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POUYA ALIMAGHAM: Hello and welcome to today's MIT Starr Forum. My name is Pouya Alimagham. I'm a lecturer and historian at MIT's department of history, where I teach modern Middle East history and Iranian history.

Before we begin, I just wanted to remind you guys that we will have a Q&A afterwards. So please submit your questions whenever they arise to the Q&A function at the bottom of the screen. And hopefully, we'll get to as many of them as possible. Please be mindful there's also a chat function at the bottom. And that's really for us to communicate with you about upcoming events, links to bios or anything else.

I would like to thank the Center for International Studies here at MIT for organizing this event, specifically Michelle English and Sabina Van Melle. A lot of work went into this event, and I'm so grateful to them. I'm also incredibly grateful to our panelists. I will introduce them to you in a moment.

This event is really important, now, more than ever because it's a very polarizing time, especially in the Iranian diaspora over what's happening in Iran. The contours of the debate and discussion have narrowed radically, and people have been hardened in their views. And for good reason. It's just a difficult time.

But now, more than ever, rigorous debate is needed. So I'm so grateful to the organizers as well as our panelists. Today's panel is called Iran and the Struggle for Normalcy Women, Life, Freedom. And I will proceed now by introducing our panelists and the titles of their presentations.

First, in order of the speakers list, is Dr. Maryam Alemzadeh. She's an associate professor in history and politics of Iran at Oxford School of Global and Area Studies and a Middle East Center fellow. She holds a PhD in sociology from the University of Chicago. Before joining Oxford, she was a junior research fellow at the Crown Center for Middle East Studies at Brandeis University and a postdoctoral research associate at Princeton University's Sharmin and Bijan Mossavar-Rahmani Center for Iran and Persian Gulf Studies.

Maryam's research interests include revolutions, state building, militias and militaries, and modern Iran and how to study these phenomena by looking at individual people and actions that create them bit-by-bit. Currently, she is writing a book tentatively titled *Revolution As Praxis: The rise of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps*.

The book is based on first-hand research on the Revolutionary Guards first generation of commanders, volunteers, supporters, and critics as they struggle to find order in chaos on a day-to-day basis. Her talk is titled Politics of the Normal Young Iranians Departure From Conventional Activism.

Our next panelist is Dr. Yalda Hamidi. Dr. Yalda Hamidi is an assistant professor of Gender and Women's Studies and faculty fellow for Teaching Towards Social Justice at Minnesota State University, Mankato and a member of the Miss Committee of Scholars.

At MMSU, Mankato Yalda that teaches transnational feminism, feminist pedagogy, and queer color of critique courses. Yalda's research cartography of Iranian feminist struggles attempts to bring an anti-racist, trauma-informed, feminist analysis to different versions of Iranian feminism in the diaspora and inside Iran. Her presentation is titled Mahsa's Revolution and the Change of the Iranian Feminist Canon

Dr. Mahrou Zhaf, our third panelist, is an assistant professor and chair of Gender and Sexuality Studies at Saint Lawrence University. She is also an adjunct faculty and psychoanalyst at Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis, as well as the [INAUDIBLE] Institute in Iran.

She has three master's degrees respectively in Persian language and literature from Allemah Tabataba'i University, multi-field and humanities from SOAS University of London, and clinical psychoanalysis from Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis. She has two doctoral degrees one in psychosocial studies and the other in clinical psychoanalysis.

Her research is on the relationship between social structure, psychopathology, and gender. Her talk is titled The Islamic Republic's Perverse State of Mind and the Female Resistance. So thank you and we will start with Dr. Maryam Alemzadeh. Thank you again.

MARYAM

Thank you very much, dear Pouya, and thank you to the whole team for organizing this panel and for inviting me.

ALEMZADEH:

Thank you all for being here and for listening.

I'd like to start my talk with a bit of a personal anecdote or story, so to speak. I was born and raised in Iran. I lived there until I was almost 30 as a middle class-ish girl and woman. Grew up in a mix of social structures in southern provinces, including Sistan and Baluchestan, and I moved to Tehran for most of my adult life.

And so this is the experience, I wanted to bring to fore, that through my teenage and young adulthood years, as your typical so-called [NON-ENGLISH] born in the '80s, I was wary and cognizant of the injustice and absurdness of mandatory hijab, or the fact that I needed a father's or a husband's performative signature to be able to leave the country and many more daily aggressions one endures as a woman in Iran.

But what I did, and I think many other women in my cohort also did, was to sort of disgruntledly accept these circumstances as annoying realities of life, and then go about the rest of my life to not meet with friends, to date, to do sports, play music, eat out, travel, and so on and so forth.

So what I did, was I somehow convinced myself that this is some kind of normal. And I can pursue what I really wanted to do with my life, which was in my case, study through higher education. I can do it despite these annoyances.

I thought that this was a rather feasible compromise to make, but that is to be very clear, as long as I was not driving to the guidance patrol van or encountered maybe less violent or more violent but extremely still unpleasant encounters, which I was for the most part, lucky to avoid.

So what I am trying to say is, I, among many others, were trying to cling to a relative normal if I may call it that. In the past few years, though, it became harder and harder to cling to this idea that there is some normalcy going on. Because I didn't live in Iran for the past 11, 12 years, but I witnessed my family and friends suffering financially, facing harsher lifestyle and political policing.

And all of a sudden, four months ago, the eye-opening movement started to happen. The experience of Mahsa Jina Amini's death and the start of the Woman, Life, Freedom uprising. So all of a sudden, our social media feed was filled with scenes from an actually, normal life seen as banal as a girl walking on the streets of Tehran fashion in a t-shirt and jeans, which would somehow rip my heart in half, just like realizing, all of a sudden, that that is the normal that I have been repressing.

And there are so many of these images, like an athlete competing as a representative of Iran without the mandatory hijab, a boy kissing his girlfriend in a public space, a girl kissing her girlfriend, the boy kissing his girlfriend in a street corner, a young Baluchi man dancing his heart out.

These images kindled a previously unacknowledged grief of what could have been, for me, at least, and I believe, for many others. And the burden of the emotional labor that many of us had performed all these years, in order to live life as somewhat normal under abnormal circumstances, came down crushing all of a sudden. And that's, I believe, was part of the emotional intensity that this movement had for all of us.

And on a much higher level, of course, something that came down even heavier, were the images of these banal and normal snippets of life brutally taken away during the movement through the repression. We felt the gravity of the obvious, that taken for granted the life being violently crushed.

So we were, all of a sudden, faced with a quest for normalcy, and its denial that was unapologetically universal and not relative. It was absolute. And it did not take into account its political, cultural context at all. And I experienced that as a wake-up call.

I think the fact that this movement has stemmed from and has raised awareness about the value of a simply normal life and the latency of everyone's right to it is crucially related to its other characteristics. So I'd like to sort of consider what does this realization of the taking for grantedness of the normal means for the form of this movement for the functioning of it and perhaps, for its future.

So take the unprecedented intersectionality of the Woman, Life, Freedom movement, for instance. It's based on the premise that-- on the tacitly agreed upon premise that just as women should not be deprived of the right to choose how they dress or where to go, just so the teenager should not be deprived of carefree fun.

The teacher, the laborer should not be denied sustenance and dignity. The Baluchi people should not be deprived of ID cards. The Kurds should not be antagonized baselessly and murdered, and the queer should not be denied the right to exist. It's as simple as that.

It's perhaps the first movement in history, one could claim, that is instigated and led by women that is not exclusively about women's rights. It's about the collective realization, instead, of the normalcy of lining up behind women. The realization that having women as vanguards does not necessarily make this movement about gender. It's again, as simple as that, in the minds of those who are active in the movement, I believe.

I know I'm idolizing the movement a bit. There have been many countering forces or rising up. People protesting, oh, why are you specifying it to women? It should be a movement for everyone and so on and so forth. And we all know about all of the nuisances that have entered, but I'm saying that aspect of it does exist.

As another characteristic of the movement, take the ideology-free and leaderless potential of this movement. It has been going on for four months, although, the bigger protests have faded a little bit these days. As a movement that is not only is ideology-free, but is actively avoiding ideology. You see on social media or from young people active during the uprising, that they kind of take pride in not knowing the political history of civil movements behind them that have happened very recently in Iran, in just these past four decades.

And of course, although like some people, some diaspora figures, particularly, have tried to anoint themselves as leaders. We know that the movement has basically happened without a leading figure calling for large demonstrations, or providing a strategy, or the next step, and so on and so forth.

So what this means, in my opinion, is that instead of following a leader pursuing a particular thought frame, a certain type of demands like more tangible demands, except for the fall of the current government, is that this taken for grantedness of normalcy in a universal and absolute manner, has enabled an overnight politicization of these very young citizens.

What I mean is-- let me illustrate it by example. Take the activists of what became the 1979 revolution for comparison. The university students that lean to the left, leftist ideologies, whether they're Marxist, Muslim mujahideen, or the more secular leftist groups, they had to raise awareness among peers and people alike.

Because the grievances that they were fighting to remove were not necessarily a lived experience for them. There was ideological work to be done. They had to sit down, and they took pride in sitting down and reading history books, manifestos, guerilla fight, like how to guides and the likes of it. And then they worked to disperse that knowledge both to recruit peers and to enlighten the masses.

Or take other social movements that have happened in Iran before the Women, Life, Freedom movement. For example, for women's rights for democratic elections, take the 2009 election, for instance, it was happening within the framework of the existing government in that the want, the demands did not need an alternative world, the completely alternative political, social world to be realized.

The demands were more or less, for the most part, within the existing structures, existing political legal structure. And so people did the political work of articulating their demands within this structure, for instance, like challenging the election results based on the existing legal regulations.

Instead, in this movement, we are seeing this overnight politicization. This generation, the so-called TikTok generation of Iran, seem to not need awareness raising. They can imagine the alternative world that they want so vividly. And they can take it for granted so strongly that all they need is just a trigger is a figure of another girl of a young woman standing on a garbage bin on the street and setting her scarf on fire.

This realization came to me when I was listening to what [INAUDIBLE] aunt was saying after she disappeared and declared for a while, and like the documentation that followed afterwards, she, the aunt, was saying that the girl, the 17-year-old, 16-year-old was she, had stuff in her backpack when she left the house for the last time, like a bottle of water, a towel, that later, the aunt realized were to resist tear gas if she encountered it.

So all of a sudden, she was acting somewhat like the urban guerrilla of the 1940s and '50s in Iran. Then we saw videos of her maneuvering the cars in the street, escaping security forces, which we know was eventually unsuccessful but also like it brings back the images of a somewhat trained activist, but she was not that. She just felt something so strongly that she felt motivated enough to embark on this.

What does it mean for the future of this movement potentially? Of course, we're not in the business of reading crystal balls here, but a lot of people have expressed concern about the lack of a leader and structures and social movement organizations during this uprising. And it's a totally valid concern.

Maybe so many young lives wouldn't have been lost so brutally if there were a better strategy of how to proceed with this protest. But I believe there is a bright side to this amorphous, ambiguous nature of this movement, exactly because it follows it's taking normalcy for granted.

And the bright side is that there is no going back. The parallel world that these young people have either vicariously lived in through social media and the connections they have to the global world, or they have tasted bits and pieces of it here and there, this is not an experience that you can undo, you can take away. This is not a scene that they have seen, and now they can unsee. This is going to stay and pop up from here and there in the future of Iran. Thank you so much. I'll stop here.

POUYA

ALIMAGHAM:

Thank you so much, Maryam. There's going to be plenty of time for questions. I do want to remind our audience members that we will have a Q&A afterwards. I am allowed to comment between the speakers if there is time. And thankfully, to Maryam, she left me maybe 30 seconds to a minute to comment.

When you were sharing your anecdote, it reminded me of my own real quick. I was not raised in Iran, but I was born there, and I grew up in California. And a couple of years ago, on Twitter, I shared this photo of my parents. I don't know if you could see it. I shared this photo of them in Iran in the '70s.

And you see my mom with her flowing hair and my dad, and they weren't married here, and they were clearly in love. And they were touching each other. And for me, this is just a very normal photo. And when I share it to people, people usually comment about how positive and how much of a sweet and loving photo it is.

When I shared it on Twitter, the reaction I got was very interesting. A lot of the Iranians who are in Iran currently, and saw this photo on Twitter, their reaction was, wow, we can't believe a time like this existed. Because they had only experienced that separation and that head covering and all of that under the Islamic Republic. So when they see this photo, they're reminded of this bygone era that seems so distant, but it's a very lived memory for my family. And that was very interesting for me to hear from them.

I want to make one more comment about women as vanguards. This is important to acknowledge but also to remind our audience. Because I'm aware of this trope that-- there's this trope about women in the Muslim world and in places like Iran that they have been secluded or isolated and oppressed and silenced. And then people see the protests now and women and young girls leading it, grade school girls leading it.

And I want to make sure they understand this isn't something that is new. It's new that they're at the forefront of it, but women and girls have a long history in Iran, going back 150 years, where there have been active in political movements and even in guerrilla organizations in the '70s, where they were guerrilla fighters fighting the monarchy's government.

So yes, with that, I would like to welcome our second speaker, Dr. Yalda Hamidi. Dr. Yalda Hamidi, take it away. thank you.

YALDA HAMIDI: Thank you, Pouya joon, and thank you MIT staff for having me and giving me this opportunity for talking to the audience. So what I want to share with the audience today is not my research. I want you to be aware of that. These are my reflections.

And I do believe that what I need for developing a more academically appropriate research is more time, but also, over the past four months and a half, I listen to the voices that are coming out of Iran. To the best of my ability, I followed the discussions on Twitter and other social media.

And I'm one of those people who lived outside Iran for the past 12 years. But I also would say that I grew up in Iran, and I left Iran when I was about 30. So these are the reflections and the mental notes that I make to myself. And I see some value in sharing them with the rest of you and just bringing to our attention that, I think, we need a change into how we perceive and how we conduct feminist scholarship.

And there are things that we can take from what the phenomena that I simply call Mahsa's revolution. So the revolution actually appeared on social media on many different levels. And all the world were able to see that. But there are two questions that come often in my academic environment.

And I'm in a gender and women's studies department, not in area studies. And the people that I talk about are mostly people who identify as feminists and, particularly, transnational feminists. So when I presented my work at National Women's Studies Association last November, some of my colleagues and friends approached me and asked if Mahsa was the new George Floyd.

They wanted to know if they can use the anti-racist lens in teaching on how Mahsa's killing has happened in Iran, and how it resulted in an uprising that came afterward. And the people who are asking these questions are people who want to avoid the colonial understanding of feminism. And they want to know if being a woman in Iran is the only source of what they perceive as oppression, or if they can perceive ethnicity of Mahsa being a girl from a Kurdish community, as something that resembles the idea of race in the United States.

And for people who are quick to criticize, let me acknowledge that I understand that ethnicity in Iran is not exactly race in the United States. All these groups are so unique and we need to spend time studying them. But I do believe that there are certain structural similarities that help us understand these structures and these questions in comparable ways.

And also, the other question was about Mahsa being a Sunni person. And people were thinking about, for example, the literature that we call racialization of the Muslims in the United States after 9/11. Some scholars would argue that in the context of the US, Muslims have been treated similar to what would be treatment of Black communities, African and African-American communities before 9/11. So the question would go farther to ask, would Mahsa be easily killed if she if she were Baha'i if she were from one of other religion and religious groups or just the fact that she was Sunni was a factor in what happened to her.

The second question that really is very interesting and important here, for me, is the question of sexuality. In the early days of Mahsa's revolution, I had a conversation with one of my colleagues and friends who identifies openly as queer of color, Iranian queer of color. And when we had this intimate conversation, she was telling me that she was in extreme rush for getting her words out and reaching out to communities and raising awareness.

And she was not illusional by any measures. So she was telling me that she knew that the time frame for listening is going to be so short and narrow. And she was worried that few days after the passing of Mahsa, the window would close and normal Iranians, meaning cisgender and heterosexual Iranians would lose their interest and would go back to their own normal business of life.

So she wanted to get as much a word about the queer community and their lives and the oppressions they face out before the window gets closed. These two incidents. These two major questions that I have in my mind, the question of race, which also includes religion and the question of sexuality bring me to the genre that I know and I teach, and that's queer of color critique.

And for people who don't Queer Of Color Critique, QOCC as we call it, is one of the strongest genres for multidimensional criticism of the world that we live in. And that world is kind of dominated by structures like racism, patriarchy but also capitalism, neoliberalism, and things that take away from our lives. And in many cases, they result in politics of death, necro-politics for the queer of color communities.

So these two questions actually give me some kind of ways. And I'm going to make myself accountable to respond to these questions when I'm thinking about normalcy. Is this life normal? If it's normal for queer Iranians of color? If this revolution is moving in the right direction for me, the response is only if this revolution pays attention and the different forces combined in the mix put the lives of queer of color on top of their priorities.

And there is a reason for that. There is a lesson I take here from, especially, Black feminists. So in the frame that Black feminists propose to us, we understand reproductive justice only if a Black, poor, disabled woman of color can have the right to terminating pregnancy or raising their children in a world that they are not worried about police shooting. at them.

Basically, the theory suggests that only if the most vulnerable among us can have that sort of freedom, the rest of us can enjoy that in the society. And this is how I translate the question. How the lives of queer of color is supposed to be affected by this revolution?

And the second question for me, as an academic who has been given a hefty baggage of privilege being my cisgender and heterosexual sexualities or my social class, my religion everything that actually led me to some of the higher places of privilege among the Iranian community and in Iranian diaspora. So in this moment, I just take a pause and I ask that question for myself. Do the scholarship that I produce prioritizes queer of color?

And the shift that I want to see is not only a shift that you would get from DEI committees and universities. Intersectionality is not the theory of adding more ingredients and stirring the pot, and those ingredients being religion, ethnicity, queerness, and whatnot, this is not how it works. This work is supposed to be foundational, explosive.

We need to look at the scholarship that exists, and we need to ask ourselves, when we talk about the history of the feminism in the nation, there are Kurds, there are Baloch, there are queer of color that I'm talking about. And if we don't see those people in their scholarship, we cannot fix this scholarship but only adding the stories of those people to what already exist.

And the shift that I'm suggesting here is a shift from multicultural feminism into anti-racist feminist lens. That's also trauma informed. It's informed of the trauma of the queer of color who are living with us but also, is anti-racist has an approach for putting Iranians of color, not the force as an ethnic dominant group, not the Shia as a religious dominant group on top of the narrative.

And it's a lot of work. And it actually comes, sometimes, out as ungratefulness to the scholarship that exists. But if we can see through the discomfort that this question poses and the opportunities that it opens for us, I think only with practicing, producing such a scholarship and asking questions that are so foundational, we get into something, some future that's also inclusive of queer of color and also prioritizes them and their normalcy and what they would like to perceive as normalcy, other than normalcy for the rest of us.

And only in the shadow of them feeling normal, whatever normal would mean for them not feeling dysphoria, not feeling exclusion, violence, honor killing. Only in the shadow of that kind of a scholarship, we can move toward a future that's different from what we're dealing with right now.

And I have one example that actually is very helpful for me to sit with and understand. I want us to think about how Angela Davis adds race to understanding of the question of Palestine. And then I want us to think about queer Palestinians as the Mecca of intersectionality for the feminist scholarship.

I do love to imagine a future that queer Kurds and queer Arabs and queer Baloch come at the center of our feminist scholarship. And whoever wants to write about this moment, it starts from them. So I just want to take a moment and say their names because some of them have been murdered, some of them have lost their freedom.

So it's just a moment to think about Haji Dani, Alireza [INAUDIBLE] Farid, Sari Hamdani. And people who dealt with something that's not normal should not be perceived normal. And they lost whatever could be the equivalent of normalcy for them. And I would like to argue that, unless we claim and we demand normalcy for these groups of people, and until we give priorities to their lives, other or cisgender, heterosexual, Fars, Shia more privileged lives, we are not going to move in the direction of any normalcy. Thank you.

POUYA

OK, thank you so much, Yalda. I have questions more than comments, so I'm just going to wait for the Q&A, but I can't wait, actually. Just a reminder to the audience, especially those who are joining us now, we just finished our second panelist. We have a third one, and then afterwards we're going to have a Q&A. And we're grateful that you are here with us.

ALIMAGHAM:

Our next speaker, Dr. Mahrou Zhaf, welcome and take it away.

MAHROU ZHAF:

Hello, everybody. First, I want to thank Michelle Pouya for arranging this panel. And I'm grateful to Yalda and Maryam. I learned a lot from you, thank you. What I'm going to talk about today is a part of a long article that I've been working on for the past couple of months.

Here, I am not trying to use the feminist theory. I'm trying to use psychoanalytic theory. It's as people call it, doctor of emotion. That's who I am. So I'm trying to make an interpretation, an attempt to understand what's going on in Iran, not from a theoretical, intellectual perspective but from an emotional perspective.

Starting with, I'm going to use a few words, and I assume not everybody is using those words the way we use in psychoanalysis. So I'm going to go over that. And then start talking about what's going on. I'm going to use the words psychotic, neurotic, and pervert but not in the common sense that we use it in the society.

When I use the word psychotic, I mean someone who is detached from reality. They have their own version of reality. Whatever it is, it's not necessarily hearing a voice or seeing something that other people don't see, simply, being detached from what's going on around you.

And then I have the word neurotic, which is someone who sees the reality and suffers from being in the reality. Imagine if you are stuck in a car traffic, and, well, there's nothing you can do. You're just stuck here. There are imaginations about, what if I could fly? What if I could do something about it? But as a neurotic subject, I'm stuck there. And I have to accept the limitations of my subjectivity.

And at the end, perverts, which is the title of this talk for today. Pervert would be someone who sees the reality. That's very important to me and the article that I'm working on. They are not psychotic. They are not detached from what's going on in the country. They are not having these hallucinations about one day mahdi is going to come and save all of us.

They know exactly what they're doing, but their version of reality is a manipulated version of reality based on what they want from reality. Imagine, in the same example, you're stuck in traffic, but all of a sudden you think that, well, I'm better than the others. So I can go there or go there or find a way. Get out of the traffic while others are waiting for the traffic light.

That version of reality, when you think you're above other people, somehow you can manipulate the law, you can see yourself in this narcissistic light, that would be what I call today pervert. I know there is a connotation around it with sexuality, but psychoanalysis has moved on a long time ago from that connotation. It has other meanings now in cultural studies and psychological studies.

So simplifying it, the way Maryam and Yalda both talked about it, I think misogyny, phallocentrism, patriarchy, androgens. However you want to understand and you want to call it and talk about Iran, these are all to me, under the category of perversion, meaning, perversion includes hating women, mistreating women.

But there are other aspects to it. And it's very intersectional. We can look at the way Baha'is have been treated in Iran, look at the way that [NON-ENGLISH], those who carry goods across the border and how they are treated in Iran. Think about all executions in '80s. Think about Sanchi and think about Plasco.

All of the things that happened in Iran, we cannot say only women were mistreated but definitely, women were mistreated. definitely women were told that you have a kind of a second class status in this country. But mistreating people is much more general laborers, workers, religious minorities, all other kinds of people, LGBTQ community, as just Yalda was talking about. And I don't like to think this is a point of mismanagement, so they don't know what to do. That's how they do it. I believe the pervert knows very well what he's doing and how he's doing it for a specific reason.

Now, I want to get into the article that I'm working on. If the preoccupation of a perverted person is power and humiliation, as we talk about it in the clinical discourse, when you work with a patient who is preoccupied with humiliating other, discharging sadistic impulses, somehow wanting to be on top of the chain all the time because there is a sense of inferiority inside. And as a compensation, you want to always go after other people, then looking at what's going on in Iran, what is "normal," quote unquote normal in Iran and has been since the revolution is being humiliated.

It doesn't matter who you are. It doesn't matter what you do. You either stick to the ideology of the government, then you receive all kinds of benefits and you humiliate others who do not, or you're opposing that. That Sense of normalcy that Maryam was talking about, was very familiar for all of us.

Somehow, you get kicked out because some people talk to you about, we'll observe your hijab. Don't wear this. Don't do that. The way all other intersectional identities are humiliated. And going back to the clinical discussion, the question is, how individual responds to perversion, to humiliation, to constantly being harassed for what they do.

For going to a party-- remember, a few years ago that was the water guns in the park. That they arrested people, basically, for having fun. Anything that is considered life drive, happiness that's forbidden. That's something bad. That that's something that needs to be cut out of this quote unquote "moral" discourse of the perversion, which is their own discourse of morality, not necessarily our understanding of morality.

If you think about perversion as a spectrum, then we can think about all governments, all governments on this spectrum of perversion because perversion is obsessed with power as all governments. We can bring examples such as, I don't know how African-Americans are treated in the States, or how refugees are treated in Australia, but today, it's a specific form of perversion, more for the Islamic Republic, that I want to talk about, which is on the end of the spectrum.

There are some democratic governments here, but towards the end of the spectrum, as it gets more and more dangerous, which perversion can turn into psychopathy. Serial killers, that form of perversion. absolute lack of conscience, basically, it's more than discharging the sadistic impulse. It's like I don't feel anything when I kill someone.

Dissociation with what I'm doing and getting back to my own understanding moral compass of the compass of life, that's where Islamic Republic stands on the border of psychopathy and perversion. And which is where all of the totalitarian regimes and fascism basically. They all start there,

What do they want? They want to feel in charge. And when you look at how Islamic Republic has treated women and other categories that we were just talking about is, there is a preoccupation with the state of idealization of a fantasy. This is very similar to eugenics and what Hitler did and what happened in slavery in the United States.

The idea of, we have this fantasy about how Iran needs to be, attacks other countries by meaning that we don't need you independent of you constantly saying death to this country, death to that country while at the same time, we need to keep the fantasy of you're amazing. You are different. You're doing our best.

And women need to fit in, Baha'i needs to be lost, LGBTQ needs to be lost, not even exist. All other people need to fit into this fantasy, one fantasy of quote unquote "the Islamic Republic" that is so successful, that is false publishing all of these papers of how amazing are we We have nuclear weapon. We have very progressive country.

And the things that they're talking about, that we, non-neurotic subjects in touch with reality, laugh at them, like, what are you talking about? But from their perspective, that's the idealization. I want to bring it back to other movements in the world that they were doing the same thing.

When Hitler decided that disabled need to be gone, and he decided to get rid of all of them because they were not good genes, and they couldn't become the real Aryan, that's the very same thing. You have idealization, a fantasy about who you want to be. Who you want the country to be. And eventually, you want people to fit in or get lost.

With that understanding, and how we understand nationalism and fascism from this emotional perspective, I want to put fascism on the scale. So what is it that they are doing? They have a few defense mechanism.

On top of the list is a splitting. A splitting is when you stand in a position that you're either with me or against me. I cannot handle the gray area. I cannot handle that you agree with me on this and disagree with me on that. It's either you're my buddy, or you're my enemy. It's a very simplistic understanding of life.

And you see it in children for the right reason, because they are not fully developed in their prefrontal cortex, but eventually, in adults, we expect to see not a black and white perspective, more gray area, not buddy or enemy. But that's exactly the first defense mechanism that we see in the government. You're either with the government, with the ideology, against everything that are against, or you're the enemy of the state.

And if you are the enemy of the state, then it starts the second defense mechanism, which is dehumanization. If we think with ourselves that how come someone can wake up one day and brutally kill someone and feel nothing about it, actually, feel good about it that, oh, you're not a good Muslim, or you're Baha'i, or whatever you are, and I am entitled to get rid of you, to kill you, to do whatever I want to do because of your identity, how psychologically is possible for someone to think like that.

It's the moment that you can dehumanize someone based on that idealization that's going on for you on and on. It's the power discourse that, I don't know, Horkheimer they all talk about, which is in a very good book that is talk about the psychology of the pervert. It has been extensively discussed.

So going on, there is a sense of shame and guilt inside of any parent that they even themselves they do not have access to. That's why they constantly want to be seen and they want to be significant. When you listen to the literature of the Islamic Republic, all the time they are talking about, we are better than United States. How Canada treats Native Americans, look at United Kingdom, look at France, look at this country.

If you truly don't care about other countries and you want your own improvement, you don't constantly mention them. If you're mentioning them, somehow, on some level, you're engaged with them. And you want to beat them. And for keeping that fantasy, for giving all that money to other countries or countries that they care about or fantasy about other countries to fight with, there is a simple idea that I need to be seen. I need to be heard. I need to be important. And for that reason, I need to keep that fantasy up.

A little bit before that, you can ask, well, why they have this fantasy? Why they are doing this to people? And specifically, it comes from a very narrow positionality. All men, all coming from the same religion, all coming, more or less, from same age, background everything going back to the idea of how the fantasy of being nationalism basically and totalitarian are born into this world. Fascism are born into this world.

It goes back after every single monarch goes down. And somehow, they want to say-- like an infant who's the first time standing on his feet --want to say, I can do that on my own. But somehow, they fail to see that no person in this world can live in isolation. We all need each other. That's how we are created. That's how we are designed.

And somehow, they will always say to the other person, I'm better than you. If you look at the humiliation aspect of it, even within the society, forget about the Islamic Republic for a second, you see even people humiliating each other by their money, by their education, by what kind of family they have, where they live, ethnicity, gender.

So that trickles down to other people somehow performing in this pervert space of mine. Somehow doing the same thing to each other that, oh, I'm better than you are. I'm going to humiliate you.

And now, skipping a lot, I have a part talking about the psychodynamic of [INAUDIBLE]. I want to go to the part that I want to talk about women basically. What is interesting to me about this new generation, who are fighting with the government, they do not need to intellectualize.

As Maryam was talking about, they don't need to read, to write, to understand. There is something specific about what I call the emotional revolution meaning, they stand in their lived experience in their emotional understanding of, I was born in the belly of the beast. I was born in this perverted space.

Maybe they don't even know the word perversion. They don't even know psychoanalysis, political theory. And they don't need to know that. What they feel is, I want to fight perversion. And interestingly, they fight it in the same way. The language they use is very different than the language of girls or people who are fighting, for example, in the green movement.

They realized, early on, that the perversion is not within the symbolic order. It has its own rules and reality. And for having the right to exist, I don't need to intellectualize it. I don't need to have a dialogue because there is no way to have it. You are not going to listen to me. You run based on sadistic impulses.

So the only way to be is to mirror your aggression, is to mirror your frustration, humiliation, to humiliate you, to use the exact same word language and act. And to me, that's fascinating. That's something I would like to study more and more.

And at the end, I want to talk about the constructing self. That how moving forward constructing an ego for the country, something that can hold all of these impulses, including sadistic impulses, and all other life drives and things that it has been forbidden for four decades.

As Philip Cushman talks about it, he talks about white ego and American slavery. So we need to talk about how we are going to develop an emotional understanding of what we have been through for 40 years, all the things we experienced, constant humiliation inside and outside of the country, going after other countries, and saying things that, sometimes, we as Iranians, even laugh at our government.

Yet, at the same time, there is a part of us that somehow God is stimulated by this perversion, by this perverse state of mind, and now, you see in the society. How we are going to understand that? How girls are going to use that fighting the government? Those are questions that I'm going to work more on that. And thank you very much for listening to me.

POUYA

ALIMAGHAM:

OK, thank you so much, Mahrou. It's wonderful to hear from all three of you. I'm going to invite the panelists to turn on their cameras for our Q&A. And I invite the audience members to submit their questions to the Q&A function at the bottom. I see we already have a few.

I'm going to start with my own questions if nobody minds. So I'm not one of those Iranians or historians of the Middle East or Iran who does away with-- has a completely native approach to the region. I understand that Iran is an amalgamation of three cultures, none of them are mutually exclusive with each other.

So I agree with that point that Iran is a combination of Persian, Islamic, and Western culture, probably, a lot more than that as well. But there is a tendency, so I wanted to hear from Yalda in particular, but really everybody about that critique that when you look at Iran through the prism of race or feminism and gender, you're really imposing a Western standard on Iran.

I don't agree with that statement, but that's a question that is often asked. So I was very curious to know how you, Yalda, or Mahrou, or Maryam, or anybody, really, if you're comfortable to speak on this issue, what your thoughts are on that question.

YALDA HAMIDI: So let me also respond to this question keeping in mind what I'm hearing from some of my friends presenting in Iran. I do not think that the queer existence or feminism are exclusively Western concepts. And I have some fact to just talk about this question.

One of the points that we teach in any queer studies class is that queer life has been existed alongside with the heterosexual and cis life all along history. And one of the things that actually pushed it back in societies like Iran, has been the Western gaze.

So particularly, when you look at [INAUDIBLE] historiography of the early 19th century Qajar Iran, you see that people are living with different sexualities. There are not queer names for these sexualities, but those sexuality has existed and have lived together.

And it was only because of the relationship between Iran and the West that they've been pushed back into corners. And they've been perceived as sinful. And the sinfulness did not come from the Islamic culture at that point. It was what, actually, conveyed to Iranians through the gaze of the Western, Christian missionaries and also other people who move back and forth between Iran and the West.

And the way that I understand feminism is very different from the notion of Western feminism. This is my work, and I do understand that the Western feminism has a history. And at this point in the world, I'm an academic person sitting in North America having a job in a feminist department that's located in America. I do understand all of this, but it does not mean that the origin of feminism or the umbrella feminism term that I use, is only about this particular historical phenomena.

So when we look at the history of Iran, for example, this is one of the actually differences that really stands out, I believe, even up to today. And we need to point that out. I'm talking about the scholarship of Firoozeh Kashani-Sabet writing on patriotic womanhood.

And patriotic womanhood is-- I believe in the 1940s, when Iranian women are coming up with solutions and ways of expressing their gender in ways that actually works for the improvement of the nations. Being those women who bring sounds and natures of the future nation, and being in charge of raising them in proper ways so that they can make Iran and Iranians proud.

It's not exactly how you would understand feminism. And the term feminism, I think, there shouldn't even be a singular version of the term. It's always feminisms. So there are many different reasons. And some of them are, specifically, locally grown, like the patriotic womanhood. And even today, when you see there is this much debate about the idea of womanhood or nation, which one goes first? Are these women separatists or not? This is the result of that conversations that we started having in the beginning of the 20th century,

I also am a very big fan of Fatima Mernissi and her scholarship. And in 1980s, she has a chapter at the end of, I believe, the book *Islam and Democracy*. And she says, it's very funny that our men look at us and see us as the embodiment of the West as soon as we remove our veils.

It's a very interesting description of what's happening right now in Iran. We remove our veils, and they see us, not only as Westerners, but they perceive us as [NON-ENGLISH]. People who are on a toxin called West and lose their agency, lose their religion, lose their backgrounds.

What I would actually argue is that feminisms are multiple versions. And I don't think that we're looking at a Western phenomena. And because of that, we should be able to use this frame, but if I'm using a white feminist frame, a frame that's actually totally irrelevant to the context of conversation about Iran, the audience should have the right to call me out.

But I don't know if I responded to your question, Pouya joon, but I think these phenomenons have absolutely local roots in almost everywhere in the world, including Iran.

POUYA Thank you very much, and thank you so much. I loved it. Maryam or Mahrou, would you like to chime in, or
ALIMAGHAM: should we move on to another question?

MARYAM I could just quickly add something. I'm not nearly as well versed as the Yalda is in this topic, but I just wanted to
ALEMZADEH: point out, maybe along the same lines, that it is possible that there are universal, or claim to be universal concepts of feminist freedom seeking in all platforms. And it is possible that a local population with a very specific history and background and a very specific contingent time in history, rises up and claims those.

We shouldn't shy away from acknowledging that a certain group, a certain population in Iran is now making claims to universal concepts of freedom, of women's rights, and so on and so forth. That does not take away from its value. That does not challenge post-colonial views of letting the locals speak. That's actually letting the locals speak and claiming expanding their world in a sense.

POUYA Wonderful point. Thank you.
ALIMAGHAM:

MAHROU ZHAF: I think Yalda and Maryam did a good job answering the question. I have nothing to add.

POUYA But I have a question for you Mahrou. We've spoken about this uprising in Iran many times before our meeting
ALIMAGHAM: today. And I'm looking at the title of your presentation, The Islamic Republic's Perverse State of Mind and the Female Resistance. In our conversations, you also spoke of sadism. I don't know. It sounds like you remember.

There's also you see the detractors of the uprising present it as a violent uprising, right? We know that the overwhelming majority of those killed are demonstrators. Several dozen have been security personnel. So we know there is conflict on the streets that is two-way, but obviously, the state is a much more powerful and violent entity. There is no right to bear arms in Iran or anything of the sort.

But people who detract from the movement will say that, oh, it's not the peaceful demonstrations that the media presents it to be. You said something that was very interesting to me. And I want to see if you would be willing to share that to a larger audience.

MARYAM

ALEMZADEH:

How would you approach if you're surrounded with people who are assuming-- who dehumanizing your self-- you, basically. If you're on the street, and you know someone is not hesitant about killing you, beating you, or arresting you, torturing you anything that comes to sadistic impulses, anything that comes within this power dynamic, they're not hesitant to do that.

The first thing that comes up is, if they are that confident in the way they treat me, in the way they see me, in the way that dehumanize me there is something ideological and very black and white going on that there is no way to fight it with discourse, which many uprising before this uprising tried to do that. And we all saw the consequence of it. We have seen what has happened.

But the only discourse here is the discourse of a psychopath. Someone who has no hesitation going to the street, and I'm using that word. I know it's a strong word. But think about, when we think about a serial killer, we think about all of these crazy creatures going out and doing things to other people.

But didn't the Islamic Republic kill authors, writers, intellectuals as in a serious, serious way, like serial killers killing one after another all of these people who were intellectuals of the country or imprisoned them. So being a psychopath is not necessarily someone who is crawling out of his cave and doing something nasty. In a way, it's the power that comes with a pervert state. It comes with unchecked power.

I just saw a comment in the Q&A, which I love that with this discourse everything is perverse. Any unchecked power, including the capitalist power, including anyone who can do whatever they want to do to other people without any consequences, that could lurk in the discourse of perversion. And that's problematic. That's why a democratic country holding people accountable for their actions and in Iran, I don't remember of anyone ever said, I'm sorry for what I've done. I apologize. I made a mistake. The government made a mistake.

It's always, we're right. We're 100% right, which is a narcissistic bent when narcissism means perversion. I'm always right. You can never question me, and if you question me, I'm going to go after you for whatever it is that you're questioning me.

What that brings up in the audience in me in a subject that is always faced with this person who's 100% right about himself and does whatever he wants to do, I mirror the aggression. I mirrored them whatever they're doing to me because there is no way out of it. Emotionally, when you're in this abusive relationship, you are beaten up all the time, eventually, you mere digression if there is a way to leave, you leave. If there's not, that's the only way to exist.

POUYA

ALIMAGHAM:

Yeah, I think that's a very important point, Mahrou. I work on the green movement and Iran's modern revolutionary history. And you see a lot of protesters and a lot of protests being nonviolent and then being dealt with violently and then responding to that violence. It's a very causal relationship. We see this in a lot of the footage in 2009.

But your point goes a little bit deeper if I'm not mistaken. Your idea is that the state has been dealing with people violently for decades. And so to respond in that matter, not necessarily just clashing on the streets, just to have that anger inside of them and then to explode all of a sudden, is not the fault of protesters losing control. It's still rooted in government repression from the beginning.

MARYAM That's how I understand it. It's like, I know nobody wants here to talk about another subject, but the Palestinians
ALEMZADEH: throw stones and the Israelis make a big deal out of it. Oh, my God, the Palestinians throw this at us. You've been killing them genocide [INAUDIBLE].

So if I want to use that example, bringing it to Iran, what's going on is, oh, Iranian did this. What have you been done to them for decades that as a result, now you're getting really angry, really frustrated and doing all of [AUDIO OUT] of course, the power dynamic is off there. How much power the state has. How much power [AUDIO OUT]

POUYA Wonderful, Maryam Joon, I have a question for you. You spoke of the movement being leadership and of
ALIMAGHAM: intentionally avoiding ideology. And you mentioned that as a good thing. I see it as having advantages and disadvantages.

That one advantage being that because there's no leader, in particular, that means that people-- there's not somebody to disagree with. Everyone could get on board, right? Or because there's no fixed ideology, anyone that has a problem in society or with the government or politically can get involved. And therefore, there is an ideology that if they disagreed with that would keep them on the sidelines.

So I understand there are virtues of it being leadershipless and avoiding ideology. But this is the context of now. In the context of, say, the Iranian revolution, the fact that the fact that the revolution had leadership, had so many ideologies and those ideologies negated the Shah's monarchy from the bottom up.

And the fact that that leadership was so important, and the example I always give is that the call for the creation of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards, the order, came from Khomeini at the behest of Montazeri and others before the regime finally came down on February 11th. And the idea was that the revolutionaries didn't trust the Shah's military. This is the same military that the United States and the British had ruled the military, overthrown Messaddeq in 1953.

So those revolutionaries who are now plotting and pushing the revolution forward, saw the Shah's army as a threat to this forthcoming revolution. And Khomeini gave the directive to create the IRGC, with the main objective of safeguarding the leadership to prevent another coup. And that is all a product of leadership.

So for this uprising to be leadershipless and to avoid ideology, has its merits but also has what I think are disadvantages. And I just want to know if you'd like to further elaborate on what you see are the merits or maybe the demerits.

MARYAM Thank you, Pouya. That's a great question. And I completely agree that it comes with advantages and
ALEMZADEH: disadvantages. I'm not of the opinion that it's decisively a positive aspect, but I do believe that it can't be any other way if we agree that the gist of the movement, that the core engine behind it has been this quest for normalcy.

It's, again, the taking for grantedness of that demand makes it hard to adhere to any type of narrower ideology, any type of authority, actually. So for me, personally, speaking from an observer from the outside, it's hard to imagine that the young people, who so energetically took to the streets and so fearlessly, as you and Mahrou were speaking, it's hard for me to see them accepting anyone's authority as the unquestionable leader of this revolution, as it happened with Ayatollah Khomeini in 1979.

This is kind of a side point, but I think a lot of the Iranian revolution, the 1979 revolution's achievements were actually happening because there was not a fierce enough structure. It remained flexible to bring people in and out. It relied on informal networks, such as [INAUDIBLE] the Islamic associations, the mosque networks, the clerical networks in Najaf around Ayatollah Khomeini.

And actually, the IRGC was not that preplanned the way it came to life. Khomeini's decree was after the revolution. Well, it's debated, actually. Like everyone says, I had the decree and gives it a date, dates it at a particular time.

But the consensus that one can take out of multiple narratives is that it came afterwards when already some grassroots militias had formed on the ground. And there was this intention, firstly, actually, from the interim government of [INAUDIBLE] and then sort of transitioned under the leadership of the Revolutionary Council and the person of Khomeini.

So I just wanted to point that out that even in the context where leftist, communist revolutions like global guerrilla movement, which was highly organized, was a major influence all over the world. The Iranian revolution slightly defied that pattern.

So if we give in to a cultural [INAUDIBLE] maybe it's in the Iranian culture to continue this informality. I'm really not saying that seriously. I don't think the current movement has a lot to be compared to the 1979 movement and to any other movement older than two decades before today. It's just a new word, a new type of personality, a new type of latch word that these young people have.

POUYA OK, wonderful. We have about-- Yes?

ALIMAGHAM:

YALDA HAMIDI: Do you mind if I also respond to that?

POUYA Please, no, no, please.

ALIMAGHAM:

YALDA HAMIDI: So one of the things that I want to talk about specifically about Iranian feminist movements or Iranian feminisms' movement, is about the fact that we never had enough opportunity and a space for organization. I remember reading a piece, an article by [INAUDIBLE] years ago. Unfortunately, I don't remember the year, but I can look it up for our audience.

And she was talking about this fact. It was published by Zanan magazine. Zanan means woman. And that's one of the major feminist publications still working in Iran. And she was saying that, to this day, we cannot talk about Iranian feminisms anymore.

Because of what happened during the Ahmadinejad period, and then what came after that, we are dealing with atrocities. And it means that most of us who identify as feminists are in and out of prisons. And because we need to survive, and because we need to just have a space to breathe and come back to our families. And we are afraid of the violence that the government, actually, puts on our bodies and our lives. We don't have a space for organizations.

And maybe I'm a pessimistic person here. I do believe that it's not anything Iranian about that. It's only the fact that the Islamic Republic has been very successful in killing every organizations, every collective movement, every party. Every time that five of us gathered together, had tea, and wanted to move towards something.

I'm one of those people who really wanted to live in Iran. That was what I wanted. That's what I want right now. Just give me a ticket, and tell me that I can teach in universities, and I'm gone. It has never been possible. I resisted. I got fired.

I went to classes. I came up with creative ways to talk about feminism without even saying the word feminism. That was one of the weirdest thing that I really did. That didn't sit well with them. It was just, there was not room for basing. So [INAUDIBLE] is a scholar of Arab literature.

And in one of her books she talks about the [INAUDIBLE] first theory, [INAUDIBLE] theory. How does the state put their feet on our throat and they pressure enough so that we don't die, but we can't do anything else. And I believe that's why we don't have organization.

I'm working with the reproductive justice chapters of high school students in Minnesota. I don't think the high schoolers in Iran would disagree if they could go to a chapter of feminist movement and organize around one or other sorts of ideology. We have many. I don't know which one would win, but I feel like this opportunity has been stripped of all of us. And that's why we don't have organizations.

And of course, I'm not a scholar of Iranian revolution, so that's the extent that I see this issue. Thank you.

POUYA

ALIMAGHAM:

It's just sad to hear what you said, Yalda, because we all know about Iran suffering from a brain drain. The best and the brightest have been leaving the country for decades. And it's unfortunate that you, who wants to go back to Iran, cannot go back and have this generation or the next benefit from your insight. It's very tragic.

We have about 11 minutes. Let's go to our audience members and we have roughly about 20 questions. Mahrou, Maryam, do you guys have any-- Yalda joon, you have any questions that you see that you want to answer directly? Some of them are a little bit long-winded. And it's been hard to read the questions and also listen to you guys and see which questions I should relay from the audience members. I'm going to just quickly look through them to see if there's anything that fits well with the program.

Well, this question is really good. And I don't have it. I'm not directing it to anybody. But we talk about minority rights. This question is about, says thank you for the interesting topics. I would like to ask about the different ethnicities and different languages in Iran. What do the speakers think about the normalcy of elimination of different languages in Iran's education system? And if it is necessary to have freedom of education in different ethnicities native language?

This is a question that Iran's been grappling with for about 100 and some odd years about how to create a modern nation state when the country is so heterogeneous and speaks so many different languages. And it's such a contentious issue, but it's also really important because here we are talking about discrimination. The fact that Mahsa joon is an Iranian Kurd. These issues come to the fore. Would any of you like to volunteer to try to address this question?

YALDA HAMIDI: One thing that I can say. My work is anti-racist pedagogies. And the importance of languages and cultures and us as educators being accommodating of what the students bring to the class, not just what we teach them. And for obvious reasons, you do not see that in Iran. And coming to this panel, I just want everybody to know that I'm very critical of the concept of normalcy.

And as academic, however, not pleasant this act is, I'm pushing for the normalcy to have some critical criteria when we think of normalcy. If I just do not make feminist claim, right now I can have a normal life in Iran. And that's just the truth. And that's what privilege offers to me.

And that normal is Iranian normal, just as Mahrou said. So I'm going to be seeing people dealing with violence. And I can just turn my head and do my own thing. And I'm going to be navigating in neighborhoods that I can even not very well and nobody cares and nobody have been really caring over the past years. It's the level of privilege.

So if I go on Twitter, and I say, this is a normal life. And I make X amount of dollars every month, this is not normalcy. That's what I'm striving for. I want religious, ethnic, and sexual minorities at some point to be able to tell me that they feel like their life is normal. And their kids have opportunities to learn in their own languages if that's what they want.

And they express their desire just like the picture, the beautiful picture that you shared Pouya joon. If people want to express affections, heterosexual or otherwise in the public sphere, and if they perceive that as normal, I want that to be able to happen. Normalcy, for the privileged people, have always been an option.

In the United States, we're having women losing their reproductive rights, but only if you have enough money to purchase yourself an airplane ticket and go to another state, you're free. This is only going to be the problem for people with more intersectional identities like the poor, the working class, the ethnic group. And because of that, I feel like this question is very important. I appreciate that. And I do believe that in imagining normalcy, that's where we need to start.

POUYA

I loved it. Thank you so much. By the way, if you notice, in the name of the events, it says here, Iran and the

ALIMAGHAM:

Struggle for "Normalcy" Women, Life, Freedom. Normalcy is put in quotation marks very intentionally. But I wanted to include that phrase. Michelle and I wanted to include that phrase or that term in the title, because that's what I kept hearing from demonstrators in the country. We want to just live in a normal situation, a normal life to many of the points you just raised. But I understand there's a lot of room for critiquing that term, certainly.

This is a question very much geared towards a sociologist. Maryam, how do you think the movement can move forward and achieve its goals given the violent repression including killing of certain protesters?

MARYAM

Well, I don't know if it's in the realm of sociology, actually or fortune telling. [LAUGHS] But as I mentioned, a lot of my colleagues are of the opinion, and rightly so based on current scholarship and past experiences, that some sort of social movement or organization is necessary. That some sort of clearer plan for the future is necessary coming through a leadership, not necessarily a single charismatic leader but a leadership body.

ALEMZADEH:

But I personally think, again, as I mentioned before, that's the moving engine behind the movement. The grievances that spontaneously caused all this is hard to fill into any organization or any particular ideology that does not emerge from the core of the movement itself. What I can imagine happening is the deepening of the already existing schisms within the governing body, within the elite as we have been witnessing bits and pieces of.

A deepening of that over time, how much time I don't know, three years, five years to the extent that a trigger, such as maybe the passing away of the supreme leader or some sort of exogenous shock anything short of military intervention, that's not what I'm imagining, ideally, could cause a breakdown.

So yes, for the movement to be the definitive force to bring about regime change, yes, it will need organization and so on and so forth. But another imaginable path is for the movement to continue here and there, like pop up every once in a while out of some grievances and contribute to the waning of the ruling elite, as it has already to a point of no return.

POUYA

ALIMAGHAM:

Yeah, I think you're right. It's been these protests these past 20 or 30 years have been cascading. So there is a connectivity to them, especially as they slowly and gradually robbed the state of its sources of legitimacy. We have about two minutes left, maybe less. Mahrou, I have two questions for you from one audience member. You could pick and choose which one you want to answer, depending on how much time you feel like you need.

One question is, how does religiosity influence the perverse state of totalitarian power? Is it any different with its secular counterparts? And the same audience member asks the second question. In what forms does this perversion exist in external forces wanting to see their own ideals inside Iran? Either pro or against revolution, pro or against orientalist attitudes, regardless of what Iranians inside want.

MAHROU ZHAF: Well, the thing is, the second question would take a while to answer, so I'll go with the first one.

POUYA

OK.

ALIMAGHAM:

MAHROU ZHAF: How religiosity affects the idealization, the, dehumanization and the sadistic behavior in a perverse government.

I think each totalitarian government the fascist government found its own way into the perverse reality, into perversion, basically. So with that idea, if you look at other fascist states, such as, I don't know. If you will look at Hitler, he found his own way with all of [INAUDIBLE] and [INAUDIBLE] and doing this and doing that.

And Islamic Republic found its own way in Muslim nation, above all, regardless of the cost. And their own understanding of Islam, again. There's so many things involved in their own version of reality. I want to bring it back to what Yalda said, that Fatima Mernissi has published extensively on understanding the difference between patriarchy and Islam and all the things that we have been reading all these years and working on.

So is it different? I think each of them find their own pervert fantasy to stick to it. And by using that, to do what they want to do. Even for serial killers, that's the same thing. They all have their own fantasy going after specific people men, women, either this hair color, this eye color. They always have a pattern to go after and do whatever they are doing. And I don't know how different is that, but each of them have their own fantasy that they're following.

POUYA OK, thank you so much. Thank you, Mahrou. Thank you to the Center for International Studies for organizing this
ALIMAGHAM: wonderful panel. Right now, more than ever, we need vigorous debate. I'm grateful for the space specifically from Michelle English and Sabina Van Melle, our wonderful panelists, doctors or professors Maryam Alemzadeh, Yalda Hamidi, and Mahrou Zhaf, thank you. And this concludes our event.

MAHROU ZHAF: Thank you very much.

YALDA HAMIDI: Thank you, everyone for being here and being patient, and thank you and MIT Center for inviting us.

MARYAM Thank you for the opportunity.

ALEMZADEH: