

# SKILLS FOR CRISIS

## **Firoozeh Farvardin**

### Politics of emotion - from (individual) fears to (collective) cares

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“ *It is (our task) to build another world — one grounded in collective care, emotional resilience, and political imagination. One where the future is not a battleground, but a shared possibility.*

– Firoozeh Farvardin

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Before I begin, I want to acknowledge something very important: This talk is not just based on my individual work or observations. What I'll be sharing today is a collective reflection — emerging from collaborations, conversations, and shared intellectual labor with activists, friends and comrades. In particular, this draws on work I've done with the International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies (IRGAC), and on contributions by my colleagues and comrades like Gustavo Robles, Borries Nehe, and Nader Talebi. Plus, *Beyond Molotovs*, The visual handbook of anti authoritarianism — which I contribute as one of the authors — forms the basis of much of what I'll share today.

So I speak not as an expert above others, but as someone helping narrate and connect the experiences and strategies of people resisting authoritarianism and building forms of collective life under pressure.

Equally important to mention, These examples and cases are not offering here for **just imitation or uncritically adopt it**. They are living strategies rooted in different places, which we might take inspiration from as we face our own crises.

## Why This Conversation, and Why Now?

We are living in a time when it feels entirely accurate to say: **"We're living through a global crisis."** But for many, especially in the Global South, this "crisis" is not a new event. It's a continuation — a deepening and intensification of structural violence and instability that has long shaped people's lives.

Still, the current global conjuncture is undeniably intense. We see overlapping economic, ecological, political, and social ruptures. Some trace this moment to the 2008 financial crash, which marked the beginning of neo-liberal capitalism's demise. But instead of collapsing, the system mutated — becoming harsher, more authoritarian, and more extractive.

“ *(The crisis is) a continuation — a deepening and intensification of structural violence and instability that has long shaped people's lives.* ”

Social movements have offered glimpses of hope, indeed the statistics shows that for instance, the Global Protests and Riots Almost Double in the past 6 years. but the system has doubled down — not just with exploitation, but with emotional and psychological forms of control. To understand how to resist this and live a livable life, we must understand how today's crises operate — not just structurally, but emotionally.

## What Do We Mean by Crisis?

Let's begin with the idea of *crisis*. It's a word we hear often — but it doesn't mean the same thing to everyone. A crisis is not just an event; it's a relational and political experience.

“ *Subjectively and the psychic level, it (the crisis) is a moment of uncertainty, when something new could emerge — for better or worse.*

”

In its most literal sense, a crisis is both a danger and an opportunity. Objectively, it marks a breakdown in how a society reproduces itself — something can no longer “go on” as before. Subjectively and the psychic level, it is a moment of uncertainty, when something new could emerge — for better or worse.

Antonio Gramsci once described this kind of moment as an “interregnum” — **a time when the old world is dying, but the new cannot yet be born**. That's where we are: in a space of disorder and possibility.

But crisis is not one thing, one single event. No one experiences *the* crisis — only fragments of it. Our experience of crisis is shaped by where we are, who we are, and how power operates around us. That's why it's crucial to understand that crisis is historical, conditional, intersectional, and mediated.

One framework that helps us grasp this is the concept of **polycrisis**. Popularized in recent years, the idea of polycrisis describes how different, overlapping breakdowns — from climate disasters to pandemics to rising inequality — interact in ways that are more overwhelming than any single cause. Together, these interconnected crises challenge our capacity to cope, think, and act. And importantly, they also make us feel vulnerable, anxious, and fearful.

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## Crises of Life, Crises of Care

From a feminist perspective, one of the most useful ways to understand the current moment is as a *crisis of care* — or more broadly, a **crisis of social reproduction**. That is, a breakdown in

the systems and mechanisms that sustain and nurture life which includes education, healthcare, food, emotional support, communal infrastructure — basically those works that are mostly invisible and undervalued, yet essential.

“ *People are burned out. Entire communities are struggling to sustain themselves. And this isn't just a personal burden — it's a political one.* ”

Specially Care work — overwhelmingly done by women, migrants, racialized communities — has long been exploited and under-resourced. In the neoliberal era, this exploitation has intensified. Welfare systems have been dismantled. Families have been left to bear the burden. And when families can't manage, the market steps in — for those who can afford it.

But the result is a dual crisis: a shortage of care and a depletion of caregivers. People are burned out. Entire communities are struggling to sustain themselves. And this isn't just a personal burden — it's a political one.

When COVID-19 arrived, it didn't *cause* this crisis — it exposed and intensified it. Years of disinvestment in healthcare, housing, and public infrastructure meant that many societies were simply unprepared. The pandemic made visible what was always true: life under capitalism is fragile. And yet, even then, crisis management didn't offer solutions. It simply deepened the same patterns of abandonment, extraction, and inequality.

## Authoritarianism as a Response to Crisis

What happens when in the moment of crisis, systems can no longer deliver stability — but also cannot imagine transformation?

This is when authoritarianism becomes attractive. In many countries, we've seen authoritarian movements — from above and from below — emerge or intensify as responses to uncertainty and collapse. Whether in state form or in grassroots fascist movements, these forces do not promise justice. They promise order, stability, and the illusion of control.

They appeal not just through ideology, but through *emotion*. And this is where we need to pause and talk about the emotional politics of authoritarianism — how it governs, mobilizes, and manipulates feelings in moments of uncertainty.

## The Emotional Engine of Authoritarianism

Authoritarianism is not just built on institutions like police. It's built on affects and emotions—fear, anxiety, resentment, and hope. These are not side effects; they are central tools.

In this **architecture of fear**, truth matters less than affect. It's not about facts — it's about feelings. The more insecure you are, the more tightly you cling to the story that gives you certainty — even if it's a lie.

One of the most powerful tactics authoritarian projects use is *emotional redirection*.

One of the most crucial of these emotions are Fear. Fear is not inherently reactionary. It can be a source of caution, survival and even care. But under authoritarian politics, fear is weaponized. It's extracted from people's real vulnerability — their loneliness, their hunger, their sense of abandonment — and redirected toward fabricated enemies.

“ One of the most powerful tactics authoritarian projects use is *emotional redirection*. (...) *authoritarianism transforms private suffering, which itself is the result of years of neoliberal individualism and disintegration infrastructure of care and communities, into collective hatred.* ”

Particularly In moments of crisis, people feel anxious, isolated, overwhelmed. Instead of addressing the root causes of this vulnerability, authoritarianism offers a shortcut: *blame someone else*.

This feeling of certainty turns *fear* into *resentment*. It creates scapegoats. Migrants. Queer people. Women. Racialized communities. These are cast as the source of the instability people feel. In doing so, authoritarianism transforms private suffering, which itself is the result of years of neo-liberal individualism and disintegration infrastructure of care and communities, into collective hatred.

## Authoritarian Hope: Who Gets to Imagine a Future?

But it doesn't stop there. Authoritarianism also offers something that many don't expect: a sense of belonging. It builds communities — communities organized around exclusion, but communities nonetheless. It provides rituals, language, identity. It gives people who feel abandoned a place to stand, even if it's on someone else's back.

“ It gives people who feel abandoned a place to stand, even if it's on someone else's back. (...) *authoritarianism is organizing not just institutions, but emotions — and it's offering people a future, even if it's built on violence and exclusion.* ”

We often assume the far right has no future to offer. That it's nostalgic, backward-looking. But this is misleading. Authoritarian movements do offer visions of the future — just not ones based on freedom or equality.

They promise survival. They promise restoration. They promise a purified world where "everything makes sense again." They create utopias — gated utopias — where only some are allowed to thrive.

And here's the danger: these projects aren't just fantasies. They're being built — through separatist enclaves, patriarchal networks, and paramilitary formations. They are *nowtopias* — lived, experimental alternatives that enact a non-democratic, non-pluralist vision of life. They may seem dystopian to us, but to their followers, they feel like salvation.

That's why any serious counter-strategy must engage with this: authoritarianism is organizing not just institutions, but emotions — and it's offering people a future, even if it's built on violence and exclusion.

## (feminist) Counter-Strategies: The Politics of Care

So what can be done?

Here's where grassroots autonomous movements particularly from the Global Souths have something powerful to offer: a counter-strategy rooted in the struggles for life against resentment, fear and fascist and exclusionary future making, what I borrow from feminist literature and practices called politics of care.

Care is not soft or passive; it is not the opposite of resistance. Rather, it is a form of resistance — a way of collectively creating life that rejects abandonment and exclusion. Care is not a one-sided, patronizing act. We do not care for something or someone; we care with something or someone. More importantly, the logic is based on different practices of commoning, defending and regenerating and reclaiming common resources but more importantly, social relations and communities which we need to collectively survive and thrive.

“ *Care is not soft or passive; it is not the opposite of resistance. Rather, it is a form of resistance — a way of collectively creating life that rejects abandonment and exclusion.* ”

You may hear or experience in the aftermath of disasters like earthquakes, during curfews, in the margins of cities — marginalised communities holding each other, feeding each other, mourning together. These are not romantic stories. They are hard, daily, dangerous forms of survival — but they are also strategic.

In global South for instance, community kitchens — often run by women — didn't just feed people during economic collapse since 2008. They became spaces of political education, solidarity, and survival.

Or during the COVID-19 crisis informal neighborhood initiatives provided food, health support, and mutual aid to their own peoples. These networks — built in the absence of state and public care — became crucial for sustaining and protecting life during the crisis but they are not charity, they are deeply political, strategic and aim at transformative change which make them different from reformist NGO or mainstream civil activism.

Let me give you some more concrete examples from the narratives of anti anti-authoritarian practices in the Book *Beyond Molotovs* and also my own research.

## Story of the Verdurazo: Feeding as Resistance in Argentina

Let me tell you the story of a group of people in Argentina—small farmers, peasants, many of them migrants—who grow most of the vegetables that feed the country. They don't own the land they work on. They live in wooden shacks, and farm in burning heat and freezing cold, and pay rent just to grow food they often can't afford to eat themselves.

After a huge economic crisis in 2001, when over half the country fell into poverty, these farmers came together and formed a union: La Unión de Trabajadores y Trabajadoras de la Tierra—**the Landworkers' Union, or UTT**.

But they didn't just ask for better conditions which they did also. They redefined what resistance could look like.

The UTT started organizing to eliminate harmful pesticides by developing agro-ecological farming practices through years of collective research and training. They also built a fair and autonomous commerce system to fight food speculation and ensure access to healthy produce.

Instead of slogans or protests with flags, they used vegetables.

They began organizing what they called **Verdurazos**: beside every day act of providing infrastructure of their lives, they organise massive actions in the heart of big cities where they gave away fresh, healthy produce—for free. Crates of tomatoes, eggplants, potatoes—placed on sidewalks near train stations, government offices, even the presidential palace.

These were not acts of charity. They were acts of defiance. In a country where neoliberal governments let people go hungry while favoring big agribusiness, the farmers said: We feed the country, and we will feed the people directly.

“ *These were not acts of charity. They were acts of defiance.* ”

This was care as rebellion.

And the state didn't like it. At one Verdurazo, the police attacked—people, and the vegetables. They threw tear gas at crates of food. They made the produce inedible. They arrested and intimidated those handing it out.

Still, the movement grew. They launched **Feriazos**, markets with fair prices, bypassing middlemen. They trained in agroecology to avoid using toxic pesticides. They created horizontal networks for decision-making. They did not wait for a future utopia—they built solidarity through the most basic and vital thing: food.

## Community or Soup Kitchens

Let me tell you about another striking example in Argentina the community kitchens that also in some part connect also to the network of Feriazos and many of these kitchens collaborate with Verdurazos.

At first glance, these community kitchens are places where people come to get a warm meal during hard times. But they're much more than that. These kitchens, mostly run by feminist and grassroots groups, are spaces of survival — **and** of political imagination.

During times of crisis, they've not only fed thousands of people but also offered something deeper: a place to talk, to learn, and to organize. They've provided legal help for women facing domestic violence. They've supported people trying to re-enter the job market. And they've given political education — helping communities understand the forces that make life so hard, and how to change them.

“ *spaces of survival —  
**and** of political imagination.* ”

In doing so, these kitchens have challenged the government's neglect and the economic policies that leave people behind. They've become symbols of care, resistance, and self-organization. **And they've grown powerful enough that the current government, under Javier Milei, has made a point of cutting their funding — not because they don't work, but because they work too well. They show people that another way of living and supporting each other is possible.**

That's why these kitchens aren't just about food which is itself important. They're also about **hope with roots** — hope served one plate, one conversation, one act of care at a time.

This is what resisting authoritarianism and overcoming the consequences of living poliy crisis can look like. Not only through confrontation, but through building new forms of life together: feeding each other, caring for each other, organizing fair distribution—not just of food, but of hope.

I will give you Another two examples from diffrent territories which are based on my ongoing research on feminist movments in the global south

Let me take you to Iran my homeland, in September 2022.

## Feminist Revolutionary Momentum 2022, Iran

You may heard, A young Kurdish woman named Jina Mahsa Amini is arrested and beaten while in custody by the so-called “morality police” — not even for what she said or did, but for what she wore. Her hijab wasn’t considered proper. Days later, she dies of her injuries. Her murder sparks a nationwide uprising. Within days, over 160 cities and many villages across Iran erupt in protest.

It was not of course the first time, Iranians took street to show their discontent. Afterall they had experienced and witnessed two revolutions in 20th century and many more protests and uprisings particulalry under the Islamic Republic Rule.

But this time it was different both in terms of forms and demands

The recent protests are not led by politicians or celebrities. There’s no central committee or charismatic figure. Instead, they rise from below — from women and gender dissidents, from the margins, from communities like kurdish and Baluch minorities who for long ignored or oppressed. The slogan “Jin, Jiyan, Azadi” — “Woman, Life, Freedom” — spreads like wildfire. And with it, something deeper is revealed.

For years like many authoritarian context, politics in Iran has been dominated by fear. Different kind of fear. Fear of war. Fear of civil collapse. Fear of speaking out. Fear that things could always get worse. Fear of mass execution and incarceration. That fear — constantly reproduced by the regime — has kept many people silent. But in this momentum, fear lost its grip. People stood up. Not just with anger and resentment— but with care with and toward each others.

“ *That, to me, is what makes this a feminist revolution. Not only because women and gender dissident were at the front — though they were — but because the entire logic of the uprising was grounded in a politics of care.*

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This radical Care didn’t begin in the streets. It was already there — quietly, in neighborhoods and networks, long before Jina’s name became a call to rise. It lived in the Covid mutual aid

groups, where neighbors brought food and medicine to each other when the state failed to help. It lived in teachers' and cultural workers' associations, demanding justice in schools and fighting for free, equitable education for every one and in every language people speak in Iran. you know in Iran, ethnic, religious and national minorities right systemacically ignored and suppressed.

It lived in environmental groups — protecting water, land, and forests in places like Khuzestan, Kurdistan, and Balochistan, often facing violent repression for doing so. It lived in solidarity funds that helped families of political prisoners survive. And in women-led community networks, born in recent economic crisis and environmental diasters, that turned everyday survival into shared resistance.

These are not headlines. These are infrastructures of care — built by feminized and marginalized bodies — that held people when fear tried to isolate them. When the protest erupted across the country, these networks didn't just support it — they became its skeleton, its circulatory system, its soul. It actually make the cooridnation of such big horizontal incident possible.

One of the clearest examples is the **Coordinating Council of Cultural Workers** — a grassroots network of educators who connected over 200 cities across the country. Not only support their guild rights, but they also connected their agendas to other movements. For instance, they defended the right to education in mother tongues and in this sense they put themself in alliance with ethnic/national minorities in Iran.and regarding gender violence including the state femicide of Jina Amini, They openly issued public calls to protest which is itself very heroic act considering the level of repression in the country. Actually, in 2022 They helped write the first demands for a post-Islamic Republic future — a vision grounded in dignity, equality, and care.

But it is just one example of many many care initiatives and I just chose this example because they published their activities and demands publicly, but there are many intitatives and care groups that either due to security issues or the scale of their activities are not visible but they were the backbone and the source of magic of revolutionary momentum of 2022 in Iran.

“ *It is a revolutionary momentum shaped by the politics of care — a refusal to live in fear, and a commitment to build life otherwise collectively.* ”

This is why the Jina uprising is not just a reaction to femicide. It is not just a protest. It is a revolutionary momentum shaped by the politics of care — a refusal to live in fear, and a commitment to build life otherwise collectively.

These mainly feminist counter-strategies that I gave their examples don't just respond to authoritarianism. They prefigure something else. They offer what the state and other instituions do not: **collective security, emotional solidarity, and political imagination.**

# Caring for the Political and Politicizing Care

Care is not only about providing services. It's about redefining politics. When we center care, we change the terms of what counts as political work. We recognize that cooking a meal, organizing a ride, checking in on someone — these are not distractions from struggle. They *are* struggle given that they have this transformative vision.

“ *In this sense, politics of care challenge both the violence of the state and the limits of traditional activism. They invite us to imagine different forms of being together — not just in resistance, but in the everyday.* ”

But this is not easy. As we know, this type of collective political care work is exhausting. It's often thankless. It can replicate the same inequalities we're trying to dismantle. That's why it must be done consciously — with attention to power, exhaustion, and sustainability. They are not perfect, they are messy and full of conflicts and uncertainties.

Still, care remains one of the most radical tools we have. It allows us to resist the emotional and utopian grammar of authoritarianism — to replace fear with trust, resentment with solidarity, and false hope with real possibility.

## Conclusion: What Are We Holding On To?

So I'll end with a question that animates much of the work now I am doing and also reflects very well in *Beyond Molotovs*:

**What are we holding on to — not just in our rage, but in our care?**

If authoritarianism offers a world of fear and control, then our task is not simply to oppose it. It is to build another world — one grounded in collective care, emotional resilience, and political imagination. One where the future is not a battleground, but a shared possibility.

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## Firooeh Farvardin

Firoozeh Farvardin is a feminist scholar and activist based in Berlin and Vienna. She was born and raised in Iran before moving to Europe. She studied sociology in both Iran and Germany and has actively participated in grassroots movements and initiatives primarily related to feminist and refugee struggles.



Since September 2024, she has worked as a university assistant at the Institute of Political Science (IPW) at the University of Vienna, specializing in politics and gender. Before her current position, she was a postdoctoral fellow at the International Research Group on Authoritarianism and Counter-Strategies (IRGAC) at the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, where she continues to serve as a research associate and collaborates with them. She is also affiliated with the Middle East Research Group (MERGE) at the Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research (BIM), where she has been conducting research and teaching since 2015.

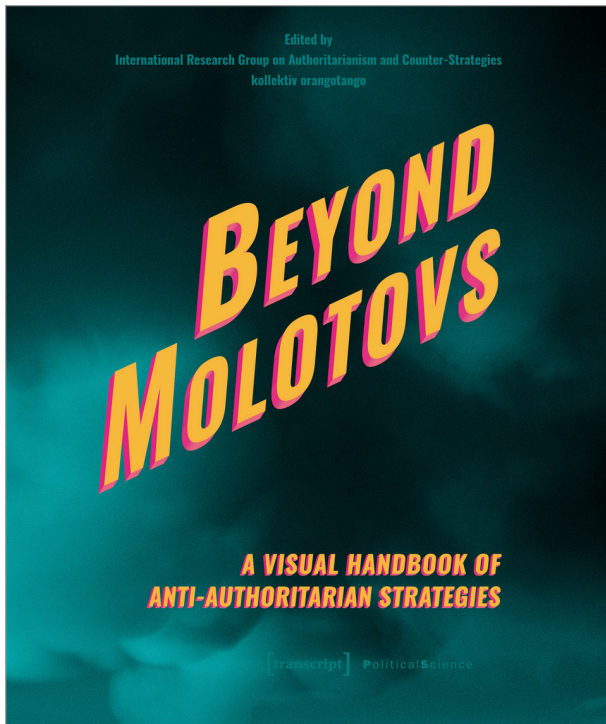
Currently, her research and activism concentrate on gender and sexual (counter)strategies and feminist utopianism under authoritarian neoliberalism, particularly focusing on the Global South(s).

Publication relevant for our project:

Firoozeh Farvardin, Gustavo Robles (2025): From (Individual) Fears to (Collective) Cares

<https://irgac.org/articles/from-individual-fears-to-collective-cares>

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*"Beyond Molotovs - A Cisial Handbook Of Anti-Authoritarian Strategies" can be found open acces published by [transcript]:*

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