

آشپزخانه
کشمکش

BREAD

Many Iranians like to eat bread hot. Seeing long lines of people in front of bakeries at 7 in the morning before work or around 6–7 in the afternoon just before dinner is not uncommon. ● We have a saying in Farsi, “Nuun Juun-eh” which means “bread is life,” or “bread is soul.” Most Persians are really averse to ever wasting or throwing away bread—if all else fails, the parents ask the children to take the stale bread outside and break it into little bits and sprinkle it for the birds. Even at the civic level bread is heavily subsidized by the government. Not having enough bread is considered a horrible way to live and so the whole country makes sure everyone has enough bread for every meal.

U.S. PERCEPTIONS

Unfortunately, since a big part of the Americans are ignorant in global political matters and since they get most of their news from the mainstream media, their opinions about Iran and Iranians are distorted by the media. Most Americans who I have encountered think that Iranians are ugly, aggressive, violent, terrorists, Islamists, and uncivilized. ● Iranians like Americans but they hate American government. So far, what I have experienced suggests that Americans like Iranians too, but they dislike the Islamic republic establishment.

NUCLEAR POWER

I don't think a nuclear capable Iran is a threat to the U.S. or any country in the world. This is how the events are presented in the mainstream media as a scare tactic to make Americans live in fear and to justify any action against Iran for the American people. I don't know whether Iran is developing nuclear power for weapons or for energy. I am very concerned that the U.S. may go to war with Iran, which would be beneficial for both governments. The U.S. would benefit from the war's profit and the Iranian government would benefit by stabilizing its position among its own dissatisfied population. ● Along with a number of Western countries whose atomic warheads are independently enough to evaporate the whole population of the world in a single moment, Iran should equally have the right to develop nuclear weapons, as well as nuclear energy for peaceful purposes. Finally, I believe that the U.S. would never bargain its international reputation and popularity by attacking a country which is home to the most ancient civilization of the world.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Iranian women have made some progress in the last 30 years. Their number is higher among university students. There are female parliament members and cabinet ministers. There are female CEOs and directors. However, women, in large part, are still considered second-class citizens with no equal rights to men. But there is a big women's movement in Iran that is trying to change the situation and this movement and its members are being harassed by the government all the time. ● Women are a critical part of the work force, just as in America. The difference probably is that Iranian women have to do more than American women because they are, to some extent, still expected to cook and clean and manage the home's well being. Hence, they almost always fulfill a double role in Iranian culture. ● Many laws and regulations are enforced in the United States, which the legal regime of Iran considers to be illegitimate and unlawful. No single individual except the military can carry personal guns. Also, mothers are not allowed to abort their infant baby, even under the most perilous and crucial situations and even if it becomes evident that the child may be born with disabilities.

FASHION

The whole appearance of young urban Tehranis is just like a big mockery of the regime's dress code. The government can't stop this age group from dressing in the way it likes. And to be fair, I have to admit that at least in Tehran, the government has become much more tolerant towards people's appearances in the last decade. In Tehran's markets these days, even “chador,” the regime-preferred dress for women—which is supposed to cover the body and hide its curves—has now found its own sexy design in see-through, tight-at-hips styles.

PERSIANS

Ethnically, Persians are Indo-European, descending from European tribes who trekked from Europe, around the Caspian Sea, and down onto the Iranian plateau, several thousands of years ago. Iranians pride themselves on their nation's historical achievements, having been a highly developed civilization even before the Greeks came onto the world stage. ● Persian is now synonymous with Iranian, even though there are other ethnicities in Iran besides Persian.

POETRY

My personal favorite line is from Iranian poet Molana (“Rumi” in West): “Blessed is the gambler who has lost everything/except the desire to gamble once more.” The rhythm and alliteration are a marvel in Persian. This is used to describe a person who gives whatever they have to reach their goals despite all the hardships and failures. ● All Persians are poets. They memorize poetry, quote it often and consult Hafez every day to see what their fortune is. Poetic fragments are so highly valued that they are often written in exchange for money. ● Many poems have turned into idioms, so an Iranian uses a number of them even if they are not aware.

GOVERNMENT

A Supreme Leader heads the government and is selected by a Guardian Consul, a group of religious elite. A President is voted into office every four years and can serve up to two terms. The President's decisions must be approved by the Supreme Leader. Generally, theocracy has the most important role in government. Iranians, in general—and young and educated people in particular—are highly skeptical of their government. ● It's a dictatorship with minimal room for democracy (i.e. elections, local councils, etc.). Most people don't like the way the government works, however, I can imagine there is a significant part of the population that benefits from the current system and doesn't want it to change.

CONFLICT KITCHEN

The current Iranian version of our restaurant serves traditional Persian dishes and beverages. Conflict Kitchen is a take-out restaurant that only serves cuisine from countries with which the United States government is in conflict. Each Conflict Kitchen iteration is augmented by events, performances and discussions about the culture, politics and issues within each country upon which we focus. The restaurant rotates identities in response to current geopolitical events.

The text on this wrapper is culled directly from interviews with Iranians living both in the United States and Iran. www.conflict-kitchen.org

ISRAEL

In general, Iranian people have no issues with the Jews. They have been living in Iran for thousands of years, enjoy the same rights as other citizens and have been free to practice their religion publicly. There are even religious schools funded by the government and public money. What Iranians resent is the creation of the state of Israel because of the disaster that it created for millions of Palestinians. To this day, Israel refuses to recognize the United Nation's resolutions for Israel to leave the occupied lands. They don't see any hope for their future and that's one reason why so many young children can be easily persuaded to take radical actions, while people in Israel enjoy all the amenities and freedom that people in the West enjoy. ● In my experience, Iranians are fairly hostile towards Israel. It has more to do with the recent political past than with religion. ● I have found little hostility towards Jews. Religions of all sorts tend to be thoroughly respected by Iranians. Israel and the U.S. have been a hinderance to the region's aspirations to rule themselves and their oil. However, the same hostility that Iranians have for Israel does not extend to the U.S. Many envy what Americans have, but not necessarily the American way of life. ● Iran still has the largest concentration of Jews outside Israel in the Middle East—a neat fact to point out.

FILM

Films for Iran have strict rules, which makes them all the more artistic and beautiful. The opposite sex cannot touch each other, violence is not allowed, and you cannot make fun of any religion. My favorite movie is “Time for Drunken Horse.” It takes place along the Iran/Iraq border. The terrain is quite mountainous and the weather cold and harsh during the winter. It's beautiful right now in the spring. Two young orphans are goods smugglers. Horses are their only means of transport. To keep the horses working through the rough winter, they feed them alcohol. I think that it talks about what happens when life is hard, when and how you push yourself through, and the consequences of this life.

YOUTH

The younger generations are defying what the government wants them to believe. In fact, they are directly opposing the regime. In their basements they play Persian and Western musics banned in public. They read banned books and pass them on. Defying the regime's propaganda is an honor for Iranian baby-boomers. ● 70 percent of Iranians are under 30. Religious leaders encouraged high birth rates after the revolution, in hope of training a loyal group and instilling in them the “values” of the revolution. The government has tried to indoctrinate this new population from a very early age. However, with the advent of technology, the youth of Iran have not accepted the government's ideology and are increasingly opposing it—a trend that I think will continue.

REVOLUTION

The Iranian Revolution was a popular upheaval in response to the growing influence of foreign states on the domestic policies of Iran's former U.S.-backed Shah, increasing poverty, gradual disappearance of religious fundamentals from the society, and social discrimination. After the revolution, the U.S. encouraged the late dictator Saddam Hussein to wage a lethal war against Iran in which at least 350,000 Iranians (including my uncle) lost their lives. ● I can definitely say the Iranian Revolution was a reactionary step backward in our history. People went crazy and at the end and put all their trust on a theocratic fascist regime based on guardianship of the Islamic Jurists. ● The Iranian revolution was the result of most people's strong disapproval of the then Shah (king) of Iran and his way of leading the country, kowtowing to foreign powers, lavishly spending state money on himself and his family and seemingly forgetting about the “ordinary” Iranian. As a result, a host of different political factions banded together with the objective of ousting the Shah. This demand for change, spearheaded by Ayatollah Khomeini, however ended up bringing something completely different than what most people expected their future government to be.

NOWRUZ (NEW YEAR)

We always receive new shoes on Nowruz, and we also put them on immediately and run to the bathroom with the new shoes on. The tradition goes that if you wear your new shoes in the house, to the bathroom, then you will get even more new shoes soon. We don't ever wear shoes in a house ordinarily, as in a Japanese household, so wearing these brand-new shoes and walking on the Persian carpets feels illegal and intoxicating in a fun way. ● Every family grows greens in advance of the new year in preparation. During the last days of the new year, you make a wish and tie greens together, and there is a song that comes with it that I can't remember. Green is a symbol of life out of earth. During the new year, you say, “My greenness (spring) to you, my yellowness (fall) to me,” which means “I wish the best for you.”

THE GREEN MOVEMENT

I think the current Green Movement actually started not last year but at least 15 years ago, which is now in its final stages. It is a movement consisting of workers, women, students, and middle class fractions that intend to bring change in Iran. Of course, everybody's idea of change is different. Some may want to change the Ahmadinejad government only and some may want to change the whole Islamic system. I don't know who the leaders are. I don't think Moussavi or Karroubi are considered true leaders who would organize the movement's actions. ● I appreciate Mr. Mousavi's efforts to democratize Iran and reform within the frameworks of Islamic Republic government. Western governments who frequently proved their hostility towards the Iranian people had better not invest in people like Mr. Mousavi who, I'm sure, would retreat from all of their claims and pledges if elected. ● Average people who are fed up with theocracy and oppressions of the past 31 years of Islamic regime are fighting alongside the Green Movement, but their goal is for democracy. Under a climate of conflict, people came out to show their anger and discontent about the regime and all theocratic followers, including the Green Movement leaders. People chanted their own slogans and shook the pillars of the Islamic regime.