

I wanted to have a “normal” life:
Resistance and Alcohol production in Iran

by

Maryam Salehi

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Supervisors:

Prem Kumar Rajaram

Johanna Markkula

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Abstract

This thesis takes alcohol production in the context of post-revolutionary Iran as a heuristic to enquire into the ways people in Iran have dealt with the invasive power of the state. The state in Iran, due to its aim to create an Islamic and “pious society” had imposed a wide variety of moral codes forcibly to the society. As the state aimed at correlative spaces of public and private, it used to probe into private spaces of people’s lives.

I argue that groups of people in Iran questioned this state-imposed complementary of public and private spaces. In order to challenge this, people employed practices that can be thought of as “resistance”. Foucault’s articulation of “dialectics of power and resistance” and Abu-Lughod’s articulation of resistance “as diagnosis of power” were my sources of inspiration.

For doing this research I had five interviews and had some participant observation during one month of fieldwork in Iran through which I tried to scrutinize their creative practices of aforementioned group of the people.

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Introduction

With the 1979 revolution in Iran, many elements were pushed back from the public space into the private. The Islamic Republic criminalized the *haram* in Islam, abolishing personal and civil liberties¹ from the beginning. This was a part of the changes with the establishment of the newborn state of the Islamic Republic which turned out to be a repressive theocracy (Keating 1997, 181). Many practices of everyday life, prohibited legally, continued their existence in a disguised way. Soon after the establishment, when the primary liberties of the early post-revolutionary years were demolished, the alternative opinions, ideas, and representations were expelled from the public space too.

Alcohol was not an exception. After the revolution, the alcohol-producing companies, workshops, and taverns were closed and alcohol became rare. This was a new age for alcohol in terms of production and consumption. During the Pahlavi period, drinking alcohol had been an ordinary activity for the ones who were interested, as there were taverns, pubs, and snack places that were selling alcoholic drinks. But when alcohol was criminalized, it was not ordinary, “normal”, or easily accessible to consume anymore.

Since 1980, alcohol can only be found in the black market in Iran. The shift to the black market, for a consumable like alcohol is dangerous. The yearly number of poisoned people with impure alcoholic drinks in Iran is huge. According to the Health Minister of Iran in only three months leading to May 2019, 500 people died out of 5000 who had been introduced to the hospitals

1 Keyhan newspaper archive in April 1979, columns regarding prohibition of production and import of alcoholic drinks. Also in February 1979 Khomeyni’s office abolished women rights law.

because of alcohol poisoning (Causalities of alcohol poisoning in Hormozgan are not going to be annouced anymore 2022).

In recent years, there has been a rise in alcohol consumption in Iran. I am saying this according to my observations and what I have heard from my informants. Besides, there was a rise in the number of alcohol-brewers among the people whom I knew. The increased number of methanol and impure alcohol poisoning is also a strong symptom of it. But the reason behind this accretion is controversial.

I was surprised by the number of recent studies done in the medical field regarding the rise in alcohol consumption in Iran; I could barely find a study in humanities. They mostly argue that the number of alcohol poisoning cases has increased after the pandemic, due to the medical myths in Iran that consuming or gurgling alcohol prevents Covid (Aghababaeian et al, 2020) and (Rostami, 2020). However, there were high numbers of methanol poisoning in the months leading to the pandemic in the summer 2018 in different provinces of Iran; according to Shahrvand newspaper 96 people died in August 2018, 170 lost their kidneys, and 16 lost their eyesight.

To see alcohol poisoning in the light of Covid and medical myths is questionable. There is a lack of accurate statistical data on the details and extent of alcohol consumption in Iran, therefore, I doubt if the medical myths regarding Covid explain this. Though, with the lack of transparency and the tendency to hide the truth that distorts the state's desired representation of the society, these might be already existing numbers that can be published now under the title of medical myth.

On the other hand, the studies conducted in humanities mostly fall within the category of seeing alcohol consumption as a social problem, studies like *An Explanation Of Students' Attitude*

Toward Alcohol Consumption (Aliverdina & Mirzaei 2017) and *Lived Experience Of Alcohol Consumption Among Youth Of Kerman City* (Kiani et al. 2020). Alcohol consumption in Iran is overlooked and the studies are mostly limited to the pathological ones (Gefou-Madianou, 2-5) and (Jayne et al., 18).

This absence can be seen as a consequence of the state's attempts at representing a moral society. The Islamic Republic has imposed strong boundaries of public and private space, in order to typify the country as an Islamic, revolutionary, or a "pious society" (Golkar 2011, 207). Retrospectively, setting these solid boundaries of public and private had not been an intent of the government; in the first years of the establishment, even the most private aspects of people's lives used to be probed. Being very restrictive, the Islamic government used to conduct home inspections and set car checkpoints to explore people's private spaces, as it aimed at ensuring that public and private are complementary.

Thus I argue a group of people have questioned this complementary of public and private space that the state was trying to enforce. Therefore, I ask if it makes sense to think of alcohol production as people's desire to break this complement and to have a "normal" life? Is it an act of "resistance" to have a "normal" life at least in private? And what does it divulge about the nature of political power in Iran?

In the following chapters, we will read about the context including the efforts the Islamic state has put into Islamicizing the society, controlling it, and confronting dissent expressions, until 2009. The second part is a brief review of the history of alcohol in the years leading to the 1979 revolution and the years after. After introducing the key informants, in the first chapter we find the story of the alcohol dealer, and brewing and living as activities that should be done nimbly. In the second chapter, I have written about a previous journalist who decided to have a "normal"

life. Besides, I am going to ponder the exceptional as everyday. The third chapter is dedicated to joy, through the story of a veteran alcohol brewer and it also includes thoughts on the “fake” and “renaming”. There are four main themes that I have devoted to the subheadings that follow the chapters. The chapters are not disintegrated, themes are expanded in them all and there are endomorphic references.

Context

The first part of this chapter includes the contextual information regarding the state in Iran and the efforts it has put into imposing moral codes. In this part I am explaining how moral policing grew in Iran before 2017 and how it changed afterward. There are two important points for me in this account. The first one is that the state performed a certain idea of morality coupled with “resistance” among certain groups of people. And the second one is about intimidation and the state's attempts at showing no mercy on dissent expressions.

The second part is dedicated to a brief introduction to *aragh*² and beer in post-revolutionary Iran and some elaborations regarding drinking.

Attempts at Islamization of the society

² A distilled alcoholic drink.

In order to “Islamicize” the society, the Islamic Republic has employed numerous strategies such as maintaining legislation and various organizations. Implementing *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* (commanding the right and forbidding the wrong) which is a Quranic commandment and urges Muslims to the good/right and avoid wrong/evil has been one of these strategies. These commandments not only include social and private relationships, but also political relationships namely between the citizens and the government. Therefore, the article 8 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic dedicated to this issue argues the obligation of the Muslims to prevent un-Islamist behavior and apply this principle to their lives (Golkar 2011, 208).

Dayereye- Amre be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar was the Morality Bureau that Ayatollah Khomeini founded for promoting Islamic codes and preventing citizens from un-Islamic behavior. In the first decade after the revolution, the Islamic revolutionary committees which was the first army organization founded after the 1979 revolution was responsible for promoting Islamic codes in the society. *Komite*³ took the responsibility of enforcing moral control and confronting “moral crimes” or “immoral behavior” such as extramarital sexual relationship, alcohol consumption, the playing of loud music, gambling, and make-up.

In the second decade, coinciding the post-war years period, the voluntary militia of *Basij-e Mostaz'afin* (Mobilization of Oppressed), already collaborating with the committees in exerting moral control over the society and during the war was in charge of recruiting, organizing, and deploying volunteers to the war zones, replaced the revolutionary committees' in social control (Ibid, 208). I find this information important as Basij as a voluntary paramilitary militia had a huge capacity to expand. In the post-war context it makes sense that people who had been to war, or people who had lost someone in the war would want to be faithful to the ideals.

³ The people used to refer to it as *komite*.

At the same time, the post-war period was a time of decline in the revolutionary fervor for many people. Being assigned as the supreme leader, Ayatollah Khamenei, initiated that the war was in the “cultural invasion” phase, in a reaction to this deterioration. Therefore, there was a shift from a “hot war” between Iran and Iraq to a “cold war” between Iran and the West. Consequently, *Basij* was ordered to take the role of controlling and imposing morality in the society, under *Amr be Maruf* and *Nahy az Monkar* title, as this command was “the key for success in this struggle”. *Basij*, merged into the police forces as the morality police, turned out to have an important role in enforcing Islamic behavior codes in the society such as wearing *hijab* by women and regulating male-female fraternization (Golkar 2011, 207-209).

This paramilitary group that was mostly in charge of controlling the society gained more power gradually. According to Golkar, in 1994, 300,000 Basijis were recruited to push back the “cultural invasion” and 300,000 were hired for commanding good and preventing evil (Ibid, 210).

Before the reformists won the election in 1997, Basij’s power was rising in multiple aspects. In 1994, the Parliament assigned Basij the responsibility of confiscating satellite dishes. Basijis were ordered to collect and destroy satellite dishes. I can remember from my younger ages when most houses did not have video door-phone, therefore, there was a problem when someone was calling but not responding who they were. Apartment neighbors usually had arguments about no one should open the door when they did not know who was ringing. Otherwise, Basjis would invade the house and take the satellite dishes.

The “cultural invasion” was not limited to imposing dress codes and personal dispositions. Morality police (*Basij*) also attacked publications and cinemas that were considered symbols of cultural invasion, closing publishers and bookstores. In 1995, they attacked the students

attending a lecture, that they did not consider proper, at the University of Tehran. This incident evoked contradictory reactions; public dissatisfaction was growing with these activities but some Revolutionary Guard commanders supported Basij actions; “the duty of the Basij force is not only security and protection but also challenging counter-revolutionary forces” (Ibid, 211).

Between 1997 and 2004, with the presidency of Khatami, the activity of Basij decreased and their checkpoints number dropped drastically. But at the same time, the conservative wing of the regime was working on new plans to exert moral control over the society. In February 1997, the Supreme Leader ordered the promotion of the “chastity culture”. Meanwhile, a high ranked member of Islamic Revolutionary Guard was defending Basij’s activities; “in the next decade, our problem will be cultural onslaught and the Basij must block its progress... Instead of creating military bases, our policy today is to create cultural societies”. According to one of Basij’s headquarters, the Basij had established more than 5,000 councils of *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* in its bases all around Iran since 2004 (Ibid, 212).

Though there was a decrease in this form of policing during this period, the Ministry of Intelligence of Iran in 1997 was planning to eliminate some of the iconic dissidents. It was the fall 1998, months after Khatami’s presidency when two significant writers from *Kanoone Nevisandegane Iran* (Writers’ Association of Iran) were kidnapped and murdered. Also, the head Nation Party of Iranian, a radical opposer of the regime, who had spent years in Pahlavi’s prisons, and the Iranian painter who was his spouse, were assassinated and slaughtered in their home. These murders, later being called The Chain Murders in Iran, were already started in 1988 and there were different attempts at assassinating intellectuals, writers, and activists. But in fall 1998, these iconic people who were openly opposing the regime were murdered in just two months (Barzegar 2004). I think this was an act of showing that the state does not tolerate any

kind of mobilization. Because these people were fighting for freedom of speech and also they were organizing groups and circles of intellectuals with opposing political positions. They were making space in the small opening of the political and social atmosphere of the reformist era. So there was a message behind these murders. The regime was saying: “ [we] are going to suffocate⁴”.

The aforementioned incident was shocking as after the Hashemi period, Khatami’s presidency was considered a new age; a less intrusive and a less invasive one. Because of the relative freedom of the press, the news of these murders was being published. But the events were momentous in the sense that the hopes for a change, for a shift toward a more accepting government, and a “normal” life, were devastated (Jehl 1998). I remember that as child, everyone was talking about these assassinations. Retrospectively, many future events and protests of the reformist era were related to this event; banning Salam Newspaper (Iran closes down newspaper 1999) and the six-day demonstrations of students protesting it (Abdo 2000). These demonstrations were reacted with an invasion to *Kuye Daneshgah-e Tehran* (one the main student dormitories of the University of Tehran), by the regime.⁵

When Ahmadinejad in 2005 won the election as the ninth president, the regime once again increased social and moral control over the society. As Basij’s presence was intensifying so did the dissatisfaction with it. There were diverse reactions to this. A head of Revolutionary Guard asked Basijis “not to get involved in citizens’ lives” but a Basij commander said that they just “should show people more respect during inspections” (Golkar 2011, 213).

⁴ Hushang Golshiri, the writer and another member of the Writer’s Association of Iran in Mohammad Mokhtari’s funeral, a significant member of it, said these words referring to the regime. Like some other people, Mokhtari first disappeared for a few days and his dead body was found after a while.

⁵ 18th of Tir or Kuy-e Daneshgah disaster, happened in July 1999.

At the same time, in 2005 NAJA⁶ got involved in implementing a “Public Safety Plan” (*Tarh-e amniyat-e ejtemai*) in cooperation with Basij. Through this plan the police started “a new series of morality offensives in urban areas” attempting at confronting “thugs”, drug dealers, thieves, and other criminals. Raiding homes violently at night to arrest thugs and others who were considered dangerous to public safety and morality was a part of this plan (Golkar 2018, 5).

On the other hand, after 2005, police began moral policing as well. The Morality Patrol (*gasht-e ershad*), that I believe most of my generation had dealt with at least once, emerged to be in charge of moral policing of the society. The Morality Patrol was supposed to prohibit women from wearing “immodest” and prevent male-female fraternization. As Golkar mentions the Guidance Patrol “created a fearful atmosphere for Iranian youth, who are always anxious about the threat of arrest due to their clothes or hairstyle” (Ibid, 5). But this was for a while, after being arrested many times, one was able to realize that it was just a show to create intimidation.

In 2009, under *Tarhe-e efaf va hijab* (hijab and chastity plan), women of the Basij paramilitary group started to arrest women who were violating the Islamic dress codes. Then in 2011, Basij established a council of *Amr be Maruf* in each Basij base. Within the new regulations Basij was responsible for implementing moral policing in each neighborhood, through peaceful and coercive methods of enforcement. According to this new regulation crimes were divided into five categories: gang, security, social, economic, and culturally organized. Security crimes were identified as “confrontations with political dissidents” and the production and sale of alcoholic beverages as the social ones (Golkar 2011, 214).

⁶ The uniformed police force, General Command of the Law Enforcement of the Islamic Republic of Iran, NAJA is an abbreviation for Nirouy-e Entezami Jomhouri Eslami Iran. However, its name has changed to FARAJA (Farmandehiy-e Entezami-e Jomhouri Eslami Iran) in recent months, due to some adjustments in the police force.

At the same time, NAJA began to prepare for future situations. Aside from *gash-e ershad* as the moral police, they established several operational units. Emergency units called *yegan-e emdad* and special units called *yegan-e vizhe* were created to support other police branches in their missions. As an example *yegan-e emdad* helps the Moral Security Police and also is used as an operational force in antinarcotic missions and suppression of protesters.

With the crisis in power and representation, there had been a change in the organization of the forces since 2009 (Fozi 2015, 57). The Iranian police were not prepared to control and put down the uprisings -the Green Movement, though the protests were less intense. The Basij militia and other IRBG⁷ forces helped the police to settle things down. However, the demonstrations were peaceful at that time in comparison to how they are today; silent protests and people with green symbols like bracelets. The police forces were also different; naive and less aggressive. If I am to think about resistance as a diagnosis of power, this was the point for a shift in suppressing demonstrations.

In the protests happening during 2017-2018 the police managed to suppress the rebellions effectively, without getting help from the paramilitary groups (Golkar 2018, 1). If before, the regime was working more with intimidation, from 2017 it played death's games⁸. It was not about the forces maneuvering with motorcycles or baton and klashnekoff, but it was about snipers, shooting.

Though imposing the dress codes remained high in priority to confront, the number of checkpoints and car inspections dropped, retrospectively. As one of my informants was saying, in the first two decades, it was common to stop a car carrying young women and men but for me,

⁷ Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

⁸ A genre of video game in which the player is supposed to eliminate other characters from the match.

20 years younger than him, it is shocking to be stopped because of this in Tehran. There was one time when we were going to another city as two girls and two boys. We were stopped and the guards inspected the car, I had *aragh* in my bag as they usually do not check women's bags. They just opened the trunk, there was a plastic bottle of water and they made some jokes about it and they did not even smell it to check if it was alcohol.

Golkar argues that the state's exerting *Amr be Maruf va Nahy az Monkar* not only has not helped promote a pious society but also has led to a gap between Iranian and Islamic values propagated by the clergy. The highest rate of crime in Iran among the Muslim countries shows that enforcing Islam in every sector of Iranian society seems to be counterproductive. Non-Islamic and even anti-Islamic attitudes are very common in Iran. The "immoral" - in terms of Islam, and even "anti-Islamist" behaviors are normalized and they are associated with "discontent with the regime and symbolize individuals' resistance to state's power" (Golkar 2011, 219).

In one of the conversations during my fieldwork, a friend mentioned the difficulty of living one's life as a Muslim in Tehran. Shirin told me that two of her previous co-workers who were fasting and wearing hijab by their choice, experience daily humiliation in the office. During Ramadan that I was doing my fieldwork in Iran, one of these women took a day off and the day after she received a warning from the boss: "If you fast and you can't work, don't fast!"

Alcohol in Iran

"Iranians drink alcohol heavily" says Ahmad. Hearing this, I remember the controversial news title "Is Iran the ninth consumer of alcohol in the world?" in Persian BBC. In this piece of news it was explained how this title had been misleading. The ninth rank was alcohol consumption per

capita for the frequent drinkers, not the consumption of alcohol per capita. But I agree with him that we are heavy drinkers. Actually, we do not have a broad width of choice.

Ahmad explained that before the revolution, when he was very young he had been to taverns with his older brothers, where they used to drink beer and he used to eat *mazze*. As far as I know, there were three well-known beer producers before the revolution; *abjoy-e Shams*, *abjoy-e Argo*, and Iran Malta⁹.

Iran Malta, established in 1967, had been producing beer until 1979. After the revolution, it manufactured the first non-alcoholic beer in Iran, under a new brand name called Behnoush Iran. Shams beer was one of the most famous beer producing companies in post-revolutionary Iran. The company was active since 1963 and it was owned by Armenians, based in an old building in eastern part of the city, Majidieh which is an Armenian neighborhood. The other famous beer company was Argo, founded in 1931. Originally, it was based in the center of Tehran, near Ferdowsi square, but it was moved to the peripheral areas of the city two times. But also the building of Argo company burnt in fire around the same day that Shams did (Bashirtash and Nabavi 2009). *Abjo* was replaced by *maa-o shaeir* after the revolution, which is the Arabic word for abjo. In Iran if one says *maa-o shaeir*, they are referring to non-alcoholic beer.

The other well-known company was Meykadey-e Qazvin (Tavern of Qazvin) that was producing *aragh-e keshmesh*¹⁰. *Aragh-e keshmesh* is the most popular spirit in Iran and there are various

⁹ *Ab* is water and also juice in Farsi, and *jo* means barley. The common word for non-alcoholic beer is the Classical Arabic word *maa-o she'ir*; *maa* which means water and *shae'ir* which means barley in Classical Arabic.

¹⁰ *Aragh* is also an Arabic word which means essence. In Farsi *aragh* refers to any distilled liquid from herbs and fruits. For example rose *aragh* and mint *aragh* that are used as remedies, but also it refers to distilled alcoholic drinks like raisin and apple *aragh*. *Aragh* also means sweat, so in *aragh sagi* it has a double meaning.

names and innuendos for it. It is usually called *aragh sagi* (dog sweat). Ahmad, my informant who has been brewing alcohol for 38 years says the name comes from the chemical structure of the ethanol. There are also other explanations, referring to the label of this company that had a dog on it. But I think it could be because of the strong smell and taste.

Aragh sagi is made like other spirits. We use raisins for it; first raisins are fermented and then the mixture is sieved and finally distilled. The whole process with raisins is super odoriferous and the resultant liquid has a strong smell and taste that the most find unpleasant. This can explain why people also use *zahr-e mari* (snake poison) to refer to it.

Ahmad believes after the revolution people started to drink more heavy alcohols, based on his own experiences. I was asking about taverns and drinks, he said: “The revolution put an end to everything.” He was saying that the taverns still had some drinks in the first months and they used to sell it to their acquaintances. “So didn’t you break their glasses?” I asked. He said “No, they were already frightened and had closed their shops.” As far as he knows, most taverns shift to eateries, as they had already had food and mazze for drinks. After a while there was no drinking alcohol, the only safe alcohol was the medical one, he said.¹¹

His brother, as a vet, had a ration of 97% ethanol. They used to get the alcohol ration from *Ettehadieh* company in Fisher Abad¹²; “We used to mix it with cola and enjoy”. He was saying they had hundreds of these alcohol bottles in their home. So for a while ethanol was the best one could find. “Then the Armenian brothers saved us” he said. The religious minorities, the ones that are not considered heathen –if not they are even deprived of the most trivial rights, are allowed to brew alcohol for their consumption legally. He told me that Armenians have had this

¹¹ Which consists of a high percentage of ethanol and distilled water.

¹² The street in the center of Tehran that is now called Sepahbod Qarani. This neighborhood has also been an Armenian neighborhood.

tradition of making aragh; “It’s in their culture.” Gradually the recipe for alcoholic drinks spread out.

I guess the most common alcoholic drink in post-revolutionary Iran had been aragh sagi but I believe in the past 5 years beer and wine have also become common. Especially beer which is really easy to make using the re-fermenting recipe.

Methodology and theoretical inspirations

For this thesis, I had a dilemma whom I should talk to and whom I should write about. I thought people might not like to reveal their alcoholic stories but, starting my fieldwork, I realized they are even interested to share and are interested to be interviewed and go for a drink with whom they usually do not.

As I aimed at writing ethnography, I decided to have fewer interviews and spend some time with the ones I was going to write about. I had five interviews with the people I knew beforehand. But I also did participant observation, I spent some casual time with them. I tried to have general conversations aside from alcohol and drinking; about their lives, their desires, their hopes and disillusionments, and their fears and their joys. Some people were more talkative, some less. Some were difficult to approach. Finally I came up with three stories that I am going to devote a chapter of this thesis to each.

Kaveh, a 55 year old handsome man, revealed that he has been working as a *saghi*¹³ since 2 years ago. It was so unexpected to me that he trusted and started to talk. I knew that he was changing his job for a while, doing different things to earn a living. He was smart or lucky enough to buy

¹³ We use this word for a dealer, either opium or alcohol. The word originally means cup-bearer; it is the same concept in a different era.

an apartment with loans before. He managed to escape the recent rises in housing prices in Iran but at the same time the home gave him the opportunity to brew on his own. Had rented a shop whose monthly payment was pretty considerable, he was not able to make a living because people were afraid of drinking and eating out for months, during the first months of the pandemic. That is why he embarked on this new business. He brews beer.

Shirin who is 35 now, had been a journalist years ago, educated from one of the top universities of Iran. She left journalism to follow her studies abroad. When she returned, she was interrogated twice because of the funding she had. But she had already left journalism and had started working somewhere else, that was why she was not really afraid, she said. Since 2019, she has been fermenting wine every year.

Ahmad has been brewing alcohol since 1985, about 5 years after the revolution. Now he is 63; he is retired and he spends his time experimenting with diverse alcoholic drinks, the hobby he has had for the bigger part of his life. Ahmad's way of being creative is mostly concentrated in brewing itself, since he told me about the trajectory of his brewing.

I barely found any research regarding alcohol in Iran in Social Sciences that does not consider drinking a social problem. I believe this gap in the literature alludes to more than itself. Alcohol, as an illegal product, [impure alcohol] as a potential life-threat, as something that brings joy, as something many people homebrew, and as a very interesting anthropological topic has been neglected. Though it is one of the most traceable items existing in the "private".

The gap I see regarding alcohol in Iran also comes from my positionality. Among the society, women were the ones who experienced the imposition and the enforcement of moral codes and Islamic moralities more than others. Women are the ones whose presence and rights are subject to illegalization, partly to be accurate. But being illegal, having an informal presence and trying

to get back one's rights, can open one's eyes. As there should be a way to resist or to survive an invasive power that attempts at slighting one recurrently. Women have been part of the recoiled ones. As a woman I am capable of noticing these absences and these gaps.

The other consideration I have to bring up is being an insider anthropologist. As being outsider and insider are fluid, as native anthropologists have shown (Forster ,13), I try not to see insider and outsider fixed. Here, the most important issue I have to deal with are achieving distance and translation. Though I have done my fieldwork in a familiar environment, within the people who I consider relatively close, I believe even doing anthropology at home within one's own community, one has dramatic class, cultural differences (Forster, 17), and idiosyncrasies.

In *The Will to Knowledge*, Foucault argues "Where there is power, there is resistance" and one is always "inside" power and never capable of "escaping" it. Also no one can acquire, seize, or share it. The existence of power depends on the multiplicity of points of resistance that are scattered all over the power network; "there is a plurality of resistances" (Foucault 1990, 95). I started from Foucault because the nature of power was a source of curiosity for me. Therefore, as overemphasizing force of power leads us to overlook the creative force of resistance, I think of power as Foucault puts "Power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something that functions only when it is part of a chain" (Adib-Moghaddam, 2013, 88-90). Then I realized in order to understand power it makes sense to study resistance, according to Foucault and Abu-Lughod. Abu-Lughod suggests using resistance as a diagnostic of power. Instead of taking all sorts of resistance as signs of human freedom, she proposes utilizing them strategically to learn more about forms of power and the ways people are entangled in them (Abu-Lughod 1990, 42).

Though Abu-Lughod argues in the context of Bedouin women, I found her work fitting for my case. As she provides an ethnographic account, and she puts emphasis on the variety of creative ways of resisting the power that seeks to control. The analytical dilemmas that she brings up are also of important for me. The first one is to develop theories that do not misattribute to the ones who resist any forms of consciousness or politics. The second trap to avoid, is the analytical conceptions like false consciousness that question their own understanding of their situation. For example, in my case, it is also easy to say that people both resist and support, as they might need to work, as they need to make a living. And the third one is how one could assume these forms of resistance are culturally provided, and they are neither cathartic nor safety valves (Ibid, 47).

Writing this thesis, I have Abu-Lughod's ethnographies of the particular in mind. She argues, this strategy built on Geertz's insight of anthropology that presumes writing as one of the "main things that anthropologists do", questions "generalization" as the main feature of operation and writing style in social sciences -which is not neutral (Abu-Lughod, 473). Abu-Lughod explains the issues coming from generalization in two categories. Quoting Dorothy Smith, she mentions that the realm of theoretically constituted objects, disjoints the discursive realm from its ground which is "the lives and work of actual individuals" reducing them to "a field of conceptual entities" (Ibid, 474). The other criticism points to the centrality of meaning to human experience, already criticized by anthropologists for being positivistic. But at the same time for example interpretive anthropology "substitutes generalization about meanings for generalizations about behavior".

The final solution, for her, in order to be alert regarding generalization is "objectivity" and expertise that come from the language of power for the anthropologist coupled by being an outsider of what they are observing and describing. The second problem with generalization is

the influences it makes through “homogeneity, coherence, and timelessness”. The latter is prone to make differences placid in order to homogenize them (Ibid, 475).

On the other hand, the theoretical framework Johansson and Vithengton propose fits the alcohol case in Iran. Therefore, I think of resistance as a practice and not necessarily a consciousness or something that leads to a certain goal (418). Inspired by Foucault’s understanding of power and resistance, I think of them as entangled and consider that power exercises through networks and “individuals are in a position to both submit and to exercise this power” (Adib-Moghaddam 2013, 90). Everyday resistance has to be understood as intersectional and as being engaged with the other powers. Also, it is heterogeneous and contingent, as the situations and contexts change. In this thesis, not far from what I want to say within it, I am trying to be creative and am trying to think about what I am writing through itself. In this thesis I am using alcohol as a heuristic to think about political power of the state in Iran.

I. Brewing for a living

For Kaveh the reason behind this unprecedented rise in alcohol consumption in Iran is half because people do not have many entertainments and half because it is a way of showing objection to the government; “People express their bottled up feelings in this way”. “it is a hobby for most of the families, I don’t say all of them” he adds.

I asked what people are objecting to and he brought up some examples. He talked about the people breaking the seats in the stadiums, as they “don’t have a problem neither with football nor the match result but they want to inflict damage to the state and they show their objection like

this.” Suddenly he mentions that it is also like compulsory hijab; “Even in a thirty minute walk, one tries to drop her hijab, just like this *White Wednesdays*¹⁴”. He explains more, if one drinks alcohol and leaves their home, they might be caught and would be condemned to 80 whip lashes. Then he says “If I am disclosed, I will have to pay a penalty, go to jail, and I might even get whiplash. However, I think of my job as something nice and adorable, it doesn’t need a big investment but it has these fears.” I told him that I am really interested in the way he articulates these practices as objections. It seemed like he found both vandalist actions and dissident practices like civil disobedience legitimate. For him, just expressing this anger mattered.

“It was February the year that Covid became pervasive. I had just opened a juice bar, with loans and a high rent that I had to pay for and I could not. I started this job as a go-between”. Kaveh had a friend, the friend who had been selling alcoholic drinks for more than 5 years; “First I got the drinks from him and sold them. I was able to make a small amount of money doing this”. As his child got married, their two-room apartment had a vacant room. Then he decided to start brewing fake beer himself. His workshop is a 3*3m room with a tiny balcony and a fridge. I found him really happy that I was visiting his workshop, he showed me various stages of re-fermenting beer.

Kaveh had tried drinking alcohol at a young age: “I used to drink more when I was younger”. He says in the 80s it had been more crucial, checkpoints had been everywhere and there had been unannounced home inspections. I wondered if those days were scarier, I had once been waiting for a police invasion and it was frightening. The same is for Kaveh: “I was more afraid when I was only drinking those years, now it doesn’t scare me that much”. I reminded him of what

¹⁴ Masih Alinejad, Iranian-American journalist and women rights activist launched the **White Wednesdays** campaign, encouraging women to remove their scarves on Wednesdays as a sign of protest.

might happen to anyone dealing with alcohol if gets caught, but he says: “The years after the revolution were very harsh, there were many checkpoints, they used to stop the cars and check them. They used to smell every bottle they could find in one’s car. They used to inspect car exhaustion pipes. But the ones who wanted to drink used to drink, so did I.”

He recognized the reason why he had been successful in his job in this short period of time; etiquette. “They say whenever we wanted to buy alcohol, it was very stressful. As they had to deal with a “criminal-looking” guy who was acting very unpleasant, saying give me the money give me the money [in a mimicry voice]. My patrons say that I am not the same, that my behavior and character is different from them. I tell people to take this bottle, have half of it and if you don’t like it, return it and get your money back.”

He talks about his job seriously, the details and the know-how of it which he believes make his beer better than his friend’s and other’s; the plans he has for the future, expanding his business into a bigger one; he believes himself as an expert. Though the job is risky, he said, he feels good doing it. For it does not need a big investment and one can make good money out of it. He enjoys that people who buy his beers are happy with it.

His specialty is beer, during our conversation, he also asked me some questions regarding brewing wine. He said he did not make *aragh sagi* because of its smell and he was curious if it is the same with wine.

He also criticizes the existing distilled alcoholic drinks, as now it is so common to add essences (of lemon, apple, and raisin) to ethanol and water and sell it; “Most of the people can’t differentiate *aragh* from medical alcohol, they drink it and they get headaches the next day.”

The *saghi* mentioned objecting to the Islamic rules and the Islamic Republic state. He is actually paying for the dysfunctional economy and mismanagement in the country. But actually, he is the

one who is benefitting from the alcohol prohibition. His position is ironic, he is a beneficiary of the illegal alcohol and criticizes the state because of installing these prohibitions and Islamist rules.

The day that we had our official interview, as we were smoking my flavored cigarettes he told me a funny story. He said that one of his patrons was an old colonel who liked him so much. This colonel is one of the people whom he delivers the drinks to, as he usually does not deliver the drinks. He asks the customer to transfer the payment first and then he appoints them a location to go and get the drink. Once, the colonel had been inviting him insistently. This is somehow common in Iran that someone insists on doing something for one or insists one to go to their home. Usually it gets complicated with the people one does not know well. We call this *ta'arof*. They spent some time doing *ta'arof*, but at some point the saghi really wanted to say that he did not want to go so he swore: "*Be joone Kaveh nemiam.*" Which means I swear to my life (mentioning his own name, which is Kaveh) I am not going. Then he told me "You know, I tell them I am Armenian and my name is Ervin." We laughed at this for a few seconds and then he said it was such an embarrassing moment. But he had come up with a plan, he said after a while he had said: "I never swear to my son's life, I am sorry but I am really busy today". It was so funny for me that we give different names to things, sometimes to protect, sometimes to mislead, but a tiny slip of tongue exposes us.

I was so curious why he was introducing himself as Armenian, an alias could have worked. I asked for the reason: "Armenians are not fraudulent like us, when you hear someone is Armenian you can trust." But I thought it might be because of the fact that religious minorities in Iran, Armenians and Jews, have the right to brew alcohol for their own consumption. I thought maybe

this gives him a feeling of confidence and security. But he said it is all because “Muslims are not reliable.”

Nimbleness

On one hand careful with the beer so that it does not produce too much foam and on the other, to empty the bottle in a motion and not to move it back and forth, one has to be nimble. Otherwise, the drink will be blurry and mud-like with the sediments or one might have a glass of foam in the end. The bootleg beers have sediments in the bottom of the bottle, one has to be careful pouring it.

This is because, during the process of adding the re-fermented beer into the bottles, the liquid loses some of its gas. Therefore they add a spoon of sugar into the bottle so that the fermentation continues and it produces gas. There is no problem with more gas, as these plastic bottles do not shatter. The plastic bottles enlarge and swell but they do not burst, unlike the glass bottles.

Ahmad, who has been brewing fake beer since 1985, told me a memory of the repetitive explosion sound from the basement of his house; “I went to the basement and saw that the ceiling is full of bottle caps”. Most of the glass bottles exploded because of the extra gas. With the glass bottles, then, they had to be deliberate and precise to avoid the explosion. But today most people use plastic bottles for brewing beer, as they buy non-alcoholic beer in plastic bottles. *Saghi* believes he is solving the issue with the sediments by a long process of cooling the bottles. As he showed me he had four stages of re-fermenting; first to mix sugar, yeast and non-alcoholic beer and to pour them in 20 liters gallons, second is to pour them into bottles with a spoon of sugar, third to put them in the balcony, the last step is to let them sit in the fridge for a while, just before being sold. Each stage takes a specific period of time, changes in time or temperature

might lead to a fizzier, more sour, or sweeter taste. The *Saghi* was proud of his product, with the production line he had adjusted nimbly. There is no quality monitoring so he has to be nimble, to not to lose their patrons.

And one can think of nimbleness as a general disposition:

“... Churchill street [in Tehran], behind the British Embassy there was an Armenian sandwich place. I used to get and bring *aragh* to my own town whenever I was visiting Tehran. But you know there were checkpoints in the roads, they used to explore the car. My trick was to hide it somewhere visible so that they couldn’t think of it as something forbidden.”

But nimbleness is not just a matter with a fizzy bottle of beer with sediments on the bottom. One has to be nimble to survive, to find a way to deal with an invasive power. It is about how to move in a narrow space between lines without trespassing them. It is about when and how to bring your boxes of beer into your home so that the neighbors do not see, it is about asking the code name to approve a real customer. It is about deciding what to write and what to publish, where to attend and where to be absent. It is about when and how to let oneself’s scarf slip, it is about when and how to leave one’s career or one’s home and when to stay. Either pouring, moving, or producing it is a matter of nimbleness, a matter of creativity, to look at the things very closely and from different perspectives, to find the pores to see if there is a space for oneself.

So maybe aside from these dual spaces, or worlds, there is another space, in-between. It is the territory where nimbleness belongs. Let me explain through an example: the saghi is a family friend, a son of my deceased grandfather’s friend. But not my brother, nor my uncle nor other family members did not know that he is a saghi. He erases the traces by naming himself Ervin

and at the same he hides himself from the ones who know him by his name. The *saghi* is so nimble, for sure.

II. I just wanted to have a “normal life”

“We [Shirin and her partner] were not used to buying alcoholic drinks, we used to drink if it was served at a party. We had never bought it, so the process of buying was scary for us” Shirin said. Drinking alcohol had not been common in their family either, specifically for women. Only his father was used to drink wine when he was young. She was saying the first time she got tipsy was the time that she found her male cousins during a family gathering in a room; “They said come in and close the door!” Shirin believed home-brewing has normalized alcohol consumption and the days of men buying aragh, hiding it in a black plastic to have it with their men friends are over. Through the domesticization of alcohol (home-brewing) women have moved gradually in the center of the alcohol production; they are playing the most important role. “Brewing wine for me is like the yearly rituals of making jam and brining pickles”, she added. And I know that she does not make jam and pickles. I agreed with her; I know two women who started brewing aragh for their own family and friends. They initiated it and they pushed their family members into it; maybe to protect them from the impure alcohols.

Alcohol not only has been normalized among women, but also the general attitude toward it has changed; as Shirin was saying 5 years ago it was not common to go to any party and alcohol was served. But nowadays, she said she could not find a get together without alcoholic drinks. Shirin believed this could be thought of as a form of civil disobedience that has led to normalization of alcohol consumption. But this normalization is happening in a larger scope, Shirin said when she

had been working as a journalist, in a reformist newspaper, they did not used to invite over their coworkers. The other day when she was thinking of throwing a small get together, a previous coworker of hers and a friend of hers asked her to invite the “guys from the newspaper”. Something she could not have thought of when she was working as a journalist.

I asked her when they had started their occasional drinking and this was the story she told me. When Covid invaded Iran, they rented a villa with a group of their friends, from which they could have done their work remotely. Their friends introduced an Armenian *saghi* to her, in the Majidieh neighborhood.¹⁵ For a while, they used to get alcohol from an Armenian *saghi* whom their friends had introduced. This *saghi* had only aragh and cognac.

I asked her when she had brewed for the first time. “It was 2010, a friend of mine had learnt a recipe for beer. We were using barley bread for it and it was really easy to make.” But she had not followed it for long. When she and her partner started to drink on their own, during the pandemic, once she ordered some wine to someone who ferments grapes every year, but she said she did not like the wine. Then three years ago she fermented wine with a friend whom she said was a wine-brewing expert. Now she brews a wide range of wines every year.

Also there is another side to this normalization, domestication of alcohol has made safe and cheap alcoholic drinks more accessible. Before the pandemic, Iran’s currency value plummeted drastically. Imported alcohol has always been expensive in Iran, and at the same time it was risky as it might have been bootleg (sometimes the branded bottles are also refilled). But after the pandemic it emerged to be unaffordable. She thought this was also a reason for people’s attempts at home-brewing. I thought lack of safe alcohol and its being expensive leads to home-brewing.

¹⁵ This one sounds more like an actual Armenian *saghi*, because Majidieh is an Armenian neighborhood. Most of the residents have been there for years and they still stay there.

Then home-brewing provides cheap and safe alcohol. Lacking a market for alcohol leads to more consumption for the ones who are producing alcohol.

I asked if she had ever thought it might be risky to buy tenths kilos of grapes and berries, and the whole process, with the specific smell of fermentation; she nodded. I said but it was interesting that we did not think of it. She told me she has never thought of it as dangerous. For me also it was more like an adventure, not a danger. But I told her, what if someone disclosed it? What if our home were called for unannounced inspections? She told me she had an image of home inspection: “I remember as a kid. My father was a leftist, once they invaded his friend’s home and arrested him and took his stuff including his books. After that he was expecting an unannounced home inspection. He took his books and wine bottles outside home. He poured his wines in the river near the town.” However, for Shirin it was something intangible; she told me if she had had this experience in 2009, when she was a journalist, this could be the case for her. She said she was not afraid of this but also even if she was disclosed she had no fear: “Now everyone has two or three bottles of wine at home.” I remembered my other interviewee’s point: “It is a small home space and a few people are engaged in it, so it’s safe.” But for me, home can be unsafe. Then I thought what Ahmad was saying, alluding to we all are potential criminals.

Shirin said: “Intentionally or unintentionally, it happened to me as a journalist. I got far from the media field. In 2009, I was attending every protest, but now, even if I know that something is gonna happen I don’t go.” She said she was somehow isolated from the society. She lives in Iran but she works remotely and makes good money, she does not need to wear hijab to go to her work, she travels, and she drinks her home-brewed wine.

I was thinking why she had started brewing, maybe the risk of getting poisoned or maybe the difficulty of finding a safe *saghi* to get *aragh* and cognac from, or maybe the limited options she had to drink. But she just said: “I just wanted to have the “normal” thing.”

The normal

I was thinking what was the “normal” Shirin was referring to. It was a controversial one, I guess. There is this “normal” which is pious and homogenous and the state tries to impose but at the same time there is this “normal” that Shirin wants to build up, in opposition to the former.

Shirin was the only one who mentioned the difficulties of living one’s life as a Muslim in Tehran. I have already mentioned the growing anti-Islamist dispositions in Iran, and the expansion of “immoral” as an act of discontent with the government (Golkar 2011, 2), actually it is so common to hear people cursing Islam, the prophet and the believers. It is not either bizarre to associate the Islamic Republic with Islam. But it might be difficult to distinguish them, though they are different.

I do not think that she considers herself Muslim. But it was so interesting that in her attempts at being “normal” at the same time she had this worry about the ones who are living their “normal” life in a different way. I thought for her “normal” is to upend what state behaves, not propagates. As she once said: “Maybe we thought we could make our private life more “normal”, now that we can’t do anything to fix the public one.”

In *The spectacle of the “Other”*, Hall writes about the different images and representations of difference and otherness. Though he is racial context, these differences can be thought

elsewhere, here Iranians. “Stereotyping” as one of the representational practices (Hall, 225) which works through essentializing, reductionism, naturalization, and binary oppositions as it deals with the play of power or more unconscious effects (Hall, 277). The solution he comes up with counter strategies that attempt at intervening in representation which is an opening to a “politics of representation”. For me the “struggle over its meaning seems to be unending” (Ibid, 277). Here, the struggle is over the normal.

III. Joy

Ahmad said he had started brewing around 1984. He has had a friend who has been working in a laboratory; “He pocketed a glass distiller from the laboratory.” For a while they were using this glass for distilling fermented raisins. Then he devised his first distiller, using a pressure pot and copper pipes. He explained that he poured the liquid from fermented raisins in the pot. The old pressure pots have two opening holes. He used to close one and screw the pipe into the other opening. But he told me that the aragh was blurry because of the copper. He told me that he had used different materials and finally he had been using plastic pipes and a cold water tub.

When he moved to another city he found a suitable tool; still¹⁶. In cities in which there is a tradition of making herbal araghs like rose-water and *aragh na'na*¹⁷, having a still is very common, one can easily find them in the market. Recently, he has started using stills which are much easier to use. I thought it was creative to rethink the already existing tools as tools for new

¹⁶ An apparatus used to distill mixed liquids. It is easily found in Iran as it is also used for distilling herbal araghs that we use as remedies.

¹⁷ Mint distillate

aims. Ahmad started using home-still when he moved to a city in which distilling herbal araghs was a yearly routine.

His favorite topic was Iranians being heavy alcohol drinkers, he believed this was because of the prohibition; “Forbidding things backfires”. I was curious, he responded with more examples: “In Iran people go to parties, they drink to get drunk. But can you think of this in Europe? No!” He told me that before the revolution, it was more common to drink beer, not aragh: “The youth used to drink one or two beers but now just two or three people drink a whole 1.5L bottle of aragh at one time.” He also mentioned that we drink aragh *sec*¹⁸, which is another sign of being heavy drinkers for him.

I asked him why he had started brewing, 5 years after the revolution, it could have been perilous then. He told me that in the town he had been living then, it had not been easy to find alcohol and “I could not have been sure if the alcohol was pure, many people got blind and many died.” But I told him I believed it had been more difficult those years, how could he have taken the risk. It was just him and his brother and in their mother’s house but also many people have been caught because of this, but he has done it because it had been better than losing eyesight or dying, he said. But also he added: “Still there were many who were caught. The Islamic Republic is a system that if you are not caught by it is fine. Before it had been very tough, they were used to inspect houses and cars. In the first years after the revolution one wouldn’t dare to drink and go out. Even in our small town, which was religious and had a low crime rate, there used to be many checkpoints”. I thought we both knew that we (not just me and him, it includes many people) all did illegal practices. I thought he was referring to the fact that “everyone is a potential criminal”, something I always murmur. Everything is fine until you are not disclosed, accidentally.

¹⁸ It probably comes from the French word, *sec* which means “distilled” and also “dry”. So he meant that Iranians do not mix aragh, to make it like a cocktail for example.

Finally he said: “ Yeah, also many were arrested and got whipped.” Then added: “But I used to take it to the swimming pool and hide it in a closet. We used to take some sips and then dive again. Aragh slaps in the swimming pool.” As if he was emphasizing on “But the ones who wanted to drink used to drink, so did I”¹⁹. Dedicated to joy or to having a “normal” life, I wondered.

I told him I believed today many more people home-brew alcohol and I asked for his opinion on this rise in home-brewing. He said it had been much easier to do nowadays, as there is less pressure from the regime. In his opinion, people did this for two reasons; first because the alcohol one could find in the black market was not safe, and second because financially it made more sense. “If one has the suitable condition for it, as one can not distillate aragh in an apartment” he added. In my attempts at making him talk more I asked what he meant by the backfire. I said, I really could not realize why people would go through all these efforts, for drinking. One just could forget about drinking. He tried to explain with other examples: he mentioned the high corruption rate in Iran; corruption on different levels. “None of these things are prohibited in Europe, but in Iran they are actual problems. For example no one is obliged to wear hijab and everyone wears what they like there. But moral corruption in Iran is mind blowing.” I thought he was trying to mention the “morality receded”²⁰ society of Iran.

“But Islamic Republic is what it is, but people want to be *sarkhosh*”²¹ He said. Then he read this verse from Khayyam, the 11th century Persian poet:

“A Book of Verses underneath the Bough,
A Jug of Wine, a Loaf of Bread and Thou

¹⁹ Kaveh, the saghi, said this when he was talking about his younger ages after the revolution.

²⁰ I am referring to Golkar’s argument, mentioned in the context chapter.

²¹ euphoric

Beside me singing in the Wilderness

SEP: Oh, Wilderness were Paradise enow!”

The fake

I told Shirin that I could see a difference ever since I left and I was back for my fieldwork. The most recognizable was that women wear “less” hijab. They did not act as if their scarf had just slipped, their scarf was under their long hair or tied around their neck. She said yes. We both agreed how wearing or not wearing hijab or being in sex-segregated places or not, was a class matter. One could even find mixed gender gyms, whose monthly fee was ten times more in comparison to a regular gym. One also could sit in a fancy cafe, and not wear a scarf. Shirin said not wearing hijab felt much better, in Iran, because it was forbidden. But added promptly: “though it is “fake” .” I was surprised, since she used the English word “fake” and we were speaking in Farsi. I took her word and thought of my own fake beer²². Fake beer, aside from the things I already mentioned, usually gives me stomach ache and nausea. “Is this the way faked ones work?” I wondered.

Shirin once told me: “Maybe we thought we could make our private life more normal, now that we can’t do anything to fix the public one.” She told me she used to attend the most protests for the Green Movement. But now, even if she knew, she would not attend: “I think there was a disillusionment after 2009. But at the same time it became very aggressive. Attending demonstrations costs one a lot now; people die easily.” I agreed. But at the same time, I started to think about how it was possible to have a “normal” private life without a “normal” public life.

²² This is the name I have given to the re-fermented beer.

How can we have a “normal” life if we all are already potential criminals²³? Aside from this, it is not just about expressing dissent or opposition, it is also about the overwhelming precarity of our lives in a fragile economy. I do not think we can have “normal” lives. But we can fake.

Then, I thought of the saghi who was faking being Armenian, to be thought of as honest; so ironic. The curious incident, also he was talking about something fake; fake aragh. Kaveh told me that many of the araghs were fake²⁴ nowadays in Iran; “It is very common now, the producers mix medical alcohol with high quality essences, apple, lemon, or raisins”. He mentioned that people could not tell the difference between actual aragh and these medical ones. They just had the fake aragh and got a headache in the morning, he added.

Ahmad’s point about moral corruption resonates with the argument that in reaction to the state imposing moral and Islamic codes, people started to represent being corrupted. But at the same time, I thought what corruption is. I thought we were supposed to wear modest, we were supposed to behave modestly, not to laugh and speak aloud, not to dance, not to show our affection and love openly. But we do now. I do not think we fake these, but maybe these are associated with being corrupted. At the same time, stereotyping also works here, I thought for Ahmed and for many others the behaviors are seen as corruption as they origin from a certain “regime of representation” (Hall 259). At the same time, for me it was interesting to see who calls it corruption, who sees things normal, and who associates them with objection.

²³ Referring to Ahmad’s comment on us being unidentified criminals.

²⁴ In Farsi, we use *taghalobi* for fake, but also the English word “fake” has become common among the youth which is associated with the non-original items that have a brand name on.

Naming and renaming

There is another name for aragh sagi; *abshangooli*. *Shangool* is the word that we use in Farsi for tipsy, and *ab* is water, so the word means the water that makes one tipsy. I remember this as a child. Once I asked my dad and uncles what they were drinking and they said *abshangooli*. For a while I did not know the real name of this joy-bringing liquid. I could have caused trouble for the family as a child if I had known “aragh”. I realized this later very well, when I had a younger brother at home and he used to talk a lot with strangers. Because of this, we were using another word for satellite dish. Actually this worked at that point, my brother used to tell everyone that we have *nokhod siah*. *Nokhod siah* comes from a famous slang in Farsi; *peye nokhod siah ferestadan*. To translate it word to word, it means to send someone to find the black pea. But actually the idiom means to send someone on a wild-goose chase, or to send someone on a fool's errand. At the same time one uses this idiom to express that they wanted to get rid of someone so they found an excuse. For the sake of fun or honesty one might tell children to go and bring *black pea*. Thus the word *nokhod siah* has this kind of playfulness in itself. But aside from the playfulness in the word, sometimes it is a matter of nimbleness to use these words in the liminal spaces where being clear might have undesired consequences (Fröhlich et al 2019, 1146–65); like a child who does not know about a double life, yet.

When I asked the youngest person whom I interviewed –Negin, how they provide the fruit for fermenting wine, she told me some stories about the Central Market of Fruit and Vegetables²⁵ in Tehran. She said they usually buy the grapes for wine from this place. Last year, as they were waiting in the queue for their turn to order 80 kilos of grapes, she initiated talking with the man standing in front of him. She said the man had so many containers, and she asks what are you

²⁵ A market located in the Southern part of the city that usually fruit and vegetable sellers and people who own a juice bar go to provide the fruit they need. The other people usually go to buy grapes for wine, Kaveh told me about this, as he had a juice bar before.

going to do with all these grape juice. “We have a *hey’at*” and then he laughs. *Hey’at* in Farsi has a religious context and it mostly refers to a mourning congregation for a religious figure.

I recollected what Ahmad said answering me when I asked where he got the raisin; he said when he was in his home-town, which was a small town, he used to buy raisins for aragh from a certain shop. He said the shop-keeper had used to tell him: “Are you having *nazr* again?²⁶” Then “You should bring us some of this raisin and rice for us.” He said the seller knew that he was brewing aragh, and he was asking for aragh in this way.

For me, it was really interesting that how these words that originate from context of Islam became a shelter to hide from the state that employs them as suppressive tools.

Negin, then said that someone told them about the incident that had happened the day before. This market has huge juicers, as many buy for example lime and pomegranate juice. However, as far as I realized, in recent years many people started to buy grapes for wine and ask the shop keepers in the wet market to give them the fruit juice. But the day before my friend went there, police forces invaded the market in order to close the shops and arrest the shop keepers who were producing wine (“Wine production in the Wet Market of Tehran, 2021). Negin was saying she could not believe this, as everything was calm and “normal”. Even people had been talking about how they made wine and what kind of grapes the other ones use, using the word *majara*²⁷ to refer to wine.

Negin said when she returned home and she searched for the news she realized that the police had caught some of the wine producers and distained their industrial juicers. But everything had been so ordinary the next day that she thought it had been a rumor before checking the news.

²⁶ It is a vow or commitment in Islam to carry out an act, for example feeding the poor.

²⁷ In Farsi we use this originally Arabic word, which means what happened for “story”. Also, the word is used when one cannot remember a word or do not want to mention the actual one.

Thinking of Ahmad's trajectory of brewing, I wonder how re-inventing things is related to re-naming things. One might re-name things to keep them the way they are, to preserve them, to let them live in a disguised way. At the same time one might re-invent things to have them as new tools. Therefore, one can think of re-naming and re-inventing as two creative ways. I thought how language can hide things and keep them protected.

The liminal space I referred to, is also recognizable here. This is the threshold of public that the illegalized could pass through by being re-named. They are being re-named to be unclear and misleading to not to endanger anyone or anything.

Conclusion: Resistance?

In my thesis, I scrutinized the illegal practice of alcohol production, as an everyday form of resistance among a group of Iranians. I argued that though the state in Iran had been increasing social policing and enforcing Islamic values for years, in order to build up a "pious society", it had not been successful in it. Although the state has made use of different strategies in order to ensure the public and private spaces are complementary in terms of being "Islamic" and "moral", this correlation has been challenged by a group of people, as they have tried to live their "normal" life, though in private.

Alcohol, being illegal and absent from the public, for me served as one of the most private but at the same time traceable things in private. Initially, the idea of studying alcohol to understand how the political power of the Islamic Republic works was inspired by Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power*. Therefore, I followed alcohol to realize the impacts of the moral policing and suppression that the state has imposed on people during these years.

The idea of looking at “resistance as a diagnosis of power” helped me to explore the “creative force of resistance” and at the same time to look awry at the political power of the Islamic Republic. This was momentous for me; to understand that a repressive state which does not show any sign of reconciliation, cannot own the discursive power. As “power must be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather as something that functions only when it is part of a chain” (Adib-Moghaddam 2013, 88-90). That is why resistance exists and resistance works, though through bizarre paths.

I tried to answer the question if these practices of finding ways to have a private space, through having “normal” life, through “faking” or “re-naming”, can be thought of as forms of resistance. Writing about resistance is like walking on a thin edge, one should be “nimble”, neither to fall into dramatizing the practices of resistance, nor to be overlooking them. In the case of Iran, there has been a change in the restrictiveness of the state in terms of social policing and moralizing the society and there also have been changes in the way people react to it. At the same time, one should not disregard the growing and more frequent number of forcibly suppressed protests happening all around the most marginalized parts of Iran. And one should not overlook the shift from the endeavors to create a “cultural society” to create military bases, as the IRCG officer mentioned in 1997²⁸.

In terms of Vinthagen and Johansson, first, alcohol production is a practice not a certain intent or consciousness. Second, alcohol production is historically entangled with power, it is not separated or independent. The third one refers to intersectionality and the fact that neither resistance nor power are not engaged with one single power; the previous paragraph regarding the shifts of power. Fourth, it is heterogenic and contingent in changing contexts and situations;

²⁸ I am referring to the military interventions of Islamic Republic in the other countries.

this is not something I can fully prove but according to what I brought about the history of alcohol, in the last days of the revolution many tavern and alcohol producing companies were set on fire. Again, setting a company on fire is not the same as producing alcohol in one's home but at the same time, it is a good example for tracing out the shifts of power and resistance.

The other consideration, coming from this framework is whether the “resisters”, call their practices resistance, or name it something else. Among the fifth of my interviewees, only Kaveh mentioned alcohol production as a way of objection. I can think of his practices, to make a living, as a form of resistance. However, in this thesis, I also tried to show how things are not what we usually call them, and how they can be re-named to be preserved. I am thinking what if my other informants call resistance or objection “being *sarkhosh*” or “being normal”.

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