

my life as a traitor by zarah gharamani with Robert Hillman.  
Bloomsbury 2008.

Coming hot on the heels of the movie version of Marjane Satrapi's wonderful *Persepolis*, *my life as a traitor* details the horrific experiences of a middle class, female Iranian student activist hauled into Evin prison in Teheran and tortured by the apparatus of the Iranian state.

Zarah Gharamani intersperses the material about her prison experience with background on her family, her upbringing and her education and writes movingly about her parents and her childhood impressions of the Iran-Iraq war. She also writes of her first serious boyfriend, son of an international Iranian businessman with close ties to the regime and the religious establishment, to whom she was never suited and with whom she eventually broke up, and of the teachers who inspired her with a love of literature and history, and the importance of the truth.

Zarah became involved in student politics, as many students do, because she disliked the society she lived in and wanted it to be made better; but because of the religious totalitarianism of the country she was pulled off the streets and subjected to sadistic brutality. The scenes in the torture room, and in her cell, especially when she is in shouted communication with other prisoners, are powerfully described and the reader will feel a visceral loathing and disgust for her persecutors.

Eventually, Zarah wins her freedom, and the book as a whole is eloquent testimony to her integrity and personal strength. Zarah Gharamani now lives outside of Iran, and the loss of a woman such as she to Iranian society is a potent symbol of everything that is wrong with that extraordinary country.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh