



CONFRONTING 'MORALITY' PART 2



FACING THE MUSIC

A PRIVATE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION FILLED WITH SONG AND DANCING TURNS INTO A PUBLIC NIGHTMARE.

By Elizabeth Walsh and Brian Williamson

ABOUT THIS SERIES

IN SEPTEMBER 2022, MAHSA AMINI, A 22-YEAR-OLD KURDISH IRANIAN, DIED WHILE IN CUSTODY OF THE GASHT-E-ERSHAD, IRAN'S MORALITY POLICE.



SHE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY ON SEPTEMBER 13 FOR "INAPPROPRIATE ATTIRE" AND DIED THREE DAYS LATER AFTER FALLING INTO A COMA.

HER DEATH SPARKED THE LARGEST PROTESTS IRAN HAS SEEN IN DECADES, WITH WOMEN REMOVING THEIR HIJABS AND CUTTING THEIR HAIR IN DEFIANCE.

GENERATIONS OF IRANIAN WOMEN ARE SPEAKING OUT ABOUT THE IMPACT REPRESSION HAS HAD ON THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES.



This series was originally published on [VOAnews.com](https://www.voa.com)



"I WAS IN PRISON
FOR FOUR DAYS FOR
BASICALLY NOTHING."

SAHAR

A 47-year-old Iranian American living in California

"IT WAS A BIRTHDAY PARTY
[AT A FRIEND'S HOUSE]. WE WERE
ALL DANCING TO THE MUSIC."





"ALL OF A SUDDEN,
[A] FEW PEOPLE GOT IN."

"THEY CLIMB[ED] THE
WALL AND CAME IN."

"THEY WERE PLAINCLOTHES POLICE. THEY SAID THEY GOT A CALL."



"THEY TOLD US ALL TO SIT DOWN. THEY TOLD THE GIRLS TO COVER THEIR HAIR AND PUT ON THEIR MANTEAU [A LONG COAT]."



"THEY ASKED FOR OUR IDENTIFICATION AND WROTE DOWN EVERYBODY'S NAME."



"[ONE OF THE FRIENDS HAD BEEN] VIDEOTAPING DURING THE PARTY."



"EVEN THOUGH [THE FRIEND] WENT UPSTAIRS AND HID THE CAMERA, [THE POLICE] FOUND IT AND TOOK THE VIDEO."

SOON AFTER THE 1979 ISLAMIC REVOLUTION, AYATOLLAH KHOMEINI BANNED MUSIC BROADCAST ON TV AND RADIO.

HE SAID,

"[MUSIC] STUPEFIES PERSONS LISTENING TO IT AND MAKES THEIR BRAIN INACTIVE AND FRIVOLOUS."

THOUGH ILLEGAL, MUSIC, ALCOHOL, DANCING AND EVEN RAVES HAVE CONTINUED IN IRAN, WITH PARTYGOERS RISKING JAIL AND CORPORAL PUNISHMENT.



IN 2018, SEVERAL IRANIAN WOMEN WERE DETAINED FOR POSTING VIDEOS OF THEMSELVES DANCING ON INSTAGRAM.



IRANIAN STATE TELEVISION BROADCAST THEIR APOLOGIES AND FEATURED POLICE OFFICERS AND OTHER "EXPERTS" DISCUSSING HOW SOCIAL MEDIA ENABLES CRIME.



IN THE WAKE OF MAHSA AMINI'S DEATH, DANCING HAS CONTINUED TO SURFACE IN IRAN, NOT ONLY AS AN ACT OF DEFIANCE BUT TO PROTEST AGAINST THE REGIME.





"[THE POLICE] KEPT US IN THE POLICE STATION THAT NIGHT."



"WE WERE ABOUT 20 PEOPLE, INCLUDING THE HOST AND THE PARENTS OF THE HOST."



"ONE BY ONE, THEY WOULD CALL US TO THE ROOM AND SHOW US THE VIDEO THAT THEY TOOK FROM US."



"ONE BY ONE, THEY WOULD PUT THE VIDEO OF YOU UP TO SHOW WHAT YOU WERE DOING AT THAT MOMENT AND INTERROGATE YOU."



"THANKFULLY, IT WAS KIND OF COLD, SO I WAS WEARING LONG SLEEVES, AND MY TIGHTS WERE VERY THICK."



"BUT OTHER PEOPLE WERE SLEEVELESS AND WEARING SHORT SKIRTS. THEY GOT INTO MORE TROUBLE."

"AFTER THE INTERROGATION,
THEY PUT US ALL IN A VAN."



"AND WE WERE, LIKE, 'OH, THEY'RE
GOING TO TAKE US TO THE MAIN
POLICE STATION, AND THEY'RE
GOING TO RELEASE US.' "



"BUT THEY TOOK
US TO PRISON."

اداره زندان کرجای



THANKFULLY, [THE WOMEN] HAD ONE SECTION OF THE PRISON, COMPLETELY SEPARATED FROM OTHER CRIMINALS."



"IN PRISON, IT WAS HORRIBLE, BECAUSE THEY TREAT YOU LIKE A WHORE."



"THEY SEARCHED US ALL OVER. THEY STRIPPED US COMPLETELY."



SAHAR23: "WE WERE 21 PEOPLE, I THINK, IN ONE ROOM. IT WAS JUST HORRIBLE."

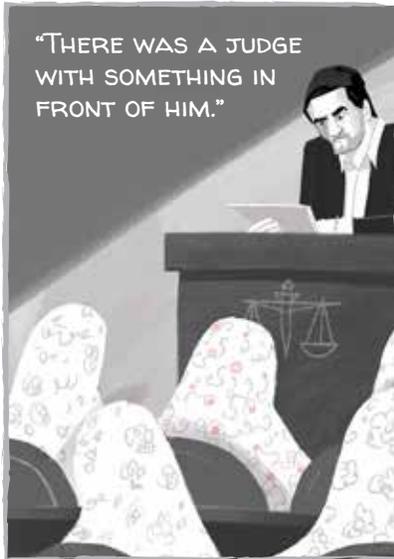


"A FEW DAYS LATER, THEY TOOK US TO THE COURT."

"THEY ACTUALLY CHAINED TWO OF US TOGETHER, FOOT TO FOOT."



"THERE WAS A JUDGE WITH SOMETHING IN FRONT OF HIM."



"HE READ IT TO ME AND HE'S, LIKE,

'SIGN IT. THAT'S IT. SIGN IT.'"



IT WAS KIND OF A CONFESSION: THESE ARE YOUR PUNISHMENTS, AND THIS IS HOW MUCH YOU'RE GOING TO PAY US."



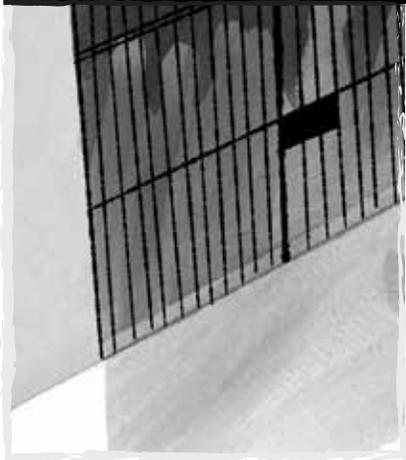
"BECAUSE I WASN'T WEARING ANYTHING REVEALING EXCEPT MY HAIR, I DIDN'T GET ANY WHIPPING."



"BUT PEOPLE WHO WERE WEARING SHORT SKIRTS AND SLEEVELESS [TOPS], THEY GOT WHIPPINGS. THEY WERE LASHED."



"SO, THE JUDGE WOULD TELL EVERYBODY, ONE BY ONE, WHAT THEIR PUNISHMENTS WOULD BE."



"THEN WE GOT BACK TO PRISON AND [RECEIVED] THE PUNISHMENT."



"THEY HAD US ACTUALLY LOOK AT PEOPLE WHO WERE GETTING WHIPPED."



"THE HOST, THE MOTHER OF THE PERSON HAVING THE BIRTHDAY PARTY, RECEIVED THE MOST."



"70 LASHES."



"ALL OF THE MEN HAD THEIR HEADS SHAVED."



((sahar39))



"IT WAS HORRIBLE,
JUST HORRIBLE."



CRACK!

"I STILL
REMEMBER IT."

"IT'S NOT JUST THE PAIN
OF IT THAT YOU FEEL."



"YOU FEEL BAD FOR THE
PERSON WHO IS BEING
LASHED. BUT ACTUALLY, I
FELT MORE ANGRY THAN
SAD OR ANYTHING."



"I GOT SO ANGRY,
FEELING LIKE THEY'RE IN
POWER SOMEHOW."





"THOSE PEOPLE ARE UNEDUCATED.
THEY POUR ALL THEIR ANGER
INTO THEIR LASHING, ONTO YOU,
WHO WAS JUST AT SOME PARTY."



"WHEN I GOT OUT,
I SAID, 'I WON'T
STAY IN THIS
COUNTRY.' "

Confronting 'Morality'

FIVE WOMEN SHARE THEIR STORIES OF GRIEF, SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE UNDER THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC. EXPLORE THE FULL SERIES ON [VOANEWS.COM](https://voanews.com)



NILU

DECADES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN IRAN HAVE AFFECTED GENERATIONS OF FAMILIES.



SAHAR

A PRIVATE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION FILLED WITH SONG AND DANCING TURNS INTO A PUBLIC NIGHTMARE.



MAHSA

M.S. WAS IN THE SEVENTH GRADE WHEN SHE WAS ARRESTED AND JAILED FOR WALKING WITH A FAMILY FRIEND WHO WASN'T A RELATIVE.



ELNAZ

GROWING UP, VHS VIDEOS HELPED ELNAZ SARBAR BOCZEK LEARN ENGLISH AND OFFERED HER A WINDOW TO A WORLD OUTSIDE OF IRAN.



ZHINA

AFTER BEING ATTACKED AND THREATENED FOR ATTENDING ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN 2022, ZHINA FLED IRAN TO THE IRAQI SIDE OF THE KURDISH REGION.



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<https://projects.voanews.com/iran/confronting-morality-women-under-the-islamic-republic/>