



CONFRONTING 'MORALITY' PART 4

# BLACK MARKET NETFLIX AND WHITE WEDNESDAYS

Growing up, VHS videos helped Elnaz Sarbar Boczek learn English and offered her a window to a world outside of Iran.



By Elizabeth Walsh  
and Brian Williamson

## ABOUT THIS SERIES

IN SEPTEMBER 2022, MAHSA AMINI, A 22-YEAR-OLD KURDISH IRANIAN, DIED WHILE IN CUSTODY OF THE GASHT-E-ERSHAD, IRAN'S MORALITY POLICE.



SHE WAS TAKEN INTO CUSTODY ON SEPTEMBER 13 FOR "INAPPROPRIATE ATTIRE" AND DIED THREE DAYS LATER AFTER FALLING INTO A COMA.

HER DEATH SPARKED THE LARGEST PROTESTS IRAN HAS SEEN IN DECADES, WITH WOMEN REMOVING THEIR HIJABS AND CUTTING THEIR HAIR IN DEFIANCE.

GENERATIONS OF IRANIAN WOMEN ARE SPEAKING OUT ABOUT THE IMPACT REPRESSION HAS HAD ON THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES.



This series was originally published on [VOAnews.com](https://www.voa.com)

"REMEMBER WHEN YOU WOULD GET A DVD AND THEN GIVE IT BACK FOR A RENTAL FEE?"



"THIS WAS HAPPENING IN THE LATE '80s IN IRAN."



**ELNAZ**

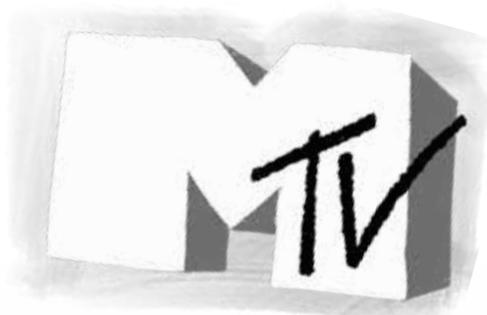
a 43-year-old Iranian American

"THERE WAS THIS GUY WITH A [SUITCASE], AND THERE WERE 30 DIFFERENT VHSES IN THERE. HE VISITED US EVERY FRIDAY."



"YOU COULD CHOOSE FIVE, OR ONE, OR WHATEVER. I THINK IT WAS \$1 A WEEK."

"AND WE WOULD HAVE THREE MOVIES FOR THE WEEK. AND THEN NEXT WEEK, HE WOULD GIVE US THREE NEW ONES."



"HE HAD HOLLYWOOD MOVIES, BOLLYWOOD MOVIES, MTV SHOWS."



"SO, THAT WAS HOW I WAS WATCHING THE REST OF THE WORLD."



"THAT'S HOW I LEARNED A BIT OF ENGLISH..."



".. AND HOW I LEARNED ABOUT MANY THINGS THAT I COULD NOT SAY IN SOCIETY."

"I COULDN'T SAY THAT  
MY FAMILY PLAYED  
CARD GAMES."



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♥

"MY GRANDMOTHER  
WAS THE PERSON  
WHO TAUGHT ME."



♥  
بی بی

بی بی  
♥

"SHE'S MUSLIM. SHE SAYS  
PRAYERS AND STUFF."



♥  
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بی بی  
♥

"BUT SHE ALSO DRINKS  
WINE, AND SHE  
TAUGHT ME HOW TO  
PLAY CARD GAMES."



♥  
بی بی

"WE ALSO DIDN'T TELL ANYBODY THAT WE DIDN'T WEAR HIJAB AT HOME, EVEN WHEN MEN VISITED."



"WE DIDN'T BELIEVE  
IN THAT STUFF."

"SO, WE HAD TO LIE  
JUST TO EXIST."



"MANY IRANIAN  
WOMEN WANT TO SAY  
THEY DON'T WANT TO  
WEAR HIJAB."



"SO, YOU HAVE THIS CRY  
STUCK IN YOUR THROAT  
... FOR 40 YEARS,  
IN MY CASE."



"[AFTER MAHSA AMINI DIED],  
I THOUGHT, IF THERE'S EVEN A  
SMALL RALLY WHERE IRANIAN  
WOMEN COME TO THE STREET,  
I'LL BE HAPPY, BECAUSE WE'VE  
MOVED ONE STEP FORWARD."



"MANY WOMEN WERE SO BRAVE, AND THEY WENT IN FRONT OF THE SECURITY FORCES AND SAID,

'WE ARE NOT SCARED,'

'WE WILL GET RID OF YOU,'

'WE WILL GET RID OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC.' "

"IT'S AMAZING TO SEE  
THEIR BRAVERY."



"AND IT'S ALSO HEART-  
BREAKING HOW THEY'RE  
PUNISHED, AND HOW THEY'RE  
BRUTALLY OPPRESSED."



"BUT AT THE SAME TIME,  
THIS IS FINALLY WHAT WE  
HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR,  
FOR MANY YEARS."



"SO, I'M REALLY  
PROUD OF THEM."



IN 2017, DURING A MONTHSLONG VISIT IN IRAN,  
SARBAR DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE IN WHITE WEDNESDAY.



WHITE WEDNESDAY REFERS TO A CAMPAIGN IN IRAN THAT BEGAN IN 2017 WHERE WOMEN AND MEN WEAR WHITE HEADSCARVES OR PIECES OF WHITE CLOTHING IN PUBLIC TO PROTEST COMPULSORY HIJAB LAWS.



@MyStealthyFreedom

THE CAMPAIGN IS PART OF A LARGER MOVEMENT KNOWN AS MY STEALTHY FREEDOM.



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"HE LIVED VERY CLOSE TO ONE OF THE MILITARY BASES, WHICH I WAS NOT THINKING ABOUT AT THE TIME."

THE MOVEMENT GAINED SIGNIFICANT ATTENTION, WITH MANY WOMEN POSTING ON SOCIAL MEDIA PICTURES AND VIDEOS OF THEMSELVES WITHOUT THE HIJAB.



BY WEARING WHITE ON WEDNESDAYS, PARTICIPANTS SHOW SOLIDARITY WITH THE WOMEN IN IRAN WHO ARE CALLING FOR GREATER PERSONAL FREEDOM.



SARBAR RECORDED HER  
TWO-HOUR TRIP VIA  
SUBWAY AND ON FOOT  
ACROSS TEHRAN.



"AT THE END OF THIS  
JOURNEY, I'M ALMOST  
DONE WITH TAKING VIDEOS,  
AND I'M ONE BLOCK AWAY  
FROM MY FRIEND'S HOUSE."



"HE LIVED VERY CLOSE TO  
ONE OF THE MILITARY BASES,  
WHICH I WAS NOT THINKING  
ABOUT AT THE TIME."



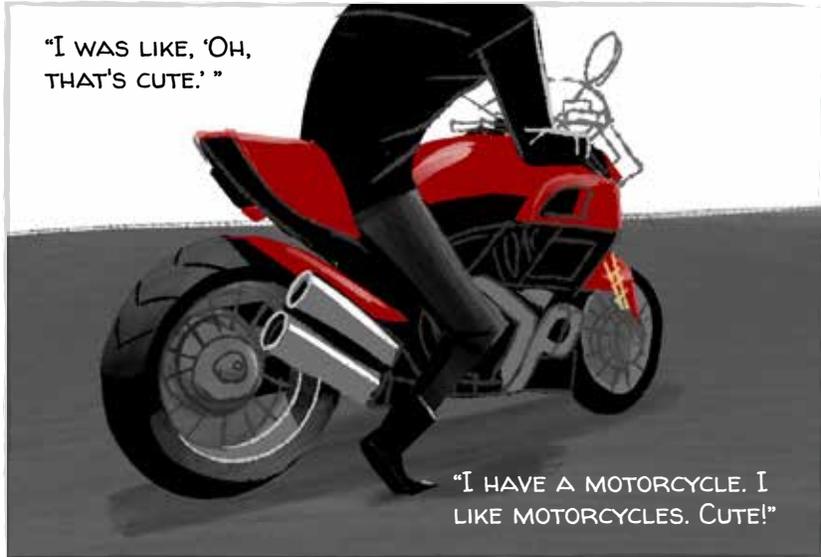
"I'M WALKING ON THE  
STREET WITH NO SCARF."



"AS I'M WALKING, I SAW THIS MOTORCYCLE, A RED MOTORCYCLE."



"I WAS LIKE, 'OH, THAT'S CUTE.'"



"I HAVE A MOTORCYCLE. I LIKE MOTORCYCLES. CUTE!"

"AND THEN I LOOK AT IT MORE CLOSELY AND SEE IT'S A 2000 CC, A HIGH-CAPACITY MOTORCYCLE."



"AND I KNEW THAT ONLY SECURITY FORCES WERE ALLOWED TO HAVE HIGH-CAPACITY MOTORCYCLES IN IRAN AT THE TIME."



"I LOOKED IN THE MIRROR OF THIS MOTORCYCLE AND NOTICED THE SECURITY OFFICER WAS LOOKING AT ME, BUT I PRETENDED THAT I DIDN'T SEE HIM."



"LUCKILY, IT WAS A ONE-WAY STREET, SO HE HAD TO TURN ONTO A DIFFERENT STREET."



"HE HAD TO TURN LEFT IN FRONT OF ME, GO A LITTLE BIT FURTHER, WAIT FOR THE CARS TO PASS, AND THEN TURN AROUND TO COME AND GET ME."

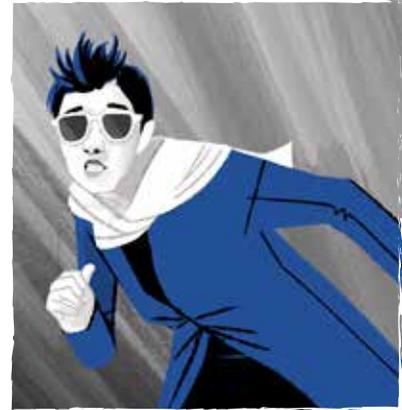


"HE'S STOPPED THERE, AND HE'S STILL LOOKING AT ME AS I'M WALKING ACROSS THE CROSSWALK ON THE STREET."



"AND I'M LIKE, 'OH SHIT, HE'S GOING TO COME BACK.'"

"AS SOON AS I FINISHED CROSSING THE STREET AND I'M OUT OF HIS VIEW, I START RUNNING."



"THERE'S A SHOP A FEW HOUSES FURTHER [DOWN], AND I JUMPED INTO THE SHOP, AND I PUT MY SCARF BACK ON."



"I DIDN'T WANT TO BE CAPTURED, BECAUSE I HAD MY AMERICAN PASSPORT IN MY POCKET."



"IF THEY GOT ME, IT WOULD'VE BEEN REALLY BAD."



"THE GUY CAME BACK. HE ACTUALLY CAME AND STOOD."



"I SAW HIM THROUGH THE REFLECTION OF THE SHOP DOOR."



"AND THEN HE TURNED BACK, AND HE LEFT. I WAS REALLY SCARED."





"DURING THAT WALK, THERE WERE TWO MEN SITTING INSIDE A PARKED CAR."



"AND THEY LOOK AT ME LIKE, 'OH, IT MUST BE WHITE WEDNESDAY.'"



"THEY GIVE ME THE VICTORY SIGN."



# Confronting 'Morality'

FIVE WOMEN SHARE THEIR STORIES OF GRIEF, SURVIVAL AND RESISTANCE UNDER THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC. EXPLORE THE FULL SERIES ON [VOANEWS.COM](https://voanews.com)



## NILU

DECADES OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS IN IRAN HAVE AFFECTED GENERATIONS OF FAMILIES.



## SAHAR

A PRIVATE BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION FILLED WITH SONG AND DANCING TURNS INTO A PUBLIC NIGHTMARE.



## MAHSA

M.S. WAS IN THE SEVENTH GRADE WHEN SHE WAS ARRESTED AND JAILED FOR WALKING WITH A FAMILY FRIEND WHO WASN'T A RELATIVE.



## ELNAZ

GROWING UP, VHS VIDEOS HELPED ELNAZ SARBAR BOCZEK LEARN ENGLISH AND OFFERED HER A WINDOW TO A WORLD OUTSIDE OF IRAN.



## ZHINA

AFTER BEING ATTACKED AND THREATENED FOR ATTENDING ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS IN 2022, ZHINA FLED IRAN TO THE IRAQI SIDE OF THE KURDISH REGION.



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<https://projects.voanews.com/iran/confronting-morality-women-under-the-islamic-republic/>