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*«[This revolution/riot] is collectively kept anonymous and anonymously kept collective. Anonymity is a collective disobedience, and it is being a disobedient collective.»*

# REVOLUTION OF THE ANONYMOUS

انقلاب ناشناس‌ها

Alexander Cyrus Poulikakos,  
anonymous author,  
Niloofer Rasooli

Alexander Cyrus Poulikakos (he/him), born 1993 in Illinois, USA, graduated with a master's degree from ETH Zurich in 2019. He currently works as an architect in Zurich at BS+EMI Architektenpartner and runs his own practice Bab Al Morpheus. The last time he was in Iran was in 2017 to visit his grandfather in Tehran.

Anonymous author is someone, who does not wish their name to be revealed.

Niloofer Rasooli (she/her), born 1992 in Zanjan, Iran, is a doctoral fellow at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture at ETH Zurich. Niloofer holds a master's degree in studies of architecture in Iran in 2018, and prior to joining gta she worked as a journalist at «Etemad Newspaper» in Tehran. The last time she was in Iran was in 2021 to move from Tehran to Zurich.

«Oh, what desires have been released during these days from the prison-house of our bodies, we women!» L. anonymously writes these words in her essay about «a women's revolution» in Iran. (1) L. is anonymous, and anonymity is not masculine.

L. compares the current uprising to the female orgasm as it has «its points of stimulation, that are neither focused nor restricted to any point of the body/street.» (2) To L. the current uprising in Iran is a feminist one; it is explosive, plural, figurative, and momental. Like the female orgasm, it is embodied through a circular stimulation of a desire, but of a desire that has been dictated as wrong.

This riot is revolutionizing the masculine and straight grammar of a revolution. It does not have and resists to having the male leader, the male savior, the male winner. It resists to follow a well-trodden path, to conform to any orientation, determined destination, or settled ideological conclusion. It is collectively kept anonymous and anonymously kept collective. Anonymity is a collective disobedience, and it is being a disobedient collective.

The story of this revolution, hence, is the one story that the anonymous collectively queers. The anonymous' uprising transgresses the hegemonic linearity of time and narrative. It is an open-end story accumulatively written and performed by a thread of anonymous bodies. It is a queer temporality, to use Elisabeth Freeman's term, «it pits itself against the dominant order of the time and, in turn, proposes other possibilities for living to indeterminately past, present, and future.» (3) Where does this queer story lead to? Anywhere except here, anywhere except where we were standing before.

In the current political literature in Iran, before refers to the time prior to the death of Jina Mahsa Amini. She, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman was killed under the custody of the so-called morality police on 16 September 2022 in Tehran where she was visiting her family. Her death split the contemporary history in Iran into two never-aligning times of before and after.

«Oh, what desires have been released during these days from the prison-house of our bodies, we women!» What relates us, the ones writing this essay far from where L. is writing, is the embodied relation to «these days». These days, «ab az sareman gozashte» [water has exceeded our heads]. From the moment of Jina's death, a stream has started flowing, first slowly then forcefully. Now, 110 days later, the stream is still flowing and resisting its before. It will not be like before because we will not be like before.

For us, the writers of this text, these days have released a desire to gather together, to write together. Our biographies are different, but inherently shaped by exile and emigration from Iran. Our common thread is the constant feeling of the pulsating pain for the location that we are no longer located in. Our common thread is being homesick of a place we do not fully know, know too well, and left behind. Our common thread is a sense of lacking, missing, incompleteness, a lump in the throat, a flesh wound that has not healed in our history.

Yet, our difference is defined by the answer to this question: «When was the last time you were in Iran?» This is a hurtful question exposing the history of the Iranian diaspora. The answer to this question categorizes the pain. In the Iranian diaspora, the time locates the pain. As some are stuck in a pre-revolution Iran, some have never been able to see their country, others left to find freedom or fled out of fear of being arrested and executed.

We contribute three short entries accompanied by images from the uprising, writing with our differences and thinking from our shared pain and hope. We do not suggest any linearity in reading the entries, as they are not written linearly. Rather, each revolves around a particular point in the revolution that is more relevant to us. These points, taken together, will tell the story of a time that has come. A time that will never be as it was before.



(fig. a) Collection of screenshots from Instagram and Twitter depicting the nonlinear chronology of the first 40 days after the killing of Jina. Image: authors' images collected from social media, September and October 2022

This revolution is an act of claiming. «Revolution» as an act itself is being claimed, reappropriating a term that has been tainted since the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Just see how quickly the meaning of «Enghelabi» [the revolutionary] has metamorphosed from the image of a man in a tie-less white collar shirt into a young woman, unveiled. This is performed through a queering of existing articulations, mirroring and distorting languages of the regime. These languages veil everyday life in public spaces and practices in order to impose an ideological facade, an ultraviolence.

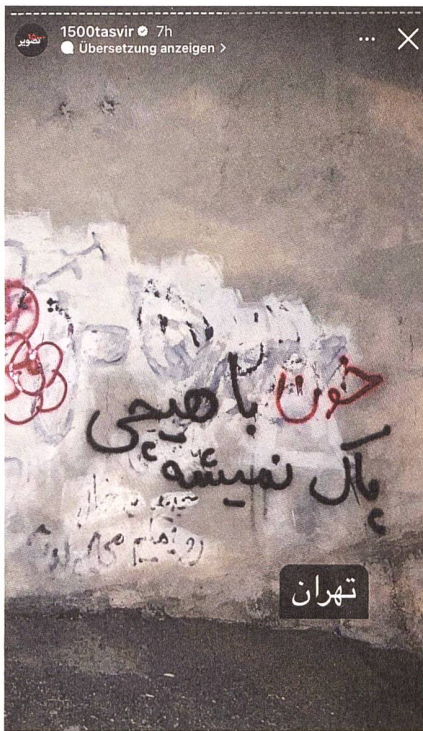
The regime has made use of the walls of the cities to spread propaganda and impose their theocratic ideology through slogans and imagery. Sieving through their facade in opposition, anonymous authors spray their own slogans on the walls of the cities, exposing unspoken truths, often by warping the governmental propaganda words and weaving them anew. After being painted over by the authorities, the newly blank wall is resprayed and reclaimed by protestors with writings such as «Blood can be erased with nothing» (fig. b). The spilled blood is the pen of these anonymous authors. These writings are shared over social media, predominantly Instagram and Twitter, and serve as the unidentified collective script that multiplies and calls on each other, creating recurrences unbound to physical boundaries and linear time.

Likewise, the authority's instrumentalization of the dead has been reappropriated. Images of martyrs and the so-called supreme leaders have been omnipresent on the walls of the cities in Iran, in shops, schools and any form of public or semi-public space. Their faces are installed to instill fear, surveillance and to remind us of their permanent power. In this revolution, their stoic permanence is being unspun and the pulsating blood they have shed is leaking through the cracks of lies (fig. c). The martyred faces of those who have been murdered for protesting, with Jina Mahsa Amini as the conveyer, are replacing the icons imposed by the government. The faces of the new revolutionaries are sprayed over the walls of the cities anonymously and turned into art, shared over social media. Jina and her fallen sisters have become the true signifiers for the uprisings, omnipresent through the directionless acceleration of flow and multiplication in the digital realm. Therefore, a unity of places has become possible, temporarily, without unity of time and physical space.

This reconstruction of the signifiers has empowered fearless Gen Z schoolgirls to take down images of the supreme leaders in their classrooms, tear them apart as well as paint make-up on their grim faces. The power of the dead has been set on fire by Gen Z, using social media, their space of escaping the normative theocratic oppression.

What has truly made this revolution unprecedented, is the queering of the masculine articulation, by reappropriation. The epitome of this can be seen in the reconditioning of the most feared and politicized object of the regime; the female body. Female bodies have set this revolution on fire, by rising and transforming into each other. This revolution is led by young women defining their bodies as signifiers, weaving a mesh impeding patriarchal systems and activating a decentralized revolution.

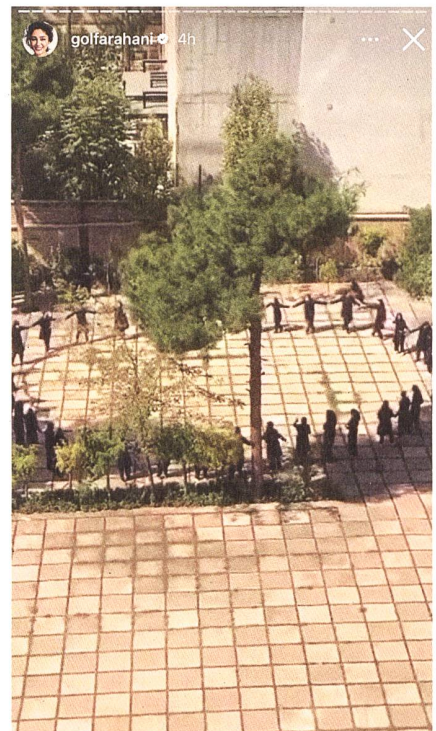
In a country with an average age of thirty-two<sup>(4)</sup> the power of the young is at a climactic level. Gen Z is rupturing the enclosed walls they live behind, to infinite openings. Through these openings a space and language have been able to leak out of Iran. A diasporic community of more than four million documented people has been invited to join the streets of the Enghelabi in their distant home, with further uprisings being sparked in Afghanistan. Through the digital windows defying physical obedience and the reigning forces of ultraviolence, the female body has become a metaphysical thread burning down the walls of her oppression.



(fig. b)  
 «Blood can be erased with nothing» wall writing over erased writings, anonymous, Tehran, Iran. Image: Instagram story by @1500tasvir, 27 October 2022



(fig. c)  
 Red paint spilled over propaganda wall images of dictators, anonymous, Tehran, Iran. Image: Instagram post by @from\_\_\_Iran, 15 November 2022



(fig. d)  
 Schoolgirls singing Shervin Hajipour's social media revolution anthem «Baraye» (for) and chanting «Azadi» (freedom) in protest on school grounds in Iran. Shervin was arrested on 29 September 2022, two days after the song was initially published. Image: Instagram story still by @golfarahani, 12 October 2022

The regime was unable to «sarkub» [to beat on the head] the nightly chants of the mass housing complex «Shahrak [Town] Ekbatan». Ekbatan is unusual for its location in Iran. Its windows are naked. You can feel that these houses are alive. Houses speak too, they breathe, and some hold you. (5) Ekbatan is one of those.

One inhabitant tweets: «Ekbatan, oh Ekbatan, oh island of courage, [...]. Now your wounded body has disabled the hardest weapons, and the stones are soft before your will. A day will come when they will say that Tehran was somewhere on the outskirts of Ekbatan.» (6) The next tweet from Ekbatan, on 1 January 2023, exposes us to the wounded body of another inhabitant named Majid Qara Baghi, who suffered lashes from the regime on his back. (fig. e) Soft lines of dark spray appear overnight, they wound the concrete walls of brutalist Ekbatan. «Understanding the meaning of flight, you will stand up even if you are paralyzed.» (7) Standing five kilometers away from the center, Ekbatan glimpses its contemporary monument. It is Iran's emblem, the «Azadi» [Freedom] Tower. This time, Ekbatan tweets on @shahrak\_ekbatan «It's time...». (8)

It is time because 44 years have passed. Soon after the construction of Ekbatan's Phase 1, the Islamic Regime's Ministry of Housing took ownership of the residential complex. Rumor has it that they believed its aerial view would depict the crown of Iran's exiled empress. The regime legitimized the construction of the extensions of Phases 2 and 3 in obliterating the image of the crashed monarchy. The architect was not involved anymore. No longer were the windows naked, instead, they were of mirrored glass.

The regime corrected Jina Mahsa Amini's body the same way they did Ekbatan's body. But Ekbatan's raw walls are naked now, they respond, as a full-body experience of circular self-stimulation. (fig. f) Blurry lines of spray appear overnight, «After Jina, everything depends on a strain of hair.» (9) Ekbatan retweets «The only way is this: we have chants every day. We have a memorial every day. We have a fortieth every day. We have sadness, anger, and hatred every day. Every day, every hour, at every place. On the streets until the end.» (10)

«The children of Ekbatan» start their chant every night at 21:00, «Let us be more cautious to be prepared. Lights off, windows open, curtains closed.» (11) Chanting «Death over the child-killing government». (12) Sometimes they cry out loud, out of their naked windows, wordlessly. Leaks went viral recording the regime appearing in Ekbatan at 23:00, flashing lasers through the windows brutally shouting «Come down!» Scenes of violence, sensitive content. They fire tear gas. We hear the shootings. Even with the windows closed, your eyes would start to tear that night. (13) Another time the authorities vandalized the entrance lobbies, (14) and one time set an apartment on fire. (15) Keeping record of the names of opponents, they are kidnapped from their parking lot or from their apartments. (16)

The community of Ekbatan organizes itself through the Internet, in times of complete internet shutdown. «Be careful of Phase 2, Block 5, the families of the members [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps] live there.» (17) One tweet explains that during the protests the regime would dress as civilians and lead the demonstration walk to «suppress and scissor them». Protestors should plan their escape routes. (18) Again we wake up to another tweet; sprayers have written on the pillars, on which Ekbatan stands: «The tears of mothers, the blood of youth, we will not forget.» (fig. g)

The body of a nation, the body of a building, and the body of a human have been wounded, yet no longer suppressed. Yet, Iran is a female name. Yet, Ekbatan means «place of gathering». Yet, Jina means «the victorious». Still, we wake up to the regime installing surveillance cameras on rooftops neighboring Ekbatan. (19) Again, we scroll to the wounded body of Majid Qara Baghi. This time, we note a tattooed flag, with the colors of Iran's; red, white, and green, on his upper arm.



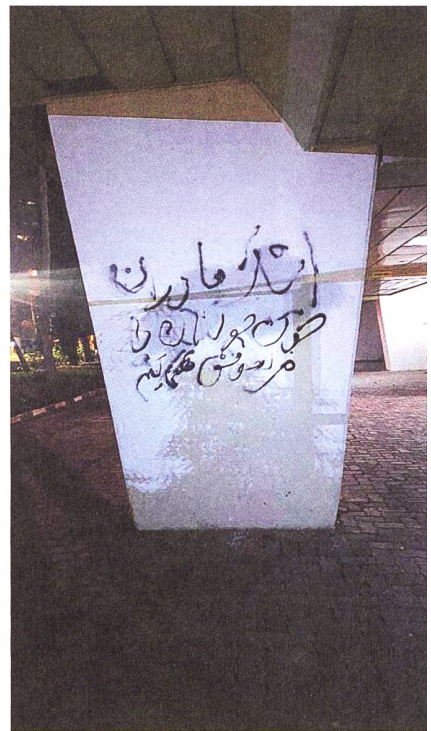
(fig. e)

The wounded body of Majid Qara Baghi, living in «Shahrak» (town) Ekbatan. These are the wounds of the brutal (1) lashes from the Islamic Regime's authorities. Ekbatan, Tehran. Image: Twitter @shahrak\_ekbatan, 1 January 2023



(fig. f)

Night time photograph of a projection of Jina Mahsa Amini's victorious smile on the structural wall of the Ekbatan housing complex. The tweet is titled «The Code to Revolution.» Amini's hair is drawn green, the color symbolizing peace on the Iranian flag. Ekbatan, Tehran. Image: Twitter @shahrak\_ekbatan, 2 December 2022.



(fig. g)

Sprayed slogan on the pillars of the brutalist housing compound Ekbatan translated to «The tears of mothers, the blood of youth, we will not forget.» (اشک مادران، خون جوانان را فراموش نمیکنیم). Ekbatan, Tehran. Image: Twitter @shahrak\_ekbatan, 28 December 2022

«Don't be afraid, don't be afraid; we are all together.» she chants, then is shot in the head.

These are the final words of Ghazaleh, a protester, 32 years old, de-veiled, standing on a utility box, taking a video of people, and, a few seconds later, of her own death. We see her death through a surprisingly intact video on her cellphone. We see a record of a death, a moment, over and over again. It is the evening of 21 September 2022. It is in Amol, Iran:

We happen to be there, when her camera starts shooting the video. We see the crowd, we see the fire, it is night, it is cold, the orange flames of the fire illuminate the crowd, the yellow shine of the moon absorbs the voices. People are shouting, people are angry, people are tired. Our body, our history, reminds us that a bullet could strike us any time; we cannot see, but we believe we see a black guard nearby. It should be somewhere, somewhere close, somewhere far, somewhere. We tremble, she looks around. She raises her voice, loudly chanting, «don't be afraid, don't be afraid; we are all together.» We come together. Her voice surrounds us, we stay in it, we stay in it for just a moment. Read it again and again, we take shelter in her voice for just a moment. And then she is fatally shot. We are all fatally shot.

When she falls, her cellphone falls from her hand. We fall from her hand onto the ground. We can only see the ceiling. There is a big, doomed gap, a concrete wound. The wound divides the ceiling, the world, and us into two never-meeting parts. People rush into the frame. They see us dead, they see her dead, they scream. Their words are drowning in the background screams, we are drowning in the wound in the ceiling. Is somebody repeating «don't be afraid, don't be afraid; we are all together»? We do not know, we never know, we die, when the camera dies. (20)

In the recent history of Iran, there are numerous people who have documented their own death, the moment of receiving a bullet in their face, chest, and heart. What remains are their voices, their final words. Their sentences become the voice of a history. A voice stretches the history. A history is condensed in a voice. Ghazale's self-recorded death haunts, and stops the continuity of time. She is killed to be erased, to be stopped, to be done. Her video, however, achieves the opposite.

Who was the first to save the video from her cell-phone? How did it survive? How many other voices have narrated their own death, but were erased after the inspection of the authorities? We do not know, we only know that Ghazaleh's voice does not end with her death, it just rises. After Ghazaleh's death, her voice went viral. Her chanting of «don't be afraid, don't be afraid; we are all together», gave another rise to the uprising. The authorities refused to deliver the body to her family. It is reported that her mother cut a vein in her hand, she bled so much that the authorities fearfully returned the body to her. (21) Blood comes to save a dead body. Ghazaleh's story does not finish here, as it may never finish, like many other histories of flesh wounds that will never finish.

«They only let her be buried in a one-meter grave. The poor girl could not even fit in there, they had to bend her legs.» (22)

Ghazaleh's grave (fig. i) is the location of pain, is the soil that if you dig, you will find nothing except boiling blood. The grave is enclosed within two walls, and stairs. The walls that once were coming as slaps on her face, the walls that once were muting her voice, concealing her body, and stealing her dreams and hopes. These muting walls come one more time on her corpse, on her grave. So, no big crowd can come together over her grave. But, a big crowd came together there, somewhere around her grave. 40 days after Ghazaleh's death, people gather in the same cemetery, de-veil, burn their headscarves, hold hands, dance, and chant what Ghazaleh was chanting. «Don't be afraid, don't be afraid; we are all together». (fig. j) This is her voice, chanting even after her death. In her voice, we shall come together.



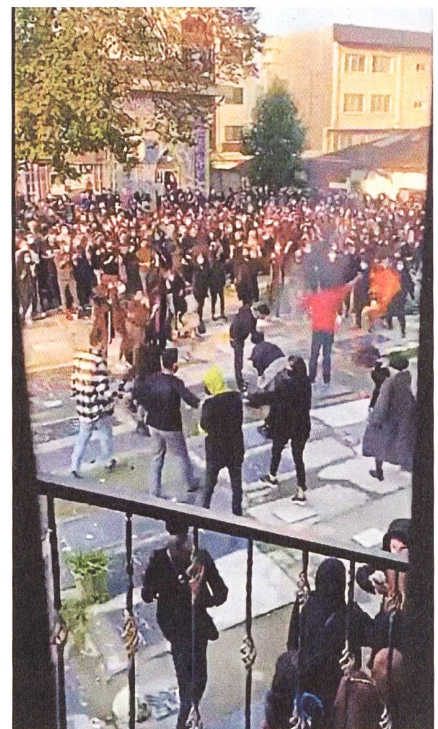
(fig. h)

Ghazaleh is standing on a utility box and making a video, she receives a bullet some seconds after. Screenshot from the video on a tweet on Twitter @ManotoNews, 20 October 2022



(fig. i)

The only photo remaining from Ghazaleh's funeral day. The photo only shows her grave. Retrieved from the anonymous photos published on Twitter @GFakhari, 27 October 2022



(fig. j)

Forty days after Ghazaleh's death, people gather in the same cemetery and protest against her brutal murder. Retrieved from the anonymous videos published on Twitter @1500tasvir, 4 November 2022

