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«We become heavy when we come together, become an all-together. Then the wire tears. Then we fly.»

IF NOT TO PERISH IN SILENCE, REVOLT WITH SILENCE

不在沉默中爆发，就在沉默中灭亡

در سکوت محو نشو، با سکوت قیام کن

Niloofar Rasooli,
Alexander Cyrus Poulikakos,
echoless, Michael Hoi Ming Du

Niloofar Rasooli (she/her) is a writer, journalist, and currently a doctoral fellow at the Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture (ita), ETH Zurich. Niloofar moved to Zurich in 2021 after working as a journalist, editor, and essayist in Tehran. Her primary focus in writing is on the politics of memory, queer theory, women's stories, and resistance in Iran. Niloofar's writings have been featured in WOZ, the 1. Mai committee pamphlet, Etemad, Kargadan, and Abadi, among many others.

Michael Hoi Ming Du (he/him) could be born in Hong Kong in 1996, or Auckland 2002, Shanghai 2017, or Zurich in 2018. He is currently pursuing his master in architecture at ETH Zurich and exploring forms of spatial practices to empower marginal voices. He wishes that one day all birds could sing in joy and with their own tongues.

echoless, born 1995 in Shanghai, is an echoless bird that wants to keep singing in silence.

Alexander Cyrus Poulikakos (he/him), born 1993 in Illinois, USA, graduated with a master's degree in architecture from ETH Zurich in 2019. He currently works as an architect in Zurich and runs his own practice Bab Al Morphens. His feathers are rooted in Iran and Greece.

«We are resisting! That the only thing more beautiful than freedom is resisting for freedom.» (2)
to Sepideh Rashnu, the poet and the warrior

CHARACTERS

Ordinary Pigeon	IGNORANCE
Headless Crow	HOME
Silenced Hummingbird	SILENCE
Vulture (no plural)	VIOLENCE
Nightingale in Mourning	MOURNING
Wide-beaked Seagull	NOISE

A wire. A group of birds sitting on it. That's all you need for a location! It can be any time of the day. It can be anywhere.

An ordinary pigeon comes and sits on the never-reaching branch of a tree. You know the pigeon, you know who he is, you know where he is. The story is interrupted.

[ordinary pigeon]: Is your Unruhe over?

[birds]: What is «Unruhe»?

The pigeon takes the dictionary from his pocket, clears his voice and reads over the entry:

[ordinary pigeon]: Unruhe, FEMININE NOUN...

[wide-beaked seagulls]: [talking to themselves] Yes! Unruhe is neither masculine nor neutral!

[ordinary pigeon]: Word forms: Unruhe genitive, Unruhen plural
1. no plural, restlessness...

[wide-beaked seagulls]: [talking to themselves] To be restless is plural!

[ordinary pigeon]: 2. no plural (= Lärm) noise, disturbance....

[wide-beaked seagulls]: [talking to themselves] Birds make noise in plural! The disturbance is plural!

[ordinary pigeon]: 3. no plural (= Unfrieden) unrest no pl, trouble...

[wide-beaked seagulls]: [talking to themselves] No plural for trouble? Trouble is plural! Come on!

[ordinary pigeon]: Unruhe stiften to create unrest; (in Familie, Schule) to make trouble. 4. (politische) Unruhen (political) disturbances or unrest, no pl. (3)

The ordinary pigeon stops reading, it has defined what it had to define. Looking from the branch down to the wire it smiles, though its beak is as rigid as a stone.

SILENCE_SILENCE_SILENCE_SILENCE_SILENCE_SILENCE_SILENCE

The birds rise from the wire to attack this text to remove no from no plural, to stir up (political) disturbance, to unrest, to be plural.

The Unruhe remains, as it always does. The ordinary pigeon goes away. The story goes on.

THIS IS OUR STORY — a singular word that is never singular.

Our story has no beginning.

Our story does not start when this line starts. It does not end when these words end. Our story can be any story, it can also be your story. Yet, it is not. It is a heavy one, like our heavy roots binding our feet. Our story is a story of ourselves, the birds chit-chatting in our own languages — our broken languages.

We do not follow a linear path in the way we talk to each other, and sometimes to you. Our path and pace of talking are similar to that of our flights, from one exile to another: collectively, interrupted, non-linear, with breaks, sometimes broken, with stops, sometimes not reaching, being hunted or stuck in a storm, but never forgetting where we are flying to and why.

We call it a non-functional dialogue, a format of talking back (4) while talking forward, fragmented, filled with gaps, chaotic, absurd, and awkward — like silence, a wilful one. Our dialogue is another form of communicating, in resistance, in reflection, in solidarity. (5)

(1) Michael Hoi Ming Du, echoless, Alexander Cyrus Poulikakos, Niloofar Rasooli

(2) Sepideh Rashnu is an Iranian poet, who was arrested on 18 July 2022 for protesting against the compulsory veiling in the country. Later in July of the same year, a video of her obligatory confession against herself was played on the national Tv, showing the traces of torture on her face. After she was released from prison, Rashnu was suspended from her studies in a painting department. As a reaction to that, she published an

unveiled photo of herself with the following words. Sepideh Rashnu (@sepidehrashnu_). «In the disciplinary committee they gave her two white pages...resisting for freedom», Instagram photo, 13 May 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CSLOc-S6oUi5/?igshid=NTc4MTIwN-jQ2YQ%3D%3D> (accessed 14 May 2023).

(3) «Unruhe», Collins Dictionary, 2023, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/german-english/unruhe> (accessed 6 May 2023).

(4) Bell Hooks, Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black, New York 2014, pp. 5—9.

(5) The writing format of this text is very much inspired by the style, format, and political commitment of the following article: The Circle's Conspiracy of Writers, «Fuck the Fucking Lines: A Provocation for Disquiet in the Academy», Kohl: A Journal for Body and Gender Research 7, no. 1 (2021), pp. 34—45, <https://kohljournal.press/fuck-fucking-lines> (accessed on 17 May 2023).



(fig. a) The birds chit-chatting, 2023.
Image: Alexander Cyrus Poulikakos



(fig. b) An anonymous poem written on the wall: It has just started, the long night / Please remember the sun in the darkness / And do not sing for the devil in silence
@northern_square, «Anonymous Contribution»,
Instagram photo, 17 February 2023



(fig. c) Anonymous Woman, unveiled, stands in front of erased graffiti reading «Woman Life Freedom» in Farsi, waving a peace sign, Iran 2022. Iran International Newsroom, «Walls Falling Under Weight of Anti-Regime Graffiti in Iran», Iranintl.com, 6 December 2022

We are the birds, but not all the birds. We are the ones who know the sound of ropes ripping. We know the ones who hum, are the ones who shout with broken, tied, and closed beaks. We know if we sit on the electrical wire, the wire will bend more and more, with every singing friend that joins. We become heavy when we come together, [become an all-together]. Then the wire tears. Then we fly.

This is our story.

HOME

I am a headless crow. My head is gone, my lips are sewn, my heart is stolen, and I am buried somewhere but still here. I am here to insist.

we saw the fire in Urumqi...(6)

we saw the mother laying her murdered child on ice...(7)

we heard the girl shouting desperately, «please open the door»...(8)

we saw young protestors disappearing in the darkness...(9)

we read their sufferings hiding under the context of Tehran...(10)

we saw how they tied their hair to enter the fire...(11)

[吾]: I have been dreaming of this image. People were holding blank A4 papers in public to protest against something. The street, deadly silent. Machines of state violence at one end; Raised hands, another end. Nothing was said, but everybody knew what they were saying.

[辈]: Dreams. The white paper welders protested in silence. If one can witness silence, one can witness oppression. Silent protests are successful precisely because the oppressor can do nothing about it. The blank A4 embodied the inability to speak. At some point, they were forbidden to sell paper.

[لله]: Fire extinguishers. Police batons. Empty apartments. Confiscated letters. Retracted text messages. They have something in common: Extinguished voices, strangled dreams.

[میم]: On a late December afternoon in 2017, a woman's act of stepping over a utility box and unveiling her hair marked a turning point in the history of utility boxes in Iran. Her name was Vida Movahed, a mother, with no background in activism. She climbed over a utility box in Enghelab [Revolution] street in Tehran. In silence, she uncovered her hair, tied the white scarf over a piece of wood, and waved it like a flag until the police arrived and arrested her. Her act made all the utility boxes on the same street into a scene of sin for the regime. The boxes became a scene of resistance — erasure — resistance — and erasure — a collective memory.(12)

[پی]: They say the Unruhe must have finished since they hear nothing anymore in the Western media. They ask me as if I was there as if I knew more since my blood is Iranian. I must know what is happening inside, as it is also my blood that is being spilled behind the walls. The truth is I do not know either, I only know that the «Unruhe» has started long ago and will not be ending anytime soon. And that this «Unruhe» is a revolution.

[爰]: The thing is, if we talk too fast we lose the ability to be heard. The effect of saturation of language produces the same effect as the absence of it. I was once standing in a crowd, one of the international echoes of the A4 revolution, we were shouting different agendas at the same time and I was not entirely sure if the person standing next to me is someone I could trust because I perfectly know that I am risking my life to be standing right there. I am endangering my ability to go back home to see my family and friends and I do not know how to make of this situation. All I know is that I have to voice out at this moment.

[جی]: In late October 2022, there was a video of an unveiled woman published all over Twitter. She was sitting silently

(6) On 24 November 2022, a fire broke out in a residential high-rise apartment building in a Uyghur-majority neighborhood in Ürümqi, Xinjiang, China. Local authorities reported ten Uyghurs were dead and an additional nine were injured, though some raised concerns of underreporting. Journalists raised questions of whether China's strict enforcement of the zero-COVID policy prevented residents from leaving the building or interfered with the efforts of firefighters. Chinese authorities have denied these claims. The fire has been called a trigger of protests in several cities across China and in several other countries targeting the Chinese government's zero-COVID policy. «2022 Ürümqi Fire», Wikipedia, 2023, [locked. The woman's daughter could not go downstairs to see her mother. Only her heart-breaking cry of «please open the door» echoed over the empty courtyard.](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2022_Ürümqi_fire#:~:text=On 24 November 2022 at,2%2C unit 2%2C room 1502 (accessed 23 March 2023).</p>
<p>(7) Kian Pirfalak was the 9-year-old child who was killed on 16 November 2022 by the security forces while sitting in his parent's car in Izeh, Iran. Out of the fear of his body being stolen by the authorities, his family decided to keep it on ice on the night before the funeral. The video of Kian's body on ice went viral and brought a nation-wide outrage for the youngest victim of the Jin Jiyuan Azadi movement in Iran.</p>
<p>(8) In early November 2022, a middle-aged woman of about 60 years of age chose to end her life by jumping from a building in the Guang Hua A9 district of Bei Yuan Dong Street in Hohhot. Because the housing block had a positive confirmed case, the whole block was under strict quarantine and the cell door was</p>
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(9) Since January 2023, Chinese police have been secretly arresting around 20 young people who participated in the White Paper Movement protest. Four young women — Cao Zhixin, Li Siqi, Li Yuanjing and Zhai Denrui — have been formally arrested for «picking quarrels and provoking trouble». Chinese authorities have also threatened lawyers and friends who have tried to support the detainees. Young people in China are paying a high price for daring to speak out for freedom and human rights. Tessa Wong and Grace Tsui, «The Protesters Who've Gone Missing as China Deepens Crackdown», BBC News,

in front of a row of police, beside Laleh Park in Tehran. The police were looking at her, and she was looking back. (13) She was looking back. I think about her a lot.

SILENCE

I am a silenced hummingbird. I hum in the humming language of the hummers of history. I hum for the bird of Azadi (16) to come.

«What is silence, what, what, O my most unique love?
What is silence but unspoken words?
I can no longer speak but the language of sparrows
Is the language that lives in the flowing sentences of nature's celebration
The language of sparrows means: spring leaf spring
The language of sparrows means: breeze scent breeze
The language of sparrows dies in the factory» (17)

[自]: I am very much looking forward to receiving your thoughtful insights. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us at your earliest convenience.

[ه]: I am out here, outside of the walls, outside of the violence. Silence about what goes on behind the walls, noise about what is beyond the walls. The silence is causing numbness; the silence is causing violence. The silence from outside legitimizes the violence. Through all the colours I see at once, I cannot see the blood dripping over the walls.

[由]: Auto-Generated Response. Your message will not be read or heard during the next six months.

[ه]: The pain needs time. The pain needs space. I look back at an empty nest. Where are my loved ones? Where are my ancestors? The machine does not understand the pain.

[勉]: If you have any time-sensitive issues, please do not hesitate to contact our helpline.

[م]: They say they are fine, talking around it, speaking about the mundane. It is all fine. But I know it is a lie. They are scared of being heard. She never answered my text message. She fears leaving traces of her noise. She fears being caught for the noise she makes.

[励]: [But you have all the space you need to talk.] Especially in such times of crisis, it can be helpful to...

[自]: Space is not a given. It is what we fight for when we burn to talk. What do we receive instead? Interruption, correction, invasion, appropriation. Our words burn in our mouths and turn into ashes. We swallow them. That is when we all know what we know, that it happened again. Then, we sit together in silence, in a blackening hole — perhaps, a form of empathy.

[ه]: Our silence is not singular. We have many shades of silence, none of which we approve of!

[由]: 平靜 A still silence — 恬靜 A sweet silence — 安靜 A peaceful silence — 沈靜 A heavy silence 寂靜 A lonesome silence — 冷靜 A cold silence — 肅靜 A solemn silence

[ه]: سکوت نشانه رضایت است! سکوت نشانه رضایت نیست! سکوت رضایت نیست! من ساکتم اما راضی نیستم! من راضی نیستم اما ساکت نیستم! (18)

[—]: Why do we have to b-r-e-a-k silence?
What is b-r-o-k-e-n when the silence is b-r-o-k-e-n?
Who is b-r-o-k-e-n when the s-i-l-e-n-c-e breaks?

[ه]: It is in silence where the revolution starts. Silence can be resistance if you choose so.

[ه]: مرغ سحر ناله سر کن! دوباره (19)

[ه]: Echo my humming! Echo my sewn lips!

[杯]: Aren't you afraid?

(10) Singapore, 18 February 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-64592333> (accessed 27 March 2023).

(11) «Letter from Tehran»: Letters from Chinese Arrestees. An anonymous Chinese journalist tried to use the voice of an Iranian protesting woman to describe her experience during her arrest in China. Because of this conversion, the article was not censored on the Chinese internet. «德黑兰来信»: 中国被捕者家书» Women4china, 16 February 2023, https://women4china.substack.com/p/dd4?utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=auto_share&r=21t-m7o (accessed 27 March 2023).

(12) The death of Jina Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish woman in Tehran under the custody of the so-called morality police sparked the Jin Jiyān Azadi movement in Iran. One of the

many symbols of numerous women going on the streets to protest is tying their unveiled hair as a sign of fighting with their freed hair against the long-established laws of restriction they have experienced over their bodies.

(13) Vida Movahed, 32, known as the «Girl of Enghelab Street» was briefly arrested in 2017 after she took off her head scarf and held it in the air while standing on a utility box on Enghelab (Revolution) Street in Tehran on 27 December 2017. The authorities detained 29 women on similar charges the following year. Her act remained one of the leading and decisive moments in the history of feminist movements in Iran.

(14) The footage remaining of this moment is a shared video, with its source and information remaining hidden.

(14) @northern_square, «Anonymous Contribution», Instagram photo, 17 February 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CoxqHqMO612/?hl=en> (accessed 14 May 2023).

(15) Iran International Newsroom, «Walls Falling Under Weight of Anti-Regime Graffiti in Iran», Iranintl.com, 6 December 2022, <https://wwwiranintl.com/en/202212066903> (accessed 17 May 2023).

(16) Freedom in Farsi.

(17) Forough Farrokhzad, *Let Us Believe in the Beginning of the Cold Season: Selected Poems*, New York 2022, p. 80.

(18) In Farsi: «Silence means approval.» Silence does not mean approval. Silence is not approval. I am silent but I am not approving. I am not approving and I am not silent.

(19) In Farsi: Sing you, the humming bird, again!

[ز]: بازگویا می‌شوی ای مرغ خوشخوان غم مخور! (20)

[ز]: You cut my words, you sew my lips, yet, my words remember, my lips sing!

VIOLENCE

«Will I ever again comb my hair in the wind?
Will I ever again plant violets in the gardens?
And place geraniums in the sky beyond the window?
Will I ever again dance across wine glasses?
Will the doorbell ever again lead me to expect a voice?» (21)

Dictating is perhaps about achieving a precise silence — to build walls, to fill them with concrete and blood, to block any openings towards outside, and to kill any imagination, any moment of wondering if the wall is the end.

[ف]: But the echoes from behind the walls haunt me.

Violence is the constant silent observation. I thought escaping outside the wall would be liberating, but it is not. I am observed. By whom? I do not know. By the cameras? By the Basij and Sepah? By the birds sitting on the telephone wire? By my neighbors? The Panopticon is the ultimate violence the regime is imposing. Its final state is when the oppressor can lay back, while we observe each other in silence, while we fear each other.

[ف]: Are you the vulture circling above my head?

I was always told to hold my head down when the waves come and wait till they pass. Don't stick your head up when the waves come, they told me. But in order to breathe, I must stick my head up, for I am not a fish.

[ف]:----

Silence is an instrument of power. The oppressor's survival is the silence of his prey. Silence is his power. Speaking up against his power has a price. But, staying in silence has a bigger one — shame.

[ف]:----

WE BREAK THE S_I_L_E_N_C_E. Because of the blood, the spilled blood.

«The soil of his grave is still fresh,
I mean the grave of those two young green hands...» (22)

The dead are collected and carried to the top of the hill by an old man. The old man unloads them on a pile for them to disappear within days. Soon after, the vultures gather around the hill, swirling in circles till finally one vulture starts to devour a body. The others follow and disappear as soon as the flesh has been torn off the bones, leaving solely carcasses behind.

The vultures are standing on the crumbling walls, afraid that with any step, the brick they are standing on will turn into sand and have them fall to the ground where the dead lay.

The
birds
don't
sing,
they ecchhhooooooooooooooo oooooooo ooo o o in pain.

[birds]: You may devour our flesh, but our bones will remain. They will speak, though our mouths are rotten for eternity behind your walls.

MOURNING

I am a nightingale in mourning. I am very tiny, as tiny as the remains of the stories of my fellow sister birds suffering all around the story.

Forgetting is violent to the dead of the history. Forgetting is an accomplice, an accomplice to tyranny! (23)

They do not forget. They are Madaran-e-Dadkhah, (24) meaning justice seeking mothers. They have all lost their children, under the electric torture, by noose, with pellet bullets, with batons, in the erased graveyards. The weeds, flowers, or grass growing from their graves know the heart of their dreams.

[ف]: GUILT — Graveyards, weeds, flowers, grass. They grow with the fresh blood of the young hands buried deep in the soil. They grow everywhere, like the never-going-silent voices that grow everywhere.

[ام]: GUILT — I live in two worlds — one filled with blood, the other with ignorance. I have to close the door of one, so I can function in the other. But I fail, every time.

(20) In Farsi: You, the nice singing humming bird, You'll find you voice, don't worry!

(21) Farrokhsad, *Let Us Believe* (see note 17), p. 78.

(22) Ibid.

(23) Ibid.

(24) For a close reading of this movement see Sama Khosravi Ooryad, «Dadkhah Mothers of Iran, from Khavar to Aban: Digital Dadkhahi and

Transnational Coalitional
Mothering, Feminist Theory,
5 October 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1177/14647001221127144>

[۲۵]: GUILT — I have to swim in all my dreams. I am not a fish, but in all my dreams they come to take bites from my feet, arms, stomach, and breasts. I swim to run away but a polar bear hunts me. He does not eat me; I have bitter meat. He passes me to them, and that's how I wake up.

[酒]: GUILT — I am sitting in this heavenly landscape of Heidi's while my sisters are looking at the scenery beyond the bars. I could have been them, and they could have been me, and Heidi, she would still run the fields as long as birds still fly here from the east.

Heidi is too happy to be sad.

[آن]: DREAM — The pain is too heavy, sometimes I cannot breathe, but I have to remember it, because remembering is probably the last resistance we can afford, in silence.

[۲۶]: DREAM — When I write, I am not writing alone. When I speak, I am not speaking alone. Voices have been vanishing into the emptiness, but I can still feel them in the air — they are around me, looking at me, whispering to me.

[۲۷]: DREAM — In silence, in blankness, in emptiness, we seek our solidarity. It is fragile. It is like a fish. It can easily slip out of our hands. Yet, we yearn to hold it, even for a second.

hey — we hear you.

NOISE

I am a wide-beaked seagull. I scream. I am the non-negotiator, the too much of this story.

D
R
O
P
S

of water wear holes in the stone, slowly, but persistently.

My dear mother. They have not thrown me into a river yet, not yet. My lungs are not filled with water, not yet, maybe not yet.

Her name was Donya, meaning the whole world. She was lost for eight days, then found in a river. Perhaps her mother was showing the picture of the whole world to the river, asking the fish and the sharks to show their teeth. (25)

As a woman*, I want a country where the blood cannot be washed away, not with water.

My dear mother. You told me to delete my arguments and voices on social media. You did exactly what the state wants us to do, to be self-censored, in fear.

«Bite your tongue,» «hold your tongue,» «Do not have a long tongue,» Aren't these the words you were always telling me when my words were not the words of a good girl? My tongue cannot bear the mouth anymore.

My dear mother. They have not thrown me into a river yet, not yet. You are the living trace of the pain of your mother, and I am yours. I know it is out of your love for me that you are so desperate. But how can I afford that, if your love comes to sew my lips? How can we break the stone, if we stop dripping?

If each of us stops dripping, we all stop D

R
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P
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N
G.

DRIP, DRIP, DRIP, and then you have the sea. I hear the voices of many drowned deep in the sea. They hum and call: SPEAK UP!

Sorry Maman, I have to drop!

And the tower of a thousand years of patriarchy f

alls
dow
n.

(25) Donya Farhadi, 22, was an architecture student in Ahvaz, Iran. In December 2022, her family announced her missing, and her body was found on the shores of the Karun River,

pierced by bullets. State medias in Iran reported her death to be not related to the uprising, but a self-inflicted jumping from the bridge and drowning in the Karun River.

