

## The Green Screen: Neda and the Lost Voices

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The history of contemporary Iran has been characterized by the presence of recurring features, including, among others, a conflictual dialectic between the ruling elite and a variety of dissident movements, and an intensive use of the available mass media in the ideological struggle against the different regimes. This article aims to analyze the role of the new media, with particular regard to Web 2.0 social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.). Its functions in the genesis of the so-called “Green Movement” related to the contested June 2009 Iranian presidential elections, and in the creation of iconic “martyrs” of the movement itself, like Neda Agha Soltan, wordless “voice” of the protests, are examined. The article reframes these specific events in the broader context of the history of political dissent in Iran. The international impact of the June 2009 protests is also considered, with special reference to the support expressed for the Green Movement by Western journalists, artists, and intellectuals.

### The Evoking and Performative Power of Images

The year was 1980. The Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi had recently been ousted from Iran, and Ayatollah Khomeini had triumphantly returned to Tehran. While the new regime was consolidating its roots, the Polish reporter Ryszard Kapuściński was spending his last few days in the country closed in his hotel room, trying to make some sense of the 1979 Iranian revolution. As the primary sources for what would become his reportage *Shah of Shahs* (1982), he made use of old photographs, unfinished letters, handwritten notes, cassette recordings of interviews, and newspaper articles he had collected during his stay in Iran (1979–1980).

Reviewing the pictures, he paid particular attention to the visualization of power and its use by both the Pahlavis<sup>1</sup> and the Islamic Republic as a tool to establish political supremacy, focusing on the two correlated aspects of “iconism” and “iconoclasm.” On the one hand, each regime had, indeed, produced a wide series of monuments and giant murals. Essential elements of their respective propagandas, these works celebrated the political and moral primacy of the head of state, whose immanence and constant

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<sup>1</sup> The House of Pahlavi of the Iranian monarchy consisted of two monarchs: Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878–1944, king of Iran from 1925 to 1941) and his son Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (1919–1980, king of Iran from 1941 to 1979).

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presence among the masses was, and still is, physically visualized by the numerous reproductions of portraits of the ruler. On the other hand, parallel to the iconic representation of the state power, the iconoclasm had represented another instrument of political struggle constantly used by the new regime against the former one (i.e., demolition of monuments and *damnatio memoriae*<sup>2</sup>), and by the dissidents against the ruling elite, whose "icons" have been the target of satire by the different opposition movements.

The relevance of pictures in the understanding of the political history of contemporary Iran, evidenced by Kapuściński, is strictly connected to the advancement of what Walter Benjamin defined as the "technological reproducibility" of the work of art (2008). Indeed, the introduction and subsequent development of press and photography in Iran has exerted an enduring influence on the strategies of struggle employed by different Iranian dissident movements since the Qajar era (1785–1925). These advances allowed a broader circulation of new ideas and made possible the denunciation of state violence by means of visual elements (i.e., photographs and political cartoons).

This process, which has been characterized by the use of different types of media, has acquired an even greater relevance since the affirmation of the Internet as a privileged instrument of communication for Iranian dissidents. The mass protests against the reelection of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in June 2009 have been characterized, indeed, by an unprecedented production and reproduction of iconic pictures, symbols, and, more generally, visual representations of both the movement and its values, widely circulated through the Internet.

This article aims to provide an analytical overview of the iconographic materials arising from the June 2009 protests, ascribable to the so-called "Green Movement," which owes its name to the theme color of the political campaign of Mir Hossein Mousavi, the main opponent of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad during the 2009 Iranian presidential elections. The article starts with a short historical introduction focused on the use of the traditional media by the Iranian dissidents since the end of the Qajar era, and then it takes into close examination the role of new media (namely the Internet) in the spreading of the symbols of the protests, with particular regard to the creation of iconic "martyrs" of the movement (like Neda Agha Soltan). Using an imaginative metaphor, it could be said that the remarkable impact on global public opinion of the videos filmed by protesters with their mobile phones during the June 2009 demonstrations has metaphorically turned "green" the television, computer, and theatrical screens where they were displayed and watched, as the visual representation of the violence of the government's repression was particularly important in gaining international support for the Green Movement.

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<sup>2</sup> In Ancient Rome, the term *damnatio memoriae*, which literally means "condemnation of memory," referred to the practice of cancelling every trace of the existence of a public person, as if he or she had never existed, as an extreme form of dishonoring punishment. It was performed by erasing any reference to the condemned person within documents and acts, and by destroying any painted or sculpted portrait. A different kind of *damnatio memoriae* was performed by the members of the Senate who also were historians against particularly hated emperors: posthumous defamation through the attribution to them of ignominious vices and corrupted behaviors.

The formal analysis of an artwork involves the identification and description of three elements: the depicted "subject"; the way in which it is interpreted and represented, named "expression"; and the "form" in which the work is composed, considered independently from the two former features. For the purposes of the present article, the iconographic references will be analyzed through these three analytical categories.

### **A Recurring Character in the History of Iranian Political Dissent: The Press**

The history of contemporary Iran has been characterized by the constant presence of a highly conflictual dialectic between the autocratic elites that have ruled the country, one group after the other, and the opposition movements and parties that have aimed to overthrow the regimes or, in some cases, achieve their reformation (Katouzian, 2003, Behrooz, 2000 and Cronin, 2013). Despite the considerable differences in the purposes and strategies of each dissenting movement, which have depended on the peculiarities of the historical moment and the power structure of the contested regime, several common features can be discerned in the history of the Iranian dissidence since the beginning of the 20th century, features which will be significant in the elaboration of political iconography of their corresponding historical moment.

The Iranian Constitutional Revolution of 1906–1909 provides a good example of these features, as this important event contained *in nuce* a series of paradigms that recurred in the following decades (Abrahamian, 1982). For the purposes of this article, at least two notable features are evident, namely the extensive use of the mass media of the time—i.e., journals and pamphlets (though targeted to an elite of literate readers)—to spread the ideas of the dissident movements, and even more important, the involvement of the Iranian diasporic communities. Indeed, the Iranians settled abroad played a pivotal role, both in the theoretical elaboration of the ideological platform of the dissidence, and in the physical production and reproduction of the propagandistic materials, away from the state censorship of the Iranian government.

The Constitutional Revolution was widely anticipated by the flourishing of reformist journals and newspapers printed abroad that were clandestinely smuggled into Iran, like *Qanun* (London), *Habl ol-Matin* (Calcutta), *Molla Nasraddin* (Tbilisi), and *Sorraya* (Cairo), as well as *Akhtar* and *Shams* (both published in Istanbul). These publications contained a critical overview of the politics and the society of Qajar Iran (Browne, 1983, p. 18), and they contributed both to the introduction in the Iranian intellectual debate of themes connected with the values and the ideas of the constitutional movement, and to the denunciation of the ruling elite.

The columnists, who often wrote under pseudonyms to preserve their political immunity, used to speak out against the deeds of the Iranian government that they considered noxious for the country, giving particular regard to the policy of appeasement toward the meddling of the European powers (especially Russia and Great Britain), and to the monopolistic concessions that were granted to the latter.

An example of the criticism toward the policy of concessions to foreign governments is provided by a series of articles published in *Akhtar* in late 1890. These articles revealed the existence of an Anglo-

Persian agreement that granted to a British company the monopoly on the full cycle of production, export, and sale of Iranian tobacco (Keddie & Amanat, 1991, p. 195).

The revelation of the secret concession fuelled the discontent against the rule of the Shah and boosted the rise of a wide protest movement in 1891:

[It was] the first successful mass protest in modern Iran, combining 'ulamā, modernists, merchants, and townspeople in a coordinated movement against government policy. The movement's coordination throughout Iran and with the mujtahids of Iraq was facilitated by the existence and heavy use of the telegraph. (ibid., p. 196)

This event demonstrated the potential of press and communication media, namely the telegraph, to impact the political history of Iran. Moreover, the 1891 protests contributed to prepare the political climate for the outbreak of the 1906 Constitutional Revolution.

The journals printed in the diaspora, often financed by wealthy Iranian merchants settled abroad,<sup>3</sup> also served to disseminate information on Iran among the few Europeans able to read Persian, who were, in several cases, supportive of the dissident movements. For example, the English orientalist Edward Granville Browne provided backing to Iranian constitutionalists exiled in London, including Hassan Taqizadeh, Mirza Aqa Farsih, Muhammad Sader Tabataba'i, and Mo'azed al-Saltana, who were put in touch by him with liberal British journalists, with the aim of creating consent around their cause amongst the British readers. Browne, together with the liberal MP Henry Finnis Blosse Lynch, also supported the creation of an extra-parliamentary "Persia Committee." This was aimed at providing the Iranian exiles with an institutional network able to grant them privileged access to both the British political institutions and the press, and also to take care of the education of the Iranian students in Britain, considered as the prospective members of a future democratic government of their homeland.

Even when published abroad, the independent newspapers faced staunch opposition from the Iranian crown, which often exerted diplomatic pressure on the foreign embassies to ask for the shutdown of the undesired publications. Several journals were effectively forced to stop printing new issues, including the abovementioned *Akhtar* and *Kaveh* (printed in Berlin), though sometimes, the editorial offices were simply moved in another country and the publication process regularly reprised.

As remarked by Peter Avery, the period of the Constitutional Revolution was also characterized by the introduction of the "*shabnāma*, Night Letter, single-sided 'jelly-typed' sheets which were unsigned and

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<sup>3</sup> The wealthy Iranian merchant milieus in the Ottoman Empire, which demonstrated themselves sensitive to the liberal ideas coming from the West, and to the modernization process enacted by the "enlightened" sultans through the so called "Tanzimat," financially supported the reformist intellectuals who used the Valide Han of Istanbul (also known as the "Han of the Persians"), an urban caravanserai in the neighborhood of Üsküdar, as their headquarter where the journals were printed and the anti-regime actions within Iran were planned and coordinated.

distributed nocturnally, hence their name" (1991, p. 839). The publishing and distribution of underground political materials like the *shabnāma*, often printed (or, in the case of audiocassettes containing discourses of exiled opposition leaders, recorded) abroad, recurs quite often in the history of contemporary Iran.

The journals issued in this period still were distinctively textual in nature, with a few visual elements limited to lithographed portraits, caricatures, and allegorical representations of historical events, metaphorically juxtaposed with the political situation of the time. In fact, the Constitutional period was characterized by the flourishing of satirical and comic papers, like *Sur-e Esrafil* or *Molla Nasreddin*, which transposed the critical contents of the articles in a funny way that was also accessible to illiterate people (see Balaghi, 2001; Browne, 1983, p. 16), an element that was taken into consideration by many Iranian dissidents afterwards.



**Figure 1. "Provocation," published in the Azerbaijani magazine Molla Nasreddin (Tbilisi) 32 (1906).<sup>4</sup>**

Source: Institute of Oriental Studies, Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg, Germany, 2012

With the restoration of the young Shah, backed by the governments of Russia and Great Britain, the Constitutional Revolution came to an end in 1911. The aftermath of the Constitutional Revolution is marked as a period of anarchy and institutional frailty, which were to be turned (as argued by many

<sup>4</sup> The political influence of Russia and Great Britain on Qajar Iran represented one of the key issues of the satire of the Iranian cartoonist of the early 20th century. In this cartoon, published in the issue 32 (1906) of *Molla Nasreddin*, an arrogant Russian bear crosses a humiliated Persia, riding on a chariot named "Provocation" that is towed by horse-like Mozaffar ad-Din Shah (1853–1907, king of Iran from 1896 to 1907) and his Grand Vizir Mirza Ali Asghar Khan Amin al-Sultan.

Iranian intellectuals of the time) by a “strong man” who would be able to protect the country from external domination. Such a desire had long been expressed through the allegory of Kaveh the Blacksmith, an epic character of the poem *Shahnameh*, who lead a popular uprising against the foreign ruler Zahhak, and it continued to resonate in the contemporary political sentiments.

Favored by Great Britain, the 1921 coup d’état, which situated Reza Khan as a permanent figure in the Iranian governing body, thus paving the way for his subsequent coronation as the new Shah-in-Shah (“King of Kings”) in 1925, affirmed the vision of the columnists of *Kaveh*. However, the affirmation of the repressive nature of the new regime brought about the development of a new opposition movement that included newly founded parties, afterwards involved in the preparation of the anti-monarchical revolution of 1979, like the *Tudeh* (the Iranian communist party) and the National Front.



Figure 2a. Front cover of issue 1 (1916) of Kaveh (Berlin-Charlottenburg).  
Source: Wikimedia Commons, 2011



Under the two kings of the Pahlavi dynasty, Reza Khan and his son Mohammad Reza, the freedom of press and speech in Iran dramatically declined, while the persecuted opposition went underground or took refuge abroad. The Confederation of Iranian Students/National Union (CISNU), based in the West but also including the Organization of the Students of the University of Tehran, played a pivotal role in the management of the dissidence against the regime of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi during the 1960s and the 1970s. The CISNU coordinated protests in Europe and the United States and kept the expatriates in contact with the homeland, and it also sought the support of Western public opinion through the press and such human rights institutions as Amnesty International (see Matin-Asgari, 2002). Meanwhile, the introduction of new technologies, like xerography and tape-recording machines, allowed a broader circulation within Iran of political pamphlets and discourses of the opposition leaders. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in particular, first from his exile in Najaf and then from the Parisian periphery of Neuville-le-Château, provided his supporters in the homeland with passionate anti-Shah sermons, which were easily hidden and smuggled into Iran, where they were able to reach thousands of people. As remarked by Peter Avery:

The recorded voice of Ayatollah Khomeini, or other leaders, had almost the same impact as if it had been delivered from a mosque or in a Husainiyya. Duplicating machines were used in order to spread revolutionary leaflets. The telephone had the same function in that messages and sermons were dialed from the outside into Iran, or from one Iranian location to another. (1991, p. 814)

Contrary to the hopes of the dissidents who had struggled against the Pahlavi regime in previous decades, the anti-monarchical revolution of 1979, which turned into an "Islamic" revolution over the few years that followed, did not result in the dawn of a new age of democracy for the country, but in yet another regime characterized by strong ideological features. The harsh repression of dissent and the purging of both the leaders and members of secular movements and parties, which had played a pivotal role in the achievement of the revolutionary goals, forced the leaders of the opposition to go underground again or move abroad.

As time passed and the Islamic government consolidated its roots, also through the propaganda connected to the Iran-Iraq war (Kermani, 2002; Khosronejad, 2006), the post-revolutionary diaspora matured the awareness that overthrowing the new regime would have to represent a long-term target, and many Iranians settled abroad semi-permanently or permanently. The increased attention of the Western media toward post-revolutionary Iran was partly due to the growing number of exiled Iranians actively involved, on the one hand, in the promotion of dissident organizations based in the West (Clark, 2007), and on the other hand, in the denunciation, by means of artistic and literary works, of the regime's violations of human rights (Darznik, 2008; Zanganeh, 2006).

### **The Making of the Image of Post-1979 Iran: The Role of the Diaspora**

The self-representation of the Iranian exile community, as remarked by Hamid Naficy in his noteworthy study *The Making of Exile Cultures: Iranian Television in Los Angeles* (1993), passed through the hybridization of the Iranian cultural identity and the Western media, both in terms of technologies,



and in terms of the language used to communicate the experience of exile (Gow, 2011, pp. 61–126; Naficy, 2001). In his 2012 work *A Social History of Iranian Cinema*, Naficy states the following:

[T]he displacement, dispersion, and exile of a massive number of Iranians, many in the visual and performing arts and cinema and television, resulted in new formations in Iran's social history and cinematic history—a diasporic formation of people with a complex subjectivity and an "accented cinema," made by first-generation émigrés and their second- and third-generation descendants. Both the wide circulation of Iran-made films and those Iranians made in the diaspora, as well as the vast diasporic dispersion of Iranians helped globalize Iranian cinema. (2012, p. xxv)

This is also true, more generally, of the Iranian culture (Bozorgmehr, 1998).

In this regard, the diasporic cultural and media production could be subdivided into two subcategories: on the one hand, the products targeted at a Western audience, aimed at producing a change in the way post-revolutionary Iran might be perceived by the reader/viewer, and on the other hand, the TV and radio programs and other artworks conceived to be aired in Iran from abroad. Notable examples of the former category are represented by books like Azar Nafisi's *Reading Lolita in Tehran* (2003) or movies like *Persepolis*, directed by Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Parnaud (Rigault, 2007), based on Satrapi's graphic novel of the same name, while the latter are almost all the products of either satellite television production operations based in California or Persian radio channels, which often merge nostalgic remembrances of pre-revolutionary Iran (e.g., secular and Westernized music, like that of the singer Googoosh) with anti-regime political messages. In the years between the first election of Mohammad Khatami as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1997 and the June 2009 elections, there had been a considerable increase in the number of Persian radio and television channels originating in the West, a fact that, together with the growth in the presence of Iranian journalists in the Western mainstream broadcast networks, played a pivotal role in the unprecedented impact of the Green Movement on Western public opinion, as will be detailed in the coming sections of this article.

### **The Making of a Virtual Community: The Impact of the Internet in Iran**

Parallel to this growth, while the diaspora was becoming stronger and more rooted in the host societies, and its cultural production was opening new perspectives in the perception of Iran and Iranians among Westerners, a new, "virtual" diaspora was being created in the immaterial space of the Internet. This virtual diaspora was comprised of heterogeneous subjects that found in the World Wide Web an incorporeal place where fleeing was possible, with the eyes of the mind, from the social and political constraints of the regime. Since 1993, when Iran became the second country in the Middle East to be connected to the Internet, the number of users has constantly grown. According to Annabelle Sreberny and Gholam Khiabany:

[B]y 1996, 2,000 people had access—their usage mostly limited to sending and receiving e-mails. Since 2000, the rise in number of internet users has been significant—from 132,000 users to 418,000 users in 2001 and to 1,326,000 in 2002. By the end of

2006, according to the Ministry of Communication, 11 million people had access to internet, a 50 percent increase from previous year. The TCI figures from September 2009 suggest that the number of users has reached 23 million. By September 2009, the national IT network was equipped with 2,558 data centres; 60,718 data access ports and 182,914 ports; 1,076 cities were under the coverage of the national IT network, and the international bandwidth had been increased to 26,153 Mbps. (2010, p. 13)

It should also be remarked that, in Iran, there are also about 50 million mobile phones, including a considerable number of smartphones, which provide access to the Internet and Internet-related services (Communications Industry News Agency, 2009). The effective impact of the widespread diffusion of Internet access in Iran that is suggested by these figures (which also include Internet café customers), should be framed, for the aims of this article, in the broader contexts of press censorship and sex segregation.

On the one hand, indeed, the Internet has played, and still plays, a pivotal role in allowing dissident Iranian journalists and intellectuals to bypass the rigorous Press Law (dating back to 1986). These dissidents have found in the Web an important device for the spreading of their critical works (e.g., the 2002 "Republican Manifesto" by Akbar Ganji, smuggled from the Evin prison where he was jailed and then published on several Persian blogs, see Marcelli, 2006). However, since December 31, 2002, the government has officially extended its efficient censorship apparatus to the Internet through the "Decree on the Constitution of the Committee in Charge of Determination of Unauthorized Websites" (Srebeny & Khiabany, 2010, p. 77), generating new limitations on the freedom of speech, though these are often skillfully sidestepped by the dissidents through a wide range of technical solutions (see Rafat, 2010).

On the other hand, while the strict gender segregation introduced shortly after the 1979 revolution has severely limited the opportunities for socialization between unmarried men and women, the Internet has provided them with a new virtual space to gather and meet up, sharing their feelings and thoughts like never before, often concealed behind a fictitious username. Consequently, since the late 1990s, chat rooms, forums, and blogs oriented to Persian-language users have rapidly flourished, producing a profound transformation in the structure and dynamics of the social relationships of Iranian youth.

In her 2004 book, *We are Iran*, Nasrin Alavi wrote the following:

In September 2001 Hossein Dearkhshan, a young Iranian journalist who had recently moved to Canada, set up one of the very first weblogs in Farsi. . . . In response to a request from a reader, Hossein created a simple how-to-blog guide in Farsi. With the modest aim of giving other Iranians a voice, he set free an entire community. Today Farsi is the fourth most frequently used language for keeping on-line journals. . . . According to the 2004 NITLE Blog Census, there are more than 64,000 blogs written in Farsi. . . . Blogging in Iran has grown so fast because it meets the needs no longer met by the print media; it provides a safe space in which people may write freely on a wide variety of topics, from the most serious and urgent to the most frivolous. (ibid., p. 1)

Throughout this pioneering study on the “Weblogestan” (an Iranian online slang term that refers to the discursive space made up of Persian-language blogs), Alavi analyzed the different types of Persian bloggers—writers, journalists, exiled Iranians, members of NGOs, and common people—considering their purposes and style of writing, as well. Each of these categories managed to find in the blogs an unprecedented space of freedom, yet that space is still dangerous because, since April 2003, the Iranian government has taken direct action against bloggers, imprisoning the authors of unwelcome blog posts. Despite the threats of the regime, the number of Iranian bloggers has continued to grow, reaching an estimated figure of about 700,000 blogs by June 2009 (Murad, 2009), making Persian one of the most commonly used languages of the worldwide blogosphere (Kargar, Ramli, Ibrahim, & Azimzadeh, 2008, p. 397; Sreberny & Khiabany, 2010, p. 35).

### **Revolution 2.0: Citizen Journalism and Social Media**

The evolution of the Internet from its origins as a board of static content into the so-called Web 2.0 that is characterized by a higher level of interaction between the users and the websites, particularly by means of social networks like Facebook (created in February 2004), YouTube (founded February 2005), and Twitter (launched July 2006), provided an essential platform for the development of “citizen journalism” materials and the instantaneous sharing of information. This culture of instant sharing is furthered by the diffusion of smartphones able to seamlessly shoot photos and videos and upload them with a comment on the abovementioned networks, where they can then be viewed and shared further still by other users an indefinite number of times.

One of the unexpected effects of this process has been the creation of an acephalous and unstructured community of young people around or under the age of 30 (the so-called “children of Revolution,” born after 1979, who represent about the 70% of the whole population),<sup>6</sup> used to communicating through the Internet. Whether they belong to organized dissident movements or not, these young people recognize themselves in at least some of the values and targets of the dissidence, with particular regard to the claims related to human rights and personal freedom, and, beyond any ideological discourse, in the anger against the corruption and economic inequalities ascribable to the malfunction of the government (Alavi, 2004, p. 111; Sreberny & Khiabany 2010, p. 52).

This unnamed yet effective community includes many reformist activists who had supported the election of Mohammad Khatami as the President of the Islamic Republic in 1997 and 2001, as well as people who had never been (actively) politically involved, but developed a strong sense of belonging in the aftermath of the contested Iranian presidential elections of June 2009. The results of the 2009 elections were rejected by all three opposition candidates as an electoral fraud because of alleged manipulations of the vote by the reconfirmed President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The results were announced on June 13, one day after the vote, and the supporters of the reformist candidates, Mir Hossein Mousavi and Mehdi

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<sup>6</sup> According to the *CIA World Factbook*, as of July 31, 2012, the demography of the Iranian population is structured as follows: 24.1% of Iranians are under 14 years of age, 70.9% are between 15 and 64 years of age, and the remaining 5% are over 65 years of age. The median age is 27.4 years old.

Karroubi, took to the streets to manifest their dissent, shouting slogans that later became iconic, such as "Where is my vote?"

Since then, the synergistic relationship between the streets and Web 2.0 has become vital for the organization of protests. On the one hand, indeed, the gatherings that came in the days following the election were mostly organized using the microblogging website Twitter, where the place and time of the meetings were first posted and then "re-tweeted" by other users—many of whom were becoming politically involved for the first time in their life. On the other hand, the same Twitter, together with Facebook and YouTube, allowed the protesters to upload and spread real-time news, photos, and videos (taken with mobile phones) directly from the streets, as mentioned before. The reduced length of the "tweets," as the posts on Twitter are called, with a maximum of 140 characters, guaranteed the broad circulation of these messages through mobile phones, whose data transfer rates are usually lower than the standard Internet connections used with personal computers. The pivotal role played by this particular social network, both in the aftermath of the 2009 Iranian presidential elections, and in the revolts that took place in several Arab countries, including Tunisia, Algeria, and Egypt, at the beginning of 2011, inspired the coinage of the evocative term, "Twitter revolutions," mostly used by the Western press.

In the period of the protests, several international mainstream broadcast media outlets (Al Jazeera, Al Arabiya, BBC, NBC News, ABC, ZDF, ARD, and RAI, among others) claimed that their journalists based in Iran were facing different types of censorship from the Iranian government, including the confiscation of electronic equipment, harassment, forced shutdown of the networks' Tehran offices, and the electronic blockage of the satellites used to transmit the signals inside and outside Iran (McNally, 2009). In this context, the "citizen journalists" who took part in the protests became the only observers of the protests, and despite the fact that the coincidence of the object and subject of the narration might raise questions about the neutrality of their reportages, the latter should still be considered important primary sources, both for the analysis of the riots and their violent repression by the state, and for the understanding of the intellectual and artistic elaboration of the same protests (Bright, 2009).

Thousands of amateur videos filmed with mobile phones during the June 2009 protests can still be watched on YouTube. While they are usually not edited in any manner, and they have been filmed in a nonprofessional way, they are still deemed valuable, as they are visually constructed in order to counterpose the peaceful and unarmed reformist protesters with the violent and armed members of the paramilitary corps, who open gunfire on the former. Severely injured demonstrators, stained with blood, are often shown in the videos, surrounded by first-aiders and other protesters only "armed" with mobile phones, who are recording the same scene (different versions of the same events, taken from different angles, can, indeed, be found on the Internet).

### **The Making of an "Icon": Neda, the Speechless "Voice" of the Green Wave Movement**

Among the numerous videos that report scenes of physical abuse of the protesters, one in particular has attracted the attention of the international media. Emerging from the chaotic chorality of the recordings of the protests related to the Iranian presidential elections of June 2009, the name of Neda Agha Soltan, and the depiction of her untimely death, which occurred on June 20, 2009, and was

immortalized in a 40-second mobile phone video (besides two other, shorter videos), have become symbols of the Green Movement and made her into an icon of the revolt. According to the Italian archaeosopher Tommaso Palamidessi, an "icon" (from the Greek word *eikón*) is not a symbol, but it expresses, through a symbolic code, a message of salvation (1986). The apotheosis of Neda as an icon in this sense is strictly connected to the Shiite cult of martyrdom and the culture of contemporary political Islam, elaborated, among others, by Ayatollah Khomeini. As remarked by Hamid Dabashi:

Shi'ism is not just a branch of Islam. It is Islam's disruptive dream of itself, remembering its own revolutionary bursting into history. . . . Shi'ism is the collective remembrance of a promise not delivered; a *conscience collective* that keeps remembering and disremembering itself. . . . Shi'is believe that a grave injustice was perpetrated when their charismatic leader, Ali, did not succeed the prophet as the legitimate leader of all Muslims. They cast this inaugural injustice as a long shadow over history. . . . From [the battle of Kerbala] one insurrectionary uprising has been second nature to the Shi'is, martyrdom (or *Shahadah*) the very cornerstone of their faith. . . . Ruled by a pantheon of everlasting martyrs, Shi'ism has been a red flag raised high upon the entirety of the Islamic history. Martyrdom, as a result, is constitutional to the agitated memory that is Shi'ism. (2010, pp. 58–59)

The Shiite cult of martyrdom, besides and beyond the veneration of the "saints," aims at making their sacrifice present in the contemporary world, transposing the scenery and the symbology of the Battle of Kerbala (meta-historically considered as a Manichaean struggle between Good and Evil) into a living event through the ideal incarnation, in the flesh of the believers, of the "inaugural injustice," the martyrdom of the grandson of the Prophet and his fellows. The popular religious rituals celebrated on the day of *Ashura* (10th day of the Islamic month of Muharram), which feature remarkable similarities with the ceremonies of Holy Week in several Roman Catholic Christian-majority countries, invite the worshippers to relive in first person the sufferings of the *Imam*, particularly during the sacred representations of the martyrdom of Hoseyn, passion plays called *ta'zieh*, and the self-flagellation of the believers (performed on a voluntary base), named *zanjeer* (Chelkowski, 2010).

In contemporary Iran, these rituals have acquired a new meaning, because of both the development of political Islam and the syncretism of Marxism and Shiism operated by the intellectual Ali Shariati, reprised by Ayatollah Khomeini in his own political discourse. Indeed, Ayatollah Khomeini developed a dualistic rhetoric that, sacralizing the class-struggle dialectic, counterposed the *mostakbirine* (the "arrogant," or the oppressor) with the *mostazafin* (the "weakened," or the oppressed), identifying the former with the caliph Yazid (and then, time by time, with the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi before the 1979 revolution, and with Saddam Hussein during the Iran-Iraq war) and the latter with Hoseyn (and then with the Iranian "oppressed" people, see Kepel, 2006).

This meta-historical discourse, which can be summarized through a famous Arabic saying which states that "Every place is Kerbala, every day is Ashura," transformed, in the Khomeinist rhetoric, both the victims of the repression of the Shah and the casualties of the Iran-Iraq war into real "martyrs." Their sacrifice is not only compared to that of the soldiers faithful to Hoseyn, but it *becomes* part of that same

sacrifice, through a kind of spiritual "transubstantiation." During the Iran-Iraq war, nuptial rooms were mounted along the streets of Tehran to allow the "martyrs" to consummate spiritually a wedding, transforming, ideally, the urban space into an outpost of *Jannah* (Paradise). The same aim, during and after the war, was pursued also through a plan of street dedications to the memory of the "martyrs," and through the iconographic visualization of the legitimization of the regime in the name of those same "martyrs" by means of highly symbolic murals depicting stylized portraits of the fallen soldiers meant to evidence their connection with the Shiite sacred world (Chelkowski, 2002).

The comprehension of the abovementioned context provides an essential key to understanding the prospective impact exerted by mobile phone videos on both the members of the Green Movement and the Iranians of the diaspora. While, on the one hand, they witnessed the historical events as a precious primary source, in a moment in which no external observers (i.e., foreign journalists) were able to record images, on the other hand, the videos, perceived more or less consciously through the superstructural categories of contemporary Shiism (even by secularized observers), transpose the victims of the repression on a transcendent level, transforming them into alleged "martyrs." In the Christian tradition, the word "martyr" derives from the Greek "*màrtus*," which means "witness"; in the Islamic world, "martyr" is translated as "*shahid*," which also means "witness." The victims of June 2009 elections are considered by their fellows as "martyrs," as they have witnessed to their ideas with the sacrifice of their own lives, unarmed and "weakened" like the *Imam* Hoseyn. The iconographical representation of their death, in the videos, closely resembles the stylized mural paintings that depict the dying soldiers in the arms of the twelfth *Imam*, or in those of their mother (an archetypal iconography that brings to mind the Christian representation of the *Pietà*).

Again, the case of Neda is exemplary in this respect. Even before her name and biography were made public, she had become an "icon" of the revolt, in the sense used by Palamidessi, since the video of her death, when she was still simply described as "a young woman," was rapidly spread through the Internet and immediately recognized as a depiction of a "martyrdom."

In the videos, Neda can be seen surrounded by two men, later identified as Hamid Panahi (her music teacher) and Arash Hejazi (a writer and physician present on the spot), who are trying to revive her, until the blood that began to flow from her nose and mouth and her stare becoming blank make it clear that she has passed away. The composition of the scene is unintentionally similar to the *Pietà*-like figures of the post-revolutionary art. It was this composition, together with the implicit attribution to Neda of the condition of innocent "*mostazafin*," which turned her into an "icon" able to serve as a vehicle, through a symbolic code, of a message of salvation, as mentioned before.



**Figure 3a. Photo of mural is by Steve Roden (2003).**



**Figure 3b. Snapshot from a 40-second video clip of Neda's death.**  
(YouTube, 2009 at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bbdEf0QRsLM>)<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> The actual impact of the video of Neda's death can be assessed through the juxtaposition of an excerpt of the video and the picture of a mural in Tehran that provides a good example of the iconism of

More precisely, becoming the “public face of an unknown number of Iranians who have died in the protests” (Fathi, 2009), Neda, whose name in Persian literally means “voice,” “calling,” or “divine message” (an element that provided further meanings to the semantic value of the video), was seen as a kind of soteric “icon.” Her death, enclosing the summa of the sufferings of the reformist movement, expressed the strength and determination of the dissidents and spiritually anticipated the earthly eschatology of the regime change, when the “*mostazafin*” will triumph over the “*mostakbirine*.” The widespread perception of Neda as a highly symbolic martyr of the Green Movement was indirectly recognized by the Iranian government, as well, through the prohibition against her family publicly celebrating a proper funeral and the traditional Shiite mourning rituals held on the third, seventh and 40th days after a death (McElroy, 2009). This ban was imposed with the hope of avoiding an emotive wave similar to that which, during the 1979 revolution, had accompanied the commemoration of the victims of the Shah’s repression, “martyrs” on their turn, and gave momentum to the fall of the regime.

However, Neda and the other young militants who had died in the demonstrations of June 2009 were commemorated on the 40th day during a ceremony at the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery in Tehran. The ceremony was attended by about 3,000 people, including the reformist leader Mir Hossein Mousavi, but the participants were dispersed by the police, and some of them were arrested. This event was also recorded by “citizen journalists” equipped with mobile phones; the videos, which were immediately uploaded on the Internet, can still be watched on the BBC’s website as part of the July 31, 2009, article “Iran witnesses: Neda memorial.”

The efforts toward the “de-iconization” of Neda performed by the Iranian government also included several attempts to demonstrate that the 40-second video was a false, staged video, or that she was not murdered by a *basiji*, but by Arash Hejazi or even by a killer recruited by a Western power; in the meantime, her gravestone at Behesht-e Zahra cemetery has been repeatedly desecrated by supporters of the regime. Despite this, and independent from the truthfulness of the video (which is not relevant to the purposes of the present article), Neda survived as an “icon” of the Green Movement and was able to cross the boundaries through the Internet, landing in the West, where her “icon” was further elaborated to become the international hallmark of the June 2009 movement.

### **Neda Goes West: The International Reception of the Footage of the June 2009 Protests**

The raw materials provided by the videos recorded by the June 2009 protesters with their mobile phones are now considered by many international broadcast networks as precious sources of information in a context where professional journalists were prevented from operating independently (or from operating at all). The videos acquired from the Web (2.0) were widely captured (and eventually edited) by the international mass media to tell the story of the Green Movement in a fashionable way for the Western audience. It was CNN, on June 21, 2009, just one day after the event, that was the first international broadcast network to feature the 40-second video of the death of Neda Agha Soltan—after it was noticed on the Internet by an Iranian-American journalist—coverage which was then reprised by many other

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martyrdom in contemporary political Shiism. Commissioned in 2003 on Ashura, the mural reads: “Martyrdom is our inheritance from the prophet and his lineage.”



American and European televisions broadcasters. Little information about it was available at that moment, and while some details were reported incorrectly at first, like the identity of the two men surrounding her (one initially credited as her father), these points were subsequently amended. What was clearly evidenced by the article published on the CNN website, though, was the exceptional emotional impact of the video. Indeed, just after its publication on the Internet, it immediately began to attract intensive commenting and was broadly relaunched on the different social networks, especially on Twitter, where it became one of the "trending topics" according to the number of "hashtags" #neda used in the "tweets," as reported by CNN in a June 22, 2009, article entitled "'Neda' becomes rallying cry for Iranian protests."

In the days that followed, the news stories related to Neda grew in number and quality, and the main international broadcast networks slowly managed to reconstruct her biography and make contact with the other characters depicted in the video, in order to provide a more detailed context for the facts. Dr. Arash Hejazi, being a pivotal eyewitness of the event, was interviewed by the BBC for a June 25, 2009, article entitled "Iran doctor tells of Neda's death." It was a short interview in which he exposed his own version of the facts, pointing out that the murderer of Neda was, indeed, a *basiji*, caught and then released by the crowd present at the accident—an important detail, because, as mentioned above, the actual identity of the killer is considered to be one of the most controversial issues of this story. However, independent from the hand who pulled the trigger that turned Neda into a "martyr," it gradually became more and more clear that her "martyrdom" happened almost by chance, involuntarily.

When Neda died, she was only 26 years old. She belonged to that 70% of Iranians who were born after the 1979 revolution and today are around 30 years of age or younger. Like many of them, she had not been politically involved before June 2009 (she did not belong to any dissident organization, nor had she expressed particular support toward one of the candidates in the presidential elections). But, like other young Iranians of her generation, she decided to take part in the protests because of the manner in which the vote had been allegedly "stolen" by the ruling elite to preserve itself. After graduating in Islamic theology at the Islamic Azad University, she was working at the travel agency owned by her parents. She was taking underground pop music lessons (with the abovementioned Hamid Panahi), and she dreamt of moving to Turkey to become a tourist guide. There, she had met Caspian Makan, who became her fiancé and, later, one of the staunchest defenders of her memory. After having some interviews with BBC Persia, Al Jazeera, and some other international networks in the days which followed Neda's death, he was imprisoned and tortured by the regime. After being released, he fled to Canada (his version of the story was detailed in a long interview released on November 15, 2009, in the British newspaper *The Observer*, entitled "Caspian Makan: 'I cannot believe it yet. I still think I will see Neda again'").

These details, which could drift her image away from the traditional idea of what a "martyr" should be, actually make her closer to many of the other protesters, who shared with her the same aspirations and the absence of a former political involvement, even reinforcing her being an "icon," (in this case, in the sense of "representative") of a whole generation. At least, so she was perceived by the militants of the Green Movement, and by the Western supporters of the movement, as well.

In the midst of the considerable emotional momentum that followed the diffusion of the video of Neda's death, some of the abovementioned international broadcasters, as well as the main social

networks, decided to turn from simple spectators of the revolts into active actors, providing, on one hand, new Persian versions of their websites (the *Farsi* edition of Facebook, produced thanks to the efforts of about 400 native translators, was launched June 18, 2009; in the same period, Persian was also added to the available languages within the Google Translate web service), while soliciting, on the other hand, the Iranian youth to be involved in citizen journalism, providing real time reportage (in the form of texts, photos, or videos) from Iran. In the meantime, the Persian television channels airing from "Tehrangeles" (a name created by the contraction of Tehran and Los Angeles, which makes reference to the presence of an extremely numerous Iranian community based in California, very active from both the cultural and political points of view), which have a considerable audience in Iran, kept broadcasting the mobile phone videos of the protests captured from the Internet, including those depicting the death of Neda.

Those same videos, together with several interviews held with eyewitnesses of the protests, represented the essential footage of a series of documentaries that were produced by some international broadcast networks in the months that followed, with the aim of popularizing the story of Neda and reframing the events of June 2009 within the broader context of post-revolutionary Iran. Noteworthy are the documentary aired by the American network PBS, entitled *A Death in Tehran* (Garnsey, 2009, then re-edited for the BBC with the title *An Iranian Martyr*), and the HBO documentary *For Neda* (Abraham, 2010).

The PBS documentary, produced by Monica Garnsey and first aired on November 17, 2009, essentially reconstructs the story of Neda through a series of interviews with her sister Hoda, Caspian Makan, Dr. Arash Hejazi, and some of her friends, as well as Faranak Amidi, a reporter of Iran's Press TV. The interviews show that most of them have been forced into exile in relation to their connection to Neda. The official reactions to her death are also considered, from the U.S. President Barack Obama to the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who formally expressed grief for the death of an innocent girl. The interviews are interspersed with archive footage of Ayatollah Khamenei's discourses, and with mobile phone videos depicting scenes of *basiji* violence in the streets of Tehran. The narrative is quite simple; it aims to provide a chronicle of the last few weeks of Neda's life, framed in the aftermath of the presidential elections. The BBC version of the documentary reused almost all the same footage, with different editing and different commentary; it was first aired on November 24, 2009.

*For Neda*, the HBO documentary, directed and produced by Antony Thomas, aired on June 14, 2010. It has a more complex structure and features a series of interviews with Neda's family and some of her friends, performed by the Iranian journalist Saeed Kamali Dehghan, and with several exiles connected with her, including Dr. Hejazi. Notable members of the Iranian diaspora settled abroad are also interviewed, including the writer Azar Nafisi, *Newsweek* correspondent Maziar Bahari, the Iranian photographer Reza Deghati, and the scholar Ali Ansari. The documentary has a clear target in mind, the American audience, and a definite aim—namely, making Neda's story even more fashionable for the Western viewer. This purpose is achieved by widening the focus to the diasporic culture and the broader human rights violations by the regime, and putting in evidence the "modern" and "Western" virtues of Neda (independence, secularization, "subversive" nature, etc.), but without referring to her as a "martyr."

On the opposite side, worthy of a short mention, there is the documentary *Crossroads* (Farahmand, 2010), produced by the Iranian state television IRIB TV3, first aired in Iran on June 11, 2010. It represents a kind of “answer” of the regime to the Western supporters of the Green Movement, aimed at deconstructing the “official” version of Neda’s death. The documentary featured the participation of her music teacher, Hamid Panahi, and of a friend of hers, Setareh. The purpose of the documentary, which presents a series of interviews and analyzes a selection of video footage related to the death of Neda, is to demonstrate the non-involvement of the state’s apparatus in her murder, ascribed to a woman not related in any way to the regime. *Crossroads* was harshly criticized by Neda’s mother, Mrs. Hajar Rostami, for the alleged manipulation of the facts, with the complicity of a person Neda had confidence in. Her complaints were expressed within an interview released by Payvan Iran News on August 30, 2010, entitled “Neda Agha Soltan’s Mother Appeals to the International Community to Help Find Her Daughter’s Murderer.”

A different kind of documentary, supportive of the Green Movement and the Iranian dissidence, was the one aired on the Italian television RAI3 on November 11, 2009, as a *lectio magistralis* of the Neapolitan journalist and writer Roberto Saviano, entitled *Dall’inferno alla bellezza* (“From Hell to Beauty”). This TV program started with the airing of the 40-second video of the death of Neda and telling the tale of her murder, and it also referred to another case of state violence, the killing in Evin prison of Taraneh Mousavi, an 18 year-old girl from Tehran who was arrested during the June 2009 protests (Sadeghi, 2009). After being arrested and repeatedly raped by the *basiji*, Taraneh eventually died from the resultant genital injuries; the lower part of her body was burned to cancel the signs of the torture (a tortured body, stated Saviano, brings indeed the “witness of barbarity”).

According to Saviano, these alleged “martyrs” of the reformist movement were women who had no desire to die: Different from the Shiite *shuhada*, they were protesting to defend their right to happiness and a different and self-determined life. Speaking of Neda, he stated that “she was protesting, she had a mobile phone in her hand, she was a woman: these were the three elements that condemned her to death.” Their beauty and self-confidence (namely, their conscience of it) were, indeed, according to Saviano, the main (ideal) reasons for their persecution by the paramilitary corps, because, in his opinion, “it is beauty that steals space to hell.” The visualization of state power, which, in post-revolutionary Iran, passed through the colossal murals depicting the Ayatollah Khomeini and the veneration of the dead bodies of the “martyrs,” is paradoxically mirrored, according to Saviano, by the beauty of the involuntary “martyrs” like Neda and Taraneh, whose bodies—someway involved in the so called “lipstick jihad”—expressed their choice to be independent and self-determined women, in spite of the prohibitions of the regime.

As exemplified by the strongly supportive discourse of Saviano, the Green Movement—like the Iranian Constitutional movement at the beginning of the 20th century, and even more so, because of the stronger cultural interrelations that exist in a globalized world—has produced a considerable impact on Western artists and intellectuals who, inspired by the videos and pictures came to the West through Web 2.0, have become staunch advocates of the reformist cause.

A particularly warm welcome was reserved, for example, to the Iranian filmmakers during the 66th Venice Film Festival, which took place September 2–12, 2009. During the inauguration ceremony of the Festival, Iranian actors and directors, along with their Western supporters, metaphorically “painted in green” the red carpet, wearing green scarves or green clothes. They also gestured by pointing their index and middle fingers upward in a “V” to express their support for Mousavi and the young members of the Green Movement. The “V sign,” which usually means “victory,” is also a symbol of the cut-off hand of Abolfazl, one of Hoseyn’s fellows in the Battle of Kerbala, which reconnects this gesture to the discourse of martyrdom explained in the prior section. On this occasion, the supporters of the Iranian dissidents also expressed solidarity with the famous film director Jafar Panahi, arrested on July 30, 2009, because of his participation in the 40th day mourning ceremony dedicated to Neda and the other victims of the abovementioned repression at the Behesht-e Zahra cemetery (Mackey, 2009).

Shirin Neshat’s movie *Women Without Men*, which analyzes the influence of the religious and social forces shaping the life of the female protagonists, four women who lived in the period of the 1953 coup d’état (metaphorically referring to post-revolutionary Iran), was awarded the Silver Lion for the best director. The movie, as well as the prize, was dedicated by Neshat to all of the victims of the long democratic struggle in Iran, from the 1906 Constitutional Revolution to the Green Movement.

Another widely appreciated Iranian movie presented at the Venice Film Festival was *Green Days*, by Hana Makhmalbaf, daughter of the renowned film director Mohsen Makhmalbaf (currently the spokesman of Mir Hossein Mousavi), which intercuts fiction and a selection of mobile phone videos related to the June 2009 protests, including the 40-second video of Neda’s death. The plot of the movie is focused on the story of Ava, a young woman from Tehran who suffers from depression but manages to find a way out from her problem through her decision to participate in the June 2009 presidential elections. She votes against Ahmadinejad, partaking in the global awakening of the Iranian youth. The film director considers Ava to be a metaphoric and soteric “icon,” in the sense used by Palamidessi, embodying both the unease and dissatisfaction of her own generation (Makhmalbaf herself was born in 1988), and the promise of a new beginning. The “lost generation” depicted in the movie actually feels lost and hopeless in a country ruled by a totalitarian regime which, besides penetrating invasively and violently the daily life of the citizens and their own spiritual and intellectual dimension, does not provide any perspective for the material and professional fulfillment of the youth. Beyond any other consideration on the value of this movie, it should be remarked that it was able to focus the attention of an international audience on the videos recorded with mobile phones, which depicted, as already remarked, the violent repression of dissent in Iran, turning the Venice Film Festival’s screens into a symbolic “green screen.”

Strong support for the democratic claims of the Green Movement came also from several Western pop stars already involved in civil rights movements. Joan Baez released, through a YouTube channel, on June 25, 2009, a homemade recording of the song “We Shall Overcome” with some words in Persian, dedicating it to the Iranian dissidents who were struggling for democracy in their own country. A few days later, on June 27, 2009, another song in support of the Iranian Green Movement was released on YouTube. This time, it was “Stand by Me,” sung by Jon Bon Jovi and Richie Sambora, together with the exiled Iranian-Armenian singer Andy Madadian. Live performances in support of the movement during regular concerts scheduled in the summer of 2009 were also done by both U2 and Madonna, and by

Iranian diasporic singers Mohsen Namjoo, Abjeez Band, Googoosh, Dariush, Shadmehr Aghili, and Hassan Sattar.

Last but not least, from the Internet (the Web 2.0 as a source of information) to the Internet (the Web 2.0 as a communication tool), the Green Movement has provided a remarkable source of inspiration for many Western cartoonists, whose works, published in satirical newspapers and magazines or directly on the Internet, were widely circulated among the supporters of the Iranian dissidents. The satire often focuses on the close connection between the Shiite clergy and President Ahmadinejad, as they provide each other mutual support, or on the role played by the social networks in support of the Green Movement. The online edition of the French newspaper *Courrier International* has collected several interesting examples of the latter type of cartoons (2009). Another interesting collection of cartoons is provided by *The Washington Post's* blog "Comic Riffs," edited by Michael Cavna (Comic Riffs, 2009). In the blog, we can read one of the slogans of the movement, "The tweet is mightier than the sword," posited in a cartoon by Steve Benson which depicts a woman with chador holding a mobile phone with the writing "Twitter" on the monitor. In another cartoon, by John Cole, a flying blue bird, meant to recall the Twitter logo, is defecating on the angry caricatures of Ayatollah Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad. Quite meaningfully, a cartoon by David Fitzsimmons depicts a woman in chador who holds a mobile phone in her right hand and a laptop in her left, while her shadow is shaped like the silhouette of the Statue of Liberty, reflecting the pivotal role played by the new technologies in the struggle for freedom of the Iranian people.

However, the most touching source of inspiration for visual artists was, once again, Neda. Her bleeding face was reproduced and redrawn innumerable times on banners and paintings, together with slogans of the movement. One of the most remarkable visual art works related to Neda regards the reimagining, done by anonymous designers, of Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel *Persepolis*. The comics of Satrapi's graphic novel based on the 1979 revolution have been refocused (through the substitution of the texts and the rearrangement of some designs) on the June 2009 presidential elections, while the little Marjane, alter ego of the actual Satrapi, has been turned into Neda, to whom, in the last panel, God says: "Don't cry, Neda. Your death will not be in vain . . ." (La Repubblica, 2009). Neda, whose name means "voice," as the main "icon" of the Green Movement, embodies the sacrifice of all the voiceless victims of the repression, expressing in this cartoon the hope of a whole generation for salvation.

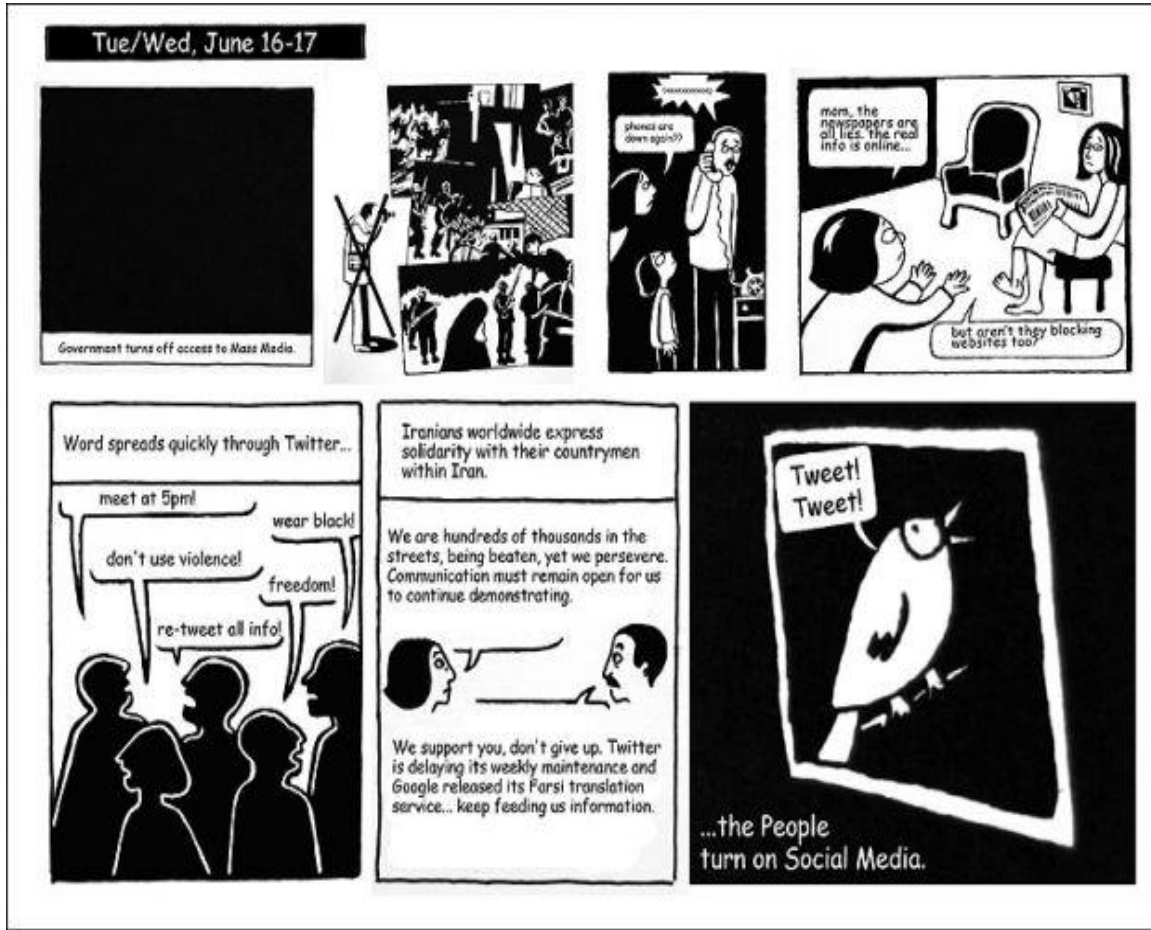
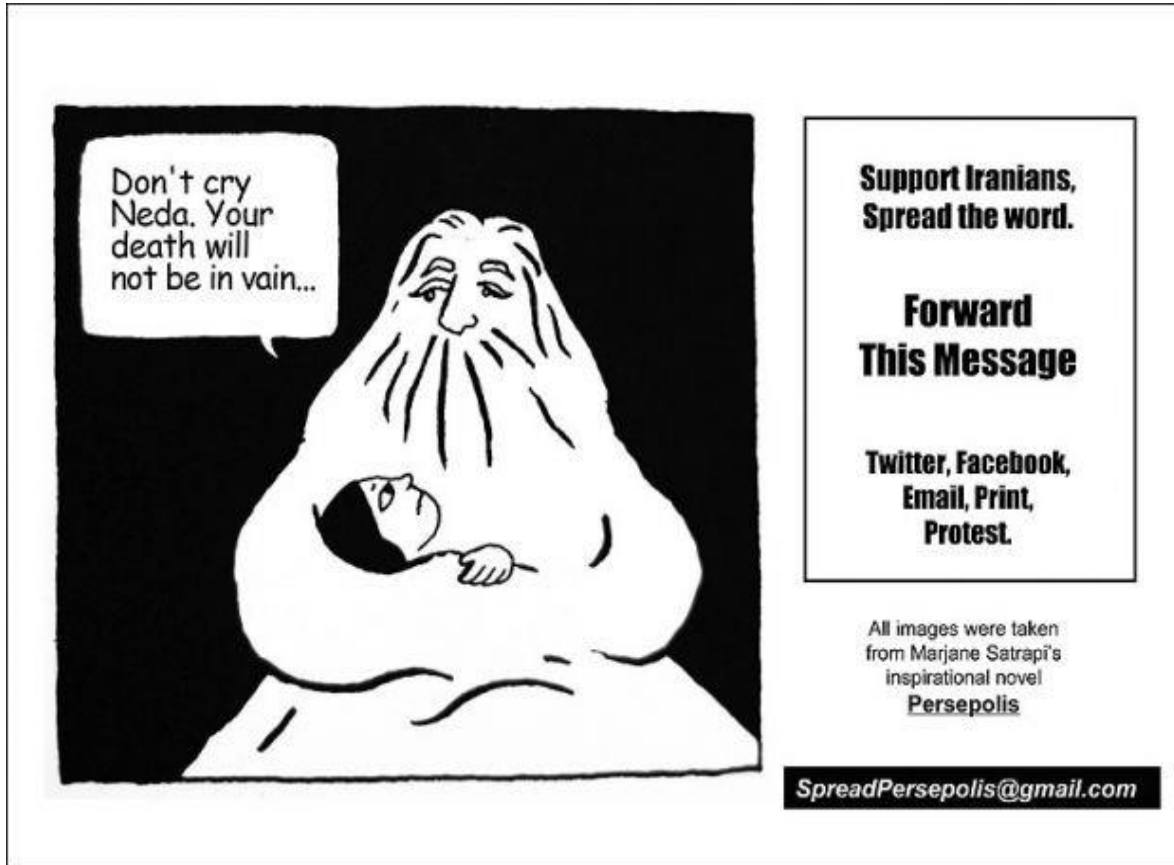


Figure 4a. "Persepolis 2.0"

**"Persepolis 2.0," an adaptation of Marjane Satrapi's original graphic novel performed by activists Payman & Sina, retells the story of Neda-Marjane, pointing out in particular the role of Twitter in the spreading of the June 2009 protests.**

Source: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/18878654/Persepolis20>



**Figure 4b. "Persepolis 2.0"**

**"Persepolis 2.0," an adaptation of Marjane Satrapi's original graphic novel performed by activists Payman & Sina, retells the story of Neda-Marjane, pointing out in particular the role of Twitter in the spreading of the June 2009 protests.**

Source: <http://www.scribd.com/doc/18878654/Persepolis20>

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