

## *Introduction*

Torture has ceased to exist.  
*Victor Hugo*

### Return of Torture

Sixty years ago Iranian lawyers would have readily agreed with Victor Hugo's famous pronouncement, "Torture has ceased to exist."<sup>1</sup> Iran had followed Europe's example of banning torture from the whole judicial process. Policemen were prohibited from using brute force to extract information and confessions. Judges lost their age-old array of corporal punishments. Similarly, prison wardens no longer routinely inflicted physical chastisements—even though they were not averse to killing their wards if ordered to do so. They murdered—but observed the taboo against torture.

By the 1980s, however, torture had returned with a vengeance. Prisoners—especially political ones—were now routinely subjected to physical torments reminiscent of bygone centuries. The taboo had been broken. According to Amnesty International, the United Nations, and Human Rights Watch, in a world in which prison brutality was rampant, Iran outdid most other countries in its use of systematic physical torture.<sup>2</sup>

This return of torture obviously runs counter to Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>3</sup> According to Foucault's famous paradigm, societies inevitably replace physical with nonphysical punishments as they move from traditional to modern dis-

courses. In traditional societies, punishments came in the shape of corporal torments—on the public scaffold as well as in closed judicially supervised torture chambers. In modern societies, however, they come in the form of prolonged imprisonment—often under close surveillance. According to Foucault, the “theater of horror” gives way to penitentiary walls; the imprint on the body, to “remolding of the soul”; the street scaffold, to the carceral archipelago; and the medieval Inquisition, to Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon—at least in grand aspiration if not in actuality.

The return of torture to Iran has been accounted for in a number of ways.<sup>4</sup> Some claim the reemergence is not surprising because torture is deeply ingrained in all “Asiatic” cultures. Others argue the reemergence is to be expected because the Islamic Republic, being a “throwback to the dark ages,” has reverted to all things medieval. Yet others argue that the return does not invalidate Foucault because its ultimate purpose is to establish social discipline by “making and then remaking the victim.”<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, apologists for the present regime have argued that Iran—like many other contemporary states—has no choice but to resort to emergency measures to counter heavily armed terrorist organizations. After all, even Jeremy Bentham, the champion crusader against torture, was ambivalent on the question of whether in emergencies the police could use force to obtain information that would directly save innocent lives.<sup>6</sup>

These explanations, however, do not bear close scrutiny. If torture was so ingrained in Iranian culture, why did it recede from the national scene for more than half a century—from the early 1920s until the early 1970s? In these five decades, prisoners often complained about *shekanjeh* (torture). But by this, they meant a slap on the face, verbal abuse, a withheld meal, or, at worst, a few days solitary confinement. Brute force was rarely used. “Shekanjeh”—like the English term “torture”—is a useful yardstick for measuring the prevalent “threshold of outrage.” One generation’s “torture” is another’s inconvenience. In the words of one former prisoner, “In the 1930s we often complained of being tortured but our suffering was nothing com-

pared to what prisoners have to bear nowadays.”<sup>7</sup> Another former prisoner writes, “I begin my prison reminiscences with much humility fully cognizant of the fact that our hardships were nothing compared to those of later generations.”<sup>8</sup>

If torture is intrinsically linked to the “traditional” nature of the present regime, why did its return predate the Islamic Republic? For it began to reemerge under the “modernizing” Pahlavi monarchy—half a decade before the revolution and the appearance of the clerical republic. As this book will show, the Shah in the early 1970s was beginning to resort to torture for reasons very similar to those of the subsequent Islamic Republic. These reasons had little to do with modernity and tradition but much to do with ideological warfare, political mobilization, and the need to win “hearts and minds.”

Similarly, the desire for social discipline cannot explain the return of torture. If its main purpose is to create discipline in the wider society, why is it hidden behind closed doors and its existence vehemently denied? The public scaffold may possibly induce social conformity; torture behind closed doors cannot. Moreover, if discipline is the main purpose, why are prison wardens so oblivious to the whole issue of order, control, and regimentation? Prison memoirs are unanimous in reporting that the authorities invariably leave the administration of the wards to the inmates themselves. Ironically, this makes the prison the one place in the whole country where “grassroots democracy,” including voting and direct participation, is practiced on a daily basis. Furthermore, torture, despite its physical damage, rarely “remakes” the personality. On the contrary, the victims—at least, those who survive—end up more alienated from the regime. As one prisoner notes, very few of her cellmates changed their views even in the worst days of ideological indoctrination. She adds that many lost their lives simply because they remained ideologically contemptuous of their interrogators.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, the search for security information cannot explain the return of torture to Iran. If the ultimate aim is to obtain such information, why then does torture invariably continue

until something far more important is obtained: the public *e'terafat*, a term that means, significantly, not only confession but also political and ideological recantation. Some modern states—especially in Latin America—have used torture for information, intimidation, and self-incrimination. But Iran uses it predominantly to obtain these ideological recantations. Some states—again in Latin America—give their interrogators free rein, thereby providing them with the opportunity to gratify personal whims and sadistic instincts. But the clerical authorities in Iran keep close tabs on the interrogators and invariably stop the torment once they have obtained the sought-after recantation.

This gives the term “torture” a special poignancy as the victims themselves can end the pain by simply complying with their interrogators’ demands. It is torture in the true sense, distinct from inhumane punishment, gratuitous pain, and degrading treatment. According to its Latin derivation, “torture” is the infliction—or the threat of the infliction—of intense physical and psychological pain to extort from the victim what the authorities demand. Some recent works on torture have diluted the term by minimizing its political poignancy and calculated rationality and stretching it to encompass any form of pain, including war suffering, plain brutality, domestic violence, religious flagellations, and even sadomasochistic pleasure. To practice torture, states do not necessarily have to be sadistic and primitive. On the contrary, they can be highly rational, modern, and calculating.

## Public Recantations

Public recantations in Iran come in various forms—in pretrial testimonials; in chest-beating letters; in mea culpa memoirs; in “press conferences,” “debates,” and “roundtable discussions”; and, most prevalent of all, in videotaped “interviews” and “conversations” aired on prime-time television. Under the Shah, leftists had monopolized such television programs. Under the

Islamic Republic, television has become an equal-opportunity medium featuring prominent figures representing a wide spectrum of opinion—from monarchists, liberals, religious conservatives, and secular nationalists, to conventional Marxists, Maoists, and Trotskyists, all the way to radical Muslims and even ex-Khomeinists, who, for one reason or another, have fallen by the political wayside. Recantations from lesser figures often do not hit the airwaves. Instead, they are shown on closed-circuit television within prisons and then filed away for future court use. In fact, they become the essential component of the prisoner's *dosieh* (dossier). The chief warden of Evin, the main political prison in Tehran, has boasted that more than 95 percent of his "guests" eventually oblige him with his sought-after videotaped "interview."<sup>10</sup>

These tapes bear striking and eerie resemblance to recantations produced elsewhere—especially in Maoist China during the 1949–54 "brainwashing" campaign and the 1965–71 Cultural Revolution; in Stalinist Russia and Eastern Europe, first during the 1935–39 Moscow trials and later in 1951–54 during the so-called Slansky trials; and in early modern Europe, from the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, when both Catholic inquisitors and Protestant monarchs often extracted confessions from political as well as nonpolitical prisoners, notably from religious dissenters. Although other societies, such as the United States during McCarthyism, have also shown some interest in public recantations, none have outdone Iran, Stalinist Russia, Maoist China, and early modern Europe in their systematic use. These four can be considered to be in a league of their own.

Despite the wide gap in culture, time, and space, these four societies have produced recantations uncannily similar in format, language, imagery, and even metaphors. These recantations are replete with such potent terms as "redemption"; "repentance"; "forgiveness"; "second chance"; "open eyes"; "seeing the light"; "cautionary tales"; "reflection on past errors"; "return to the Community"; "treason"; "betrayal"; "deviation from the straight and narrow path"; "sin and pitfalls of utter

damnation”; “devilish deeds”; “clandestine meetings”; “sinister conspiracies”; “hidden hands”; “richly deserved punishments”; “wolves in sheeps’ clothing”; and, of course, “consorting with the enemy and his representatives.” The same scriptwriter could have composed all the recantations—with, of course, some improvisations for the immediate circumstances. A recantation given in Iran could well have been presented by Nicolai Bukharin, Rudolf Slansky, a Chinese revisionist, Galileo, Thomas Cromwell, or a Templar knight.

Even witch trials in early modern Europe produced similar confessions—although their victims were “social” rather than “political” deviants. They were invariably dragged to court by neighbors rather than by the authorities. They were accused not of high treason but of *maleficium*—use of black magic against fellow villagers. They submitted themselves to punishment ostensibly to save their souls in the next world rather than to redeem themselves in this world. Despite these differences, their confessions repeated themes found in political recantations the world over: demonic meetings, crimes against fellow beings, choosing evil over the good, deviation from the correct path, the mortal danger posed to all by external forces, the naming of names, and the plea to be reintegrated into the Community. Not surprisingly, some consider witch trials in early modern Europe to be merely an extension of medieval heresy trials.

The recantations in these very different societies are similar precisely because they perform a similar function—that of grand theater staged by the authorities as positive propaganda for themselves and as negative propaganda against their real and imagined enemies. They are intended to destroy as well as to win over hearts and minds. The texts are similar precisely because they have comparable subtexts, pretexts, and even contexts.

As positive propaganda, the recanters praise on high the powers that be—whether Church, State, Crown, Party, or Leader. They submit to the authorities and recognize their legitimacy by meticulously citing their honorific titles, grand

claims, and historic achievements. They reaffirm the official version of reality, of Truth, and of History. In short, they repeat the Gospel according to their Rulers. They also reconfirm the importance of ideological conformity and the pitfalls of non-conformity. This explains why such shows appear less in conventional autocracies and more in ideologically charged societies—whether modern or medieval, whether totalitarian or highly traditional. Some have mistakenly linked public recantations to modern totalitarianism, forgetting that such shows were pioneered by medieval inquisitors who lacked even rudimentary state institutions. In submitting, the recanters affirm not only the omnipotence and righteousness of the authorities but also, significantly, their intrinsic benevolence. This explains why they invariably absolve the authorities of any pain they may suffer and instead stress that punishment ultimately originates from God, the Community, the General Will, or the Irresistible Forces of History. Forgiveness comes from the authorities; retribution, from powers beyond.

As negative propaganda, the recanters proclaim on high their own and their colleagues' utter depravity. They come onto the stage to humiliate, dehumanize, and demonize themselves as well as their associates. Repeating official accusations, they depict themselves as criminals, saboteurs, conspirators, traitors, scoundrels, deviants, degenerates, vermin, mad dogs, and even the Devil's sexual partners. In short, they confess to having inverted and subverted society's positive values. The intention is to devastate the opposition through disillusionment, demoralization, and depoliticization. In fact, this negative propaganda against the enemy is as significant as the positive propaganda for the authorities. While the introduction and conclusion of the text sing loud praises for the authorities, its main content rants and raves against the enemy.

One's mere presence on the stage is itself a form of suicide, for it signifies the explicit rejection of oneself as well as the implicit betrayal of one's own friends, colleagues, and beliefs. One does not have to be a Christian to be repelled by the figure of Judas—by "traitors," "betrayers," "turncoats," "rats," "finks,"

“stool pigeons,” “squealers,” and those who name names to save their own skins. Not surprisingly, many Iranians in the 1980s equated recantations with suicide and total destruction of one’s *aberru* (honor, reputation, self-respect, and even persona).

Recantations work best when their publics, especially the targeted audience, share two preconceptions. First, they feel that their society is mortally threatened by omnipotent external forces plotting incessantly with enemies well hidden in the very bowels of their community. This *mentalité* can be termed conspiratorial—even paranoid. Second, they are remarkably innocent of the stage preparations that precede the show. They associate confessions with truth, guilt, redemption, and moral conscience—not with torture, coercion, violence, and unbri-dled power. Consequently, the recantations stress the “voluntary” nature of the whole exercise as well as the sinister links between external and internal enemies. These two issues feature as prominently as propaganda for the authorities and against the opposition.

In all four cases, the enemy was omnipotent as well as omnipresent. In medieval and early modern Europe, it took the shape of the Devil, his well-concealed agents, and his equally well-concealed dupes—Jews masquerading as Christians, churchgoing peasants harboring Manichaean heresies, or witches pretending to be harmless old women. The Inquisition handbook *Malleus Maleficarum* (The Hammer of the Witches) spelled out how to identify, unmask, and convict such deadly women. Cool-headed scholars such as Thomas Moore and Jean Bodin, not to mention John Calvin and Martin Luther, were convinced that thousands—perhaps hundreds of thousands—of witches were running rampant and endangering the whole of Christendom. According to one leading historian of European witchcraft, many of those burned at the stake had aroused their neighbors’ suspicions long before they were actually brought to trial.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, the charges brought against the Templars—however fantastic to the modern ear—struck a chord for their contemporaries as many already suspected this secretive order of practicing homosexuality, worshipping the



Devil, and aiding and abetting the Muslims in the Holy Land.<sup>12</sup> The confessions merely reinforced public suspicions and preconceptions.

In the communist world, the external enemy took the form of imperialism—especially German in the Moscow purges, British in the Slansky trials, and American in the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Imperialism was deemed extremely dangerous because it could recruit agents who to all outward appearances seemed to be militant communists—even veterans of the Bolshevik Revolution, of the Spanish Civil War, and of the Long March. In his *Short History of the Communist Party*, Stalin drastically revised dialectical materialism to argue that the class struggle would inevitably intensify—not wane—in the decades following the triumphant revolution. Thus, according to Stalin, the danger of conspiracies increased in the 1920s to peak in the 1930s. The Moscow trials were clearly pitched to two different audiences. For the party faithful, those in the dock had aided and abetted the German “fascist”—if not objectively, at least subjectively by not fully supporting the party leadership. For peasants who still believed in the supernatural, the defendants had sold their souls in exchange for the destruction of cattle and crops. This explains why Trotsky (Lev Bronstein), even though isolated in distant Mexico, was credited with demonic powers and accused of damaging the harvest as well as masterminding grand conspiracies with his archenemies—Kamenev, Zinoviev, and Bukharin.<sup>13</sup>

The “paranoid style” is equally prevalent in Iran.<sup>14</sup> The public—at least since the 1930s—has become increasingly convinced that foreign enemies are incessantly plotting to destroy the country with the help of a *seton-e panjom* (fifth column). This foreign term has gained currency not only among nationalists, royalists, leftists, and liberals but also among religious conservatives and even so-called fundamentalists, who supposedly reject all alien concepts. For some, the real enemy is capitalist America; for others, imperialist Britain; for yet others, communist Russia. In Khomeini’s terminology, America is the “Great Satan,” Russia the “Other Satan,” and Britain the “Little

Satan.” These satans are to be taken with the utmost seriousness because they have for years created their own fifth columns by recruiting citizens who appear loyal in terms of birth, upbringing, language, and even religion but, in fact, are disloyal in their inner thoughts and ideological affinities. The accusation of being a “foreign agent” and a “fifth columnist” invariably sticks simply because much of the public is convinced that foreign powers are pulling many of the strings within the body politic. In fact, the accused themselves often subscribe to the conspiratorial paradigm—although they would make an exception of their own cases. In the same way that European “witches” believed in the existence of the Devil and his agents, self-confessed “foreign spies” in Iran subscribe to the prevalent conspiratorial theory of politics.

The recantations become especially useful when the audience is predisposed to accept confessions at face value and is innocent of the efforts that go into producing the show. The recanters, not to mention the authorities, insist that the testimonials are the product of much self-examination, reflection, and reconsideration, and that such confessions have nothing to do with coercion but are genuine signs of guilt, penance, and striving for redemption—either in this or in the next world. In Iran, as in premodern Europe and the communist world, confessions are deemed to be the “proof of proofs,” the “mother of proofs,” and the “best evidence of guilt.” In the words of two European historians, “common justice demanded that witches should not be condemned to death unless convicted by their own confession.”<sup>15</sup> Had not Saint Augustine himself declared that self-confession was the very best proof of heresy? As Bukharin cryptically noted in his final speech, “The confession of the accused is a medieval principle of jurisprudence.”<sup>16</sup>

Even the Inquisition minimized the role of torture—at least before the public. It preferred the euphemism *quaestio*—“to question.” It reserved the term “torture” for the suffering borne by the supposed victims of “black magic.” It convened behind closed doors, presenting to the public only the final testimo-

nials and the climactic auto-da-fé.<sup>17</sup> It restricted the circulation of handbooks on judicial torture—these books became well known centuries later when anticlerical historians cited them with much relish.<sup>18</sup> These books regulated the types of torture to be used, stipulated that blood should not be spilled, and required that the damning confession be repeated outside the torture chambers—this made them “voluntary.”<sup>19</sup> Henry Lea, the leading authority on the Spanish Inquisition, argues that the court proceedings have “singularly few” references to torture simply because it was felt that its mere mention “would invalidate the force of the testimony.”<sup>20</sup>

The Inquisition argued that this form of questioning was incidental to the final outcome. It also argued that the primary function of the procedure was to save souls; that the devious nature of the Devil made it impossible to obtain direct evidence; and that information gathered from “questioning” was as good as direct evidence so long as it came from those who were “probably guilty”—that is, those deemed suspect because of their social standing and individual behavior. Similar rationales are to be found in contemporary Iran.

The role of torture was also hidden during the Moscow show trials. The American ambassador reported to President Roosevelt that the confessions proved “beyond doubt that the defendants were guilty.”<sup>21</sup> Why else, he insisted, would they present such damaging confessions against themselves? Similarly, British jurists observing the trials reported that the confessions “proved” beyond doubt that the defendants had conspired with the Gestapo.<sup>22</sup> A Russian scholar writes that “at the time it did not occur to people that a confession made in a public court had not necessarily been freely and voluntarily given.”<sup>23</sup> One prison inmate relates how newcomers even in 1938 were shocked to discover the “methods of persuasion” used to prepare defendants for their trials.<sup>24</sup> Significantly, such trials lost their press coverage in 1939 as soon as the Soviet regime acknowledged that previous police chiefs had used brute force to obtain the 1935–38 confessions.<sup>25</sup> Once confes-

sion is linked to torture, its spell is broken. Once broken, the confession carries the danger of damaging the authorities as much as their intended targets.

This accounts for why public confessions raise eyebrows in the West—especially among those exposed to such potent works as Voltaire's *Candide*, Beccaria's *Crimes and Punishments*, Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*, Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon*, Bertolt Brecht's *The Life of Galileo*, and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*. Their readers inevitably see confessions through jaundiced eyes—even if the confession happens to be genuine. The terms “confession” and “Inquisition”—especially when the latter is accompanied by the adjective Spanish—automatically invalidate the whole procedure by conjuring up images of torture, intolerance, and medieval superstitions, for example, Goya's *Auto de Fe* and *The Holy Office*. This is one arena of modern life where art has left a deep imprint. Only deconstructionists continue to find redeeming features in the inquisitional process.<sup>26</sup> Once confessions are coupled with state torture and coercion—not with individual guilt and redemption—the macabre theater threatens to undermine the authorities rather than to bolster them.

It should be noted that those most instrumental in exposing the Moscow trials were from the left—Orwell, Koestler, Isaac Deutscher, and the now-forgotten Victor Serge. An anarchist who helped to found the Comintern, Serge fell afoul of Stalin but was saved from the gulag by his French literary friends. He influenced many others, especially through his autobiographical works *From Lenin to Stalin* (1937), *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* (1948), and *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1951). He was the very first to compare the Moscow trials to the Spanish Inquisition and political recantations to medieval confessions. Also, Deutscher suspects that Brecht wrote his *Life of Galileo* (1938) under the shadow of the Moscow trials.<sup>27</sup> Few Iranians before the late 1980s had read these potent works; and those who had tended to dismiss them as worthless pieces of Western

cold war propaganda. They did not value them as useful prisms through which they could view their own contemporary arena—at least, not until the early 1990s.

The impact of public recantations was enhanced in Iran by the introduction of television—especially of the videotape in the late 1970s. This armed the Islamic Republic with a propaganda weapon unimagined by the likes of Stalin, Mao, and the Shah—not to mention the Tudors, the Spanish Inquisition, and the European witch-hunters. Prisoners could be tortured into giving confessions and recantations. These could be taped—with little effort and cost—then edited, polished, and, if necessary, remade from scratch. The final product could be aired on radio and television, reaching audiences far greater than those of newspapers and pamphlets. By the mid-1980s, most Iranians—including peasants—had easy access to radio and television. The video further enabled the regime to fully control the timing as well as the content of the eventual show. Some tapes were previewed by Khomeini himself before being aired to the nation. What is more, the most important recantations were given additional circulation through newspapers, pamphlets, and books. The Islamic Republic, often dismissed as “medieval,” is highly creative in this realm. In fact, it has the dubious honor of being the world’s premier producer of recantation shows.

As public texts carefully prepared by the state and its victims, these recantations reveal much about contemporary Iran. They place in the limelight the state’s avowed ideals—in the ideological as well as in the political, social, and economic realms. They hold up the opposition as the inversion of these ideals. They cite moral issues that bolster and undermine those active in the public arena. They also provide an avenue into the psyche of the larger society—its hopes and fears, likes and dislikes, dreams and nightmares, values and taboos, aspirations and aversions, past grievances and future strivings, collective memories and selective histories. In short, recantations throw valuable light on the country’s *mentalité*.

## Prison Literature

Although few in Iran had read the potent Western works on tortured confessions, Iran has a rich genre of prison literature going back to the 1940s. The genre began in 1942 when Bozorg Alavi, a young Marxist writer just released from prison, published two best-sellers entitled *Prison Scrap Papers* and *The Fifty-three*. These works left a deep imprint on Persian literature as well as on modern Iranian politics.

Bozorg Alavi's books are unlike previous prison literature found either in Iran or in the West. Such Persian literature had been composed mostly by fallen court poets pleading clemency, bemoaning their plight, singing praises of those on high, and groveling in the hope of regaining royal favor.<sup>28</sup> They can be described as conventional court poetry—but composed in royal dungeons or in provincial banishment. Bozorg Alavi's writings are very different. Classic Western prison literature—Dostoevsky's *House of the Dead*, Oscar Wilde's *De Profundis*, Serge's *Men in Prison*, and Prince Kropotkin's *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*—is presented in a chronological narrative. Bozorg Alavi illustrates the human predicament in prison with poignant vignettes, vivid character sketches, composite events—part real, part fictional—and frugal brush strokes reminiscent of Ernest Hemingway, Franz Kafka, and John Steinbeck.

In a subtle and low-key manner, Bozorg Alavi depicts how ordinary individuals confined within narrow walls, often for indefinite periods, try to preserve their sanity, dignity, privacy, hopes, principles, political ideals, and humor (invariably of the black variety). Without moralizing, political sloganeering, and appeals to the transcendental powers of God, Justice, and History, Bozorg Alavi recounts how diverse individuals thrown together by force of circumstances—or rather, by force of the state—cope with such mundane problems as boredom, meddlesome guards, difficult cellmates, lack of cigarettes, and strained family relations. He often uses small events in prison to illustrate issues of social injustice in the larger world outside. The true heroes, in his eyes, are ordinary humans who survive

prison by retaining their sanity, personality, and individuality. In a short story entitled “Waiting,” he writes,

The prisoner’s greatest pain is not the separation from loved ones. Nor the lack of normal pleasures. Nor the kick on the behind from the guards. Like it or not, one has to put up with these. One gets used to them. No, one’s worst pain is being locked up with others. The place, after all, is a prison. You are cooped up with people with whom you have nothing in common. You have to eat with them, talk to them, share a cell with them. How long can you talk to someone about your personal life? How many times can you tell them you are sick and tired of this existence—especially of looking at his torn underwear? How long can you sit and watch your cellmates gobble down their food into their gaping mouths? How long can you stand having loud nervous laughter rudely interrupt your daydreams about snow-covered mountains and green fields? This type of torment can go on endlessly.<sup>29</sup>

Some have noted that the historical novel came to Iran in the 1920s as an instrument for building modern national consciousness. Few have noted that the prison genre arrived in the 1940s—thanks to Bozorg Alavi—as a form of protest against the state, of resistance against the establishment, and of eye-witness account against the powers that be, including the condescending literati eager to relegate dissenting voices to oblivion. Much has been written on the Persian novel, but nothing on this genre of prison literature.

Hot on Bozorg Alavi’s heels, two veteran communists—Ardashir Ovanessian and Jafar Pishevari—published their own prison memoirs. Others trickled out in the next ten years, until the 1953 coup put a temporary end to them. The genre, however, resumed as a torrent in the decade immediately after the 1979 revolution. Although most recent memoirs deal with the more immediate 1980s, some go back to the 1930s, some to the 1940s and 1950s, and some to the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Many of the authors are women bearing witness to loved ones

who did not survive prison. Most are written by leftists; some, by royalists, nationalists, and Islamists. But whether the authors are old or young, men or women, leftists or nonleftists, they are all influenced—explicitly or implicitly—by Bozorg Alavi.

Although these memoirs often lack Bozorg Alavi's subtlety and literary talent, they nevertheless provide a wealth of information on prison life. They—especially those written by women—throw light on daily life: on the relationships between classes, ethnic groups, young and old, rival political organizations, leaders and followers, sympathizers and true believers, Muslim and non-Muslim. They illustrate changing perceptions of shame, honor, justice, self-respect, individual rights, and the human body. They also illuminate the culture of resistance, especially attitudes toward violence, deprivation, torture, and corporal punishment. They contain some hints as to who does and does not survive the ordeal with body and mind intact. Even more important, they reveal the behind-the-stage preparations that went into the making of the famous, or rather notorious, television recantations. They do for Iran what Orwell, Koestler, Brecht, and Miller have done for the West.