The Living Ashraf: For Justice

Men in masks
Murder innocents,
Then sweep away
The evidence
In hasty mass graves
Dug in secret.
Their guilt is betrayed,
For they are afraid
That tribunal reports
Will unveil this.
What they did in the night,
God will bring into light,
And raise a cry for justice.

The ghosts of Ashraf
Haunt the streets.
They do not sleep;
Even in death,
Martyrs do not retreat:
They are looking for justice.

The Living Ashraf
In every land
Reach out to the dead
A loving hand,
And hold each memory
In grieving hearts.
Ashraf's sacrifice
Becomes a part
Of everything
That's done or said
For Justice.

Across the years
And seas of tears,
The martyrs of Ashraf
Comfort the Living
With witness to the things they sought—
As Living Ashraf seeks them still
With no retreat or diminished will,
On the path that leads to Justice.

Carole R. Fontana
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A Teller Speaks of Tales

The stories that are told here are true stories they have not been filled in by imagination were shaped by design or to give a false picture of what happens to women in a long and especially to women of the feminist resistance known as the People's Mojahedin of Iran.
Why do we tell such awful story. What is to be learned from reading this book. Why would anyone want to read about such awful things?

Well these stories are not simply here to introduce western readers two concepts of torture that routinely take place throughout the Mideast when women are subjected to misogynist interpretation of Islam.

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. Extreme situations are classified by psychologists of traumatic psychological distress as circumstances where normal rules do not apply hence people are not always able to respond in the very best turn because in a very real way they have been taken by surprise the horror that they feel can sometimes cause a paralysis a disassociation or a general collapse this is very true of soldiers in wartime as well as women victims of domestic abuse or sexual violence.

The girls and women who are responding and told those stories to me an assistance and translator are persons who found away and extraordinary way not to be held captive by what had taken place but rather to move forward and propose a response that would have the effect of making these women into freedom fighters who took their own experience seriously enough that they gave their lives and their fortunes to the attempt to keep this from happening two girls and women in the future in a world where when the term Muslim is used we have been taught to think of terrorist of man in suicide jackets or bearded imams to proclaim the Morosi Pearry wordy of Islam and the deathknell of Western civilization seldom do we find that women are spoken except as some sort of damsel in distress whose main purpose in life is to justify rest during intervention to save such poor helpless creatures from what else might happen if Islam is left to its own devices.

Stories and poems....
These are the verbal legacies of humanity. Before history was written, or the great statues of kings were carved, there were stories and poems, told inside family tents, or

recited around the camp fires of clans of related families ringing an oasis. Such creations represented individual works of imagination, but served a social purpose as well. Stories and poems rehearsed what had been, shaping narratives into well-known images with which the hearers could automatically connect, as well as carving out wholly new ways of telling what needed to be said, remembered and repeated. Stories and poems served as primarily tools for forming the identity of each new generation, reminding the hearers of where they had come from, and gesturing toward where their journeys might go.

Before there was Scripture, or philosophical treatises, or scientific manuscripts, there were stories and poems, passed from mouth to mouth, from grandparents to children, from teacher to apprentice, from tribes to states. In the matrix of this vast human "technology" of remembering and understanding, the teller of the oral tales was viewed not as a simple entertainer—though that was certainly an aspect of the art of telling tales—but as a gifted source of wisdom of the past, made accessible to the present, on behalf of the future. The status of storyteller or poet has found its way into 'folkspeech', habits of repetition which instruct and delight. As a Zen saying has it,

"If you meet a soldier on the road, show him your sword;
If you meet a Zen master on the road, show them your poem."[1]

In some cultures, storytelling was nurtured in its members by forms of apprenticeship where future narrators learned the secrets of oral composition. Guilds of practitioners taught those who would follow, whether drawn from their own kin group, or chosen in some other fashion from the general populace. Such old-style instruction might include the use of an accompanying musical instrument, deployment of traditional figures of speech, a stock of metaphors, a pattern of verbal rhythms, or narrative action, all of which together allowed the crafting of tales in ways that immediately informed their audiences of the solemn yet playful event about to take place.

Elsewhere, stories might be left to an exceptional individual who displayed, almost from childhood, the ability to memorize and create stories out of the events around them. Either way, the Narrator's Voice was a hallowed entity able to take on a life of its own, and a worthy occupation to which one could aspire. No person was barred from the art—slave or dream interpreter, king or prophet, woman or man, blind aged grandparent or astonishing child—all who showed aptitude could participate. "The proof of the pudding is in the eating", a wise woman might say of such advancement by display of excellence. The ability to tell a story and make it into a salvific event is enshrined in the tale of Sharzade, the Persian storyteller who used her craft and wit to tell such stories that her Sultan husband-for-a-night could not bring himself to silence

1. The original reads "...show him your poem". I have made the pronoun inclusive in recognition of the reality of female tellers of tales, and wise women, past and present.

her voice, as he had vowed, when morning came: the power of her stories was such that until they came to an end, there could be no question of the narrator's end!

With this kind of ancient heritage, 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.[2] 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

2. 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.

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 shapefully 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 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.