

Iran and the West: lost in media translation? (guest blog)

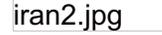
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What's it like to be from a country under the global media spotlight? How does it feel to be told that you are part of the Axis of Evil or even that you must "unclench your fist". This article is by an Iranian who helped with the translation of the recent BBC documentary series, [Iran And The West](#), which explored the role of Iran in global politics over the last 30 years. Here Bahareh explains what it is like to see the world watching and judging your country through the media – and what it felt like to be part of a [programme](#) that sought to tell the wider story.



"I am from one part of the Axis of Evil, a place that supports terrorism in Lebanon and Palestine. We have an 'ugly-funny' president who every now and then becomes the main character in a new cartoon or animation made by political exiles inside and outside the country. He has been condemned for saying that holocaust happened in a much smaller scale than what is mentioned in history. He was mocked for his famous speech in Columbia university where he said 'we don't have gay men in Iran',

 But he is 'never' and I mean 'never' mentioned for daring to stand in the face of the US , not giving in, and pushing the country towards access to nuclear power. Under President Ahmadinejad Iran has even sent a satellite to space, despite being under sanctions, a scientific achievement which all the oil-rich Arab countries with all their strong connections to the US , could not even dream about. Iran is in the volatile region of the Middle-East where news is always about a suicide bomb in Iraq or Afghanistan.

How often does the western media talk about the successful Iranians leading big scientific and health projects in the US and Europe? Has anyone ever read in the western media about Maria Khorsand , the Iranian woman directing Sony Ericson's technology licensing department? What about Omid Kordestani, Google's senior vice president of worldwide sales and field operations?

What about the growing blogosphere of Iran? How often is that mentioned? I don't think western people ever imagine that we have access to internet in Iran. They imagine us traveling with camels in narrow roads and showing only eyes behind a black veil.

 My classmates look so shocked at me when I tell them that so many girls drive their cars in Iran. At least we should be happy some western media mentioned Anousheh Ansari, the first Muslim and Iranian woman who ever went to the space, though the cameras zoomed on the US flag wrapped around one of her arms trying to avoid Iranian flag wrapped on the other arm(even though it was the flag before the revolution).

This is what you could call the 'power' of media especially in an era, which despite all accessibility of knowledge and information, people prefer to stay more media savvy rather than media wise.

And then one day just by chance, I join this team who are making a [documentary](#) on Iran and the west for the BBC to help them with translation for a short time. The first thing I noticed was how stressed the whole team is. It's only weeks before transmission and to add to all that stress, they receive phone calls every now and then to let them know that yet another interview is cancelled.

Once they are on their way to the airport to get an interview which was arranged months ago with that ex-president in New York, and here comes the phone call: ' Sorry, just informed that it's cancelled.' But they are not disappointed and they insist to rearrange it even if it means getting it hours before going on air.

The team behind the programme ' [Iran and the West](#) ', delve deep into the story, to get access to the words that were actually uttered behind the closed doors of nuclear talks between Iran and the EU, those days we just read stories of European delegation offering a '5+2 package' to Iran. Whatever that meant?? We watched on TV that the French

hostages were freed from Lebanon in 1992, did we ever know that their freedom was part of a deal between Iran and the US for sunny days in their relations, a promise which the US never kept.

BBC 2's recent three episode documentary 'Iran and west ' dared to go beyond the borders of archive news, accessing the rarest footage ever and talking to the most prominent people making the news. From Talks with the man engineering the American embassy's hostage taking in 1979 to talks with the ex-foreign secretary Jack Straw about his sneaking inside a toilet in a train to answer an important phone call from Iran, are the magnificent aspects of this very different BBC documentary on Iran."

This article by an Iranian translator.

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