

Preface

The stories here are stories of courage and endurance they are stories of hope and astonishing resilience. The women who speak in this book were ordinary people who became extraordinary as they encountered and responded to extreme situations.

The stories presented here are true, collected from real persons and presented with a minimum of editing. They have not been artificially enhanced to make anyone look better or worse, more or less ethical, or any different from how our Participants chose to present themselves. These oral narratives of women from the People's Mojahedin of Iran, or their female supporters, were solicited via in person interviews over 2009 to 2013, during events held in Paris or Auvers-sur-Oise, France. The interviews involved a collective process: a list of questions was presented by me, the Narrator, to each participant; an editor, Jennifer Shaw, took notes during the interviews for all except one (M. Saremi, whose testimony was recorded from memory of the first, less formal interview), and she later polished the English, but left the turns of phrase, unique usages of non-native speakers, and outbursts (where occurring) as they occurred, to preserve the flavor of the stories told. Ms. Nasrin Saifi, an Iranian ex-patriot now living in the United States, served as the translator for most of the interviews. She was aided by Ms. Sarnaz Chitsaz, of the Women's Committee of the National Council of Resistance in Iran, and ??, a supporter of the feminist movement for regime change in Iran.

The experience of hearing these stories of imprisonment, abuse, genocide, and resistance was a disturbing one for all involved. Often, all of us paused to weep, and tiny gasps and other sounds served as an accompaniment to some of the episodes related. A spirit of collective sisterhood emerged from these narratives, giving comfort to narrator, editor, translator and informant alike. One translator expressed her deep gratitude for the work undertaken here, noting that while the sisters of the PMOI (Peoples' Mojahedin of Iran) held in a prison camp (Camp "Liberty") in Iraq, and their underground supporters in Iran were still in danger, there was no time for them to leave their struggles in order to do the work of sharing what these women as a group had been through. In such circumstances, they felt that have a known supporter and academic author take up that task was a great blessing for their cause.

In fact, it was a privilege to sit with these women and become faithful keepers of their words; we left feeling that we were the ones who had been blessed.

In order to make these women's experiences in a feminist Muslim resistance movement more accessible and understandable to audiences in the West, we include here also a chapter or two on the history of the movement of the Mojahedin-e-Khalq (the Iranian designation for the PMOI), and the theological insights of its leader, Maryam Rajavi. The history lesson on the group's political and armed struggles and how it earned them the unwarranted label of 'terrorist'

was composed by Col. Wesley Martin (ret.) of the U.S. Army (with some editing by the present writer). We served for some years as the Head Coordinator of the Counter-Terrorism Theatre in Iraq and Afghanistan during and just after those ill-fated wars, and came to know "the Ladies" well during his posting in Iraq, when he was in constant contact with the leaders and members of the PMOI in their self-built Ashraf City, in the Diyala Province of Iraq, about 60 miles north of Baghdad. General Dave Phillips, US Army, served as the head of Security at Ashraf, and was there when members were interviewed by the "Alphabet Agencies" who found not a terrorist among them. Other generals who served at Ashraf came to know these women and men well, and after the transfer of sovereignty from the Coalition Forces to the government in Baghdad in 2009, together they have served as whistleblowers against the unrelenting campaign of slander and disinformation about the PMOI oozing out of Tehran and its fanatical, fundamentalist Islamic regime. They have lost stars and standing by their willingness to unveil the truth of this long-standing Resistance Movement; they have been vilified by State Department officials, and, ultimately, required defense in court for the unfair charges leveled against them. US, European and Muslim political leaders ranging from conservative to liberals have added their voices to the choir of military men calling for the protection of these dissidents from Iran and its puppet government in Baghdad. Despite the machinations of the Iranian and Iraqi governments, it is worth noting that despite the US State Department's collusion with its Tehran-backed allies in the Iraqi government, the women and men of the Resistance continued to be viewed as faithful and fruitful allies and sources of intelligence in the struggle for a pro-democratic Iran, one which is free of nuclear arms and which no longer sponsors terrorism throughout the region. In fact, the provision of intelligence to the United Nations Atomic Weapons watchdog groups and the West about Iran's secret nuclear installations is one of the very reasons why Tehran is determined to exterminate this group, with the willing aid of the Shi'ite fundamentalists who populate the new 'free' post-war Iraq.

The simple truth is that, in the absence of any evidence of terrorist activity on the part of the PMOI/MeK after extensive investigation by the CIA, NSA, and US Armed Forces, the women and men of Ashraf City were declared to be Protected Persons under the Fourth Geneva Convention by both the United States and the United Nations. They voluntarily disarmed and were granted civilian refugee status within Iraq, and given the promise of protection by the US Army and the United Nations once all governmental functions were transferred to Iraq in 2009. This promise carried with it the provision of medical care, humanitarian services, resettlement to third-party nations, and forbade any extradition (refoulement) to Iran where the members of the Resistance would certainly be tortured and executed. As the so-called "moderate" President of Iran, Rohani, came to power and publically declared his intention of playing a game of delay by pretending to negotiate with the West (thereby giving Iran the time to complete its ambition to become a nuclear power), the intelligence provided by the PMOI network inside Iran became a target of the Mullahs' elimination of all dissent. Rohani had been a henchman of the earlier "moderate" President Khatami, both noted for their ruthless executions of political prisoners of conscience within Iran's jails before conceding to Western demands on the Human Rights fronts before mutually beneficial negotiations and trade deals might take place. Like the firebrand

President Ahmadinejad's assertion at Columbia University that Iran had no gay or lesbians—precisely because of Iran's program of hangings and executions of such persons!; Rohani, like Khatemi before him, presses on with the policy of doing away with all political opposition so that when the West mentions Human Rights violations, there ~~there~~ are no survivors left to testify to these facts. The Mourning Mothers network inside Iran, women with nothing left to lose after the imprisonment and execution of their sons and daughters by the Mullahs, keeps careful watch over unscheduled and unannounced executions within Iran's notorious prisons. Working with the PMOI inside Iran, they have been able to send information to the United Nations, documenting that it is mostly the prisoners who are PMOI ^{in Iran} who are currently being executed in droves. Why are those particular prisoners considered so dangerous to the existing government? They are the survivors of Khatemi and Rohani's earlier Human Rights violations inside the prisons of the regime, and they are keeping watch and counting up ^{the} numbers during their long imprisonments. Information is smuggled out to the mothers of the dead, and from there it makes its way to the outside world.

It's hard to masquerade as a reformer when the world has hard evidence to the contrary. It's hard to pretend you are not working to weaponize plutonium when your countryfolk send the location of your secret installations to the outside world. In both cases, it is the PMOI that unmasks the internal crimes against humanity that are the everyday norm within Iran.

~~It~~ It is no wonder that the real terrorists want them dead. Add to this the sophisticated and astute female leadership of the movement, and the Mullahs' ideology of constitutionally justified female inferiority collapses. In the face of a fierce, intelligent, and courageous female opposition that inspires men born into sexism to reject it wholesale, the men ^{and the} have transformed themselves into new beings who are quite capable of embracing female leadership. Tehran has no answer ~~to~~ ~~this~~ other than its usual one: death, and more death.

The voices here amply illustrate why Tehran is afraid. The women who tell their stories of midnight courage, and daytime torture, of longing and loving, of imprisoned baby girls who are fed by an entire cell block sharing their rations, and mothers emboldened by the depth of their loss, are all here testifying to what makes Tehran tremble:

Women are strong.

Women are powerful.

Women endure.

A Survivor People: The Power of Personal Narrative

Why are we telling the stories of such human disregard for basic decency of human life? Why do we ask you to read the narratives of survivors in a distant land with a history that is not much known by regular citizens in the West? Why should you read on?

The stories here participate in the Human Rights tradition of personal testimony gathered from survivors as evidence for crimes against humanity, which hopefully will one day be brought to judgment in international courts that make such matters their focus. Such stories are spawned by what trauma psychologists refer to as 'extreme situations'.

Extreme situations are classified as circumstances and events where normal rules do not apply. Hence, people are not always able to respond in ^{the} traditional ways that they have learned, because in a very real way they have been taken by surprise by a world whose rules they do not understand. People who survive extreme situations often find themselves with not only physical wounds from their ordeal, but also emotional and intellectual wounds that are not as visible to others. These latter states roughly correspond to the form of combat injury we now know as posttraumatic stress disorder. The situation for dissidents as well as ordinary people in Iran is such that daily events ? - - - - -

Posttraumatic stress disorder is something with which those who provide support services for veterans are very familiar. Usually thought of as a 'disease' afflicting mainly males in and after combat experiences, the collective PTSD of women prisoners has seldom merited the same attention or study. We find that people who have been broken by war, political or domestic abuse that is ongoing, as well as victims of normal violence have difficulty moving on to productive life even though they may have survived the primary event of extreme abuse. The women and men of the MeK are remarkable, as you will see in their stories, for the way they sought a different explanation of their suffering – one that empowered them to move beyond their brokenness into torchbearers for human rights and a civil society defined by decency and compassion. We ask you to persevere in reading their stories so that their courage, commitment, and example may be added to the resources of human resilience that all persons everywhere need to incorporate into their own ways of being.

Trauma psychologists tell us that three things are necessary to make the move from surviving to thriving. First, the circumstances in which the abuse is taking place and the abuse itself must end. No person, no matter how resilient, committed or thoughtful, can be expected to progress through the stages of healing as long as they are still at hourly and daily risk of more torture in human treatment or despair. It is a sad truth that the entire country of Iran and not just the MeK and ^{as} expatriates around the world, are daily continuing to experience the terror and threat that is Iran's only way of retaining power for the theocratic elites who run the country. Whether it is a person inside Iran struggling to make ends meet under an inept regime, a member of the dissident group currently at risk in Iraq, or an expatriate living in the West, everyone has daily evidence before them – hangings, public harassment for the slightest infractions of medieval law

codes, and outright acts of violence against people and families, are arriving every day. In such circumstances, those who have thrown in their lot with the feminist resistance are actually existing in a healthier mode of being: they know that their enemies are real and determined to wipe them out; they know that they are trapped between political forces at the international level; and they understand that their struggle is ongoing. Yet, they are not helpless; they act, even when those actions do not seem to bear fruit or represent only a minute fraction of what needs to be done to reestablish a humane and wholesome government in their country. They have moved from helplessness to dedication, from nursing their wounds to planning for a future whose end they may never see. There is a lesson here about the role of a collective vision in sustaining individual resistance and hope.

Second, in order to move into healthy survivorship, the survivor must find a way to reconnect with a community of support, and that community is essential in validating the reality of their suffering. In particular, *public* acknowledgement of the situation of abuse must take place as part of the goal of ending such profoundly damaging experiences. The solidarity of the community, often public, often private, is sometimes taken in the form of empathetic listening to what the survivor has experienced. It is important that the survivor's view of the world is accepted as a real and genuine coping response in the middle of events which are extreme, and require strengths in a person which they were never taught to develop; hence, the community becomes a living resource, a kind of encyclopedia of human capacities for resilience, and the survivor, "validated by a public," can move on, assured that at least a few people understand why they may think or act as they do.

Third, survivors move into the realm of thriving when they have been validated to the point where they can again trust their responses to evil. It is a curious fact that most survivors of torture, war, and other forms of physical/emotional trauma only truly reclaim their lives when they dedicate some portion of their selves to the prevention of the same kinds of dreadful treatment they themselves have experienced.

The MeK has provided a crucible in which survivors of political terror, sexual and other forms of torture, and long imprisonment under appalling conditions have been able to get on with not just their own lives but ^{with} envisioning and building a new and healed life for their whole country. The work of the MeK in attempting to empower Iranian society to make better choices and necessary changes has brought together all of the necessary ingredients that survivors need to change their world and the world of their descendants. First, the MeK by setting up bases and working groups in Iraq and around the world have made the breakthrough from helpless imprisonment to empowered resistance, even while some of them remain imprisoned in Iran or Iraq. They have taken a step that moves them closer to a new world, which they dream and yearn for and for which they are already engaged in daily work to achieve. While the abuse has not yet fully stopped, nevertheless the MeK have become the candle whose faint but steady light illuminates the dark and dangerous path ahead.

The MeK has also met the second requirement for promoting survivorship: they have unmasked the dirty secrets of Iranian prisons, illegal nuclear installations, and a worldwide campaign of disinformation. They have provided ongoing support for refugees from Iran, networked with other groups under attack from Iranian proxies like Hezbollah, Hamas, and Assad's Syrian army, and smuggled information and important military intelligence out of Iran to the West. Their many speeches and events repeatedly highlight and lift up the courageous example of those who have been the Mullahs' victims. They celebrate worldwide the incredible bravery of ordinary people who have responded to non-ordinary events in astonishing ways. So many who have started out as suspicious of the MeK have become ardent friends and supporters precisely because of the decades-long persistence in bringing the state of the Iranian people to the attention of the world, even as the Mullahs brand them as terrorists and attempt to keep the veil of the Revolution as a cloak for what is going on inside their borders.

Finally, the people of the MeK have taken up as their task the goal of preventing the continuation of a fanatical, and brutal regime. They maintain a thorough and vibrant network within Iran as the people inside that country struggle to use what means are available to them to bring about political change. If the MeK succeed in their quest to turn Iran into a vibrant, diverse, economically-grounded, and member-in-good-standing of the world community, they will have eliminated the conditions which perpetuate torture. They will have removed a state sponsor of religious terrorism as a key actor in the travails of the region of the Mideast. If they succeed, they will have embodied a progressive Islam that adheres to the teachings of the Prophet, but interprets them in ways that enhance human dignity. Simply by enduring, the MeK has been able to show their countryfolk that they are not helpless, that the Mullahs' terror can be opposed, and that individual lives and choices matter. *(including those belonging to women)*

We invite you to read these stories as part of a journey of social recovery. The West, and in particular Britain and the United States, has a long history of interference in the politics of the Mideast. These have not always been good histories, and in fact have set the stage for Khomeini's murderous theft of the Revolution of 1979. The West is now faced with another turning point in its relations to Iran: will we continue with war and economic bargaining, or will we insist on basic human dignity as a baseline for all members of the human community? As we ponder our own loss of power to order the world as we please in the United States, it is interesting that Iran in the form of the MeK offers us back knowledge we will find useful in our own revitalization of our national self-image. We must stop the abuses that torture our own people or the globe; we must stand in solidarity with survivors of the tragic wars that have taken place in this new century, and we must stop engaging in fruitless behaviors that have already failed numerous times. Finally, the MeK has shown us how to prevent becoming a torturous state by their faithfulness to a vision of a compassionate secular Islamic state where women, religious minorities, and even political dissidents may all count on equal treatment under just laws.

how does it come about that some stories seem to repeat a similar pattern over and over again? This is one of the great question that has often plagued first students of folklore, then observers of dense creations of fiction like the novel, all the way to the archivist seeking to make sense out of oral narratives. How do we account for similar pattern of behavior, characterization, dysfunction or strange events is somehow repeated generation after generation?

Students of such issues have long noticed that in the arena of Greek and Roman mythology, it was also discovered that one person God's had done as another's ancestors. In other words it was, it was actually it presumes that contact between two cultures, the first trade and exploration, then via economic and cultural ties like marriage, allowed the transmission of basically one story which then took many forms as it moved among its daughter societies, not uncommon for travelers to discover earlier versions of what they thought of as the stories of their knots but told to them now by persons who claims actual blood ties with the great heroes and ancestors of the distant past. This form of of understanding inherited knowledge told though the medium of story is called migration

love story is allied

"cultural migration ". Cultural migration person that ties between two societies or culture, first exploration trade, to be followed later five formal economic ties, often regularized thru marriage, which allows various cultures to document for social Laur of another culture eventually causing it to become mythology rather than family history through such contacts stories more or change into different versions, with locally main characters, and local motifs, yet somehow much remains the same. This view of how stories share common similarities does not tell us about how the first story presumably the one from which all other versions derived, came to be told in the way it was in the first place why was how did come to be told play the very first time? For example how did it happen that human babies were left the band something to calm become partial groups that had rejected them while one can be leave certainly that this happened not once, but many times, given the way we see children this property in our own modern times, we do not know by studying the change of particular motifs, what we had and that this substance of stories to begin with

, it is, then, no small thing to declare oneself a teller of tales, and take up a cycle of stories as one's own. In some cases, telling stories of the past seems like a prophetic form of active resurrection of those long dead: by mouth to mouth retelling of What Happened, the dead live once more, often, and repeatedly. In other cases, the telling of invented stories—"fiction" or "mythology" as some moderns might characterize the genres—becomes a tour de force of unique imagination that can shape a culture: "...these are the stories of the Starship Enterprise..." or "Long, long ago in a galaxy far, far away...". Would

we have 'smart phones' or 3D printers, MRIs and "Cat" scans without those futuristic stories that helped 20th century culture imagine its own future as something very different from its past? Would the young have learned to speak of what was once known as 'spirit' as 'The Force', or would the old have dreamed of medicine that could reverse so much of the burden of age? Probably not; for without the legacy of stories, reimagined and passed on in media which, while different from the oral tales of the past, nevertheless retained the shape and power of the stories and poems of earlier ages, we would remain 'stuck' in the actual, and ignorant of the possible.

And so the heritage and the necessity of storytelling, narrating, composing, performing, and in our age, researching, writing and publishing, goes on without pause. Yes, it may currently be the fashion to shape one's abrupt punctuations of life's stories into 128 characters, or a fleeting image in time snapped on a phone camera, able to fly around the atmosphere like Puck girdling the Earth at Oberon's command. But it is not until such snippets are joined together, "threaded" in juxtaposition of replies or like contributions, that an actual narrative, a story, emerges. And such forms of telling are not to everyone's taste, nor is their ability to outlast the moment yet apparent. Still, elder generations must remain open to the possibilities of Twittered Tales and Snapchatted Sagas, for just as some communities took laments from the biblical Psalms and made of them the expressive Blues, stories and poems, like Murder, will out. The Telltale hearts of humanity are always composing, and tastes, tempos, and methods can, may and will change. As we will see below, some stories of oppressed peoples are now found in their most shocking truth on Facebook, or flitting, like a wraith, from proxy server to proxy server, as Power seeks to suppress a people's need to tell the truth of their lives to the world.

With trepidation, then, this teller of tales speaks to you now of stories which have not yet had their endings written, punctuated by poems in celebration or agonizing reflection on the grieving that happens along the way. [A scholar of the ancient past of the what we now call the "MidEast" and monotheistic "Scriptures", I am used to stories and poems whose endings have broken off the edge of the clay tablet, or torn away from the outside of the papyrus roll. PostModern critics say such moments in a scholar's life invite the insertion of oneself into the 'gap', that the loss of endings only embodies the way that the propaganda of any text, any story, eventually betrays itself as partial, an inevitable betrayal of the very claims of truth that often impelled the story to be told. Perhaps that is true, and not so bad a way to view the lost ending of Middle Kingdom Egypt's Tale of the Eloquent Peasant, but when the stories one tells are of martyrs who *did* live, who *did* give their lives for a belief, or who might yet live, if only the world knew their story and cared—in such cases, PostModern theory must address itself to the Ether of MetaTheory, for it has no place on the ground where stories are written in cruelty, sacrifice and blood.]

So, I invite you, Gentle and Determined Reader, to read on, even though I cannot promise you endings as of yet. The story told here is of the determined resistance movement led by women, for the sake of women and girls, and currently being enacted in the refugee and prison camps of Iraq, in the prisons of Iran, in the dogged work of Human Rights activists in the great capitals and courts of the "civilized" world. This is the story of a particular group of the feminists of Iran, the Mojahed of the Mujahedin-e-Kalq.¹ The story begins in the Universities and the coffee-shops of Tehran, Shiraz, and Tabriz under the wretched colonial rule of Shah Pahlevi, and written in blood during and after the "Islamic Revolution" of the brutal Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979. This story is taking place now in the notorious Evin Prison, Iran's own Bastille, and in the crimes against humanity being committed in the name of the United States and the sovereign nation of post-war Iraq. The characters are living, breathing women and the men who follow their leadership, and they weave through a maze of obstacles placed before them by an oil-hungry and blind postcolonial West, and the devious and bankrupt fundamentalist state still dominating the long suffering people of Iran. The Dead, martyrs of the Resistance movement, live among these stories also, for the story began with them, and they have entrusted its ending to the next generation of those who hunger and thirst after righteousness for their people. And, yes, the Teller of these Tales has also taken on a life in these stories also. This recorder of heartbreaking oral histories of these women and their Beloved Dead began as an activist observer volunteering for a Non-Governmental Organization which considers the problems of women and religion from the standpoint of United Nations promulgations. But just as stories rarely end where they began, neither has the activist: the Observer has become Narrator, a committed family member, hoping with stories to atone in some small part for the shame of her own government and the unknowing people to whom it lies.

For these are stories that matter: life and death are in the power of the Tongue, the biblical Book of Proverbs tells us, and here that power is shamelessly and shape-fully deployed. I make no secret of it: I believe that if you hear (read) the stories of these women, that you will come, as I have, to care what happens to them and the people for whom they sacrifice themselves. As a religious scholar, I think of them as the "Daughters of Allah"—though that moniker is totally unIslamic, and not one they themselves would care to own—because of their similarities to the female Christian martyrs of the early Church, girls and women who believed, and in that belief in the possibility of salvation for all, became courageous members of One Family whose Father was God. Thecla, Felicity, Perpetua, and the rest: they went to the arena and died in droves for their belief in salvation, and the Church hailed them—and their brothers martyrs—as the Daughters and Sons of God. Today, we are living in a new era of Martyrdom, as Islam worldwide struggles

¹ Also known in the West as the PMOI: The People's Mojahedin of Iran; the NCR-I (National Council of Resistance in Iran) is the political arm of this group; and some of the PMOI are members of the NLA, the National Liberation Army.

to reclaim its soul from violence, terror and bigotry. In this conflict, the Feminist Resistance in Iran and Iraq represents a ray of hope, a radical alternative, a worthy cause about which one should care passionately.

And perhaps together, that caring can write a new end to the familiar story of horror, sacrifice, and hope.