

**The People Reloaded: The Green Movement and the
Struggle for Iran's Future**

Nader Hashemi & Danny Postel, eds.

Brooklyn, NY: Melville House Publishing, 2010. pbk. 462 pages

The People Reloaded – an anthology of the multiplicity of voices, belonging to various perspectives, fields, and geographical locations throughout the world, and primarily and principally in the Iran and Iranian diasporas – is edited by Nader Hashemi (of the University of Denver) and Danny Postel (the editor of *The Common Review*). The book is a definitive selected collection of fifty-three writings and political analyses written by

diverse voices interested in and engaged with the struggle for democracy in Iran. *The People Reloaded* is comprised of key documents, statements, interviews, letters, and essays – and it seeks to capture “an important moment in Iran’s history (xxii).”

This book is a rich, consistently engaging anthology that makes an important effort to provide “an intellectual and political roadmap,” which helps the reader in understanding the tumultuous events that have rocked the Islamic Republic since June 2009 – a period when the struggle for the democracy in Iran underwent a “momentous transformation (xi).” The facts, analyses, shadings, and nuances that these essays provide allow the reader to better understand whatever direction Iran can or may take in the future. The editors contribute to the work the introduction and two essays; the remaining essays are those of noted historians, political activists in and out of Iran, and journalists. Among the historians are Ervand Abrahamian, Hamid Dabashi, and Juan Cole; the activists include Ayatollah Mohsen Kadivar, Shirin Ebadi (2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner), and Hossein Bashiriyeh; and the journalists include Roger Cohen, Stephen Kinzer, and Laura Secor. The combined effect is a history of the Green Movement, which includes much of Iran’s revolutionary past and a vision of the future of the Green Movement in its struggle for justice and a voice in the ancient civilization of Iran.

Organized chronologically, the book is divided into four parts: Democracy in the Streets: The Birth of a Movement; Beyond “Where Is My Vote?” – A Green Vision Takes Shape; Confronting Setbacks, Rethinking Strategy; and A Luta Continua: The Green Movement’s Second Year and the Struggle for Iran’s Future. These four parts consist of twelve, seventeen, ten, and fourteen essays respectively. They are preceded by the editors’ introduction and followed by notes and a list of contributors.

The book’s major title, *The People Reloaded*, is drawn directly from the title of one of Morad Farhadpour and Omid Mehrgan’s essays that speaks to this point – the continuity of the democratic struggle within Iran, particularly in the post-revolutionary period. According to Farhadpour and Mehrgan:

The expression “*people reloaded*” tries to capture this sense of repetition without mere imitation; and people are trying to redeem the *lost hopes* [during the period of last 30 years] *and aspirations of the revolution*, as they did once before by electing Khatami in 1997. But this time, we are much more *resolute and creative*. (131; italics added)

Most essayists insist the Green Movement's goal is not revolution, but is an adherence to the Iranian constitution, one which avoids narrow interpretations of religious doctrine. The sociologist Asef Bayat, in his compelling essay "A Wave for Life and Liberty," maintains that the "hardline Islamists" have always feared that these values might not be able to hold firm if the nation opened up to the outside world. He further argues that the Islamists' critique of globalization is linked to their deep anxiety over losing their self-worth in Iran itself and, thus, the challenge before Iran's leaders is to "transform the rhetoric of 'independence'" into a sacred entity, "a virtue whose violation would invite punishment (43)."

The book does not strive to be a history; instead, it serves as a guide on Iranian opposition politics, the understanding of the goals and strategies of the Green Movement, and the analyzing of methods for participation within Iran's current system with the goal of change. There are also lessons on authoritarianism's creeping ways: in his essay, Slavoj Žižek warns that governments increasingly embrace a form of capitalism delinked from democracy, and that the "virus of authoritarian capitalism" is slowly but surely spreading around the globe. And Farhadpour and Mehrgan note that in demanding or preserving rights, Iranians and citizens of any nation must be vigilant on multiple fronts.

It is true that the widespread protests of the year 2009 have faded because of the brutality and cruelty of the Iranian government, but there is no shadow of doubt that the Green Movement will shape the future of Iran. In his essay, "Strategies of Hope," Nader Hashemi states:

The Green Movement's nonviolent orientation can best be, affirmed by continuing to articulate a new future for Iran, one that marks a clear historical break from the violent past and which is rooted in lessons from other political struggles that have universal appeal, such as ... the African-American struggle for civil rights and the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa. (406)

In other words, as a democratic-learning community, the Green Movement is still in its formative stage and as such, it is in the process of unceasing development. It is a self-institution and a self-formation that learns from its own errors. The effectiveness of the Green Movement rests, therefore, on self-organizing the Iranian civil society, a society which insists in living in truth against lies.

Recent protests in Iran proved that the Green Movement has not died, despite the crackdown since the disputed 2009 presidential election. And

what is certain is that the current power holders have lost moral credibility by virtue of their brutal crackdowns on the Iranian civil society. Moreover, by asserting the republican principle of popular sovereignty, the Green Movement has posed a counterclaim of legitimacy against the Iranian theocracy.

The People Reloaded will help the Green Movement stand as a model for future protests in Iran and elsewhere. In the Green Movement's quest for reform, supporters display patience, a belief in nonviolence, and an willingness to unite behind one candidate. As many writers point out, eloquently and fervently, the Iranian people deserve reform of their own design. Nevertheless, Iran's leaders continue to cling to control, but they should know from their own experiences, better than other leaders throughout the greater Middle East, that "reform delayed is revolution."

The People Reloaded ends without a conclusion to match its strong, descriptive, innovative, and informative introduction. This significant omission deprived the editors of the opportunity to tie up loose ends and reinforce the main points made in the essays. It also denied the readers a fitting climax. The book also lacks an index. Besides these two weaknesses, the book is the first to bring together the leading voices and key players in Iran's Green Movement—providing a vital resource for the study of Iran, social movements, and the future of the Middle East. The book is well designed to give the reader with minimal knowledge of Iran's current politics and its recent past a comprehensive overview of the last couple years and the historical context that shaped them. It is highly recommended for researchers and analysts of political and international relations, particularly those with focus on Iran and sociopolitical movements in Middle East.

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