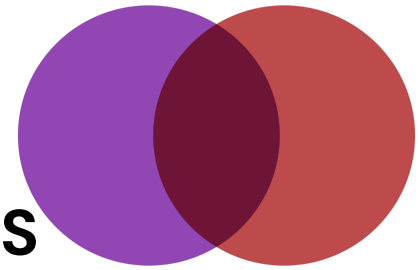
DIAGRAMMES

Chowra MAKAREMI

AFFECTIVE RESISTANCES



Prolog

The politics of cruelty are not reducible to sadistic abuses of power. As the anthropologist Chowra Makaremi argues in her latest book, they constitute the political register of an increasingly vast array of regimes whose purpose is no longer to justify or even to conceal the violence they inflict. On the contrary, displaying their ability to cause pain and kill with total impunity is how these regimes seek to not only quell and preempt opposition but also to secure the acquiescence of those who are made to witness their deeds.

Cruelty is thus a method of government. Chowra Makaremi quotes the Argentinian anthropologist Rita Laura Segato who calls it a form of social pedagogy. By exposing the vulnerability of their targets, by demonstrating their ability to convert human beings into corpses as well as to make them disappear without a trace, the practitioners of the politics of cruelty intend to teach important lessons. They expect the people they govern to realize the precariousness of the bonds on which they rely and, for that very reason, to grow indifferent to the suffering of others. Fright followed by stupor, resignation and, eventually, detachment are the emotions that the politics of cruelty aim to produce.

That resistance occurs under such circumstances and sometimes even sparks an uprising is a kind of miracle, Chowra Makaremi marvels. Tracking recent examples of such miracles, from Tehran to Minneapolis, from Buenos Aires to Shaheen Bagh, from Diyarbakir to Khartoum, from Kyiv to Gaza, is the primary purpose of her book, *Résistances affectives*. While the politics of cruelty attempt to corrode and sever the bonds that sustain empathy and enable solidarity, "affective resistances" endeavor to buttress existing attachments but also to create new ones in the face of loss and destruction. Hence the role of mourning as an essential way of warding off the reduction of the dead to corpses destined to oblivion.

The politics of attachment that respond to and resist the politics of cruelty have a crucially feminist dimension, Chowra Makaremi stresses. Her point is not that women are naturally on the side of emotions and bonding, whereas cold reason and individual self-interest would be intrinsically masculine. The politics of attachment enjoy an elective affinity with feminism because women tend to be assigned to the maintenance of social bonds and are thus in a privileged position to politicize them when they are under threat.

Born in Shiraz in 1980, Chowra Makaremi moved from Iran to France in 1983 with her father and her brother. Her mother, who took part in the 1979 revolution but opposed Ayatollah Khomeini's rule was arrested when her daughter was a few months old and eventually executed, in the 1988 massacre of political prisoners. Trained as both a political scientist and an anthropologist in France and Canada, Chowra Makaremi started working on the politics of cruelty deployed by the Islamic Republic of Iran when she discovered a notebook in which her grandfather had chronicled the period ranging from the incarceration of his two daughters to the execution of Chowra's mother.

After translating, editing and publishing the notebook in French, Chowra directed a documentary film, called *Hitch*, in 2019, based on her last trip to Iran, where she looked for traces of her mother. Then, in 2023, she published *Femme, vie, liberté,* a historically and theoretically rich ethnographic account of the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising set off by the death in custody of Mahsa Jina Amini, a Kurdish-Iranian woman, in September of 2022. More recently, Résistances Affectives, published in French in 2024, widened her anthropological exploration of the politics of attachment to a variety of terrains such as Ne Una Menos, the movement against feminicides in Latin America, the Sudanese revolution of 2018, the Shaheen Bagh protests in India, and Black Lives Matter in the US.

In our interview, we started by inviting Chowra to reflect on the current fog of war and its impact on the people with whom she is in close contact – in Iran, Palestine, and Lebanon but also in Ukraine. We then talked about her singular way of weaving the personal and the political, from the discovery of her grandfather's notebook to her engagement with the Woman, Life, Freedom movement and its aftermath. How did the unanswered questions of her childhood but also her situation as an exile or diasporic subject inform her method as an anthropologist as well as her political sensibility? The third part of our interview focused on the Iranian regime, its enduring structure, its transformations since the Revolution, and the different modes of resistance that it has generated. Finally, we asked Chowra to walk us through her recent work on attachment and cruelty at a transnational level, but also to flesh out the feminist dimension of both her perspective on the social movements that she studies and of her own activism.

Our interview took place in Paris on April 15, 2026.

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Chapter 1

Muffled Voices

The Politics of Care, and Invisible Labor

by Clara Beccaro

The concept of care was first introduced in English-speaking feminist thought in the early 1980s. Against moral theories grounded in autonomy, rights, or universal principles, the psychologist Carol Gilligan proposed a new starting point for ethical reflection: the ordinary relations that weave everyday life. In her work *In a Different Voice* (1982), she shed light on an ethics attuned to mutual responsibilities and the forms of dependency that link individuals to one another.

Over time, the concept of care moved beyond the framework of moral philosophy in which it first emerged and became instead a way of thinking about work, often invisible labor, that allows societies to function. Among those who contributed significantly to its expansion is the American philosopher Joan Tronto. In her work, care no longer refers only to an attunement to others or to activities associated with "taking care" of people. It designates a broader set of practices through which we sustain, repair, and uphold the world in which we live. The term thus applies as much to bodies as to relations, infrastructures, and communities. This shift toward ordinary practices, from autonomy to interdependence, has profoundly reshaped the social sciences over the past decades.

This perspective, however, clashes with the dominant political narrative of neoliberal societies. As certain thinkers, such as Wendy Brown and Silvia Federici, have shown, care begins precisely where the fiction of the self-sufficient individual collapses. Caring for others requires recognizing that no one is entirely autonomous, and that every life is marked by moments of vulnerability and dependency. Yet the liberal subject is defined, on the contrary, by its capacity to manage itself, to transform personal resources into capital, and to make autonomy a mark of success. In such a world, our reliance on others is easily construed as a weakness or failure. The paradox is that this ideal of autonomy rests on an immense amount of care work. From household labour to childrearing, from supporting the elderly to caring for the sick, a multitude of activities essential

to the reproduction of social life remain largely invisible. This invisibility is not an oversight. It is one of the conditions for the functioning of a social order that constantly depends on care while refusing to recognize our mutual dependence as a universal condition.

Since the 2000s, however, the politics of care have been subject to significant criticism, particularly from decolonial and transnational feminist perspectives. The problem, as several thinkers have pointed out, is that care is not necessarily synonymous with emancipation. Care practices are always embedded in social relations and hierarchies of power. Humanitarian interventions, for example, have often reproduced a distinction between rescuers and victims that echoes certain colonial logics. Similarly, feminist scholarship has shown that the valorization of care can sometimes reinforce gendered and racialized divisions of labour rather than challenge them. The issue, therefore, is not simply to celebrate care. It is to ask how care is organized, distributed, and made visible. Who cares for whom? Who performs this work? Which forms of suffering receive public attention, and which remain ignored? A politics of care cannot sidestep these questions, for what is at stake is not only the recognition of care, but the broader set of power relations that structure its distribution.

The Iranian Kurds

by Tom Novak

In the 2026 conflict between Iran, Israel, and the United States, international attention briefly turned toward the Iranian Kurds. Often forgotten in history, they were suddenly thrust into the spotlight by Washington and Tel Aviv, acquiring a reputation for holding "the fate of the Iranian regime in their hands"[1]. The conflict created an unprecedented situation in the history of the Islamic Republic and raised questions about the role that the Kurds might play, given that many viewed the fall of the regime as being in their interest. Yet this was not automatically the position adopted by the political forces of Iranian Kurdistan. While regional crises have often acted as accelerators of Kurdish history, they have also carried major risks for civilian populations. To hope to benefit from the conflict would have required embracing a binary logic that aligned Kurdish actors with Tehran's enemies, namely the United States and Israel. Kurdish history, however, has been marked by repeated episodes of instrumentalization and abandonment by foreign powers, a legacy that helps explain such caution. The retaking of Kurdish-controlled areas by Ahmad al-Charaa's Syrian forces, amid international indifference, is still fresh in the minds of Kurdish activists[2].

Comprising at least 10 million people, the Kurdish community represents roughly 10 percent of Iran's population. Iranian Kurdistan is located in a border region adjoining Turkey, Iraq, and Syria. Since 1923, when the promise of a Kurdish state was withdrawn by the Western powers, the Kurds have struggled for independence or, at the very least, autonomy[3]. Subjected to a dual process of political and economic exclusion — denied full civil rights while simultaneously being exploited — the Kurds have resisted the regime in order to survive and preserve their culture. The Kurdish movement is composed of a wide range of organizations that differ in their methods of action and ideological orientations, yet all advocate democracy in Iran, the decentralization of power, and the establishment of a federal system[4]. The principal parties include the PDKI (Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan), Komala, PJAK (Party for a Free Life in Kurdistan), and PAK (Kurdistan

[1] Title of a program broadcasted by France Culture on March 17, 2026: "Les Kurdes ont-ils le destin du régime iranien entre leurs mains ?", interview with Sahar Bagheri (IRIS).
[2] In early 2026, forces of the Syrian transitional government led by Ahmad al-Charaa launched an offensive against the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This led to the rapid recapture of most of the territories administered by the Kurdish autonomous administration in northern and eastern Syria. This development prompted the de facto collapse of the Kurdish self-governance framework and a recentralization of territorial control in favor of Damascus, against the backdrop of a breakdown in the transitional agreements reached in 2025.
[3] Sharifi Dryaz, Massoud. "Chapitre 5. État et minorités en Iran : les enjeux de la question kurde". L'Iran et ses rivaux Entre nation et révolution, Passés Composés, 2020. p.81-94.
[4] Claire Pilidjian, "Les principales organisations kurdes", *Le Monde diplomatique,* march 2020.

Freedom Party). Their objective is to overthrow the regime and defend the right of the Kurdish people to self-determination within the framework of a democratic Iran.

Iranian nationalism has historically been constructed through an ideological discourse that links the unity of the state to a millennial history, a Persian language, and an "Aryan race[5]." The emergence of this political model at the beginning of the twentieth century triggered a cycle of violence that gave rise to Kurdish revolts and mobilizations, which were systematically repressed by the Shah's regime (1925–1979)[6]. Kurdish collective memory has nevertheless been marked by a unifying event, however brief it may have been. The Republic of Mahabad was established in 1946 during the occupation of Iran by the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. It was crushed twelve months later by the Iranian army, supported by the United States. Yet, as the first experiment in Kurdish autonomy on Iranian soil, it profoundly shaped the Kurdish political imagination, providing it with an anthem, a flag, and its first martyrs.

The Kurds played an active role in the fall of the Shah's regime in 1979, notably under the leadership of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, secretary-general of the PDKI from 1973 to 1989. In the aftermath of the Revolution, they sought to negotiate with Ayatollah Khomeini in order to establish an "autonomous Kurdistan within a democratic Iran." On March 31, the population was asked to answer the following question: "Are you in favor of replacing the previous regime with an Islamic Republic whose constitution will be approved by the nation?" The majority of Kurds boycotted the referendum, refusing to endorse a theocratic regime. At the time, Kurdish towns were experimenting with forms of self-government through the creation of local councils. Unacceptable to the new clerical authorities, this autonomy was perceived as a threat to the integrity of the state and was therefore brutally repressed. In 1979, Khomeini officially declared a jihad against the Kurdish rebels and launched a wave of repression that escalated into a guerrilla war. The conflict continued throughout the following decade and ultimately enabled the regime to reassert its control over Kurdish territories by the late 1980s.

The Kurdish question gradually became a security issue for the Iranian authorities, who instrumentalized it as a means of reinforcing their sovereignty through more coercive forms of rule. The struggle for autonomy has consistently been portrayed by the regime as the product of foreign interventions seeking to destabilize the state. This strategy has involved exploiting the

[5] In Iran, the "Aryan race" refers to an ideological reinterpretation of a term derived from Indo-European linguistics, which was reappropriated in the 20th century by nationalism to denote a supposed continuity between Persian populations and the ancient Indo-European peoples. It has served as a discursive construct aimed at anchoring national identity in a prestigious pre-Islamic genealogy and symbolically distinguishing it from Arab or Turkish affiliations.
[6] H. Bozarslan, *Histoire des Kurdes*, Cerf, 2025.

division of Kurdistan among several states in order to advance the regime's interests, even when this has required supporting Iraqi Kurdish actors. The center–periphery dynamic structures Iranian territory around administrative and political hubs where power is concentrated, while peripheral regions remain marginalized. As a result, Kurdish areas have long suffered from economic underinvestment and limited recognition of their cultural and linguistic rights. This relationship has often been described as a form of internal colonialism, whereby natural resources (water, minerals, and forests) are extracted while local populations are kept in conditions of poverty. With some of the highest unemployment rates in the country, Kurdish regions are particularly vulnerable to the recurring economic crises affecting the Iranian regime.

The "Women, Life, Freedom" movement was born in the Kurdish city of Saqqez, the hometown of Mahsa Jina Amini, before spreading throughout the country. Its slogan, Jin, Jiyan, Azadî ("Woman, Life, Freedom"), itself emerged from the Kurdish women's movement. Kurdish women were at the forefront of the protests and consequently faced particularly severe repression. Since 2022, Iraqi Kurdistan has become both a refuge for those fleeing repression and a base for political and militant opposition. As a result, the region has been regularly targeted by Iranian attacks.

In their conflict with Iran, Israel and the United States have turned to the Kurds, viewing them as a key political actor in weakening the regime and potentially opening a new front[7]. In response, the unprecedented coalition formed by Iran's seven main Kurdish parties has adopted a cautious stance, which Chowra Makaremi describes as an expression of the "non-binary nature of politics." Historically hostile to the Islamic Republic, the Kurds certainly share certain interests with the United States and Israel. Yet they advocate a fundamentally different political logic. While the weakening of the mullahs' regime presents an unprecedented political opportunity, the consequences that entering the war could have for civilians are potentially devastating. Positions within the coalition are not entirely uniform, but this general attitude of caution underscores the specificity of the Kurdish position. It cannot be reduced to a binary understanding of politics, as it is shaped by a long history of instrumentalization and abandonment. In its March statement, the coalition declared: "This war is not the war of Iranian society or the nations of this country […]. On the contrary, it is the dictatorial and repressive regime of the Islamic Republic that has taken the entire population hostage, stripped it of all its rights and freedoms, and—last winter alone—massacred thousands of protesters and citizens demanding their rights[8]."

[7] P. Barbancey "Guerre en Iran : pourquoi les États-Unis et Israël se tournent-ils vers les Kurdes ?", *L'Humanité,* March 8, 2026.
[8] https://pjak.net/so/10668

The Twelve-Day War

by Tom Novak

The "Twelve-Day War" refers to the first direct military confrontation between Israel, the United States, and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Lasting from June 13 to June 24, 2025, it inaugurated a new phase of open conflict between the major powers of the Middle East. Officially, Israel justified its offensive as a measure of self-defense against the threat posed by Iran's nuclear program. However, it also served to disrupt ongoing negotiations between the United States and Iran over the nuclear issue and shifted international attention away from the destruction unfolding in Gaza, at a moment when discussions surrounding a two-state solution were gaining renewed prominence at the United Nations. On the Iranian side, although the authorities appeared to have been caught off guard by the offensive, they quickly displaced their desire for revenge onto political opponents and minority populations.

On the night of June 12–13, 2025, Israel launched a surprise military operation against Iran, codenamed *Rising Lion*. As strikes hit Tehran and other strategic sites across the country, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel was acting to neutralize Iran's nuclear program, as well as its ballistic missile and military capabilities. The attacks targeted nuclear facilities and residences associated with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (known as the *Pasdaran*), the elite force tasked with defending the Islamic Republic. Several high-ranking military officials and nuclear scientists were killed, including senior figures within the Revolutionary Guards. At the same time, a series of covert sabotage operations attributed to the Mossad reportedly took place inside Iranian territory, aiming to disrupt missile-launching capabilities. In Tehran, the scale of the assault were widely perceived as an outright declaration of war, generating a climate of profound uncertainty. That same night, Iran's Supreme Leader and the Revolutionary Guards announced the launch of *Operation True Promise III*, initiating a retaliatory aerial campaign.

The nuclear issue is quickly overshadowed by other strategic objectives. Benjamin Netanyahu, for example, declares that the death of the Supreme Leader would be a way to put an end to the conflict. In response, his American counterpart states that he knows "exactly where" Ali Khamenei is hiding, but does not intend to kill him, "for the time being." A few days after Donald Trump's abrupt departure from the G7 summit[9], the Europeans attempted to assert themselves

[9] At the 2025 G7 summit, the U.S. president left the proceedings early, citing diplomatic and security considerations that he deemed a priority. His departure was interpreted as a sign of uncertainty regarding the continuity of U.S. engagement in multilateral discussions, forcing several European delegations to readjust their priorities.

diplomatically in the conflict, hoping to avoid further surprises from the Americans. It was a futile effort since on June 22, Washington launched *Operation Midnight Hammer* by bombing three Iranian nuclear sites: Fordo, Natanz, and Isfahan.
On the eleventh day of the war, Tehran was bombed again by Israel, which targeted not only military sites but also the prison of Evin, where many political opponents are held, prompting condemnation from international observers (NGOs, the United Nations). That same day, Iran retaliated by striking the largest U.S. base in the region, located in Qatar. The following day, Tuesday, June 24, Donald Trump announced a ceasefire. Israel accepted it, believing it had achieved its objectives, and Iran subsequently agreed to the terms.

Both sides claimed victory. The Islamic Republic asserted that it had inflicted a historic defeat on Israel, while Donald Trump and Israel maintained that they had destroyed Iran's nuclear infrastructure. In reality, the war appears to have had only a limited impact on Iran's nuclear capabilities, delaying its program by just a few months. However, the NGO *Human Rights Activists* reported that the bombing campaign in Iran caused 1,000 deaths and 4,500 injuries. The Israeli authorities, for their part, reported 28 deaths on their side. An investigation by Amnesty International concluded that serious violations of international humanitarian law had occurred and called for an investigation into possible war crimes.

Moreover, far from easing domestic repression, the hostilities have been used by the Iranian authorities to intensify their crackdown on dissent. In June 2025, security forces increased arbitrary arrests and executions, while the Supreme National Security Council restricted internet access and tightened digital censorship. Under the guise of national security, Iran launched what many described as a "spy hunt," deporting more than 200,000 Afghan refugees accused of assisting Israel's operation[10]. In Israel, the offensive against Iran received broad support from much of the political class, the media, and public opinion. Presented as a "moment of glory" for the country, the operation was reportedly backed by 70% of the population[11].

Behind Israel's stated objectives, it is possible to identify several underlying motivations for the offensive. First, it immediately contributed to derailing the negotiations that began on April 12 between the United States and Iran, which focused both on controlling Iran's nuclear program and on the possible easing of economic sanctions against Tehran. The conflict also served to divert international attention from the ongoing genocide in Gaza and directly undermined the prospects

[10] Jean-Pierre Perrin, "Après le cessez-le-feu, le régime iranien sombre dans la paranoïa et la répression", *Médiapart,* published on July 2, 2025.
[11] Luc Bronner, "En Israël, Benyamin Nétanyahou conforté par la guerre avec l'Iran et les frappes américaines", *Le Monde,* published on June 23, 2025.

of the UN conference on the two-state solution, scheduled for that same period, which aimed to encourage further recognition of the Palestinian state. More broadly, the twelve-day war can be situated within a longer-term strategy to constrain Iran's development. As Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi has argued, the strikes targeted not only military facilities but also key elements of Iran's economic, industrial, and scientific infrastructure[12]. The war contributed to rising oil prices and an accelerated decline in the value of the rial, further deepening the economic crisis that had already fuelled the protests of December–January 2026, which the regime brutally suppressed.

[12] Eskandar Sadeghi-Broujerdi, "Israël et les États-Unis mènent une guerre contre le développement de l'Iran", Contretemps, published on April 22, 2026.

Chapter 2

Traces

The 1988 Massacres

by Tom Novak

The mass execution of political prisoners carried out in Iran during the summer of 1988 remains one of the most violent episodes in the history of the Islamic Republic. Over the course of a few weeks, thousands of detainees were executed following summary proceedings. Among them was Chowra Makaremi's mother, a member of the MEK (*Mojahedin-e Khalq*, or People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran). For years, the Iranian regime sought to obscure the scale of the massacre. Yet through the testimonies of survivors and victims' families, the events were gradually documented, leading many observers to characterize them as a crime against humanity. Faced with official silence, relatives became central actors in the work of remembrance and political resistance. Chowra Makaremi's scholarship is deeply concerned with these politics of memory and with the role they play in shaping the structures of political power in Iran. She argues that the consolidation of the Islamic Republic occurred on two interconnected fronts: externally, through the Iran–Iraq War (1980–1988), and internally, through the repression of political opponents[13]. The 1988 massacre must therefore be situated within a broader political history — one in which terror functioned as a constitutive mechanism in the production of state power.

At the end of July 1988, Iran's Supreme Leader issued a fatwa declaring that "those in prisons who persist in maintaining their hypocritical position are considered to be at war against God and will be condemned to death." A few days earlier, on July 20, the MEK the regime's principal opposition force, had launched a military offensive from Iraq into Iranian territory. The authorities subsequently invoked this attack to justify the repression that followed. Yet testimony from survivors suggests that the decision to carry out the executions had been made well before July 1988[14]. Moreover, the scope of the killings extended far beyond members of the MEK, targeting

[13] Sorg, H. (Chowra Makaremi), (2008). "Le massacre des prisonniers politiques de 1988 en Iran : une mobilisation forclose ?" Raisons politiques, 30(2), 59-87.
[14] Mohajer, N. *Voices of a Massacre : Untold Stories of Life and Death in Iran, 1988*, Oneworld, 2020, ch. 1.

political prisoners from a wide range of ideological backgrounds. On July 27, prison authorities placed detention centers under lockdown and suspended family visits “until further notice.” The following day, in conditions of complete secrecy, the mass execution of thousands of detainees began.

The execution process relied on prisoners appearing before special commissions composed of representatives of the regime. These “death commissions” were tasked with assessing detainees’ political loyalties through brief interrogations and determining their fate. “Do you still believe in the Mojahedin? Would you agree to publicly denounce the organization to which you belong in front of other prisoners[15]?” Those who refused to renounce their political commitments were typically sentenced to execution. In each prison ward, lists of names were drawn up, and few of those taken away ever returned. The executions first targeted members of the Mojahedin, beginning with women and then men, before extending to prisoners affiliated with other opposition groups, including the Tudeh Party, Peykar, the Fedayin, and Kurdish political organizations.Within the prisons themselves, information circulated only in fragments. It was not until family visits resumed, at the beginning of the winter, that prisoners began to grasp the scale of the massacre that had unfolded[16].

Outside, families gathered at prison gates, hoping for some sign of their imprisoned relatives. For months, they received no information. Then, in November 1988, many were summoned by prison authorities and handed a brief notice confirming the death of their loved one. They were forbidden from holding funeral rites[17]. Working alongside members of the Iranian diaspora, families campaigned for investigations by the United Nations. Yet the exact number of victims remains unknown. Estimates vary widely, ranging from several thousand to as many as ten thousand people killed.

The regime’s authoritarian control over mourning extended the violence of the executions far beyond the moment of death and deep into the lives of surviving relatives. Bodies were not returned to families, burial sites were kept secret, and the discovery of mass graves led many to conclude that prisoners had been buried anonymously and collectively. Families who sought to uncover the truth or pursue justice were frequently met with harassment and intimidation. In the face of these efforts at erasure, remembrance itself became a form of political resistance.

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[15] *Ibid.*
[16] Ervand Abrahamian, *Tortured Confessions. Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1999.
[17] K. Shahrooz, "With Revolutionary Rage and Rancor...", art. cited, p. 240-241.

Survivors and relatives worked to document the massacre and transmit its history, transforming individual testimonies into collective archives capable of withstanding the regime's violence. Among themselves, families shared moments of gathering and fellowship, which played an essential role in the circulation of information and in helping them grasp the full scale of the massacre. Those sentenced to death — most of whom were executed for "hypocrisy" or "apostasy" — were buried outside Muslim cemeteries, notably at the Baha'i cemetery in Khavaran, southeast of Tehran. Since 1988, ceremonies have been held there modeled after the *bozorgdasht* ritual (the annual visit to the cemetery), and the cemetery has been transformed into a field of flowers in memory of the victims.

Almost forty years later, the Iranian regime continues to deny any responsibility for the 1988 massacre. This refusal was particularly evident in 2016, when an audio recording of a meeting involving members of one of the death commissions was leaked to the public. The recording was met with official celebrations of the purge as a necessary victory over a "handful of terrorists." Many of those who participated in the death commissions have since occupied, or continue to occupy, prominent positions within the Iranian state. Mostafa Pour-Mohammadi, for example, who served as Minister of Justice under President Hassan Rouhani, was reportedly a member of one of these commissions. The individual criminal liability of government officials continues to stand in the way of any acknowledgment of the crimes committed in 1988.

The People's Mojahedin

by Tom Novak

The People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran, or Mujahedin-e Khalq (MEK), has been one of the most significant and structured revolutionary opposition movements in contemporary Iranian history. Fatemeh and Fataneh Zarei, Chowra Makaremi's mother and aunt, were both militants within the organization. Founded in 1965 in a context of political repression under the Shah, the MEK emerged within a revolutionary milieu that combined political Islam, Marxist categories, and anti-imperialist nationalism. Its ideological and strategic evolution, however, particularly during the Iran-Iraq War, gradually led to its marginalization within Iran. Marked by armed struggle, massacres, and accusations of sectarian tendencies, the history of the MEK reflects both the courage of resistance and the violence of repression, as well as the errors and contradictions of a revolutionary organization.

The emergence of the MEK must be understood within the broader climate of opposition to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's regime during the 1960s, a period marked by the repression of political opponents and the influence of revolutionary internationalist movements [1]. The uprisings of June 1963, which followed the arrest of Ayatollah Khomeini, constituted a decisive turning point. Faced with state violence, former militants of the Movement for the Liberation of Iran (MLI) came to view armed struggle as a necessity: "The question is no longer whether to take up arms, but how and when." The organization subsequently went underground and developed a military strategy inspired by the Algerian, Vietnamese, and Palestinian guerrilla movements.

On an ideological plane, the MEK proposed a synthesis between Shiite Islam and the Marxist legacy, drawing inspiration from the works of Ali Shariati. It rejected atheist materialism while advocating a classless society and a critique of Western imperialism. Shiite Islam was presented as a religion of the poor and the oppressed, entrusted with a mission to liberate them from domination. This political project proved attractive to educated youth, particularly those from the urban middle classes, and the ranks of the MEK rapidly expanded. However, the regime's repression severely weakened the organization. The SAVAK infiltrated its networks and executed a large number of its members during the 1970s.

The MEK played an active role in the 1979 Iranian Revolution and initially welcomed Khomeini's return. However, a fundamental disagreement soon emerged between the organization and the clerical leadership: the MEK rejected the principle of *velayat-e faqih* (rule by the religious jurist)

and instead advocated a social and pluralistic vision of political Islam. The organization criticized the concentration of power in the hands of the clergy and organized mass demonstrations to resist what it saw as the "hijacking" of the revolution. It was one of the few political parties to field candidates nationwide in the 1981 parliamentary elections; Chowra Makaremi's mother, Fatemeh Zarei, ran for office in Shiraz. The repression that followed was severe. Fatemeh was arrested during a demonstration, imprisoned, and tortured for years. The MEK was declared illegal, and a fatwa issued by Khomeini described it as "hypocritical" and an enemy of the regime. Its leaders, including Massoud Rajavi, went into exile and founded the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI) as a political alternative to the Islamic Republic. In the 1980s, Rajavi launched an "ideological revolution" within the organization. It was presented as a doctrinal overhaul; it sought to establish absolute loyalty to Rajavi and redefine political commitment as total and exclusive. The dissolution of family ties, the prohibition of independent emotional relationships, and the implementation of intrusive self-criticism practices serve to align individual subjectivities with the movement's agenda.

In 1986, at a time of geopolitical realignment, the MEK established itself in Camp Ashraf in Iraq with the backing of Saddam Hussein, then the principal enemy of Iran (1980–1988). It created the National Liberation Army of Iran and took part in military operations against the Iranian regime. This decision marked a watershed moment, widely perceived as a betrayal by a large part of the Iranian population, and led the organization to lose much of its national legitimacy. In 1988, the MEK's armed wing attempted an incursion into Iranian territory with the aim of triggering a popular uprising and overthrowing the regime. The operation failed, resulting in 1,300 deaths. Shortly afterwards, the Iranian authorities carried out a purge of political prisoners and activists in Iranian prisons (see entry), an event that deeply marked the organization.

Following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003, Camp Ashraf was bombed by the U.S. military. An agreement was subsequently reached. MEK members were disarmed and placed under U.S. protection. The organization gradually abandoned armed struggle and turned toward international lobbying activities. In 2002, it had already publicly revealed the existence of secret nuclear facilities in Iran, prompting the International Atomic Energy Agency to open an investigation. The Iraqi government, now aligned with Tehran, subsequently expelled the MEK from its remaining bases.

Starting in 2013, the organization established itself in Albania. The approximately 3,000 militants of Camp Ashraf 3 are organized within a highly hierarchical structure, centered on the

charismatic figure of Maryam Rajavi. A number of testimonies have pointed to the movement's sectarian drift. The cult of personality surrounding the Rajavi couple, the strict control over members' private lives, and coercive practices have all raised concern.

As part of its lobbying strategy, the MEK has sought to secure political support in the United States, a declared enemy of the Islamic Republic. This alignment has led it to build ties with (neo-)conservative figures such as John Bolton and Newt Gingrich. The organization's recent rallies often have an almost surreal quality: in a hall resembling a television studio, activists are arranged in military formation while Maryam Rajavi delivers impassioned speeches on freedom and emancipation, followed by appearances from figures such as Rudy Giuliani, Donald Trump's lawyer. Several investigations have also suggested that the MEK may have been used as an operational conduit by Mossad to exert pressure on Iran. These controversies are themselves exploited by the Iranian regime to discredit the opposition group. In any case, the revolutionary vanguard of the 1960s bears little resemblance to the organization today.

Seeing Like a Child: Inheriting the Korean War

by Clara Beccaro

What does a child see that adults no longer can? And what happens when the child is looking not only at the world around her, but at a war that ended before she was born? These are the questions that animate Clara Han's *Seeing Like a Child: Inheriting the Korean War* (2021). In a personal and formally experimental work, Han, a professor of anthropology at Johns Hopkins University, weaves together narratives of childhood memory, intergenerational loss, and the fragile processes of kin-making and kin-unmaking in order to account for the lives of her father and mother, both of whom fled North Korea during the Korean War. At the center of the book is an experiment in seeing. Han asks what might become visible when we take seriously the perspective of the child as someone learning to make sense of a world whose meanings remain uncertain. Throughout the book, she moves between the voice of the child she once was and that of the anthropologist she later became. Her childhood memories are interspersed with brief reflections on kinship, language, trauma, and care. The result is neither an autobiography nor a conventional ethnography. It is, instead, an exploration of what it means to inherit a history one never lived through.

Seeing Like a Child unfolds in several movements. It begins in Los Alamos, New Mexico, where Han's parents settled after emigrating to the United States. There, in a town forever associated with the atomic bomb, Han grows up within a family shaped by another twentieth-century catastrophe. At the age of eleven, her mother's debilitating stroke abruptly transforms the household, altering the relationships between parents, children, and siblings. Around this event orbit countless smaller scenes: family gatherings, moments of confusion, routines of caregiving, stories told by her father about a homeland he left behind. What makes these recollections compelling is Han's refusal to explain them from the secure vantage point of adulthood. The child remains present throughout. She notices, for example, details without fully understanding them. She senses tensions she cannot yet name. And, the course of history appears not as a grand narrative but as an atmosphere, something embedded in the gestures, silences, and everyday routines of the familial space. As Han suggests, seeing like a child means attending to the process of learning itself: learning kinship, learning affliction, learning what death and loss might mean before one has the language to fully grasp them.

The question of inheritance takes a different form in the book's second half, where language moves to the foreground. Han reflects on not being taught Korean as a child, a consequence of

her father's determination that his children assimilate into American life. For him, the language carried the weight of betrayal and exile. Yet years later, Han returns to Korea and immerses herself in intensive language study. As she reconnects with relatives and becomes pregnant with her daughter Ella, language becomes less a matter of recovery than of possibility. Through Ella, another future comes into view. Unlike her mother, Ella begins learning Korean from an early age. Watching her daughter inhabit a language that could have been closed to her, Han reflects on what can and cannot be transmitted across generations.

In the final section of the book, Han returns to her father and to the familial authority that shaped much of her childhood. Stories about siblings, obligations, and unspoken rules reveal how kinship structures everyday life long after children become adults. As his health declines and he eventually comes to live with Han, the book turns increasingly toward questions of caregiving, aging, and mortality. Once again, Ella's presence offers a different perspective. Through her attempts to understand her grandfather's illness, Han glimpses how children often encounter life's most difficult realities with a clarity that adults struggle to sustain. What emerges from *Seeing Like a Child* is more than a family history or an account of inherited trauma. It is a meditation on how history endures within intimate life and an invitation to rethink how both memory and anthropology itself are understood. Wars do not end when treaties are signed or borders are drawn. They persist in speech and silence, in family obligations, in the languages people lose and recover, and in the stories that can only be told indirectly. Sometimes, Han suggests, it takes a child to notice what remains.

Chapter 4

Möbius Strip

The Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)

by Tom Novak

The war between Iraq and Iran was one of the longest and deadliest conflicts of the twentieth century. Over the course of eight years (1980–1988), the First Gulf War claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and left a profound trauma on the populations of both countries. In Iran, however, the conflict also provided the newly established regime, founded in 1979, with an opportunity to consolidate its power. Khomeini immediately seized upon what he called an "imposed war" and transformed it into a "sacred war," using it to strengthen authoritarian control over society.

When Saddam Hussein launched his invasion of Iranian territory in the autumn of 1980, he was convinced that he would secure a rapid victory over his rival. At the time, the Iranian Revolution had raised fears of revolutionary contagion among Iraq's predominantly Shiite population. Only a few months after the upheavals of 1979, Iran's military forces were more fragile than ever. The hostage crisis involving Americans[18] had further isolated the Islamic Republic within the international community. The Gulf monarchies and Western powers, equally concerned by the spread of revolutionary Islam, offered Saddam military and financial support. The Iraqi dictator, however, greatly underestimated the patriotic reaction of the Iranian population. Faced with a foreign invasion, many Iranians rallied around the newly established Islamic Republic in a reflex of national unity.

The conflict began on September 22, 1980, driven in large part by Iraq's desire to seize control of the Shatt al-Arab waterway and the oil-rich areas surrounding it. Faced with the massive Iraqi offensive in the province of Khuzestan, Iranian resistance gradually organized itself, notably

[18] The hostage crisis began in November 1979, when Iranian students seized the U.S. Embassy in Tehran and held 52 American diplomats captive for 444 days. The occupation was carried out in protest against the support that the United States had provided to the deposed Shah.

through large-scale popular mobilization. The Iranian army, poorly equipped, relied heavily on the Revolutionary Guards and their volunteers, the Basij. Often very young, sometimes only twelve or thirteen years old, and poorly trained, these volunteers were sent to the front lines in "human wave" assaults, a tactic that proved extremely deadly. Beginning in 1981, Iran succeeded in pushing back Iraqi troops and recapturing occupied territories, including the city of Khorramshahr in 1982. This series of victories marked a major turning point in the conflict and inflicted a significant military and political setback on Iraq. Less than two years after the war had begun, a favorable outcome for Iran appeared within reach: Iraq requested a ceasefire, and the Gulf monarchies offered financial compensation for Iran's losses. The war seemed on the verge of ending.

Emboldened by his successes, Khomeini refused all negotiations and decided to pursue the war on Iraqi territory as a means of punishing the Ba'athist regime. Iran consequently launched operations against Basra in an attempt to isolate its Persian Gulf neighbour and prevent it from exporting oil. Iranian troops, despite their determination, were confronted with Iraq's modern weaponry, much of it supplied by France. The conflict gradually expanded into the Persian Gulf, where attacks on oil infrastructure and commercial shipping weakened Iran's exports. What followed became known as the "Tanker War," a phase of the conflict marked by escalating attacks on vessels. As ships were targeted and set ablaze, international concern grew. Several countries deployed naval forces to secure maritime navigation in the Gulf. Kuwait, in particular, requested American protection for its vessels.

In the north, Iraqi Kurds seized the opportunity to challenge the Ba'athist regime and, in 1983, launched an organized insurgency that would continue until the end of the war. Iran supplied weapons to the Kurdish guerrillas in the hope of weakening Iraqi forces. It was in this context that Saddam Hussein decided to resort to chemical weapons, first against the Iranian army and later directly against Kurdish towns and villages accused of collaborating with the enemy.

Beginning in 1985, Iraq launched the "War of the Cities," using its air force to strike deep into Iranian territory. A conflict that had previously been concentrated along the border now reached central Iran, destroying thousands of homes. In 1987, the United Nations called for a ceasefire. Yet the conflict continued to escalate. After Iran attacked a Kuwaiti vessel sailing under U.S. protection, the United States retaliated by bombing Iranian oil platforms. The war seemed endless. Fighting intensified further in 1988, culminating in Operation Anfal in Iraqi Kurdistan and the bombardment of the city of Halabja. By this stage, the conflict had taken on some of the

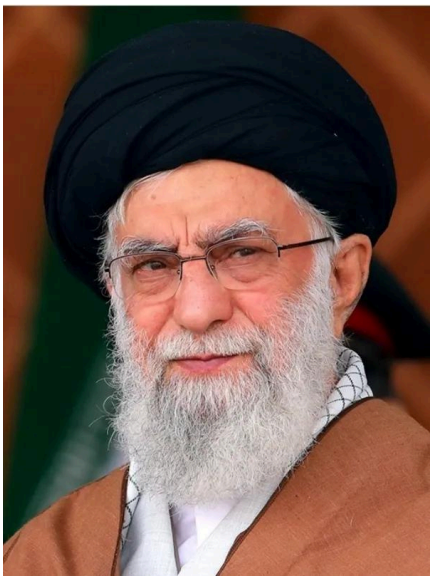
characteristics of the First World War, marked by heavy artillery, chemical weapons, and massive casualties.

The Americans intervened after one of their vessels was struck by an Iranian mine. The operation disabled part of the Iranian fleet and marked one of the largest military engagements involving the U.S. Navy since 1945. Weakened, Iran was forced to abandon its positions in Iraq. On July 3, 1988, an Iranian Airbus was shot down over the Strait of Hormuz by an American missile. This tragedy, combined with the pragmatic influence of Hashemi Rafsanjani within the Iranian regime, accelerated Khomeini's acceptance of a ceasefire on August 20, 1988. After the ceasefire came into effect, the People's Mujahideen (see entry) attempted to invade Iran from their base in Iraq. However, Operation Eternal Light failed, resulting in 1,300 deaths.

These eight years of war, which quickly evolved into a struggle for supremacy, ended in a form of stalemate. Half a million deaths plunged Iranian society into mourning. Economically, the country was weakened by the destruction of its infrastructure and mounting debt. Politically, however, the conflict significantly strengthened the regime. It accelerated political mobilization and the Islamization of society while marginalizing the left before its definitive elimination in 1988 (see entry). The war also provided the regime with an opportunity to construct a new narrative of martyrdom. Presented as a struggle against oppression, it transformed fallen soldiers into heroes of Islam and the nation; ceremonies held in memory of the martyrs served as instruments of social control.

The conflict also highlighted the opportunistic realignments that accompanied the thawing of Cold War divisions. Iraq's suppliers included, side by side, the United States, the USSR, France, China, and the Gulf monarchies. On the American side, the Iran-Contra scandal revealed the secret arrangement between the administration of Ronald Reagan and the Khomeini regime. Washington clandestinely sold arms to Iran in order to secure the release of American hostages held by Hezbollah in Lebanon, while diverting part of the proceeds to finance the Contras in Nicaragua despite a congressional ban.

Finally, the war underscored the international isolation of the Iranian state, reinforcing the perception of a nation under siege. Neither Western governments nor Middle Eastern states condemned the Iraqi invasion of 1980 or Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against civilian populations. This sense of isolation was one of the factors that led Khamenei, Khomeini's successor, to revive Iran's nuclear program during the 1990s.



Portrait of Ali Khamenei

by Tom Novak

After thirty-seven years of absolute power, Ali Khamenei's face has become inextricably linked to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Born in 1939 in the holy city of Mashhad, Ali Khamenei grew up in a modest family of clerics who claimed descent from the Prophet Muhammad. Wearing the black turban traditionally associated with the Prophet's descendants, he appeared destined for a religious career. During his theological studies, however, Khamenei was increasingly drawn to literature and politics[19]. It was in the literary salons of Mashhad that he encountered intellectuals at the crossroads of Shi'ism and Marxism. In 1957, the young man became acquainted with Ruhollah Khomeini and embraced the ayatollah's revolutionary ideology. A committed opponent of the Shah's regime throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Khamenei was arrested six times and eventually banished from Tehran.

When the 1979 Revolution broke out, his friend Hashemi Rafsanjani helped bring him into the nascent regime. Initially appointed to the Revolutionary Council, Khamenei was later named by Khomeini as Tehran's Friday prayer leader — a prestigious position — and subsequently became deputy minister of defense. On June 27, 1981, while preparing to deliver a sermon at the Abuzar Mosque in Tehran, he survived an assassination attempt that left his right arm permanently impaired. Shortly after recovering from his injuries, he was elected President of the Republic, a position he held until 1989 after winning reelection. It was during this period, as Iran was embroiled in war with Iraq, that Khamenei forged close ties with the Pasdaran, the military and ideological force established in 1979 to safeguard the Islamic Republic.

When Ayatollah Khomeini died in 1989, Ali Khamenei was not the obvious choice to succeed him. His elevation to the position of Supreme Leader was made possible by the sidelining of Ayatollah Montazeri, the designated heir apparent, and by the support of Rafsanjani within the Assembly of Experts. Yet Khamenei had never attained the rank of Grand Ayatollah or "source of emulation", forcing the regime to amend the Constitution in order to make his appointment possible.

[19] Soulayma Mardam Bey, « Ali Khamenei, la chute de l'architecte », *L'Orient le jour,* published on June 15, 2025.

Khamenei compensated for this lack of religious legitimacy by forging an unprecedented alliance with the Revolutionary Guards. The new Supreme Leader secured for them a privileged position based on a parallel economy sustained by patronage and political favors. Over time, the Pasdaran transformed themselves into a vast economic conglomerate operating largely beyond the reach of elected institutions, to the point that they are now estimated to control a substantial share of the national economy[20]. In return, the Guards became one of the regime's principal instruments for suppressing opposition movements. Khamenei also strengthened his ties with the Revolutionary Foundations, whose vast financial resources have enabled him to pursue his political objectives. By 2013, the Supreme Leader was reported to preside over an economic empire valued at approximately $95 billion[21]. He has likewise consolidated his authority over the judiciary, which has come increasingly under clerical control.

As for the Republic's elected officials, Khamenei has been quick to remind each of his presidents of their duty to obey while holding them accountable for unpopular decisions. In practice, decision-making power has increasingly gravitated into Khamenei's shadow. Beginning in 1989, the Office of the Supreme Leader became the regime's central institution. Comprising more than 5,000 people, it functions as a veritable parallel government, operating largely as a black box. Under Khamenei's leadership, the Office has mediated decisions among the regime's various centers of power (economic, military, judicial, and religious) while ensuring the system's overall "stability."

Upon coming to power in 1989, Ali Khamenei was deeply affected by the collapse of the Soviet Union. So profound was this influence that he came to view any form of political opening as a potential path to regime collapse. In his eyes, economic and political liberalization constituted an existential threat. Khamenei's rule has therefore been marked by the systematic and often violent repression of opposition movements, including the 1999 student uprising, the 2009 Green Movement, the *Women, Life, Freedom* movement, and the protests of December–January 2026. The Supreme Leader has consistently viewed politics through a stark distinction between loyalists and enemies of the regime; any expression of internal dissent is consequently interpreted as a conspiracy that must be crushed.

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[20] « La mainmise des Gardiens de la révolution sur l'économie iranienne », France 24, broadcasted on October 2, 2024.
[21] Steve Stecklow, Babak Dehghanpisheh and Yeganeh Torbati, "Khamenei controls massive financial empire built on property seizures", Reuters, November 11, 2013.

Khamenei's worldview has also been deeply shaped by anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism. In his view, the Islamic Republic is engaged in a historic confrontation with the United States and its allies. It is within this framework that he sought to build the "Axis of Resistance," a network of regional alliances linking Iran to Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and Palestine. This axis relies on a constellation of state and non-state actors, including organizations such as Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis, enabling Iran to project its influence throughout the region. For many years, this strategy significantly strengthened Iran's position in the Middle East. More recent developments, however, notably the war with Israel and the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime, have considerably weakened the axis. Moreover, Khamenei's proclaimed support for Palestine has often been more visible in his rhetoric against Israel than in tangible gains for the Palestinian people.

Ultimately, Ali Khamenei was killed in Israeli-American airstrikes on February 28, 2026. The death of the regime's principal architect has placed the Islamic Republic under severe strain and raised fundamental questions about its ability to survive the political, economic, and geopolitical pressures it faces from both within and beyond its borders[22].

[22] Firouzeh Nahavandi, « Ali Khamenei, architecte d'un régime militaro-religieux », *Les clés du Moyen-Orient,* published on March 8, 2026.

Chapter 5

Bonds

Counter-Pedagogy of Cruelty (Rita Sago)

by Thomas Gmür

The "pedagogy of cruelty" and the resistance it engenders — the "counter-pedagogy of cruelty" — are among the concepts coined by Rita Segato, an Argentine anthropologist living in Brazil. Segato relies on this conceptual toolkit to describe the affective mechanisms through which a regime of cruelty not only emerges but is also resisted under colonial patriarchy. In an interview with Veronica Gago in May 2015, Segato explained that, by framing cruelty in terms of a "pedagogy," she was able to show how the subordination and objectification of populations, particularly women, acquired their reproductive capacity and effectiveness only through a long process of desensitization. This desensitization, enabled jointly by state institutions and the mass media, becomes possible through the progressive habituation of the society of the spectacle to the omnipresence of cruelty in the logics of security, administration, and the market. In other words, patriarchal violence becomes banal, along with a range of predatory and humiliating practices. Although it implicates society as a whole, the pedagogy of cruelty is deeply gendered. It operates through the transmission of authoritarian norms of masculinity and submissive forms of femininity.

This slow process of learning depends both on exposure to spectacular forms of violence — through femicides, deportations, or mass disappearances — and on more insidious forms of violence, such as domestic abuse, social isolation, and everyday sexism and racism. Through the quotidian repetition of these social phenomena, asymmetries of power, worth, visibility, and freedom are gradually naturalized on a large scale. They impose expectations and encourage behaviors that sustain these unequal and murderous structures, notably by choking off avenues toward empathy. "Example and horror on one side; habit and denial on the other: this is the pedagogical method," summarizes Chowra Makaremi, who also describes this process as one of "active indifference": a denial that reproduces cruelty and that she notably illustrates through the

Western world's relationship to homeless people. This understanding of the mechanisms of cruelty emerges from a form of theorization "from below," developed over the course of Segato's anthropological work on sexual violence in Latin America, particularly in Brasília in the 1990s and later in Ciudad Juárez in northern Mexico. Across these various fields of inquiry, Segato has also shown how the pedagogy of cruelty serves to legitimize exploitation and suffering as necessary paths toward modernity in the Global South.

To resist this technology of consent, Segato therefore proposes cultivating a counter-pedagogy. Makaremi describes it as a triple, collective task of "unlearning by telling, bonding, or feeling." It begins by recentering the histories of marginalized concerns, whose visibility and circulation can open new horizons within predatory and exploitative structures. Struggling against destructive atomization also requires reweaving the social bonds systematically broken by cruelty, particularly those linking women, the poor, those excluded from citizenship, and other populations on the front lines of this violence. Finally, faced with the law of the strongest, Segato insists on the necessity of developing collective forms of protection, care, attention, and organization that do not seek to replace state institutions but rather to build solidarities that exceed the framework of the law and its institutions. Rethinking such forms of coexistence requires another kind of sensibility—one that theories of care have been inviting us to cultivate for decades.

Ni Una Menos

by Thomas Gmür

In March 2015, 19-year-old Daiana García was found dead on the side of a road, her remains inside a garbage bag. A few weeks later, 14-year-old Chiara Paez, pregnant at the time, was beaten to death by her boyfriend and his mother. Among nearly 300 annual femicides, as a woman or trans person is killed every 30 hours in Argentina, these murders prompted the collective *Ni Una Menos* [*Not One Women Less,* or *Not one more murder of women*] to begin mobilizing in the spring of 2015. Denouncing violence against women, exposing the institutions that legitimize and reproduce it, demanding justice for the victims, their name borrows a slogan popularized in the 1990s by Mexican poet and human rights activist Susana Chávez — who would tragically also become a victim of femicide — : "Ni una mujer menos, ni una muerta más" (Not one woman less, not another dead woman). Their condemnations quickly expanded to include all forms of gender-based violence and discrimination, and a further catchphrase emerged: "Vivas Nos Queremos" [*We want ourselves alive.*]

On June 3rd 2015, 200,000 demonstrators joined a social media call to assemble in Buenos Aires, soon followed by many more around the country, before the movement also gained widespread traction throughout Latin America and around the world. These first demonstrations were initiated by a group of women journalists and activists related to the Clarín group, one of the most important Argentine press conglomerates, in the run-up to the 2015 presidential faceoff, in which incumbent Cristina Kirchner would be defeated by the conservative candidate Mauricio Macri. Albeit also including major public figures, *Ni Una Menos* has been a fundamentally grassroots movement, growing and often organizing "from below," in schools, universities and workplaces, whilst managing to politicize new segments of the Argentine population.

On October 19, 2016, *Ni Una Menos* called for the first feminist mass strike in Argentina. Their demonstrations have since been decisive in the national and transnational effort for the acknowledgement of gender-based violence and discrimination. Their public pressure has enabled some important judicial transformations, and reports to the National Women's Council multiplied soon after the first mobilizations. The protests gave center stage to the families of femicide victims to expose their grievances and partake in the nationwide wave of solidarity. Striking reenactments of these murders formed on the streets, such as women dressed in garbage bags to recall the bodies of the victims found in public landfills. The movement has also been instrumental in ramping up support for reproductive rights, and more generally it

constitutes a driving force of the Argentine left resistance, as reflected in their slogan being sometimes completed and resignified by adding *"sin trabajo",* to demand as well that *no more woman be without work*.

Woman! Life! Freedom!

by Clara Beccaro

Woman! Life! Freedom!: Feminist Resistance in Iran opens with a scene familiar to those who live far from their homeland and find themselves compelled to witness political upheaval through a screen. Chowra Makaremi describes herself following the protests that swept Iran in 2022 with unwavering attention. She watches images circulating across social media, online group chats, and news outlets, whose reports reach her in fragments. "I am riveted to events through screens: without relinquishing this paradoxical distance, I want to give the eruption of this spontaneous revolt a depth of field that makes it possible to identify its multiple origins, while also grasping the irreversible shift it represents, whatever its future may be," she writes in the book's prologue.[23] The book emerges from this tension between proximity and distance; from a desire to follow events as closely as possible as they unfold, while also giving them the historical depth necessary to understand their significance.

In September 2022, Iranian women took to the streets under the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom," which Chowra Makaremi adopts as the title of her book. The movement gave rise to an unprecedented wave of anti-government protests across the country. At its center was the death of Jina Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who died in the custody of the morality police after being arrested for allegedly violating Iran's mandatory veiling laws. Published in 2023, Makaremi's book departs from a conventional chapter structure in favor of a chronological form that closely follows the unfolding of the uprising itself. It is composed of roughly forty dated chronicles spanning the period from September 15, 2022, to February 11, 2023. Each entry is anchored in a specific moment and serves simultaneously as a testimony to the everyday life of the revolt and as a point of departure for a broader exploration of Iran's political history and anthropological realities.

The first entry, titled "September 15, 2022," opens in a hospital in Tehran. Through the eyes of journalist Niloofar Hamedi, we encounter a young woman lying unconscious in a hospital bed. "She is in a coma; the doctors do not have much hope," writes Makaremi.[24] The young woman is Jina Mahsa Amini. She dies the following day. Makaremi situates this scene within a much longer history of state violence, both ordinary and lethal. She traces its intensification under the presidency of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, from 2005 to 2013, arguing that it served to "prolong the

[23] C. Makaremi, *Femme ! Vie ! Liberté ! Échos d'un soulèvement révolutionnaire en Iran,* La Découverte, 2023,"La révolution est plus proche de vous que la jugulaire de votre cou», our translation.
[24] Ibid, "September 15, 2022".

survival of an authoritarian regime increasingly strained by social inequalities and spectacles of injustice."[25] From the opening pages, Amini's death emerges not as an isolated tragedy but as the symptom of a broader political order whose contradictions would ultimately fuel the uprising that followed. The subsequent chronicles trace how Amini's funeral became a catalyst for collective mobilization. Makaremi describes both her family's determined resistance to state pressure and the rapid organization of Iranian women who rallied around her memory.

The funeral culminated in a demonstration outside the governor's office. There, women removed their veils and chanted the Kurdish slogan "Jin, Jiyan, Azadî" — "Woman, Life, Freedom." "Unprecedented," writes Makaremi.[26] What had begun as an isolated incident was transformed into a political event. The death of a young woman ceased to be a private tragedy and became the point around which a broader movement of contestation crystallized, capable of turning dispersed grievances into collective revolt.

Across the forty-six chronicles that make up the book, Chowra Makaremi reconstructs this historic uprising while situating it within a dense web of political and social genealogies. She shows, for instance, what social contract is disrupted when women burn their veils or when anti-regime slogans appear on public walls. The point, she insists, is not to reduce the veil to a universal symbol of women's oppression in Muslim societies — a reading deeply embedded in Western imaginaries. "In Iran, refusing to wear the hijab means rejecting a much broader and more all-encompassing form of gender segregation, as well as male control over public space, of which the hijab is the most visible manifestation."[27] Nevertheless, she emphasizes, the uprising led by the slogan "Woman, Life, Freedom" cannot be understood as merely a women's movement. "It is very clearly a movement that involves all segments of the population: men and women from small and large cities, from wealthy neighborhoods and poor suburbs. "[28] One of the book's strengths lies precisely in showing how a demand born of women's specific experiences came to serve as the political language of a much broader protest movement, capable of uniting social, generational, and ethnic groups with sometimes very different backgrounds. This is illustrated by the entry dated September 30, 2022, devoted to what would later become known as "Bloody Friday" in Zahedan. On that day, 93 worshippers were killed as they left a Sunni mosque in the province of Sistan and Baluchistan. Makaremi shows how the Baluch, a marginalized population, then joined the ongoing uprising. "It took the Baluch's solidarity with the national revolt for the

[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid, «September 16, 2022"
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

extent of their subordination to become visible to the rest of the country."[29] Their mobilization was fueled in particular by the outrage sparked by the rape of a Sunni teenage girl by a police officer. The book thus highlights how distinct experiences of domination, whether based on gender, ethnicity, religion, or territory, converged within a single protest movement, making "Woman, Life, Freedom" much more than just a feminist slogan.

In the following essays, Chowra Makaremi continues her ethnographic and political analysis of the events shaking Iran — both within the country and among the diaspora — up to February 11, 2023. She focuses in particular on how young people developed a political consciousness of opposition to the dictatorship through social media, on rumors of poisonings in girls' schools beginning in the fall of 2022, and on the hanging of 23-year-old Mohsen Shekari on December 8, 2022, just a few weeks after his arrest during a protest. Some of these chronicles span several pages, while others consist of only a few lines. All, however, contribute to the same endeavor: documenting the many forms of resistance to the established order and the ways in which a popular will for change asserts itself, day after day. In their brevity as well as their breadth, they reveal the contrasting rhythms of an uprising composed of both spectacular moments and ordinary acts of resistance.

[29] Ibid, "September 30, 2022"

Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo

by Thomas Gmür

Leading a major human rights movement for truth and justice, the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo were a group of Argentine women striking for their so-called "disappeared" children and grandchildren under the Argentine military dictatorship of Jorge Rafael Videla in the 1970s and '80s. The Mothers (*Madres de Plaza de Mayo*) were mostly housewives with little to no previous political experience. They simply met while searching for their relatives in the waiting rooms of the Interior Ministry before heading to the streets beginning in April 1977. They convened around the Plaza de Mayo, the center of state authority in Argentina, facing the Casa Rosada presidential palace, as well as government offices, major banks, and the Metropolitan Cathedral. The movement would then reassemble every Thursday, expanding their critique to the military dictatorship and economic repression. Meanwhile, the Grandmothers (*Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo*) assembled as a human rights organization, joining forces to find the babies kidnapped by the regime and put up for illegal adoption. They also demonstrated on the eponymous square, initiated the creation of the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team, and worked with scientists such as Clyde Snow (see entry in Eyal Weizman's interview Dossier) to identify 133 grandchildren and counting.

Along with Amnesty International, the Argentine National Commission on the Disappeared (CONADEP), as well as journalists and scholars, the Mothers and Grandmothers confronted governmental stonewalling by relentlessly exposing the disappearances. They also reinvigorated social critique and challenged gendered assumptions about political mobilization in the country. Abroad, they inspired similar struggles, such as the "Mad Women of the Place Vendôme" in Paris – North African women who protested against a wave of racist crimes in 1984.

In 1979, against mounting popular pressure from the Mothers and Grandmothers, and after having denied all disappearances, the junta passed two laws that defined the disappeared as dead and attempted to close the issue by granting economic reparations to the families. The Mothers and Grandmothers maintained their opposition to this presumption of death and to the associated regime of posthumous reparations. In 1984, the white shawls that the *Madres* typically wore, initially embroidered with the names of their own disappeared children and the dates of disappearance, were adorned with a new slogan, *"Aparición con vida"* [Bring them back alive!]

The Mothers' Movement

by Thomas Gmür

In the wake of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo (see our interview with Veronica Gago), the Argentine women who gathered in the eponymous square in the late 1970s to denounce state indifference and responsibility for the disappearance of their children, a number of political movements, often led by mothers, have emerged in different contexts around the world. Their aim has been to address specific collective injustices and to develop new forms of mobilization in the pursuit of truth and justice. In Iran, the Khavaran Mothers likewise transformed personal grief into a living political demand. Through a patient, tenacious, and attentive form of resistance, they reshaped traditional modes of opposition to authoritarian rule. A decade after their Latin American counterparts, these activists were forced to confront not only the massacre of their children but also the silence and erasure that followed it. Some even dug through mass graves with their bare hands in search of their children's remains, buried without ceremony in a desolate area along a road southeast of Tehran. This massacre was the result of the summary executions ordered in 1988 by Ruhollah Khomeini against thousands of political prisoners, including members of religious minorities, students, left-wing activists, and supporters of the People's Mojahedin Organization of Iran.

Beyond the individual and private task of identifying their loved ones, this movement acquired a profoundly political dimension by publicly exposing the scale of the state's crimes. Following their initial mobilizations, the Khavaran Mothers began to gather regularly at this site of memory, particularly on Fridays, in defiance of official prohibitions on erecting gravestones or holding commemorative ceremonies. Over time, the movement took on a transgenerational character and inspired a number of similar initiatives in Iran, including the Mothers of Laleh Park in 2009, the Mourning Mothers in 2019, and later groups such as Mothers for Peace and Mothers Seeking Justice. This continuity of activism contributed, beginning in 2007, to the establishment of a people's tribunal in The Hague — the "Iran Tribunal" — which ultimately concluded that "the Islamic Republic of Iran bears full responsibility for the flagrant human rights violations committed against its citizens."Although the tribunal's ruling was informal and non-binding, it nonetheless played an important role in legitimizing the political struggle of the Khavaran Mothers on the international stage.

"The Saturday Mothers" (*Cumartesi Anneleri*) are another example of this exemplary practice of counter-memory in response to political violence. Since 1995, they have gathered in Istanbul to

bring into public space, week after week, the painful memory of their disappeared children, imprisoned or killed by the Turkish state during the 1980s. Every Saturday, their political act takes the form of a half-hour sit-in — silent, yet deeply eloquent. The portraits they hold aloft of their loved ones, victims of forced disappearances and political assassinations, are enough to expose the insidious brutality of the state. What began with only a few dozen participants has steadily grown over the years. Today, the Saturday Mothers mobilize several thousand people despite repeated repression, arrests, and the regular dispersal of their gatherings by police forces.

The Turkish sit-in found a powerful echo in 2019 in Shaheen Bagh, a suburb of Delhi. There, Muslim women occupied public roads to protest a citizenship law that effectively excluded members of their religious community from access to naturalization — an undeniable violation of the spirit of the Indian Constitution. This displacement of protest from traditional public squares to major transit routes was a way of making their struggle visible. The first gatherings followed one another day and night and lasted for several months, foreshadowing tactics later associated with the French Yellow Vests movement. Moreover, the democratic demands condensed in the slogan "Save the Constitution" succeeded in linking the initially local and largely maternal solidarity movement of these mostly elderly Muslim women to a broader civic cause. It connected them not only to the first opponents of the law — the students of Jamia Millia Islamia University, who were tear-gassed and beaten by the police — but also to a wider network of democratic activism. The decisive role played by the grandmothers, the *dadis*, was further amplified by younger activists who circulated their actions on social media. Women from other religions, castes, and social classes soon joined the movement. In this way, the traditional distinction between the *ghar* (the home) and the *bahir* (the public sphere) was largely dissolved. Practices of care and attachment were brought into the streets, while domestic concerns themselves became politicized.

Across all these contexts, those whom Chowra Makaremi calls the "conductors of a counter-investigation" intertwine reparative acts with archival work. The regimes challenged by these subversive practices of mourning are compelled to justify their past actions, sometimes to ask forgiveness, or at the very least to renegotiate the terms of future public order. From Argentina and Iran to Turkey and India — and more recently to Mexico, Bosnia, and Syria — these modern-day Antigones have consistently coupled the demand for burial and remembrance with a meticulous mapping of state violence. Their goal is not only to preserve memory but also to facilitate understanding and contribute to the dismantling of oppressive structures. The public

expression of maternal grief is therefore more than the transformation of vulnerability into courage: it exposes the fractures of power itself and opens new political horizons.