. It seems that Iranian journalism is bound for the same fate as that of our politics, economics, culture, and so on; the fate of being unconventional, of being a law unto itself.

Writing for Iran and Iranians whilst living in exile involves both keeping pace with the history of Iran's journalism and also accompanying it. There has never been a time in the turbulent history of this country where journalists and reporters have not resorted to migration and exile, whether willing or forced. This is because the tradition of dictatorship has been an enduring institution in this region of the world.

Before being exiled from Iran, being forced to migrate from my home, I had heard that the blind have a far more sensitive sense of hearing than that of the sighted, that their sense of smell is stronger, and that all their other senses take on greater responsibilities in order to compensate for the absence of the power of sight. The same is true for those who do not have the power of hearing; their hands take the place of their tongues, allowing them to speak, and their eyes serve as their ears, enabling them to listen. A year after being exiled from Iran, I have experienced that practicing journalism from outside the borders of one's homeland is something akin to having difficulty hearing or seeing; one must use all of one's senses in order to continue being a journalist whilst practicing from afar.

Being a journalist for a people whom you have not been able to sit amongst, for a country whose atmosphere you have not been able to breathe and soak in, writing on subjects which you have not been able to touch and feel first-hand, is like trying to visit a patient in hospital who is under quarantine. Your only access to understanding his condition is to try and decipher the beeping and flashing of the medical equipment you can see through the thick pane of glass that separates you. The patient might be running a fever, but you are not able to feel the heat of his hands or witness his struggle to breathe, signs which would tell you of his illness. Instead you are given readings from machines. You do not have access to the same air that the patient is breathing, and you cannot get close enough to see the slight movements of his hands, head, and neck; these small signs of life. All you can see are the instruments, wires, and indicators which, although necessary for monitoring the patient's health, are insufficient for understanding his condition.

When the only way to hear, see, smell, and feel what you must write about and represent is through blogs, social networks, chat, email, and the scant products of citizen journalism, the task of stripping events of rumours and presenting news that is fair and impartial is exceedingly difficult.

On top of these difficulties, it must be noted that the domestic experts and scholars who have access to current information are also prevented from communicating. We are left with repeated information that has been passed around for years or has been received second or third hand. The journalist in exile then has the task of rummaging through reams of uncertain data searching for a fresh topic, news, a voice or an image for a people watching and listening to him from so far away.

For a country where most of the information, the news, and what you have to know about and understand is never broadcast on the official news channels, printed in the press, or discussed on television or radio, practicing journalism from afar whilst conforming to the principles of the profession is exceedingly difficult. This complicated task has become the daily struggle of journalists and reporters living in exile.

The journalist in exile is deprived of so much information; for example, the sort of information that government officials only reveal when the recorders are off, or the information one can only gather from unofficial conversations. Yet, it is precisely this sort of information that will spur a journalist to file a report, and also serves to bring life and substance to a text.

From this perspective, journalism in exile is a strange, pure, and exceedingly different experience from that of a journalist living and writing in his own country. So far removed from the heart of events, journalism practiced through the internet, telephone, Skype, and based on information from blogs can be a very dangerous task. This time the danger is not of being arrested or tortured, but concerns one's credibility and reputation as a journalist.

You have to search for the hidden meanings that might lie beneath the words of your interviewees. You must learn how to build your opinion from their tone of voice. You have to develop new sensitivities and new skills so that you can find the meanings in the simplest of sentences.

With the resources available today and the development of information technology, those journalists who have left Iran over the last year within this latest wave of emigration and exile, have a far greater chance of maintaining their commitment to journalism than their predecessors did. With the aid of these resources, one can dedicate more time to keeping up-to-date with events and to being more precise. For the modern journalist in exile, the virtual world of the internet has undeniably become our reality. This virtual world feels even more real to us than the air outside of Iran which we now breathe.

Investigation has become the most important aspect of practicing journalism in exile. The journalist in exile is no longer the simple purveyor of the stories which he sees and hears. He now plays the role of a skilled and clever detective who, after obtaining information indirectly, can retrieve the actual events and concrete facts. He is not easily deceived, and his approach is realistic and fair.

From an internet conversation in the small window of a simple chat room he must ascertain all of the information he would normally glean from a real, face-to-face exchange in which he would be able to

MY LOVE FOR MY PROFESSION IS NOT BOUND TO A TIME AND PLACE.

grasp it with all his senses, and this is a difficult task. Even punctuation marks, such as an open or a closed parenthesis and two dots [:) :(] become the very tools and resources that enable the journalist in exile to feel, understand, and report.

To be a journalist in exile means teaching oneself a whole new means of practice, differing from that explained in any handbook on journalism. Throughout my experience of journalism in exile, while I am busy writing, interviewing, or reporting news, I have found that my mind is always plagued with a question. I feel constantly torn as to whether this mode of journalism and newsgathering can in any way conform to the norms and standards taught about the practice of the profession.

Reuters Foundation published a handbook for reporters in October 2004 which gives an answer to this persistent question. The text acknowledges that: "There is no universal code for reporters, for the way they operate, or are allowed to operate, varies from one country to another."

Bearing this in mind, the fact that myself and my colleagues in Europe and America or anywhere else outside Iran, near or far, are still Iranian journalists for Iran and the Iranian people is not such a strange concept. It is one of the distinctions of practicing our profession for a country which, according to Reporters Without Borders in the days following the 2009 elections, is considered "the biggest prison for journalists in the world."

The practices of newsgathering and journalism do, however, have core principles which can and must be adhered to in exile, no matter where in the world one is or for whom one is writing. Precision, objectivity, honesty, and fairness are neither affected by the physical distance between a journalist and his topic, nor by the means by which he gathers information. It is always up to the journalist to respect these principles, so that, whether he has chosen his exile or not, he can remain a journalist whilst practicing from afar, and a good one at that.

Another worry that has plagued me during this year is a doubt as to what kind of role we journalists who are exiled from Iran can play. Moreover, is this kind of journalism of real benefit or use to anyone?

I believe that the responsibilities of a journalist include keeping a scrutinising eye on the activities of the government, the courts, and all other centres of political power. Journalists play a vital role in uncovering corruption, and in conveying the voices of all members of society to one another, especially of those who are pushed to the sidelines. It also falls to journalists to explain the country's economic, political, cultural, and social situations. Considering that these are their objectives, we can see the daily efforts that journalists in exile make towards fulfilling these aims and responsibilities, and that their activities are achieved with remarkable success.

The feeling I get each morning when I open emails or listen to my messages is irreplaceable, and incites me as a news gatherer to pursue my duty and pushes me as a reporter to investigate new topics. The immense satisfaction I get from my job and my love for my profession are not bound to a time and place and will never leave me.

Being a journalist and continuing to be a journalist in exile, whether that be voluntary or not, is an opportunity to have a voice and to write for a people whose freedom to speak and write has been restricted. In a country in which whispering has always been more eloquent than screaming, journalism through the use of internet resources is a costly exercise, but is at the same time sweet and pleasant.

These are dark days, where the closure of the media and press has cast a gloomy cloud over the atmosphere of sharing and spreading information. Once again, the arresting and punishment of journalists and other media members has become an everyday topic; freedom of expression has been lost in Iran. Because of this, journalism in exile can fulfil an important mission, albeit slowly.



Arash Hassan Nia born in 1976, studied economics and subsequently started his journalistic career in 1997 in the economic newspaper Jahan-e Eqtesad. He has worked for numerous publications and newspapers that have all been closed down. His articles have appeared in Hamshahri, Eqbal, Sharq, and Kargozaran,

amongst others. In 2006, he was elected to be a member of the Association of Iranian Journalists' central committee. After the 2009 elections, Arash Hassan Nia was interrogated several times by the authorities and decided to leave Iran in October 2009. He is now living in Prague and works for Radio Farda.





LIFE WENT ON, BUT SOMETHING OF THE CITY WAS LOST FOR GOOD.

Fahimeh Khezr Heidari EARTHQUAKE SURVIVOR

In 2003 an earthquake shook the village of Bam, with its mud brick buildings and fortress of over a 1000 years old. Between 25,000 and 45,000 of my fellow citizens were killed. Don't be too surprised; it is always like this in Iran. Experts have never compiled accurate figures for the numbers of individuals living in Iran, nor for those who have died. We have no reliable figures for how many are suffering from AIDS, we do not know precisely how many people were sent to the gallows last year, nor can we even say why dolphins are killing themselves en masse in the southern ports. We talk about everything in approximations, whether we are discussing philosophy or fairy tales.

So, if your eyebrows have been raised in astonishment it is best that you lower them and realise that in our country the distance between official and unofficial figures in every field is as far as heaven is from earth, just like the figures reporting the 25,000 to 45,000 killed in an earthquake registering 6.6 on the Richter scale in Bam. But why am I reminded of the terrible Bam earthquake now? Because I want to begin my story here:

I was not one of the 25,000 to 45,000 victims of the Bam earthquake, but worse-I was one of its survivors.

When the earthquake shook Bam, I was a journalist in Tehran. When I was reporting on the disaster, one question constantly occupied my thoughts. I was asking myself-everything else aside-what would a human being feel who goes to sleep one night and wakes in the morning to find that he has lost everything he had; that his people, all his loved ones, are suddenly gone, in the space of a mere few hours?

Well, years went by. Since the earthquake, Bam will never more be that city of mud brick huts filled with the perfume of date trees. Bam and its beautiful 1000-year-old castle still lie in ruins. Nothing has changed. But now I have found an answer to my burning question.

The day I left Iran, I left my country, my family, and my memories. That day and in that very last painful, drawn-out moment-that last image which I left behind-in that moment I understood how it feels for a human being to go to sleep one night and then wake in the morning to find that she has lost everything she had, all she held dear.

If you are born in the "Third World"-a name you gave our part of the world-and grow up and live there, nothing about you will be ordinary. If you are from Iran, a country surrounded by war-torn and destitute neighbours, with deep and bottomless wells and vital arteries filled with the black disaster-this is what we call our great misfortune: oil-then everything will be even farther from ordinary. Your childhood will be full of the cries of warning sirens and the terror of war, your youth will be completely wasted by arguments about the colour of your stockings or the hejab imposed on your head, and your adolescence will be a useless battle between you and a system full of ideological and absolutist thugs. All those who have chosen the controversial profession of journalism will most certainly have thought about all these things at length.

In Iran, a journalist's life can be likened in some ways to that of the Traveller communities in Europe. In fact, I don't have to look that far afield-it can be compared with the life of the migrating tribes of our country, but with this difference: while migrating tribes and Travellers follow a schedule and make their own decisions about their seasons of migration, the Iranian journalist does not have this right.

When any of us participate in journalistic conferences or workshops abroad, we are faced with the astonishment of our colleagues from other countries. They cannot imagine why we have gone through so many newspapers in the course of our professional careers! Why is it that a journalist has written for 10 or 15 different newspapers and left each of them after a brief period? And so we always end up having to explain and describe Iran's political structure, which cannot tolerate a relatively free circulation of information, where the government closes all relatively critical and independent newspapers one after the other.

I emphasise "relatively" because in our country the conditions are such that an absolutely independent press and media cannot exist. The press is essentially political-everything in Iran is political, whether it be philosophy or fairy tales-whether it be "with" the government or "against" the government. The first option is easy and trouble-free; also, it is left unadulterated and can even be profitable. Governmental or semi-governmental newspapers are eternal and immortal newspapers. Their average lifespan: they have always been and will always be.

The second way of working is bothersome, difficult, and exhausting because it cannot be pure and true to itself. Let me explain: in Iran you cannot have a media which is "absolutely" opposed to the government. Rather, in the best-case scenario, you can have a media which offers its critique out of sense of duty but still respects the inviolable principles of regime censorship. These are the non-governmental, party, and relatively critical newspapers. Their average lifespan: they cannot depend on anything to ensure their existence. They can easily collapse at any time after one meeting of the Press Supervisory Board, or sometimes even without a meeting having been convened.

So, as a result, it is recommended to you as a journalist that you change your job. If, however, you don't want to become a taxi driver or, if you are very fortunate, a book dealer, and you insist on remaining a journalist, you should choose a long-lasting newspaper of the first type. If you nevertheless choose a short-lived newspaper of the second type, remember that your career will be marked by unemployment, poverty, threats, interrogation, prison, displacement, and exile.

Newspaper offices are generally the best place for political discussions and debates. The hottest political discussions and even disputes can always be found there a few months before any election is held. So, the exceedingly important tenth presidential elections were approaching, under circumstances in which many were discontent with Mahmud Ahmadinejad, the ninth president. The reformists, with whom I and many of my friends and colleagues are closer and in more agreement, and for whose newspapers we write, were rising up to take the government back from the Principalists in these elections.

I was among the pessimists. I said that I would not vote and during discussions with my friends and colleagues I would say that

Ahmadinejad will definitely remain in place and that it is impossible that they would allow anyone else but him to be elected. I would refer to the re-organisation and strengthening of the Ministry of the Interior, which carries out the elections in Iran, and insist that all this was significant and that the Leader's office and the government officials responsible for the elections would keep Ahmadinejad in his seat in Pasteur Street regardless of the people's vote.

Even so, I saw that hope was circulating again under the city's surface. Mir Hossein Moussavi broke his 20-year silence and was championing the slogan of change to bring us a few steps closer to our hopes for democracy.

The candidates' televised debates threw the city into uproar. Mehdi Karroubi was so blatant in his criticism of the regime that everyone was stunned. I had doubts about the outcome of an election in which one of the competitors was also the organiser and the supervisor, but every day I went into the streets along with my friends and like-minded people to chant slogans for change.

The enthusiasm and frenzy turned the city's streets upside down. We couldn't believe it. They were suddenly permitting us to come out into the streets with green balloons and wristbands and chant slogans for our candidates until three or four in the morning, shouting and criticising the government. As an Iranian born after the Revolution this was all an amasing experience for me and completely unlike anything I had ever seen. And so I went go crazy and voted once more.

When the electoral fever subsided, Ahmadinejad remained in Pasteur Street at such a price. The public were suppressed, people were killed, and more were arrested and imprisoned. The press was not spared either. The last of the newspapers I wrote for were closed down. All the political and social enthusiasm turned to a grey silence which descended on the city after the immediate repression organised by the regime. Many left Iran.

Those who remained were depressed and miserable. As the reports of arrests and prison sentences kept arriving, we just stared at each other in silence and stupor. We didn't have anywhere left to report these happenings, and no one even took up a pen.

Normal daily activities returned to the streets. Life continued. People quarrelled with taxi drivers about the fare. Students impatient to move sat behind red traffic lights and the sound of honking and

I WAS JUST 30 YEARS OLD, AND STILL WANT-ED TO FILL THE YEARS AHEAD WITH WRITING. BUT WHERE?

the hum of metropolitan Tehran assaulted the ear as ever. Life went on, but something of the city was lost for good. Travelling the streets one remembered how much blood had been spilled on the asphalt. The odour of tear gas kept returning to the city's memory. Citizens were killed, but everywhere you looked Ayatollahs Khamenei and Khomeini were smiling down on the people from giant murals.

I was just 30 years old, and still wanted to fill the years ahead with writing. But where?

I am sitting now behind my work desk in a media outlet which is thousands of kilometres from my home, my city, the place for which and about which I write. I now write more freely-there is no such thing as absolute freedom-but from so far away. It is hard work for us born in the world's abyss; both staying and leaving are difficult and exhausting.

But the last word about staying was said when I realised that the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran had banned me from travelling, from the moment they took my passport and said, "You are not permitted to leave the country." I knew that I could not submit to that ban. I had endured the censorship of my hair, the censorship of my brain, the censorship of my feelings, the censorship of my being a woman, the censorship of my questions, the censorship of my profession, and now I was being locked in a cage. The way out is not comfortable, nor is it secure or certain. It's a painful path-if you want to follow it to the end, you are better off not knowing what lies ahead.

"I fled my country." This absurd statement is akin to saying, "I fled my mother!" One can only imagine what kind of mother that must be!

I ran through the wilderness, surrounded by the howling of wolves, trudging through deep winter snows, within shooting range of the sleepy border guards. I ran panting from my country and took refuge in a different land, I, along with dozens of others, who all had no choice after the bitter presidential elections except to flee and flee and flee.

But now I sit behind my desk in a media centre that doesn't censor the truth with red ink. I sit here and write about Egypt and Tunisia and the Arab world's awakening. A sliver of hope sprouts within me, like a seedling in the jungle's darkness, reaching for the light, shouting, "Don't lose heart!" All this shows that the world can no longer abide dictatorship and repression. All these educated youths, the internet, the media, and universities have opened new windows out onto the free world. Nations want to be citizens and not subjects. Freedom will sing its song, even in your earthquake-smote land, Iran.

And so I write and work and follow the events in Iran, bit by bit. It is full of pain and tears, this distance that has been almost a year now. But I am comforted by these feelings that free reporting in a free media could, to some extent, be effective in changing the conditions in my country. These feelings are like a flame that will not go out, even if every night you have a nightmare in which you see yourself as a survivor of the disastrous Bam earthquake, even if after you sleep at night you wake in the morning and find that, suddenly, all your possessions, all your people, whatever you hold dear, are suddenly lost.



Fahimeh Khezr Heidari, born in 1978, has a degree in Persian language and literature from the University of Tehran. She first became involved with the press through a job in the administration of the newspaper Salam. She then worked as a journalist for the women's magazine Zanan and several dailies like Hayat-e Now,

Farhang-e Ashti, and Etemad-e Melli. She also wrote a popular blog. Fahimeh Khezr Heidari left Iran in early 2010 and now lives in Prague where she works for Radio Farda.





I COULD NOT STOP WATCHING AND I WAS BURNING.

Maryam Mirza

NO ONE IS WAITING AT HOME FOR ME

The taxi drives forward. The air is stuffy and I lower the window. The movement of the car wheels on the pavement creates an unnatural sound. I listen. Although this sound is unnatural, it is familiar. It transports me back to the day when, in keeping with Iranian tradition, we close relatives of the bride and groom sacrifice a sheep for the good fortune of the couple. Although it is a tradition to make this sacrifice, we were not up to staring into the sheep's pleading eyes and cutting its throat in our yard ourselves (as many Iranians do). We decided to make a donation of the sheep and it was suggested that we take it to the Kahrizak nursing home. That day, too, the air was stuffy and I impatiently lowered the window. The sound was that same sound of the asphalt as we approached Kahrizak.

But this is not Tehran, with Kahrizak just a short distance away. Until I left Iran, Kahrizak had always been known as a government home for the disabled and elderly, not for the reports on the raping of arrestees there during the post-election events. No, this is in the quiet town of Bonn along the banks of the River Rhine. I am a journalist whose life was unimaginably altered in the early hours after the presidential elections.

The taxi brings me to my little room in an old quarter of the town. It is late and the driver waits for me to turn my key in the lock and enter safely before driving off. I turn the key-an act which during the nearly two years since I left Iran has often, though not always, been accompanied by a wave of sorrow as I remember that there is no one waiting for me at home. Haruki Murakami, in his book What I Talk About When I Talk About Running, wrote that pain blocks concentration. I repeat this sentence to myself; not like someone who believes in incantations and repeats it out of faith and obedience, but to criticise it, to analyse it, to wrestle with the philosophy behind it. Accepting it would mean accepting that a journalist who was one day flung out of her recognised geographical bounds will forever be deprived of the gift of concentration that is so essential to her work and way of life.

The continual calls I have from Iranian journalists who have stayed in Iran offer me a strong argument with which to counter this quotation. Many of them are unemployed or now working in public relations, and they constantly ask me what it has been like to leave. It seems that to be a journalist for a country whose people were patiently expecting governmental reforms and were deprived of even that hope is a painful experience whether you are abroad or still in your home-land.

When did I first hear the name Kahrizak? I don't recall. Its name was usually associated with the sorrows depicted by television soap operas. Often in these series a plot would develop around the life of an elderly man or woman who has been abandoned in a corner of the nursing home by their children and eagerly awaits a visit from them. It was summer and we were in the magazine's office. The editor was saying to one of my colleagues, "Go and write something about Kahrizak, but don't make it look grim. Many of the families who left their loved ones there had no choice. Given modern lifestyles, we must get over the taboos about homes for the aged."

Maybe it wasn't summer, but for some reason my memories of working in the office of the magazine Zanan are bound up with feelings of summer-the burning Tehran summer when my headscarf twists with sweat and the hair around my neck and I often arrive at the office irritable over the heat and traffic and hejab. One of the blessings of the magazine staff usually consisting entirely of women is that I can often remove my headscarf and have some relief. But there are many times when I am at my wit's end coping with the challenges of being a female journalist; like when a government organisation does not allow a female reporter to enter without a chador and I am forced to tolerate the humiliation of wearing the mandatory garment to enter. Or when I would see a religious guidance patrol, which had one of their stations in Haft-e Tir Square near the magazine's building, and would have to hurriedly sneak past them and throw myself into the magazine's office so that I would not be held back and kept from my work.

But it was not summer the day the magazine was closed down. It was winter, January 2008, on the sixteenth anniversary of its founding. Zanan had seen many different periods pass, and while academics and intellectuals always had criticisms of the way our magazine was written, they still had no doubts as to its commitment to pursuing, expounding, and, in many cases, taking the lead in raising women's rights issues. A brief statement on the website of the Fars News Agency, which is linked to Iran's security institutions, announced our closing before even the slightest warning about this was communicated through official channels, such as by letter, to the magazine's head.

Of course, we took advantage of this opportunity and distributed the magazine's last issue on the excuse that an official memo had not arrived. The cover of this issue was a picture of Benazir Bhutto with her two fingers held up in a victory sign. Like her, we felt like we had been assassinated by a patriarchal government. They had called the magazine a "den of feminists" and issued an order for its closing.

That evening a few of us went by car to buy dinner for the magazine's staff that had all come together in the office to eat. The next day the lead photograph in Etemad-e Melli showed part of this gathering. This newspaper was also then shut down in the days after the 2009 elections. Many likened the closure of our magazine to the assassination of a 16-year-old youth. At that point no one even imagined that only a little more than a year later the murders would not be just metaphorical, but would take place in the streets.

In the same way, many activists and journalists had not believed that they would be arrested en masse with the beginning of the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's first term as president, or that this series of arrests and heavy sentences would be intensified with his election to a second term to such an extent that Reporters Without Borders would deem Iran to be one of the countries considered as a hell for journalists.

And yet, all these things came to pass. Every day a new name, or even several, was added to the list of arrested journalists. Our generation had not been schooled in guerrilla activity. We had not been trained to sleep in the mountains and flee the low ground. We had actually decided to be journalists and not armed political militants! But many of my friends fled Iran, one by one. Those that stayed first went to Evin prison for a few days or months and then when they emerged suffered periods of despair, suspicion, and threats; a time fraught with the fear that any day they could be sent back to prison by a simple court order.

Fariba Pazhou was one of my journalist friends who had been arrested. Newly arrived in Berlin, I phoned her family, the minutes passing by as I counted my coins, handing them one by one to a Turkish man. The news was not good, and left me feeling weak. Her cell was so narrow that they called it a coffin. I dreamed of her. I wrote to her and later found out that her interrogator gave her my letter saying, "Read this"-something that might seem strange but that is still possible given Iran's unpredictable security systems. In my letter I told her that she and the many other journalists had been arrested because they had not stood down in fear when the government launched its attacks, because they had stood face to face with the totalitarian power and stared into its eyes!

Fariba read my letter and then slipped it under the carpet in her cell. Later, it was found by someone else who read it and duplicated it. That is how important writing and communication were in those days for each of us outside Iran, that and a sense of camaraderie and deep sympathy with those caught in the middle of the struggle.

How do I remember Fariba? Dancing! It was at the wedding of one of our mutual friends, a political reporter whose husband was a political activist. He was not spared the horrors of the post-election events and our friend gained the title of wife of a political prisoner. Their wedding was just a few months before the elections. With the groom being a political activist, many of the guests there were also politically active. After the elections, not only the groom, but many of those friends celebrating at that wedding became guests in Evin prison. Among them was Fariba, who had danced away that spirited night. She was tortured in Evin and survived those days with the help of fistfuls of pills.

I, too, have experienced Evin. It was in March 2007, before Zanan was closed. I had come to report on a rally of women's rights activists in front of the Revolutionary Court, and was beaten and thrown into a police van far too small for the 18 arrested women in it. Actually, they arrested a total of 33 people that day. I was interrogated for hours and finally prosecuted. When I went to court, I was asked to sit in a corner and rewrite the report which I had written for Zanan after I had been freed from prison! After reading the initial report the case's interrogator
THE INTERROGATOR HAD ASKED IN ASTONISHMENT: THIS WAS PRINTED?

had asked in astonishment, "This was printed?" and I replied, "Yes, it was!" I had brought magazines with me to show that I had been a reporter for Zanan for a long time and that on that day, as usual, I had been fulfilling my professional obligations. The judge took them and began thumbing through them. They read articles aloud to each other in which some clerics had said that having multiple spouses would be considered forbidden in the modern world and they laughed mockingly. They held the fruits of all our hard work in their hands. What we would look at with pride after printing, they would sneer at, repeating the article's title and glaring at me.

One of my articles entitled, "Summer again" provoked their anger even more than the rest. It was about the instigation of the plan for the "struggle against improper veiling." It was extremely critical and included quotations from lawyers saying that such a thing has no place in law.

Before his first term as president and during his electoral campaign Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had answered queries as to his opinion about improper veiling with a sneer and said, "Doesn't our country have greater problems than a few strands of a young person's hair?" However, the plan to fight improper veiling was implemented under his government with intensity reminiscent of the early revolution.

The video of a girl who had been beaten and whose face was dripping with blood spread rapidly around the internet. She had been attacked and injured in Haft-e Tir Square, close to my office in Zanan and the common meeting-ground of myself and my friends.

If you leave Haft-e Tir Square and head for Vali Asr Square you arrive at the bookshops. During the reformist period the book dealers had reshaped their identity and you could happily while away hours there. Before that point, bookshops were considered a place just to buy, but then book cafés became popular and a culture developed where people would spend hours roaming around the bookshops. Book cafés were our stomping ground, for all us students, reporters, activists in various social and political circles, and, in general, us book readers. We would hold our discussions about politics there, meet our friends, or arrange our amorous rendezvous. But then, during Ahmadinejad's first term as president, one after another, the book cafés were closed on government orders. During his second term, many bookshops in that area (Haft-e Tir Square and Karim Khan Street) closed of their own accord due to bankruptcy. We clasped those things that were precious to us in the palms of our hands like someone who has found a cup of water in the desert, and, fleeing the streets, retreated anxiously with them into our homes. There was no work to be found either. More than anything, that time was a season of insults and closures, though not as severe as what would come after June 2009.

The Voluntary Action Institute was a well-known NGO which worked on capacity building for civil society, and I was responsible for its publication. Not more than a few days after I was released from detention, the institute came under attack from the security forces. They came in while we were working and told us not to budge from our seats, filmed each one of us, and told us to go. Then they arrested the institute's manager and sealed off the office.

I had worked in the Voluntary Action Institute at the same time working for Zanan, where the pay did not even cover a month's living costs. After it was closed, we tried to continue our activities on a website about civil society while we waited for the court to address our case and clarify our situation. We held meetings in the park and in a café. But the court was never convened, and a year later Zanan was closed.

Having worked as a volunteer on feminist websites, my time was now occupied with newspapers, since the pressure was increasing. The last feminist website on which I worked was Zanestan, where I sat on the editorial board, but the government arrested one of its most active members. When it had become popular after about a year of professional and persistent work, the judiciary asked the website's host to close it. They did this in a way that meant that its articles could not even be found through search engines anymore.

It was during the course of this repression, which made life for print and internet journalists utterly miserable, that some writers announced on their blogs that they would no longer practice journalism. Some of my friends joined research foundations or UN agencies in Iran instead.

It was now the winter of 2008/09. The newspaper I was working for closed due to financial difficulties. Still, I was happy because of my part-time collaboration with the newspaper El Pais and because of the rumours about newspapers and websites due to be launched with the approach of the tenth presidential elections.

During the 2005 elections, many people, demoralised over what became of the reforms, voted for someone who they thought would not just try to get things done with slogans but would actually implement change by using his post as mayor of Tehran and, of course, by spending the municipal budget. Let us say he knew how to please the crowds, with moves such as giving out loans, etc.

No matter how stifled we felt during Ahmadinejad's first term and despite the fact that he had not fulfilled society's lower classes' economic needs, the people were once more just waiting for someone to come and make changes. This attitude of waiting for someone to come and implement change seems to be a typical Shiite stance, and is perhaps a reflection of the Shiites' anticipation as they await their Twelfth Imam. This mind-set countered all the efforts launched by the newly-founded NGOs to empower the citizens during the reformist period. But then, during Ahmadinejad's first term, it was confirmed that if the president and his government were to rise to their full stature against the demand for change, there would be so little room that it would be hard to breathe. And now, once again, the people were waiting for someone to instigate change. I wanted someone to come to power who, even if he himself did not to intend to initiate change, would preside over a government not be bent on resisting it-something similar to what we had witnessed during the reformist period, despite all its faults.

Despairingly, I hoped that the atmosphere of repression would ease up a bit; that we would once more be able to lie down in the meadows of the squares and parks and speak optimistically of launching a website or, tired from work, sit in our beloved book cafés and drive away our weariness in that familiar atmosphere. I wished that happiness and laughter were as free as they had been during the reformist period. I wished that the guidance patrols, which had attacked the foundations of my city like termites, would release women from beneath their harsh stares.

Now that I think about it, although these are elementary and minimal wishes, I believe that with the regime showing its true colours after the 2009 elections, the achievement of these wishes could set the stage for the collapse of this extreme patriarchal and totalitarian system. It now seems to me that being able to laugh could be considered an achievement whose preconditions and consequences have the ability to terrify the grim system in power.

I remember that when I was in Evin prison they were terrified every time that we laughed about something and would nervously separate us. And isn't this regime nothing more than some strange smoke blowing around a security core hiding at its centre, over which there is no order? We were approaching the Persian New Year of 2009. The candidates were being announced. When Mir Hossein Moussavi decided to run and Mohammad Khatami withdrew from the elections, our optimism about the future diminished. Within a short time, however, this completely turned around as it seemed increasingly likely that Moussavi would win.

The only specific recollection I had of Moussavi's family was when the editor of Zanan spoke with his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, who had just been dismissed as president of Al-Zahra University (during Ahmadinejad's first term as president) and I listened to the protests which in those days were still kept to whispers.

When Moussavi announced that he was running for office, I was still not sure which candidate I would back, although I was certain that I would definitely vote.

One day I went to one of Moussavi's main campaign office to get an interview for El Pais and was turned away. I complained to my colleague at the newspaper, and he replied, "It doesn't really matter because he won't be elected anyway." But less than a month later I was announcing to my colleague that I would be voting for Moussavi in the elections and he saw with his own eyes that our original prediction was quite far from what ultimately transpired when public opinion and the people's approval were leaning towards Moussavi and the streets suddenly turned green.

Around that time, I was invited to travel to Poland and I went to the embassy in Jordan Street to make my travel arrangements. I happened to be wearing a green shawl which I had put on with no particular intention. The reactions I was met with out on the street made me realise that the people considered me to be one of them–I was one of the young people, who, with their energies liberated, were in the streets laughing with a cheerfulness that hadn't been seen for years.

In the past I had not only been at that gathering that ended with my arrest, but also to many other meetings of female activists that had led to beatings, and now I was amazed by the behaviour of the police. They were respectful and said things like, "if you please" and "kindly."

All this felt like a breeze against my face and I gradually came to believe that something was once again beginning to flow in the rotten corpse of reforms, something like blood. Perhaps this was the result of the public demands made by a people whose women had attained a

IT WAS AS IF SOME-ONE HAD FLAYED MY MEAGRE HOPES BEFORE MY EYES.

high level of university education and were no longer ready to go back to staying at home and being shackled to their husbands.

Aside from the police, men were also behaving more respectfully than before. There wasn't a whisper of obscenity. Only a short while before, I was strolling with a friend (who, after the 2009 elections, was forced to flee over the border to Turkey in the dead of winter) one spring morning when I heard several obscene remarks made behind us and I remember thinking to myself that my countrymen had fallen thousands of steps behind.

But now I saw the men and young boys throughout the streets showing respect and I saw how, with this atmosphere of a little more freedom, the people's behaviour changed and they were ready to adopt a more humane attitude, particularly regarding women. The people all smiled at each other, and for me these smiles meant life-a life which I considered we deserved to have. Even Ahmadinejad's supporters treated the supporters of the other candidates respectfully.

The heavens themselves could not have contained the words to describe how I was feeling in those days. I was also in love and I delighted all the more in being alongside the one I loved in the streets which now belonged to us.

Despite these feelings, most of my hopes were still with our social activists, NGOs, and media and not with any particular individual, even if that individual was Mir Hossein Moussavi. The fact that he held hands with his wife in photographs made me optimistically believe that his statements regarding women's rights could be realised.

At that time I was invited to a conference in Berlin. The day of my flight coincided with the Friday night of the elections or, more accurately the Saturday morning after the elections. I thought to myself that it was likely that all journalists' comings and goings would be under close scrutiny and all contacts abroad be held suspect, but the new atmosphere gave me hope. I decided that I would be in Berlin for ten days and then return to Iran and then travel on to Poland for a few days.

What encouraged me more than anything else was that after these two trips, Ahmadinejad's legal and official term as president would be over and measures could once more be taken to revive Zanan or set up a new magazine with the same staff. My heart yearned to work with that group which I loved above all else. On Friday I cleaned my painted green nails and went to the local mosque. I slotted my ballot with Mir Hossein Moussavi's name written on it into the ballot box. Everywhere was calm with that Friday quality (like Sundays in Europe). I walked home. My suitcase was in the middle of my room. My mother and father were not home and my sister was busy studying.

An hour later, I took my suitcase and headed with my father to the airport. My sister was on the top floor and we did not even bother to properly say our goodbyes. At the foot of the high stairs I shouted "Good-bye" and she answered, "Bye! Have a nice time." My mother stood by the door and watched me leave. I did not know that this would be the last time we would see each other.

I was in the airport's transit lounge when the election's preliminary results were announced. What a shock! Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was beating everyone with an unbelievable lead. Not a sound went up from the transit café where I sat watching the television. All were silent and only stared. It is no exaggeration to say that no one even touched his coffee. There wasn't a sound. But for me, it was as if someone had flayed my meagre hopes before my eyes. It was too hard for me to hold back my tears. I wept and, weeping, I left Iran.

This was to be the last exit stamp on my passport. It shows that I left my country on the date of the elections, or, as they later would call it, my country's coup d'état, never to return, despite my grief for my friends and family and my city's familiar streets.

As soon as I left my country, it seemed to explode. The streets in which we had chanted slogans until midnight while the police stood on the sidelines were now given over to the military and the paramilitary Bassij. They beat and they killed and all the while I was attending a media seminar in Germany!

Of course, my head was always buried in my laptop. There, as I clicked on a link to a video, the world came apart and dissolved before my eyes. It was the video of the Neda Agha-Soltan's killing! The young girl was killed by a shot fired directly at her in the borough of Amirabad in Tehran, captured on a mobile phone camera. I could not stop watching and I was burning. Blood drenched her face and I was on fire. A young German girl attending the seminar tried to console me. She took my hand in hers and said, "Be glad that a revolution is breaking out in your country!" But I had not thought about a revolution, I had only come for a ten-day stay and had perhaps been simple-mindedly expecting to buy some souvenirs and bring them back and then resume my life which had been, so to say, put on hold for a few years under the thumb of militarisation and brutality.

Of course, things were different then from what is happening now, where the dominoes of revolutions are falling across the region. In those days, most people were still thinking of internal and slowmoving changes in the system, perhaps to prevent criminal events like the affair in Kahrizak, which now stands for rape and torture and murder instead of a home for the elderly and disabled.

From then on, the pace of events sped up. I remained in Germany with the help of a short term residency, since all news coming from Iran was bad. It was news about arrests and persecution and repression. Those few, small things we still had in our country were destroyed in front of our eyes. Many of my friends, whose homes and offices were the dearest places in the world for me, left Iran over land or, with fear, by air. The newspaper offices where I used to poke my head in and see my friends were all closed. As for the book dealers, most of them pulled down their shutters. The course of change (in the opposite direction than we had hoped for) was so rapid that I thought that nothing awaited me in that country but repression, suffocation and the memories of friends who were no longer there!

I began working with Reporters Without Borders and then I went from Berlin to Bonn and began my work with Deutsche Welle Persian. With each step forward I got further away from that life which was taken from me so unexpectedly and so shockingly that I could scarcely believe that it had ever existed.

Sometimes I try to trace my path back and speak with my friends about old times, but I see nothing but the piles and heaps that their bulldozers have made of our lives. There is nothing now left from the past that I could return to. But the green road of hope is not closed and I look to the future where we can take back not only the social and political things which have been stolen from us, but a hundred times worse, our friendships and relationships, and our youths. This is the future I want, and in a country which is mine and with a lifestyle which, however crippled and deformed, is what I am familiar with.

Whenever I put my key in the lock and enter, I am struck by my sorrow at not being able to see my mother at home or my father and those near and dear to me. But I know that if I throw away the key and return to my country, nothing is waiting for me there either. I log onto the internet and send and receive news and thus work for change in my country. I take refuge in Facebook and Twitter and try to keep up with those who are still in Iran and to struggle alongside them. Of course, I continue with my daily life, which feels, more than anything else, like running a marathon. That is all.



Maryam Mirza, born in 1981, had just started university when she went to the women's magazine Zanan, which she had read throughout her high school years, to apply for a position as a writer. Succeeding, she not only learnt the basics of journalism and reporting working at this magazine, but her experiences

there influenced her whole life. Committing herself to women's rights, Maryam Mirza wrote for several of the women's movement's online publications and ultimately became a permanent member on Zanan's editorial board. She also collaborated with other Iranian and foreign newspapers. She left Iran on the day of the presidential elections and now lives in Bonn working for the Persian section of Deutsche Welle.





Mana Neyestani

WITHOUT WORDS



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Mana Neyestani, born in 1973, began his career as an editorial cartoonist with the rise of the Iranian reformist newspapers at the end of the 1990ies. At the time, he also published several adult comic books, but ultimately had to turn to children cartoons due to political pressure. In 2006, one of his drawings in the children

section of a newspaper led to his imprisonment. Forced to flee the country, he continued working from exile in Malaysia for online publications. After the election crisis of 2009, Mana Neyestani's drawings became a symbol of the Iranian protest movement. He has received several awards for his work, most recently the 2010 Courage Award of the Cartoonists Rights Network International, and is now living in France.

TIMELINE

16 JANUAR 1979

After months of demonstrations, strikes and protests, Mohammad Reza Shah and his family leave Iran. Two weeks later, Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini returns from 14 years of exile in Iraq and France, welcomed by a crowd of several million.

11 FEBRUAR 1979

The old regime finally collapses, revolutionaries take over government institutions, the royal palaces, and the central Broadcasting Organisation. The 22nd Bahman of the Iranian calendar is annually the climax of the 10-day celebration of the victory of the Revolution.

30-31 MARCH 1979

A nationwide referendum overwhelmingly approves the creation of an Islamic Republic.

4 NOVEMBER 1979

Leftist students loyal to Khomeini occupy the US-Embassy in Tehran provoking a crisis that lasts for 444 days. The 13th Aban in the Iranian calendar commemorates the fight against "imperialism and Western arrogance"

22 NOVEMBER 1980

Iraq invades Iran, beginning the Iran-Iraq War that lasts for eight years.

31 OCTOBER 1981

Mir Hossein Moussavi is appointed prime minister.

28 MARCH 1989

Khomeini sacks his designated successor, Ayatollah Montazeri, who later becomes a leading critic of the regime and is placed under house arrest.

3 JUNE 1989

Khomeini dies. A day later, former president and low-ranking cleric, Ali Khamenei, is promoted to the rank of an Ayatollah and declared the new Supreme Leader of the Revolution. The revised constitution eliminates the post of the prime minister and expands the powers of president and the Supreme Leader.

3 AUGUST 1989

Rafsanjani is elected president and declares an era of reconstruction.

23 MAY 1997

Former Culture Minister Mohammad Khatami is elected president with an overwhelming 70 per cent of the vote on a platform of social and political reform. The 2nd Khordad of the Iranian calendar marks the beginning of the reform era. It gave name to the coalition of political groups and parties supporting Khatami as well as the broader reform movement.

8 JUNE 2001

Khatami is re-elected president.

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 1998

A group of intellectuals are killed in what became known as the "chain murders". An investigation by reformist journalists uncovers the involvement of agents of the Intelligence Ministry, backed by conservative and hardline politicians, in the assassination of numerous dissidents since the late 1980s.

9 JULY 1999

Students protests break out in Tehran and other cities after the closure of the reform newspaper Salam. The dormitories at the University of Tehran are stormed by a group of plainclothes militia, an attack instigated by political hardliners. The following days of unrest lead to several deaths and a significant crisis for the reform government. The 18th Tir becomes a key date for the Iranian student movement.

FEBRUAR 2000

In the sixth parliamentary elections, the reformist 2nd Khordad Coalition wins a majority of the seats and Mehdi Karroubi is elected speaker of the Majles. As this victory was supported by the reformist newspapers that mobilised the voters, the conservatives reply with a judiciary campaign against the press. In April, more than a dozen publications are closed within one night.

FEBRUAR 2003

High voter abstention leads to the victory of a coalition of younger and lowerranking conservatives in the municipal elections. Ahmadinejad becomes mayor of Tehran.

FEBRUAR 2004

The Guardian Council's wide-spread disqualifications of reformist candidates in the seventh Majles elections provoke a sit-in of the incumbent parliamentarians. The elections result in a victory for the reshaped conservatives, running as the "Principalists".

24 JUNE 2005

In the final run-up to the presidential elections, the relatively unknown Ahmadinejad wins with his populist manifesto against political heavy-weight Rafsanjani. In the first round Ahmadinejad had reached second place by only a marginal number of votes, just managing to defeat reformist candidate Karroubi, who claims the results of the poll have been manipulated.

8 FEBRUAR 2009

After months of pressure from supporters and a campaign organised by reform-minded youths, former president Khatami announces his candidacy in the coming presidential elections.

9 MARCH 2009

Mir Hossein Moussavi announces that he will run for president after 20 years of political silence. Consequently Khatami withdraws and asks his supporters to back Moussavi.

2-8 JUNE 2009

For the first time, Iranian state television broadcasts a series of live debates between the presidential candidates. The debate between Ahmadinejad and Moussavi proves highly controversial and stirs voter mobilisation.

8 JUNE 2009

A human chain of Moussavi supporters holding up ribbons in the green colour of his campaign stretches across Tehran and other Iranian cities (see article by A. Ghafouri in this volume).

12 JUNE 2009

The Islamic Republic's tenth presidential elections are held. The next morning Ahmadinejad is announced winner with 63 per cent of the vote and a participation of 85 per cent of eligible voters. The three defeated candidates claim election fraud and demand a recount of the votes. Demonstrations are sparked and a Bassij attack on the Tehran University dormitories ends in the first deaths of protestors.

15 JUNE 2009

An estimated three million people assemble in Tehran for a silent protest against the "theft of their votes" in the biggest demonstration since the Islamic Revolution. The defeated candidates Moussavi and Karroubi attend the rally along with many other reform activists.

19 JUNE 2009

In his sermon for the Friday prayer, Supreme Leader Khamenei demands an end to the demonstrations and fully backs the re-election of Ahmadinejad. The sermon is generally interpreted as official authorisation for the suppression of the protests.

20 JUNE 2009

Security forces and plainclothes militia violently crush protests in Tehran. Direct shots at the crowds leave more than 20 fatally wounded, among them Neda Agha-Soltan whose death is captured on video and spread on the internet, becoming a symbol for the resistance against the regime.

17 JULY 2009

For the first and last time after the elections, Rafsanjani leads the Friday prayer at the University of Tehran. In his sermon, attended by Moussavi and hundreds of thousands of opposition supporters, Rafsanjani criticises the handling of the protests and demands an open debate to restore peoples' trust in the system.



The opposition movement uses the official festivities for Qods-Day, annually celebrated by the regime to express solidarity with the Palestinian people, for more public protests. Protesters chant slogans like "Neither Gaza, nor Lebanon, my life is for Iran".

4 NOVEMBER 2009

The anniversary of the US-Embassy takeover provides another opportunity for the opposition to utilise regime rallies for their protests.

7 DECEMBER 2009

National Student's Day (16th Azar) sparks widespread protests in the universities against the Ahmadinejad government, to which the authorities respond with increasing brutality.

20 DECEMBER 2009

Ayatollah Montazeri, a leading cleric critical of the regime, dies. Massive funeral processions in the religious city of Qom are attended by thousands of Green Movement supporters.

27 DECEMBER 2009

On Ashoura, the most important religious day for the Shiites, security forces brutally confront demonstrators in different cities across the country, killing several people and arresting hundreds. The widespread use of violence on this holy day further undermines the legitimacy of the regime and aggravates the overall crisis (see article by B. Ghafouriazar in this volume).

11 FEBRUAR 2010

On 22nd Bahman, the highly anticipated anniversary of the Revolution, Green Movement supporters appear to have only gathered in scattered groups in the midst of official rallies due to a massive deployment of security forces and a new wave of arrests. The government claims to have put an end to the "movement of sedition"-as it calls the protests.

15 JUNE 2010

A year after the massive silent protest against election fraud, Moussavi publishes the "Green Charter" outlining the goals and identity of the Movement. (see article by M. Yazdanpanah in this volume)

14 FEBRUAR 2011

In solidarity with the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt, thousands of protesters again take to the streets in Tehran and other major cities after a year of relative silence, violently clashing with the security forces. The protesters chant "Mubarak, Ben Ali-now it's the turn of Seyyed Ali [Khamenei]!"

As a consequence to their support of these demonstrations, the opposition leaders Mir Hossein Moussavi and Mehdi Karroubi, along with their wives, are taken to an undisclosed location by security forces to be kept in complete isolation.

1 JUNE 2011

Temporarily released from prison to attend the funeral of her father, veteran political dissident Ezatollah Sahabi, the political activist Haleh Sahabi dies during clashes between mourners and security forces in Tehran.

10 JUNE 2011

Dissident journalist Hoda Saber dies in Evin-Prison while on a hunger strike to protest against the death of Haleh Sahabi.

12 JUNE 2011

Two years after the disputed elections, scattered protests take place in Tehran along with a massive deployment of security forces, arrests and intimidations.

GLOSSARY

The Bassij (literally: mobilisation) were formed by Avatol-Bassij lah Khomeini during the initial revolutionary period of the Islamic Republic in November 1979 as a militia youth organisation designed to protect the establishment of the new regime. During the Iran-Iraq-War (1980-1988) thousands of ideologically fervent young Bassij volunteered to the front, ready to sacrifice their lives to defend the country against the Iragi army. Today, under the command of the Revolutionary Guards, the Bassij form a nation-wide organisational network with an estimated 10 million members. In addition to their role as an instrument of social control and suppression of dissent, they provide welfare and education services to the poorer social classes. 2nd Khordad The Iranian date of Khatami's victory in the presidential elections on 23rd May 1997, the 2nd Khordad, became the name of the coalition of political groups and parties that supported the president's reform programme. It also refers to the broader movement behind his election, carrying ideas of democratisation, political plurality, civil liberties, and social and cultural tolerance.

Mosharekat The Mosharekat, or Participation Front Party, is Iran's biggest reformist party. It was formed in 1998 by a group of politicians, students and intellectuals supporting Khatami and went on to develop branches across most of the country. Together with the other principal organisation of the political reformists, the Mojahedin of the Islamic Revolution, the Mosharekat saw several of its key members arrested after the elections of 2009. Later, the authorities declared both organisations to be illegal. Revolution Street One of Tehran's main roads dividing the city into north and south. It passes the University of Tehran and its extension runs into the vast Azadi, or Freedom Square. During the revolution, major demonstrations against the Shah were held on this street and it has been regularly used for regime processions since. Some of the protests against the 2009 elections also took place on Revolution Street.

Source of Emulation In the hierarchy of the Shiite clergy only a few highly qualified Ayatollahs, revered by the people and recognised by their peers, become a "Source of Emulation" (Marja'-e Taqlid). Their religious rulings (fatwa) are, in principle, binding for the believers who choose to follow them.

Vali Asr StreetTehran's major thoroughfare stretches for about 20 km
from the central railway station in the city's working class
south to Tajrish Square in the affluent north. Entirely lined
by trees, the former Pahlavi Street was built on Reza Pahl-
avi's order and then, after the Revolution, was renamed
using one of the titles for the Shiite's Twelfth Imam. Dur-
ing the election campaign of 2009, Moussavi's supporters
formed a human chain along this street connecting the
socially different areas in a highly symbolic act.

Velayat-e Faqih The "guardianship of the jurist" is the concept of governance developed by Khomeini, the charismatic leader of the Islamic Revolution, which gives political leadership to Shiite clerics as those most qualified during the absence of the divinely inspired Imam or Mahdi who would guide the community of believers. According to Khomeini, the Leader, or Vali-ye Faqih, should have both outstanding political and religious credentials; a requirement that was ignored for political reasons when Ali Khamenei, a less qualified cleric, succeeded to this office.



"WE EXIST"

