

3 Willful Voices from Iranian Revolutionary Uprising

By Mahtab Mahboub

All independent Journalists, but especially female journalists in Iran present a potential threat to the state by just reporting on social realities from their perspective. They are the child in “The Emperor's New Clothes” who blurts that the king is actually wearing nothing but empty rhetoric! According to the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), ever since the beginning of the “woman, life, freedom” revolutionary uprising in Iran, at least 58 journalists have been arrested in relation to reporting on the waves of protests and human rights abuses by the state, all over the country. Iran is now “the world's third biggest jailer of journalists”, following China and Myanmar. Among those arrested Elahe Mohammadi and Niloufar Hamedi drew attention to Jina (Mahsa) Amini's death after lying in a coma while in “morality police” custody and Nazila Maroufian later interviewed Jina's father in which he emphasis “ stated [that his daughter had no previous illnesses](#) that could be to blame for her death”. Niloufar's photo of Jina's parents crying as their daughter dies on the hospital bed, published on Twitter was the first report about the case. Elahe's report from Jina's funeral inspired many to raise their voice against injustice done to women. Nazila's interview titled “They are lying!” gave a platform to a victim of state violence and disrupted the monopoly of the state over the narrative of Jina's death. But who are these brave journalists?

Three years ago, Elahe Mohammadi spent a whole night behind the walls of Rajayi-Shahr prison just outside the city of Karaj to document and narrate stories of execution of prisoners or their forgiveness by next of kin of the victim under retribution law. This is what her husband reminds us on the 75th day of her arrest, hoping that Elahe had not heard of the news of Majidreza Rahnavard's execution. On September 29, 2022, security forces arrested Elahe Mohammadi, a reporter for the daily newspaper Hammihan. She had traveled to Saqqiz, Jina (Mahsa) Amini's hometown to cover her funeral on the 17th September in which thousands of people chanted “Jin, Jian, Azadi” (woman, life, freedom) for the first time. In the report published in Hammihan newspaper, where she worked as a journalist, she had quoted Jina's parents that they asked for people's solidarity and had defended their right to seek justice for their daughter. Just for doing her profession as a journalist, she was summoned by the security forces and was arrested on her way to the police station. She was then taken to the notorious Evin prison and charged as agents of the CIA. However, this is not the first time she is punished for making the suffering of women visible. Back in April 2020, due to her reporting on the conditions of women in Qarchak Prison -where she, herself is held right now- in the days of the Coronavirus outbreak, and covering protests regarding the downing of the Ukraine International Airlines Flight 752 in the November 2019 by Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the IRGC sued her and she was accused of spreading lies to disturb the public mind, prosecuted, granted bail, and was banned from writing in the media for a year. Yet, no punishment has silenced her powerful voice!

“The first thing that occurred to me was to call Niloufar and ask her to write about the suspicious

“suicide” of a forest ranger in our city, then I remembered she is in prison”, writes an environmental activist in a small city in north Iran. In June 2022, Niloufar had published a video of morality police officers shooting a couple in a park after getting into an argument with the man over the woman’s hijab. She had previously reported on honor killings and violence against women, and was among the very first to publish on the sexual harassment in the media. She was very active within Iranian #metoo movement and wrote many articles on the suffering and at the same time power of women* who came forward with their stories. On the 100th day of her arrest, her husband had tweeted: “I am in the middle of my eighteen week marathon preparation, Niloufar has also jogged with the ugly prison slippers; on both sides of this wall, we won’t abandon life, our love is more powerful than the darkness”. Niloufar practices Yoga in prison and has even made a challenge of repeating “Sun Salutation” 30 times in a row. Many-including some fellow female journalists- have joined her challenge and post about it on their social media. She keeps life alive and inspires even behind the thick cement walls!

On 4th January during her court procedure Nazila Maroufian fainted and was taken to the hospital. A Kurdish -also from Saqqez like Jina- this 24-year old journalism student at Allameh University in Tehran, was fully aware of the risk of publishing her interview with Jina’s father. In a tweet she thanks Mostaghelonline for publishing the interview and writes “as I publish this, I want everybody to know that I don’t have any health issues and I don’t intend to kill myself!”. She is hinting at the state attempts to stage killing of dissents and protestors as suicides, including through making televised “confessions” -recorded under torture and psychological pressure- of family members who confirm the suicide of their loved ones in front of cameras of “interrogator-journalists”. Nazila knew she could be arrested and now we know that her life is in danger, like many courageous women who tried to speak the truth and expose the regime’s lies. She has faced extreme psychological torture during the more than two months of illegal arrest to make forced confessions which she has resisted so far. The choice to give voice to the most oppressed through journalism should not be punished by imprisonment, torture and brutality!

While the state-run media is increasingly losing its audience and legitimacy among Iranians and the Persian speaking broadcasters from outside Iran as well as the social media has increasingly become sources of information for people, the life and destiny of these daring journalists remain in the hands of judges of “revolutionary courts” with no access to independent lawyers. However, they have proven that their voices, their passion for life and their fight for “woman, life, freedom” is unstoppable, despite all the pressures.