

Travelling Seriously Harms Your Prejudices

My Trip to the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iranian women are oppressed. Iranians are uneducated. Everybody living in Iran is strongly religious. Iranian people hate the West and Israel. Be careful – Iran is dangerous!

These are only some of the many preconceptions people have about the country of Iran and its people. Me and my Mum always wondered whether these were true or only misconceptions, which is why we decided to go on a journey to see for ourselves. As it was our first time travelling there, we opted for a guided trip with a small group. This article will focus on the many answers to our question, mainly based on our own perceptions.

What is important to note is that we only travelled there for a rather short period of time and only visited larger cities, which is why our perceptions might not be 100% applicable to people living in the countryside.

Women in Iran

Iran is a country with a multi-ethnic society – therefore characterised by different languages and religions. Of course, there are really religious families whose female members are entirely covered. This mostly depends on the area you are in. For instance, people in the city of Yazd (population: 656.500 (2016), located in the centre of Iran) have a stronger belief in religion, whereas in Isfahan (population: 1,9 million (2016), located 250km west of Yazd) people are more open with teenage

girls wearing rather “western” clothes, such as jeans in a used look and headscarves loosely slung around the back of their heads, while of course still respecting the general clothing rules.

It was interesting to see that a lot of young women had band-aids on their nose, looking like they had undergone plastic surgery just recently. The fact that they wore them rather proudly in the open could tell that this possibly works as a status symbol. I suppose only richer women can afford this – in European countries, girls rather focus on their hair, which is less of an issue there due to the headscarves.

It also seemed like the headscarves are seen as a normal aspect of everyday life and part of the tradition for most while still being obligatory. However more and more people are taking issue with this with a public outcry beginning to spread in the form of small protests, sometimes ending in arrests for the women who risk taking their headscarves off in public.

Also, many Iranians have found their own ways of avoiding strict regulations, such as the segregation of sexes in some public facilities by having a picnic in the park instead of going to a restaurant or camping instead of sleeping in a hotel.

Education

According to UNESCO, Iran had an adult literacy rate of 85.54% in 2016. There is still a gap between the sexes with men having a rate of 90.35% and women

80.79%. The youth literacy rate, which counts for the ages between 15 and 24, is much higher, with a total of 98.10%, also with a smaller gap between the male (98.27%) and female population (97.93%) in the year 2016. Throughout the years, these rates have constantly increased. Germany, by comparison, had 6,2 million people who were barely literate in 2018, which is a percentage of approximately 7,5%.

In higher education, the number of students at almost all levels has doubled between 2000 and 2007. Due to the high demand, students had five different options in 2010: public universities, the Islamic Azad University, which was the first government monitored private university, Payame Noor University for long distance education, private universities, and evening sessions at the public universities.

Our experiences are in accordance with these statistics as we mostly talked with the younger population since they all spoke English really well. In cases where the other person's English skills were only limited our guide sometimes translated for us.

Iranians and the West

Sometimes it is claimed that the country is not up to par compared to the “Western” countries. Many Iranians told us that they don't want abrupt change, but rather enough time to open up at their own pace. There is a part of the population that just

wants to live in peace like they used to for past years or even decades, while another part wants to adapt to the ideas of western countries. We could also feel an underlying pressure and anxiety about what is going to happen under the presidency of Donald Trump, as many fear a situation like in Syria and therefore want to keep as closed off as possible.

What we couldn't find was any evidence regarding the preconception that Iranians don't like or even hate people from “the West”. Each day people came to take a picture with us “tourists” and had a lot of questions about Germany, its people and life here. Some even gave us their address and phone number in case we come back sometime and need a place to stay. Most people were really open, especially the younger population and if not, they just kept to themselves – there was never anyone who seemed hostile towards us.

Obviously not everything is perfect or runs smoothly in Iran, there are still a lot of problems many people are unhappy with – for instance the obligatory headscarf or gender divisions. However, according to our perceptions, it can be said that most of the preconceptions are not at all or only partially true and that travelling seriously harms these prejudices.

Some Thoughts on the Upcoming Election

Often described as the City on the Hill, bathed in celestial light, the US currently accounts for by far the greatest number of Corona Virus deaths per capita in the world.

The classic text assessing the USA's democratic experiment is Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. He foresaw what would foretoken its failure: when the country's citizens thought that their representatives no longer represented them. This, of course, applies to many of today's purported democracies—including perhaps Germany's—but especially to my country's. In the *Republic*, Plato set forth what has become known as the cycle of regimes, from aristocracy to timocracy (love of honor) to oligarchy to democracy to tyranny. Today the US is arguably a national security state based on oligarchy (rule by the few).

In the 2016 election, running for the Senate cost an average of \$24 million and \$1 million to run for the House of Representatives. The intersection of power and money is on display every day in the Congress where there are few members who have not suborned themselves to the banks, to the private healthcare companies, to Big Pharma, to the fossil fuel companies, to the military-industrial-academic complex ... the list is long.

Trump is an utterly despicable human being, but he is an outgrowth of the US's imperial decline. All of which serves as the context for what is likely to happen

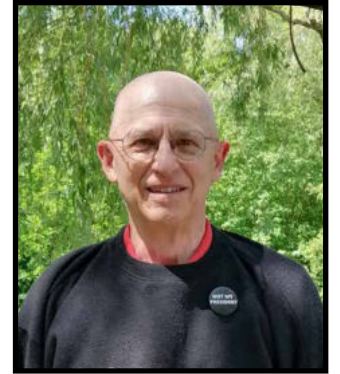
on November 3, Election Day. The Republican Party cravenly caters to Trump and his demagoguery. Of equal significance is the responsibility of the Democratic National Committee (DNC) for Trump's 2016 election and now for his possible re-election. The DNC is accurately described as Wall Street Democrats. Like Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden is an establishment favorite. He was the senator from Delaware, the headquarters of VISA and other major corporations because of their friendly tax rates. The reason Biden opposes Medicare for All and the Green New Deal is that these would wipe out the for-profit private healthcare industry and the fossil fuel industry, plus decimate Big Pharma.

Biden supported the repeal of the Glass-Steagall Act, which the banks loved but which precipitated the 2008 financial debacle. Biden was a member of the Senate Banking Committee when it formulated the student loan program which has immiserated so many university students, and which he continues to support. Biden was a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which voted to put Clarence Thomas on the Supreme Court and which savaged Anita Hill. The DNC's focus now and going forward is to stress the need to get rid of Trump. Campaigning on a negative is always less effective than a positive, but the key reason is to distract voters from Biden's record.

To stand a chance of being elected, Biden needs the support of the many young people who supported Bernie Sanders because of the student loan travesty. Biden also needs the leftists who

supported Sanders because of his long-standing commitment to move the country from capitalism to socialism. That both groups will vote for him in significant numbers is questionable. Will Trump's criminal incompetence in handling the Corona Virus epidemic make a difference? Will the explosion in response to racist police violence make a difference? The image of the racist police officer on the neck of George Floyd embodies for Black Americans 400 years of oppression. This will lead to more Black Americans voting, if they are not suppressed. But most white Americans continue to support the police.

In recent presidential elections, voter turnout has been around 60%, and the elections have been narrowly decided, with each candidate garnering around half the vote. That means that the electorate has been divided: 30% Republicans, 30% Democrats, and 40% non-voting. I anticipate that the 40% will determine the upcoming election. If Trump wins re-election, it will be a total disaster, likely leading to fascism. If Biden wins, it will be a disaster, cementing Wall Street's hegemony. I love my country, but I expect it will decline further from what had struck de Tocqueville as such a promising political venture.



Jack Sigel

My political activism has developed as a complement to my professorial endeavors. A participant opposing the Vietnam War and nuclear armaments, I became a member for 15 years of the Board of Directors of Chicago Area Peace Action (CAPA), the largest peace and justice organization in the mid-western US. CAPA undertakes to offer forums with political analysts not accorded access to the mainstream corporate controlled media. I would read their books and articles preparatory to meeting with them. This political education was then linked with my becoming one of the leaders of the Occupy Chicago movement, developing significant on the street political experience. I continue to work with Chicago activists, currently focused of the fossil fuel divestment movement and anti-Trump actions.

Joe Biden – the Great Liberator?

Has the Democratic Party Made the Right Decision With Its Nominee for 2020?

There's a lot of work to do for the Democratic presidential nominee Joseph Robinette Biden Jr. (77), currently working from home in his basement in Wilmington, Delaware. So much in fact that some party members are already panicking over their chances to win the Oval Office back from Donald John Trump (73) in this year's upcoming presidential. So let's focus on why he is a safe and yet risk choice as nominee.

Not the Knight in Shining Armor We Expected

In early February this year Joe Biden was pretty much written off. Iowa, New Hampshire and Nevada had at large been a disaster for the former Vice President. Until that Saturday evening, when the loyal black voters of South Carolina pulled him back into the race, despite his faint performance that far. With rivals dropping out fast, Biden went on to win big on Super Tuesday and eliminated all mathematical chances for the progressive Bernie Sanders.

No doubt the Democratic Party could have chosen an equally – if not better – qualified persona like Elizabeth Warren or a real rhetorical top-notch like Pete Buttigieg. But the old political veteran managed to unite the older, more moderate and even the practically oriented progressive Democratic voters behind him, despite his shortcomings like his dwindling charisma and his sometimes confusing statements at live events. Because they all saw in him their lowest common denominator: a moderate, emphatic, decent and consensus-oriented candidate that can win conservative votes and redeem them from the presidency of Donald Trump.

#metoo Accusations Against a Democrat

Joe Biden is also called a “backslapper” by some. Much like

Bill Clinton he is a people's person, seeking the physical proximity with his supporters – male and female. The growing #metoo debate has long broached this issue, calling some of his hugs and caresses “too fatherly” or even “encroaching” at times. Biden has since apologized as well as for his poor treatment of Anita Hill in the 1991 hearing against Clarence Thomas and vehemently denies the allegations of rape by Tara Reade. The Democratic nominee fears the reputation as an old white man who molests women – an image that the current president has publicly bragged about on record. Especially the last two cases put him in a delicate position as a Democrat. Following the demand to “Believe All Women” and consequently resign in the face of allegations is not an option, strategically speaking, because it would significantly weaken the Democrats' image as the “good guys”. He instead must make the argument for necessary investigations facing allegations because he wants to contrast people like Trump who don't care for allegations of sexual misconduct at all.

The Difference to Hillary

Contrary to Hillary Clinton in 2016, Biden has already united the party and all of its prominent figures behind him and can/has to use the upcoming months to build a movement integrating more of the progressive Sanders supporters and climate activists without frightening off moderate/conservative voters to secure his razor-thin lead in the important battleground states. If he manages that, he will have to face off against a Republican Party that – contrary to 2016 – has united behind their candidate with chock-full war chests which will make for a long and dirty fight for the Oval Office this campaign season – exploiting every little weakness he shows.



Tragedy And Triumph – 30 Years Apart

South Africa Celebrates Two Milestones In Its History in 2020

March 21st is Human Rights Day in South Africa. It's also the date on which a crowd of about 7,000 protesters peacefully demonstrated against pass laws, a part of the state's Apartheid policy. The South African police opened fire on the crowd, killing 69 people and injuring more than 180.

This event, also known as the Sharpeville Massacre, occurred 60 years ago, in 1960. The high toll in victims generated a massive national and international outcry. Nelson Mandela and other fellow congressmen of the African National Congress took a stand by burning their own passports.

But What Led to the Massacre and the Complicated Situation in 1960?

Sharpeville was built in 1943 to replace a nearby township, a designated place for black South African citizens to live. Because of overcrowding, illnesses were spread there. Due to these circumstances, the government started to remove, not kindly ask, people from this township in 1958. Sharpeville had a high crime rate, a high unemployment rate and serious youth problems due to many children joining gangs or affiliating with crimes. Furthermore, a new police station was established there, and these policemen were very eager on checking passports and deporting illegal residents. So, in general, the people living in Sharpeville weren't too happy about their living situation.

On 21st March a large group of township residents showed up at the local police station opening themselves up for arrest, because they weren't carrying their



identifying documents. That is, where it all started to get out of hand. More and more people turned up to show their support. All these people, feeling mistreated, joined the protest. At some point, the police, apparently mostly young and ill-educated officers, got scared, because of the large crowd. One of the officers started to fire into the mob. Needless to say, the crowd was only armed with a few stones, no more. They were basically slaughtered.

30 years later, in 1990, that same Nelson Mandela was released from prison after serving 27 years of a lifetime prison sentence for "sabotage against the government". On 5 August 1962, he was arrested for allegedly still running the ANC (African National Congress). First, he had to serve a 5-year sentence, but the government wasn't inclined to release him promptly. He was arguably the world's most famous political prisoner, at the time. Mandela's release and a lot of other events led to South Africa's first democratic election in 1994, when Mandela became President of South Africa. Unfortunately, after serving as a president for only 5 years, till 1999, he passed away in 2013.

What is the Situation in South Africa Like Today?

To this very day, South Africa has not been completely united. On May 8th, Matamela Cyril Ramaphosa was elected president. The election saw the lowest voter turnout in history, but why? South Africans are trying to express their frustration over growing inequality, high unemployment and corruption in the country. Although there are democratic elections South Africa still has a long way to go...

Building Peace

The History of UNESCO

The Colosseum, the Great Wall of China and the Water Management System of Augsburg. What do they have in common? All three of them are part of the 1,073 world heritage sites, preserved by UNESCO. What does this acronym stand for, both linguistically and for us as a society?

Brief History

UNESCO means „United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization“. The founding of this institution goes back 75 years, which takes us to the year 1945. Actually, its history had already started three years prior to that: in 1942, several European enemies of Nazi Germany and their allies met in the United Kingdom for the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education (CAME) to consider solutions attempting to put an end to the war. Their vision was to rebuild educational systems once peace would prevail in Europe again. Proper education – not only in Germany – was expected to prevent such a war from ever happening again.

The USA and new governments joined the Conference for the establishment of an educational and cultural organization in London, November 1945. A total of 44 countries headed for the creation of an organization which stands for a "culture of peace". In the end, UNESCO was founded on 16th of November and a couple of years later, in 1958, the headquarters in Paris was inaugurated.

Work in Progress

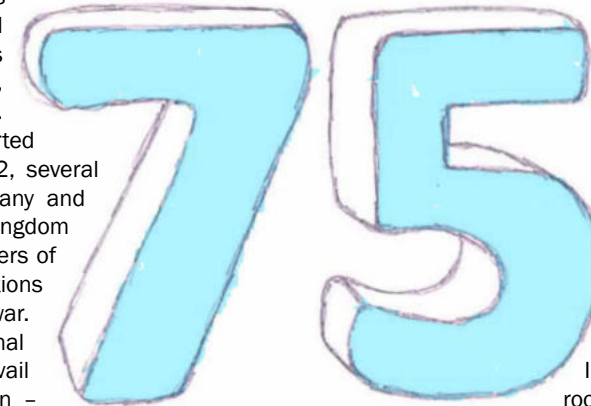
Since then, the organisation has come far. 167 countries worldwide have world heritage sites preserved by UNESCO. With over 2,000 staff in Paris and over 50 field offices globally, UNESCO reacts to the world's most pressing problems such as

the lack of fresh water in many African countries. Although they need some time to get started, the organization tries its best to build a peace process, strive for sustainable development, intercultural dialogue, poverty eradication, just to name a few. Another interesting subject worth of investigation is how they are represented in the media. Nowadays, every big company, influential politicians and NGOs are present online to reach out to the world, to address the citizens. The UNESCO doesn't only provide an informative website in six widely spoken languages but is also present on YouTube and Instagram. Regional offices also serve to represent UNESCO and inform about recent issues.

While most people may know UNESCO through their educational efforts in third world countries or for preserving and protecting heritage sites, they respond to a recent topic as well: the Corona-Crisis. On their Instagram Account they inform about recent changes and facts and try to deal with conspiracies about the virus. In times like these it's important not to make room for dubitable statements that endanger democracy – which is badly needed at the moment.

Why Am I Reading About This?

There's hundreds of anniversaries celebrated in 2020. The best-known anniversary may be the end of the Second World War. Yes, it's a significant date that shall never be forgotten and we still see the consequences of this era today. No matter how destroyed Europe was, how many people lost their lives in the war, there was still hope. These nations worked together to found UNESCO, had hope for a better tomorrow, a better future for the generations to come. They believed that, if they collaborated, they could make the world a better place. In my opinion, that's a wonderful message.



No End to Remembering

But an Ending to Remember

The anniversary of Germany's unconditional surrender in 1945 to end the Second World War is a reason for celebration in many nations. Known as the 'Victory in Europe Day' – short VE Day – the 8th of May is also recognized as Liberation Day in countries which participated in the global war. In Russia and other post-USSR countries, Victory Day on May 9th takes the spotlight with parades and fireworks in most cities.

Revision of the Second World War

With the election of Adolf Hitler as the new chancellor of Germany in March 1933, the first step into war had already been taken. A dictatorship with far-reaching consequences was born as the Weimar Republic had been stripped of its democratic function. In 1939, the groundwork was laid. Officially recognized as the beginning of the Second World War, the Third Reich breached the borders of Poland on September 1st by using staged events as a pretext for the invasion.

Germany, Italy and Japan already signed friendly treaties amongst each other in 1936. As the war was getting started, they intensified their alliance. The Axis Powers came to be, as these three nations were now allies for the following years. On the other side, the major players of the Allied Powers were Great Britain, France, and later on, in 1941, the United States of America, the Soviet Union and China. Participants on the Allied front were countries with historical connections to the Allies, like New Zealand or Australia.

As the war went on, the Hitler regime and its allies took over France and split it into two occupation zones in a cooperation with Mussolini's Italy. Time went by and even

though Germany succeeded in holding off the Soviet troops on the east front, they weren't getting the results they desired. After years of stalemate, the Allies initiated Operation Neptune in 1944. Allied forces invaded Normandy on June 6th, commonly known as D-Day. The Wehrmacht lost the battle and found itself in a dire position afterwards.

The Days Before and After the Surrender

Germany had been put under enormous pressure in the years 1943 and 1944, and after a final desperate attempt to fight back against the Allied Powers, both east and westwards, the fate of the Third Reich was sealed. German forces were captured and thus troops all throughout Europe began surrendering. On April 30th, Hitler took his own life, leaving the capitulation in the hands of his subordinates.

May 8th, 11:01 p.m.: Germany's surrender is now official. Almost six years after Poland had been invaded, the tyranny of modern history's worst dictatorship has finally found its end. The death toll of over 55 million people – most of them civilians – speaks volumes about how people felt when they heard the news. Although the USSR suffered about 26 million casualties during the war, they were probably the ones celebrating the most. Not even one day after the announcement was made, the

country ran out of all of its vodka reserves in what was probably the biggest party to date.

The other Allied forces celebrated in similar fashion, but a good amount of time had to pass until many Germans were able to accept their role as the perpetrator in the war, even if they might have seen themselves as victims. Even so, you could also hear people sighing in relief that this torturous first half of the decade had come to an end. Shortly thereafter, the rebuilding of the destroyed cities and infrastructure commenced. The first few years were hard, as the population had to work whilst suffering from hunger and misery.

Aftermath in a Destroyed Country

In the years following the surrender, the former Third Reich split into four occupation zones held by France, Great Britain, the USA and the USSR. The Allied Powers soon came to conclusion in their quest for an appropriate retribution. Germany had to pay reparations to the Allied forces, endure dismantlement of its factories in the east and undergo denazification, which resulted in the Nuremberg trials. With the reunification of East and West Germany in 1989 and 1990, the reparations were paid in full and the Federal Republic of Germany was established.

In 1949, as a direct response to the gruesome actions

carried out by the Nazi regime, a conference was held in Switzerland. The Fourth Geneva Convention was created, 85 years after the first entry had been put in place. The latest installment did not focus on the combatants, but rather the civilians who got dragged into the operations. Over 100 states all around the world signed the treaty to protect innocent people in the case of war a few years later.

Remembering the Deeds Today

Nowadays, the anniversary of the end of the Second World War is celebrated in most of the countries that were directly involved in the war. Depending on their role during the war, the names vary between Victory (in Europe) Day or Day of Liberation. These are national public holidays in their respective countries. Some celebrate the victory against the Nazis with parties and parades, while others choose to only remember the fallen. The former republics of the USSR celebrate on May 9th due to the time difference on the day of the surrender.

In Germany, the Day of Liberation on May 8th is used to commemorate all victims. Furthermore, everyone is expected to remember the historic responsibility our ancestors burdened us with. During this year's 75th anniversary – which was a unique holiday this year in Berlin – the Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier vigorously appealed to the public during the memorial service to not forget what happened: "There is no end to remembering. There is no salvation from our history. No, remembering is not a burden – but not remembering will be."

