

# AROUND TOWN



## These current times

### Citizen radio sets dial to Iran.

By Floris Dogterom

On the second floor of a building in Oost, a new radio station has just started broadcasting. Listeners can tune in to the short wave station for a couple of hours a day, or 24 hours a day on satellite and the internet. You gotta know your Persian, though.

The Netherlands seem to be fertile ground for media aimed at Iran. Since 2004, the Dutch language website IranActua.info has been providing news on world affairs with a focus on Iran. Then there were plans to start a satellite TV station to provide inhabitants of the Islamic dictatorship with independent information. Parliament supports the initiative, but Hossein Bastani, one of the initiators, reveals in an email that the plan has been called off, 'because it's clear that the Dutch government would never permit a non-entertaining Iranian satellite channel be founded in this country.'

No such obstacles for Radio Zamaneh, though. Last month, the station saw its first short-wave broadcast, a daily programme on current and cultural affairs. Via satellite and the internet, a worldwide audience has access to information round the clock. Radio Zamaneh—which more or less means 'the current time'—is based on Linaeusstraat, opposite the Tropenmuseum.

In the early evening, the young editorial staff are doing their thing, while behind a window, in the studio, today's show is being presented by two hosts. 'We believe in citizen journalism,' director Mehdi Jami says. In citizen or participatory journalism, people play an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information. Jami, who looks something of an anachronism with his long ponytail and Zappa-esque moustache, is a softly spoken intellectual who gives cautious answers.

In Iran, in a former life, he was a researcher and lecturer; later, he became a radio journalist with the BBC in London, from where he was recruited to lead Radio Zamaneh. Mehdi says: 'We're the first radio station using citizen journalism in the Iranian situation. We're aiming at minimising the distance between the radio producer and the listener, in that we ask our listeners to send us radio or written reports which we broadcast or publish. We are mixing traditional radio and blogs to create radio blogs, while putting the emphasis on interactivity. Iranians from within Iran and in the diaspora are participating, sending in their descriptive reports of what's happening in the place where they live.'

You'd expect both Mehdi and the radio station to speak out fiercely against the government of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who, in an earlier stage of his career, allegedly worked for some time as an executioner in the notorious Evin Prison, where thousands of political prisoners were executed in the bloody purges of the 1980s. Not so. Mehdi says: 'We are independent; we don't promote Dutch foreign policy or anything else. I don't believe in political change through broadcasting. But what we can change is the type of information people get. If you take people seriously by giving them

*The political agenda is a social one.*

information on the basis of which they can form their own opinion, it will be beneficial for their sense of dignity.'

When asked why he left Iran, Mehdi says that he 'wanted a better environment with more freedom.' But surely he must have a political agenda? Mehdi smiles. 'If people in Tehran say "Down with Ahmadinejad!" we'll cover that. Of course. But we're not a political pressure group. My political agenda is a social one. I want my people to have a normal life. Only a normal society can produce normal leaders. Now, Iran creates certain types of leaders, who are all roughly the same. Without a change in society that won't change. Look at what's happening in Afghanistan and Iraq. The idea was to turn these countries into democracies. But it didn't work out. Why? Because the respective societies stayed the same. All changes should be brought about by Iranians, and not be imposed by other countries. We do our bit in that process.'

'But even a slow change is not what we're after. We're about doing our job professionally—that's all there is to it. I have no political ambitions whatsoever, but if my listeners do, I say that's up to them. By the way: a big change in Iran is never going to happen without a revolution in the oil industry. As long as there is oil, there will be corruption.'

Mehdi says it's hard to measure the success of Radio Zamaneh. He adds: 'But we receive lots of comments via the website. During the first two months, over fifty people wrote a review of our programmes, which we published. Maybe in six months or a year we can compete with the BBC's Iranian broadcasts.'

[www.zamaneh.info](http://www.zamaneh.info)

## Real to the 'core

### The ins and outs of amateur porn.

By Dara Colwell

Whatever you think of porn, you've got to admit that Sergio Messina is trying to keep it real. Or 'realcore', to be exact. A pirate radio DJ/indie musician/journalist/technology researcher based in Milan, Messina has spent the last decade focusing on the digital pornography revolution. But far from your average peeping Tom, Messina funneled his investigations into a presentation—really, more of a show—called 'Realcore', a term he coined to describe online amateur porn.

Unlike softcore pornography, which is simulated sex, or hardcore, which shows real sex in faux settings, Realcore focuses on reality (translation: regular folk) rather than beauty. 'In Realcore, anyone can take the stage,' says Messina, who will appear at the Melkweg this Friday during the Transitofestival (see Short List). In 'Parallel Identities', a three-person panel programme about identity and communication technology, Messina presents material he's collected over the years—enough to give audiences a good, if unforgettable gawp. 'Realcorers want to be real, reachable and interactive. The viewer is part of the game,' he says, noting that amateur porn invites reciprocation because 'ordinary' people get off on real sexual desire, rather than unearthly penises.

Messina's interest in Realcore began in 1996 when, like everyone else at the time, he spent long hours surfing the internet.

*I am Realcore. Are you?*



True to human tendency, pornography already accounted for 80% of web traffic, but with the advent of digicams, amateur porn skyrocketed. 'They [the images] were radically different, with a strong "underground" feel,' says Messina. 'The idea of self-made pornography was, and still is, very appealing to me—politically, socially, culturally and yes, sexually too,' he says.


Realcore does seem to have a certain democratising effect over traditional porn. According to Messina, it serves as a revolution of the normal, combating stereotypes of what's considered standard desirability. Several such examples (found on Messina's website's blog) are an older woman posing naked next to a gas canister, one bending over an ironing board and a corduroy fetishist swathed in the same material. 'Very few of the people portrayed in Realcore would be considered "sexy,"' says Messina, noting that what makes them sexy is their sexual longing. 'Advertising and television are all geared for beauty, so even if their motivation is not political, the effect certainly is.'

As for the political, Realcore is mostly free, it involves immense sexual variety—hetero or gay, fetish or vanilla—as well as physical types far beyond traditional porn's taste for silicon-swollen bleach blondes. It's often shot in long, unedited segments or real time, with a wide-angle lens to capture action over details, and covers real sexual acts between real, consenting adults. 'I like its horizontality,' says Messina, who has become something of a sexual anthropologist in his net travels, 'and the sensation of watching people actually enjoying themselves, versus actors simulating sexual ecstasy for cash.'

An odd but interesting aside, Messina inadvertently discovered differences between nationalities participating in Realcore. Italians, he says, tend to blur details such as tattoos, faces or furniture—anything that might lead back to their true identity; Germans, on the other

hand, like messy situations, such as playing with food or mud; Americans, predictably, talk frequently to the camera; and Northern Europeans are no-nonsense and open. As for the Dutch in particular, Messina followed what he calls the 'Parking sex people'. Throughout the late '90s, they would stage large orgies in parking lots, then post the blurred images—perhaps to protect members of the CDA—online. 'I have a picture of the police interrupting a party,' he says.

For those who'd argue modern society oversexualises everything from toothpaste to cars, Realcore may seem like more of the same: a continued oversaturation of the market, not to mention the reality TV sector. 'This is certainly a point. Jaded people look for variation,' says Messina. 'But it could also be a reaction to an oversaturated world of surgical beauty and sexual uniformity.' As he sees it, as much as advertising or mainstream pornography would like consumers to buy a certain standard of beauty, desire casts its net much wider. 'You could even see Realcore as an unconscious attempt to bring back a more natural and personal way to desire,' says Messina. 'They say "I'm not objectively beautiful, yet I can be desirable. I am desired and I like this."'

Whatever you think of the subject, Messina's work raises interesting questions. Realcore, because it portrays real interactive sexual practices, by its very existence shows there's definitely a bigger picture out there. According to Messina: 'We have a much clearer picture of what can be done with our bodies, and believe me, it's a big picture that's vast and varied. This has been of inspiration for many since the invention of the web, and it's going to grow.' As the author describes in his presentation: 'The future is here, and it's sweaty, it's sticky, and it swallows.' 

'Parallel Identities', 27 October, 20.30, Melkweg, Oude Zaal, €8, <http://realcore.radioglad.io>



By Sharida Mohamedjoesoef

SANSTIRE

Thirty days filled with an odd mixture of contemplation, devotion, will power, partying and family get-togethers. This year, jazzed up with lively debates and lectures on a variety of topics related to Islam in the Netherlands. In Amsterdam—home to some 120,000 Muslims—alone, over a hundred activities were organised, and those were just the official events! All this came to an end last Monday, as Muslims all over the world, from Amsterdam to Zanzibar, took part in the *Eid al Fitre* celebrations, the feast marking the end of Ramadan, in Dutch better known as the *Suikerfeest*.

True, a few years ago here, one would have needed a magnifying glass to spot any such activity. But then again, then there was no 9/11, no murder of Theo van Gogh, no reports on the radicalisation of young Muslims and so on. Events like these catapulted the Muslim community into action; and not just on the cultural and religious front, either, as Dutch Muslims are also becoming increasingly active in the political arena.

Given the upcoming elections on 22 November, one the biggest Turkish organisations in the Netherlands, the Milli Görüs, decided to host an *iftar* coupled with a debate on the role of Muslims in Dutch politics. One of the speakers was Hikmat Mahawat-Khan. A Muslim of Surinamese descent, he is known for his spicy one-liners and speeches peppered with critical remarks on what he considers to be misbehaviour on the part of Muslims. When news got out that Mahawat-Khan had joined EenNL, a political offspring of Pim Fortuyn's legacy, his critics had a field day, labelling him a traitor serving a xenophobic and racist agenda. Well, you can say many things about him, but a racist he is not.


(For those of you who missed this part of recent Dutch history, the would-be politician Fortuyn called Islam a 'back-

ward culture'. He was brutally murdered in May 2002 by an animal rights activist.)

With hotheaded Mahawat-Khan on the panel, you are usually in for a fiery debate on integration and participation. And sure enough, I was not disappointed. Loud grunts of disapproval rippled through the audience as he was off on his hobby-horse again, saying things like 'integration has failed,' or 'Muslims themselves are in part responsible for being discriminated against on the Dutch labour market.'

Yet what would have been an absolute no-can-do a couple of years ago, finally seems to be taking root: criticism from within the Muslim community, from the new Milli Görüs foreman Yusuf Altuntas to Mohammed Ousala, a prominent member of the Dutch Association of Imams. Unique, given the fact that those two organisations are all-Sunni, while Mahawat-Khan belongs to the Lahore Ahmadiyya movement and is thus considered a heretic by various Muslim groups.

Be that as it may, more prominent Muslims seem to have cottoned on to the fact that postmodern gibberish (read: politically correct remarks) or jihad-denial will not solve the problem of polarisation. They will have to address this issue in their mosques and Islamic cultural centres, making fellow Muslims understand that they—and they alone—can change the image of Islam. During this year's Ramadan, Muslims more than ever seized the opportunity to counteract the message of violence and hatred spread by the Bin Ladens of this world. But it's only a first step. What about the remaining 335 days? Now there's a challenge for us, if ever you saw one.

From your Ramadan reporter: *Eid mubarak*, happy Eid! 

[www.ramadanfestival.nl](http://www.ramadanfestival.nl)