

Thursday, 02 July 2009

## Neda's 'divine message' to the Iranian people



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Psychologists have long spoken about the influence and effect a person's name has on his or her life. When the 40 second video of Neda Agha-Soltan's distressing death at the hands of Iranian bassiji forces was released on the internet, it became the most watched video of the recent uprisings in Iran. Neda's name in Farsi means "divine message" "voice" or "calling," fitting considering her fate.

The first desperate moments of footage in which Neda seems to still be alive are filled with frantic chaos as those around her including her father and music teacher gather around her and a doctor on scene applies pressure to her chest. A few seconds pass and as consciousness departs, a quick stream of blood begins to flow from Neda's nasal area, and the distraught wailing of disbelief begins with statements like, "don't be afraid Neda" and "stay Neda, stay here." The beseeching of those around her to cling to life slowly turns to screams of horror as Neda's face becomes immersed in blood, the surrendering of life eventually forces itself upon her loved ones who were fighting its acceptance.

Since June 20, the circumstances surrounding Neda's killing are unraveling before the world's eyes. Without a doubt Neda's death has become both symbolic and unique in the sense that that documentation (witnesses, video, etc) was accidental and yet available so that her story is more or less transparent and therefore unable to be factually obscured.

The BBC conducted an interview with Neda's fiancé, Caspian Makan, in which he stated that she had simply stepped out of a vehicle during high traffic to get some fresh air when she was suddenly shot in the chest. In another article Makan explains that Neda never participated in any demonstrations or rallies supporting candidates Ahmadinejad or Moussavi, that she in fact did not even vote or approve of what Iran deems to be an "election" process. Makan explained that Neda simply wanted "freedom for all."

This distinction is not to be taken lightly. Whereas the media has widely painted the turmoil in Iran as a Moussavi vs. Ahmadinejad issue, the fact of the matter is that the majority of Iranians use the occurrence of these elections as a pretext to be able to protest the lack of freedoms and rights as a whole without their lives being immediately endangered.

Since the massive and bloody crackdown in the aftermath of the announcement of Ahmadinejad's second term as Iran's president, Iran's population of upset and frustrated protestors have become well aware of the price of protesting. While much of Iran's resistant youth has been systematically killed throughout the years, the scenes of Neda's last moments became symbolic of the tragedy of all youth who have fallen for freedom. Defying friends and family who attempted to dissuade Neda from attending a rally that day, in the instance that she might be shot she stated, "Don't worry, it's just one bullet and it's over." Indeed, the youth of Iran know very well that the decision to live and to walk in Iran's streets bears the threat of no return; they have accepted this harsh reality without fear, but with enduring sorrow at the loss that has beset them.

The Times also published additional information surrounding Neda's killing as witnessed by an Iranian doctor living in the U.K. who happened to be in Iran and at the scene at the time of the incident. Arash Hejazi describes in painful details the last few seconds of Neda's life, which has changed him forever. Hejazi's witness account is indispensable to piecing together the girl, story, and life that was Neda. After hearing a commotion, Hejazi witnessed Neda yelling "death to the dictator" when she had seen riot police charging viciously at peaceful protestors. As Neda moved to what seemed to be a more secure area, she was skillfully targeted, and shot to death. In what took less than a minute, Neda's 27 years of life came to a dramatic and abrupt close.

Whereas Neda's death was remarkable, her life was entirely typical. She had studied philosophy and music, traveled often outside Iran, and was engaged to be married. While Neda possessed all these things, the lack of freedom and cruel oppression she witnessed her fellow citizens struggling with was a source of angst for her. Like so many of Iran's youths, her yearning for freedom had imbedded itself deep into her consciousness, and continued to be strengthened and renewed with each ubiquitous instance of cruelty and oppression she witnessed. Clearly political dissidents and opponents in Iran are jailed, tortured, and executed; but killing and targeting a young woman like Neda has, in the public eye, taken the Iranian regime's cruelty to new heights.

Greater political implications also accompany this great loss. With Neda's death also comes the death of what could be termed as the "Khatami Syndrome" in which hope is placed on a specific (often times termed as moderate) presidential candidate that is expected to be capable of fostering change from within the Iranian regime's framework.

The election of Khatami who was deemed to be a moderate is a sufficient example to prove the myth of moderation. Regardless of who was appointed the position of presidency, a point rarely understood is that those who carried out the violence and crackdowns, the Basij militias and the feared Revolutionary Guards, report directly to Khamenei, and no one else. The Iranian regime has dug their own grave with this very public display of violence committed against its own citizens; they show an absolute intolerance for even the slightest questioning of the regime and their practices. The consequence as we are seeing now, is the shattering image of Iran's governmental figures, and the ideological structure on which it stands (notion of Supreme Leader, etc), which up until now had maintained absolute control. There is no longer any hope for negotiations, change, or moderation. The Iranian regime has reached a point of no return.

As Neda's story continues to gain worldwide attention, so too does the desperation of the Iranian regime to somehow mask or obscure this tragic event into some set up concocted by foreign enemies. As the crucial evidence with video and witness testimony exist, Neda's story will continue to be told as it truly happened; a rare occurrence for almost all of Iran's slain victims. The "divine message" Neda taught so many was in a sense her destiny; that as she ascends higher and higher in the hearts and minds of all those who continue to understand the meaning of her death, so too do Iranians become closer and closer to realizing the freedom that she and so many others paved for them.

\* Written for AL ARABIYA. Ana K. Sami received her Masters degree at the Colorado School of Mines majoring in International Political Economy of Resources and is a specialist on human rights and women's issues in Iran.