

Shiva Tabari March 2020

## **The Long madness of February: the Parliamentary Election and the Corona Panic**

“What is rational is real;  
And what is real is rational.”

**Hegel**, preface to *Philosophy of Right*

“Marx is making a pun out of the fact that *Verkehrtheit* [inversion] is often identified with *Verrucktheit* [madness]. An inverted world is indeed a *mad world*, insofar as the subject becomes the predicate and the predicate becomes the subject.

**Peter Hudis**, *Marx's concept of alternative to capitalism*

“Something unknown is around me and it gazes pensively. What – you are still alive Zarathustra?  
Why? Wherefore? Whereby? Whither? Where? How? Is it not *madness* to continue living?”

**Friedrich Nietzsche**, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*

### **An Open Letter to those who found out we are living in a mad world**

I am writing this report in a situation in which most Iranians are panicked and self-quarantined. Persian New Year is on the way, but no one is thinking about the new year anniversary. This is an open letter to my fellow humans around the world who are panicked and struggle hard to live and fight with COVID-19. It is an open letter to those who found out that we are living in a mad world which hasn't yet found the power to transform its way of living in a way that would not destroy its own planet anymore. An open letter to those whose life has been destroyed by multinational wars, dictatorships and powerful fascists of our world. It an open letter from Iran. People in many countries think that we are terrorists, enemies of freedom, uneducated or maybe bunch of angry protestors who have no understanding of democracy. Recently, people in different regions may also see us as zombies who spread viruses in the world! This is the appearance of our country right now. Or in a medical language these are symptoms of our reality. **This is an**

**open letter to all of you that witnessed this appearance, these symptoms of *our mad world* and are curious about the *rationality* within it.**

I am writing it in a situation in which most radical political circles have been repressed, many of our friends are under arrest. We are encountering a new wave of hunting student activism right now. First of all, forgive me for my sad voice. However, being sad about the situation is not synonymous with being hopeless. Sadness for Iranians and many Middle Eastern people is just a **preface** to our consequent anger and fight. Tradition of singing *Noha* and *Marsiya* in Islamic and Persian culture is not just a lament about a dead person or tragic situation. It is about fully grasping our pain and understanding who inflicted this pain upon us. It is about preparing ourselves for another attack and another wave of protest. So, don't mistake the upcoming lines as a 'requiem'. They are not for creating a feeling of *grief*. They are treatments for *indifference* and becoming an *activist*.

Look at our world! The evening has arrived. Forgive me, but evening has arrived and its evil shadow is upon our lives. People in the *north* are panicked. People in *south* are dying. We are on the verge of another **world war** (look at the complex situation in Syria right now), millions of people are escaping the hell that northern countries have created for them in Syria, Iraq, Iran, and many sub-Saharan poor African countries.

Look at our world! Look how flowers of life in different regions of the world (Rojava revolution, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Ecuador, Hong Kong and other uprisings) are withering under freezing wind of evening.

Look how jungles are burning, animals are dying, and heavy storms are destroying people's houses, not only in the South but also in the North, too. look at the seemingly powerful England. Even a developed country, like England is suffering so much from these events.

Oh, it can't be real! No! It was a nightmare...

It is a big relief, when you wake up after a vicious, horrifying nightmare. It is a big relief, when you wake up and escape from a mad world in which every element is against you and wants to attack you, to torment you or destroy you. Suppose that in that mad world

of your nightmare, you are desperately yelling for help, trying to run from nasty creatures that are attacking you, but you find yourself unable to yell, or run. I am sure you have had this experience. And what a relief when you wake up from that mad nightmare!

Wake up from your sweet dreams! We are in that mad nightmare! And there is no way to escape it! Vicious forces are controlling/destroying our world and we are desperately yelling for help.

Wake up! And ask yourself a serious question: do you want to *live* in this madness? Or do you prefer to die?

Of course, those of you who love the life wholeheartedly, those of you who feel pain when you see oppression, inequality and contradiction, those of you who feel ashamed of ignoring other's pain *do* want to live! You are in love with life.

But don't mistake *living* with reproducing yourself! **Repeating yourself in a mad nightmare is a suicidal activity.** Living in a mad world is *overcoming* the mad world. Once you begin to understand 'overcoming', you will find out that you have to overcome yourself!

Overcome your indifference! Kill your indifference before your indifference kills you! "*I hate the indifferent. I believe living means taking sides. They who truly live cannot help but to be citizens and partisans. Indifference is apathy, parasitism, perversion, not life. That's why I hate the indifferent*".

Overcome your indifference about madness of the *inverted* world. Look! We are not controlling our destiny. A **mad project** is forcing us to make war on each other, oppressing people and inflicting misery upon others.

Look! This madness is real. And this real has its own *rationality*. Understand it and make it a *transitional* situation by your revolutionary activity. This is life, my friend.

## **Origins of the COVID-19 outbreak in Iran**

Now let me change my voice and talk about the long nightmare of February in another way:

Should we consider epidemic spread of the corona virus in Iran (and other countries) as an accidental, contingent factor in the process of historical development? Or is it a social phenomenon *emerging from* the internal conflicts in each society? Of course, the corona virus is not a random natural disaster that could happen in any part of Earth. The rate of spread, death, psychological reaction of people and government, in any country is different due to difference in their internal dynamic. The corona virus only appears to be a biological disease, but it is essentially a social product. Just like cholera outbreak in Yemen (2016-2019) which was the result of so-called 'structural regulation' (call it process of devaluing labor power and intensification of labor) of the IMF in Yemen. When the IMF, as one of its preconditions for their funding program, forced the Yemeni government (2014) to double the price of fuel, workers and poor people of Yemen reacted in series of protests leading to a revolution. Revolution and civil disobedience was not IMF's intention with 'structural regulation', just like disobeying the American-led, IMF-backed 'structural regulation' in Iran (1963) led to the formation of germ-cells of revolutionary projects and the consequently 1979 Revolution. What was the reaction of imperialist leaders of IMF to Yemen and Iran's revolution? A multinational war in order to suppress the revolutionary force. In Yemen, we are witnessing a devastating war since 2015. Saudi Arabia and other members of their coalition are bombarding and destroying the social facilities of Yemen, including hospitals and water supplies. The result has been an outbreak of 'cholera' and 'famine' and, of course 'Shia militancy'. Surely when a country is under attack by outsiders, there is no space for progressive, democratic political projects. All of them will be suppressed and wiped out due to emergency situation. People will also trust militias more in these kinds of situation. The IMF punished Yemeni poor workers with cholera, famine and 'Houthi' dominancy, similar to their punishment of Iran's 1979 Revolution by inflicting a multinational war (1980-1988), and making an apparently emergency situation for Iranians to justify the Islamic Republic and Revolutionary Guard Corps to eliminate other political projects which were the true core of Iran's Revolution. Imagine your seemingly developed and democratic country if it were to be bombarded for almost a decade, and you are under deadliest sanctions of history where you cannot trade with almost anybody. One day, you will suddenly find out that a military general is ruling the country and people have no democratic rights in process of decision

making in society! **In brief, I want to point out two things:** 1) apparently random natural disasters, like heavy floods, sand storm, disease outbreaks, are in fact not random and natural 2) apparently internal problems of Middle Eastern countries (more generally countries of *the South*), like dictatorship, high level of corruption and cyclic aggressive mass protests, are not their internal problem but are the result of their interaction with imperialist powers.

With this preface, let's now look at the current outbreak of corona virus in Iran. Official reports state that (2/29/2020) more than 300 people have been infected and more than 30 people have been killed. Unofficial reports, which seem to be more realistic, state that more than 18,000 people have been infected and more than 200 people have been killed. Iran, after China, is the country with the highest death rate. How can we explain this historical event? In fact, this disaster emerged, on the one hand, from the 40-year history of US sanctions on Iran's economy, the deadliest sanctions in US history on any country, during Trump's presidency, and on the other hand, from the intensification of struggle between Iran's progressive class projects and Islamic Republic. In short, the outbreak of the corona virus in Iran is the result of the war of the USA with both the Islamic Republic and the Iranian people and the war of the Islamic Republic with both the USA and the Iranian people.

### **History of US sanctions on Iran**

In 4<sup>th</sup> of November, 1979 group of college students belonging to 'Muslim student followers of Imam [Khomeini]'s line', part of the 'Office of Strengthening Unity' (OSU), and a rival to the project of 'Global Confederation of Iranian Students' (GCIS), took over the US embassy in Tehran. Their action was supported by Islamic political groups. The liberal interim government of Iran resigned and a major political crisis started. Here I will not explore the internal dynamics of the struggles within Iran and how Islamic groups benefited a lot from this crisis. My intention is to shed light on the role of US reactions.

10 days later, President Carter signed the 'Executive Order 12170', declared national emergency, and blocked all the properties of the Iranian government, including the central bank of Iran. The properties included 12 billion dollars of bank deposits, gold and other properties.

10 month later, Iraq invaded Iran and America increased sanctions against Iran, prohibiting any third party to sell weapons to us.

Later on, in May 1996, the United States put more sanctions on Iran's petroleum industry. Based on 'Executive Order 12959', the US banned any trade with Iran, including goods and technology. There were harsh penalties for any third party who traded with Iran.

During the Iran's reformation led by president Khatami, the US eased some of the sanctions. However, during presidency of G. W. Bush and specially after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, things changed. Sanctions were renewed. Even American scientists who edited or published scientific manuscripts in collaboration with Iranians were threatened with prosecution! a threat that was resisted by US academic societies.

In November 2007, most of Iranian banks were unable to transfer money to or from United States banks, directly or indirectly.

In October 2012, the EU imposed the toughest sanctions that Europeans have ever ordered for any country. They banned Iranian oil exports, prohibited any trade of precious metals and petrochemicals to or from Iran, and froze all the assets of our central bank. The new sanctions put restrictions on foreign trade, financial services, energy sectors and technologies. Later on, the EU disconnected all of Iranian banks and financial institutions from its international network.

In July 2013, America announced that according to their new Executive Order, significant transactions with the rial (Iran's currency) will expose anyone to sanctions.

In August 2018, Trump warned that anyone doing business with Iran, including medical businesses, will not be able to do business with America.

The Swiss Humanitarian Trade Arrangement (SHTA) tried to open a medical trade channel to Iran, but failed to do that under pressure of Trump's administration.

Now we can ask this question: what is the relation between US economic terrorism on Iranian people and corona outbreak? I leave the answer to the reader.

### **Iran's Anniversary of the Revolution and the Parliamentary election**

The IR is trying to protect itself from both US hostilities and internal struggles. It is a tough situation. 11<sup>th</sup> of February (anniversary of 1979 revolution) and 21<sup>st</sup> of February (Parliament election) were two important dates for the IR regime to regain its strength after the events of January, especially the Ukrainian plane crash.

Iran's anniversary of the Revolution and the Chinese New Year (13<sup>th</sup> of February) are almost simultaneous. The IR also had a special plan to invite many Chinese to Iranian cultural cities and prepared special cultural programs for them. A unique project to strengthen their relation with China, a friend of the IR, revive tourism with Iran, and make the IR great again!

The outbreak of corona virus in China in January made Iranians anxious about the invitation of Chinese to Iran. Two weeks after that, all international airlines stopped their flights to and from China, Iran's Mahan airline was still active in China. The IR ignored all the concerns about these issues. Soon, in early February rumors about the corona infected people inside Iran spread in social networks. But the IR's full attention was on 11<sup>th</sup> of February and their hope for a prestigious anniversary. The government denied any case of corona infection. Although the demonstrations of 11<sup>th</sup> of February were designed to raise the prestige of IR, it turned out to be field for widely spreading the corona virus.

Between 11<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> of February, there were many unofficial reports of detection of the corona virus among Iranians. Again, the government denied all of this news and aggressively told claimed that these news reports were foreign plots to decrease participation of people in the upcoming parliament election. On 20<sup>th</sup> of February, one day before election, the death of a middle-aged man in the city of Qom (central city of clerics) by the corona virus was affirmed. No report of infected people! Only one death by corona virus. People found out that the virus had been spread broadly without the government's acceptance of the situation. The government denied all demands to postpone the election or quarantine any city. Again, their focus was totally on the election and regaining their political strength.

Finally, the outbreak of the corona virus emerged from madness of US-IR politics. Right now, most Iranians are panicked and self-quarantining themselves. There are reports of dozens of deaths daily and many more becoming infected. It is very hard to understand the different reaction of poor middle-class people and poor workers in this situation. It is also very hard to understand particular modes of collaboration among different projects in resolving this national disaster. We shall wait for more information.

What will be the next month's madness? Will I be alive to report it?! *“into your eye I gazed recently, oh life! And then into the unfathomable I seemed to sink”*.