

Guardian's Correspondent "Pinocchio" in Tehran: Demonizing Iranians, Nonsensical Propaganda

A Response to Tehran Bureau/The Guardian's Propaganda

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Virtually everyone is familiar with Pinocchio's story – a wooden puppet carved by Gepetto brought to life by a fairy that instructed him to be "brave, truthful, and unselfish" in order to remain a real boy. What I remember the most about Pinocchio was his failure to heed the fairy, his nose growing longer with every lie. This seems to be the case with Tehran Bureau's unnamed 'correspondent' who failed to heed the '[canons of journalism](#)' by making up tall stories about Iran in her article "[How the hijab has made sexual harassment worse in Iran](#)" — in effect turning herself into

Correspondent Pinocchio (CP).

CP writes a damning account of being sexually harassed in Iran, of being subjected to 'ogling', "whistling, hissing, smacking, licking, puffing" and 'unhindered expressions of lust' and 'profanity'. She backs her personal account with remarks from a friend who told her that she felt "naked, and worthless." Not only is CP claiming that hijab has made the situation worse for women, but she also quotes someone as saying: "Basically, a woman shouldn't walk in the street without male protection,". What nonsense.

Now as a scholar of US foreign policy I pay close attention to propaganda. Misinformation is nothing new to me and I don't like to spend my time and energy responding to all the lies. But this particular article by CP hit me hard because I happen to be in Iran at the moment and in the same exact location/neighborhood she mentions in her tall tale. And it had it not been for the fact that the evening prior to reading her story I had been talking to my husband in California telling him that never had I felt more safe and comfortable walking alone and eating alone in a restaurant than I did here, I would have dismissed CP's propaganda. But CP's lies had a personal effect on me and I could not let it rest — especially in light of Tehran Bureau's malicious history.

Tehran Bureau (TB) was established shortly prior to the 2009 elections in Iran. It would seem the sole purpose at the time was to start false allegations about the 2009 elections in Iran (Foreign Policy Journal Editor Jeremy Hammond has a brilliant piece on this [HERE](#)). TB's ability to promote lies and with it, unrest, must have caught the attention of PBS. Tehran Bureau is now affiliated with PBS. PBS [receives funding from the Federal Government](#). Hosting Tehran Bureau by [The Guardian](#) may have well given the paper a boost for its very continuity was questionable as admitted to in 2013 when its [CEO warned that his paper may not survive](#).

So given this colorful background of Tehran Bureau and CP's blatant lies, I was prompted to

set the record straight and share my experiences and observations which were the exact opposite of what PC wrote in her piece. What I saw and personally experienced was profound respect. No glaring stares, no harassment. Simply the kind of courtesy that is offered to a woman and that is demanded by society. It seems to be me as if in Iran the hijab serves as a reminder of how men are expected to behave toward women. (See article on hijab and status of women in Iran [HERE](#)). So what is CP on about?

Of course there is the possibility that CP is a budding beauty and Iranian men simply can't handle her splendor (what an insult to Iranian men). Were I to give her this benefit of the doubt and imagine her to be a radiant beauty, her (possible) beauty would be completely eclipsed in Iran. As Mara wrote of the Iranian women in her 2012 article titled [For the women of Iran, with Love](#) "They are the most beautiful women I have ever seen". I concur - as do many others. And Iranian men are accustomed to beauty. So I tend to dismiss her claims of "harassment" based on her glamor.

On the other hand, it may be that she was completely ignored. After all, in many countries around the world men do indeed harass women and make sexual overtures. Some women are flattered while others are offended. But being invisible is not easy to handle. Being invisible may be likened to a blank piece of paper on which one can write anything and all things imaginary - depending on one's inclination. What is an undisputed fact is that contrary to CP's report, many Iranian women go all out to become visible.

I spent hours in a coffee shop in a beautiful park (Ab o Atash - literal translation water and fire) near where CP claims to have walked, and watched young women. Faces made up, dressed fashionably in their colorful 'hijab' they parading around like peacocks that opens their glorious tails in order to attract attention. Sadly for them, I was doing the glaring while they were left mostly unnoticed. And in their midst there were also women who did not venture out to make an impression with their hairdo and clothing. They were beautiful in their simplicity and modesty. I made a mental note of them too, of their ease and confidence in themselves.

Now it would be a lie to claim that all women are ignored and all men here are well behaved. With all the demonizing of Iranians, it may be hard to believe that Iranians are normal! As with every other country in the world, there are men who harass women and who make unsolicited approaches. This is more a personal upbringing than a norm. In the pre-revolution years, when I visited Iran as a very young teenager, harassment and catcalling was prevalent. As a shy girl, I wanted the ground to open up and swallow me up so that I would be spared the stares, the pestering. But things have changed. What was once common is truly rare these days. Men would not dare disrespect women - and they don't.

I would very much like to suggest that PC take her notebook or laptop, sit in the aforementioned park (or anywhere else in Tehran and elsewhere) and speak the truth. Perhaps only then, as with Pinocchio, her courage and unselfishness to write truthfully will turn her into a real bona fide correspondent.

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