

Contesting the Iranian Revolution: The Green Uprising

by

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Note on Transliteration

Following the example of many scholars of the Middle East and North Africa who write in the English language, I have taken the liberty of using a slightly modified version of the transliteration system as outlined by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies (IJMES)*. A couple points warrant specific mention. To distinguish between the third Shi'ite Imam, Husayn, and Mir Hussein Mousavi, the main opposition candidate in 2009, I have spelled their names accordingly in order to avoid confusion. Furthermore, I have used the words or names as they commonly appear in English, such as Mossadeq, Shi'ite/Shi'ites, and Yasser Arafat, as opposed to Mossadegh, Shi'i/Shi'a, or Yasir Arafat—as noted in the *IJMES*. Unlike many authors, however, who are increasingly choosing not to use diacritical marks, I have consciously included all such marks for good reason. Activist slogans are an integral part of this study yet their rhythmic efficacy is, despite my best efforts, partially lost in translation. Like so many languages around the world, Persian has a rich poetic tradition, which was brought to bear in the streets of Iran through the expression of creative and potent slogans. Thus, in a desperate attempt to respect that ingenuity, I have translated all the relevant slogans and have accompanied each with an in-text transliteration that includes all the diacritical marks.

CHAPTER I: Situating the 2009 Green Uprising

I. Theoretical and Empirical Framework

Iran is but one country that gives real-world application to the Orwellian mantra that “history is written by the victors.”¹ Indeed, the militant clerics, who consolidated power at the expense of all the revolutionary factions, have worked tirelessly to present their version of the Iranian Revolution’s history as the *only* version—one best encapsulated by the state’s preferred revolutionary slogan: “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic” (*esteqlāl, āzādī, jomhūrī-ye eslāmī*). For years, the Iranian government has presented this one-sided history to the benefit of its ruling class and self-affirming ideology.

Just as the events of 1978-79 are far more complex and disputed than the state would like to admit, the historic uprising of 2009 is equally contentious. More than five years after the revolt, the Iranian government continues to refer to the Green Movement as “the sedition”—a conspiracy orchestrated from abroad and without organic roots within the country.² Inspired by the studies that contested the “official” narrative of the

¹ The famous quote is tellingly attributed to Winston Churchill, the British premier who ordered his secret service to work hand-in-hand with the American CIA in order to orchestrate the overthrow of the Iranian government on August 19, 1953.

² “Fetneh-ye 88 toṭ’eh-ye došman ‘alayh-i īrān būd”. *Fars News Agency*. 10 Aug 2014. <<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=13931007001669>>. Also see: “Fīrūzābādī: yowm allāh-i nohom-i dey maḥṣūl-i ensejām-i ‘omūmī-ye mardom shod”. *ISNA*. 1 Jan 2014. <http://goo.gl/Ymi2h3>. There is no doubt that the US government, especially during the second Bush administration, was spending millions of dollars to “promote democracy” in Iran. There is significant doubt, however, about the destination of the allocated \$75 million—an amount that was increased in later years. While the

Iranian Revolution, this work aspires to do the same with the “official” narrative of the uprising in 2009.

The events of 2009 are historically consequential not only because they could have dire consequences for the Iranian government in the long-term, but also because of what they tell the reader about the critical juncture in which Iran’s experiment with Islamism finds itself. After 30 years of Islamic rule, a new generation of activists, who were raised under the ideology and authority of the Islamic Republic, challenged that state by co-opting the system’s discourse, history, and symbolism, all of which they reprogrammed with subversive meaning and leveled against the state with a profound sense of purpose. In doing so, activists brought to the fore in a fiery manner the post-Islamist shift that has been taking place in Iran in recent years.

This study takes the archival footage from the events in question, interviews, memoirs, diplomatic cables, activist articles, news data, all of which are intertwined with the research material from the history of the Iranian Revolution in order to produce the context necessary to understanding the tectonic shift the uprising in 2009 represents.

The first chapter demonstrates how the movement crystallized under the cover of the presidential campaign, and morphed into a protest movement in its contentious aftermath whereby activists appropriated the state’s symbols and history in order to condemn both the election results and the government. The second chapter focuses on a

Iranian government suspected that the money was used to finance dissidents and groups to launch a velvet revolution, the bulk of the funds—according to one seasoned observer—were used for Persian language programming such as Radio Farda and Voice of America. What is certain is that the news of the funds’ establishment undermined “the kind of organizations and activists it was designed to help, with U.S. aid becoming a top issue in a broader crackdown on leading democracy advocates over the past year, according to a wide range of Iranian activists and human rights groups.” See Wright, Robin. “Iran On Guard Over U.S. Funds”. *The Washington Post*. 28 April 2007. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/04/27/AR2007042701668.html>>.

specific date in the history of the protest movement: Jerusalem (*Quds*) Day. Quds Day, as with other state-sanctioned political holidays, was co-opted and subverted as a means by which to denounce the state. The *Ashura* protests of 2009, likewise the subject of its own chapter, illustrate how protesters similarly appropriated what has become a religio-political holiday in order to condemn the regime. The final chapter explains how and why the state was able to deliver a temporary but meaningless “defeat” to the movement on February 11, 2010, the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution’s triumph (*22 Bahman*). The concluding chapter will also show how the ramifications of the uprising endured beyond 2009.

II. Background

More than two years before the protest movement in Tunisia ignited the firestorm of revolution—known as the “Arab Spring” in the West or the Arab Uprisings³ in Arabic—the region and the wider world bore witness to Iran’s protracted post-election uprising—the Green Movement. Iran’s revolt was hailed as the largest and most formidable challenge to the Iranian state since the events of 1978-79—a history that has shaped the manner in which regional leaders, military officers, foreign heads of state, journalists, analysts and commentators, and, most consequently, various peoples view Iran and the Middle East. Indeed, the Iranian Revolution of 30 years prior, perhaps more than any other revolution of the twentieth century is ubiquitous inasmuch as its

³ “Arab Spring” is a misnomer because it incorrectly implies that Arabs were apathetic and complacent until 2011. Indeed, Arabs have busied themselves with violent and nonviolent uprisings throughout the modern period in the Middle East and North Africa. The Palestinian uprisings (1987-93 and 2000-05) are but two examples that exemplify both the violent and nonviolent historical occurrences that predate the “Arab Spring.”

ramifications created a “shock-wave” that was “felt round the world”⁴ and which continues to reverberate throughout the region.

In 2011, for instance, observers and politicians viewed Egypt—an Arab country that has not had formal relations with Iran since the Iranian Revolution—through the prism of the very revolution that precipitated the severance of ties between the two more than three decades prior. As popular forces engulfed Egypt in revolt against Hosni Mubarak, the country’s “Arab president for life,”⁵ American and Israeli leaders invoked the specter of Egypt becoming the “next Iran.” Israeli Premier Benyamin Netanyahu stated, “Our real fear is of a situation that could develop ... and which has already developed in several countries, including Iran itself: repressive regimes of radical Islam.”⁶ American Senator Mark Kirk wrote a public letter essentially calling for direct US intervention in the affairs of a sovereign country by beseeching President Obama to support the “secular nationalists” and take action to “defeat” the Muslim Brotherhood so the organization does not “follow Iran’s revolution, turning Egypt into a state-sponsor of terror.”⁷ In the aftermath of Mubarak’s ouster, the ruling Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) declared that “Egypt will not be governed by another Khomeini.”⁸ Even

⁴ This phrase is a headline to a news piece in *The Observer*. See “Shock-wave felt round the world”. *The Observer*. 7 Jan. 1979, pp. 9.

⁵ To quote the title of Roger Owen’s *The Rise and Fall of Arab Presidents for Life* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2012).

⁶ Black, Ian. “Egypt set for mass protest as army rules out force”. *The Guardian*. 31 Jan 2011. Accessed 25 March 2011. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/jan/31/egyptian-army-pledges-no-force>>.

⁷ Kirk, Mark. “Press Release of Senator Kirk: Senator Kirk Statement on Muslim Brotherhood”. Personal Website. 2 Feb 2011. Accessed 25 March 2011. <<http://kirk.senate.gov/record.cfm?id=330818>>. It’s also important to note that Senator Kirk’s obsession with the Iranian government has led him to advocate policies that not only target the Iranian government but also harm the civilian population, callously arguing “‘It’s okay to take the food out of the mouths’ of the Iranian people to punish their government for its misdeeds.” Clifton, Eli, and Ali Gharib. “Pro-Sanction Group Targets Legal Humanitarian Trade with Iran”. *The Nation*. 13 Nov 2014. Accessed 22 May 2015. <<http://www.thenation.com/blog/190601/pro-sanctions-group-targets-legal-humanitarian-trade-iran>>

⁸ “Army says no to ‘Khomeini rule’ in Egypt,” *Associated Foreign Press*, 4 April 2011, Accessed 4 April 2011.

Ayatollah 'Ali Khamenei, Iran's Supreme Leader, magnanimously credited Iran's revolution for serving as the exemplar for action for fellow Muslims in the era of the Arab Uprisings:

“Today's events in North Africa, Egypt, Tunisia, and several others, have a different meaning for the Iranian nation. They have a special meaning. These events are part of the Islamic Awakening, which can be said is itself a result of the victory of the great Islamic Revolution of the Iranian nation.”⁹

According to Kirk, Netanyahu, the SCAF, and Khamenei, it didn't matter that the Iranian Revolution and the uprising were separated by more than three decades with an abundance of differences.

“Such a generalization and simplification minimizes the social, political, cultural, geographical, and historical factors that distinguish these two countries and their historical trajectories. In brief, the blurring of history conveniently overlooks many significant variances encompassing economic factors; the fundamental differences between Iranian Shi'ism and Egyptian Sunnism and the subtle but important variations in these countries' Islamist movements; the Cold War context important to Iran in 1979 compared to the contemporary political nuances relevant to Egypt; cultural differences between predominantly Persian Iran and Arab Egypt; geographical realities between an Iran bordering the Soviet Union in 1979 and an Egypt bordering Israel and a Hamas-ruled Gaza Strip in 2011; all are overlooked to draw needless and dubious parallels.”¹⁰

What's more, such a narrow perspective ignores the crucial role of the sizeable Christian minority in Egypt that makes it all the more difficult for Egypt to become the “next Iran.”¹¹

⁹ Khamenei, 'Ali. “Khoṭbehāye namāz jom'eh-ye tehrān + tarjomehye khoṭbeh-ye 'arabī”. *leader.ir*. 5 February 2011. <<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=10955>>.

¹⁰ Alimagham, Pouya. “The Iranian Legacy in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Military Endurance and U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities”. *UCLA Historical Journal*. Vol. 24 Iss. 1, 2013.

¹¹ The fact that Copts constitute 10 percent, or nearly 10 million Egyptians, means that it is far more difficult to establish an Islamic government in Egypt than in Iran, which did not have such a large religious minority in 1979.

Similarly, the Green Movement of 2009 could not evade the references to the Iranian Revolution. The actual connection between the two, however, is much more profound. Whereas in 2011, leaders either drew upon their limited knowledge of the Iranian Revolution in anxiety or invoked that history to score political points, journalists inside Iran referenced the Iranian Revolution when reporting nearly every momentous occasion in the uprising in order to underscore its historical gravity. For instance, *Al Jazeera's* opening line in reporting the second day of the uprising referred to it as “the biggest unrest since the 1979 revolution”¹² while *Reuters* called the protests “The largest and most widespread demonstrations since the 1979 Islamic revolution...”¹³ To be sure, for outsiders the uprising invoked the Iranian Revolution because it likewise brought millions of Iranians to the streets in defiance of their government.

The street marches were one of the most awe-inspiring and memorable aspects of the Iranian Revolution. Literally, millions of Iranians marched often under the threat of state violence to register their revolutionary protest against the monarch's absolutism.

Charles Kurzman, author of *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, notes that

“It is almost unheard of for a revolution to involve as much as 1 percent of a country's population. The French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, perhaps the Romanian Revolution of 1989—these may have passed the 1 percent mark. Yet, in Iran, more than 10 percent of the country marched in anti-Shah demonstrations on December 10 and 11, 1978.”¹⁴

¹² “Poll results prompt Iran protests.” *Al Jazeera*. 14 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/2009613172130303995.html>>.

¹³ Hafezi, Parisa. “Thousands mourn Iranians killed in protests”. *Reuters*. 19 June 2009. <<http://in.mobile.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-40437520090618>>.

¹⁴ Kurzman, Charles. *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 121.

Anywhere between 6 to 9 million took part in demonstrations on those two days (Hamid Dabashi puts the number at 17 million¹⁵) in what Kurzman believed could quite possibly be “the largest protest event in history”¹⁶ until that point. So vaunted and historically consequential were these street demonstrations that post-revolutionary¹⁷ Iranian leaders rather wishfully advised Palestinians “to deploy the multi-million tactic to destroy the Israeli army and Israel itself.”¹⁸ The long span of three decades did not dissuade journalists from invoking the events of 1979 when the 2009 post-election uprising likewise witnessed millions of Iranians flooding Iran’s streets against their government. As before, they voted with their feet against a government they believed did not respect the ballot box, and they did so under the threat of state violence.

The uprising in 2009, however, shares a deeper history with 1979 that transcends the space and time of the momentous street demonstrations. Indeed, the repertoires of action that were cemented in the state-sanctioned narrative of the revolution informed the actions of Green Movement activists in 2009 thereby giving their reprogrammed methods historically-infused importance. As a consequence of so much of the Green Movement’s symbolism, slogans, and strategies being rooted in the Iranian Revolution, it is prudent to first outline some of the major works on the Iranian Revolution because that history and scholarship inform the framework by which the Green Movement will be analyzed and understood.

¹⁵ Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA*. London & New York: Z Books, 2010, pp. 207.

¹⁶ Kurzman, pp. 122

¹⁷ By “post-revolutionary” I mean the period after February 11, 1979—the date of the revolution’s victory—and not a period in which Iran has begun to move past the goals and ideals of the revolution. Although to be certain, such an argument can be made.

¹⁸ Jaberī, Faleh A. *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq*. London: Saqi Books, 2003, pp. 250.

III. The Iranian Revolution and its Historiography Matter

Nikki Keddie's *Roots of Revolution*, one of the first books published regarding 1979, places the Iranian Revolution in the context of the West's century-long economic and cultural penetration and political domination of Iran. The revolution, Keddie argues, is part of a longer historical occurrence of Iranian resistance against the country's economic, political, and cultural subjugation. Starting with the Tobacco Revolt of 1890-92 and moving through the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-11, Muhammad Mossadeq's oil nationalization movement of the early 1950s, and culminating in the Iranian Revolution of 1979, Keddie shows how Western penetration provoked a nativist political, cultural, and ideological reaction not only to foreign domination but also towards its local agent, the government of Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (r. 1941-79). The Shah worked in tandem with imperialism to the benefit of large domestic and foreign industrial and agricultural companies, all of which was conversely detrimental to the wider population.

Ervand Abrahamian's magnum opus, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, which was inspired by Hanna Batatu's exhaustive *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq*¹⁹, approaches the history of modern Iran via class formation and structural factors, while also placing special emphasis on the history of Iran's communist party—the Tudeh (Masses) Party. Employing a class analysis, Abrahamian outlines Iran's twentieth century history to argue that the transition from tribalism into social classes without the necessary political modernization served as the main mechanism for

¹⁹ The full title of Batatu's masterpiece is *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of its Communists, B'athists, and Free Officers* (London: Saqi Books, 2000).

the revolution. Under the Qajar dynasty (r. 1796-1925), Iran was divided among linguistic, tribal, and ethnic groups, and the Qajars used a policy of divide-and-conquer and tactical retreats in order to stay in power. The Qajars weren't necessarily strong, but persisted because society was weak in terms of organization, class consciousness, and unity. Imperialism, however, affected Iran in a manner that prompted people to act through a class perspective. For instance, Qajar economic concessions to the West affected tobacco growers in all regions and ethnic groups in Iran, causing them to act as a social group to safeguard their economic interests. Imperialism and its political dominance over the Qajars, therefore, threatened the livelihoods of many causing an uproar and the impetus to protect the Iranian economy by limiting the power of the monarchy via the establishment of a constitution. As the Pahlavi dynasty (r. 1925-79) modernized and expanded the bureaucracy, army, and economy, Iran experienced further class formation without the requisite political modernization, which sowed the seeds of the revolution:

“...the revolution came because the shah modernized on the socioeconomic level and thus expanded the ranks for the modern middle class and the industrial working class, but failed to modernize on another level—the political level; and that this failure inevitably strained the links between the government and the social structure, blocked the channels of communication between the political system and the general population, widened the gap between the ruling circles and the new social forces, and, most serious of all, cut down the few bridges that had in the past connected the political establishment with the traditional social forces, especially with the bazaars and the religious authorities. Thus by 1977 the gulf between the developing socioeconomic system and the underdeveloped political system was so wide that an economic crisis was able to bring down the whole regime. In short, the revolution took place neither because of overdevelopment nor because of underdevelopment but because of uneven development.”²⁰

²⁰ Abrahamian, Ervand. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 427.

Misagh Parsa's *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, however, argues that structure and class action are important, but they alone cannot account for the revolution. What is also needed, Parsa argues, are resources as well as solidarity structures and organizations, all of which the modern middle class lacked at the time of the revolution. Parsa, a sociologist, affirms Keddie and Abrahamian's understanding of Iran's structure by the late 1970s, when

“State development policies clearly served particular rather than general societal interests, as claimed by the government. These policies gave rise to widening economic inequality and burgeoning inflation. In industry, agriculture, and commerce, the government's development strategies consistently favored the upper class over the working classes, urban over rural, and large, modern enterprises over small, traditional ones.”²¹

The state intervened in the economy to the benefit of the few and the detriment of the many thereby making it the primary target of the revolution. Employing Charles Tilly's resource mobilization theory of collective action, Parsa goes on to argue that the bazaari class was especially hurt by the state's policies and was equipped with the requisite solidarity structures and financial power but not the springboard from which to launch the revolution. Intense state repression meant that political activity in the bazaar was impossible. Thus, they found a resourceful ally in the militant clergy who were able to harness the power of the mosque network, which spanned the country, in order to mobilize the population for revolution.

Parsa's work, a giant in the study of the Iranian Revolution, is also not without its shortcomings. Parsa bases his argument on the premise that the mosque was autonomous and safe enough to avoid state repression and was free to organize a revolution; that the

²¹ Parsa, Misagh. *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989, pp. 63.

state had decimated all other opposition groups while leaving the clergy unscathed and able to launch and lead the revolution. The truth is, however, that after Khomeini's uprising in 1963-64, the mosque was one of the most dangerous places for political activity in Iran. Khomeini himself was imprisoned several times and ultimately exiled while all of the revolution's key clerical leaders including Khamenei—Khomeini's successor—Rafsanjani, Taleqani, and Montazeri—the one-time designated heir to Khomeini—spent years in prison for their political activities. Taleqani, one of the most politically influential clerics after Khomeini, died shortly after the revolution's triumph after being “frequently ill, apparently due to torture suffered in nearly 15 years of imprisonment under the regimes of the shah and his father.”²² State surveillance of the clergy was so severe that one cleric, for instance, was imprisoned for two years for “the crime of receiving a letter from Khomeini and answering it.”²³ Parsa even seems to contradict himself when he notes that several thousand clerics were informants on the SAVAK payroll.²⁴ The Shah himself admitted that “for some time my government had been providing our clergy with substantial support.”²⁵ One reviewer of Parsa's work went so far as to call his assumption that ‘the mosque was the only organization that had maintained relative autonomy from the state’ a “fantasy.”²⁶

Dabashi, Moaddel, and Algar to varying degrees place special emphasis on the role of ideology in the making of the revolution. Dabashi's classic, *The Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* does not

²² “Iran grief-stricken over Taleghani's death”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 11 Sept 1979, pp. 4.

²³ “The Shah's Divided Land”. *Time*. 18 Sept 1978, pp. 35.

²⁴ Parsa, pp. 197.

²⁵ Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Answer to History: By Mohammad Reza Pahlavi The Shah of Iran*. New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1980, pp. 155.

²⁶ Dabashi, Hamid. Rev. of *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, by Misagh Parsa. *Contemporary Sociology*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Mar., 1991), pp. 211-212.

suggest that ideology was the only or even the main engine for the revolution, but a critical one nonetheless:

“‘The Islamic Ideology’ was the quintessential prerequisite of ‘the Islamic Revolution’ in Iran. Although I am not suggesting that this ideology caused the Revolution, I do submit that ‘the Islamic Revolution’ could not have occurred without ‘the Islamic Ideology.’”²⁷

Algar, however, goes a step further by arguing that Khomeini’s leadership of the revolution and the subsequent clerical consolidation of power afterward was a logical outcome of Shi‘ite doctrine:

“If the sole legitimate successor of the Prophet, if the sole wielder of legitimate authority after him is no longer present on the earthly plane, that means that inherently any worldly power that claims to exercise authority must *ipso facto* be illegitimate unless it can demonstrate in a clear and indisputable fashion that it exercises on behalf of the absent Imam.”²⁸

Accordingly, only the Hidden Imam has the right to rule and all worldly authority is illegitimate in his absence. A qualified *mujtahid*, a learned Islamic scholar who has the skill to engage in independent reasoning with respect to legal questions using the sources of law as defined by the Shi‘ism, can exercise authority “on behalf of the absent Imam.” In other words, with the Hidden Imam in a State of Occultation since 874 CE, such a *mujtahid* is the *least* illegitimate authority because he is most in tune with the will of the only legitimate authority—the Hidden Imam. The *mujtahid* “is not merely a legal authority, one who can give an expression of opinion in this fashion concerning a problem of Islamic law; he is also a person whose views, under certain circumstances,

²⁷ Dabashi, Hamid. *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. London and New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008, pp. 7.

²⁸ Algar, Hamid. *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. Oneonta and New York: Islamic Publications International, 2001, pp. 15.

must be followed.”²⁹ Thus, Khomeini’s ideology and leadership is a direct consequence of this logic in which he endowed the *mujtahid*’s authority with state power.

Mansoor Moaddel’s *Class, Politics, and the Iranian Revolution* is without a doubt one of the more comprehensive works in considering the role of ideology in the revolution. His criticism of Parsa’s analysis effectively sets the stage for his own contribution to the debate:

“It is one thing to argue that the bazaaris were antagonized by the state’s policies and therefore supported the Islamic alternative to the Shah’s rule. It is quite another to explain the emergence of coordinated actions by members of diverse classes in the revolution and their fascinating harmony in demanding the overthrow of the monarchy and the establishment of Islamic government.”³⁰

Moaddel doesn’t discount the role of structure and class. Rather, he employs a class analysis that is intertwined with the discourse of Islamic ideology to explain the revolution:

“A ...major problem in these theories involves their excessive emphasis on the notion that people act piece by piece according to their interests or values. But action is necessarily integrated into larger assemblages called strategies of action, and ideology plays an independent causal role because it shapes ‘the capacity from which such strategies of action are constructed.’”³¹

He goes on to say: “Revolutionary ideology tends to transcend all the class, ethnic, and even sex differences among the participants (those ‘locked’ within its discursive field), as if they have formed an undifferentiated mass tied together within the imageries and symbolic systems generated by the ideology itself.”³² Indeed, there was class conflict

²⁹ Algar, pp. 22.

³⁰ Moaddel, Mansoor. *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*. New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 14.

³¹ Moaddel, pp. 16.

³² Moaddel, pp. 19.

before, but no revolution. The revolution happened in 1979 because class conflict now had an Islamic ideology that was mutually negating with the Shah's ideology:

“The revolutionary crisis began when the social discontent was expressed in terms of Shi'i revolutionary discourse. Dual sovereignty emerged because the state and the opposition were constituted by and through two mutually negating ideological universes. The themes of Shi'i revolutionary discourse (that Iran's problems were related to the West's cultural domination and the un-Islamic nature of the institution of monarchy, and that there was a religious solution to these problems) contradicted in essence the monarchy-centered nationalist discourse.”³³

Thus, according to Moaddel, “ideology is not simply another factor that adds an increment to the causes of the revolution. *Ideology is the constitutive feature of revolution.* Ideology makes revolution a phenomenon distinct from the routine contention for power or class conflict.”³⁴

Amir Said Arjomand, a sociologist and author of *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran*, is another scholar's work that warrants attention. Utilizing a social movement model merged with breakdown theories, Arjomand argues that the rise of the centralizing state under the Pahlavi dynasty stripped the clergy of their authority by placing the judiciary and the education system under that of the state's. What's more, the Shah's land reform affected their financial interests as much *waqf* land was re-distributed. The clergy, vested with religious authority, wielded their influence over rural immigrants, who were residing in Tehran's shantytowns as a result of the land reform's failures. Disconnected with city-life, these migrants found solace in the familiarity of religion through clerically-run neighborhood religious organizations, or *hayats*. This alliance incorporated other opposition groups who were either aggrieved politically (the Tudeh,

³³ Moaddel, pp. 268.

³⁴ Moaddel, pp. 2.

Liberation Movement, National Front, et al) or economically (the bazaaris), or both (i.e. the clergy) in order to bring about the revolution. Asef Bayat's *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran*, however, contradicts a main point in Arjomand's thesis by utilizing statistical data to argue that urban migrants did not participate in the revolution *en masse* until the final months before its victory.

Charles Kurzman is another sociologist who contributed to the discussion of the causes of the Iranian Revolution with his *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. He methodologically considers each theory while opining that they are only partially complete. For instance, in terms of the economic factors serving as the catalyst for the revolution, he argues:

“Revolutions occur when economic problems worsen, especially after a period of relative prosperity. In Iran, the oil boom of the mid-1970s gave way to a troubling recession in 1977. But this recession was no more severe than previous ones, and the groups that suffered the most were not the most revolutionary.”³⁵

The organizational theory, which Parsa championed in *Social Origins*, is also problematized:

“Revolutions occur when oppositional groups are able to mobilize sufficient resources to contest the regime's hold on the population. In Iran, the Islamists mobilized the nationwide 'mosque network' against the regime. But the mosque network was not a preexisting resource for the Islamists and had to be constructed and commandeered during the course of the mobilization.”³⁶

Rather, Kurzman argues that there's too much confusion in a revolution to try to explain with complex theories. Rather, it's a real-time decision on the ground in which “fence-sitters” decide at a critical juncture that revolution is viable and that an alternative to the

³⁵ Kurzman, pp. 6.

³⁶ Kurzman, pp. 6.

regime is possible—an epiphany that subsequently prompts their participation. According to Kurzman, until those fence-sitters—the bulk of the people who ultimately made the revolution—crossed that mental threshold, only the die-hard revolutionaries were on the streets fighting for revolutionary change.

His explanation, or what he calls the “anti-explanation... runs counter to the project of retroactive prediction... Instead of seeking recurrent patterns in social life, anti-explanation explores the unforeseen moments when patterns are twisted or broken off.”³⁷ In the winter of 1978, Iranians joined the revolution by the millions crossing that unpredictable mental threshold because they realized that a revolutionary alternative was indeed viable, that their presence made it even more viable, and that the millions sharing the streets with them meant it was safer to participate. It became a self-sustaining cycle that ultimately brought down one of the Developing World’s most powerful dictatorships. As with previous treatments of the Iranian Revolution, however, Kurzman’s work is not without its flaws. He analyzes each theory of the revolution separately without considering the possibility that a combination of the explanations could effectively explain the “roots” of the revolution.

Without a doubt, the most fascinating aspect of these manuscripts is how they are in conversation with one another. Each author considers the works of his predecessors and offers an invaluable theoretical contribution to assess the same historical event. They may not agree with one another, but they all complement each other’s work in a fashion that benefits the reader who considers all the arguments in tandem with one another. As a result, these warrant careful consideration not only because they inform the framework

³⁷ Kurzman, pp. 138.

in which the Green Movement is analyzed, especially with regards to Moaddel's focus on ideology, Kurzman's anti-explanation, and Parsa's emphasis on resources, solidarity structures, and organizational structure, but also because the Iranian Revolution itself is crucial to the historical weight and background of the movement in 2009.

Thus, while Senator Kirk, Prime Minister Netanyahu, and Ayatollah Khamenei mistakenly analyzed Egypt in 2011 by unjustifiably employing the prism of the Iranian Revolution, and journalists referenced 1979 in order to highlight the historic nature of the demonstrations in 2009, a new generation of Iranians on the street and on the Internet were doing something entirely different with regards to their past and present: They were contesting the ownership and the very meaning of the Iranian Revolution and its symbols in order to condemn the outcome of the Iranian Revolution—the Islamic Republic.

In 2009, 60 percent of Iran's population was under the age of 30.³⁸ The Islamic government facilitated this baby boom during its first decade in power in order to radically increase the country's population after the revolution:

“When the Iranian monarchy was overthrown in 1979, the leaders of the new Islamic republic drew attention to a tenet of the Quran that encourages early marriage and large families. Population growth became part of the national agenda, with incentives to reward families for each additional child. Everything from TVs to cars to food was distributed on a per capita basis through a rationing system, making it advantageous to have many children. These incentives remained in place through the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq War, when population growth was viewed as a strategic advantage: more children, more future soldiers.”³⁹

³⁸ This “youth bulge” is not unique to Iran as nearly the same percentage of the Arab world is under the age of thirty. See James Gelvin's *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

³⁹ Berson, Caroline. “The Iranian Baby Boom: Why the Islamic republic has such a youthful population”. *Slate*. 12 June 2009. Accessed 28 Feb 2014. <http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/explainer/2009/06/the_iranian_baby_boom.html>.

With the end of the war in 1988 and an economy in tatters, the government continued to compromise ideology in favor of pragmatism⁴⁰ when it implemented one of the most advanced contraceptive and family planning systems in the world.⁴¹ The state was able to curb the post-revolutionary baby boom but it still had to contend with those who were born during the war years—a generation that eventually came to constitute a burgeoning youth population.

This generation experienced no other state authority but that of the Islamic government, which began its consolidation the very moment the revolution made its final push towards the total destruction of the monarchy during the Ten Days of Dawn.⁴² The clerical domination of the reins of power was completed by 1983 when the main armed opposition to the Islamic government, the Mujahidin-i Khalq Organization (MKO), was decimated with the death of its field commander, Musa Khiabani.⁴³

⁴⁰ Pragmatism superseding ideology began well before the end of the war. One obvious example occurred when the revolutionary government circumvented its own opposition to Zionism and imperialism in order to purchase American arms and spare parts at inflated prices through Israel in the mid-80s. The US government used those profits to circumvent Congress' embargo against supporting the right-wing militias in Nicaragua. Iran in turn used its influence with Lebanese groups sympathetic to Tehran to get Americans held hostage during the Lebanese civil war released. When these dealings were uncovered, the subsequent scandal was termed the "Iran Contra Affair." Iranian revolutionaries who had long derided the US as "The Great Satan" were as embarrassed as the Reagan Administration, which had promised to never "negotiate with terrorists" and was legally prohibited from both selling arms to Iran and financing the Contras in Nicaragua. America's ally, Saddam Hussein, who was locked in a bitter war with Iran, predictably felt betrayed by his American counterparts. To read more on how the government compromised ideology in favor of national interest, see Tarock, Adam. *Iran's Foreign Policy Since 1990: Pragmatism Supercedes Islamic Ideology*. Hauppauge: Nova Science Publishers, 1999.

⁴¹ To read more about Iran's prized family planning program, see Weisman, Alan. "What Started the Biggest Population Boom in History? How Iran's explosive expansion warns us about our overpopulated future—and shows us how to fix it". *Medium*. 5 Feb 2014. <<https://medium.com/matter/what-started-the-biggest-population-boom-in-history-1909ce55ada2>>.

⁴² The Ten Days of Dawn (*dah-i fajr*) refers to the climactic days in the revolution in which Khomeini returned to Iran on February 1 after his long exile and the final stages of the struggle that culminated in a two-day insurrection that precipitated the state's total collapse on February 11, 1979.

⁴³ The post-revolutionary power struggle effectively ended during the summer before Khiabani's death. I chose to mark the occasion of Khiabani's demise as the end of the power struggle in order to acknowledge that the MKO continued to pose a military threat, however nominal, to the clerical government until his death on February 8, 1983. The MKO responded to the domestic dismantling of its

From the beginning, the clerics labored to ensure that the government was Islamic not just in name but also in form. They achieved this by Islamizing not only the state's institutions including the constitution and system of governance, the armed forces, and judiciary, but also the education system, arts and culture, and even the physical and aesthetic landscape of the country. In doing so, statues and murals, some of which cover entire sides of buildings, visualized in aggrandizing form the leadership, symbols, and martyrs of both the revolution and Iran-Iraq War.⁴⁴ The state aimed to create a population that was both pious in faith and obedient and Islamist in political persuasion.

The result was a generation's birth and emergence that corresponded with the thirty-year history of the Islamic Republic. These youths were raised fully cognizant of the state's ideology, history, and symbolism, all of which glorified a radical Islam and a politically selective reading of the Iranian Revolution's history.⁴⁵ The state—borne of the revolution—rooted its legitimacy on the religious and revolutionary authority of its undisputed leader, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, 1400 years of Islamic history intertwined with a militant interpretation, and the historic mobilization of 1978-79 that shocked the world by bringing one of the Third World's most powerful (and seemingly stable) dictatorships to a definitive end at the hands of a protracted popular movement.

organization by regrouping abroad in France and Iraq under Saddam Hussein, the latter of which provided the MKO with a military base. To read more about the Mujahidin, see Ervand Abrahamian's fascinating *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989).

⁴⁴ The Islamic government refers to the Iran-Iraq War as the "Imposed War," and its war effort as the "Sacred Defense."

⁴⁵ I consciously use the word "selective" because there were many factions that participated in the Iranian Revolution. Describing the revolution as an Iranian one affords the appropriate space to include all those factions, including the Tudeh Party, the various radical Marxist factions of which the Fada'iyan was the most important, the MKO, the Mossadeqist National Front, Mehdi Bazargan's Liberation Front, as well as the militant clergy who rallied behind the leadership of Khomeini. The revolutionary government refers to the Iranian Revolution as Islamic in order to marginalize the contribution of all those non-Khomeinist factions that were integral to the revolution.

So important is this revolutionary history to the ideological foundation of the Islamic Republic that the founder's successor, Ayatollah 'Ali Khamenei, is hailed as "the Leader of the Revolution." Although he certainly was not the leader of the revolution, such a title emphasizes the continuity of the revolution in the form of his succession thereby bestowing Khomeini's legitimacy onto Khamenei, a cleric dwarfed by the religious and political stature of his predecessor as well as many of his peers in the wider Shi'ite world.⁴⁶ To put it differently, if Khomeini's charisma and revolutionary credentials legitimated the Islamic system before his death, then the system institutionalized and "routinized" that charisma and history in order to legitimize his successors through such titles as "the Leader of the Revolution." The most obvious visualization of this legitimating continuity encapsulated in such a title is the simple but ubiquitous display of Khamenei's pictures beside that of his exalted predecessor (Figure 1.1). To be sure, such history and symbols afford the revolutionary state with the claim to authority in Iran and beyond.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Khamenei himself acknowledged his political and religious standing relative to his towering predecessor: "Imam Khomeini was so great that among the great men and world leaders in history, one could hardly imagine a man with such characteristics, except among *prophets* and the *infallibles*. Neither I as a humble theology student with all shortcomings and defects, nor any other man in the Islamic Republic can reach the summit of that distinguished and *exceptional personality*." Translation provided in Ashraf, Ahmad. "Theocracy and Charisma: New Men of Power in Iran". *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*. Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1990), pp. 142.

⁴⁷ I don't want to digress, but it can certainly be argued that these symbols and history were and continue to be employed not only to afford the state with the legitimacy to rule Iran, but also to serve as the vanguard of the wider Muslim world.



Figure 1.1. The caption at the top of this Tehran propaganda mural reads: “We will continue on the path of the Imam [Khomeini] and the martyrs of the revolution.” Visualizing that very point, Khamenei’s image is located below his predecessor, the charismatic leader who founded the Islamic Republic and bequeathed it to his successors to “continue.”⁴⁸

In order to cement its legitimacy in a manner that ensured political durability, the revolutionary government instilled such symbols and history in a new generation of Iranian youth who were raised under the ideological authority of the state. Although this ideology, history, and symbolism were designed to authenticate the state, they also equipped the population, especially the youth, with the discourse and symbolic tools to attack that same state.

IV. Contesting the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in 2009 and Post-Islamism

⁴⁸ Fotini, Christia. “We will continue on the path of the Imam and the martyrs of the revolution”. Tehran propaganda mural collection. July, 2006. JPEG File. <<http://goo.gl/IN4yjS>>.

In 2009, Green Movement activists contested the ownership of the state-sanctioned history and symbolism by appropriating and subverting them for their own anti-state purposes. They contested the very meaning of those ideological symbols by reprogramming and leveling them with devastating ferocity at the state whose very legitimacy was rooted in those symbols—a strategy one activist referred to as “political jiu-jitsu”:

“Among the martial arts, jiu-jitsu is a method of fighting in which one fighter neutralizes the opponent by turning the opponent’s attack against himself while expending the least amount of energy... Green activists can use these legitimated symbols in order to de-legitimize the state.⁴⁹

In other words, if the Iranian state championed the history of the Iranian Revolution to justify its authority—a rule that came about as a consequence of the revolution—then Green Movement activists contested the meaning and ownership of the Iranian Revolution in order to legitimate their own uprising against the very outcome of that revolution: the Islamic Republic and “the Leader of the Revolution.”

Thus, the Green Movement may have failed in terms of canceling the election results or altogether bringing down the state, but they succeeded in delivering a debilitating discursive blow to that state’s ideological foundations. If it is possible to transcend the arbitrary win-lose binary that inevitably marginalizes other historically consequential victories of the Green Movement⁵⁰, then it is possible to understand phenomena in 2009 that may very well have ramifications beyond Iran and into the wider realm of Islamic political thought in what Asef Bayat calls the “post-Islamist turn.”

⁴⁹ Salehpour, Jalal. “Cheh ghazeh cheh īrān”. *Rahesabz*. 17 Sept 2009. Accessed 13 Mar 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/1653/>>

⁵⁰ For a prime example, see the article in *The Economist* titled “The revolution is over” (1 Nov 2014) in which the author simplistically refers to the 2009 uprising as “the failed Green revolution” because it was unable to “topple” Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. <<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21629338-changes-iran-make-nuclear-deal-more-likely-not-month-perhaps-eventually>>.

In Bayat's formulation,

"...post-Islamism represents both a *condition* and a *project*, which may be embodied in a master (or multidimensional) movement. In the first place, it refers to political and social conditions where, following a phase of experimentation, the appeal, energy, and sources of legitimacy of Islamism are exhausted, even among its once-ardent supporters. Islamists become aware of their system's anomalies and inadequacies as they attempt to normalize and institutionalize their rule. Continuous trial and error makes the system susceptible to questions and criticisms. Eventually, pragmatic attempts to maintain the system reinforce abandoning its underlying principles. Islamism becomes compelled, both by its own internal contradictions and by societal pressure, to reinvent itself, but it does so at the cost of a qualitative shift...Yet Post-Islamism is neither anti-Islamic nor un-Islamic nor secular, it endeavors to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty. It is an attempt to turn the underlying principles of Islamism on its head by emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scripture, and the future instead of the past. It strives to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom, with democracy and modernity (something post-Islamists stress), to achieve what some scholars have termed an 'alternative modernity.' Post-Islamism is expressed in acknowledging secular exigencies, in freedom from rigidity, in breaking down the monopoly of religious truth. In short, whereas Islamism is defined by the fusion of religion and responsibility, post-Islamism emphasizes religiosity and rights."⁵¹

The Green Movement's challenge to the Islamic state in 2009 repudiated the government by co-opting and subverting its ideology in order to attack it, which is part of a historical occurrence in which large segments of the population in tandem with "scores of old Islamist revolutionaries" who "renounced their earlier ideas and warned of the dangers of a religious state to both religion and the state,"⁵² brought the conflict with the state's ideology into the open on Iran's streets and virtual spaces in the aftermath of the presidential election. They did so in order to challenge the state's "rigidity" and obtain

⁵¹ Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, pp. 10-1.

⁵² Bayat, pp. 11-2.

their “civil rights,”⁵³ which does not necessarily contradict religion. Quite the opposite, the movement harnessed the power of both religion and the state’s religio-political symbols in order to emphasize “rights” and attack the state’s “monopoly” on Islamic truth—an Islamic truth the government used to legitimize itself.

Thus, Iran’s Green Movement may have lost in the simplistic sense by failing to force the government to cancel the election results, but it nevertheless prevailed in fostering a language and space that robbed the Iranian government of its legitimacy thereby challenging its monopoly on self-legitimizing religious discourse. It did so not only because it forced the government’s hand by exposing it as a state that rules not through the ballot box but through coercive power, but also because the state lost its hegemony over the history and symbolism through which it derived its legitimacy. In other words, Green Movement protesters irreversibly challenged the state’s ideology—symbolism, Islamic roots, and revolutionary history—thereby depriving it of its legitimacy. If, for example, Imam Husayn’s 7th century martyrdom was a vaunted symbol in the state’s ideological repertoire, then activists in 2009 appropriated that legacy to sanction their protest as a day of action in which the righteous weak stood in revolutionary defiance of the illegitimate state “usurper of power.” If Palestine (and with it Jerusalem), one of the Iranian government’s most valued international causes and a core tenet of the Iranian state’s ideology, extended legitimacy to the Iranian state for championing its liberation, then Palestine too became a symbol of protest that dissidents appropriated in 2009 in order to attack the state’s “occupation” of power in Iran. Thus,

⁵³ In harmony with Bayat’s conception of “rights,” Dabashi refrains from referring to the Green Movement as a revolutionary movement and instead calls it a “civil rights movement.” See Dabashi, Hamid. “Expert: Protesters want civil rights, not revolution”. Interview by John Roberts. *CNN*. June 22, 2009. <<http://am.blogs.cnn.com/2009/06/22/expert-protestors-want-civil-rights-not-revolution>>.

the Green Movement's effectiveness came not only from its million-man marches in the street, but also from the consequential discourse it employed against the government.

V. The Ideological Universes of 1979 and 2009

During the era of Reza Shah (r. 1925-41), the founder of the short-lived Pahlavi dynasty, "The dominant cultural trend within civil society and Reza Shah's cultural policies belonged, in principle, to the same ideological universe: secularism and nationalism. The Shah's modernization policies were supported by his critics, although on the whole they were ambivalent about his rule."⁵⁴ During the reign of the last Pahlavi monarch, however, the ideology of the opposition began to change. As a result of the pervasive influence of such ideologues as 'Ali Shari'ati, Jalal Al Ahmad, Ayatollah Taleqani, Ayatollah Motahhari, Ayatollah Khomeini and others, the Shah's critics started to analyze and critique him through the prism of Islam. Consequently, the movement in 1978-79 differed from its predecessors inasmuch as its ideology effectively canceled the ideological universe of the state, precipitating a revolutionary predicament in which the triumph of one inevitably meant the total destruction of the other:

"A revolutionary situation is shaped by revolutionary discourse. It is not simply a condition of dual sovereignty. It is a dual sovereignty constituted by and through two mutually negating ideological universes—the state's ideology and the ideology of the opposition. Revolutionary discourse contradicts the discourse of the state and advances an alternative way of viewing—a seeking solutions to—the problem of social life through direct, unmediated revolutionary action of the masses."⁵⁵

In 2009, the Green Movement did not necessarily put forth an ideology that "negated" the state's worldview the way the revolutionary movement did in 1979. Rather, it did

⁵⁴ Moaddel, pp. 144.

⁵⁵ Moaddel, pp. 18-9.

something entirely different but equally forceful: the uprising in 2009 contested the ownership and meaning of the “sacred” symbols of the Iranian Revolution—as championed by its offspring—the Islamic Republic. In doing so, they appropriated those symbols and history, reprogrammed them, and used them to sanction their attack on the ideology and legitimacy of the Islamic Republic—the entity borne of that very revolution.

It is important to note that the Green Movement’s use of “Islamic” symbols to contest the legitimacy of an “Islamic state” is not without precedent. According to Hamid Dabashi:

“From the Umayyads (661-750) to the ‘Abbasids (750-1258) down to all other major and minor Islamic empires and dynasties, there has never been an Islamic form of government that has not been radically challenged and opposed in precisely Islamic terms. As soon as a dynasty has come to power in Islamic terms of legitimacy, a revolutionary movement has arisen to challenge it in precisely Islamic terms.”⁵⁶

The Green Movement is the latest manifestation of this historical trend. Certainly, the dynamism of the Green Movement cannot be reduced and categorized as “Islamic,” but it undoubtedly arose to challenge the Islamic Republic “in precisely Islamic terms.” Strategically appropriating the core Islamic symbols of the state, the uprising in 2009 fired an ideological blow to the state more powerful than any weapon, which is precisely why the government dealt more harshly with the protesters arrested on ‘*Ashura* than on any other day of action. The state accused captured demonstrators with “waging war on God”⁵⁷ and “desecrating”⁵⁸ the anniversary of Husayn’s 7th century martyrdom simply

⁵⁶ Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran: A People Interrupted*. New York and London: The New Press, 2007, pp. 218.

⁵⁷ “Ezheī az e‘dām-i 3 nafar az dastgīrshodegān-i ‘ashūrā khabar dād”. *Rahesabz*. 1 Jan 2009 <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/6865/>>.

⁵⁸ “Rāhpaymāī-ye mardom sarāsar-i keshvar ‘alayh-i bīhormatī beh ‘ashūrā”. *KhabarOnline*. 30 Dec 2009 <<http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/33396/>>.

because they used Husayn's sacrality and Islamic legacy to castigate the Islamic government.

In the year 680 CE in the desert city of Karbala, Husayn, the quintessential figure in Shi'ism, died a martyr's death that has reverberated throughout Islamic history and beyond. Surrounded and outnumbered, Husayn and his small band of followers refused to pledge allegiance (*baī'ah*) to those they believed usurped the Caliphate and subverted the message of Husayn's grandfather, the Prophet Muhammad. This death, according to Dabashi, solidified defiance and resistance as an integral component to Shi'ism, which can be activated at any juncture in history.

The death of the Prophet's grandson created a legacy in which its moral authority is based on its posture of resistance. Once it achieves power, it ceases to be the Shi'ism of Husayn's martyrdom—one of defiance against power and oppression—and instead assumes the mantle of those that murdered Husayn. It is “morally triumphant when it is politically defiant, and that it morally fails when it politically succeeds.”⁵⁹ In other words, Shi'ism thrives on failure and fails upon success. This explains why Shi'ism has a long history of revolt—from the time of Husayn and those who after his martyrdom sought to avenge his death—to subsequent Shi'ite uprisings such as the Nuqtavi, the Hurrifiyya against the Ilkhanids in Sarbedaran, and the relatively recent Babi revolts, all of which were rooted in Shi'ite millenarianism.⁶⁰ Dabashi affirms that in order for

⁵⁹ Dabashi, Hamid. *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*. Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, xvi.

⁶⁰ That is not to say that Shi'ism has not experienced moments of political quietism or has not been used to empower the state. 'Ali Shari'ati has written and talked extensively about the difference between Safavid Shi'ism (Black Shi'ism), which is clerically-supported and designed to maintain an unjust status quo, while 'Alavi Shi'ism (Red Shi'ism) is revolutionary and breeds resistance to tyranny. See Shari'ati's *Tashī'eh 'alavī va tashī'eh şafavī*. For a more thorough reading on Shari'ati's life and impact, see Rahnema, Ali. *An Islamic Utopian: A Political biography of Ali Shari'ati*. New York, I.B. Tauris, 2000.

Shi'ism to remain morally potent, it “must always be in a posture of resistance.”⁶¹ Thus, while the Islamic government in Iran is doctrinally rooted in Shi'ism, it is paradoxically assuming the mantle of those who murdered the Prophet's grandson, the cornerstone of Shi'ism's martyrology.⁶² Conversely, the Islamic Republic has produced a resistance to it in the form of the Green Movement that is not necessarily “Islamic” but has utilized the emotive power of Shi'ism and the ideological universe of the Islamic government in order to legitimize its defiance while delegitimizing the authority of the state.

Beyond the discussion of ideology, it is important to note that the Green Movement shares other important characteristics with its predecessors. Modern Iran's political movements—starting with the Tobacco Revolt (1890-1892) and moving through to the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11), Mossadeq's nationalist movement (1951-53), the Iranian Revolution (1978-79), and reaching the Green Uprising (2009)—underscore an unrelenting popular struggle to create a political system that respects the rule of law in which nobody, especially the country's leadership, is above it. In other words, the Iranian people of all political backgrounds have fought and sacrificed throughout the years to foster a system in which its head of state—Nasir al-Din Shah in the case of the Tobacco Revolt—does not freely sell the rights to an important cash crop to foreign interests, or “the Leader of the Revolution” does not validate an election wrought with irregularities. What's more, generations of Iranians have struggled for a government that is not overrun by corruption and does not arrest and torture political prisoners in order to

⁶¹ Dabashi, *Shi'ism*, pp. 313

⁶² For more on the topic of martyrdom in Islam, see Cook, David. *Martyrdom in Islam*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

induce confessions to shamefully broadcast to national audiences—an undeniable reality under both the the last Pahlavi shah and the Islamic Republic.⁶³

VI. Outline and Methodology of the Dissertation

This study will illustrate how the Green Movement activists negated the state's ideology not by producing an alternative to the ideological universe of the state the way revolutionaries did in 1978-79, but by taking ownership of the symbols of the state, Islam, and the Iranian Revolution in order to legitimize their activism and discredit the rule of the Islamic government.

All these chapters will also show how technology, the Internet, and social media, are changing the way activists register their protest. In doing so, they will demonstrate how the protests transformed and continued even when the government took full control of the streets. YouTube, the global online video sharing website, constitutes an important archive that hosts thousands of videos uploaded by citizen journalists. This video archive provides the Persian-language researcher with a digital window through which to view the events in question in order to ascertain the uprising's common themes, demands and slogans of the demonstrators, activists' strategies, state conduct, and much more. As such, if the Iranian Revolution was the “world's first televised revolution,”⁶⁴ then the Green Uprising was the world's first socially broadcasted revolt in which citizens were

⁶³ See Abrahamian, Ervand. *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999. For a personal account of forced confessions, see Bahari, Maziar. *Then They Came for Me: A Family's Story of Love, Captivity, and Survival*. New York: Random House, 2011.

⁶⁴ Ansari, Ali. *Confronting Iran: The Failure of American Foreign Policy and the Next Great Conflict in the Middle East*. New York: Basic Books, 2006. pp. 83. Bani Sadr called it “the first revolution in the world whereby the leadership enjoyed such unprecedented coverage.” See Abolhassan Banisadr. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 21, 22 May 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 5 (seq. 101). Accessed 22 April 2015.

their own cameramen and reporters, and social media and YouTube were the channels by which their raw footage reached national and international audiences. In other words, they televised their own revolution.

One YouTube account holder, Mehdi Saharkhiz, became a main source of videos from events in Iran. He first began uploading videos that he received in a mass email.⁶⁵ The videos became widely circulated when mainstream media outlets like CNN “picked it up and broadcast them”⁶⁶ to people around the world. Consequently, activists learned about his online presence and began sending the videos directly to him, which became especially important since the state blocked their access to YouTube and social media websites after the start of the uprising. Thus, Saharkhiz, who posted the videos with English and Persian titles, served as a conduit for hundreds of time-stamped videos that activists risked their lives to record and transmit to him through file sharing websites such as Dropbox and Media Fire.⁶⁷ He spent hours organizing, translating, and uploading the files because he knew that the uprising was “very historical” and he wanted it “to be recorded in history because it wasn’t something that happened very often.”⁶⁸ Furthermore, there were an estimated 200 foreign media journalists⁶⁹ covering the election, after which they were either “invited” to leave the country when the post-election uprising erupted, or left after burdensome restrictions prevented them from doing their job effectively.⁷⁰ Saharkhiz, and presumably the countless citizen journalists filming

⁶⁵ Saharkhiz, Mehdi. Personal interview. 19 May 2013.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Director Ramin Asgar, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., June 13, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI247_a.html.

⁷⁰ Kay McGowan, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., July 29, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI306_a.html.

events, wanted the government to know that although foreign journalists were no longer on the ground to record the state's brutality, a watchful eye nevertheless ensured that the "regime's brutality was recorded and broadcast to the world" with the hope that the visual documentation of the bloodshed would render the state "less likely to harm people."⁷¹ Governments are indeed freer to suppress when there is nobody to bear witness to the injustice, but recording government repression makes it far more difficult for the state to deny or commit wholesale violence. As Saharkhiz put it: "We're able to identify a police car run over a protester and have proof of this, not from one angle, not from two angles, but three different angles. That makes even governments change the way they behave because there is proof of every wrong move."⁷² Thus, as a consequence of foreign journalists being expelled from Iran, activists' unfiltered raw footage from the events uploaded onto YouTube constitutes invaluable data through which to study and analyze the history of the Green Movement.

Unfortunately, many of these videos serve as incriminating personal evidence of involvement in anti-state activity so many Iran-based users have had the foresight to remove their uploaded videos in order to protect themselves. As a researcher who has been chronicling the uprising from the onset in 2009, it was very alarming to learn that the footage was being taken down. One cannot help but think about the safety of those who have risked their lives in order to document for the world the details of their historic uprising.

⁷¹ Mehdi Saharkhiz. Personal Interview.

⁷² Mehdi, Saharkhiz. "My YouTube Story: Mehdi Saharkhiz". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 12 May 2010. Accessed 2 October 2014. <<http://youtu.be/AbKqXt8F8fo>>.

For the purposes of this manuscript, however, I have used software to download, reference, and archive all of the footage cited in this manuscript in order to ensure that the citations of the work can indeed be located in the long-term as the availability of these videos becomes increasingly limited. If users subsequently delete their personal videos, I will abide by their wishes and not jeopardize their safety by uploading the copied versions that are stored in my archive.

Other digital sources equally empower this study. According to Abrahamian, the eminent historian of modern Iran, “the State Department has failed to observe its own declassification rule and has found various excuses for delaying the release of documents on Iran...” and that “it is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a historian to gain access to the CIA and MI6 files on the coup.”⁷³ The Anglo-American coup culminated on August 19, 1953, yet seasoned historians such as Abrahamian struggle to acquire state files on a fateful event that transpired more than half a century ago. Diplomatic and intelligence files pertaining to the 1978-79 revolution are even harder to access. Yet, the massive and historic diplomatic leaks orchestrated by such people of conscience as Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden provide an invaluable opportunity to access files on the 2009 uprising that may not otherwise have been accessible for another 50 or more years. Thus, it is fitting that the study of one of the 21st century’s first and most dynamic uprisings has the good fortune of harnessing such recent data as American diplomatic cables—as well as information available through modern mediums such as YouTube, social media, and the Internet in general—to record personal

⁷³ Abrahamian invokes chapter 7 (verse 40) of the Qur’an to highlight the impossibility of gaining access to such files. See Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. New York and London: The New Press, 2013, pp. 6, 149.

testimonies, analyze acts of protest, and consider invaluable writings of those on the ground in Iran who struggled on behalf of the Green Movement.⁷⁴

Since crowd action was such a spectacular and memorable part of the movement's history, the second chapter utilizes such digital sources in order to explain how and why the demonstrations contested the state's control of the streets while also showing how the street protests were an integral part of the wider campaign of co-opting the state's ideology through the appropriation of already legitimated celebrations, holidays, and anniversaries. Street marches, long a part of the repertoire of the Iranian Revolution and the state, which held annual demonstrations to mark important political and religio-political holidays, became a potent nonviolent weapon in the Green Movement's range of action against the government when the former systematically and strategically upended those holidays to register its protest against the state.

One such religio-political day of action is the subject of the third chapter. Quds Day (Jerusalem Day) takes place every year on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadhan in which Muslims across the Muslim world protest in solidarity with the Palestinians and against Israel's occupation, especially its seizure of East Jerusalem (Quds). East Jerusalem is the location of Islam's third holiest mosque and its first *Qibla*—the direction in which Muslims the world over pray.⁷⁵ Quds Day is especially important to Iran as it was the revolutionary Islamic government that established the day of solidarity, which subsequently spread to other Muslim countries.

⁷⁴ The United States embassy in Iran has, of course, been defunct since the hostage crisis of 1979-81. American embassies in neighboring countries, however, have unofficially served the same capacity, whereby Iranians from Iran visit for their visa and travel needs. Specifically, the US embassy in Dubai has also served as a major center for intelligence and data gathering.

⁷⁵ Jerusalem was indeed the first *Qibla* during the early years of Muhammad's prophethood. After several years of revelation, however, he designated Mecca to serve as the *Qibla*, the first and last change in the direction of Muslim prayer.

Every year the state organizes mass rallies across Iran in which the government and its supporters walk lockstep around a unifying issue—Palestinian liberation. More importantly, the symbolic protests are designed to highlight the state’s support of the Palestinian movement thereby underscoring the Islamic government’s revolutionary credentials and its legitimacy. In other words, the day is not confined to expressing solidarity with Palestinians but is also a means by which to express solidarity with the state that champions the Palestinian cause. In 2009, however, Quds Day protests were unprecedented in the thirty-year history of the holiday.

Green activists subverted the state’s Palestine-centered symbolism in a variety of ways. Either they denounced Palestine in order to negate the Islamic Republic, or they altogether appropriated it so as to equate the state with the Israeli occupation. In doing so, they situated their resistance against the regime with that of the Palestinian struggle against the Israeli occupation. The tactic of negating Palestine was the more dominant trend within the movement, but the latter in which they co-opted Palestine to denounce the state was decisively more scathing and troubling for a government that rested its legitimacy on its support for the Palestinians. In other words, it was one thing for the state to denounce Green activists for repudiating Palestine as part of a “foreign” and “Zionist plot,”⁷⁶ going as far as referring to them as “Israeli mercenaries,”⁷⁷ but it could say little when other activists placed the state in the same breath as the Israeli occupation.

This day of action unlike the others outlined in the second chapter warrants its own treatment because of the wider historical context important to Palestine as a symbol

⁷⁶ “Hoshdār-i sepāh-i pāsdārān; ekhlālgarān dar rāhpaymāi-ye rūz-i qods bā barkhord-i farzandān-i ghoyūr-i mellat movājeh khāhand shod”. *Fars News Agency*. 26 June 2009
<<http://farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8806260664>>.

⁷⁷ “Farātar az khaṭā”. *Kayhan*. 13 September 2009.
<<http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/880622/2.HTM#other200>>.

and political cause in relation to Iran and Iranians. That historical backdrop helps to highlight the meaning behind the Quds Day protests in 2009. The chapter will show what Palestine meant to the generation that fought for the revolution of 1978-79, and how the revolutionary government institutionalized Palestine as a core ideological tenet and drilled an entire generation of Iranians raised under its authority in the justness and righteousness of the Palestinian cause. Only then will the subversive magnitude of the anti-regime Quds Day protests, the final segment of the chapter, be fully appreciated.

The fourth chapter briefly addresses Ayatollah Montazeri's life and death, which occurred in the tumultuous month of December (2009), and became another occasion for protest. His passing and the anti-government mourning processions provide an opportunity to examine Montazeri as a case study in post-Islamism. An architect of the Islamic system, Montazeri eventually morphed into one of its fiercest critics. Thus, Montazeri's evolution and death exemplify the growing trend of post-Islamism unfolding in Iran in 2009 and onwards.

What's more, the customary 7th day of mourning in observance of his death coincided with *Tasu'a* and *'Ashura*, the two days in which Shi'ite Muslims all over the world commemorate the 7th century martyrdom of the third Imam, Husayn—the Prophet's grandson—and the Imam's valiant half-brother, 'Abbas (Abolfadhl). *'Ashura* has special meaning to the Islamic Republic not only because it governs theoretically according to the will of the Hidden Imam, the twelfth direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, but also because the historic mobilization on *'Ashura* in 1978 helped bring the Iranian Revolution to its crescendo.

In the 1970s, Shi'ite Muslims in Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Bahrain used the occasion of *'Ashura* not simply to customarily mourn his death, but to mobilize against the injustice they were facing as Shi'ites. Revolutionary Iranians in the most populous Shi'ite Muslim country in the Islamic world harnessed *'Ashura's* defiant message and organized the largest anti-government march in the entire history of the Iranian Revolution. The enormity of the march in 1978 helped persuade the Shah, who had been resisting the uprising for nearly a year, to abdicate and leave the country a month later. In other words, the Islamic government came to power atop such a massive *'Ashura* protest, and has since employed rhetoric imbued with Husayn's legacy in order to legitimize its Islamic credentials and authority.

On December 27, 2009, however, Green activists appropriated already legitimated mourning ceremonies by subverting Husayn's legacy in order to equate the state with the murderers of the Third Imam. Just as protesters likened the state to the Israeli occupation and themselves to the oppressed Palestinians on Quds Day, demonstrators on *'Ashura* similarly cast themselves as righteous rebels akin to Husayn, and the state in the same vein as Yazid—the infamous caliph that ordered the massacre at Karbala. In other words, they co-opted and subverted the state's Islamic discourse and leveled it to devastating effect against the Islamic government.

Both *'Ashura* and Montazeri's death are the subject of a single chapter because they occurred within days of each other and are conceptually linked. Indeed, the 7th day of mourning for his death coincided with *Tasu'a* and *'Ashura*, and Husayn's anniversary and Montazeri's passing work in tandem with each other in terms of the discussion of post-Islamism. As with chapter two, foregrounding is necessary for this unit. *'Ashura's*

history and its meaning as a cataclysmic event in Islamic history, as well as its role in mobilizing protests across the Middle East in the 1970s, especially the single largest demonstration in the history of the Iranian Revolution, are crucial to understanding the blistering message deployed against the state on *'Ashura*, 2009.

The conclusion will explain how the government's "defeat" of the Green Movement on February 11, 2010, the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution (22 *Bahman*) is a simplistic reading of history. Indeed, the final chapter will update the reader on the legacy of the Green Movement, its impact on the 2013 presidential election in which centrist, Hassan Rouhani, succeeded the disputed winner of the 2009 election, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The conclusion will not end with a prediction of what to expect in terms of the final outcome of the historic events of 2009 because, as with other complex histories, it is increasingly difficult (and amateurish) to predict the future of Iranian history.

Before the study proceeds, however, it is important to posit a disclaimer. The Green Movement belongs to those who fought for it, risked their lives, livelihoods, and futures, and ultimately paid a heavy price for it. The question of who is allowed to speak for such a multi-faceted movement is a delicate matter. This work does not pretend to be the impossible voice of those millions of people who came out onto the streets of Iran to repudiate a state that has long been lording over them. Instead, this study takes their writings, posts on social media, footage from the events in question, interview data, memoirs, both written and through the Iranian Oral History Project at Harvard University, illuminating opinion pieces penned by activists, diplomatic cables, and Persian and English news articles (from the 1970s and 2009), all of which are intertwined

with secondary sources in order to outline Iran's modern history and put forth an analysis that transcends the oppressive win-lose binary. In doing so, this work deconstructs the limiting simplicity of viewing the Green Uprising through the narrow lens of 2009 thereby allowing for a more non-linear, in-depth, and revealing discussion of the protest movement.

As for objectivity and neutrality, it is fitting and prudent to quote the fearless Sara Roy, author of *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*, "neutrality is often a mask for siding with the status quo and objectivity—pure objectivity—does not exist and claiming it is dishonest."⁷⁸ My interest in modern Iranian history, a history I consider to be one of continuous resistance and revolution, is heavily rooted in the fact that I am an Iranian-born citizen whose family obtained political asylum when we came to the US in the mid-eighties after the Iranian Revolution and during the Iran-Iraq War. I was raised in an Iranian household where that revolution and war, regardless of how far we were from them both, were a big part of us and our family history. My interest in Iran and the wider region took an academic turn at the University of California where I had the opportunity to learn beyond my family narrative. Thus, I do not delude myself with any notion of neutrality or objectivity when approaching the Green Movement—the next chapter in Iran's long and storied resistance history.

Having said that, I trust that the reader, who will likewise be invested in this work with emotion as he or she undertakes the journey of reading it, will judge this study based on the facts and evidence.

⁷⁸ Roy, Sara. *Failing Peace: Gaza and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict*. London and Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2007, xvi.

CHAPTER 2: Co-opting the Past: Crowd Action on the Streets and Beyond

I.I. Introduction

This chapter places the crowd as a central agent of change and contestation in modern Iran. In doing so, the chapter affirms Charles Tilly's emphasis on the importance of 'opportunity' in facilitating social movement activity, such as when the Iranian crowd used the opportunity of the election campaign to mobilize—only to change strategies by taking advantage of state holidays to re-emerge and renew their protests after the state re-instituted the repressive climate. The nighttime chants of “Allahu akbar” as well as activists' appropriation of Beheshti's anniversary, Rafsanjani's Friday sermon, the anniversary of the US embassy takeover, and Student Day are all integral to the discussion of how the movement upended Iran's political calendar and discourse for the sake of giving weight and legitimacy to their demands.

The chapter begins with a brief discussion of how the crowd was discussed in history in order to contextualize and underscore the importance of studying the crowd and its role in making history.

I.II. Significance of the Crowd as a Social Concept

Until the 1960s, historians and other academics have largely neglected studying the political crowd, considering it unworthy of scholarly attention. Gustav Le Bon, the

nineteenth century “arch-conservative”⁷⁹ social psychologist, describes the crowd as composing “criminal elements, riffraff, vagrants, or social misfits.” Indeed, “social historians of the eighteenth century in England have tended to adopt this view: though avoiding the more prejudicial of these labels, they have been inclined to see the urban ‘mob’ in terms of the ‘slum population’ of large cities or the poorest of the poor.”⁸⁰ With this predisposition, it is understandable why there was such a dearth of material pertaining to the study of the crowd. Historian Ervand Abrahamian notes that this disregard is “especially true of the Middle East.”⁸¹ To date, only a handful of academics have written about the historical role of the crowd in the region.

Several scholars of enduring influence eventually challenged and undermined Le Bon’s summation that the crowd was undeserving of academic consideration. British Marxist historians such as E.P. Thompson, George Rudé, Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, and Raphael Samuel, along with Marc Bloch and Georges Lefebvre, who coined the term “history from below,” and sociologist Charles Tilly, all contributed to the study of history that circumvents the typical focus on white men of power and nation-states in favor of a “bottom up” approach that emphasizes the role of people and collective action in the making of history. Hobsbawm specifically credits Bloch and Lefebvre for their role in establishing a new method by which to view history: “...it was the French tradition of historiography as a whole, steeped in the history not of the French ruling class but of the French *people*, which established most of the themes and even the

⁷⁹ Abrahamian in *The Coup*, pp. 205.

⁸⁰ Rudé, George. *The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England 1730-1848*. New York and London: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964, pp. 198.

⁸¹ Abrahamian, Ervand. “The Crowd in Iranian Politics, 1905-53”. *Past & Present*, No. 41 (Dec., 1968). Oxford University Press, pp. 184.

methods of grassroots history...”⁸² Abrahamian, as the Iranian heir to that tradition, is one of the first historians to study Iranian “history from below” with his “The Crowd in Iranian Politics 1905-1953” and “The Crowd in the Persian Revolution.”⁸³

It is important to note that Le Pen was not alone in his disdain of the crowd, as “local conservatives have frequently denounced it as ‘social scum’ in the pay of the foreign hand...”⁸⁴ On June 14, 2009, two days after the disputed Iranian presidential elections, the incumbent and declared winner, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, unwittingly affirmed Le Bon’s notion by referring to protestors alleging fraud as “riffraff” or “street trash” (*khas o khāshāk*).⁸⁵ Other hardliners accused protestors of being “Israeli mercenaries”⁸⁶ and opposition leaders of constituting a “fifth column”⁸⁷ in the service of the foreign “enemy,” all of which was “part of a plan by the US and Britain to destabilize Iran.”⁸⁸

A comprehensive study of the crowd not only disproves such sentiments but also affords the reader the opportunity to study “history from below.” By focusing on the political crowd—its actions, slogans, and strategies—it becomes apparent that the crowd was not only highly disciplined and sophisticated thereby dispelling Ahmadinejad’s

⁸² Hobsbawm, Eric. *On History*. New York: The New Press, 1997, pp. 203.

⁸³ Abrahamian, Ervand. “The Crowd in the Persian Revolution”. *Iranian Studies*. Vol. 2, No. 4 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 128-150. Years later, the likes of Stephan McFarland and Stephanie Cronin followed Abrahamian’s lead. See McFarland, L. Stephen. “Anatomy of an Iranian Political Crowd: The Tehran Bread Riot of December 1942. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 17, No. 1 (Feb., 1985), pp. 51-65; Cronin, Stephanie. “Popular Protest, Disorder, and Riot in Iran: The Tehran Crowd and the Rise of Riza Khan, 1921-1925”. *International Review of Social History*. 2005, Vol. 50 Issue II, pp. 167-201.

⁸⁴ “The Crowd in Iranian Politics, 1905-53”. pp. 184.

⁸⁵ “Daftar-i aḥmadinezhād, khas o khāshāk khāndan-i montaqedān tavasot-i vey rā tashīḥ kard”. *KhabarOnline*. 18 June 2009. <<http://goo.gl/ZArwtC>>.

⁸⁶ “Farātar az khaṭā”. *Kayhan*. 13 September 2009. <<http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/880622/2.HTM#other200>>.

⁸⁷ “Kayhān mūsavī rā sotūn-i panjom-i doshman khānd”. *Rahesabz*. 4 July 2010. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/18751/>>.

⁸⁸ “Iranian protesters ‘not agents.’” *BBC News*. 27 August 2009. 4 August 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8223606.stm>.

claims of hooliganism, but also served a deeper function that transcends the aim of revoking the election results or repudiating the incumbent's allegations of "riffraff." Studying the crowd in 2009 both before and after the June 12 election provides the reader with the opportunity to witness a development unprecedented in Iran's modern history. Indeed, the Green Movement's challenge to the Iranian government in 2009 amounts to a total attack on the state's Islamist ideology and brings into the open the historical occurrence in which a large segment of the Iranian population, including veteran leaders of the Islamic system, have entered into what Asef Bayat refers to as the "post-Islamist turn."⁸⁹

Although researching the crowd and the context in which it operated offers unique insights into a complex history, its study has historically been wrought with difficulties because participants in crowd action have "rarely left archival material of their own..."⁹⁰ Fortunately, remedies abound with the rise of the Digital Age and the citizen journalist. Equipped with digital cameras and hi-tech cellular phones, crowd participants record history as it unfolds and broadcast it to the world via the Internet in general and YouTube and social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter in particular.

Thus, with the advent of digital sources, the Persian language researcher has the opportunity to shed light on the multi-faceted role of the crowd in the election campaign that overnight turned into a mass movement and shook the foundations of the Islamic Republic of Iran. By surveying the slogans of the crowd, participants' attire, actions and strategies, and placing it all in proper context, it is evident that the crowd was anything

⁸⁹ Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, pp. 10-1.

⁹⁰ Cronin, pp. 169.

but ruffraff or street trash. On the contrary, this chapter argues that the sophistication of the crowd empowered its participants to harness Islamic history, ideology, and symbolism of the state in order to subvert the ideological universe of that very state.

Throughout the study, the proper political context will be highlighted in order to understand the role of the crowd in the important episodes of the Green Movement's short but eventful and consequential history. The chapter will document the circumstances of the crowd's emergence, its ingenuity in conducting protests in an increasingly repressive environment by leveraging Iran's own revolutionary history through specific strategies. Nighttime "Allahu akbar" chants and co-opting Iran's political calendar in particular gave potency to their actions. Specifically, the study will survey the events and slogans pertaining to the week before and after the presidential election; the anniversary of the assassination of Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti, a main regime architect; Ayatollah 'Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani's Friday sermon; the anniversary of the US embassy takeover; and Student Day—all of which provide an extraordinary window into the crowd's actions—actions that repudiate allegations of banditry while demonstrating the efficacy of the crowd's ideological challenge to the regime. Jerusalem Day, Iran's appointed day of global solidarity with the Palestinian people, along with the death of Ayatollah 'Ali Montazari and *Tasu'a* and *Ashura*, the anniversary of the 7th century death of Imam Husayn and his half-brother, are allotted their own treatment in order to adequately outline the history crucial to understanding the gravity of those days of action.

Studying crowd action as "history from below" serves other important purposes as well. All too often history has focused almost exclusively on "the Great Men" who

have “made” history—such an approach is at the expense of those men and women who have actually turned the tide of events on the ground or created their own space and discourse that is also consequential. The Green Movement was a popular uprising that at certain junctures in its storied history often surprised its own leaders, Mousavi and Rahnavard, Karroubi, and Khatami. Thus, by viewing the movement “from below,” this chapter rightfully places the crowd at the center of events in this electrifying history.

What’s more, studying history through such a lens also affords the opportunity to dispel dangerous government accusations. States categorize political crowds as “street trash” in the “pay of foreigners” in order to justify their violent suppression thereby conveniently avoiding the crowd’s legitimate grievances. This generalization aptly describes the post-election Iranian street scene in 2009. On the other hand, by focusing on the crowd in terms of its acts and specific days of action then it becomes all the more difficult to believe the state’s allegations that validate the government’s repression. To be sure, the crowd as a subject of historical study disallows such white-washing; history may be written by the “victors,” but that history is contested—as is the victory.⁹¹

The political climate in which the crowd came to dominate the streets is an opportune starting point as it provides the reader with a chronology of events crucial to understanding the transformation of the movement. Obtaining awareness of the proper political atmosphere is indeed important because it explains how and why the crowd emerged when it did, and eventually how it evolved in response to the re-instated suffocating political atmosphere. The political climate will be continuously revisited

⁹¹ The deconstruction of the false win-lose binary will be continuously revisited throughout this study.

throughout the chapter in order to understand how intense pressure from the state above affected the crowd below and how the crowd strategically acted in response.

II. Situating the Phenomenon of the Iranian Crowd

Sociologist Charles Tilly argued that “to the extent that relations between governments and their subjects remain intermittent, mediated, coercive, and particular, incentives to join in collective, public claim making by means of social movement... displays remains minimal, indeed mostly negative.”⁹² Expressly, the lack of democratic freedoms and legal protection from the state’s monopoly on violence generally precludes crowd action and social movement activity:

“Repression is a key factor affecting opportunities for action. In general reduced repression increased the likelihood of insurgency, while an upsurge in repression reduces the likelihood of protest by raising the cost of mobilization and collective action. Under repressive situations, victims of social processes find themselves incapable of overcoming their adversaries, not because they cannot conceive of alternative possibilities, but because they are unable to maintain their resources, networks, and solidarity structures in the face of repression.”⁹³

Iran has experienced few short-lived intervals in which the population enjoyed protection from the state’s repressive capacity and was able to mobilize politically. 1941 marked the resuscitation of the country’s political life when the Allies occupied Iran during the Second World War and deposed Iran’s strongman, Reza Shah.⁹⁴ Mossadeq’s premiership

⁹² Tilly, Charles, Lesley J. Wood. *Social Movements 1768-2008*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009, pp. 137.

⁹³ Parsa, Misagh. *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989, pp. 24.

⁹⁴ It was in this period when the first freely elected parliamentary elections were conducted, which marked Mossadeq’s return to politics after his internal banishment. See Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*. New York and London: The New Press, 2013, pp. 35. This was also the time when Taleqani returned to Tehran after the state-imposed internal exile was no longer enforceable, and continued his ideological work and dissident activities. So affording

(r. 1951-53) was especially noteworthy for its commitment to constitutional laws—a commitment that the British and American intelligence agencies exploited to stage the overthrow of Iran’s democratically-elected government.⁹⁵ Consequently, Iran’s burgeoning political life came to an abrupt end with the Anglo-American coup in 1953, which effectively terminated Iran’s short-lived experiment with democracy for a quarter century.⁹⁶ The Iranian Revolution once again created the space whereby a vibrant political life emerged in the period between the collapse of the monarchy and the militant clergy’s consolidation of power. Unlike its counterpart in the middle of the century, the “Iranian Spring” in 1979 lasted only a few months. In keeping with precedent, Iran’s next opening was even shorter, spanning only a few weeks in 2009, but its brevity does

was the opportunity of Reza Shah’s downfall that Iranian communists established the Tudeh Party. See Hamid Dabashi’s *The Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008), pp. 222.

⁹⁵ According to Taleqani’s chief aide, Mohammad Shanehchi, who was politically active at the time, Iran enjoyed “absolute freedom” during Mossadeq’s brief leadership in which newspapers and radio stations were free and unimpeded. Specifically, two newspapers, *Ettela’at* and *Kayhan*, both of which were in the hands of Mossadeq’s enemies (the latter was funded by the court and run by the conservative Masoudi family) and were among the mostly widely read papers of the time, were unhindered in their relentless criticism of the prime minister. See Mohammad Shanehchi. Interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, 4 March 1983, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 1 (seq. 22). Accessed 30 April 2015. Also, see Abrahamian in *The Coup*, pp. 58. On the Anglo-American exploitation of Mossadeq’s commitment to constitutional laws in order to overthrow him, see Abrahamian’s entire work but specifically the third chapter in *The Coup*, pp. 149-204.

⁹⁶ The importance and fateful consequences of the coup, especially for Iran, has inspired an ever-growing literature on the subject. Foremost among them is Abrahamian’s *The Coup: 1953, the CIA, and the Roots of Modern U.S.-Iranian Relations*, which dispels the established narrative that the “British negotiated in good faith, the United States made serious attempts to act as an honest broker, and Mossadeq failed to reach a compromise because of his intransigence—traced invariably to his presumed ‘psychological makeup’ and Shi’i ‘martyrdom complex.’ (Abrahamian, pp. 2). Furthermore, he also questions “the conventional wisdom that places the coup squarely and solidly within the context of the Cold War—within the conflict between East and West...” Rather, he situates “the coup firmly inside the conflict between imperialism and nationalism, between First and Third Worlds...” (Abrahamian, pp. 3-4). For another important work on the subject, see Kinzer, Stephen. *All the Shah’s Men: American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2003. It’s also important to consider that the coup was not only disastrous for Iran but for the wider Developing World. The obvious American role in the overthrow alerted right-wing forces in other countries that they had a potential ally in the US for their anti-democratic plans. Thus, it makes perfect sense that the CIA and right-wing forces in Guatemala, for instance, began drawing up their coup plans almost immediately after the “success” of Mossadeq’s ouster. See Karabell, Zachary. *Architects of Intervention: The United States, the Third World, and the Cold War, 1946-1962*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1999.

not in any way diminish the historic opportunity that was seized upon by millions of Iranians.

Before the start of election season in Iran, the country had experienced years of social and political restrictions, which were tightened under Ahmadinejad's presidency. The government's security forces in tandem with its paramilitaries ensured that student gatherings and demonstrations were a costly undertaking. What's more, access to sites such as Facebook and Twitter were blocked and critical journalism often resulted in arrest and the closure of newspapers. If political rights and civil liberties were severely curtailed in Iran, and social movement activity generally takes place in an environment where such rights and liberties exist, then how did the crowd come to rule the streets of Iran in 2009?

III. The Crowd before the Elections

Antonio Gramsci, one of the most important Marxist thinkers of the 20th century, understood that there must first be preparation for a popular uprising before it can occur: "Every revolution has been preceded by an intense labour of criticism, by diffusion of culture and the spread of ideas..."⁹⁷ Iran's Reform Movement that became a powerful political force from the late nineties onwards, wasn't necessarily revolutionary but it called into question much of the Iranian government's dogma. Reformist President Muhammad Khatami (r. 1997-2005) tried to emphasize the republican aspects of the system by strengthening the power of the elected government bodies—namely the parliament and the presidency—and the individual rights of citizens. He argued that for

⁹⁷ Butko, Thomas J. "Revelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam". *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, May 2004, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 57.

nearly two decades, Iran experienced more of the “Islamic” in the “Islamic Republic” at the expense of the “Republic,” and he aimed to curtail the veto power of unelected clerical bodies. It is important to note that Khatami did not start the Reform Movement, which was a consequence of pressures from below. Indeed, Iranian men and women had long been organizing themselves into women’s groups and student associations to demand a relaxation of social controls, more equitable rights between the sexes, freedom of assembly, speech, thought, freedom from arbitrary arrest and torture, and much more.

Large segments of the population displayed this refusal to abide by the government’s dogma in miniscule acts that were tantamount to little victories over the state’s ideological rigidity. Alcohol consumption and mingling of the sexes, for example, are banned, but members of Iran’s youth⁹⁸ attended underground social gatherings and consumed alcohol, often at great personal risk. Similarly, women who did not wish to don the *hijab*, the Islamic headscarf that is mandatory in Iran, did so but on their own terms. Wearing lightly colored scarves, sometimes even slightly transparent ones, and pushed back as far as legally possible all represented for many a subversive repudiation of the Islamic government’s social and ideological controls. According to Asef Bayat,

“Iran’s postrevolutionary young had turned into ‘youth,’ a collective social agent. Their movement did not embody a coherent organization, ideology, and leadership (unlike the student movement), but rather ‘collective sentiments’ in asserting youthful, albeit fragmented, identities. Theirs was a movement whose principal expression lay in the politics of presence, tied closely to everyday collective being, cultural struggle, and normative subversion. This mass of fragmented individuals and subgroups shared common attributes and expressed common anxieties in demanding individual liberty and in asserting their collective identities.”⁹⁹

⁹⁸ I cautiously say “members of Iran’s youth” so as to not generalize all of Iran’s youth as one monolithic entity that partakes in the same social habits.

⁹⁹ Bayat, pp. 65.

They gave meaning not only to what they *did*, but simply for how they *were* as well: “The youth movement’s identity is based not so much on collective *doing* as on their collective *being*; and they make their claims less through collective protest than *collective presence*.” In other words, the youth were a threat to the state’s ideology simply by wearing certain clothes or sporting certain hairstyles, which were indirect markers of protest—what Bayat later called “Life as Politics.”¹⁰⁰ ‘Ali Akbar Nateq Nouri, a regime stalwart and former speaker of the parliament, affirmed that the youth express passive political dissent in their clothing when he contrasted the political attire of the revolution with the subversive “style” of today:

“During the monarchy, if a youth wanted to resist the government, he would raise the flag of Islam and change his appearance accordingly... Boys would don shirts that had a cleric’s collar and beard, and girls would go to public places such as universities with a complete veil or chador. And now, when a youth wants to behave in a way to show opposition to the government... they show their protest by changing their appearance and with bad veiling.”¹⁰¹

On the eve of the Shah’s final departure from Iran in the face of the revolutionary uprising, *Time* noted, “One striking feature of the anti-Shah demonstrations has been the presence of masses of Iranian women. In Tehran they marched by the thousands, encased from head to foot in black, shapeless chadors... as a form of political involvement and protest against the Shah’s autocratic rule.”¹⁰² Conversely, if the *hijab* and facial hair signified one’s revolutionary predisposition in 1978-79, then “bad hijab” and the “changing” of “appearance” underscored anti-regime sentiment in 2009. To put it

¹⁰⁰ Bayat, Asef. *Life as Politics: how Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010.

¹⁰¹ “Qal’ o qam’-i dokhtarān va pesarān eshtebāh ast”. *Tabnak*. 2 June 2014. <<http://goo.gl/lh45qU>>.

¹⁰² “Back to the Chador”. *Time*. 25 Dec 1978, pp. 37. *Time* also included an important interview by an activist who supported the revolution but refused to don the *hijab* “even as a symbol of protest, insisting that Iranian women will never go back to the old ways.” See “A Case of Warring Perceptions: Some voices, pro- and anti-Shah, in Iran’s internal debate”. *Time*. 25 Dec 1978, pp. 38.

plainly, Iranian youth “wore their politics on their sleeves” in both 1979 and 2009, but inverted the meaning of the revolution’s stylistic protest symbols in 2009.

Their collective presence during the presidential campaigns showed signs of what Gramsci referred to as the ‘War of Movement,’ in which some campaigners—even before Mousavi and Karroubi’s campaign and supporters alleged fraud—used the cover of the election to protest the state proactively and directly, as opposed to passively. After the June 12th vote when millions accused the state of rigging the election, the campaign morphed into a full-scale “frontal attack” on the government in which passive dissent was supplanted in favor of open confrontation on the streets and in cyber space. Their “frontal attack” did not necessarily offer a new ideology to supersede that of the Islamic government but rather repudiated the state’s ideology as a whole.

Gramsci argues that the elite controlling the state constitute the ruling “Hegemon,” which pushes a set of self-affirming ideas or ideology unto the population eliciting the requisite consent in order to perpetuate its rule: “... each individual is fundamentally influenced by the ideas of the ruling ‘hegemon’... this influence is felt unconsciously through the hegemon’s projection of ‘common sense’ which are a set of ideas

“...used to acquire the ‘consent’ of the masses to its rule—[and] are nothing more than the narrow and selfish interests of the elites superimposed on the general interests of the people. As a result, the masses accept the morality, the customs, and the institutionalised rules of behaviour disseminated throughout society as absolute truths that cannot or should not be questioned.”¹⁰³

In other words, by accepting the state’s ‘common sense’ view of the world, citizens are acquiescing to the power dynamic of the ruler and the ruled. Gramsci further argued that

¹⁰³ Butko, pp. 43.

citizens become revolutionaries when they refute the ‘universal truths’ of the state thereby freeing the mind to find its true revolutionary consciousness. In 2009, however, protesters didn’t reject the state’s ‘universal truths.’ Rather, they “freed” their minds from the belief that those universal truths were fixed or belonged exclusively to the state. In doing so, they appropriated and subverted them, giving them new meaning that rendered them as powerful nonviolent symbols and occasions of protest against the state. What’s more, the election provided the ‘opportunity’ to transform the youth’s “collective being” into a full-scale frontal assault on the state, or what Gramsci called the “War of Movement.”

In its 2009 Iran report, the controversial Freedom House¹⁰⁴ acknowledged that “supporters of all candidates seemed to enjoy a relatively relaxed and politically vibrant atmosphere”¹⁰⁵ in the months leading to the vote. The presidential campaigns allowed for a political opening—an ‘opportunity’ for people to come onto the streets under the guise of supporting their candidate’s campaign. The state wanted its citizenry to take interest in the vote and to participate in the elections because it feared disinterest or voter apathy would lead Iranians to shun the process, which could have amounted to a no-vote for the system that organized the elections. In other words, the state feared that voter apathy would jeopardize the legitimacy of the Islamic system as a whole. The opposite, the government believed, was also true: if Iranians went to the polls then they would be participating in an important state-sanctioned political event thereby acknowledging and

¹⁰⁴ Freedom House is not an unbiased source as it produces some very political reports in the service of power. Its analysis of the pre-election climate in Iran is nevertheless accurate.

¹⁰⁵ Freedom House. “Freedom in the World – Iran.” 2010. 4 August 2010.

<<http://www.freedomhouse.org/template.cfm?page=363&year=2010&country=7842>>.

affirming the state's legitimacy and authority.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the state encouraged a relatively free climate in which Iranians could develop an interest in the election by reading, discussing and exchanging their views, and organizing and campaigning for their candidates. To facilitate the free flow of ideas, "the two ministries of Information and of Islamic Guidance, under the supervision of the Leader, unblocked Facebook (along with other social networking websites) with the aim of encouraging young voters to participate in the June elections."¹⁰⁷ The availability of increased connectivity empowered candidates to relay their political platforms to a savvy youth population. It was indeed the first Iranian presidential election in which candidates harnessed the social power of YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter to reach a wider audience.¹⁰⁸ The Mousavi campaign went so far as to send succinct text messages to citizens' mobile phones to garner support.¹⁰⁹ One supporter especially credits the former prime minister's election team for its ability to harness Facebook's organizing capacity in order to run a "successful campaign," noting that the "campaign managers organized supporters, planned gatherings and garnered support through Facebook pages dedicated to the Reformist candidate."¹¹⁰ Additionally, many Mousavi supporters developed a Facebook presence inviting their peers to "become green"¹¹¹—the color of the campaign. Most importantly, the use of

¹⁰⁶ Predictably, Khamenei said that such a massive turnout of "40 million people" proved that the people "believe in the system." See "Khoṭbeh-ye namāz jom'eh-ye tehrān." *Khamenei.ir*. 11 September 2009. <<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8033>>.

¹⁰⁷ Babak Rahimi. "The Sacred in Fragments: Shi'i Iran since the 1979 Revolution". *From Theocracy to the Green Movement*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 69.

¹⁰⁸ "Gozāresh-i abc az noāvarihāye tablīghāt-i entekhābāt-i mūsavī". *Aftab News*. 19 May 2009 <<http://goo.gl/VZkUiv>>.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Nasr, Octavia. "Tear gas and Twitter: Iranians take their protests online". *CNN*. 15 June 2009. <<http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/06/14/iran.protests.twitter/index.html>>.

¹¹¹ "Jonbesh-i 'sabz' dar īrān dar āstāneh-ye entekhābāt-i riāsat jomhūrī". *DW*. 6 Feb 2009 <<http://goo.gl/cl8Oh8>>.

such technologies enabled candidates to “level the playing field” with the state’s preferred candidate, who had greater access to state resources, especially radio and television airtime.¹¹²

Just as with previous movements in modern Iranian history, technology played an important role in 2009 in terms of facilitating the communication and coordination. In the Constitutional Revolution of 1905-1911, revolutionaries used the telegraph to organize and communicate across large swaths of territory. In the 1950s, nationalists used the next generation of communication—the telephone—to spearhead the national movement against the British Empire’s control over Iran’s natural resources. During the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, revolutionaries smuggled cassette tape recordings¹¹³ of Khomeini’s fiery anti-Shah speeches¹¹⁴ back into Iran where the likes of Ayatollah Beheshti transmitted “them by telephone to mosques and villages all over the country.”¹¹⁵ The immediate audience of such speeches would then relay Khomeini’s messages to their friends and neighbors thereby assuring that even those who did not frequent the mosques

¹¹²“Gozāresh-i abc az noāvarīhāye tablīghāt-i entekhābāti-i mūsavī”. *Aftab News*. 19 May 2009 <<http://goo.gl/VZkUiv>>.

¹¹³ By the time of the revolution, these cassette tapes came to constitute a small but thriving business venture. Khomeini’s speeches were in such demand that the merchants selling the tapes were making more than a six-fold profit per sale. See “The Ayatullah’s Hit Parade”. *Time*. 12 Feb 1979, pp. 37.

¹¹⁴ In one such tape, Khomeini stated that “if the religious leaders had been in power, they would not have allowed the Iranian nation to become the captive of the Americans and the British... They [the religious leaders] would have punched the government in the mouth.” (Ibid, pp. 37) Punching “the government in the mouth” is an especially important phrase that will be addressed in detail further below.

¹¹⁵ Butler, David, et al. “The Mullah’s Men”. *Newsweek*. 12 Feb 1979. pp. 47. Veteran activist and Taleqani’s chief aide, Mohammad Shanehchi, noted that when Khomeini was in Paris his speeches were transmitted to all corners of Iran in a matter of hours through the use of tape recordings that were relayed to Tehran from Paris via telephone and were transcribed, copied, and disseminated all over the country, including remote rural areas. See Mohammad Shanehchi. Interview recorded Habib Ladjevardi, 4 March 1983, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 4 (seq. 93). Accessed 2 May 2015.

or did not have access to the tapes received his political messages nonetheless.¹¹⁶ In 2009, technology spanning cell phones equipped with the capacity to make phone calls, send messages, and to capture pictures and footage, as well as the Internet—encompassing the blogosphere, video sharing and social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—were instrumental in relaying messages to a larger audience. As noted earlier, the Internet was especially useful in terms of its organizing capacity for the presidential campaigns prior to the uprising. Afterward, however, its role should not be overstated. While Western media hailed Iran’s uprising as a “Twitter Revolution”¹¹⁷ (one former Bush aide even argued that Twitter should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for its role in facilitating the uprising¹¹⁸), the reality on the ground was a bit more complicated, as will be discussed further below.

The relaxation of political restrictions and censorship signaled to Iranians that the repressive climate was temporarily suspended. Sensing the change in the political environment presiding over them, they seized the opportunity of the election season to organize. Thus, Iran’s tenth presidential elections created the space and relative safety for the political crowd to emerge onto the streets. Unlike the US¹¹⁹, there are only 4-5 weeks of active campaigning in Iran with one respondent likening the brevity of the elections to a “high school student body election.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ “A Case of Warring Perceptions: Some voices, pro- and anti-Shah, in Iran’s internal debate”. *Time*. 25 Dec 1978, pp. 38.

¹¹⁷ “Editorial: Iran’s Twitter revolution”. *The Washington Times*. 16 June 2009.

<<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/16/irans-twitter-revolution/>>.

¹¹⁸ Pfeifle, Mark. “A Nobel Peace Prize for Twitter?”. *The Christian Science Monitor*. 6 July 2009.

<<http://www.csmonitor.com/Commentary/Opinion/2009/0706/p09s02-coop.html>>.

¹¹⁹ The American electoral process is the exception not the norm. Election season in the US is abnormally and onerously long.

¹²⁰ Rezaian, Jason. Telephone interview. 26 July 2010.

Interest in the contest gradually grew in the weeks preceding the elections. Specifically, excitement piqued with the occurrence of the one-on-one televised presidential debates, the first in modern Iran.¹²¹ Iran had televised presidential debates in the past but this was the first time in which the candidates faced off against each other on a one-on-one basis, thereby allowing for more focused and adversarial debates that sparked the population's interest. The second of six television debates was especially electrifying for both camps. Mousavi faced a combative Ahmadinejad, who accused his chief rivals—Mousavi, Karroubi, and Rezai—of being part of a plot financed by Rafsanjani to unseat him. The idea was that each candidate appealed to a certain aspect of Ahmadinejad's base: Rezai, the former commander of the Revolutionary Guards, was thought to be able to siphon off votes from the military establishment that was customarily loyal to Ahmadinejad; Karroubi, a seasoned cleric and politician, could erode his support amongst the clerical and religious classes; and Mousavi and his wife, Zahra Rahnavard, can appeal to the leftists, secularists, and female voters.¹²² According to the incumbent, Rafsanjani was seeking vengeance for losing the presidential race in 2005, and epitomized the corruption that afflicted Iran both past and present. Interestingly enough, the president of the Islamic Republic presented himself as an “anti-establishment candidate”¹²³ battling against those who want to undo the revolution from within. Mousavi, in turn, condemned Ahmadinejad's foreign and economic policies, his focus on the Holocaust as harmful to Iran's national interest, and accused the president of putting

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Director Ramin Asgard, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., June 3, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI232_a.html.

¹²³ Director Ramin Asgard, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., June 4, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI233_a.html.

Iran on the path to “dictatorship.”¹²⁴ Without a doubt, the most distasteful part of the debate transpired when Ahmadinejad “named and shamed” Mousavi’s wife by accusing her of obtaining her academic credentials through dubious means.¹²⁵ It is very likely that Ahmadinejad was trying to undermine Rahnavard’s role, which was especially noteworthy as she actively campaigned for her husband—an unprecedented occurrence in modern Iran—and helped generate interest among female voters in Mousavi’s candidacy.

The impact of this singular television debate cannot be understated. Accusations of fraud, corruption, and embezzlement were broadcast to a shocked national audience. According to one respondent, “All the things people had been talking about at home” were now being debated on live television and the historical importance of the occasion “clicked”¹²⁶ for viewers, creating a sort of “political chemistry.”¹²⁷ One activist believed that it was during the television debates when people realized “who is on the side of the people and who is not, who sides with the government and who sides with the people.”¹²⁸ Apathy gave way to the conviction that although all the candidates were screened by the Guardian Council, a powerful conservative body of 12 unelected clerics and laymen¹²⁹, there was a real difference between the candidates, especially between incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Mir Hussein Mousavi—the former prime minister-turned-reformist. One source went so far as to say that the television debate between Mousavi and Ahmadinejad changed the state’s “sense of control” over the election with green

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ “Matn-i kâmel-i monâzereh-ye musavî va aḥmadīnezhād”. *Aftab News*. 4 June 2009. <<http://aftabnews.ir/fa/news/90164>>.

¹²⁶ Rezaian, Jason. Telephone interview.

¹²⁷ Chargé d’Affaires Richard LeBaron, London, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, June 18, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09LONDON1442_a.html.

¹²⁸ V., Shahin. Personal interview. 14 April 2014.

¹²⁹ Juan Cole likens the Guardian Council’s power to that of the U.S. Supreme Court.

appearing “everywhere” overnight.¹³⁰ Indeed, after the first televised debate, excitement translated into a Mardi Gras-like atmosphere in Tehran in which the four main candidates’ bases, especially that of Ahmadinejad and Mousavi, were out in force. With election fever in full swing, the crowd emerged onto the streets with slogans, placards, pictures, and signs of unity. Participants marched throughout the streets everyday until the day before the actual elections, where a mandatory 24-hour lull was customarily enforced.

Young people constituted the bulk of the street crowds. The youth of Iran are the overwhelming majority of the citizenry and they live under a system in which political rights are limited and civil liberties are severely curtailed. With much of the constitution inspired by a conservative interpretation of Islam, the youth are disallowed from mingling with the opposite sex—to the degree that is enforceable—and are limited in their ability to voice political criticisms. Needless to say, dancing on the streets, playing music loudly from car speakers, and shouting overtly political slogans *inter alia* are forbidden. The opportunity of the election facilitated an environment in which regular prohibitions were either suspended or unenforceable, prompting the crowd to circumvent a number of the state’s social and political taboos.

This normally forbidden Mardi Gras-effect gripped the streets everyday and did not dissipate with nightfall. One witness to the election carnival attested:

“As afternoon fades into evening, the streets grow increasingly crowded and restless. Tehran’s notorious rush hour traffic morphs into a supercharged campaign carnival that marches non-stop until around 2:00 a.m. The throngs of pedestrian campaigners absorb ever greater numbers,

¹³⁰ Chargé d’Affaires Richard LeBaron, London, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, June 18, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09LONDON1442_a.html. “Everywhere” in this instance is a generalization most relevant to urban centers as Ahmadinejad enjoyed considerable support in rural areas.

and inch further and further on to the streets, choking the flow of traffic. Drivers honk their horns when they see likeminded campaigners. Crowds boo at cars boasting a rival's poster. By late evening, electioneering dissolves into frenzy... A car suddenly stops mid-traffic, its stereo blasting party music. Its passengers, almost certainly Mousavi supporters, disembark and break into frenetic dancing, joined by gleeful onlookers.”¹³¹

Thousands clogged the streets and walked alongside cars stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic. People clapped their hands over their heads repeating Mousavi's name: “Hands in the air, Mousavi! Hands in the air, Mousavi!” (*dastā bālā, mūsavī!*), as if they were fans at a soccer match.¹³² Similar scenes were replicated elsewhere in the country, such as when a massive pro-Mousavi rally concluded with large numbers of people roaming “the city in cars and on foot, honking horns, and chanting slogans” that equated Mousavi with freedom (*mūsavī, āzādī!*).¹³³ Such street festivals also gave way to more inspiring means of bringing attention to Mousavi's candidacy.

On June 8, 2009, four days before the election, young men and women formed a 20-kilometer human chain spanning from Tajrish Square to the Tehran Train Station through a main Tehran thoroughfare, Vali Asr Street. Young women, who comprised the majority of the human chain, lined along the street with like-minded young men, bidding Ahmadinejad farewell with a resounding pro-Mousavi slogan: “Ahmadi bye bye.”¹³⁴ Such campaigners used the occasion of the election not only to support their candidate, but also to voice their protest against the government as a whole; Iranians holding hands

¹³¹ Doostdar, 'Alireza. “Cheeseburgers and sharks: Iran's election campaigns in full swing”. *The Dawn Blog*. 11 June 2009. Accessed 3 August 2010. <<http://blog.dawn.com/2009/06/11/cheeseburgers-and-sharks-iran%E2%80%99s-election-campaigns-in-full-swing/>>.

¹³² AFP. “Youth rallies for Mir Hossein Mousavi”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 10 June 2009. Accessed 3 July 2010. <<https://youtu.be/G-PI7Gtliog>>.

¹³³ Ambassador Anne E. Derse, Baku, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, June 12, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAKU474_a.html.

¹³⁴ AlJazeeraEnglish. “Presidential candidates court Iran youth”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 10 June 2009. Accessed 4 July 2010. <<https://youtu.be/381DirqYxoE>>.

as part of the human chain chanted: “Assistance from God [leads to] imminent victory, death to this deceptive government”¹³⁵ (*naşron min allāh faḥon qarīb, marg bar īn dowlāt-i mardom farīb*¹³⁶). Perhaps, the most fascinating aspect of the slogan was the fact that it was popularized during the Iranian Revolution. In other words, campaigners were employing Iran’s revolutionary past to condemn the revolutionary government even before the post-election crisis gripped Iran. To be certain, the election climate afforded Iranians the opportunity to voice subversive political sentiments, such as when 6,000 supporters chanted in unison, “Death to the Taliban – in Kabul and Tehran”¹³⁷ at a pro-Mousavi election rally in which they explicitly attacked clerical rule in Iran. Such slogans underscored the anti-government sentiment even before campaigners believed their victory was stolen from them. Mashalah Shamsolvaezin, a political commentator and former director of several reformist newspapers, observed: “What’s happening now is more than what should happen before an election... This is an expression of protest and dissatisfaction by people. They are venting their frustration and feeling very powerful.”¹³⁸

The massive rallies and street marches for Mousavi imbued campaigners with a sense of confidence that their candidate was going to be Iran’s next president unless he and his supporters were robbed of their electoral destiny. Recognizing such a possibility,

¹³⁵ Goodzila82. “20 Km Human Chain in Tehran-June 8th”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 8 June 2009. Accessed 3 August 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PP-iji4VTQQ>>.

¹³⁶ This is a verse from the Qur’an (Sūrat as-Şaff [61:13]). Translations for the verse vary, visit alim.org for four common translations. I have translated it in a manner that works in the Persian context of the protest.

¹³⁷ “Hāshīeh hāyeh sokhanrānī-ye mūsavī dar sālon-i 6000 nafari-ye mashhad”. *Aftab News*. 24 April 2009. <<http://goo.gl/eK581u>>.

¹³⁸ Worth, Robert. “Huge Campaign Rallies Snarl Tehran”. *The New York Times*. 8 June 2009. Accessed 23 April 2014. <<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/09/world/middleeast/09iran.html>>.

they declared, “If fraud doesn’t occur, Mousavi will win”¹³⁹ (*agar taqalob nasheh, mūsavī avval mīsheh*).¹⁴⁰ The fear of a rigged election was so real that it prompted hundreds of University of Tehran students to demonstrate in front of the Ministry of the Interior, warning, “If fraud takes place, Iran will revolt.” (*agar taqalob besheh, īrān qīyāmat mīsheh*).¹⁴¹

The crowd’s immense presence on the streets, coupled with overtly political slogans was cause for great concern among regime authorities. Brigadier General Yadollah Javani, the deputy commander of political affairs for the powerful Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, accused the presence of Mousavi supporters on the streets as being part of a “velvet revolution” and promised that “any kind of velvet revolution will not be successful in Iran.”¹⁴² Causing the regime even more consternation, the crowd coupled its massive street presence with the appropriation of a potent Islamic symbol.

For the first time in contemporary Iran, a candidate adopted a color to symbolize his campaign. The Mousavi camp selected the color green “to symbolize the fact that Mousavi is a descendant of Prophet Mohammad.”¹⁴³ The color choice was designed to give both Mousavi and his campaign an aura of religious legitimacy in the eyes of the

¹³⁹ It is important to note that like many cultures, the poetic tradition is an integral part of Iranian culture. Many, if not all the slogans uttered before and after the elections have a powerful rhythmic tone and flow that does not effectively translate into English.

¹⁴⁰ Goodzila82. “20 Km Human Chain in Tehran-June 8th.”

¹⁴¹ Sullivansilver. “Tajamo’-i dāneshjūyān dāneshgah-i tehrān dar moqābel-i vezārat-i keshvar”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 June 2009. Accessed 3 August 2010.
<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=46P9VHgnpeg>>.

¹⁴² Omidvar, Shervin. “Sepāh mūsavī rā tahdīd kard: enqelāb-i makhmalī rā dar noṭfe khafeh mīkonīm”. *Roov Online*. 9 June 2009. Accessed 20 December 2014.
<<http://www.roovonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/archive/2009/june/09/article/-16589c36c9.html>>.

¹⁴³ “Battle of colors in Iran's presidential campaign.” *PressTV*. 28 May 2009. 29 June 2010.
<<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=96233§ionid=351020101>>.

conservative establishment. Green is considered the color of Islam because it was “supposedly Mohammed's favorite color,” and it is said that he wore “a green cloak and turban, and his writings are full of references to the color.” Furthermore, the Qur’anic chapter, “The Human,” describes heaven as a place where people wear “garments” of “fine green silk.”¹⁴⁴ For these reasons and others, Islamic groups, states, and empires have historically employed green in their flags in order to convey an Islamic character and legitimacy to their authority.¹⁴⁵ Iran’s pre- and post-revolutionary flag likewise incorporates green.

That green afforded Mousavi’s candidacy and campaign an Islamic legitimacy posed a significant challenge to the state. The former premier, who was the longest serving prime minister during Khomeini’s guardianship (*velāyat*), provided the early leadership to the Islamic Republic when it was creating its political and ideological foundations, causing many to refer to him as the “Imam’s prime minister.”¹⁴⁶ Now, however, campaigners had donned the color and were campaigning for Mousavi who promised reform. Moreover, others garbed in Islamic green used the cover of the campaign to denounce the entire Islamic system, using slogans that either invoked the anti-government revolutionary fervor of its predecessor, the Iranian Revolution, or put

¹⁴⁴ Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali, Muhammad, Muhammad Muhsin Khan. *Interpretation of the Meaning of the Noble Qur’an in the English Language*. Riyadh; Dar us-Salam Publishers, 1996, 29: 21.

¹⁴⁵ For example, the flags for both the Palestinian Islamic group Hamas and Saudi Arabia, a self-avowed Islamic state, are green with Islamic writing on them. The flag of the Fatimid Caliphate that ruled Egypt from the 10th century to the 12th was solid green.

¹⁴⁶ “Faryād-i āzādi-ye nakhost vazīr-i emām dar dāneshgāh-i amīr kabīr”. *Kaleme*. 14 April, 2014. <<http://www.kaleme.com/1393/01/25/klm-180544/>>. It’s important to note that although Mousavi was the premier, Khomeini was the final arbiter of power in Iran between 1979-1989.

the theocracy in the same breath as the Taliban—a movement that the Iranian government opposed ideologically and militarily.¹⁴⁷

The Mousavi campaign's strategy of adopting Islamic green as its color, however, garnered the suspicion of the authorities not only because of the specific choice but also because a color was adopted in the first place. Weeks before the elections, conservative media outlets accused "Mousavi's supporters of following in the footsteps of those who staged color revolutions in some former Soviet republics."¹⁴⁸ Regime authorities grew all the more nervous as Iran's youth controlled the streets in the run-up to the election while wearing a single unifying color. Consequently, three days prior to the election, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards warned that the adoption of a color for the "first time in the elections signaled that a velvet revolution was underway for the 10th presidential elections" and promised that it will be "nipped in the bud."¹⁴⁹

The 20-kilometer human chain, which was "cause for excitement" among spectators who were increasingly interested in the campaign, was peppered in green.¹⁵⁰ Young men and women lined the streets holding a green rope, which served as a chain linking the campaigners. Participants clenched the rope wearing headscarves, headbands, armbands, wristbands, visors, shirts and ties, all of which were green. Several were even wearing green capes.¹⁵¹ Merchants exploited the opportunity by selling all sorts of green goods, from Mardi Gra-style beads to pom poms, and some painted their faces

¹⁴⁷ The Islamic Republic sustained the resistance to the Taliban by providing critical financial and military assistance to the armed opposition in the late 1990s when the Taliban controlled 90 percent of Afghanistan.

¹⁴⁸ "Battle of colors in Iran's presidential campaign".

¹⁴⁹ Omidvar, Shervin. "Sepāh mūsavi rā tahdīd kard: enqelāb-i makhmalī rā dar noqte khafeh mikonīm". *Rooz Online*. 9 June 2009. Accessed 20 December 2014.

¹⁵⁰ Doostdar, 'Alireza. Email interview. 2 August 2010.

¹⁵¹ Goodzila82. "20 Km Human Chain in Tehran-June 8th".

“resembling the Incredible Hulk.”¹⁵² In more obvious political fashion, demonstrators hoisted green campaign posters that placed Mousavi alongside former president Mohammad Khatami, a reformist cleric who endorsed Mousavi’s candidacy and was widely popular among students. So widespread was the use of the color to show solidarity with the Mousavi campaign that Iran’s national football team jumped in the fray of the post-election turmoil by coming onto the field in South Korea in green wristbands.¹⁵³

The campaign’s decision to adopt green as Mousavi’s color was designed to bestow the candidate an aura of Islamic legitimacy. In the aftermath of the election when the political crisis brought Iran to a standstill, campaigners morphed into committed protesters and voiced their politically scathing demands while wearing green. In doing so, the meaning of these political acts became amplified when considered in tandem with the Islamic color. When activists shouted slogans invoking the Iranian Revolution at a government that came to power through that same revolution, those slogans were imbued with greater intensity and posed a more serious ideological challenge because those activists uttered those slogans while wearing the quintessential Islamic color. In doing so, activists transformed green from being merely an Islamic color that affirmed Mousavi’s “religious” credentials into an Islamic color that became a marker of protest—one that constituted a central nonviolent weapon in the movement’s arsenal—which they deployed to attack the Islamic regime on a discursive and ideological level. In other

¹⁵² Rezaian, Jason. Telephone interview.

¹⁵³ “Mardom-i ĩrān moħtāĵ-i honarnamāi-ye ‘arabhā barāye baghā-ye ākharĭn omĭd + film”. *Tabnak*. 17 June 2009. Accessed 7 August, 2010. <<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=52190>>. Interestingly, participants in the post-election demonstrations returned the gesture by carrying placards that read “Iran’s champions” emblazoned “over a photograph of the players wearing ‘Mousavi green.’ See Timothy Richardson, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al, July 1, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI269_a.html.

words, the government's own Islamic symbols including green and revolution-era slogans were now part of the opposition's repertoire of action that was used to contest the product of the Iranian Revolution—the Islamic Republic.

Before such a dramatic transition, however, there was a mandatory lull in campaigning for the day before the elections. The crowd, high spirited and hopeful, retired home in order to rest before the fateful June 12th vote. In hindsight, this was the proverbial “calm before the storm”—one that wasn't entirely unexpected. On the eve of the election, classified American documents aptly describe the possible outcomes that lied ahead:

“Similar to the campaign period itself, which has been punctuated by personal attacks and the massive mobilization of voters across Iran's fractured society, the outcome of the election is likely to be polarizing. Either of the probable outcomes - a Mousavi win in the first or second round, or the re-election of Ahmadinejad tainted by the perception of fraud - will, at a minimum, spark a struggle over verification of the results. There are signs that both camps are setting the scene to contest the results, with Ahmadinejad supporters also alleging malfeasance by his opponents' camps and laying down unrealistically high bench marks of the number of votes Ahmadinejad should in [sic] a fair contest. Social unrest is also possible given the conviction among large swaths of society now that Ahmadinejad can not [sic] win fairly; conversely, Ahmadinejad has portrayed himself as a champion of disenfranchised Iranians and a potential martyr at the hands of a corrupt establishment. His supporters are not likely to take defeat well.”¹⁵⁴

IV. The Crowd in Relation to Iran's Presidential Elections and the Aftermath

The Interior Ministry reported that nearly 40 million Iranians or 85 percent of the electorate voted in the elections with incumbent Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sweeping his

¹⁵⁴ Director Ramin Asgard, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., June 11, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI245_a.html.

closest rival Mir Hussein Mousavi by more than 10 million votes.¹⁵⁵ The disparity with which Ahmadinejad won caused widespread outrage as many believed that gross irregularities occurred. The final result becomes especially suspicious when one considers that Iranian youth voted in droves, and precedent indicates that the more the youth participate in the elections, the higher the probability of a reformist victory.¹⁵⁶ What's more, the speed with which the election results were released shocked many. Although votes were cast by paper ballot, the Interior Ministry "released results from a first batch of 5 million votes just an hour and a half after polling stations closed. Over the next four hours, it released vote totals almost hourly in huge chunks of about 5 million votes—plowing through more than half of all ballots cast."¹⁵⁷ Semi-official news agencies even "began indicating he had won before polls closed and before counting was to have begun."¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, Mousavi alleged that the number of votes for nearly 170 electoral precincts exceeded the number of voters.¹⁵⁹

There continues to be considerable debate whether fraud took place and the degree with which it occurred. What really transpired is actually unimportant. Rather, the perception of the truth is far more consequential and millions of Iranians believed that

¹⁵⁵ "Natayej-i nahāyī-i dahomīn doreh entekhābāt-i rīāsāt jomhūrī". Ministry of the Interior. 24 March 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010.

<<http://moi.ir/Portal/Home/ShowPage.aspx?Object=News&CategoryID=832a711b-95fe-4505-8aa3-38f5e17309c9&LayoutID=dd8faff4-f71b-4c65-9aef-a1b6d0160be3&ID=5e30ab89-e376-434b-813f-8c22255158e1>>.

¹⁵⁶ AlJazeeraEnglish. "Presidential candidates court Iran youth".

¹⁵⁷ "Speed of Iran vote count called suspicious". *Associated Press*. 15 June 2009. Accessed 7 Aug 2010. <<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31375293/>>.

¹⁵⁸ Director Ramin Asgard, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., June 15, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI249_a.html.

¹⁵⁹ "Bayānīeh shomāreh-ye panj-i mīr hussein mūsavī khetāb be mardom: nagozārīd dorūghgūyān va moteqalebān parcham-i defā' az nezām-i islāmī rā az shomā berobāyand". *Gooya News*. 20 June 2009. <<http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2009/06/089606.php>>.

widespread fraud took place, which prompted a popular nonviolent uprising in the days and months after the June 12th presidential election.

The regime's fear of a velvet or color revolution seemingly became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The morning after election results were announced, the political crowd—enraged at what they perceived to be a rigged election—took to the streets.¹⁶⁰ With the ballot a closed avenue, crowd action in the streets became the only real alternative for political expression in Iran. The crowd flooded the streets again, this time shouting, “We told you that if fraud occurs, Iran will revolt!” (*goftīm taqalob besheh, īrān qīyāmat mīsheh!*), and pelted the riot police from afar with stones.¹⁶¹ The *Associated Press* reported that “Thousands of protesters—mostly young men—roamed Tehran looking for a fight with police and setting trash bins and tires ablaze. Pillars of black smoke rose among the mustard-colored apartment blocks and office buildings in central Tehran. In one side road, an empty bus was engulfed in flames.”¹⁶² Protests were also reported elsewhere, including the holy city of Mashhad.¹⁶³

At the start of the revolt, the government re-instated its usual restrictions on such websites and even slowed the speed of the Internet to dissuade people from going online—even if they could break through the government's filtering of websites such as

¹⁶⁰ “E'terāzāt-i mardomī dar saḥ-i shahr-i tehrān”. *Abtab News*. 13 June 2009.

<<http://aftabnews.ir/vdcbazb9.rhbg5piuur.html>>

“Poll results prompt Iran protests”. *Al Jazeera*. 14 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010.

<<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/2009613172130303995.html>>.

¹⁶¹ Amirpix. “Clash between election protestors and police in Tehran.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. 14 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/Lp0KRMF78IY>>.

¹⁶² Murphy, Brian. “Election battles turn into street fights in Iran”. *Associated Press*. 14 June 2009. 7 August 2010. <<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2009/06/14/election-battles-turn-street-fights-iran.html>>.

¹⁶³ “Tazāhorat-i khīābānī dar chand shahr-īrān dar e'terāz beh natāyej-i entekhābāt”. *Radio Farda*. June 23, 2009. <http://www.radiofarda.com/content/f4_riots_Iran_election_result/1753532.html>.

YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter.¹⁶⁴ If activists were unable to access YouTube, then they adapted by sending the video files to supporters abroad who would then upload them onto the video sharing website on their behalf. Furthermore, they learned to decrease the size of the video files thereby making it easier to send through a government-induced Internet slowdown.¹⁶⁵ Thus, such tools served as a conduit to convey to the world the reality on the ground in Iran.

Mehdi Saharkhiz, a main source of videos from Iran that included footage of politically sensitive events, noted that “Social media was more about sending information out of the country than about organizing. It allowed people to transmit information from Iran to the world in a remarkably quick fashion. The Internet was too slow for coordination.”¹⁶⁶ Basic word of mouth, however, was instrumental in the coordination of the uprising.¹⁶⁷ One activist, who was arrested the first week after the uprising and held in Iran’s notorious Evin Prison, observed that word of mouth was far more important to organizing events than social media. He attested that he even saw an activist holding a sign that included information about the next day’s protest time and location while standing in the middle of an ongoing demonstration.¹⁶⁸ Iran’s famous cab drivers¹⁶⁹, who have developed a keen sense of categorizing and labeling passengers based on their attire,

¹⁶⁴ Weaver, Matthew. “Iran’s ‘Twitter revolution’ was exaggerated, says editor”. *The Guardian*. 9 June 2010. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/09/iran-twitter-revolution-protests>>.

¹⁶⁵ Saharkhiz, Mehdi. "The Role of Social Media in the Iranian People's Struggle". Interview by Behnood Mokri. *Voice of America*. Washington D.C., 28 Feb. 2011. Television.

¹⁶⁶ Mehdi Saharkhiz. Personal Interview. 19 May 2013.

¹⁶⁷ Kay McGowan, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., June 18, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI255_a.html.

¹⁶⁸ S., Bijan. Personal interview. 30 June 2012.

¹⁶⁹ It is important to note that I am in no way suggesting that cab drivers offer a view into all of Iran’s complexities. Too often Western journalists travel to north Tehran and converse with cab drivers or the English-speaking elites of the city and generalize the entire country based on their narrow and selective window onto Iran. Rather, I am noting that cab drivers played a role in relaying information to citizens they thought would be interested to know about upcoming events.

style, and speech¹⁷⁰, played a pivotal role in spreading information about forthcoming demonstrations to would-be activists and sympathizers.¹⁷¹ To be sure, many were able to circumvent government filters and access Mousavi's Facebook page¹⁷², which provided useful information about protest times and places¹⁷³, but social media's role in coordinating protests should not be overstated. In sum, while technology was important in organizing the campaigns before the election, it functioned more as a means by which to inform the world about what was transpiring inside Iran than to organize the uprising. The part Twitter played in the so-called "Twitter Revolution"¹⁷⁴ was especially exaggerated.¹⁷⁵

YouTube videos were indeed instrumental in chronicling common themes pertaining to what was transpiring on the ground in Iran. One such video, for instance, shows protestors walking peacefully only to be interrupted by policemen on motorcycles cutting through the march causing demonstrators to rush aside. Most of the motorcycles

¹⁷⁰ M., Elnaz. Personal interview. 25 June 2011.

¹⁷¹ Chargé d'Affaires Don Lu, Baku, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., July 21, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAKU575_a.html.

¹⁷² Ibid. Mohammad Sadeghi, who at the time was 27 and residing in Germany, launched Mousavi's Facebook page in January before the election. The growth in the number of the page's followers prompted Mousavi's campaign to contact Sadeghi thereby facilitating coordination in the run-up to the election. Afterwards, however, that coordinating came to a halt as a consequence of government repression and the arrest of many of Mousavi's staff members. Subsequently, the page continued to serve as a hub for many inside and outside of Iran whereby activists coordinated days of action and tactics. Graphic designers-turned-digital activists also submitted their work to illustrate such tactics and to visualize their defiance.

¹⁷³ For instance, Mousavi's Facebook page provided times and locations for protests across the country on June 15, the day in which the Green Movement produced the largest protests in the history of the uprising. See Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. "e'tešāb, rāhpaymāi va tajamo'-i fardā, farmān-i allāh akbar-i emshab." Facebook. 14 June 2009. Accessed 22 Jan 2014. <<http://goo.gl/kHZwzk>>.

¹⁷⁴ "Editorial: Iran's Twitter revolution". *The Washington Times*. 16 June 2009.

<<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2009/jun/16/irans-twitter-revolution/>>.

¹⁷⁵ Weaver, Matthew. "Iran's 'Twitter revolution' was exaggerated, says editor". *The Guardian*. 9 June 2010. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/jun/09/iran-twitter-revolution-protests>>. Also, see Clark, Liat. "Study: Twitter was not the driver behind 2009 Iranian protests". *Wired*. 4 June 2013.

Accessed 4 May 2015. <<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2013-06/04/iran-twitter-use>>.

carried two policemen, one of which was a driver while another straddled behind him striking at protestors with his baton. Once satisfied that they had adequately disrupted the march, the police would rush back the same way they came. The crowd, angered and provoked by the seemingly unjustified assault, attacked the rear motorcyclist knocking him onto the ground. As he tried to run away, the crowd descended upon him with one person yelling “hit him” as the crowd-turned-mob sought revenge. Though bruised, exhausted, and shocked, he was carried to safety by demonstrators while others called for him to “come out” as they torched his motorcycle.¹⁷⁶ This scene was not an isolated incident and was replicated several times.¹⁷⁷ The impulsive desire to fight back when provoked was repeated throughout the history of the protest movement but most, if not all, of these incidences have one significant trait in common: whenever the crowd was able to descend upon one of its attackers, female activists played an important role in saving the paramilitary’s life. Women repeatedly either beseeched their countrymen to stop their assault or often thrust themselves into the melee to shield the attacker-turned-attacked.

The intensity of popular anger over the election results is not to be understated. Iranian journalist Saeed Kamali Dehghan interviewed Morineh Tahmasebi, a 57-year-old mother, and her insight offers a window to a commonly shared sentiment:

"I lost one of my sons in the Iran-Iraq war, he was killed for defending his country and now my mouth is completely shut. [The election results are] not what my son and my family wanted—it doesn't have anything to do with Islam. These riot police are worse than any criminals in the world. Now I feel ashamed to say that there was a time when I defended the

¹⁷⁶ Mousavi1388. “Riot police caught by crowd – Protests in Tehran after election”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 14 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/dSECAvBTanQ>>.

¹⁷⁷ Amirpix. “Clash between election protestors and police in Tehran”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 14 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/CCwrqBpbqjA>>.

Islamic Republic. It's not what we wanted. It's worse than a dictatorship. I regret that I lost my son for this regime now."¹⁷⁸

Such resentment helps explain why the first day after the elections was marred by rioting—provoked or otherwise.

In his seminal book, *The Crowd in History*, George Rudé writes, "...the intrusion of the unexpected might create a panic or otherwise divert the crowd from its original purpose: in such cases, the charge of fickleness would appear to have some substance. But, in general, such 'mobility' of behavior was not typical of the riotous crowd."¹⁷⁹ Although subsequent days saw more clashes, often times provoked by riot police, the crowd showed extraordinary restraint even as its size increased dramatically. Certainly, the limited incidence of violence should not detract from the crowd's disciplined approach to street protest.

For example, on June 16, four days after the elections, hundreds of thousands marched on Vali Asr Street against the election results and they did so in a manner that rebuked the regime's characterization that they are thugs, hooligans, or ruffians. They marched with remarkable self-control, gesturing the victory symbol with hands raised above their heads and walking in near complete silence.¹⁸⁰ "Anxious not to be falsely depicted as hooligans by authorities,"¹⁸¹ they marched in front of Iran's Radio and Television Station carrying signs that stated: "Lies are forbidden."¹⁸² Their silence not only showcased the crowd's discipline but also protested bias reporting as well as the

¹⁷⁸ Kamali Dehghan, Saeed. "Iran Disputed Elections: The Aftermath". *The Guardian News Blog*. 15 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/blog/2009/jun/15/iranian-elections>>.

¹⁷⁹ Rudé, 253.

¹⁸⁰ thenima1. "iran silent protest...valiasr street.....16 june 2009". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 16 June 2009. Accessed 25 April 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVBZQCsqdjo>>.

¹⁸¹ "Iran opposition keeps up pressure". *BBC News*. 16 June 2009. Accessed 24 April 2014. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8103577.stm>.

¹⁸² thenima1. "iran silent protest...valiasr street.....16 june 2009".

lack of media coverage, which in the days after the election focused on Ahmadinejad's victory rallies and street interviews with his supporters. One frustrated activist explained in her own words the reasoning behind the silent protests:

“...You flip through the channels of Iranian TV and see Ahmadinejad supporters, you see Ahmadinejad making light of this situation and other officials calling the pro-Mousavi protesters ‘sore losers’ or ‘no good looters who want to cause havoc in society’. Since their voices are not heard, the protesters have been protesting in silence. They say silence speaks louder than words and this is a prime example of that (both the silence of the protesters and the silence of the government on this issue).”¹⁸³

Thursday, June 18, 2009, Mousavi called for a funeral procession to be held in Tehran to mourn those that had died in the post-election violence. Responding to his call, hundreds of thousands¹⁸⁴ of opposition mourners gathered at Imam Khomeini Square in Tehran holding gruesome photographs of those killed and signs that pledged "Our martyred brothers, we will take back your votes," and asked "Why did you kill our brothers?"¹⁸⁵ Cloaked in black, the traditional color of mourning, and green, the campaign color that had been transfigured into a color of protest, the crowd sang nationalist and anti-state revolutionary songs.¹⁸⁶ As will be discussed in subsequent chapters, revolutionary slogans and mourning ceremonies became powerful symbols and occasions for protest.

Perhaps no single day in post-election Iran was as breathtaking and memorable as June 15, 2009. According to Tehran's mayor, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, nearly three

¹⁸³ Anonymous. Email interview. 20 June 2009.

¹⁸⁴ "Sūgvari-ye jam'-i anboh-i mo'tarezān dar tehrān". *BBC Persian*. 18 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090618_ba-ir88-funeral-demo.shtml>.

¹⁸⁵ Hafezi, Parisa. "Thousands mourn Iranians killed in protests". *Reuters*. 18 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE55F54520090618>>.

¹⁸⁶ Iranriggedelect. "Massive Mourning Rally". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/M091xSOCNL8>>.

million people, the largest protest event since the revolution 30 years prior, marched on Freedom Square.¹⁸⁷ Sociologist Charles Kurzman, author of *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, argues that the larger the protests, the greater the participants feel a sense of “safety through numbers.”¹⁸⁸ The protestors *en route* to Freedom Square gave voice to this notion when they chanted, “Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid, we are all together” (*natarsīn, natarsīn, mā hameh bā ham hastīm*).¹⁸⁹

One participant effectively captured the sentiment behind the momentous occasion by offering his initial reaction when laying eyes on the massive march:

“I had heard that people were converging on Freedom Square so my friends and I drove there but nobody was around. We assumed that they hadn’t arrived yet so we decided to go find a parking spot that had easy access to a freeway in case paramilitaries attacked and we’d have to escape quickly. Finding a parking spot and getting back to the square took nearly 30 minutes. But when we got there, we began to feel the ground tremble from under our feet. I climbed a pedestrian cross bridge and got very emotional at what I saw. The march was so immense that I could not see the end of the approaching crowd. Tears filled my eyes because I was proud of my countrymen’s unity - it was a beautiful thing.”¹⁹⁰

The view from a civilian overpass directly over the immense crowd confirmed the size and magnitude of the march onto Freedom Square with protestors filling the main street

¹⁸⁷ The link to the source has since been deleted but the Internet proves that not even governments can exert total control over the medium of cyber space. In other words, nothing can fully be deleted from the Internet. As such, an Iranian activist uploaded footage of the day of protest onto YouTube. It is apparent that several million people indeed participated in the historic march. See Saeidkermanshah. “Protest continued – Protestors are going to Freedom (AZADI Sq)”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 15 June 2009. Accessed 7 August 2010. <https://youtu.be/9_hr7G4At84>. Classified American cables echoed the estimates as ranging from one to three million. Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., February 24, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RPODUBAI47_a.html.

¹⁸⁸ Kurzman, Charles. *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 123.

¹⁸⁹ MrDemocrature. “15th June 2009 millions protest in iran against election fraud in Iran”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 16 June 2009. Accessed 24 April 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FjQLC4w1XMY>>.

¹⁹⁰ Anonymous, Payman. Personal interview. 6 August 2010.

leading to the square literally as far as the eye could see.¹⁹¹ The sheer vastness of the crowd made it impossible to see where the protest began and where it ended—leaving one journalist, Maziar Bahari, who was imprisoned shortly after, to attest “that the horizon had become green.”¹⁹² Indeed, two years before Egypt’s Tahrir (Liberation) Square captured the world’s attention as the epicenter of the Arab Uprisings, Iranians converged by the millions on Azadi (Freedom) Square in Tehran.

Freedom Square was a focal point for crowd action during the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79 and is the site of annual state-sponsored mass marches marking the victory of the revolution. Before the revolution, however, it was known as Shahyad, ‘Remembrance of the King,’ which symbolized “Iran’s 2,500 unbroken years of monarchy” and was a symbol of the Shah’s White Revolution.¹⁹³ On December 10, 1978, the largest protest event in the history of revolutionary movement culminated in the royalist square, where millions gave new meaning to such public space by negating the monarchy’s ideological universe. One Iranian who witnessed the revolutionary gatherings at Azadi Square in 1978 returned as a journalist in 2009, observing that “the scene” reminded him “of the demonstrations against the shah.”¹⁹⁴ He interviewed a 54-year-old man who marched in both historic gatherings and likewise saw many parallels:

¹⁹¹ Saeidkermanshah. “Protest continued – Protestors are going to Freedom (AZADI Sq)”.

¹⁹² Bahari, Maziar. *Then They Came for Me: A Family’s Story of Love, Captivity, and Survival*. New York: Random House, 2011, pp. 77. *Tabnak* is one of the few remaining news sites inside Iran that has not taken down the pictures from the massive protest. See “Taṣāvir: tajamo’-i ārām-i mo’tareẓīn”. *Tabnak*. June 16, 2009. <<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=52048>>.

¹⁹³ Gage, Nicholas. “Protesters March for 2D Day in Iran; Violence is Limited”. *The New York Times*. 12 Dec 1978, pp. A1. The White Revolution was a series of reforms, of which land reform was its cornerstone, that Shah implemented in 1963 in order to avert a bloody revolution. He named the reforms in a manner that unscored the bloodless aspect of his “White Revolution.”

¹⁹⁴ Bahari, pp. 75-6.

“We walk along this route because it has taken us a long time to reach freedom since the revolution... I see many similarities between what happened then and now.”¹⁹⁵

In 2009, millions once again appropriated the same politically significant square, which had served as a rallying point in 1978-79 to demand the abolition of the monarchy, and used the public space to condemn the election results. In other words, the square that was associated with the Shah and his White Revolution during the Pahlavi dynasty—and was the scene of the most significant demonstration of the Iranian Revolution—served as the location where the Green Movement brought the largest upheaval in post-revolutionary Iran to a crescendo. Furthermore, belying allegations of hooliganism, the political crowd displayed increasing sophistication by using a repertoire of revolutionary slogans, songs, and nonviolent resistance to target the regime. Such street demonstrations are only one tool in the crowd’s toolbox of protest tactics.

V. The Crowd and the Symbolic Appropriation of the Past – “Allahu akbar”

The crowd demonstrated a high degree of ingenuity when it invoked history in order to give weight and meaning to their contemporary demands. Slogans, places of political significance like Freedom Square, important dates on Iran’s political calendar, and powerful methods of expressing opposition, all of which had their historical precedents rooted in Iran’s revolutionary past, were co-opted, subverted and re-programmed to convey dissatisfaction and opposition to the Islamic regime.

One such method was the tantalizing and highly symbolic nighttime rooftop chants of “Allahu akbar” (God is greatest), a common means by which people showed

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

their opposition to the monarchy and their support for the revolutionary movement in 1978-79.¹⁹⁶ ‘Allahu akbar,’ the cornerstone of the Islamic faith that affirms that there is no greater being than the Almighty, became a means by which revolutionaries in 1978 voiced their opposition to the Shah’s US-backed rule of Iran. Revolutionaries kept hope and the momentum of the revolution alive during the darkest days of the Shah’s military crackdown when the streets were unsafe for protest activity by going on their rooftops and repeatedly declaring two authoritative words: “Allahu akbar.” One contemporaneous observer noted that the tactic was “an ingenious way to harness the momentum of the marches, to literally raise the volume of fury and discontent...”¹⁹⁷ On December 2, 1979, for example, when the Shah had backtracked on political reforms and installed an emergency military government that imposed a strict 9 P.M. curfew, protesters emerging from evening prayers “almost exactly at 9 P.M.” shouting slogans against the monarchy. From the rooftops in “the poor and working-class neighborhoods, thousands cheered the demonstrators on by shouting their rallying cry over and over... ‘God is great.’”¹⁹⁸ These revolutionaries, wearing white burial shrouds signifying their readiness to die for the revolution, met their fate when “the sounds of machine-gun and automatic-weapons fire mingled with the chants.”¹⁹⁹

For three decades, the Islamic Republic has exalted such history to demonstrate the emotive power by which it established its authority, and “orders people out onto their

¹⁹⁶ Kurzman, pp. 119.

¹⁹⁷ Ebadi, Shirin. *Iran Awakening: A Memoir of Revolution and Hope*. New York: Random House, 2006, pp 36-7.

¹⁹⁸ Ibrahim, Youssef M. “Teheran Is Decked With Symbols of Death”. *The New York Times*. 2 Dec 1979, pp. 3.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

roofs on the twenty-second of *Bahman* [February 11th] in memory of those nights...”²⁰⁰
In 2009, a new generation of activists learned this lesson in a manner that contradicted the government’s aims.

Green activists revamped this tactic of “powerful passive resistance”²⁰¹ to express opposition to the Islamic government—an authority that came to power riding a wave of such innovative protest activity thirty years prior. In the words of one participant, “Allahu akbar” was “the symbol of the [Iranian] revolution.”²⁰² If shouting “Allahu akbar” in 1978 professed revolutionaries’ support for Khomeini, then in 2009 it proclaimed opposition to the system Khomeini bequeathed—the Islamic Republic.

The first night after the election results were announced, and after a day of clashes with security personnel, protestors across Iran took to their rooftops to chant “Allahu akbar” under the cover of darkness. One Iran correspondent claimed, “All of Tehran is shouting ‘Allahu akbar’ from rooftops.”²⁰³ The chants were so loud and numerous that it prompted one observer to refer to the phenomenon as the “wailing of wolves.” To ensure that the chants echoed across the country, Mousavi’s Facebook page relayed the information to users nationwide who were able to circumvent the government’s filtering of Facebook. Thus, those users who accessed Mousavi’s page on June 14, 2009, were advised to begin the “Allahu akbar” chants at 9:00 PM until 11:00 PM “tonight and every night.”²⁰⁴

²⁰⁰ Ebadi, 37.

²⁰¹ Rezaian, Jason. Telephone interview.

²⁰² V., Shahin. Personal interview. 14 April 2014.

²⁰³ Kamali Dehghan, Saeed. “Iran Disputed Elections: The Aftermath”.

²⁰⁴ Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. “E’tešāb, rāhpaymāi va tajamo’-i fardā, farmān-i allāh akbar-i emshab”. Facebook. 14 June 2009. Accessed 22 Jan 2014. <<http://goo.gl/kHZwzk>>.

The occurrence of the “Allahu akbar” chants, often times punctuated with “Death to the dictator,” served several important purposes. First and foremost, it was a way for the crowd to harness the power of the revolutionary past in order to express outrage at the present political situation. One veteran observer, who participated in the Iranian Revolution, noted, “The shouting from the rooftops already has some regime leaders thinking of 1978-79 rather than 1999.”²⁰⁵ 1999 was the year of the short-lived week-long student protests, whereas 1978-79 was the era of the revolution that brought the monarchy to its tumultuous end. In other words, the chants served as an indicator to the authorities that the 2009 uprising constituted a more formidable challenge than its more recent predecessor in 1999. Furthermore, it was a means by which the movement authenticated itself and dispelled accusations of serving a foreign plot in pursuit of a velvet revolution—a point affirmed by Mousavi: “A generation had been accused of having fallen out of religion. But it rose with the chants of Allahu akbar... How unjust are those whose minor self-interests propel them to declare this Islamic miracle a foreign plot and ‘velvet revolution.’”²⁰⁶

Additionally, the nighttime chants were also a means by which citizens reminded their compatriots that they were not alone in the struggle: “It’s the way we reassure ourselves that we are still here and we are still together,” says Nushin, a young housewife who never participated in oppositional activity prior to the 2009 protests.²⁰⁷ She noted,

²⁰⁵ Deputy Principal Officer Sandra Oudkirk, Istanbul, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, June 17, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ISTANBUL220_a.html.

²⁰⁶ “Bayānīeh-ye shomāreh-ye panj-i mīr hussein mūsavī khaṭāb be mardom: nagozārīd dorūghgūyān va moteqalebān parcham-i defā’az nezām-i islāmī rā az shomā berobāyand”. *Gooya News*. 20 June 2009. <<http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2009/06/089606.php>>

²⁰⁷ Fletcher, Martin. “‘Wailing of wolves’ in Iran as cries of Allahu akbar ring from roofs”. *The Times*. 25 June 2009. Accessed 9 August 2010.

<http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article6572101.ece>.

“Even my little daughter joins me, and I can see how she feels that she is part of something bigger”²⁰⁸—sentiment that was echoed by a woman who recorded such anonymous resistance to the backdrop of her defiant words: “They can take away our SMS, our Internet, and our cell phones but we can show them with our cries of ‘Allahu akbar’ that we can still gather amongst ourselves.”²⁰⁹ This sense of solidarity was an especially pressing message a week after the elections when the state implemented a widespread crackdown stifling the street protests. Indeed, it enabled activists and sympathizers to continue to protest after security forces had “cleared” the streets.²¹⁰ The chant’s effect on unity even persuaded those unconvinced that fraud took place to participate as it was their way to show their sympathy for the protestors who were feeling the wrath of government repression.²¹¹

Alongside the theme of unity, the act was a discursive challenge in which even the state’s hegemony over God was shattered. One Tehran resident who recorded the chants as they pierced the night, referenced the regime’s derogatory remarks about the crowd to make her divine appeal:

“Once again cries of ‘Allahu akbar’ are rising – one of the most simple and effective ways to call people to come together. They can take away our text messaging, they can take away our Internet, they can even take away our phones, but with our cries of ‘Allah-o-Akbar’ we will show we can still come together. People are calling God with all their heart. Maybe their voices will shake the Kingdom of God. Defenseless people who have been called thugs and vagrants, defenseless people who have been called dirt and dust, defenseless people who have expressed

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ oldouz84. “ALLAHO AKBAR ARSHE ELAHI RA BE LARZE DAR KHAHAD AVARD 26 KHORDAD”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 16 June 2009. Accessed 9 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/ztE-z0ooXd4>>.

²¹⁰ Chargé d’Affaires Doug Silliman, Ankara, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, August 13, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ANKARA1185_a.html.

²¹¹ Doostdar, ‘Alireza. Email interview.

themselves with silent and peaceful protest, now at night from the Kingdom of God ask for help.”²¹²

It is important to note that the overtly religious nature of the chant should not distract from its oppositional significance; the chants are a popular means through which Iranians from all religious persuasions participated. Indeed, the same Tehran resident attested:

“Many of us don’t even believe in God, but each night we come and on God we call for the others, for those who died, for me, for you, for Iran. The voices are coming from far away. They [the chants] leave you shaken. They give you hope, but they also show helplessness. They show that there are still people searching for justice and show how defenseless they are – that the only thing left for them to do is cry ‘Allahu akbar.’”²¹³

Shouting “Allahu akbar” also served as a warning. Nushin, cognizant of Iran’s revolutionary past, noted, “This is what people did before the revolution and I hope it warns the regime about what could happen if it doesn’t change its way.”²¹⁴ Above all, it was a potent declaration of anti-state conviction best encapsulated by one Facebook user who reminded his compatriots to begin shouting “Allahu akbar” at a certain hour in order to “backhand this bastard cleric [Khamenei] in the mouth.”²¹⁵

Although crude political language, there is something historically forceful about hitting somebody “in the mouth” in the context of modern Iran. Specifically, Khomeini gave his first official address to the nation upon his triumphant return to Iran in February, 1979, memorably proclaiming that he will “hit” the last vestiges of the Shah’s

²¹² Mightierthan. “Poem for the Rooftops of Iran: Defenseless People”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 16 June 2009. Accessed 9 August 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6bbEMxo2Xo>>.

²¹³ Mightierthan. “Poem for the Rooftops: Let Us Not Forget”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 21 June 2009. Accessed 9 August 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QocvegFNuzc>>.

²¹⁴ Fletcher, Martin. “‘Wailing of wolves’ in Iran as cries of Allahu akbar ring from roofs”.

²¹⁵ Sabz, Mani. “Emshab alaho akbar saat 22 faramosh nashe baraye to dahani zadan be in akhound harom zade.V.”. Facebook Comment. 30 Dec 2009.

government²¹⁶ “in the mouth.”²¹⁷ For an entire generation of Iranians who had been reeling under the heavy boot of the Shah’s military apparatus and vaunted intelligence agency, SAVAK, and were on the verge of their revolution’s final push towards total victory²¹⁸, such words from the aged leader of the unfolding revolution was full of redemptive revolutionary zeal. In other words, after more than three and a half decades of the Shah’s rule, and after more than a year of revolutionary struggle on the streets of Iran, this frail 76-year-old man uttered such simple but powerful words that gave potent affirmation to millions who were on the cusp of bringing the hated and once-feared government to a definitive end. In 2009, in a twist of political fate, Iranian citizens were likewise proclaiming their self-affirmation by symbolically striking Khomeini’s successor “in the mouth” through electrifying and historically charged nighttime chants of “Allahu akbar.”

Indeed, the appropriation of such protest activity with a revolutionary precedent is a powerful means by which to cast doubt both on the election’s legitimacy and that of the regime as a whole. For a government that bases its legitimacy on religious discourse and symbolism to face protestors shouting “Allahu akbar” in opposition must have been highly disturbing for the state—a state that came to power atop nighttime chants of “Allahu akbar” three decades prior. “Allahu akbar” the quintessential Islamic slogan, on

²¹⁶ By “last vestiges of the Shah’s government,” I mean the state institutions, including the army, and the then recently appointed premiership of Shahpour Bakhtiar—an opposition leader who broke ranks with his National Front to take the reins of power in order to prevent the total collapse of the system. He subsequently fled the country and was assassinated in France 12 years later by agents of the Islamic Republic.

²¹⁷ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Ghayreqānūnī būdan-i majles va dowlat-i manšūb-i shāh va mafāsed-i rezhīm”. 1 Feb 1979. Tehran. Vol. 6, pp. 16. <http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=6&tid=7>.

²¹⁸ The Shah fled Iran on January 16, 1979. Khomeini returned to Iran after 14 years of exile on February 1, 1979. Ten days later, the revolution was completed after a two-day armed insurrection spearheaded by guerrilla groups, mass defections in the armed forces, a revolutionary seizure of Iran’s police station, army barracks, and state radio and television stations, and the announcement of the military’s neutrality.

par with “There is no god but God,” predates the emergence of the Islamic Republic by nearly a millennium and a half, and came to be an integral part of the state’s set of “universal truths” in the modern era. After the election, however, it was not negated the way Gramsci outlined as a necessary precondition to obtaining “true consciousness,” but rather was altogether appropriated and redirected as a nonviolent assault on the state’s ideological monopoly and hegemony over the “sacred.” In doing so, “God” no longer belonged strictly to the state, but was also on the rooftops of those who invoked His emotive power against the Islamic government.

The rooftop chants were not the only means of protest appropriated from Iran’s revolutionary past. The government’s stifling and systematic response to the post-election demonstrations prompted a new approach for crowd action that was likewise ingenuous and historically significant.

VI.I. The Crowd and the Symbolic Appropriation of the Past: Iran’s Political Calendar

On the first Friday after the elections, the country’s supreme leader, Ayatollah ‘Ali Khamenei delivered Iran’s most important sermon at the University of Tehran. Typically, “Friday prayers are led by a rotating roster of imams throughout Iran, chosen by the supreme leader... to relay his message every week... When Khamenei delivers the sermons himself, making a rare public appearance, it means there is something very important at stake.”²¹⁹ As such, he endorsed the legitimacy and fairness of the vote and called for an end to the demonstrations, accused America and Israel of a conspiracy to

²¹⁹ Bahari, pp. 87.

provoke unrest in order to stage a velvet revolution akin to the one that transpired in Georgia in 2003, and warned that if the demonstrations continued then the government would not be held responsible for the blood that would inevitably be shed.²²⁰ Though clashes had occurred throughout the prior week and dozens had been killed, Khamenei's Friday sermon²²¹ amounted to a declaration of war against the protesters in which compromise was impossible and a total end to the street protests was the state's only objective. From that moment onwards, a comprehensive crackdown was fully implemented.

According to one observer, the security operation was overwhelming:

“They [security personnel] have blocked off the roads and have not been allowing anyone to approach the meeting point for the protest. Friends who tried to go, returned scared and alarmed, they warned that we should stay home and not even think about leaving. Everyone is calling their friends and family to tell them about the number of police who have lined the streets leading up to Enghelab and Azadi (Freedom) Square. Anyone who has seen the police are advising others to not come close to the area. I have heard reports from friends working in different parts of town that the police are out on the streets in large numbers (Vanak Square, Villa Street and many other main areas leading up to Enghelab Ave). The fully geared Special Forces police and the helmet-wearing plain clothed Basijis (militiamen) are staged all over Tehran's major squares and their presence has been stern and threatening.”²²²

Another observer noted that there were various groups of security personnel each of which served a different function. One group, for example, aimed to disperse gatherings, make arrests using stun grenades to demobilize demonstrators in order “to bind their hands and put them into black vans,” and engage in intelligence gathering work such as

²²⁰ Khamenei, 'Ali. “Khotbehāyeh namāz jom'eh-ye tehrān”. *leader.ir*. 19 June 2009. <<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=7190>>.

²²¹ It is interesting to note that the state hailed the Friday sermon as “historic” while activists called it “the Sermon of Blood.” See, for example, “Sokhanān-i rahbarī-ye enqelāb dar namāz jom'eh-ye tārikhī-ye tehrān”. *Alef*. 19 June 2009. <<http://alef.ir/vdcawany.49n0u15kk4.html?47820>>.

²²² Anonymous. Email Interview. 20 June 2009.

taking photographs and filming videos of activists.²²³ Another served as a deterrent by lining up in rows in order to prevent entry into main squares such as Revolution Square.²²⁴ In other words, the security operation to bring the protests to an end was wide-ranging, systematic, and very effective.

Khamenei's speech and subsequent crackdown, however, did not address or assuage the crowd's grievances. In fact, Khamenei's endorsement of Ahmadinejad and the election results, and his decision to unleash the security forces as a solution to the protests meant that he was now party to the conflict on the side of the incumbent and against the demonstrators. Consequently, widespread resentment persisted and the demonstrators had a new target in Khamenei and the Islamic system that he personified and over which he presided. Thus, since he left little room for compromise and the protesters' demands remained unfulfilled, they continued with their protest movement in order to give voice to their grievances while evolving and adapting to the new security situation.

As security personnel flooded the streets in even greater numbers than before, the crowd needed a new kind of political cover to come out into the open and protest the regime. Sociologist Charles Tilly argued:

“When connected dissidents face authoritarian regimes, they commonly have three choices: bide their time in silence, engage in forbidden and clandestine acts of destruction, or overload the narrow range of tolerated occasions for assembly and expression. In the third case, criticism of regimes often occurs in the course of public holidays and ceremonies – Mardi Gras, inaugurations, funerals, royal weddings, and the like – when authorities tolerate larger and more public assemblies than usual.”²²⁵

²²³ Kay McGowan, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., June 23, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI258_a.html.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Tilly, Charles. *The Politics of Collective Violence*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 73.

Iran's political and cultural calendar provided a plethora of opportunities in which the government tolerated "larger and more public assemblies than usual" but with unexpected consequences. The crowd, reeling from the security crackdown, improvised using specific state-sanctioned political holidays as a cover and opportunity for continued action.

From the Islamic government's onset, regime authorities have worked tirelessly to utilize politically significant calendar days—especially days pertinent to the Iranian Revolution—as a means by which to have the masses and the regime walk in step. Million-man marches, the main engine of the Iranian Revolution, are recreated and re-enacted in order to harness the history of the revolution for the sake of legitimating the product of that revolution, the Islamic Republic. Such days abound: Jerusalem Day²²⁶, which falls on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadhan; the anniversary of the seizure of the US embassy on November 4; the anniversary of the assassination of Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti and other top leaders on June 28 (*haft-i tīr*); Student Day (December 7); the ten days leading up to the triumph of the revolution and culminating on the revolution's final victory (February 11); and others are all official days on which the regime mobilizes shows of support. What's more, the government blurred the line between state and religion by incorporating Islamic holidays into its political calendar—the most significant of which is *Ashura*, the anniversary of the 7th century martyrdom of Imam Husayn, a Shi'ite figure of monumental religious and historical importance. Under

²²⁶ Although Iran is based on the solar calendar, the Islamic calendar relies on the lunar calendar. Thus, lunar-based religious holidays fall on different days on the solar calendar. In 2009, Jerusalem Day occurred on September 18, 2009.

the cover of such politically important days, the crowd turned events on their heads by emerging onto the streets in order to denounce the election results and the regime.

VI.II. The Crowd and the Symbolic Appropriation of the Past: Beheshti's Anniversary

Mir Hussein Mousavi, opposition leader and Ahmadinejad's main challenger in the presidential election, gave voice to the strategy of appropriating Iran's religio-political calendar for crowd action when he said:

“The most important issue is that the vast ‘Green’ social movement that has been formed across the country... should use all these religious celebrations by relying on their creativity... Every day, we can have an agenda for illuminating and for pursuing the long-term goals of our extensive ‘Green’ movement.”²²⁷



²²⁷ Mousavi, Mir Hussein. “Matn-i kāmel-i sokhanān-i mīr ḥusseīn-i musavī dar jam‘-i farhangīān va tashakol hāyeh mo‘alemān-i īrān”. *Ghalam News*. 27 July 2009. Accessed 16 August 2010. <https://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=112950157605>.

Figure 2.1. Mousavi's Facebook page published what is presumably an activist-made image, visualizing the strategy of co-opting state-sanctioned political holidays in order to stage anti-regime marches and rallies. Posted on November 26, 2009, the goal was to underscore the continuity of the movement by demonstrating on Student Day (December 7) as noted at the bottom with the clock's long hand, which in the color of the movement points to the next Green day of action—the preceding one of which is highlighted at the right as the anniversary of the embassy seizure, or “National Struggle Against Global Arrogance Day.” The caption plans two protest actions: One a march starting at 4:00 pm from Revolution Square to Freedom Square, and the other a protester-induced traffic jam to block the main roads at 6:00 pm.²²⁸

The crowd, however, had already begun refining its strategy, or perhaps informed Mousavi of the strategy through its actions. (Figure 2.1) Before Mousavi's speech, a large crowd gathered in front of the Qoba mosque to mark the twenty-eighth anniversary of the June 28th bombing²²⁹ that killed many top leaders of the Islamic Republic, of which Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti was the most significant. Beheshti was one of the founders of the Islamic Republic and one of the most powerful men in post-revolutionary Iran. Through his leadership of the Islamic Republic Party, he played an integral role in facilitating the militant clergy's consolidation of power during the post-revolutionary power struggle that eventually led to the decimation of virtually all the other factions that united to make the revolution. Furthermore, he was instrumental in the writing of the Islamic constitution and implementing it when he led the campaign to Islamize Iran's judiciary, one of the most important power centers in the burgeoning Islamic system.

²²⁸ Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. “Like clockwork - Co-opting political holidays”. 26 Nov 2009. Facebook Post.

<<https://www.facebook.com/mousavi/photos/a.172726419453.118347.45061919453/186592639453/?type=3&theater>>.

²²⁹ There is still considerable debate about who carried out the bombing. The government blamed the MKO, which at the time was waging an armed struggle, of which suicide attacks, mail bombs, and hit-and-run tactics were commonly deployed against the post-revolutionary clerical consolidation of power. Many, however, argue that regime insiders orchestrated the mass assassination as part of an internal power struggle. Those who are of the latter opinion credit Rafsanjani with the bombing as part of campaign of eliminating his rivals, namely Beheshti. That he is believed to have been expected at the meeting but was absent or was present but left early gives some credence to the theory.

Killed in a bomb blast in 1981, the government has since lionized his “martyrdom” as a sacrifice for the Islamic system.²³⁰ Accordingly, “his martyrdom is trumpeted annually by the Islamic Republic in a commemoration ceremony open to the public—and as such, fully licensed.”²³¹ In sum, the day provided the crowd with a legal loophole to gather in a climate where crowd action was otherwise forcefully prohibited.

There could be no doubt that the commemoration enjoyed a large presence of Green Movement activists. After Beheshti’s son and a top Mousavi adviser, ‘Alireza, concluded his speech, the crowd broke out chanting “Greetings to Beheshti, Salutations to Mousavi” (*dorūd bar beheshtī, salām bar mūsavī*).²³² By placing Mousavi’s name along that of Beheshti’s, the crowd subverted a day typically reserved for mourning one of the founding fathers of the system in order to denounce that very system. That Beheshti was one of Khomeini’s most trusted lieutenants and a regime architect didn’t prevent the crowd from appropriating Beheshti’s legacy in order to present their case for Mousavi. What’s more, the state, with all its organizational and military capacity, was seemingly disarmed and unprepared to deal with the ingenuity of these Green Movement activists who legally seized the opportunity of Beheshti’s commemoration to register their protest. Indeed, had the government prevented the crowd from congregating at the Qoba mosque, it would have effectively disallowed people from “observing” the “martyrdom” of one of the regime’s most revered personalities. The crowd transformed the anniversary into a rally, reminiscent of the pre-election atmosphere, as campaigners-

²³⁰ Beheshti was the head of the Islamic Republican Party and spearheaded the campaign to Islamize Iran’s judiciary system.

²³¹ Mahtafar, Tara. “Beheshti’s Ghost”. *Tehran Bureau*. 28 June 2009. Accessed 10 August 2010. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/06/beheshtis-ghost.html>>.

²³² Freelran4life. “Front of Ghoba mosque in Tehran”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 28 June 2009. Accessed 10 August 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7njmARTzzKU>>.

turned-protesters raised their hands above their heads clapping and chanting in unison: “O’Husayn, Mir Hussein.”²³³

When people heard the rumor that Mousavi had arrived, the “People, hands raised in the 'V' sign, as far as the eye could see in both directions down the street, [began] chanting pro-Mousavi slogans. The chorus spread like lightening, and indoors erupted as well with fervid chanting.”²³⁴ When they heard that mosque officials had barred him from entering the mosque compound, the crowd of 4,000 inside went onto the streets chanting, “Long live Karoubi, long live Mousavi.”²³⁵ Furthermore, marchers on Shari‘ati Street leading up to the mosque shouted “Allahu akbar,” “Death to the dictator,” and “The Iranian will die before accepting humiliation and suffering” (*īrānī mīmīrad, zellat nemīpazīrad*).²³⁶

George Rudé notes that slogans serve a particular function such as “to unify the crowd itself and to direct its energies toward precise targets and objectives.”²³⁷ The slogans help explain the crowd’s motives and the significance of the occasion “as [the slogans] may help to throw further light on the event itself and tell us something of the social and political aims of those that took part in it.”²³⁸ Indeed, the last slogan, “The Iranian will die before accepting humiliation and suffering,” especially underscores the efficacy of the crowd’s use of history.

²³³ Khajesharif. “Yā hussein, mīr hussain – tajamo‘-i e‘terāzāmīz-i mardom – masjīd-i qobā”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 28 June 2009. Accessed 10 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/oney1QF03iM>>.

²³⁴ Mahtafar, Tara. “Beheshti’s Ghost”.

²³⁵ TheElection88. “Karoobi among the people in Ghoba street”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 28 June 2009. Accessed 10 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/TZupydS90jY>>.

²³⁶ SamaniAli. “Tehran Shariaty St. 28 June 2009”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 28 June 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/B2vjeXJk6Jc>>.

²³⁷ Rudé, pp. 245.

²³⁸ Rudé, pp. 11.

The slogan was popularized during the Iranian Revolution of 1978-79, which attests to the degree of the crowd's historical awareness and its ability to harness that history to its advantage. In sum, they were using slogans from the Iranian Revolution on the day of the "martyrdom" of one of the founders of the product of the revolution—the Islamic Republic—in order to denounce a system in which its head is considered "the Leader of the Revolution." In doing so, they contested the ownership of Beheshti's anniversary and the slogans of the revolution in order to cast doubt on the state which in part rested its ideological legitimacy on that revolutionary history.

The co-opting of Beheshti's anniversary served as a key juncture in the unfolding of the protest movement. The state's inability to prevent activists from gathering under such a political umbrella convinced organizers of the utility of such a tactic—one that was replicated in a more organized and systematic manner as the uprising continued sporadically in the coming months. In addition to political days on Iran's calendar, such historically poignant slogans were also appropriated and turned against the regime—a common strategy revisited throughout the post-election turmoil. The method carries enormous symbolic value as such slogans were once used to denounce dictatorship in 1978-79, yet the crowd reprogrammed and re-deployed these profound and often poetic declarations in order to draw a parallel between then and 2009; that dictatorship endures in Iran and so does the resistance against it.

VI.III. The Crowd and the Symbolic Appropriation of 'Sacred' Political Space: The Friday Sermon

Sociologists such as Tilly stress the importance of 'opportunity' when understanding mobilization for collective action. In the run-up to the election, the

occasion of the presidential campaigns prompted the temporary suspension of state repression thereby affording activists and campaigners the opportunity to mobilize. A week after the election and consequent protests, however, Khamenei ordered a crackdown in an attempt to end street protests, which prompted the opposition to evolve and adapt to the reinstated and more stifling security climate. Yet, divisions at the top provided space to maneuver as political leaders within the state openly backed the opposition.

Parsa, referencing both Tilly and Korpi, opines that

“Another key variable affecting mobilization and collective action, especially by groups with few resources, is the structure of opportunities, or balance of power, among contenders. In general, as the balance of power changes in favor of aggrieved groups over their adversaries, it increases the likelihood that such groups will instigate conflicts. On the basis of this principle, the likelihood of insurgency by aggrieved but weakly organized groups increases under the following conditions: when weakly organized groups anticipate a favorable response from government authorities or are able to form alliances with more powerful groups, such as a segment of the dominant class. Such situations arise especially when a reformist government comes to power, promising social change, or when the dominance class is divided. Under such conditions, weak aggrieved groups will benefit from the resources and support of others to mobilize for action.”²³⁹

Ayatollah ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the billionaire “consummate insider”²⁴⁰ who in 2009 was the chairman of two powerful government institutions, the Expediency Council²⁴¹ and the Assembly of Experts²⁴², has long been one of the most politically and

²³⁹ Parsa, pp. 23-4.

²⁴⁰ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 10, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI532_a.html.

²⁴¹ The main purpose of the Expediency Discernment Council of the System, or the Expediency Council in short, is to arbitrate between the parliament and the Guardian Council. The fate of legislation passed by the parliament but vetoed by the Guardian Council is decided by the Expediency Council. The parliament-approved legislation that contradicts Islamic law may still be ratified by the Expediency Council if that legislation is deemed to serve the greater good. The governing principle is *maṣlaḥat*, or the interest of

financially powerful people in post-revolutionary Iran, and openly championed the opposition in defiance of Khamenei and Ahmadinejad. In doing so, his support and that of many others within the government effectively meant that the government was not speaking with one voice with regards to the protest movement thereby creating the space for the movement to endure, which bore fruit on July 17, 2009. Rafsanjani was permitted to give a Friday sermon in the country's most important and politically sensitive Friday Prayer, the congregation hall at the University of Tehran. His Friday sermon provided Green activists the opportunity to once again gather as they did with Beheshti's anniversary and protest the election results and the state. Alternative media sources advised activists to avoid wearing green armbands until they were inside—presumably to ensure admission into the hall—and to chant “the opposite” of the state-sanctioned slogans.²⁴³ That they did so during a Friday Prayer is also very telling of the larger historical prowess of the movement.

The nationwide mosque network was instrumental in mobilizing the population for the revolution in 1978-79, as it was with the Arab Uprisings of 2011 and beyond. The mosque has a natural organizing capacity—especially on Fridays when Muslims, pious or not²⁴⁴—congregate for Friday prayers. Parsa argues that the mosque provided the militant clergy, their pious followers, and political allies the “autonomous organizations

the community. Some scholars of Islam have opined that the incorporation of such a principle has resulted in Iran's Shi'ite system becoming “Sunnified” in this specific regard.

²⁴² The Assembly of Experts is a council of Islamic theologians who are vested with the power to appoint, and in theory, to dismiss the Supreme Leader. The council, for instance, was instrumental in appointing Khamenei to succeed Khomeini after his death in 1989.

²⁴³ Chargé d'Affaires Don Lu, Baku, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., July 21, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09BAKU575_a.html.

²⁴⁴ One does not have to be “pious” to attend Friday prayers and some do so merely because of custom or to find solace.

and resources, communication networks, and favorable opportunities”²⁴⁵ to carry forth the revolution in 1978-79—a point affirmed by one contemporaneous dissident lawyer who contrasted his disadvantaged organizational capacity with that of the clergy:

“We have not been allowed to form political parties. We have no newspapers of our own. But the religious leaders have a built-in communications system. They easily reach the masses through their weekly sermons in the mosques and their network of mullahs throughout the nation.”²⁴⁶

Parsa prophetically noted that the Islamist consolidation of power after the revolution and the subsequent state takeover of the mosques effectively meant that the nationwide mosque network could not serve as a launching pad for dissident activity as it did during the Iranian Revolution.²⁴⁷ Indeed, since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, the Office of the Supreme Leader is responsible for appointing all the Friday Prayer leaders of the country’s mosques. In doing so, the state ensures the political obedience of the imams and precludes the mosques from becoming centers of dissidence. One month after the elections in 2009, however, both divisions at the upper echelons of power and the organizational capacity of the mosque were exploited to once again facilitate protest activity.

On July 17, 2009, in a bid to appease Rafsanjani and the opposition, the government allowed him, a staunch Mousavi supporter and bitter Ahmadinejad rival, to give the country’s main Friday sermon at the University of Tehran. In addition to the presence of expected pro-regime attendees, countless opposition activists amassed under the cover of the Friday sermon to renew their denunciations of the election and the

²⁴⁵ Parsa, pp. 22-3.

²⁴⁶ “The Shah’s Divided Land”. *Time*. 18 Sept 1978, pp. 35.

²⁴⁷ Parsa, pp. 314.

system that ratified them. That they did so using the pulpit and University of Tehran's prayer hall only adds potency to their actions and demands.

Inside, Rafsanjani invoked the Iranian Revolution, his role in that "sacred" history, and his proximity to Khomeini to authenticate his legitimacy and his critical words:

"What you are hearing now is from a person who has been with the revolution moment by moment from the very beginning of the struggle, which our leader Imam [Khomeini] started. We are talking about 60 years ago until today. I know what the Imam wanted and am familiar with the basis of the Imam's thoughts."²⁴⁸

After invoking his revolutionary credentials to authenticate his words, he proceeded to discuss the election results and aftermath in a diplomatic manner that nevertheless favored the opposition:

Doubt [about the election results] came down on our nation like the plague. Of course, there are two separate currents. There is a group of people who have no doubts... But there is also another group whose numbers are not few and include a great section of our erudite and knowledgeable people, who say: "We doubt." We should take measures to remove this doubt."²⁴⁹

The seasoned politician adept at balancing his interests—opposition towards the status quo but without undermining the system's continuity and his political power—urged unity, the release of political prisoners, and a relaxation of the opposition's media, all while beseeching attendees "to not contaminate the position and the sanctuary of Friday prayers by inappropriate comments and slogans," to which the crowd responded with cries of "Freedom! Freedom!"²⁵⁰

²⁴⁸ Shabakeh-ye khabarī-ye tebiān-i īrān. "Film-i kāmel-i namāz jom'eh-ye 26 tīr 1388". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 17 July 2009. Accessed 20 August 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N1OIYIESRDU>>.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁵⁰ "Rafsanjani: Iran in crisis". *Al Jazeera English*. 17 June 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/07/200971793040418381.html>>.

Although many activists were able to attend the sermon bringing the hall to full capacity, thousands more gathered outside. Numerous sources attested to the vastness of the crowd. One young participant, for example, observed that it was the largest Friday prayer gathering he had seen in his short life,²⁵¹ while state media acknowledged the presence of hundreds of thousands²⁵², and the opposition claimed that one million people attended.²⁵³

Walking alongside the university, the crowd denounced Ahmadinejad's victory by shouting "Liar, shame on you, leave the country" (*dorūghgū, ḥayā kon, mamlekato rahā kon*) and "O'Husayn, Mir Hussein." As they passed the university's main gate, the crowd walked passed the police, who were in riot gear and standing guard behind an iron gate, prompting marchers to ask: "Brother soldier, why kill your brother?" (*barādar arteshī, cherā barādar koshī?*)²⁵⁴—a slogan from the Iranian Revolution particularly effective in sapping the morale of conscripts. Indeed, protestors in 1978-79 famously marched passed soldiers posing this very same question as they pleaded with their fellow countrymen to avoid fratricide, causing many to defect to the revolutionary movement.²⁵⁵ Invoking the bygone era, they also chanted "The canon, the tank, the basiji, no longer have an effect" (*tūp, tānk, basījī, dīgar aṣar nadārad*).²⁵⁶ The *basij* is the regime's hard-line paramilitary force used to violently disperse crowds and, under normal

²⁵¹ V., Shahin. Personal Interview.

²⁵² Timothy Richardson, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., July 20, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/O9RPODUBAI293_a.html.

²⁵³ Daragahi, Borzou and Ramin Mostaghim. "Tehran's streets erupt after a key cleric speaks". *The Los Angeles Times*. 18 July 2009 <<http://articles.latimes.com/2009/jul/18/world/fg-iran-prayer18>>.

²⁵⁴ Irsngreen1. "namāz jome'h-ye tehrān dāneshgāh-i tehrān". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 17 July 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FRQQydgYBLU>>.

²⁵⁵ Keddie, Nikki. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 255.

²⁵⁶ Irsngreen. "namāz jome'h-ye tehrān dāneshgāh-i tehrān". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 17 July 2009. Accessed 11 January 2014. <<http://youtu.be/lkgW44w9tul>>.

circumstances, serve as the country's morality police and reserve force.²⁵⁷ “The canon, the tank, the machine gun, no longer have an effect” (*tūp, tānk, mosalsal, dīgar aṣar nadārad*)—the original slogan from the Iranian Revolution—was appropriated and re-configured against the *basij* and the regime that used them to suppress the crowd.

Such reprogramming of slogans from the Iranian Revolution demonstrates how the aims, meaning, and symbolism of the Iranian Revolution were being contested. The state rests part of its legitimacy on the revolution that brought it to power, and it has drilled the population, especially the youth who were raised under its authority, in the images, symbols, slogans, and history of that revolution. On the occasion of Rafsanjani's Friday sermon, activists co-opted those revolutionary slogans and subverted them thereby infusing them with new meaning and purpose. If those slogans were designed to oppose the Shah's repression in 1978, then those slogans—slightly modified—now took aim at the Islamic government's repression in 2009. What's more, that they gave voice to such slogans during the occasion of a Friday Prayer, the quintessential Islamic space sacred to the Islamic Republic, further affirms that the Green Movement was determined to appropriate not just slogans important to the government, but even its public spaces—the very same ones that were used to mobilize the population for the Iranian Revolution that brought it to power.

The government was privy to the opposition strategy of using the ‘opportunity’ of political and religious events to gather and give continuity to the movement and its demands, and responded in kind. For instance, Khatami was scheduled to be the prayer

²⁵⁷ On the post-war mandate of the *basij*, see Ostovar, Afshon. *Guardians of the Islamic Revolution: Ideology, Politics, and the Development of Military Power in Iran (1979–2009)*. (PhD Thesis). University of Michigan, 2009, pp. 140-2.

leader for the Night of Power (*shab-i qadr* in Persian, *laylat al-qadr* in Arabic), the night Muslims believe the first Qur’anic verses were revealed to the Prophet Muhammad. The annual event, which in 2009 fell on September 8, typically takes place at Khomeini’s shrine, a site of national and transnational importance run by his grandson, Hassan Khomeini—a supporter of the opposition.

Reports abounded that the opposition was planning on using the event, as it did Rafsanjani’s sermon and the anniversary of Beheshti’s martyrdom, to “turn out in force as a show of strength.”²⁵⁸ Consequently, the government put pressure on Hassan Khomeini to prevent Khatami from speaking in the hope that it could control the event at the expense of the opposition’s strategy. Thus, the government was embarrassed and infuriated when Khomeini refused to disallow Khatami from speaking and instead canceled the event²⁵⁹—a tradition which for the past two decades had been broadcast to the nation from Khomeini’s shrine. The state’s aim was not to cause the event’s cancellation, but only to deprive the opposition of the ‘opportunity’ to stage a “show of strength.” That Khomeini shut down the event not only snubbed the government, but it prevented the authorities from presenting an image in which the post-election crisis was winding down and a sense of normalcy was returning to Iran.

To ensure that there was no doubt behind the meaning of his decision to cancel the event, Hassan Khomeini, who sparked controversy after being absent from Ahmadinejad’s inauguration, subsequently visited Mousavi’s advisor—‘Alireza

²⁵⁸ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., September 8 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI373_a.html.

²⁵⁹ “Marāsem-i shab-i ahyā-ye haram-i khomeinī laghv shod”. *Tabnak*. 4 September 2009. <<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=62560>>.

Beheshti—after his recent release from detention.²⁶⁰ Responding to the rebuke, state media along with allies in the conservative press attacked Khomeini, bemoaning: “The least that was expected was for you to not cancel the religious gathering at the holy shrine of the Imam for the sake of somebody like Khatami.”²⁶¹

Although the government also came out of the Night of Power incident bruised, it nevertheless succeeded in preventing the opposition from co-opting another state-sanctioned event to gather and register its protest. Days later, the government’s attempts to rob the opposition of another occasion for renewed protest met with continued success when it disallowed the annual commemoration of Ayatollah Taleqani’s death.

Iranian Marxists often referred to Taleqani, a black-turbaned cleric, as the red-turbaned cleric (*ākhūnd-i ‘amāmeḥ qermez*) to emphasize his populist worldview.²⁶² The Mujahidin-i Khalq Organization, for instance, a group that during the revolutionary period blended Islamic monotheism with Marxist economic theory²⁶³, continues to refer to the revolutionary as “Father Taleghani.”²⁶⁴

²⁶⁰ Arash Motamed. “Hamalāt-i jadīd-i kayhān va īrnā beh ḥassan khomeinī”. *Rooz Online*. 14 September 2009. <<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/archive/2009/september/14/article/-053a405c12.html>>.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² That Taleqani fused Islamic discourse with Marxist terminology certainly helped garner such a populous standing. Furthermore, Montazeri, who spent time with Taleqani in the Shah’s prisons, observed in his memoirs that Taleqani was exceptional in his warm relations with revolutionaries of various worldviews in prison. See Montazeri, Hossein ‘Ali. “Khāṭerāt: khāṭerātī rāje’ beh zendegī-ye āyatollāh ṭāleqānī”. Los Angeles: Ketab Corp, 2001, pp. 381-82. It’s important to also note that Taleqani’s son, Mojtaba, was a *Mujahid* who subsequently converted to Marxism. Rafiqdoost talks about Mojtaba’s problems with the regime after the revolution in some detail. See Rafiqdoost, Mohsen. *Barāye tārikh mīgūyam: khāṭerāt-i moḥsen-i rafiqdūst (1978-1989)*. Tehran: Andisheh Press, 2013, pp. 83. Abrahamian documents Mojtaba’s letter to his father whereby he outlines his conversion in spectacular fashion. See Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Iranian Mojahedin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 157-62.

²⁶³ I refer to the MKO’s ideology in the past tense intentionally. The closer to western and Israeli intelligence agencies and American neo-conservatives the group has grown, the further it has moved away from the radical ideology of its founders, many of whom died for those beliefs waging an armed struggle against the monarchy. See, Hersh Seymore. “Our Men in Iran?” *The New Yorker*. 5 April 2012. <<http://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/our-men-in-iran>>. I also refuse to call them “Marxist-

Taleqani, a principled and committed dissident who was a “symbol of revolutionary purity”²⁶⁵ and “commanded the streets of the capital,”²⁶⁶ was critical of the post-revolutionary clerical consolidation of power, opposed the imposition of the *hijab*—a state mandate he believed was intended to prompt women to stay at home²⁶⁷—and specifically objected to the establishment of the *vilāyat-i faqīh*.²⁶⁸ The first post-

Islamists,” which was a propaganda label deployed by the Shah to attack and discredit the MKO as a group that was “eclectic” in its naïve and deviant blending of Islam and Marxism. See Mohammad Shanehchi. Interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, 4 March 1983, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 2 (seq. 48). Accessed 30 April 2015. Massoud Rajavi, the MKO’s leader (along with his wife), argues that they are not only Muslims, but believers in the “true Islam,” and found it incredibly insulting when after the revolution Khomeini required Rajavi to profess his faith. Rajavi, despite the insult, wrote a letter affirming his belief via the *shahada*, which was subsequently published on the front page of various Iranian dailies as “The Mujahidin professes their faith.” Rajavi says that he accepted this insult in order to deprive Khomeini of the ability to accuse the MKO of unbelief. See Massoud Rajavi. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 29 May 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 1 (seq. 20). Accessed 23 April 2015.

²⁶⁴ Rajavi, Maryam. “On 4Mar, 100th anniversary of Father Taleghani's birth, true spirit of Iran's anti-monarchical revolution, we honor his memory #iranelection”. 4 March 2010, 8:45 a.m. Tweet. Massoud Rajavi likewise referred to him as “Father Taleqani,” as well as the MKO’s “spiritual father.” See Massoud Rajavi. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 29 May 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 1 (seq. 20-1). Accessed 23 April 2015.

²⁶⁵ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., September 8 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI373_a.html.

²⁶⁶ Butler, David, et al. “The Mullah’s Men”. *Newsweek*. 12 Feb 1979, pp. 47. Taleqani was so popular that he garnered the most votes in the country’s first election for the Assembly of Experts—the council tasked with drafting a new constitution. See Abrahamian, Ervand. *The Iranian Mojahedin*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 54-5. His chief aide noted that Taleqani was especially close to university students, intellectuals, scholars and professors, with all of whom he was in constant contact through his Hedayat Mosque. It was such relationships, according to the aide, that set Taleqani apart from other clerics in terms of his thought, awareness, and understanding. Consequently, unlike other clerics, he never viewed the Marxists and secularists as his enemies. See Mohammad Shanehchi. Interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, 4 March 1983, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 2 (seq. 35, 48). Accessed 30 April 2015.

²⁶⁷ Taleqani, Tahereh. “Pedaram mokhālef-i hejāb-i ejbārī būd”. *Rahesabz*. 13 Sept 2013. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/75520/#taheretaleghani>>.

²⁶⁸ Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: bakhshī az khāṭerāt-i faqīh va marj’a ‘alīqadr hażrat-I āyatollāh al’ozmā montazerī”, pp. 455-8. Taleqani’s death after the election, however, removed a major obstacle to enshrining the *vilāyat-i faqīh* in the Islamic constitution. Consequently, his untimely death has prompted some to believe that hardliners killed him to facilitate their consolidation of power. Shanehchi details the suspicious circumstances regarding Taleqani’s death by heart attack. See Mohammad Shanehchi. Interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, 4 March 1983, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 2-3 (seq. 53-62). Accessed 30 April 2015.

revolutionary Friday prayer leader of Tehran,²⁶⁹ Taleqani died less than a year following the revolution after being “frequently ill, apparently due to torture suffered in nearly 15 years of imprisonment under the regimes of the shah and his father.”²⁷⁰ To this day, he continues to epitomize an Islamic revolutionary ideal that transcends the rigidity of clerical rule in Iran. Consequently, the Islamic government in 2009 feared that the annual commemoration of his life and his legacy would result in another opportunity for anti-regime protest, and required for the first time in 30 years that Taleqani’s family obtain permission to hold the gathering, which was expectedly denied upon his granddaughter’s official request.²⁷¹

The government willingly insulted its previous presidents such as Khatami, or the iconic personalities of its revolution, including Taleqani—a man many called the “Father of the Nation”²⁷²—because of the overriding necessity to prevent the protest movement from enduring through such opportune annual events. The inescapable problem for the government, however, was that it had programmed too many such events into Iran’s political calendar and not all could be cancelled.

VI.IV. The Crowd and the Symbolic Appropriation of the Past: The Anniversary of the US Embassy Takeover

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 441-443. This is an especially noteworthy point as it was the first time in the modern period in which the Friday prayer leader also gave a *khutba*, or sermon. According to Montazeri, clerics disallowed such sermons before the Islamic Republic, arguing that sermons were only permitted in the instance of just leadership. Thus, when the revolution toppled the unjust monarch thereby facilitating the emergence of an Islamic government, so the argument goes, it was permissible to reinstitute Friday prayers complete with sermons. Also, see Fischer, Michael. *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 217.

²⁷⁰ “Iran grief-stricken over Taleghani’s death”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 11 Sept 1979, pp. 4.

²⁷¹ “Posht-i pardeh-ye laghv-i bozorgdāsht-i āyatollāh ṭāleqānī dar ḥosseinī ershād va e’lām-i maḥal-i jadīd-i bargozārī-ye marāsem”. *Rahesabz*. 8 September 2009. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/1273/>>.

²⁷² Talegani, Tahereh. “Pedaram mokhālef ḥejāb-i ejbārī būd”.

Iran's political calendar has an abundance of holidays in which the Iranian government encourages its supporters to stage demonstrations in order to underscore its popular support and revolutionary roots. Mass rallies are especially important because they were the cornerstone by which millions of Iranians demanded the revolutionary overthrow of the monarchy in 1978-79, and the post-revolutionary government orchestrates such rallies to invoke the legacy of the popular movement thereby affirming its own revolutionary history and legitimacy. On November 4, 2009, however, Green Movement activists again used the occasion of a political holiday to renew their protest. The security climate, in full force since Khamenei delivered his first Friday sermon exactly one week after the June 12th elections, was relaxed in order to encourage government supporters to participate in the mass rally marking the anniversary of the US embassy seizure. Green Movement activists exploited the opportunity afforded to them by the temporary lifting of the ban against street gatherings and poured onto the streets to use the state's symbolism against itself. Once again, the historical backdrop behind the US embassy seizure is important in understanding the gravity of the activists' challenge on that day.

In 1953, in concert with the British and the Iranian army, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) staged the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadeq. The US embassy in Tehran served as the base of operations for Operation Ajax.²⁷³ Twenty-six years later the Shah, then in exile less than a year after the revolution's triumph, was admitted into the US for cancer treatment on October 22, 1979, provoking concern among revolutionaries that the US wanted to repeat history in Iran by

²⁷³ Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary Patrick Moon, Kathmandu, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, June 18, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09KATHMANDU520_a.html.

overthrowing the new revolutionary order and re-installing the ousted monarch. Revolutionary forces were especially alarmed after the publication of pictures showing a meeting between moderate Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan and Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi with President Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in Algiers.²⁷⁴ Fearing that the meeting and the arrival of the Shah into the US indicated another covert American plan for yet another coup in Iran, radical students breached the walls of the US embassy on November 4, 1979. After initially releasing some of the staff, 52 American personnel were held for 444 days. Khomeini did not order the attack, but its popularity prompted his endorsement for the capture of what he came to call "the Nest of Spies"²⁷⁵—a label that has become part of the official lexicon of the state.²⁷⁶ Khomeini initially planned to use the hostages as a bargaining chip to pressure the Carter administration to return the Shah²⁷⁷, who at the time of the embassy seizure was in New York for cancer treatment.²⁷⁸ Khomeini failed to secure the Shah's return to Iran to stand trial, yet he refused to order the release of the hostages even after the Shah left the US, as the hostages had become pawns in the post-revolutionary power struggle. Thus, when the moderates within the government were unable to have the embassy personnel released, they resigned from their positions marking what Khomeini referred to as the "Second Revolution" and a milestone in the Islamist takeover of all the reigns of political power.

²⁷⁴ Keddie, Nikki R. *Roots of Revolution: An Interpretive History of Modern Iran*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 262.

²⁷⁵ It is also often translated as "Den of Spies."

²⁷⁶ "13 ābān-i emsāl porkhorūsh tar az hamīsheh silī-ye mellat, ashk-i āmrīkā rā darāvārd". *Kayhan*. 4 Nov 2009. <<http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/880814/3.htm#other306>>.

²⁷⁷ The US and Iran were signatories to an extradition treaty that required the US to return Iranian citizens wanted in Iran.

²⁷⁸ "Iran may try American hostages as 'spies' unless shah returned". *The Jerusalem Post*. 19 Nov 1979, pp. 1.

Since 1979, marking the anniversary of the embassy seizure has been a state-sanctioned event to highlight the ongoing struggle with the US and imperialism. The day, officially known as “National Struggle Against Global Arrogance Day,”²⁷⁹ is designed to shed light on America’s interventionist role in pre-revolutionary Iran, the Middle East, and the wider world and to underscore the Iranian state’s revolutionary anti-imperialist credentials²⁸⁰ while also emphasizing Iran’s “will to remain independent.”²⁸¹ November 4, 2009, however, proved to be a unique day in the history of its commemoration.

Weeks before the event, organizers and supporters were preparing to co-opt and subvert the event, which the government could not prevent through cancellation because it was a national event and a fixture in the state’s political calendar. The Mousavi campaign used social media three weeks in advance to inform supporters who were able to circumvent government filters of the necessity to come out by the millions.²⁸² With official media either not covering Green protests or presenting such demonstrations in a negative light, the campaign urged voters to spread the news of the forthcoming event as “you are the media.”²⁸³

While thousands came out in solidarity with the regime and against the US and imperialism, a large crowd congregated at Haft-i Tir Square to continue protesting both the election results and the regime that ratified them. They did so as the first major anti-

²⁷⁹ “13 ābān-i emsāl porkhorūsh tar az hamīshe sīlī-ye mellat, ashk-i āmrīkā rā darāvārd”. *Kayhan*. 4 Nov 2009. <<http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/880814/3.htm#other306>>.

²⁸⁰ The day is most important for marking the anniversary of the embassy seizure, but it’s also historic for other reasons as well. The day coincides with the anniversary of when the Shah exiled Khomeini to Turkey in 1964, and when the Shah’s forces killed several protesters at the University of Tehran during the revolutionary upheaval in 1978.

²⁸¹ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., November 2, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI469_a.html.

²⁸² Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. “13 ābān”. Facebook. 14 Oct 2009. Accessed 22 Jan 2014. <<https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?pid=2494413&id=45061919453>>.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

regime gathering in nearly two months²⁸⁴ and despite the Revolutionary Guards warning that the “Iranian nation will not allow any group to impose itself and use diversionary and false slogans on 13 Aban [Nov. 4].”²⁸⁵

With green ribbons tied to their wrists and clenched in their hands, they once again appropriated and subverted slogans from the revolution strategically switching key operative words to make new slogans: “The canon, the tank, Kahrizak²⁸⁶ [detention center], no longer have an effect” (*tūp, tānk, kahrīzak, dīgar ašar nadārad*).²⁸⁷ They used yet another slogan from the revolution to attack the head of the Guardian Council, the conservative body that affirmed the election results: “Damn you Jannati, you are the nation’s enemy” (*jannatīye la’natī, to doshman-i mellatī*).²⁸⁸ The original slogan

²⁸⁴ The last major demonstration until November 4 occurred during the Quds Day rallies on September 18—the subject of the next chapter.

²⁸⁵ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., November 2, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI469_a.html.

²⁸⁶ Kahrizak is a detention facility that gained notoriety when three activists arrested for protesting the election results died under torture. The government denied that their deaths resulted from physical abuse and blamed their deaths on meningitis. It was only with the death of Mohsen Rouhalamini, the son of a prominent conservative official who headed the Ministry of Health’s Pasteur Institute and served as an adviser to the other conservative presidential candidate, Mohsen Rezaei, that such allegations of prisoner abuse gained traction in the eyes of the authorities. Consequently, Khamenei ordered the closure of the facility in July, 2009. Karroubi, however, persisted and disallowed the government to put the issue to rest quietly, and penned a strongly worded letter to speaker of the parliament, Ali Larijani, claiming that he had documented proof of both torture and rape. An official investigation ruled out rape but acknowledged the deaths were the result of prisoner abuse and laid blame with Tehran’s Prosecutor General Saeed Mortazavi, who effectively became the “fall guy” for the government. By that point, *Kaleme* noted that a fourth prisoner, Ramin Aqazadeh, had also died at Kahrizak. The prisoner abuse both discredited the government but certainly also created a sense of fear for many activists who dreaded such a potential fate. See Timothy Richardson, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al, July 27, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI301_a.html; “E’lām āmādegi-ye karūbī barāye erā’eh-ye mostanadāt nāmehash beh mas’ūlan-i nezām”. *Aftab News*. 18 Aug 2009. Accessed 13 May 2015. <https://goo.gl/iE14n0>. “‘Rāmīn āqāzādeh’ chahāromīn qorbānī-ye kahrīzak mo’arefi shod”. *Kaleme*. 23 Jan 2010. Accessed 13 May 2015. <<http://www.kaleme.com/1388/11/03/klm-9298/>>; Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., January 12, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RPODUBAI11_a.html.

²⁸⁷ UNITY4IRAN. “Iran Tehran 4 Nov 09 Shariati St Seyed Khandan Protest P37”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 4 November 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/WGqGiXi0Ct8>>.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*.

unequivocally stated: “Shah you American, you are God’s enemy” (*ey shāh-i emrīkāyī, to doshman-i khodāyī*).

Instead of the typical anti-American slogans, the crowd usurped Khomeini’s 1979 rhetoric in order to condemn one of the few countries that congratulated Ahmadinejad’s victory: “The Russian embassy is ‘the Nest of Spies’” (*lāneh-ye jāsūsīyeh, sefārat-i rūsīyeh*).²⁸⁹ Green activists specifically targeted Russia since their neighbor to the north was perceived to be protecting the regime.²⁹⁰

What’s more, the marchers brazenly shouted, “Khamenei is a murderer, his authority is null and void” (*khāmeneī qāteleh, velāyatash bāteleh*)²⁹¹, and committed acts that were illegal and simply unfathomable before the post-election turmoil. In one such incident, the crowds chanted “O’Husayn, Mir Hussein,” as one protestor climbed atop a billboard of Khamenei and tore it down to loud cheers and hands raised.²⁹²

They even took aim at the physicality of Khamenei’s body, of which his right arm lost its function after a mail bomb nearly claimed his life during the post-revolutionary power struggle when many of the Islamic Republic’s early leadership died in bomb blasts, hit-and-run operations, and even suicide attacks.²⁹³ His disabled right arm is a potent reminder that he derives his revolutionary credentials not only through his proximity to the Iranian Revolution’s undisputed leader, Khomeini, but also from the fact that he physically contributed to the struggle by serving considerable time as a dissident

²⁸⁹ 1388sabz. “Sho’ārhāye mardomī ‘alayh-i istebdād dar sālrūz 13 ābān”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 4 November 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/8vuAuz6J520>>.

²⁹⁰ Chargé d’Affaires Doug Silliman, Ankara, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, January 8, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ANKARA1185_a.html.

²⁹¹ UNITY4IRAN. “Iran Tehran 4 Nov 09 Shariati St Seyed Khandan Protest P37”.

²⁹² Freedom Messenger. “pāreh kardan-i plākārd-i bozorg-i khāmeneī”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 4 November 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/nVjqewNANCY>>.

²⁹³ See, for example, chapter 9 in Abrahamian’s *The Iranian Mojahedin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 206-23.

in the Shah's prisons and surviving a near-death assassination attempt that caused permanent injury to his arm. So important are such political bona fides that he poignantly and in a cracking voice invoked his ailment in the closing remarks of his first post-election sermon, which he gave at the height of the crisis to a sobbing audience: "I have only my humble life. My body is handicapped. I have a good name that you have bestowed upon me, and I am ready to sacrifice all I have for the sake of Islam and the revolution..."²⁹⁴ It is precisely this nobility in physical suffering that protesters on the "National Struggle Against Global Arrogance Day" challenged through mockery, shouting: "Our Leader is a jack ass, crippled in one arm" (*rahbar-i mā olāgheh, ye dastesham cholāqeh*).²⁹⁵ To put it plainly, they ridiculed his injury in order to discredit those very physical and revolutionary credentials that affirmed his political legitimacy.

Khamenei's authority and stature was theoretically above the factionalized politics of the state, yet he intertwined his political standing with Ahmadinejad the moment he endorsed his election "victory." Thus, although the slogans after the first week of the elections were directed against the results and Ahmadinejad's persona, Khamenei—Khomeini's successor as "the Leader of the Revolution"—also became the target of the Green Movement's wrath ever since his Friday sermon, especially as the protests endured in the months after the June 12th vote. By the anniversary of the embassy seizure, Khamenei, as the personification of the state that ratified the election results, nearly supplanted Ahmadinejad inasmuch as he bore the brunt of activists' slogans, anger, and subversive zeal.

²⁹⁴ Khamenei, 'Ali. "Khoṭbehāyeh namāz jom'eh-ye tehrān ". *leader.ir*. 19 June 2009.

<<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=7190>>.

²⁹⁵ GREENPOWER0. "Rahbar-i mā olāgheh, ye dastesham cholāqeh / 13 ābān". Online video clip. *YouTube*. Accessed 15 May 2015. <<https://youtu.be/X1huhn49Zcc>>.

In contrast to the Quds Day protests, crowds were not entirely free to use the cover of the occasion to protest without experiencing violent reprisals.²⁹⁶ Indeed, there was a noticeable increase in the degree to which the state was willing to forcefully repress crowds. Security forces, working in tandem with Revolutionary Guards, police, and Basij units, deployed tear gas, clubbed protesters with batons, and even shot into the air in a bid to prevent large crowds from congregating.²⁹⁷ Zeynab, a 22-year-old student, attested: “We started our protest very peacefully but riot police attacked us with batons and teargas on our way in Vali-e-Asr Street. I saw people who were bleeding badly from the head.” Another participant stated, “They chased us down a dead end. We were all crushed together and the riot police shot something like five teargas canisters into the alley.”²⁹⁸ Even Karroubi, who attended the opposition rallies, was tear-gassed and slightly burned by a canister.²⁹⁹ Without a doubt, the increased repression signaled the state’s growing frustration with a movement that persisted in its refusal to accept the election results as *fait accompli*.

Nevertheless, protests were reported in Rasht, Isfahan, Zahedan, Kermansha, Mashhad, Shiraz, Tabriz, which saw its first large protests in months, and, of course, Tehran—the focal point of the street movement against the state.³⁰⁰ While there is no

²⁹⁶ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., November 4, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI474_a.html.

²⁹⁷ Director Alan Eyre. Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., November 5, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI479_a.html.

²⁹⁸ Black, Ian and Saeed Kamali Dehghan. “Iran protesters hijack 30th anniversary of US embassy seizure”. *The Guardian*. 4 November 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/nov/04/iran-protests-embassy-30th-anniversary>>.

²⁹⁹ “Ḥamleh-ye nīrūhā-ye ḥokūmatī beh mehdī karrūbī va zakhmī shodan-i moḥāfeẓānash”. *Radio Farda*. 4 Nov 2009.

<http://www.radiofarda.mobi/a/F8_13_ABAN_RALLY_KARROUBI_UNDER_ATTACK/1869011.html>.

³⁰⁰ Director Alan Eyre. Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., November 5, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI479_a.html.

verifiable data with regards to the numbers of demonstrators that braved the regime's threats, estimates range from tens of thousands to as much as a million.³⁰¹

The ability of the Green Movement to produce such numbers is even more impressive considering the timing of 2009's "National Struggle Against Global Arrogance Day." One of the most noteworthy successes of November 4, 2009, was the fact that it showed to both the state and many Green sympathizers—the "fence-sitters"—that given the opportunity, protesters will take to the streets to renew their demands even after long gaps between days of action—the last day of mass protest, Quds Day, took place 7 weeks prior and nearly 5 months since the June 12 election.

Iran's political calendar provided many opportunities for crowd action but often times the days fell far apart from one another. The month of December, however, afforded ample openings for the political crowd. The first, Student Day, was on December 7 and it provided a natural day of spirited defiance since it was born of radical protest. The second was the passing of a major regime critic and one of the most senior religious leaders in Iran and the wider Shi'ite Muslim world, Ayatollah Montazeri. The last and the climax of crowd action in December took place on *Tasu'a and 'Ashura*, the anniversary of the death of Imam Husayn and his valiant half-brother, which in 2009 fatefully fell on December 26-7 and coincided with the 7-day mourning period for Montazeri's passing.

VI.V. The Crowd and the Symbolic Appropriation of the Past: Student Day

³⁰¹ Ibid.

Iran has a long and rich history of student activism that even transcends Iran's national borders.³⁰² In Iran, the site of contestation and repression, vanguard student activism inspired, affirmed, and echoed the voices of the wider populace. As with mosques in the pre-revolutionary period, high schools and universities—especially the latter—provided a natural venue for organization, leadership, and collective action:

“Schoolteachers were a social group that played a brief but significant role in the conflicts of the early 1960s. The unique position of teachers gives them the potential to influence political processes through their contact with students, who are often very active politically in developing societies. Student networks have linkages with other elements of society and can be activated during times of conflict. These networks are often critical in forming coalitions and escalating conflicts.”³⁰³

It is also important to note that the university provides an environment conducive to the exchange of ideas. For many, it was through their newly established friendships with fellow radical students that enabled them to get access to banned literature that they shared amongst one another in secret. The university not only provided a natural venue by which students established social networks and organized politically, but on a more basic level it facilitated the relatively free flow of radical ideas in the first place. For example, one Marxist Feda'i activist, 'Alireza Mahfoozi, was able to further develop his militant ideas through his tenure as a university student where such information was more readily accessible.³⁰⁴ Consequently, the university served as a hotbed through which

³⁰² When I was a student leader at UC Berkeley, veteran community activists would often approach me and speak with respect and admiration for radical Iranian students who were studying in Berkeley during the revolutionary 1970s. One went so far as to opine that those Iranians were the “most radical” among Berkeley's revolutionaries.

³⁰³ Parsa, Misagh. “Mosque of Last Resort: State Reform and Social Conflict in the Early 1960s”. *A Century of Revolution: Social Movements in Iran*. Ed. John Foran. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994, pp. 145.

³⁰⁴ 'Alireza Mahfoozi. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 7 April 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 1 (seq. 5). Accessed 25 April 2015.

many students nurtured their subversive ideas and formed organizations in order to mobilize for revolutionary upheaval.

A biographer of the Shah notes that university activism was so powerful that the teachers' strike of 1961 "left an indelible mark on the Shah's political psyche, as well as on the Kennedy administration's perception of the internal situation in Iran."³⁰⁵ What's more, in exile after revolution, the Shah expressed his bitter disdain of student activism, which he in large part blamed for the tumult that led to his ouster:

"Today I have come to realize that the events of 1978-79 are attributable in part to the fact that I moved too rapidly in opening the doors of the universities, without imposing a more severe preliminary selection. The entrance exams were too easy... Some of our students were not prepared to face so many novelties. They lacked the spiritual maturity to confront the apparent ease of their new lives. Sometimes they slid into laziness but most often took to confrontation and disputation. They had received so much without any effort that appeared natural to them to claim ever more. Like spoiled children, these students caused so many confrontations that Iranian universities finally sank into anarchy."³⁰⁶

The Shah was justified for giving radical students partial credit for the revolution. The efficacy and potency of student activism reached a crescendo by the time of the revolution when university students and faculty came together to form the National Organization of Universities in 1978 in order to mobilize for the revolution. So instrumental was their role in the revolution that they helped sustain the oil strike that brought the Shah's state, which was highly dependent on oil sales, to its "knees,"³⁰⁷ when "...The National Organization of Universities requested all university employees to contribute one day's salary to striking oil workers."³⁰⁸ Even the estimated 100,000

³⁰⁵ Milani, Abbas. *The Shah*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012, pp. 251.

³⁰⁶ Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Answer to History: By Mohammad Reza Pahlavi The Shah of Iran*. New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1980, pp. 116,

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 167.

³⁰⁸ Parsa in *A Century of Revolution*, pp. 155.

Iranians studying abroad took part in the revolutionary mobilization by forming a “vocal vanguard against the Shah in almost every major city in the [Western] world, airing their opposition with slogans in the London subway or demonstrations in Los Angeles, Washington or New York City.”³⁰⁹

The clerical government, keenly aware of the critical role Iran’s universities played in the making of the revolution, sought to neutralize that historic bastion of anti-state radicalism immediately after the revolution. Thus, the newly established Cultural Revolutionary Council, despite the opposition of Iran’s first president, Abolhassan Bani Sadr, sought to eliminate rival centers of power by ordering the closure of the nation’s universities in what effectively amounted to a systematic purge of leftist university students and faculty.³¹⁰ Two years later when the universities reopened, Khomeini ruled that only those students without affiliations to foreign ideologies would be permitted to enter.³¹¹ So disruptive was this purge to the organizational capacity of the student movement that when workers’ unions were subsequently attacked during the clerical consolidation of power, “the students could offer little assistance because they had already been partially demobilized by the closure of the universities.”³¹²

³⁰⁹ “The Shah’s Divided Land”. *Time*. 18 Sept 1978, pp. 36.

³¹⁰ In his memoirs, Bani Sadr contends that the real aim of the closure of the universities was not to “Islamize” Iran’s educational system, as the Cultural Revolutionary Council explicitly stated, but to eliminate not only the organizational capacity of leftist students and guerrilla groups but also to deprive Bani Sadr of a vital support base in order to eventually unseat him. See Bani Sadr, Abolhassan. *Dar sar-i tajrobeh: khāṭerāt-i abolhassan-i banī ṣadr, avvalīn ra’is jomhūr-i īrān*. Frankfurt, Islamic Revolution Publishing, 2013, pp. 272-281.

³¹¹ Parsa in *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, pp. 267. The government often conducted a thorough background check to ensure that students seeking admission were not “contaminated” by foreign ideologies. Such a check could have encompassed sending an official to the home of the student to ask them questions and checking to see if they had any subversive books in their possession, consulting with the neighbors of the family, and/or requiring the student to have a cleric or official attest to their worldview in writing.

³¹² *Ibid*, pp. 297.

After the purge, the Islamic government implemented a two-pronged approach to ensure that Iran's universities would not revert to their historical legacy of revolutionary activity:

“The obvious approach has been to crack down on any student movement that has the gall to publicly challenge the government, whether by expelling protesting students, arresting and jailing them, or shutting down their newspapers and limiting their speech. The other approach has been to populate universities with the children of the children of the revolution, with the Basij, and with underprivileged and deeply religious youths from working-class families: exactly the kinds of people that the government can reasonably rely on to counter any threat to an Islamic Republic that has taken extremely good care of its own. And reliable they are, for every time a student pro-democracy movement crops up on any campus, other *Islamic* student organizations are there to challenge it, even violently.”³¹³

Perhaps nothing is more telling of the importance the Iranian government places on the political and social utility of the university than when the state established the country's foremost Friday prayer hall at the University of Tehran. That the Islamic government created a sacred space for Iran's most important Friday Prayers³¹⁴ at the University of Tehran of all places attests to the clerical desire to ensure that the Islamic forces have an undisputed presence in Iran's most politically influential university. Every Friday, thousands of the regime's most hard-line supporters congregate at the University of Tehran, an institution with a potent pre-revolutionary legacy of radical activism. Despite the government's attempts to stifle student activism, including purges of the university system, the establishment of a Friday Prayer Hall in Iran's most activist university, the

³¹³ Majd, Hooman. *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran*. New York: First Anchor Books (Random House), 2009, pp. 115.

³¹⁴ It is important to note that Friday prayers are considered by some clerics to be illegal during the Occultation of the Hidden Imam. After the revolution, however, Montazeri and others successfully made the case to Khomeini that the establishment of an Islamic Republic fulfilled some of those requirements thereby allowing for full Friday prayers. See Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: bakhshī az khāṭerāt-i faqīh va marj'ā 'alīqadr hazrat-i āyatollāh al'ozmā montazerī”, pp. 441-3.

policy of granting admission and scholarships to students from within the ranks of its supporters, and more the state has not been entirely successful in diminishing university-wide anti-government activism. The student uprising in 1999 and student protests in 2003, for example, serve as reminders that student dissent endured in the face of the government's best efforts. Thus, it should come as no surprise that universities were one of the early centers of the uprising against the election results, and consequently one of the first targets of the regime's subsequent crackdown. Specifically, at least 12 students were killed on June 14, 2009, when government paramilitaries forcefully tried to quell a "wave of campus rebellions" in Tabriz, Isfahan, Hamedan, Babol, Kermanshah, Amirkabir University (Tehran), the University of Tehran and the University of Shiraz, both of which stood above their counterparts in producing "martyrs."³¹⁵

By December, 2009, when the government overran the streets with security personnel while maintaining its decades-long control of the mosques—the nationwide institution that provided the Iranian Revolution with its organizational and mobilizing capacity—the universities filled the void and kept the flame of the protest movement burning. In particular, activists on Student Day (December 7, 2009) organized the largest

³¹⁵ Tait, Robert and Saeed Kamali Dehghan. "Iran: 12 students reported killed in crackdown after violent clashes". *The Guardian*. 15 June 2009. Accessed 12 May 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/15/iran-students-protest-election-results>>. The *BBC* puts the number of fatalities at 7, see "Daftar taḥkīm-i vahdat: haft dāneshjū koshteh shodehand". 17 June 2009. Accessed 12 May 2015. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/06/090616_si_ir88_tahkim_students.shtml>. Iranian-Canadian *Newsweek* journalist, Maziar Bahari, who was in Iran to cover the election and was arrested, detained, and the focus of an international campaign to secure his release, had this to say about the attack on the University of Tehran: "After the police and Basij units entered the dormitory, security closed the gates so that no one could get out. Every student from the dorm—whether he had taken part in the demonstrations or not—was dragged out of his room. Outside the dorm, the anti-riot police piled them together and beat them with clubs. Many were kicked until they became unconscious. In some cases, the anti-riot police sodomized the students with clubs. At least several were killed." Bahari, Maziar. *Then They Came for Me: A Family's Story of Love, Captivity, and Survival*. New York: Random House, 2011, pp. 66.

and most coordinated nationwide student protests since the closure of Iran's universities in 1980. As with before, University of Tehran warrants specific mention, as it was the university that served as the vanguard of protest activity in 2009.

Iran's first modern institute for higher learning, University of Tehran, was founded in 1934. Like other Iranian universities, University of Tehran has served as a "hotbed of political activism and protest since inception."³¹⁶ Its reputation for radicalism was cemented after British and American intelligence agencies overthrew Premier Mohammad Mossadeq in 1953.

Three months after the overthrow, then Vice President Richard Nixon came to Iran to show the Eisenhower administration's full support for the coup government³¹⁷—a visit that kindled the Shah's enduring friendship with one of the most controversial American presidents in US history.³¹⁸ Nixon's endorsement of the Shah's regime, however, outraged an already aggrieved populace and that anger manifested itself at Iran's universities, of which the University of Tehran served as the main bastion of agitation. Protests on December 6-7 led to the deaths of three students at the University of Tehran's Faculty of Engineering (FOE).³¹⁹ It was Iran's Kent State massacre, or rather

³¹⁶ Sahimi, Muhammad. "16 Azar: Iran's Student Day". *Tehran Bureau*. 6 December 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/12/16-azar-irans-student-day.html>>.

³¹⁷ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 7, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI521_a.html.

³¹⁸ Pahlavi, 16-7.

³¹⁹ Unlike in the United States, engineering students in Iran are famous for their radicalism. In my discussions with many engineering graduates from the 1970s, I've been able to glean two common explanations as to why such students were (and continue to be) especially militant. The first is that many engineering students were imbued with a sense of political purpose upon entering their field inasmuch as they felt the obligation to acquire the skills necessary to help develop the country. Thus, it was natural for these students to transition from a politicized field to political agitation once they entered the university. Another more Marxist explanation is that many students hailing from lower socio-economic backgrounds considered a degree in engineering as a means by which to move up the social ladder, especially since there was such a need for their specialty to help build Iran. Consequently, radical ideologies organically

the massacre at Kent State was America's University of Tehran massacre (the tragic killings in Tehran predate the Kent State shootings by 16 years). Since that turbulent year, December 7th (*shānzdah-i āzar* or *shūnzdah-i āzar* in colloquial Persian) has been unofficially marked as Student Day and is commemorated "as a symbol of the struggle of Iranian students against dictatorship."³²⁰

Throughout much of Iran's twentieth century history (from the consolidation of Reza Shah's rule in 1921 onwards), a strong central government stifled political activity.³²¹ One student activist, however, attested to the important role of the university in such a climate:

"You realize that outside of the universities, there was practically no political movement. That is, the strangulation and surveillance which had been introduced, which the regime had introduced in all official spheres, was very heavy... The only place it couldn't completely control was the university, since the university was principally a place of gatherings..."³²²

In keeping with the legacy of 1953 and exploiting the universities' resource in which the organizational capacity and the proximity of students to one another provided a unique environment for coordination, each Student Day was marked by student demonstrations that raged across Iran's university campuses. One student who studied at the same Faculty of Engineering in the 1970s affirmed the endurance of student activism:

"In the 1970s, when I was a student in the FOE, we always commemorated 16 Azar [7 December]. My freshman year in 1972-1973 also coincided with the 10th anniversary of the Shah's so-called White Revolution of February 1973. The year before, 16 Azar was particularly

appealed to these students who felt that such worldviews spoke to their plight or that of their families they left behind to attend college. That engineering is so math-intensive certainly helped many of these students understand Marx's *Das Kapital*. As is often the case, the truth as to why engineering students in Iran are so political probably lies somewhere in between the two theories.

³²⁰ Sahimi, "16 Azar: Iran's Student Day".

³²¹ The period between the 1941-1953 and the short-lived "Iranian Spring" after the revolution are obvious exceptions.

³²² Kurzman, pp. 113.

powerful and marked by large demonstrations at the University of Tehran. The demonstrations in 1974 were so large that the engineering faculty was shut down for the entire 1974-1975 year. In 1975, two of my classmates, Mohammad Ali Bagheri and Hamid Aryan, who had started their studies at the FOE in the same year that I had, were killed by the Shah's security forces. In fact, many of my contemporaries in the FOE were jailed or killed, either by the Shah's regime or the Islamic Republic after the 1979 Revolution.”³²³

After the revolution, the Islamic regime officially recognized Student Day in an attempt to control its message; the state preferred to circumvent the day's legacy of fiery anti-government revolutionary activity in favor of a more “perfunctory occasion during which senior officials typically visit campuses and give speeches about the importance of students and higher education to Iran's future.”³²⁴ In 2009, however, radical students re-appropriated the day in order to denounce the regime. The first Student Day after the election results, therefore, promised to be a day of fiery protest.

Expectedly, the government was well aware of the potential for anti-state protests and implemented measures to prevent or control the day's event as much as possible. It placed between two to three “guards” at university entrances to prevent non-students from entering universities and using the opportunity of Student Day to augment the anticipated student crowds.³²⁵ Moreover, several streets were closed as security teams of three to four stood around Tehran's universities while security personnel patrolled the area by motorcycle.³²⁶ In contrast to the pre-election climate where the restrictions on mediums of communication such as the Internet were relaxed in order to encourage voter interest and participation in the election, the mobile phone network and text messaging

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 7, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI521_a.html.

³²⁵ “Gozāresh-i taḥavolāt-i rūz 16 āzar dar tehrān va barkhī shahrhā”. *Tabnak*. 7 Dec 2009. <<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=76033>>.

³²⁶ Ibid.

were brought down on Student Day and the Internet was “sluggish and heavily filtered” to prevent activist coordination and transmitting non-state sanctioned news and information abroad.³²⁷ Furthermore, in the run-up to the event, pro-Ahmadinejad media announced that they planned to air the confession of Abdollah Momeni, a prominent student leader imprisoned since June 21—two days after Khamenei’s June 19th sermon. That the release of the purported “confession” was scheduled for Student Day prompted Momeni’s wife to argue that the government’s aim was to inspire “fear” among students ahead of their quintessential day of protest.³²⁸

Coinciding with the government’s efforts, students around the country had been preparing since their last day of mass action, November 4th³²⁹, to transform Student Day into a “Green Student Day”³³⁰ and renew their protest.³³¹ Likewise, Mousavi anticipated mass action when he attested to the historical importance of the day and what it meant for post-election Iran:

“University Student day is ahead of us. In our modern history the student movement has always been the flag-bearers and has acted as the reason and purpose for people’s movement. During the bitter days following the coup, and in some of the darkest times in the history of our nation when all hope seemed to be lost, what happened in the 16th of Azar of 1332 (December 7 of 1953) was a clear sign that the spirit of people and their historical demands are still alive. Those ‘three drops of blood’ and ‘three godly Azar’ that created a basis for the University student day are after half a century later still a vivid and enlightening reminder in the memory of the people because they signified the existence of greater reality in the

³²⁷ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 7, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI521_a.html.

³²⁸ “Takzīb-i ede’āye pakhsh-i e’terāfāt-i ‘abdollāh mo’menī”. *Rahesabz*. 3 Dec 2009. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/4844/>>.

³²⁹ Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. “16 āzar”. Facebook. 8 Nov 2009. Accessed 29 Jan 2009. <<http://goo.gl/dILHcO>>.

³³⁰ Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. “16 āzar: rūz dāneshjū-ye sabz”. Facebook. 26 Nov 2009. Accessed 29 Jan 2009. <<http://goo.gl/Pi45VM>>.

³³¹ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 7, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI521_a.html.

lives of the people. In the years and generations that followed these signs were maintained through the student movements and still does.”³³²

Thus, December 7, 2009, despite government measures, became a day when university students around the country used their campuses as springboards to give continuity to the Green Movement and to denounce the Islamic government.

Most of the demonstrations shared similar attributes. They all happened on school premises and virtually all the participants were students, men and women alike. Security personnel, sometimes unsuccessfully, blocked the entrances in order to both ensure that non-students could not join the protests and swell their numbers and to prevent the protests from spilling onto the streets. Furthermore, many of the protests included the singing of a particularly significant political song: “My grade-school friend” (*yār-i dabestānī-ye man*).

The song was first sung in a revolution-era political film titled “From Cry to Terror” and its “stirring lyrics epitomize the country's longstanding struggle for freedom...”³³³

*My schoolmate
You're with me and going along with me
The alphabet stick is above our heads
You're my spite and my woe
Our names have been carved
On the body of this blackboard
The stick of injustice and tyranny
Still remains on our body*

*This uncivilized plain of ours
Is covered with weeds
Good, if good
Bad, if bad*

³³² Mousavi, Mir Hussein. “Bayānī-ye shomāreh-ye 16 mohandes mūsavī beh monāsebat-i 16 āzar”. *Kalame*. 6 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://www.kalame.org/1388/09/15/klm-4896>>.

³³³ Ovaisy, Saya. “My Grade-School Friend”. *Tehran Bureau*. 17 November 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/11/my-grade-school-friend.html>>.

*Dead is the hearts of its people
My hand and yours
Should tear up these curtains
Who can, except you and I
Cure our pain?*

*My schoolmate
You're with me and going along with me
The alphabet stick is above our heads
You're my spite and my woe
Our names have been carved
On the body of this blackboard
The stick of injustice and tyranny
Still remains on our body.³³⁴*

“My grade-school friend” first became prevalent during the presidency of Mohammad Khatami, and reached an unprecedented level of popularity during the post-election turmoil as it became “Iran's resistance anthem par excellence.”³³⁵ Although the people sang the song at many junctures throughout the 2009 protests, on Student Day it became *alma mater* of all universities in observance of December 7th. Through the lyrics, crowds of students commonly conveyed their contempt for the government in a single melodic voice.

Dressed in green and with faces covered to conceal their identities, students at the University of Tehran marched while singing the song and clapping their hands above their heads in rhythm with the anthem.³³⁶ At Islamic Azad University, students walked in a large circle on the campus courtyard singing the *alma mater* while clapping.³³⁷ Students at Shahid Beheshti University filled an auditorium and clapped and sang along

³³⁴ “An Iranian Revolutionary Song: My Schoolmate (Yar-e Dabestani-e Man)”. *Payvand News*. 15 June 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://payvand.com/news/09/jun/1152.html>>.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ GREENPOWER0. “Tehran uni protest 7dec/sorūd-i yār-i dabestānī dāneshgāh-i tehrān16āzar”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <https://youtu.be/Myn_Cm6bgZI>.

³³⁷ Mowjcamp. “16 Azar, Azad University “Tehran Shomal”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/ZdIVmrKEZGI>>.

to a slideshow that featured the song. The slideshow ended in defiance of Iran's theocratic system by displaying Iran's Islamic flag without the Islamic *Allah* emblem in the center, causing the audience to cheer.³³⁸ The Islamic government changed Iran's historic flag³³⁹ replacing the lion and sun motif with that of "Allah" shaped like a tulip, the symbol of martyrdom in Shi'ism.

That students sang the "resistance anthem" culminating in an image of the Iranian flag that was deprived of the Islamic Republic's emblem—the symbol that represented its authority over Iran—attests to the Green Movement's negation of the system's ideological foundation. Indeed, students coupled "My grade-school friend" with a variety of slogans, banners, and acts of defiance in order to display their rejection of the state's authority and legitimacy through the repudiation of its symbols.

Students at Qazvin University marched behind a banner that proclaimed, "The university is alive" (*dāneshgāh zendeh ast*), as they chanted: "Rape, treachery, death to [Khamenei's] authority" (*tajāvōz, jenāyat, marg bar īn velāyat*).³⁴⁰ Merely declaring that "The university is alive" is a profound statement given the state's systematic attempts to consolidate its hold over the university system and suppress free thought in order to foster obedience. One university student who was expelled for her Green Movement activism expanded on the meaning of "The university is alive," by affirming, "It means that if they [the government] can stifle thoughts and ideas everywhere, the university will remain

³³⁸ Farhad50626. "Tazāhorāt-i dāneshjūyān-i dāneshgāh-i shahīd beheshtī dar rūz-i 16 āzar". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <https://youtu.be/_luUoFzD7bw>.

³³⁹ Many Iranians mistakenly believe that Iran's Lion and Sun flag belongs to the Pahlavi Dynasty. The flag in fact predates the dynasty, and Muhammad Reza Shah Pahlavi affirmed in his autobiography that the Lion and Sun flag "does not date from our dynasty, under whose folds millions of Iranians have sacrificed themselves during many centuries..." (Pahlavi, pp. 190).

³⁴⁰ IranFree88. "Dāneshgāh-i qazvīn 16 āzar". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 13 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/2kUOh1fzWWI>>.

defiant in safeguarding those thoughts and ideas.”³⁴¹ In “safeguarding” that freedom of thought and resistance in the face of government repression, students at Najafabad University gathered to voice their support for Mousavi and declared that “torture, rape, no longer have an effect” (*shekanjeh, tajāvōz, digar aṣar nadārad*).³⁴²

What’s more, students at Hamedan University reassured one another by chanting “Don’t be afraid, we are all together” (*natarsīn, natarsīn, mā hāmeh bā hām hastīm*) and wished “death upon the Basiji” (*marg bar basījī*).³⁴³ At Polytechnic University, students shouting “Allahu akbar” tore down the gate that separated them from the crowd outside and chanted for the outsiders to “come in” (*bīyā tū*).³⁴⁴ Students at Science and Technology University threatened: “We are men and women of war, fight with us so we fight!” (*mā zan o mard-i jangīm, bejang tā bejangīm!*)³⁴⁵ Indeed, on Student Day, the students responded to Khamenei’s crackdown with their own militancy as even the father of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Khomeini, was not exempt from rebuke and suffered the indignity of having his picture torn up³⁴⁶—a highly inflammatory and illegal act in post-revolutionary Iran that signified the total rejection of Iran’s Islamic system.³⁴⁷

³⁴¹ T., Golnar. Personal interview. 22 October 2013.

³⁴² GREENPOWER0. “Tazāhorāt-i dāneshjūyān-i dāneshgāh-i najafābād 16 azār”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/7Kr1BPVWlnI>>.

³⁴³ Freedom Messenger. “Dāneshgāh-i abū ‘ali-i hamadān 16 azār”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 14 December 2009. Accessed 24 April 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4R4PCwFiQAc>>.

³⁴⁴ Ghovaza. “VIDE0524”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/qG5xM8YTRng>>.

³⁴⁵ IranFree88. “Dāneshgāh-i ‘elm o san’at 16 azār”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2010. Accessed 12 August 2010. <https://youtu.be/u54Hva9a_el>.

³⁴⁶ “Desecration of Imam Khomeini portrait sparks protests”. *PressTV*. 12 Dec 2009. Accessed 14 August 2010. <<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=113544§ionid=351020101>>. There is considerable controversy surrounding this “desecration,” with some activists arguing that the regime staged the whole episode so as to incriminate the opposition while rallying regime supporters to counter such sacrilege.

³⁴⁷ It warrants mentioning that opposition leaders alleged that the state staged the tearing of Khomeini’s picture in order to discredit the opposition. Having said that, I do believe that there were strands within the Green Movement that were indeed capable of making such a provocative statement as tearing an image of Khomeini.

Opposition students at Mashhad University faced student supporters of the regime and took turns trying to drown each other out, with the Green activists eventually prevailing. This scene was replicated at Sharif University, where students shouting “Death to the tyrant, whether the Shah or the [Supreme] Leader” (*marg bar setamgar, cheh shāh bāshe, cheh rahbar*) were temporarily interrupted by Islamist students—only to be drowned out by boisterous chants of “death to the basiji” (*marg bar basījī*).³⁴⁸

By referring to “the Leader” in the same vein as the Shah, the students invoked the history of the Iranian Revolution throughout which the overwhelming majority of the populace was united in opposition to the Shah. In doing so, they legitimated their protest against what they deemed to be a dictatorship akin to that of the last Pahlavi shah. If the Islamic authorities rode to power atop a popular wave of anti-Shah resentment, then they were now being equated with a reviled and popularly overthrown monarch. In other words, the students contested ownership and the meaning of the Iranian Revolution in order to castigate “the Leader of the Revolution.” Furthermore, such slogans simultaneously condemned the Shah and also belied allegations that the opposition was comprised of counter-revolutionaries trying to restore the monarchy. Lastly, the severity of such political chants contrasts with the iconic slogan of the movement’s early days: “Where is my vote?” The protracted crackdown either marginalized such voices or facilitated their transition to more radical political expressions. Wherein one demanded an equitable solution to the election crisis through either a recount or revote, more radical slogans that predominated in the uprisings’ latter days manifestly took aim at the entire system and its personification, Ayatollah Khamenei. Perhaps no event is as memorable

³⁴⁸ Khajesharif. “Marg bar setamgar, cheh shāh bāsheh, cheh rahbar / dāneshgāh-i sharīf 16 āzar”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 12 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/zVfGynPs07Q>>.

as the one that transpired at Amirkabir University in which the story of one seasoned activist both illustrates the state's increasing repression and the corresponding change in the movement's overall tone.

It is often said that the leaders of tomorrow come from the youth of today, yet in Iran in the aftermath of the disputed elections the leaders of the day came from the youth of the day, and Majid Tavakoli is one such leader. With full knowledge of the state's repressive capacity through his previous arrests³⁴⁹, he fearlessly gave an impassioned speech about the importance of Student Day, promising: "We will no longer accept tyranny."³⁵⁰ The crowd of students punctuated his speech with heated chants of "death to the dictator" and "the student will die before accepting humiliation and suffering."³⁵¹

Two days later, the semi-official *Fars News Agency* reported that Majid Tavakoli was arrested. Associated with Iran's praetorian guard—the IRGC—*Fars News* provocatively called Tavakoli a "coward," alleged that he wore women's clothing in order to avoid detection, and went so far as to publish photos of him garbed in the Islamic headscarf.³⁵² Eyewitnesses belied the regime's claims and activists accused the government of pettiness for trying to humiliate the activist by posting photos of him wearing women's clothing.³⁵³

³⁴⁹ Tavakoli was arrested in 2007 and again in February 2009 (before the election), serving 15 months in prison and 115 days in solitary confinement respectively.

³⁵⁰ Mehdi Saharkhiz. "Majid Tavakoli's Speech December 7th 09 16". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 13 August 2010. <<https://youtu.be/Lin9PWr55RU>>.

³⁵¹ *Ibid*.

³⁵² "Dastgīriye majīd tavakolī bā lebās-i zanān lakke nangī bar dāman efrāṭiyūn bāqī gozāsht". *Fars News Agency*. 9 December 2009. Accessed 13 August 2010.

<<http://www.farsnews.net/newstext.php?nn=8809171609>>. His image was published alongside a similar picture of President Bani Sadr, who allegedly wore the *hijab* to avoid detection as he fled the country after his ouster in 1981.

³⁵³ Mackey, Robert. "Iran's State Media Mocks Arrested Student Leader Pictured in Women's Clothing". *The New York Times Blog*. 9 December 2009. Accessed 13 August 2010.

The most fascinating aspect of this episode in the dynamic history of the popular uprising against the government is how the *hijab*, one of the most visible signs of Iran's Islamic rule, became the object of contention as well. One of the most controversial aspects of the Islamists' consolidation of power immediately after the revolution was the state policy that required all women, pious or not, Muslim or not, to dawn the Islamic headdress in public.³⁵⁴ The Iranian government, as with many governments around the world irrespective of religion, has long viewed the female body as a battlefield in which its regulation and control must be a priority if there is to be a "moral order" or a healthy functioning of society.³⁵⁵ The Islamic government has, to the degree enforceable, separated the genders and has made the Islamic headscarf mandatory for women in order to promote modesty thereby facilitating the much idealized "moral society." If the Iranian government's rule is apparent on the streets of Iran through the painting of murals honoring the leadership of the revolution as well as the martyrs of the revolution and the war, then the government's authority is similarly apparent on the bodies of its populace in which mandatory dress codes for both men³⁵⁶ and women are enforced.

<<http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2009/12/09/irans-state-media-mocks-arrested-student-leader-pictured-in-womens-clothing/>>.

³⁵⁴ Interestingly, the issue of attire is part of a wider discussion of Iran's struggle to balance modernity while maintaining its sense of identity. Reza Shah constituted one extreme who outright banned the *hijab*. The Islamic government falls on the opposite but equally extreme end by mandating the Islamic headdress.

³⁵⁵ See, for example, Laura Briggs' *Reproducing Empire: Race, Sex, and U.S. Imperialism in Puerto Rico* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002) in which she uncovers the consequences of colonialism that transcend economics and politics. Briggs factors in race and gender in order to underscore how American colonial administrators in Puerto Rico sought to control seemingly "deviant" working-class women's sexuality through "scientific methods," including hygiene and birth control (even sterilization), thereby preserving the racial purity and health of white men who partook in sexual activity with Puerto Rican women—the supposed incubator of venereal disease.

³⁵⁶ Men are likewise prohibited from wearing certain articles of clothing such as shorts or tank tops which expose men's shoulders.

In December 2009, however, the “sacredness” of the *hijab*, the quintessential symbol of the government’s authority over the individuality of its population, was contested. When the state used the *hijab* to “humiliate” Tavakoli, as the opposition alleged, Green activists countered in a manner imbued with profound meaning that transcended the solidarity they wished to convey to Tavakoli. As part of their “Be a Man” campaign, hundreds of Iranian men³⁵⁷ inside the country and abroad, including non-Iranians, posted pictures of themselves wearing the Islamic headscarf in order to express national and international solidarity with Tavakoli and to nullify the government’s humiliation of the activist.³⁵⁸ In doing so, they turned the *hijab*, the state’s mandatory “sacred” headdress proscribed for women, into a symbol of protest aimed at the Islamic government’s attempts to discredit one of the scions of the protest movement. What’s more, that they were men and not women donning the *hijab* further underscored the ideological challenge that was being leveled at the Islamic government.

In 1978, the Shah was rightly perceived to be a secular head of state beholden to Western powers, namely the United States, and many ideologues argued that he served as a conduit for Western culture overrunning Iran—a ‘cultural invasion’ deemed to be at the expense of the country’s native Islamic culture. Discotheques, casinos, liquor stores, and brothels, all of which were considered foreign to Iran’s culture and clashed with the country’s Islamic norms, were legalized or tolerated by the state. What’s more, the state even imported new living standards and dress styles such as toilets (as opposed to squat

³⁵⁷ For a compilation of the photos, see Īstādeh bā mosht’s video, “Mā hameh majīd tavakolī hastīm”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 10 December 2009. Accessed 2 February 2015. <<http://youtu.be/xNgN1rbXjLc>>.

³⁵⁸ “Iranian men don hijabs in protest at student’s arrest”. *BBC News*. 12 December 2009. Accessed 13 August 2010. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8409778.stm>.

toilets)³⁵⁹ and neckties, which were not necessarily in violation of Islamic norms but symbolized the degree with which the Shah preferred foreign cultural tastes to his own. The Shah's predecessor, Reza Shah, went so far as to even outlaw the *hijab*—a policy his son reluctantly abandoned in order to garner clerical support early in his nascent rule.

In the build-up to the revolution, many female activists, even ones without a devout worldview, wore the *hijab* as a symbol of defiance against the state's seeming betrayal of Iranian culture and the head of state's subservience to foreign powers. To put it plainly, for many women the *hijab* became a symbol of the revolution.³⁶⁰ That is not to say that they wished to display their religiosity or to demand that the *hijab* become compulsory, though certainly many did for those very reasons, but it does illustrate how it became an icon of revolutionary defiance.

In 2009, the *hijab* as a mechanism for contestation had come full circle in an unexpected and unprecedented way. Now, Iranian and non-Iranian men, some even with full beards, wore the *hijab* to snub the government in the same manner that pious and secular Iranian women garbed the *hijab* to show their opposition towards the government in 1978. As such, Iranian activists and international sympathizers appropriated even such Islamic attire—a visible symbol of Iran's ruling ideology—as part of the wider campaign to not only show their solidarity with one of the movement's most spirited activists, but also to deliver a striking blow at the state's ideological repertoire using its own symbols.

³⁵⁹ At the time of the revolution, both my parents, Shahram and Sonia Alimagham, worked in the state-run National Iranian Oil Company's computer division. After the revolution, they witnessed first-hand the Islamic authorities' decision to have all the flush toilet bowls, which were perceived as symbols of the west's cultural domination in Iran, ripped out in favor of flush squat toilets—considered indigenous to Iran and the region. Such disruptive and petty changes only took place in the NIOC-owned buildings, not ones in which the company held tenancy.

³⁶⁰ Incidentally, that so many women donned the *hijab* to show their support for the revolution made it easier for Khomeini to make the headscarf compulsory.

These acts of solidarity with Tavakoli, however, did not convince the government to show the imprisoned student leader any leniency. Tavakoli was convicted of a range of Orwellian charges, such as “participation in an illegal gathering with the aim of harming national security,” “propaganda against the state,” and “insulting” the Leader and the president, and was ultimately sentenced to eight and a half years in prison.³⁶¹ A year later, the Revolutionary Court banned him from pursuing his education while in prison or even after the completion of his sentence.³⁶²

Tavakoli’s arrest, prosecution, and sentencing underscore the severity of the state’s repressive measures and the hardening effect it had on certain segments of the opposition, which reached a crescendo in the bloody *Ashura* day protests three weeks later. As the protests continued on specific political holidays throughout the months after the election, the government intensified its crackdown and augmented its security presence on the streets. The regime stepped up its efforts to hinder access to the Internet and text messaging as specific days of action approached, making it more difficult for the de-centralized movement to coordinate. Dissidents were being jailed with a greater frequency and reports of prisoner abuse became widespread, especially at Kahrizak. The death toll on the street continued to rise and the regime began executing dissidents in a bid to persuade people to de-mobilize and to dissuade them from gathering in crowds to mark upcoming official holidays.

³⁶¹ “Ta’id-i ḥokm-i hasht sāl o nīm-i zendān-i majīd tavakolī dar dādgāh-i tajdīdenāzar”. *Rahesabz*. 18 Sept 2010. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/23673/>>.

³⁶² “Ḥokm -i jadīd-i dādgāh-i enqelāb: mahrumīyat-i dā’emī-ye majīd tavakolī az edāmeḥ-ye taḥṣīl”. *Kalame*. 18 Sept 2011. <<http://www.kalame.com/1390/06/27/klm-73521/?theme=fast>>.

Yet, student demonstrations occurred at more than a dozen universities and even several high schools³⁶³ throughout the country.³⁶⁴ Although there is no exact tally for the number of students who participated in the Student Day demonstrations, the estimates of “tens of thousands”³⁶⁵ are highly probable—a profound showing given the intensity of the state’s repression. Furthermore, it once again reminded both sympathizers and the state, whose officials avoided student wrath by not entering campuses to deliver their perfunctory annual Student Day addresses³⁶⁶, that the movement was alive and durable a month after the last day of mass protests and six months after the election despite increasing state repression.

Before the regime succeeded in driving the movement underground, two final occurrences prompted mobilization, both of which took place during the same month of December: the passing of dissident cleric Grand Ayatollah ‘Ali Montazeri and ‘*Ashura*. The two events are merged into one chapter as a result of being intertwined both in terms of its historical subject matter as well as the fateful sequence of events. Indeed, ‘*Ashura*’s emotive power is derived from a long history which must be considered in order to fully appreciate the Green Movement’s explosive ‘*Ashura* day protests.

VII. Conclusion

The Islamic government came to power through million-man marches intertwined with an Islamic discourse that negated the ideological universe of the Shah. Whereas

³⁶³ Freedom Messenger. “Tazāhorāt-i dānesh āmūzān-i yek dabīrestān-i dokhtāraneh”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 7 December 2009. Accessed 2 February 2015. <<http://youtu.be/Ee60WyR3YZg>>.

³⁶⁴ Chargé d’Affaires Doug Silliman, Ankara, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, December 8, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09ANKARA1744_a.html.

³⁶⁵ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 8, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI525_a.html.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid*.

protests and challenges to power in the past used the same secular-nationalist discourse of the Pahlavi dynasty, the Islamic Revolution posited a discourse that was diametrically opposed to the monarchy's ideological worldview.

For three decades after the revolution, the Islamic government drilled an entire generation of youth raised under its authority in Islamist ideology. In 2009, however, aggrieved segments of the population used that discourse and symbolism to castigate the very regime that relied on such ideology for legitimacy. These activists used what Gramsci referred to as the ruling elite's "common sense," not necessarily to negate the state's ideological universe as in 1978-79, but as emotive tools that were appropriated, reprogrammed, and subverted in order to challenge the Islamic state. In other words, Green activists harnessed the emotive power of the government's Islamic symbols and revolutionary history to "backhand" the state using its own language and doing so on the most potent of days.

The election campaign created the necessary breathing room for voters to mobilize for their candidates. Some even used the temporary lifting of repression to voice their rejection of the state as a whole. The government, hoping the relaxation of the political environment would encourage voter participation in a state-sanctioned political event, grew increasingly concerned with what was more and more looking like a street movement than an election campaign.

After the election, Iranians from all walks of life participated in a week-long uprising as the state struggled to rescind the political opening that it facilitated for the sake of fostering interest in the election. Khamenei's Friday sermon, however, affirmed Ahmadinejad's "victory" and promised a full-scale security crackdown in order to bring

the uprising to a decisive end. Activists expanded the scope of their wrath to target the state and “the Leader of the Revolution,” and ingeniously evolved to adapt to the new security climate thereby facilitating the movement’s street presence on specific days well into the months after Khamenei’s sermon.

If the election campaign offered the crowd the “opportunity” to mobilize, then political occasions and holidays such as Rafsanjani’s own Friday sermon, Beheshti’s anniversary, the anniversary of the embassy seizure, Student Day, and others provided activists renewed opportunities to continue to register their protest in a climate that was otherwise hostile to any sort of non-state-sanctioned political activity. The government cancelled several such events—the Night of Power and Taleqani’s anniversary—in order to rob the opposition of the opportunity to mobilize against the state. Some events, such as the anniversary of the embassy seizure and Quds Day, could not be cancelled as they were a staple in the calendar of the Iranian state. The government had an even more difficult time shutting down Student Day, the anniversary of which continues to evade government control despite its best efforts—a reality echoed by Majid Tavakoli, who 7 months after his arrest wrote a letter from prison to mark the anniversary of student uprising in 1999, observing defiantly: “...the university remains the ruling government’s biggest nightmare.”³⁶⁷

If the government could not cancel the event in question then it did its best to either suppress or control protests. That the state increased repressive measures in the run-up to the event may have persuaded some to stay at home and crowds did indeed

³⁶⁷ Tavakoli, Majid. “‘My Bitter Memories’ | A Letter by Majid Tavakoli on the Anniversary of University Attacks”. Trans. By Negar Irani. Persian2English. 7 July 2010. Accessed 12 May 2015. <http://persian2english.com/?p=12549>.

decrease in size in comparison to the first week of protests after the June 12 election. Yet, the government could not altogether rob the opposition of the opportunity to protest on such days because segments of the opposition remained mobilized, the occasions for protest remained ripe, and the movement endured. Such days imbued with a history that dates back to the Iranian Revolution were appropriated along with slogans and other symbols from the historic era to protest the very state that rode to power atop that unprecedented revolution.

Even “Allahu akbar,” the quintessential Islamic profession on par with “There is no god but God,” and its storied role in the Iranian Revolution when activists proclaimed their support for the revolution with those two authoritative words, were likewise appropriated along with Islamic green in order to attack the state’s legitimacy using its own discourse, symbolism, and “common sense.” Even the Islamic headdress was subverted to express solidarity with Majid Tavakoli and to condemn the state’s repressive tactics as well as the system as a whole.

Belying allegations of hooliganism, the protesters showed increased sophistication by leveraging Iran’s revolutionary past for the contentious present. The Green Movement may have failed to cancel the election results but its continuity and endurance, ability to absorb the state’s repression, and the movement’s consequent evolution caused it to transcend its initial demand of canceling Ahmadinejad’s election win. Khamenei and his position as the Supreme Jurisprudent, clerical rule as a whole, and the entanglement between religion and state were added to the movement’s list of demands as outlined in their slogans and actions, especially as the protest movement continued and hardened in the face of systematic state reprisals. Although the Green

Uprising similarly failed to change the composition and nature of the state in the short-term, it succeeded in casting a discursive challenge to the Islamic Republic unparalleled in its thirty-year history. In doing so, activists did not renounce the faith of the overwhelming majority of Iranians. Rather, they contested the state's hegemony over "God" and Islamic history, the ownership of the Iranian Revolution and its symbols and meanings, and used the state's own discourse and symbolism in order to transcend the rigidity of the state in what Bayat argues amounts to a "post-Islamist turn."

CHAPTER 3: Contesting Palestine: Generating Revolutionary Meaning

I. Introduction

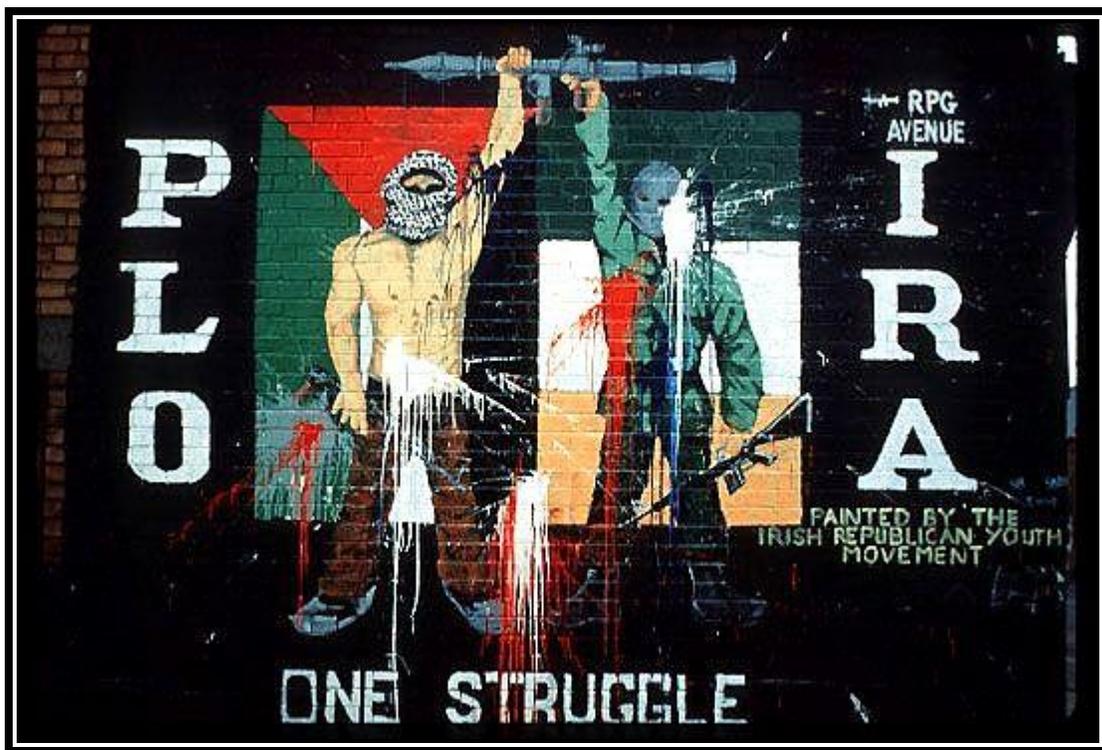


Figure 3.1. PLO and the IRA: One struggle

For decades, the struggle in Palestine has captivated the imagination of millions across the region and beyond. Although Arab leaders and Arab citizens of the Middle East and North Africa have long focused³⁶⁸ on the issue, it nonetheless transcends Arab identity, Islam, and even the region. Perhaps nothing better encapsulates this point than a mural in Northern Ireland in which a Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) fighter

³⁶⁸ In the case of Arab leaders, I can add a caveat that such focus typically only amounted to “lip service.”

stands next to an Irish Republican Army (IRA) militant jointly clutching a rocket-propelled grenade above a caption that declares the two peoples as fighting “one struggle” for liberation (Figure 3.1).³⁶⁹ To be certain, many around the world have been able to make common cause with the Palestinians despite being separated by religion, language, and geography.

Countless Iranians both before and after the revolution have likewise identified with the struggle in Palestine. In the 1970s, for example, Iranian guerrillas bombed Israeli targets in Iran both in solidarity with the Palestinians and to defy their monarch’s proximity with the Israelis. After the revolution, the Islamic Republic positioned Palestine as a cornerstone of its ideology and foreign policy outlook. In other words, the legitimacy of the Palestinian movement amongst revolutionary circles in the 1970s was afforded state sanction in the post-revolutionary period. In 2009, a generation of Iranian youth raised under the authority and ideology of the Islamic government co-opted such legitimated Palestine-centered discourse and subverted it in order to condemn the same state.

³⁶⁹ Gannon, Sean. “Israel is continually delegitimized and demonized in Republican demonstrations and publications”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 7 April 2009. <<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/IRA-PLO-cooperation-A-long-cozy-relationship>>. The image of the mural is from 1982, on Beechmount Avenue, Belfast. Another mural depicts two political prisoners, one Irish and the other Palestinian, reaching through their respective prison bars in order to grasp one another’s hands in solidarity. One user on the social networking and news website, Reddit—where the image of the mural was posted—noted, “I live here in Belfast, about 20 minutes away from where this picture is taken. There are murals like that all over the place here, each with their own strong political agenda from both sides...” Another user responded to a question about the popularity of the Palestinian issue in Northern Ireland, stating: “Amongst Catholics/Republicans it is pretty popular... We usually just ignore it [the religious dimension of the conflict] in favour of taking an anti-American/British/Israel stance on the whole thing.” See “Pro-IRA/Pro-Palestine mural (Belfast, Modern)”. Reddit. 6 Nov 2014. Accessed 3 Mar 2015. <http://www.reddit.com/r/PropagandaPosters/comments/2ljxmm/proirapropalestine_mural_belfast_modern/>. It’s also interesting to note that political memorabilia that underscore the unity of the two struggles are listed for sale on eBay and other online marketplaces.

By underscoring the revolutionary discourse related to Palestine and the Green Movement, the first part of this chapter serves as primer to set the tone for the rest of the unit. The segment is especially important because it deconstructs common perceptions with regards to the uprising thereby clearing the way for alternative perspectives—as outlined by activists themselves. The following section chronicles a brief but crucial history of Palestine in relation to Iran before, during, and after the 1978-79 revolution in order to provide the backdrop necessary to understanding the emotive power of Palestine in the Iranian context. The importance of this history, which outlines the manner in which Iranians of different political persuasions gave Palestine an exalted political status, is central to appreciating the magnitude of the Green Movement’s contestation of Palestine as an ideological symbol. In other words, pre- and post-revolutionary Iranians heralded Palestine as a political symbol of monumental significance, and that history is important because it gives that very symbol tremendous weight and meaning in the Iranian context. It is this weight and meaning that the Green Movement harnessed when they appropriated the state’s hegemonic discursive control of Palestine as a symbol and wielded it and all its emotive power against the Iranian state in 2009.

The chapter then proceeds to show how the Islamic government used Palestine as an ideological pillar. Only when the importance of Palestine to Iran under the Islamic Republic is established can the enormity of the Jerusalem Day anti-government protests in 2009 be fully understood. The final part of the chapter will illustrate how the Green Movement co-opted Jerusalem Day, infused it with new meaning, and deployed it against the very state that legitimated itself through such a potent transnational symbol.

II. Generating Revolutionary Discourse

The Green Movement did not begin as a protest movement but rather a street campaign that championed both reformist candidates, Karroubi and Mousavi, especially the latter. Although there were rumblings of protest before the presidential election, as some of the reformists' supporters used the cover of the campaign to protest the system of governance³⁷⁰, it did not become a bona fide protest movement until after the election results were announced and allegations of election fraud became widespread. It was then that the campaign-turned-movement rallied to protest the government.

Much has been made of the character or aims of the protest movement. Some have called it revolutionary while others, notably Dabashi, have referred to it as a civil rights movement akin to the pivotal campaign that challenged the racial status quo in mid-century America.³⁷¹ Among intellectuals and academics, Dabashi's reference has gained the most traction, which is not entirely surprising as the Green Movement has been overwhelmingly nonviolent and calls from within the movement—as echoed by its

³⁷⁰ On June 8, 2009, four days before the elections, young men and women formed a 20-kilometer human chain spanning from Tajrish Square to the Tehran Train Station and through one of Tehran's main thoroughfares, Vali Asr Street. Young women, who comprised the majority of the human chain, lined the street with like-minded young men, bidding Ahmadinejad farewell with a resounding pro-Mousavi slogan: "Ahmadi bye bye."³⁷⁰ More to the point, sensing the political shield provided by the campaign, they declared "Assistance from God [leads to] imminent victory death to this deceptive government." See Goodzila82. "20 Km Human Chain in Tehran-June 8th." Online video clip. *YouTube*. 8 June 2009. Accessed 24 September 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PP-iji4VTQQ>>.

³⁷¹ Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran, the Green Movement, and the USA*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2010, pp 12.

leadership—have focused on civil rights rather than revolutionary change³⁷² or armed struggle.³⁷³

Some of the movement’s detractors have gone so far as to categorize it as just another Islamist movement that shares in the symbolism and worldview of the ruling Islamic system. On the face of it, this labeling also has some credibility. Mousavi, Karroubi, Khatami, and Rafsanjani, all of which are veteran leaders of the Islamic Republic, are the main political figures associated with the movement. Mousavi and Rafsanjani were especially close to Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic. Mousavi is considered “Imam’s prime minister”³⁷⁴ as he was Iran’s premier throughout much of the eighties when Khomeini was the final arbiter of power, and Rafsanjani was one of Khomeini’s closest aids—so close in fact that he is credited with persuading him to end the ruinous 8-year war with Iraq.³⁷⁵ While it is true that activists on the ground spearheaded the movement frequently causing Mousavi and others to

³⁷² It would certainly be difficult to argue that the leaders of the movement, or rather the personalities around which the movement often gathered, including Mousavi, Karroubi, Khatami, and Rafsanjani, sought revolutionary change. These leaders are some of the Islamic Republic’s senior statesmen and have long worked *for* rather than *against* the foundation of the system of governance.

³⁷³ There was very little about the movement to suggest that an armed insurrection or a civil war was ever on the political horizon. Of course, that didn’t prevent some from posing sensationalist analyses. For instance, on the eve of the Iranian government’s most vaunted political holiday—the anniversary of the revolution’s victory (February 11)—Reza Aslan wrote: “as Iran braces for what could be the largest and most violent demonstrations since the election that returned Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to power, the country may be on the brink of civil war.” See “Iran on the Brink”. *The Daily Beast*, 8 Feb 2010. When that theory failed to materialize, he offered another equally sensationalist prophecy three days later: “If the mullahs and the merchants begin joining forces with the protesters, even as the Revolutionary Guard becomes more entrenched in the political sphere, a civil war may be inescapable.” See “Iran’s Eerily Silent Streets”, *The Daily Beast*, 11 Feb 2010.

³⁷⁴ “Faryād-i āzādi-ye nakhost vazīr-i emām dar dāneshgāh-i amīr kabīr”. *Kaleme*. 14 April, 2014. <<http://www.kaleme.com/1393/01/25/klm-180544/>>.

³⁷⁵ Eshragi, Ali Reza, and Baji, Yasaman. “Debunking the Rafsanjani Myth”. *Al Jazeera*. 21 Feb 2012. Accessed 24 Sept 2013. <www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2012/02/2012215164958644116.html>.

comment on an event after the fact³⁷⁶, nevertheless his role must be acknowledged as he was the candidate behind whom the movement rallied and crystallized in the first place. That such “Islamic” figures are associated with the Green Movement and that some of the movement’s slogans were—on the face of it—religious in theme, have prompted many to condemn the movement as part of an internal Islamist power struggle.

The point is not to choose a categorization because the movement was all of these and none of these at the same time. Any attempt at categorizing a multi-faceted movement is a disservice to the plurality of voices and worldviews predominant in the uprising. Millions of Iranians from all political persuasions protested under the banner of “the Green Movement” and invoked religious symbolism—as well as symbols that have come to be associated with religion, such as what the state refers to as “Islamic Palestine”—in order to pursue a variety of aims. Such objectives ranged between canceling the election results, protesting the government’s brutality, advocating for women’s rights, as well as goals that transcended Ahmadinejad’s “victory,” including the complete overthrow of the Islamist system, of which the Islamic constitution and Khamenei’s position of the Guardian Jurist (*valī-ye faqīh*) are its cornerstone.

If it is possible to circumvent these labels and challenge the traditional notion of what it means for a movement to be “revolutionary,”³⁷⁷ then the conversation changes entirely. In the most basic context of protest movements—notwithstanding any radical

³⁷⁶ It was only after demonstrators adapted their protest activities to the new security climate by using the occasion of Beheshti’s anniversary to stage anti-government demonstrations that prompted Mousavi to instruct demonstrators to use such political holidays to give continuity to the movement in order to renew their demands.

³⁷⁷ The debate regarding what constitutes a revolutionary movement is too cumbersome to outline here. For the sake of brevity and for the point at hand, suffice it to say that a movement can be considered revolutionary in its most basic form if it seeks to replace the governing system with an entirely different polity, i.e. replacing the monarchy with a republic.

change pertaining to social relations and the means of production—“revolutionary” often describes a movement that seeks a revolutionary change in the system of governance. The military coups that overthrew the monarchies in Egypt in 1952 and Iraq in 1958 were championed as “revolutionary” since they both abolished the monarchy and proclaimed a republic.³⁷⁸ Iran’s leaders hailed its 1978-79 protest movement as “revolutionary” as it laid waste to the entire monarchical order and its ruling political, financial³⁷⁹, and military brass. Indeed, members of the financial elite that supported the pre-revolutionary order were either put to flight or executed. The Shah’s generals who presided over the military—one of the main pillars of the Pahlavi dynasty³⁸⁰—were

³⁷⁸ That throngs of people came out in support of the coups by flooding the streets thereby blocking roads and preventing a counter-coup military mobilization, lends credence to the argument that the coups were “coups-turned-revolutions.” This is especially true in Iraq, where a small group of men drew up the coup plans in secrecy and without the involvement of the people in the initial stages of the “revolution.” Subsequent popular participation, however, was integral to the revolutionary change that swept the country. Specifically, at least 100,000 poured into the streets of Baghdad to show their support for the coup. Their numbers were vital to safeguarding the coup from counterrevolutionary activity or armed interference by members of the Baghdad Pact, the potential intervention of which expressly concerned many of the coup plotters before the event. Hanna Batutu observes that by crowds “clogging streets and bridges not only in Baghdad but in many other towns, it hindered possible hostile counteractions.” Most of the 3,000 troops who had spearheaded the destruction of the monarchy did not carry any ammunition, but the bodies of the demonstrations literally provided sufficient arms in ensuring that the action was not a brief moment in history but a coup that had morphed into a popular revolution. See Batutu, Hanna. *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq: A Study of Iraq’s Old Landed and Commercial Classes, and of Its Communists, Bathists, and Free Officers*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 805. Interestingly, when Bani Sadr was based out of Paris before the revolution and before the Algiers Accord (1975) ended animosities between the Shah and Saddam, personnel from the Iraqi embassy approached Iran’s future president and advised him that there was no other way but through the military to bring about change in Iran, and that he should establish contacts with the officer corps inside the country. Bani Sadr retorted that just because such a plan worked in one country like Iraq or Egypt, it didn’t mean that it had universal application, and that “the problem of Iran belongs to Iranians and whatever we do is for us to decide, and that it would be better if you didn’t involve yourself in these affairs.” See Abolhassan Banisadr. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 21, 22 May 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 4 (seq. 84). Accessed 22 April 2015

³⁷⁹ The financial elite entail “business and industrial figures” who left the country and took with them a “drain of capital... into the billions of dollars.” See “The Khomeini Era Begins”. *Time*. 12 Feb 1979, pp. 40.

³⁸⁰ This is a constant theme throughout Abrahamian’s *Iran Between Two Revolutions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), but he specifically stresses the point in periodic detail from page 135 onwards.

likewise executed or fled the country.³⁸¹ The Islamist government not only purged the military but created parallel armed forces, most notably, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, which was founded with the main purpose of safeguarding the revolution's leadership—the defense of which was deemed a necessity given the Iranian military's role in implementing the Anglo-American coup against Premier Mossadeq in 1953.³⁸² The judiciary, media, educational system, even the physical landscape of the country, and most important of all—the constitution—were Islamized thereby producing an entirely new and revolutionary order—notwithstanding the lack of change in terms of the social classes and their relationship to the means of production.³⁸³ This total transformation stands in stark contrast to the endurance of the vested interests in Egypt in the era of the Arab Uprisings. The lack of deep-seeded change in Egypt has been credited with the counter-revolutionary coup that ousted the democratically-elected Muhammad Morsi in 2013.³⁸⁴

If the discussion continues to be confined to whether the Green Movement was revolutionary in a Marxist sense or simply by virtue of whether it sought to completely change the system of governance, then some of the most fascinating and historical

³⁸¹ My grandfather, Major General Sohrab Jahangiri, was one such military officer who was put to flight.

³⁸² As early as 10 days before Khomeini's historic return to Iran, Ayatollah Montazeri's son, Muhammad, first argued for the necessity of a "revolutionary guard corps" to "preserve the revolution"—by which it is doubtless that he meant the revolution's leadership—Khomeini in particular—whose return was imminent. See Rafiqdoost, pp. 48. The need to "preserve" the revolution was indeed real, as some Mossad officials at the time felt that Khomeini would not constitute a threat because the Shah's security apparatus would assassinate him. See Alpher, Yossi. *Periphery: Israel's Search for Middle East Allies*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015.

³⁸³ Parsa talks about this in detail in *Social Origins*, arguing that little changed socially other than a new albeit Islamist elite eradicating and replacing the old elite.

³⁸⁴ Egypt in the era of the Arab Uprisings provides an effective case study. The revolutionary change in Egypt was not comprehensive like in 1979 Iran thereby allowing the Mubarak-era vested interests in the military, media, and the economy—the so-called "deep state"—to stage a comeback in the form of a counter-revolutionary coup in the summer of 2013. For further reading, see Alimaghham, Pouya. "The Iranian Legacy in the 2011 Egyptian Revolution: Military Endurance and U.S. Foreign Policy Priorities". *UCLA Historical Journal*. Vol. 24 Iss. 1, 2013, pp. 45-59.

aspects of the Green Movement will inescapably be marginalized. Doubtless, elements within the movement may have sought a radical change in terms of Iran's polity, but the potency and enduring legacy of the movement lay in the fact that it was innovative in an entirely different manner, which itself constituted an altogether different revolution. In other words, the Green Movement was revolutionary on its own terms, not for what it wanted but for what it did: it seized all of the Islamic Republic's symbols and with them their emotive power, and rebranded and reprogrammed them in order to deploy them against the state which relied on those very symbols to legitimate itself. To put it in Moaddel and Gramsci's words, the Green Movement appropriated all of the Islamic Republic's ideological symbols thereby harnessing the power of the state's understanding of what constitutes "common sense,"³⁸⁵ subverted them and used them as symbolic weapons to either infuse their protests with emotive power against the government or altogether "negate"³⁸⁶ the state's ideology. Palestine is one of the most potent symbols in the ideological armory of the Islamic Republic that the Green Movement masterfully co-opted and leveled at the state's ideology with devastating fervor.

As with before, the discussion of Palestine as a symbol of contestation must be viewed in the wider context of protest against the Iranian state. Although it is instinctual to analyze the 2009 protest movement through the events that unfolded on the streets of Iran as they were the most visible, dramatic—and in terms of the number of participants—the most breathtaking and memorable, this chapter furthers the thesis that if the reader wants to fully understand the gravity of the Green Movement's revolution and

³⁸⁵ Butko, Thomas J. "Revelation or Revolution: A Gramscian Approach to the Rise of Political Islam". *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, May 2004, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 43.

³⁸⁶ Moaddel, Mansoor. *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*. New York and Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 268.

challenge to the government in 2009, it must not view the movement as a phenomenon beholden to the date and location of its occurrence. Although the movement erupted in 2009, it drew upon a history of struggle to deliver its post-Islamist attack on the state. Indeed, the historical context must be included in any discussion of the Green Movement as it adds critical meaning, for example, to the symbolic value of Palestine in the Iranian theatre of radical protest. Furthermore, some of the most important displays of defiance were not confined to the street. The Digital Age has created opportunities to launch new and creative ways of protest. As such, acts of dissent on the streets will be part of a larger canvas entailing acts of protest online and social media.

Before the chapter addresses the fateful events of 2009, it is prudent to first outline a brief history of Palestine in relation to Iran before, during, and after the Iranian Revolution in order to provide the foregrounding necessary to appreciate the power of Palestine as a symbol in the Iranian context—an understanding central to a pivotal moment in the history of the Green Movement, Quds Day.

III. Iran and Palestine: A Brief History

The establishment of a Jewish state in Mandate Palestine affected the calculus of the entire region, including “non-Arab” Iran.³⁸⁷ When Zionist leaders declared an independent State of Israel in Palestine in 1948, the Shah’s government faced a dilemma. The Shah viewed Israel’s establishment as strategically beneficial since Arab money, manpower, attention, and resources would be directed toward confronting the Jewish

³⁸⁷ I put “non-Arab” in quotes because such a phrase is not very useful, especially since Iran has a large Arab minority in its southern regions. Incidentally, it’s just as problematic to refer to Iraq as an “Arab country” since it has a very sizeable Kurdish population, or Israel as a “Jewish state” when it is not governed by Jewish law and has a rapidly growing Muslim population.

state instead of Iran. This was especially important to Iran as it saw “Arab Iraq” as a specific regional threat.³⁸⁸ During the October War of 1973³⁸⁹, for instance, Iraq sought a guarantee from Iran that it would not take advantage of Iraq removing its troops from its border with Iran and committing them to the Syrian battlefield of the war.³⁹⁰

While Israel indeed helped regional rivals like Iraq divert attention away from Iran, the Shah nevertheless had to maintain a balancing act in order to avoid both Arab scorn across the region and popular antipathy at home. So important was this balancing act that when false rumors of Iran’s formal recognition of Israel spread to Qom, Iran’s center of religious learning, the Shah’s government was forced to profusely deny the rumor to quell the uproar.³⁹¹ Furthermore, when Nasser accused Iran of recognizing Israel, the Shah’s government strongly rebuked the allegation, expelled Egypt’s ambassador, and severed diplomatic relations with the most populous Arab country in the world to make its point.³⁹² Despite such political grandstanding, however, Iran under the Shah frequently tilted in the direction of close ties with Israel. The Jewish state shared mutually-hostile relations with its surrounding Arab states and it sought to penetrate the wall of isolation by forming alliances with non-Arab states such as Iran, Turkey, and

³⁸⁸ Three decades later this suspicion was realized when Iraq under Saddam Hussein invaded Iran on September 22, 1980. It is also relevant to note that many Arab states, with the exception of Syria and Libya, supported Iraq with funds, equipment, and even manpower. Moreover, it is widely believed that Saddam invited King Hussein of Jordan to fire the opening shot that officially launched Iraq’s invasion of Iran.

³⁸⁹ Also known as the Yom Kippur War and the Ramadhan War.

³⁹⁰ Lowrie, Cairo, to Department of State, November 7, 1973, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/1973STATE219402_b.html.

³⁹¹ Montazeri, Khāṭerāt: beh rasmīat shenākhtan-i isrāīl tavasot-i shāh va mokhālefāt-i ṭollāb bā ān”, pp. 146-9.

³⁹² “Iran Cuts Cairo Tie In Dispute on Israel”. *Reuters*. 28 July 1960, pp. 1.

Ethiopia as well as forming pacts with religious minorities such as Lebanese Christians, and non-Arabs including the Kurds.³⁹³

This strategy, known as the Periphery Doctrine, meant that the longevity and stability of the Pahlavi regime was an absolute priority for Israel. Consequently, Israel's national intelligence agency, the Mossad, in collaboration with the American CIA³⁹⁴, helped form and train Iran's own intelligence agency, SAVAK, which was notorious for its efficiency in torturing and "disappearing" dissidents.³⁹⁵ One of the reasons why Iran's

³⁹³ Ibid, pp. 21.

³⁹⁴ The Shah himself admitted that "...Many SAVAK officials went to the U.S. for training by the CIA." See Pahlavi's *Answer to History*, pp. 157. It's also worth noting that such training included methods that were "based on German torture techniques from World War II." See McCoy, Alfred. *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror*. New York, Owl Books, 2006, pp. 74. Iranian Marxists, who bore the brunt of the SAVAK's repression, justifiably blamed successive American presidents for arming the Shah "...with billions of dollars of U.S. arms..." and providing "...the most extensive secret police network and mechanisms for repression developed by the U.S." See "Shah's U.S. Visit: Newest Plot Against Iranian People". *Resistance* (A Publication of I.S.A.U.S., Member of Confederation of Iranian Students). (Vol. 4, No. 8). September, 1977.

³⁹⁵ In 1975, Amnesty International (AI) issued a sharp condemnation of the Shah's regime in its annual report, noting: "The Shah of Iran retains his benevolent image despite the highest rate of death penalties in the world, no valid system of civil courts and a history of torture which is beyond belief." See Ennals, Martin. *Amnesty International Annual Report 1974/75*. 1975, pp. 8. A more detailed account can be found on page 128, where AI offers an unconfirmed range of between 25,000 to 100,000 political prisoners in Iran. One of the worst kinds of modernization that the Shah imported from the West was its torture techniques, which were rooted in science and designed to inflict maximum pain on its victims in order to prompt dissidents' to divulge information. See Abrahamian, Ervand. *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999, pp. 106-7. One legendary guerrilla, Ashraf Dehghani, who was captured and tortured before undertaking any armed action, describes in her memoirs her agonizing torture, which included multiple rounds of beatings, the whipping of the soles of her feet, after which she was forced to painfully walk on them, electric shocks, rape, sodomy, the pouring of boiling hot water in her rectum, and much more. See Dehghani, Ashraf. *Hemaseyeh moqavemat*. Siahkal.com. 1971. Accessed 25 April 2015. Chapter 2.

<<http://www.siahkal.com/english/part1.htm#Chambers>>. So serious and effective were these torture techniques that guerrillas often kept cyanide tablets on their bodies in the case of their imminent capture at hands of the Shah's. As a result of the real fear that even the most committed guerrilla fighter might break under such effective torture and reveal critical information about their organization, many kept cyanide tablets with them if the necessity for "revolutionary suicide" arose. Interestingly, one guerrilla considered his tablet as the only "weapon" he carried. See 'Alireza Mahfoozi. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 7 April 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 1 (seq. 7-8). Accessed 24 April 2015. Dehghani described how "revolutionary suicide" was indeed a weapon when one of her comrades poisoned himself rather than being taken alive, opining: "Comrade Kazem once again proved the regime's impotence and inefficacy through a true revolutionary's glorious self-sacrifice." See Dehghani, pp. 4 (Chapter 1). The idea is that despite the Shah's vaunted security apparatus, guerrilla

1979 revolution was so anti-Israel is precisely because Israel “helped set up the SAVAK secret police that later terrorized the nation,”³⁹⁶ a fact not unknown to the population that reeled from SAVAK’s heavy boot:

“This close identification of Israel with the Shah’s regime and its repressive policies was widely held and largely accounted for anti-Israeli sentiments. Even before the revolutionary forces took power, the Shah’s alignment with Tel Aviv was condemned by his last prime minister, Shahpour Bakhtiar...”³⁹⁷

Indeed, nearly three weeks before the Shah’s final departure from Iran, Khomeini underscored Israel’s hand in the Shah’s repression: “Israel is the biggest supporter of the Shah and is responsible for setting up SAVAK. For this reason, Israel is a partner in the crimes of the SAVAK and the Shah.”³⁹⁸ That Israel helped create a police state in Iran, however, was only one reason that garnered the aversion of Iranians. The issue of Palestine also prompted many amongst Iran’s clergy, radical student groups, and even state officials to hold Israel in contempt.

For the militant clergy, Palestine was an Islamic issue that affected all Muslims regardless of sect, ethnicity, or nationality. Ayatollah Khomeini, for example, did not recognize the ethnic and national divisions amongst Muslims. For Khomeini, what fate

fighters, armed with light weapons and revolutionary zeal, maintain sovereignty over their bodies—their ultimate weapon. Thus, in the case of their imminent capture, militants have the freedom to die through revolutionary suicide rather than surrender their bodies to a state that would certainly torture them in order to extract information.

³⁹⁶ “Iran cuts Israel ties”. *The Boston Globe*. 19 Feb 1979.

³⁹⁷ Ramazani, R.K. *Revolutionary Iran: Challenge and Response in the Middle East*. Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986, pp. 151.

³⁹⁸ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Bayān-i dīdgāh-i islām dar mored-i masā’el-i mokhtalef”. Interview. 28 Dec 1978, Neauphle-le-Château, Paris. Vol. 5, pp. 295. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=5&tid=70>>.

befell the Muslims of Afghanistan or Palestine was not confined to the national boundaries of those countries, but concerned Muslims all over the “Islamic World”³⁹⁹:

“...We do not regard Islam as being confined to Iran. Islam is Islam everywhere. It is the same Islam in Egypt, Sudan, Iraq, the Hijaz, Syria and other places. We cannot separate our fate from that of other Muslims... We cannot consider the Arabs or the destiny of the Arabs, nor that of the other (Muslim) countries, as being separate from ours. It is the same Islam everywhere, and all Muslims – we included – are duty bound to protect Islam wherever it is.”⁴⁰⁰

In his book *Kashf al-Asrar (The Revealing of Secrets)*, published nearly four decades before he would go on to lead a revolution in the name of Islam, he argued forcefully that “the walls they have erected throughout the world in the name of countries are the products of man’s limited ideas” and that the world is “the homeland of all the masses of people... under the law of God...”⁴⁰¹ Almost 30 years later in his seminal tract, *Islamic Government*, he argued against the continued existence of such nation-states, blaming the imperial powers for dismembering the Ottoman Empire when they “separated various segments of the Islamic nation from each other and artificially created separate nations... about ten to fifteen petty states.”⁴⁰² It is important to note that after the revolution, the Islamic Republic labored to make Khomeini’s vision for the Islamic World a reality. For instance, Khomeinist Iran co-founded⁴⁰³ the Lebanese Hizbullah, an armed political

³⁹⁹ I use the phrase “Islamic World” rather cautiously because it’s not very descriptive as it seemingly suggests Muslims inhabit an entirely separate and different world.

⁴⁰⁰ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Ahamīat-i ḥefẓ-i jomhūrī-ye islāmī – naqsh-i roḥāniyat dar ẓul-i tārikh – ṭarḥ-i khīānatbār-i sāzesh bā isrā’īl”. 16 Nov 1981. Tehran. Vol. 15, pp. 369-70. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=15&tid=176>>.

⁴⁰¹ Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Kashf al-asrār*. 1942, pp. 276.

⁴⁰² Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Ḥokūmat-i islāmī: vilāyat-i faqīh*. mu’aseseh-ye āmūzeshī-ye pazhoheshī-ye emām khomeinī, 1970, pp. 30.

⁴⁰³ I purposely say “co-established” because Khomeini and Iranian guardsmen from the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps were instrumental in its formation but do not deserve all the credit since it was militant Lebanese Shi’ites who likewise provided crucial leadership and the foot soldiers for the organization.

movement established in part to fight Israel in solidarity with what Khomeini referred to as “Islamic Palestine”⁴⁰⁴—a worldview which Hizbullah echoed when they published an open letter in 1985 declaring their existence:

“We are linked by a strong ideological and political connection – Islam. From here, what befalls the Muslims in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Philippines or anywhere else verily afflicts the body of our Islamic nation of which we are an inseparable part, and we move to confront it on the basis of our main legal obligation and in the light of a political view decided by our leader the *Wilayat al-Faqih* [Ayatollah Khomeini].”⁴⁰⁵

Ayatollah Mottahari, one of the leaders of the Iranian Revolution and an architect of Iran’s Islamic system and whose assassination in 1979 prompted an official “day of national mourning,”⁴⁰⁶ also warrants mention because he effectively placed Palestine within both an Islamic context and history:

“What would the Prophet of Islam do if he was still alive today? What issue would occupy the Prophet’s thoughts? By God we are responsible regarding this crisis. By God we have responsibility. By God we are being ignorant. By God this very issue would break the heart of the Prophet today. The problem that would fill Husayn ibn ‘Ali’s heart with sorrow today is this issue.

If Husayn ibn ‘Ali was here today, he would say ‘if you want to mourn for me today, if you want to lament over me, your slogan today must be ‘Palestine.’” The Shimr⁴⁰⁷ of 1300 years ago is dead and gone. Get to know the Shimr of today. Today the walls of this city should tremble to the slogan of Palestine. And what efforts have we Muslims exerted for Palestine? By God it’s a shame for us to call ourselves Muslims. It’s a shame to call ourselves Shias of ‘Ali ibn Abi Talib. The enemy has ravaged our fellow Muslim’s land, murdered and imprisoned their men,

⁴⁰⁴ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Hoshdār be moslemīn-i jahān dar mored-i felestīn va efsā-ye jenāyathāye rezhīm-i shāh”. Feb 1979. Najaf, Iraq. Vol. 2, pp. 322. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=2&tid=269>>.

⁴⁰⁵ Jaber, Hala. *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, 54-5.

⁴⁰⁶ “Iran mourns killing of top Khomeini aide”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 3 May 1979, pp. 4.

⁴⁰⁷ Shimr, the commander of Yazid’s army, massacred Husayn and his band of followers in the Battle of Karbala in 680 AD.

violated their women and took their jewelry from their ears and hands...
Are they not Muslims?”⁴⁰⁸

By invoking such dramatic and emotive history, Mottahari equated Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians as akin to the massacre in Karbala. In doing so, Mottahari’s speech situated the issue of Palestine overtly within wider Islamic history in order to provoke a call to action: Supporters of Husayn are unable to reverse the course of history and prevent his martyrdom at the Battle of Karbala, but they can carry forth his legacy today by coming to the aid of the suffering Palestinians. The implication is that Husayn was a Muslim, Palestinians are Muslims,⁴⁰⁹ and so too are Iranians, which explicitly intertwines their timeless fates as the Muslim community, theoretically, is one *ummah*—or “Islamic homeland.”⁴¹⁰

For the militant clergy, however, Palestine was not simply a Muslim issue because Palestinians were predominantly Muslim but also because Palestine is home to Islam’s third holiest site, *al Quds* (Jerusalem in Arabic), and is Islam’s original *qiblah*—the direction in which the first Muslims prayed. Furthermore, Jerusalem’s centrality in the Abrahamic faiths and the religious wars over the Holy Land, namely the Crusade Wars, has prompted an Islamic preoccupation with safeguarding the city. As Rashid Khalidi notes in his seminal *Palestinian Identity*,

“[the] idea of Palestine’s special importance is, at least in part, rooted in the heightened Islamic concern for Jerusalem and Palestine that followed the traumatic episode of the Crusades. This idea was widespread, and

⁴⁰⁸ The text of his famous speech is posted in full online and the actual audio clip can be found on *YouTube*, see Ruh. “Shahīd morteżā mottāharī va feleštīn”. *Doshmantarin*. 15 Nov 2010. Accessed 24 Sept 2013. <<http://doshmantarin.blogspot.com/1389/08/24/post-10/>>, and Bahmanpour, ‘Alireza. “Ayatullah’s Historical Speech about Palestine”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 June 2010. Accessed 24 September 2013. <<http://youtu.be/-SxOUMLfX7c>>.

⁴⁰⁹ The Islamist depiction of Palestinians as Muslims is not entirely accurate as around one-fifth to a quarter of Palestinians are Christians.

⁴¹⁰ Khomeini, *Hokūmat-i islāmī*, pp. 93.

persisted for centuries thereafter. One of the most eminent eighteenth-century religious figures in Jerusalem, Shaykh Muhammad al-Khalili, in a *waqfiyya* document of 1726 establishing an endowment that survives to this day, warned that the transfer of *waqf* property to foreigners in Jerusalem constituted a danger to the future of the city, which must be built up and populated if Jerusalem were to be defended against the covetousness of these external enemies.”⁴¹¹

The advent of nationalism in the region sparked renewed conflict over the city, and in 1967 Israelis conquered and occupied East Jerusalem—the site in which Muslims believe that the Prophet ascended to heaven and back—and officially annexed it in 1981⁴¹². For the city to slip from Muslim control is considered by the likes of Khomeini to be an affront to the honor and territorial integrity of the wider Muslim nation, or the “Islamic homeland.”

He repeatedly argued for the return of Palestine and Jerusalem (*Quds*) to the “Islamic homeland” as matter of supreme importance:

“I ask of God the Blessed and Exalted that our brother nation of Palestine will overcome its difficulties. We are their brothers. From this movement’s inception more than fifteen years go, I have always, in my writings and speeches, spoken of Palestine and brought attention to the crimes that Israel has perpetrated there. God willing, after we are freed from these fetters then to the same degree that we stood with you at that time and are now standing with you, I hope that we will confront the problems together like brothers. I beseech God the Blessed and Exalted to exalt Islam and the Muslims and to return Quds to our brothers.”⁴¹³

⁴¹¹ Khalidi, Rashid. *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997, pp. 30.

⁴¹² This annexation is not recognized by much of the world simply by virtue of the Geneva Conventions, which, in summary, considers territorial conquest and annexation unlawful. See Sharon Korman’s *The Right of Conquest: The Acquisition of Territory by Force in International Law and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 224.

⁴¹³ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Ghalabeh-ye īmān bar qodrathāye shayṭānī”. 17 Feb 1979. Tehran. Vol. 6, pp. 179. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=6&tid=72>>.

Even in the final years of his life, the last decade of which he served as the revolutionary head of state who had the country's media and resources at his disposal, he continued to call for the return of Palestine to the Islamic fold:

“Defending the honor of Muslims, defending the lands of Muslims and defending their resources is an imperative and we must ready ourselves for achieving these divine goals and for defending Muslims. In the present circumstances particularly, where the true sons of Islamic Palestine... let out the cry of ‘oh Muslims’ as they sacrifice their lives, we should stand against Israel and the aggressors with all the spiritual and material strength at our disposal...”⁴¹⁴

That Khomeini—sanctioned with an authority that was rooted in both his stature as one of the most senior religious leaders in the Shi‘ite realm and who commanded the fealty of religious followers from within and beyond Iran’s borders, as well as his position as the undisputed leader of a historic revolution that had brought him to the apex of power of the largest Persian Gulf country—referred to Palestine as “Islamic Palestine” affirms the sacred value and high priority that Islamic revolutionaries placed on the issue. As such, he was unequivocal with regards to Israel even before the Shah’s demise, pledging that a future revolutionary Iran would never sell Israel oil nor recognize the country.⁴¹⁵

Palestine’s importance, however, was not limited to the militant clergy as many strata of Iran’s populace sympathized with the Palestinian cause. Two guerrilla groups, the Fada’iyan-i Khalq and the Mujahidin-i Khalq (MKO), galvanized an entire generation of radical students in the 1970s by launching an earth-shattering guerrilla war against the monarchy. The war began in 1971 when the Fada’iyan, using as a revolutionary model the Moncada Barracks Attack in 1953 that eventually led to the Cuban Revolution six

⁴¹⁴ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Etteḥād shūm qodrathā dar moqābel-i islām”. 28 Feb 1988. Tehran. Vol. 20, pp. 486. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=20&tid=257>>.

⁴¹⁵ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Tazāhorāt-i tāsū‘a va ‘āshūrā sīāsat-i jomhūrī-ye islāmī”. 11 Dec 1978. Paris. Vol. 5, pp. 207. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=5&tid=46>>.

years later,⁴¹⁶ launched a guerrilla assault on a gendarmerie in the northern town of Siyahkal, Gilan. Subsequently, these two groups competed with one another to become Iran's revolutionary vanguard by launching one spectacular attack after another.

Although the Cuban model provided a historical precedent, Palestinian revolutionary groups such as George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and Yasser Arafat's Fatah Organization marked the incredible rise of guerrilla groups in the late 1960s and 1970s in the Middle East, and served as immediate exemplars of action for Iran's radical student organizations and guerrilla movement.⁴¹⁷ Such groups, along with their counterparts in Iran, perceived Israel as both a colonial enterprise as well as America's imperial outpost in the Middle East.⁴¹⁸ Unlike the militant clergy who viewed Palestine through an Islamic lens, Iran's guerrillas saw the struggle in Palestine through the prism of third world liberation movements.

The Fada'iyan and the Mujahidin aspired to follow the path of Cuban and Palestinian revolutionary groups by violently overthrowing the Shah's government, which they likewise viewed as a product of Western imperialism. Said Mohsen, a

⁴¹⁶ In his guerrilla manifesto, Ahmadzadeh argued: "Didn't the Cuban experience show that a small armed motor [band of guerrillas] can launch the insurrection thereby gradually provoking the masses [the large motor] to join the rebellion?" See Ahmadzadeh, Massoud. "mobārezeh-ye mosalaḥāneh ham estrātezhī, ham tāktīk". Siahkal.org, 1971, pp. 30.

<<http://www.siahkal.com/publication/RMassoud-All-chapters.pdf>>. It's not clear exactly when Ahmadzadeh wrote this seminal text. He was executed on March 1, 1972, the Siahkal attack occurred in February, 1971, so it must have been written sometime before the guerrilla operation.

⁴¹⁷ The meteoric rise of the guerrillas was precipitated by the monumental Arab defeat in the 1967 Six-Day War. Although guerrilla groups existed before the war, afterwards they were augmented by volunteers who had lost all hope in the ability of Arab armies to fight Israel using conventional means. It was also a time in which Palestinians began to rely more on themselves than their neighbors to alleviate their plight and took matters into their own hands unlike never before. The spectacular emergence of groups such as al-Fatah and the PFLP galvanized the radicals of the region—Arab and Iranian alike.

⁴¹⁸ Parsi, Trita. *Treacherous Alliance: The Secret Dealings of Israel, Iran, and the U.S.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007, pp. 82.

member of the Mujahideen's central cadre, attested to the Palestinian example of armed insurrection when he uttered the following defense during his military trial:

“The present situation leaves one with no choices but to take up arms against the royalist regime. Why do we advocate armed struggle? We advocated armed struggle because we have examined carefully both the revolutionary experiences of other countries and the last seventy years of Iranian history: particularly the constitutional movement; the crushing of that movement by Reza Khan; the overthrow of Dr Mossadeq in the infamous coup of August 1953; and, of course, the bloody massacres of June 1963. What is more, the revolutionary experiences of Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria and the Palestinians have shown us the new road... We have two choices: victory or martyrdom.”⁴¹⁹

So important was Palestine to this generation of radical activists that their solidarity extended beyond words and into action. Both groups sent activists to Fatah and PFLP guerrilla training camps⁴²⁰ in Lebanon in the 1970s with explosive consequences. Some stayed and fought side-by-side with Palestinian groups against Israel⁴²¹, and others returned home, several with Palestinian wives at their side⁴²², in order to wage the

⁴¹⁹ Translation provided in Abrahamian Ervand. *The Iranian Mojahedin*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 133-4.

⁴²⁰ In his memoirs, Massoud Rajavi, the Mujahidin leader, confirms that the MKO received military assistance from Arafat's al-Fatah organization. See Massoud Rajavi. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 29 May 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 2 (seq. 21). Accessed 24 April 2015. Also, see Saxon, Wolfgang. “Arab leaders Call Iran Shift Historic: Saudis Are Worried About Anarchy and Others are Cautious, but the P.L.O. Appears Joyful”. *The New York Times*. 14 Feb 1979, pp. A9.

⁴²¹ “Facing the New Realities: After the changes in Iran, it's now or never at Camp David”. *Time*. 4 March, 1979, pp. 40. According to Ostovar, many militants, including Montazeri's son—Muhammad—and Yahya Rahim Safavi, who would later become an IRGC commander, established strong ties with the PLO in Lebanon during the 1970s. Such relations not only resulted in their own training and military involvement in PLO operations, but also facilitated the secret deployment of Iranian guerrillas to Lebanon for training. See Ostovar, pp. 93.

⁴²² According to Taleqani's chief aide, Taleqani's son, Mojtaba, a member of the Mujahidin sided with the Marxist faction during the schism that produced two groups—one that stayed true to its original Islamic worldview and the other, the Marxist Mujahidin, which eventually became Paykar. Mojtaba, imprisoned in pre-revolutionary Iran for such memberships, fled the country upon his release and went to Lebanon to collaborate with Palestinian factions. While in Lebanon, he wed a Palestinian woman who returned with him to Iran and occasionally served as a translator between Ayatollah Taleqani's office and the Palestinian diplomatic corps that established an official presence in Iran after the revolution. See Mohammad Shanehchi. Interview recorded Habib Ladjevardi, 4 March 1983, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 4 (seq. 66-67). Accessed 2 May 2015.

guerrilla war. Upon their return to Iran, they staged bold attacks against the regime, American installations and personnel. For example, official American cables noted “28 confirmed explosions (11 of which [were] directed against US presence)” in the four months spanning the spring and summer of 1972.⁴²³ Such attacks were in opposition to US support for the Shah and because the US was “trying to stamp out revolutionary movements in such places as Vietnam, Palestine, and Oman.”⁴²⁴ Furthermore, in 1972, “they bombed the Jordanian embassy to protest King Hossein’s state visit...” in order “to revenge Black September, the month in 1970 when King Hossein unleashed his troops on the PLO.”⁴²⁵

Even senior members of the Shah’s government were sympathetic towards the plight of the Palestinian people. The Foreign Ministry, for example, was especially well-known for being critical of Iran’s proximity to Israel—criticism more rooted on humanitarian grounds than religion or revolutionary politics. Accordingly, one former Iranian official stated the reluctance with which they were tasked to cooperate with Israel: “Even those technocrats that were helping Israel, in their hearts they were really unhappy that Israel was doing these things to the Palestinians.”⁴²⁶ When the matter of Zionism as a form of racism was put to vote at the United Nations, “ambivalent feelings of Iranian Foreign Ministry bureaucrats about Israel turned out to be a critical factor influencing

⁴²³ Farland, Tehran, to Secretary of State, August 10, 1972, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/72TEHRAN4789_a.html.

⁴²⁴ Abrahamian, *Iranian Mojahedin*, pp. 140. The Shah also worked to stamp out such revolutionary movements. Specifically, he infamously sent troops to help the Omani sultan put down the Dhoffar Rebellion, which was backed by the Soviet Union and the allied People’s Democratic Republic of Yemen.

⁴²⁵ Abrahamian, pp. 140.

⁴²⁶ Parsi, pp. 63.

Iran's vote."⁴²⁷ In other words, even though Iran's government was closely aligned with the Jewish state, sympathetic officials in the foreign ministry nevertheless voted in solidarity with the Palestinians and in favor of the resolution.

When the Iranian Revolution swept away Israel's ally, such pro-Palestinian sentiments came to the fore. On February 11, 1979, the day of the revolution's victory, guerrilla groups in tandem with armed volunteers⁴²⁸ dealt the regime its *coup de grace* by attacking police stations, the offices of the secret intelligence, government buildings, military barracks, television and radio stations, political prisons, and a "yelling crowd" laid siege to Israel's mission in Tehran.⁴²⁹

Although the Shah's government did not have formal diplomatic relations with Israel, the mission for all intents and purposes functioned as an embassy, even though the Israeli flag "wasn't flown at the mission and Israeli diplomats did not participate in ceremonies that protocol required other diplomats to attend."⁴³⁰ This was done so the Shah could maintain deniability in his relations with Israel so as to not agitate a populace and wider region that was emphatically pro-Palestinian. Revolutionaries, however, were aware of the scale of the Shah's alignment with Israel and, consequently, sacked and torched the mission during the final insurrection.

⁴²⁷ Parsi, pp. 64. The resolution passed on November 10, 1975 with 72 voting for it, 35 against, and 32 abstentions. A decade and a half later, the US undermined the resolution in a bid to placate Israel after it was not invited to join the US-led coalition during the Persian Gulf War.

⁴²⁸ Rafiqdoost, pp. 41.

⁴²⁹ "Iran cuts Israel ties". One Fada'i guerrilla specifically credits the Fada'iyān with its role in the *coup de grace* when it mobilized fighters to defend the spontaneous Homafaran uprising in Doshan Tappeh against the siege of the Imperial Guard. The successful defense of Doshan Tappeh set in motion the series of assaults elsewhere that precipitated the culmination of the revolution. See 'Alireza Mahfoozi. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 7 April 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 1 (seq. 20-2). Accessed 28 April 2015. It's also important to note that the insurrection precluded a military coup, which was a likely possibility. See Montazeri, "Khāterāt: moshārekāt-i vāqē'ī-ye mardom dar ḥokūmat, ramz tadāvom-i enqelāb", pp. 782.

⁴³⁰ Parsi, pp. 27.

The attack on the Israeli mission preceded the infamous seizure of the US embassy by almost 9 months. Cutting off relations with Israel was such a priority for the Iranian Revolution that

“Iran’s relations with no other country in the world, even the United States, were so quickly and drastically overturned as its relations with Israel were. The revolutionary regime’s relations with the United States and all the Gulf states, including Iraq, did not deteriorate until after the so-called second revolution that destroyed the provisional government of Mehdi Bazargan.”⁴³¹

Even the Shah’s last prime minister⁴³² attempted to appease a mobilized population in order to ward off the revolution’s final push towards the total destruction of the state by terminating relations with Apartheid South Africa, ending oil exports to Israel, and expressing solidarity with the Palestinians: “The government of Iran will continue its ties with its Arab brothers and will support them, particularly the Palestinians in achieving their goals.”⁴³³ The revolutionary government went so far as to blacklist “foreign companies which in the past had indirectly sold oil to Israel” and to “ensure that any company buying Iranian oil would not sell it to Israel.”⁴³⁴ Khomeini even took his provisional government by surprise when he ordered the termination of diplomatic

⁴³¹ Ramazani, pp. 151.

⁴³² Shapour Bakhtiar was the Shah’s last premier inasmuch as the National Front leader agreed to the position on the condition that the Shah leave Iran on an “extended vacation.” See *Khāṭerāt-i shāpūr bakhtīār: nakhost vazīr-i īrān (1979)*. Iranian Oral History Project (Center for Middle Eastern Studies Harvard University), Bethesda: IranBooks, Inc., 1996, pp. 100. In fact, Bakhtiar was a life-long and committed opponent of the Shah and the Pahlavi dynasty. Not only did Bakhtiar envision a Mossadeqist parliamentary system in which the king would reign and not rule, but Bakhtiar also had a personal incentive in opposing Pahlavi rule: The dynasty’s founder, Reza Shah, executed Bakhtiar’s father. See *Khāṭerāt-i shāpūr bakhtīār*, pp. 110.

⁴³³ “Iran to cut off oil to Israel, South Africa”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 12 Jan 1979, pp. 1.

⁴³⁴ “Iran bans firms that sold Israel oil”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 8 Mar 1979, pp. 4.

relations with Egypt in “protest against the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and a gesture of support to the Arab states that oppose it.”⁴³⁵

That Yasser Arafat, the leader of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, was the first world leader to visit Iran a week after the triumph of the revolution should come as no surprise. That he was a leader of a movement and not a head of state that came to Iran should also come as no surprise.⁴³⁶ Although he came uninvited, he and his 31-member delegation⁴³⁷ received a hero’s welcome with crowds marking his arrival with chants of “Palestine will be victorious, Israel will be destroyed” (*felestīn pīrūz ast, isra’īl nābūd ast*).⁴³⁸ When asked why he came to Iran without an invitation, he is believed to have retorted: “One does not need an invitation to go home, therefore, I did not need an invitation,”⁴³⁹ and reportedly said, “When we flew into Iranian airspace I thought I was visiting Jerusalem.”⁴⁴⁰ Moreover, the keys to the Israeli mission, which was partially burned a week prior, were given to Arafat who “proclaimed it the office of the PLO in

⁴³⁵ Kifner, John. “Khomeini Orders Iranian Regime To Break Relations With Egypt”. *The New York Times*. 1 May 1979, pp. A3. Khomeini went on to say that Sadat’s peace treaty with Israel was a “betrayal to Islam, Muslims, and Arabs...” See Khomeini, Ruhollah, “Şolḥ-i meşr va isrāīl (kamp dayvīd)”. 25 March 1979. Qom. Vol. 6, pp. 410. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=6&tid=164>>

⁴³⁶ Bani Sadr was emphatic in his memoirs that under no circumstances would he receive help from foreign governments. When it came to the Palestinians, however, he was open to the idea of not only receiving Palestinian support but also giving it to them as well. Bani Sadr said that he personally wasn’t given any aid but he would not have been opposed to such a happening because “In our opinion his [Arafat’s] circumstances were different than that of a government because we considered them [the Palestinians] as a movement much like ours...” See Abolhassan Banisadr. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 21, 22 May 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 4 (seq. 86). Accessed 22 April 2015

⁴³⁷ Markham, James. “Arafat in Iran, Reports Khomeini Pledges Aid for Victory Over Israel”. *The New York Times*. 19 Feb 1979, pp. A6.

⁴³⁸ DamnFool2k. “‘Arafāt dar īrān – sāl-i 1357”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 14 September 2013. Accessed 18 Feb 2015. <http://youtu.be/EPXWG_ZDWxY>.

⁴³⁹ “Javāb-i nā ārām-i ‘arafāt”. *Ghanoon Daily*. 28 Nov 2012. <<http://goo.gl/rIQZiM>>. It is important to note that Arafat’s position in the Arab-Israeli conflict was increasingly weakened as Egypt, the largest and most powerful Arab country, was removed from the conflict through the Camp David Accords. Consequently, Arafat descended upon Iran a week after the revolution’s triumph in a desperate attempt to find a powerful ally to replace Egypt.

⁴⁴⁰ “Arafat and Khomeini denounced Israel as their common enemy”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 19 Feb 1979, pp. 1.

Iran... and raised the PLO flag to the cheers of 200 onlookers.”⁴⁴¹ Arafat hailed the ‘common goals’ of the Iranian and Palestinian revolutions...,” emphasized the sacred importance of Quds⁴⁴², and repeated Khomeini’s slogan, “Today Iran, Tomorrow Palestine.”⁴⁴³

The optimism of the Palestinian delegation in Iran and the general Palestinian movement over the triumph of the Iranian Revolution cannot be overstated. Beirut, for instance, where the PLO was stationed at the time of Iran’s revolution, “echoed with machinegun fire” as they “saluted” the revolution’s triumph.⁴⁴⁴ Other Palestinian factions such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine—a guerrilla group that trained many Iranian Fada’iyan fighters in the 1970s—declared that “the victory of the Iranian revolution is a victory for the Palestinian people and the Arab masses.”⁴⁴⁵ So hopeful were the Palestinians for Iran’s revolution that they supplied their allies with weapons⁴⁴⁶ and training⁴⁴⁷, presumably to help revolutionary forces defend their gains.

⁴⁴¹ “Iranians vow aid as Arafat takes over Israeli legation”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 20 Feb 1979, pp. 1.

⁴⁴² Ramazani, pp. 153.

⁴⁴³ Markham, James M. “Arafat, in Iran, Reports Khomeini Pledges Aid for Victory Over Israel”. *The New York Times*. 19 Feb 1979. Khomeini and Arafat’s jovial relations were short-lived as the two had completely different visions for Palestine. What’s more, that Arafat took credit for the early release of the women and African-American US embassy personnel, the remaining 52 of which endured captivity for 444 days, angered Khomeini. That Arafat failed to broker a ceasefire between warring Iran and Iraq and subsequently sided with Saddam only ensured that Arafat never stepped foot in Iran again. In Khomeini’s Iran, state-sanctioned pro-Palestinian sentiment exalted Quds and an “Islamic Palestine” that was part of the transnational Islamic nation, both of which circumvented Arafat and his secular nationalist goals.

⁴⁴⁴ “PLO jubilant over Khomeini victory”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 13 Feb 1979. For a more detailed discussion regarding the global impact of the Iranian Revolution, see Esposito, John. *The Iranian Revolution: Its Global Impact*. Miami: Florida International University Press, 1990.

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁶ In his memoirs, Rafiqdoost, one of the founders of the Revolutionary Guards, claims: “Before the war, the first weapons and ammunition that I purchased was from Arafat in Lebanon. I remember they [Arafat’s forces] developed their own missile launchers and Kalashnikov bullets... During one trip, I bought 2,000 Kalashnikov rifles, 200,000 Kalashnikov bullets, 500 rocket launchers, and 5000 rockets and took them to Iran.” See Rafiqdoost, pp. 143.

⁴⁴⁷ Ostovar, pp. 54.

Indeed, the revolution marked Iran's entry into the Arab-Israeli conflict⁴⁴⁸, though in the worldview of Iran's Islamist leaders it was a conflict that pitted Muslims against Zionists and their imperialist backers—namely the United States.

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this transnational solidarity is that it defies common perceptions of the Cold War, which is often viewed through the prism of great power rivalry—East versus West, and Capitalism versus Communism. For many in the Developing World, however, struggling against the yoke of colonialism and imperialism was more a matter of North versus South, or developed versus underdeveloped countries, than between the East and the West.⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, this revolutionary camaraderie between Iranian and Palestinian militants is especially noteworthy in the context of the Shah's ideology—one that exalted a racial hierarchy in which the Persian Shah, “the Light of the Aryans,”⁴⁵⁰ sat at its apex against the Middle Eastern “Other”—namely the

⁴⁴⁸ One can make the argument that Iran has long been a party to the conflict through its alignment with Israel before the Iranian Revolution. *Time* affirmed this point succinctly after Arafat's visit to Iran: “It was the Shah of Iran who sold oil to the Israelis, who used it to power tanks and planes that were fighting the Palestinians.” See “Facing the New Realities: After the changes in Iran, it's now or never at Camp David”. 4 March 1979, pp. 40. Months before *Time* made that point, Khomeini affirmed the sentiment in the fall during the revolutionary uprising when he said: “The Shah gives Islamic Iran's oil to Israel to repress Muslims.” See Khomeini's letter to Arafat: “Tashakor az 'elām-i hemāyat – poshtibānī az feleštīn”. 19 Sept 1357. Najaf. Vol. 3, pp. 476. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=3&tid=289>>. Iran after the revolution, however, became a different kind of party to the conflict by switching sides.

⁴⁴⁹ For a more thorough account of the struggle between the developed versus the underdeveloped, see Gleijese, Piero. *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976*. Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

⁴⁵⁰ Heavily influenced by European fascism and Kemalism, the Pahlavi dynasty expounded an ideology in which “Iranianness” was constructed along an ethnic line—as determined by language and a selective reading of history. Thus, Persian-speakers constituted a normative Iranianness in the eyes of the state before the revolution. Afterwards, Shi'ite Islamic identity supplanted the Pahlavi dynasty's hierarchy of ethnic supremacy. In other words, Persian-speakers, regardless of religion, enjoyed a privileged status during the Pahlavi era; after the revolution, Shi'ite Muslims, irrespective of ethnic identity, became the new standard, as envisioned by the Islamic government, by which to determine one's Iranianness. That Iran's current leader is a Shi'ite Islamic jurist of Azari Turkic origin exemplifies the post-revolutionary hierarchy. That is not to say, however, that racism does not persist on a popular level both inside Iran and certainly within the expatriate community, as well as on a structural level in Iran. For a more thorough reading on the subject, see Asgharzadeh, Alireza. *Iran and the Challenge of Diversity: Islamic Fundamentalism, Aryanist Racism, and Democratic Struggles*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

Arabs. In other words, revolutionary Iranians were able to make common cause with the Palestinians despite the monarchy's hegemonic "common sense."

Such history demonstrates the deeply organic link that existed between the Palestinian national struggle and Iranian revolutionaries of all political persuasions. Thus, when the Islamic Republic instituted Palestine as a cornerstone of its ideology, it didn't do so in order to pre-empt allegations that its foreign policy was partial towards Shi'ite Muslims.⁴⁵¹ Rather, the Islamic Republic situated the liberation of Palestine (and Quds) as one of its founding pillars because of the deep concern for the Holy Land, which was shared between the Palestinian movement and those who fought to make the Iranian Revolution a reality. Undeniably, it was believed that the victory in Iran would eventually translate into victory in Palestine.

The Islamic Republic institutionalized "Islamic Palestine" after the revolution's triumph by inculcating an entire generation of Iranians in the tenets of Palestinian liberation. In doing so, the government equipped this generation, which was raised under the state's ideology and authority, with a potent discourse that would backfire against Khomeini's successors in 2009. Before the discussion proceeds to the events of 2009, it is necessary to outline how and through what symbolism such Palestine-centric discourse was taught to this generation. Only then can the slogans, images, and Palestinian symbols deployed against the state in 2009 be fully appreciated in terms of their power and efficacy.

⁴⁵¹ As'ad AbuKhalil wrote in 2014 that tensions between Hamas and Iran over the war in Syria "hurt Iran (and Hezbollah) as that relationship helped dispel the sectarian cast of Iranian policies in the Arab East." "Some determinants of Iranian policy in the Arab East". *al-Akhbar English*, 3 Nov 2014. Such a statement seemed to suggest that Iran supported Hamas, a militant Sunni Islamist organization, in order to refute allegations of sectarianism in which Iran only supported Shi'ite groups such as Hizbullah in Lebanon and SCIRI and others in Iraq. The outlined history above, however, underscores the point that for the Islamic Republic, the issue of Palestine is vitally Islamic and fully above sectarian considerations.

IV. Institutionalizing Palestine in Revolutionary Iran

The Iranian government institutionalized Palestine in a multitude of ways ranging from textbooks and the country's religio-political calendar to even its physical landscape. A fitting example of such ideological indoctrination can be found in a second grade Persian grammar textbook published three years after the revolution. The emotional intensity of chapter 15, a fictional letter written by a Palestinian refugee boy for his peers in Iran, warrants full quotation:

“Do you know me? I am your brother. I am Palestinian, we Palestinian children are Muslim.

The name of our country is Palestine and name of your country is Iran. You live in your own country and in your own home. But we are refugees in the desert because the enemy has occupied our home and homeland. We now live in the desert. We spend our days and nights under tents. The tents are our schools. But even here, the enemy won't leave us alone and burns our tents. They show no mercy to our young or old, and they even bomb our hospitals. Do you know why? It's because we want to return to our home and country and expel the enemy from our homeland.

Ever since your revolution was victorious, our enemy has grown frightened and for this reason harasses us even more.

Our enemy is Israel. Israel is our enemy and is your enemy and the enemy of all free peoples.

We will resist Israel until our very last breath and we know that you will help us. All free peoples will help us. We will resist and with the grace of God we will be victorious and we will return to our dear country where we will live in freedom.

Hoping for victory, God preserve you.”⁴⁵²

The letter is remarkably close to Khomeini's speeches on Palestine, which were given with mature audiences in mind:

⁴⁵² *fārsī: dovvom-i dabestān*. (Tehran, S. 1360), pp. 48-51.

“...[Israel] is driving the innocent brothers of our faith out of their homes, destroying their houses and burning their crops, while the Muslim governments remain indifferent to these crimes even occasionally partaking in such crimes or busying themselves with pointless negotiations, leaving the brave Palestinian freedom fighters to courageously resist Israel alone... Our brothers and their defenseless children are burning in the flames while facing many dangers.”⁴⁵³

Indeed, in Khomeini’s Iran, children were now exposed to the state’s ideological focus on Palestine through such heart-wrenching and real-life stories. They were tasked to memorize political concepts as “occupation,” and homework questions derived from the letter asked “Where do the Palestinians live?” and “Who has occupied their homeland?” as well as “Who is their enemy and what does the enemy do to them?”⁴⁵⁴ Such questions were meant to drill a new generation in the plight of the Palestinian people in an unforgettably emotional manner. The “Letter from a Refugee Child” is inset with a drawing of a Palestinian boy and the tents in which he and his refugee family live (Figure 3.2).⁴⁵⁵ The enlarged eyes are undoubtedly designed to emphasize a sense of innocence in order to invoke deeper sympathy. What’s more, the letter highlights that while Iranian children are fortunate enough to have the luxury of proper schools, they should perhaps feel a sense of shame at their privilege because their “brothers” in Palestine undergo schooling in tents, which to make matters worse are often set ablaze by Israel—“the enemy of all free peoples.” Not only should they feel guilty, but they should also feel a sense of obligation because, as a consequence of Iran’s revolution, “the enemy... harasses” them “even more.”

⁴⁵³ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Ḥamleh-ye rezhīm-i šahūnīstī be jonūb-i lobnān”. 22 March 1978. Najaf. Vol. 3, pp. 358. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=3&page=358>>.

⁴⁵⁴ *fārsī: dovvom-i dabestān*. (Tehran, S. 1360), pp. 50-1.

⁴⁵⁵ *fārsī: dovvom-i dabestān*. (Tehran, S. 1360), pp. 48.

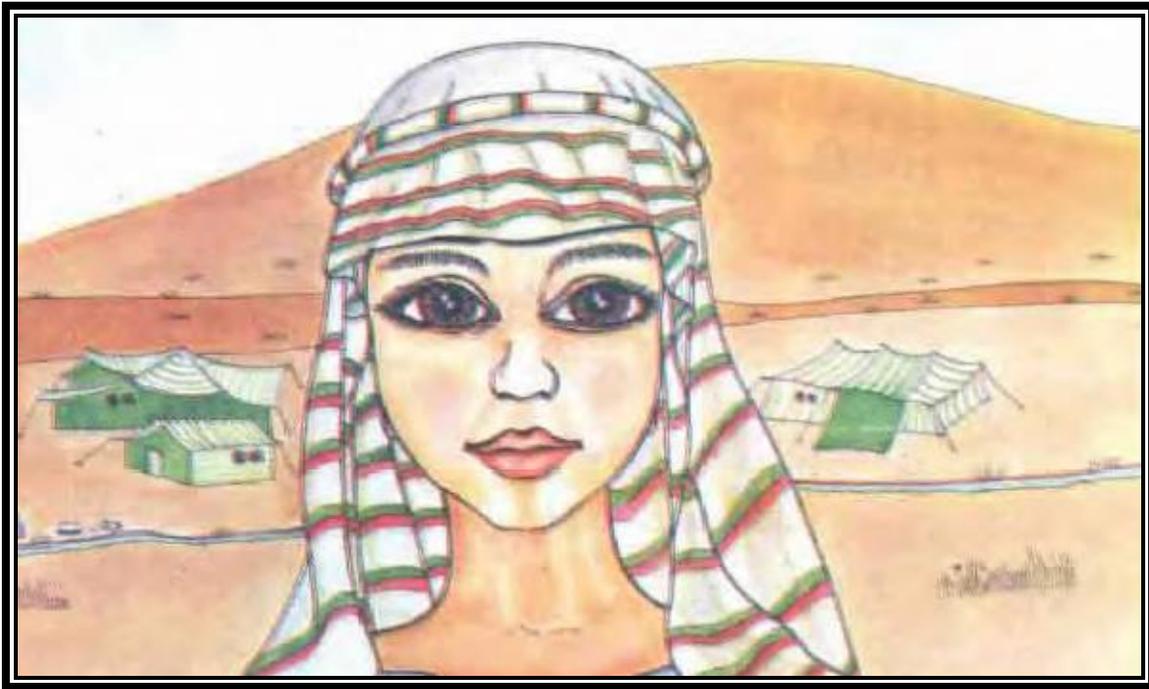


Figure 3.2. Textbook image of a Palestinian refugee boy

No aspect of the letter is more loaded with Iran’s Islamist ideology than the introduction, which treats Palestinians, regardless of sect and the presence of a sizeable Christian minority, as Muslims akin to their Iranian counterparts rendering them as “brothers.” In other words, the text employs basic language accessible to a child in order to deliver ideological lessons that emphasize the necessity to return “Islamic Palestine” to “the Islamic homeland” and Iran’s obligation in that just and noble effort. Through such exposure, Iranian children obtained an early introduction in emotive stories of oppression and resistance thereby empowering them with a state-sanctioned discourse that legitimized resistance to oppression.

Just as these drills were designed to inculcate a generation in the cause of Palestine, the revolutionary government likewise sought to drill Iran’s wider population in the importance of Palestine’s liberation. Thus, Khomeini’s masterstroke came with his

designation of the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadhan to be Quds Day, a day in which Iran ideologically cemented its status as one of the most ardent international champions of the Palestinian movement.

Ayatollah Montazeri suggested⁴⁵⁶ the establishment of such a day in order to unite “hundreds of millions across the Islamic world over the issue of Palestine, with Muslims in each country coming out on a single day...”⁴⁵⁷ He hoped that governments would cooperate with such popular forces thereby facilitating a common platform for the liberation of Quds and Palestine. Heeding Montazeri’s suggestion, Khomeini designated the last Friday of Ramadhan as Quds Day with the objective of directing the Islamic world’s heightened sense of religiosity to “strive to save Quds”⁴⁵⁸ from what Khomeini called “the usurper”—Israel. In his letter proclaiming the establishment of Quds Day, he once again employed the imagery of burning houses in Israel’s contemporaneous assault on southern Lebanon in order to underscore the necessity and urgency of such a day of solidarity:

“Over the years I have repeatedly reminded Muslims of Israel the usurper’s danger, and it is now increasingly launching savage attacks on our Palestinian brothers and sisters in south Lebanon with the aim of destroying Palestinian resistance, continuously bombing homes and dwellings. I call upon Muslims around the world and their governments to unite against Israel and its backers. I invite the Islamic world to commemorate the last Friday of Ramadhan, which falls amongst the most blessed days of the month, in order to support the Palestinian people. Such a day will be known as Quds Day, and Muslims around the world must

⁴⁵⁶ It important to note that there is a debate as to who was responsible for recommending the establishment of Quds Day to Khomeini. Some believe that Mustapha Chamran, Mehdi Bazargan, or the Fada’iyan share in the credit. I blame the confusion on the popularity of the issue amongst all factions at the time. See Alipour, Farahman. “Feleštīn dar āyeneh-ye khāṭerāt-i āyatollāh”. *Rooz Online*. 19 Dec 2010. <<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/wijeh/wijehitem/archive/2010/december/19/article/-06dcc80b99.html>>.

⁴⁵⁷ Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: ‘elām-i rāhpaymāi-i mīlīūnī barāye āzādsāziye qods”, pp. 544.

⁴⁵⁸ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Vizhegīhāye rūz-i qods”. 16 Aug 1979. Qom. Vol. 9, pp. 276.

<<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=9&tid=94>>.

gather in solidarity with Palestinians in their pursuit of their lawful rights.”⁴⁵⁹

The historic first Quds Day witnessed “millions of Iranians” demonstrate in solidarity with Palestine “throughout the country,” where they wished “Death to Carter, Begin, and Sadat”—the first Arab head of state to formally recognize Israel.⁴⁶⁰ Khomeini marked the occasion with a fiery speech in which he underscored the universal message of the day: “Quds Day is the day in which the oppressed stand and face their oppressors,” and invoked Iran’s struggle against both the Shah and his foreign backers in order to inspire Palestinians and fellow Muslims to rise up against their “oppressors”: “We, with a smaller number, revolted in the face of numerous enemies and defeated the superpowers... Just as Iran revolted and rubbed the noses of the oppressors in the dirt, so should the oppressed of other nations...”⁴⁶¹ In doing so, Khomeini used the occasion of the first Quds Day to place the Shah in the same category as Israel, and grouped the long suffering Iranians with the oppressed Palestinians. Furthermore, he made certain that there was no ambiguity about the connection between Quds Day and the government that established it: “Quds Day is not only a day for Palestinians but also an Islamic day. It is a day for Islamic government. It is a day in which the flag of the Islamic Republic must be raised in other [Islamic] countries.”⁴⁶² From the first Quds Day after the revolution until 2009, it has been a day of state-sanctioned mass rallies in which the country’s leadership, state ideology, and certain segments of the population walked in step in solidarity with Palestine and the Iranian government.

⁴⁵⁹ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Entekhāb-i ākharīn jome’h-ye māh-i ramāzān be ‘onvān-i ‘rūz-i qods’”. 7 Aug 1979. Qom. Vol. 9, pp. 267. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=9&tid=88>>.

⁴⁶⁰ “Millions Mark ‘Palestine Day’”. *The Washington Post*. 17 Aug 1979.

⁴⁶¹ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “vīzhegīhāye rūz-i qods”.

⁴⁶² Khomeini, Ruhollah. “vīzhegīhāye rūz-i qods”.

Thus, if an Iranian came of age in Iran after the revolution then he or she was exposed to the issue of Palestine through elementary school textbooks. If, however, an Iranian already reached adulthood at the time of the revolution, Quds Day provided the opportunity to instill in him or her the tenets of “Islamic Palestine.” If they stayed away from such a day, then there’s a chance they would learn about the struggle in Palestine through the state media’s relentless focus on the issue.

For instance, one Tehran Radio communiqué promised that the Iran-Iraq War would “continue until attaining the liberation of Qods (Jerusalem) from the Zionist domination...”⁴⁶³ Indeed, the decision to continue the war into Iraq after Iran liberated all Iraqi-occupied territory in 1982 was publicized under such banners as, “War, War Until Victory” and “The Road to Jerusalem Goes Through Karbala.”⁴⁶⁴ The government resolved to continue the war after one of the most consequential military operations, which was named after Quds (*‘amalāāt-i bayt ol-moqadas*)⁴⁶⁵, led to the liberation of Khorramshahr after two years of Iraqi occupation. In the same vein, the government named the Revolutionary Guards’ external operations unit the Quds Force. Lastly, if all else failed to convince the populace to view the issue of Palestine through a state-sanctioned Islamic lens in which sympathy for the former necessitated support for the government that championed Palestine’s liberation, then the authorities erected statues,

⁴⁶³ Bernstein, David. “Iran invades Iraq: ‘first stage in liberation of Jerusalem’”. *The Jerusalem Post*. 15 July 1982.

⁴⁶⁴ Rafiqdoost, pp. 218. Abrahamian notes that the slogan actually read: “The Road to Jerusalem Goes Through Baghdad.” Perhaps both were used interchangeably as they (almost) served the same sentiment. See Abrahamian, Ervand. *A Modern History of Iran*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 171. Ostovar documents how the IRGC viewed the liberation of Quds as the paramount priority that was “blocked” by the war with Iraq. Thus, successfully defeating Iraq, the ‘lesser victory,’ was necessary in order to commence operations to achieve the ‘greater victory’ of freeing Jerusalem. As Ostovar put it, “...Iraq became seen as both the literal and figurative gateway to Jerusalem....” See Ostovar, pp. 89.

⁴⁶⁵ Rafiqdoost, pp 212.

named streets and districts, and painted murals and slogans in honor of Palestine throughout the country.

Of all the means at its disposal to communicate its worldview, the government preferred the visual medium “because it could effectively convey political, religious, and ideological notions to the public through culturally familiar metaphors and symbols.”⁴⁶⁶ Furthermore, “unlike textual publications, which required literacy, a basic education, and *time* to read, visuals could be grasped quickly and effortlessly by the general Iranian viewer.”⁴⁶⁷ Thus, the government re-visualized and re-branded Iran’s physical and aesthetic landscape in the post-revolutionary period in order to depict, extol, and transmit its ideological universe to the country.

Katherine Verdery notes that

“...among the most common ways in which political regimes mark space are by placing particular statues in particular places and by renaming landmarks such as streets, public squares, and buildings. These provide contour to landscapes, socializing them and saturating them with specific political values: they signify space in specific ways.”⁴⁶⁸

Palace Square is one such square that was infused with “specific political values” when it was renamed and remade into Palestine Square after the revolution. Located where Taleqani Street meets Palestine Street, both of which were likewise given such names after the revolution, the square is situated between Amirkabir University of Technology and Tehran University—the bastion of modern Iran’s radical politics.

Palestine Square is adorned with two murals and a statue that illustrate the Islamic government’s legitimating imagery by visualizing the sacrality of Palestine and Islamic

⁴⁶⁶ Ostovar, pp. 106.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ Verdery, Katherine. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 39-40.

Iran's role in its liberation. The first mural in question is one honoring Sheikh 'Abbas al-Musawi, Hizbullah's secretary-general who was assassinated by Israeli helicopter gunship in 1992 (Figure 3.3).⁴⁶⁹ Below al-Musawi is the Dome of the Rock mosque in Quds with a Palestinian wearing an 'Allahu akbar' arm band, both of which remind the passerby of Palestine's Islamic identity. The shattered Star of David in this context symbolizes the forthcoming Islamic victory over Zionism. At the center of the square where vehicles circle is a statue displaying the heroic David and Goliath struggle over Palestine, which is represented by a vertical geographic outline encompassing both Israel and the Occupied Territories—the totality of historic Palestine. That a silhouette of the Dome of the Rock is carved out of the middle of the statue only affirms the significance of Quds to the dispute (Figure 3.4).⁴⁷⁰ What's more, on one side of the statue is a Palestinian gripping a rock, which highlights the asymmetry of the conflict while also underscoring Palestinian defiance and identity (Figure 3.5).⁴⁷¹ The stone, intrinsic to the iconography of the story of David, is one of the many symbols associated with the Palestinian movement around the world.

In addition to the *kufiyyah*, the Palestinian⁴⁷² scarf/headdress, the rock is likewise an emblematic symbol organically linked to the Palestinian movement and warrants special attention given the manner in which Green activists utilized it to register their protest in 2009. So important is the rock to the Palestinian narrative of resistance that it transcends both space and time, figuring prominently in transnational Palestinian culture.

⁴⁶⁹ Alimaghham, Pouya. "Palestine Square-1". 2006. JPEG File.

⁴⁷⁰ Alimaghham, Pouya. "Palestine Square-2". 2006. JPEG File.

⁴⁷¹ Alimaghham, Pouya. "Palestine Square-3". 2006. JPEG File.

⁴⁷² The *kufiyyah* is often referred to as a Palestinian scarf, even though Arabs and non-Arabs across the region claim it as their own. Kurds often don the head scarf, and Iranians have their own version of it called the *chafiyeh*, which Khamanei often wears.

Palestinian brides and grooms, for instance, are often welcomed to their wedding hall through the *zaffe*, traditional dancing and singing that includes the chorus from the popular song, “Mommy, they demolished our house”:

“Mother, they demolished our home, and the home of my brother and our neighbor. But don’t be upset my precious mother, for they increased our stones. We are Palestinians, we are not terrorists. Ours is a just cause, mother, and we just want to return to our home.”⁴⁷³

Along with the stone, a second Palestinian in the statue is clutching a Qur’an thereby symbolizing the centrality of the religious identity of most Palestinians, affirming that steadfast belief in the holy book, God, and his final prophet will empower them to overcome the hardship of the Israeli military occupation (Figure 3.6).⁴⁷⁴ The other side of the statue recognizes the matriarchal role of women in the struggle as a Palestinian mother, covered in Islamic headdress, is likewise defiantly gripping a stone while holding her lifeless son (Figure 3.7).⁴⁷⁵ The bottom right is a shattered Star of David, underscoring the belief that faith and resistance will triumph over Zionism.

Lastly, there is a second mural along the sidewalk below the image of Sheikh al-Musawi (Figure 3.8).⁴⁷⁶ Contrasting with both the statue and the mural above—both of which are related to Palestine in a manner that does not directly involve Iran—this second mural includes the presence of Iranian soldiers. In doing so, it situates Iran in the context of the struggle over Palestine not only as a party to the conflict but also its vanguard as it

⁴⁷³ Atshan, Sa’ed. 29 Dec 2014. 12:30 p.m. Facebook Comment. These lyrics of resistance are such an important and enduring part of Palestinian culture that when Jordanian singer Omar al-Abdallat came to the West Bank, audiences requested the same song three times. When he was asked about his experience performing in Palestine, he responded, “I feel I am in Jordan, because the audiences request the same songs.”⁴⁷³ The majority of Jordan’s population and the queen are of Palestinian descent. See “‘Mommy they demolished our house’ top song at Ramallah performance”. *Ma’an News Agency*. 4 Oct 2008. <<http://www.maannews.net/eng/ViewDetails.aspx?ID=205420>>.

⁴⁷⁴ Alimaghham, Pouya. “Palestine Square-4”. 2006. JPEG File.

⁴⁷⁵ Alimaghham, Pouya. “Palestine Square-5”. 2006. JPEG File.

⁴⁷⁶ Alimaghham, Pouya. “Palestine Square-6”. 2006. JPEG File.

affirms the leadership role of the clergy. Indeed, one of the two clerics in the mural is directing the soldiers to a target, which tellingly is a black crow whose claws are insidiously usurping three Islamic holy sites. That the Dome of the Rock mosque in Jerusalem is included in the three emphasizes not only Israel's "usurpation" of the mosque but also Iran and the clergy's sacred role in returning it to the "Islamic fold."

In sum, the "specific political values" visualized in Palestine Square illustrate that Palestine is a hallowed Islamic issue because of the presence of Quds and the generalization that Palestinians are Muslims; and that revolutionary belief in Islam and its holy book—in contradistinction to any foreign and godless ideology—will lead to victory; and Islamic Iran, empowered with an Islamic government, is endowed with the duty, leadership, and moral strength to spearhead Palestine's total liberation. Furthermore, the same sentiment depicted in Palestine Square was given mundane normality in the form of Iranian currency whereby Khomeini—the personification of the Islamic Republic both during and after his death—is pictured on the front side of the 1000 rial bank note and Jerusalem's Dome of the Rock on the other (Figure 3.9).



Figure 3.3. Palestine Square mural of Sheikh 'Abbas al-Musawi



Figure 3.4. Statue at Palestine Square



Figure 3.5. Close-up of the Palestine Square statue



Figure 3.6. Close-up of Palestine Square statue from a different angle



Figure 3.7. Close-up of the Palestine Square statue from a third angle



Figure 3.8. Second mural at Palestine Square



Figure 3.9. Jerusalem-themed Iranian banknote

The revolutionary movement in 1978-79 was emphatically pro-Palestinian and the Islamists institutionalized Palestine as a symbol for two purposes. The most obvious reason was because the leaders of the revolution and those on the ground who voted for the revolution with their feet were pro-Palestinian either out of religious solidarity, humanistic ideals, comrades-in-arms fighting for liberation, or a combination thereof. A secondary reason was because Palestine was and continues to be an issue towards which many in the Islamic World and beyond feel a deeply emotional attachment. Dabashi rightly observes that

“The geopolitics of the region cannot, of course, be reduced to the Palestinian predicament; however, nor can it be ever divorced from it. The fundamental historical fact of the last half century is that there is no bleeding wound on Arab and Muslim consciousness deeper and more hurtful than the plight of the Palestinians and the barefaced theft of their homeland.”⁴⁷⁷

As a consequence of that emotive power, leaders of much of the Middle East have sought to utilize those passions for their own political purposes.⁴⁷⁸ The Islamic Republic is one such government that has championed the Palestinian movement out of sincere conviction but not without gain. Iran’s government affirms its revolutionary credentials by supporting the quintessential revolutionary movement of the region, one that as outlined above carried a distinct aura of resistance that captivated and inspired Iranians from across the political spectrum. To put it plainly, the government added to its legitimacy—at the expense of other Iranian factions sympathetic to Palestine—through its pro-Palestinian credentials.

Thus far, this chapter has outlined the role Palestine symbolically played before, during, and after Iran’s own revolution, and underscored its ideological utility in the hands of the Islamic Republic. The Iranian government’s discursive use of Palestine was manifest in a multitude of ways, such as in politically infused stories taught to young Iranian pupils, annual rallies on Quds Day, statues, murals, or squares wrought with

⁴⁷⁷ Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran, the Green Movement, and the USA: The Fox and the Paradox*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2010, pp. 120.

⁴⁷⁸ The most obvious and dreadful example can be found in 1991, when Iraqi president Saddam Hussein fired scud missiles at Israel “in solidarity with Palestine” during the US-led coalition’s bombing of Iraq. At the onset of the conflict, President George H.W. Bush enlisted the support of Arab states such as Egypt and Jordan in order to counter Saddam’s claims that the American-led bombing of Iraq was a war against Arabs and Muslims. Israel was not invited to join the coalition so as to keep the Jordanians and Egyptians in the coalition. They did not want to be seen as fighting alongside Israel against a fellow Arab country. Saddam’s missile attacks were designed to provoke an Israeli response so as to prompt the Arab states to withdraw from the coalition. Saddam, a leader who paid much lip service to the Palestinian cause and erected statues of himself pointing towards Jerusalem, like many of his fellow Arab heads of state, sought to use the issue of Palestine to his benefit. This was especially the case in the first Persian Gulf War. Using loan guarantees, Bush Sr. persuaded Israel to not respond for the sake of preserving his coalition.

emotion, all of which were chronicled in order to provide the foregrounding necessary to understanding the scale of the Green Movement's ideological challenge to the state in 2009. It is precisely this history and powerful symbolism that was harnessed and deployed to attack the state that derived its legitimacy in part through that very symbolism. The brilliance and dynamism of the Green Movement is that it took Palestine as a state-sanctioned symbol and contested its meaning and uses.

There were two overriding trends within the Green Movement in relation to Palestine: The first and seemingly more dominant trend was the repudiation of Palestine as a means by which to attack the legitimacy of the state; The second and probably more consequential for the regime was the Green Movement's appropriation of the legitimacy of Palestine as a symbol and its conversion into a Green Movement ideological weapon, which activists subsequently leveled against the same state that legitimated itself through such symbolism.

V.I. Palestine Contested

By September, 2009, the government had adapted to the opposition strategy of co-opting regime holidays in order to stage anti-government rallies, and cancelled two such events, the Night of Power and Taleqani's anniversary, thereby depriving activists of the opportunity to demonstrate. Quds Day, however, could not be cancelled without the government losing "too much face,"⁴⁷⁹ so it opted to issue several warnings instead.

⁴⁷⁹ Director Alan Eyre, Iran Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., September 14, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI378_a.html.

No warning was more important than the one delivered by Khamenei during his first sermon since the Friday after the June election. Responding to the post-Islamist challenge of the demonstrations, he defended the Islamic identity of the Islamic Republic:

“...if politics is separated from morality, it becomes devoid of spirituality. Consequently, politics takes on a bankrupt nature serving as a means for acquiring power at any cost, obtaining wealth, and advancing one’s interests ahead of everything else... This sort of politics becomes a plague onto the people. One of the dangers of separating politics from religion—which some have always promoted in the Islamic world and in our country as well, and today unfortunately some are raising the issue of separating religion and politics—is that when politics is separated from religion then morality and spirituality also become separated.”⁴⁸⁰

In a clear warning to the opposition, he went on to promise that although the system tolerates differences of opinion, it will deal harshly with those who challenge the “foundation of the system.”⁴⁸¹ The sermon, which occurred one week before the annual Quds Day rallies, was an attempt to control the message of the forthcoming day. In contrast to Khomeini’s first Quds Day message when he called for solidarity with Palestinians while also declaring that it was “a day for Islamic government,”⁴⁸² his predecessor noted that “Quds Day is devoted to the issue of Quds, in which Iranians show their unity,” and that they should “be cautious so that no one could use the occasion of these gatherings to create divisions between us”⁴⁸³—a clear attempt to pre-empt and caution against anti-government activity. Not only did Khamenei warn demonstrators ahead of the Quds Day rallies, but the state broke with tradition and appointed Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami—a staunch conservative—to give the Quds Day sermon instead of Rafsanjani, who had customarily given the address and whose last sermon on July 17,

⁴⁸⁰ Khamenei, Ali. “Khoṭbehāyeh nāmāz jome’h-ye tehrān”. 11 Sept 2009. <<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8033>>.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid.

⁴⁸² Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Vizhegīhāye rūz-i qods”.

⁴⁸³ Khamenei, Ali. “Khoṭbeh hāyeh nāmāz jome’h-ye tehrān”.

2009 served as an occasion for massive protests.⁴⁸⁴ Despite the government's maneuvering and threats, the opposition continued to mobilize in order to turn Quds Day into a "Green Day."⁴⁸⁵

In keeping with its thirty-year tradition, the Iranian government organized pro-Palestinian protests on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadhan, which in 2009 fell on September 18. Iran, the country in which Quds Day was established with the express purpose of mobilizing Muslims across the world to show their support for Palestine, witnessed not only its usual protests but also extraordinary demonstrations with an unprecedented counter-programmed message. As they had done before with preceding political holidays, the Green activists used the occasion of Quds Day to show their strength after a two-month lull on the streets and they did so not simply to express solidarity with the Palestinians, but to also bring attention to brutality at home.

Despite a massive security presence and official warnings to the crowd not to hijack the annual display of solidarity with the Palestinians with "deviant slogans"⁴⁸⁶, "tens of thousands"⁴⁸⁷ of people gathered to renew their protests in such cities as Mashhad, Rasht, Tabriz, Shiraz, Isfahan, Bushehr, Kerman, Ahvaz, Yazd, and central

⁴⁸⁴ Hosseini, Sina. "Mokhālefat-i rahbarī bā eqāmeḥ-ye nāmāz jome'h-ye rūz-i quds tavasoṭ-i hāshemī". *Rahesabz*. 16 Sept 2009. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/1613>>.

⁴⁸⁵ Alongside calls from opposition leaders including Mousavi, Karroubi, and Khatami to use Quds Day as a day of action, organizers campaigned online and on the streets to encourage protesters to come out. For instance, 9 days before the Quds Day rallies activists hung a banner on a pedestrian overpass under which thousands of vehicles pass daily, including an image of Mousavi's face above a caption that read: "Quds Day, Green Day" (*rūz-i qods, rūz-i sabz*). See mirhosseinsabz. "Otūbān-i nāyesh sho'ār-i rūz-i qods rūz-i sabz". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 9 September 2009. Accessed 13 March 2015. <<https://youtu.be/4G9BEt3VLKA>>.

⁴⁸⁶ "Hoshdar-i shadīd-i sepah beh ekhlālgarān dar rahpaymā-ye rūz-i quds". *Alef*. 17 Sept 2009. <<http://alef.ir/vdcc1mqp.2bq1p8laa2.html?5wml>>.

⁴⁸⁷ "Ḥozūr-i gostar-deh-ye mo'tareẓān dar rūz-i quds dar īrān". *BBC Persian*. 18 Sept 2009. http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/09/090918_ba-quds-rally.shtml. To confirm that the opposition's protests were indeed massive, see forougheirani. "Tazāhorāt-i rūz qods 88". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 September 2009. Accessed 12 March 2015. <<https://youtu.be/eAEI9bUfPk8>>.

Tehran, which hosted the largest gatherings.⁴⁸⁸ Even though “marchers celebrating Jerusalem Day generally outnumbered the protesters” in the capital, “there were parts of the city where the opposite was true.”⁴⁸⁹ The large crowd in Tehran declared “Death to the dictator, whether the leader [Khamenei] or the doctor [Ahmadinejad]” (*marg bar dīktātor, cheh rahbar cheh doktor*)⁴⁹⁰ and warned, “Ahmadi, Ahmadi, this is the last message, the Green Movement of Iran is ready to revolt!” (*aḥmadī, aḥmadī, īn ākharīn payāmeḥ, jonbesh-i sabz-i īrān āmādeh-ye qīyāmeḥ*).⁴⁹¹

V.II. “No to Gaza, no to Lebanon, I sacrifice my life only for Iran”

The most common slogan of the Quds Day anti-government rallies was “No Gaza, no to Lebanon, I sacrifice my life only for Iran” (*na ghazeh, na lobnān, jānam fadā'-ye īrān*).⁴⁹² Lebanon was mentioned in the same vein as Palestinian Gaza because much of Iran’s foreign policy in terms of supporting armed groups that repeatedly exchange fire with Israel includes Hamas, which controls Gaza, and Lebanon’s Hizbullah.⁴⁹³ The slogan was not necessarily an expression of Iranian isolationism or

⁴⁸⁸ Timothy Richardson, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al, September 20, 2009, Wikileaks https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI386_a.html.

⁴⁸⁹ Worth, Robert F. “Despite Warning, Thousands Rally in Iran”. *The New York Times*. Sept 18 2009. Accessed 24 Sept 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/09/19/world/middleeast/19iran.html?_r=0>

⁴⁹⁰ Tazahorat2009. “iran september 18, 2009 qods day anti regime rally part 6.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 September 2009. Accessed 10 August 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pj68-4fEzc0>>.

⁴⁹¹ Peive17. Vesal St. Iran Tehran 18 sep 2009 P36”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 September 2009. Accessed 11 August 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9OzK3t58QUY>>.

⁴⁹² 2009IranRevolution. “2009 Iranian Revolution – Nasrolla poster & “No to Gaza, No to Lebanon...” Sept 18”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 21 September 2009. Accessed 14 May 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JDD-UhSPsvU>>. Also, see forougheirani. “taḏāhorāt-i rūz qods 88”.

⁴⁹³ Iran’s support of Hizbullah has long been a central foreign policy prerogative. Iran played a critical role in Hizbullah’s formation in terms of organization, arms, funds, ideology, and even guidance. Hizbullah was formed with the express purpose of establishing an Iranian-style Islamic Republic in Lebanon and to resist Israel. The former objective has largely been abandoned. It’s important to note that Iran had no such role in the origins of Hamas and Iran’s support for Hamas is not on par with its support for Hizbullah. For a

pro-Israeli sentiment. On the face of it, the crowd gave voice to a current of Iranian nationalism that abandoned the Islamic Republic's foreign policy priorities.

In his response to the Green Movement's leaders who criticized the slogan, one writer using the penname "Jamal Irani" authored a revealing piece in defense of the slogan by explaining the rationale behind its use. In the article, Jamal criticized opposition leaders⁴⁹⁴ for recommending changes to the slogan, stating that "Just as Mr. Mousavi and Karroubi repeatedly declared that the leaders of the movement are the people and whatever slogan stems from the heart of the popular gatherings and is decided upon by the people cannot be changed..."⁴⁹⁵ The author affirmed that the slogan "in no way supports Israel's oppression of the people of Gaza and Palestine," adding a scathing rhetorical question: "How can a people who are themselves suffering from oppression under a tyrannical regime accept the same fate for another defenseless people?"⁴⁹⁶

Jamal argued that the people are simply fed up with the Iranian government taking advantage of the Palestinian issue for its own political objectives:

"The government's exploitation of Palestine and Lebanon for its own propagandistic purposes, and its exploitation of its animosity for Israel for its domestic politics has caused the people to hold a negative view in relation to the issue of Palestine and the entirety of the conflict... The government's excessive news coverage of Palestine, Hizbullah, Lebanon, and Israel over the past 30 years has caused people to be entirely agitated with anything related to them. It is likely that 30 percent of the

selection of the rapidly expanding literature regarding Hizbullah, see Hamzeh, Ahmad Nizar. *In the Path of Hizbullah*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004; Jaber, Hala. *Hezbollah: Born with a Vengeance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. For a good primer, see Norton, Richard August. *Hezbollah: A Short History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007.

⁴⁹⁴ Mousavi, Karroubi, and Kadivar, the latter of which is in exile in the US and was a pupil to dissident cleric and one-time successor to Khomeini, Ayatollah Ali Montazeri, all came out against the slogan and advised demonstrators to foster pro-opposition and pro-Palestine slogans such as "Yes to Gaza, yes to Lebanon, I sacrifice my life for Iran."

⁴⁹⁵ Irani, Jamal. "Cherā mardom goftand: 'na ghazeh na lobnān, jānam fadā'ye īrān". *Rahesabz*. 23 June 2010. Accessed 24 Sept 2013. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/18060/>>.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

government's media coverage over the past 30 years has been devoted to Palestine alone. This has caused the people to have a negative reaction towards Palestine."⁴⁹⁷

In other words, Jamal highlights two critical points: 1) The Palestinian cause has lost credibility in the eyes of a segment of the opposition because of its association with the Iranian government and the fact that it has been seemingly forced onto them; 2) The movement is recognizing the government's political use of Palestine and Lebanon as "exploitation" for "propaganda purposes." The government's implied argument has long been that it warrants not only domestic support but also wider Islamic support because it champions the quintessential "Islamic" cause—the liberation of Palestine and Quds—both of which are dear to millions in the Muslim World and beyond. In other words, to support the Islamic government is by extension akin to supporting the Palestinian cause. Jamal and those who shouted "No to Gaza, no to Lebanon..." however, repudiated that outlook by labeling the government's strategy as "exploitation," thereby refusing to allow the state to legitimize itself through its solidarity with the Palestinians. To put it plainly, the slogan strategically attacked a central issue important to the government ideology in order to attack the very basis of the Islamic government.

What's more, conversations with activists and sympathizers of the movement have yielded another popular reason, which was echoed by Jamal when he wrote:

"The government's one-sided and unjustified support for Hizbullah and Hamas while the people of Iran are in need of that support has consequently intensified the people's hatred for the two."⁴⁹⁸ One social media user in Iran added that although he's only 17 years of age, he strongly believes that "If these countries were in a better situation than us they

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

would never help us.”⁴⁹⁹ There is no way of knowing if such a calculus is true but that is beside the point. Rather, his frustration illustrates a distinct viewpoint in which a large segment of the population has grown increasingly weary of the Iranian government seemingly prioritizing Palestine at the expense of Iranians. Indeed, another user commented that her priority is “first Iran and my countrymen and then others.”⁵⁰⁰ Lastly, Hizbullah’s secretary-general, Hassan Nasrallah, garnered the antipathy of such activists when he supported Khamanei “at a time when he is giving a sermon of blood in Iran and killing youths,” which “has caused people to hate him [Nasrallah] and take sides against him.”⁵⁰¹

Thus, although expressly a nationalist slogan, “No to Gaza, no to Lebanon, I sacrifice my life only for Iran” condemns the government’s exploitation of Palestine and Lebanon, and highlights their guilt-by-association in the eyes of many Green Movement activists and supporters. More importantly, the slogan is an attack on a central foreign policy prerogative and an ideological tenet, which as detailed above, the government has emphasized in a variety of ways for thirty years. Part of the government’s ideological foundation rests on its support of the Palestinians but such slogans called that foundation, and by default, the legitimacy of the state into question. More succinctly, by repudiating Palestine they were “negating” a fundamental pillar in the Islamic government’s ideological foundation.

V.III. “Palestine is right here”

⁴⁹⁹ Hatami, Nima. 27 May 2013. 12:19 a.m. Facebook Comment.

⁵⁰⁰ Ramazani, Yalda. 27 May 2013. 12:12 a.m. Facebook Comment.

⁵⁰¹ Irani, Jamal. “Cherā mardom goftand: ‘na ghazeh na lobnān, jānam fadā’ye īrān”. *Rahesabz*. 23 June 2010. Accessed 24 Sept 2013. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/18060/>>.

More consequentially, however, was a second strand within the movement, which did not repudiate Palestine but altogether appropriated it in order to infuse its protest with an undeniable potency. For these activists, Palestine was a revolutionary symbol of defiance against tyranny and did not belong to the state, but was identifiable to all peoples suffering under the yolk of oppression. It is precisely through such discourse that the state's thirty-year emphasis on Palestine backfired. These Green activists subverted Palestine in terms of both the state's rhetoric and the political language that it had drilled into the minds of a generation of Iranians, reprogrammed it giving it a new revolutionary meaning, and leveled it against the regime as a devastating attack on the state's ideology.

On the eve of the first Quds Day after the election results, Jalal Salehpour underscored the efficacy of such a strategy in a piece he published on an opposition website:

“Putting the Iranian state on par with the Zionist regime, which the Islamic Republic has long condemned as the symbol of usurpation and oppression, is a serious attack on the legitimacy of the Iranian state. In doing so, the Green movement is placing itself beside the issue of Palestine, appropriating such a state-legitimized symbol in order to delegitimize the Iranian regime.”⁵⁰²

Salehpour went on to elaborate the utility of co-opting Palestine and the precise target of their “attack on legitimacy of the state”:

“...Adopting the second trend or position can be a fatal blow to the legitimacy of the regime. The meaning of this blow can be realized when we consider the inner core of the regime's ideology, and that consists of the absolute power of *vilāyat-i faqīh*, anti-imperialism, and anti-Zionism. By claiming the anti-imperialist, anti-Zionist leadership of the Islamic world in the past three decades, the state has been able to mobilize

⁵⁰² Salehpour, Jalal. “Cheh ghazeh cheh īrān”. *Rahesabz*. 17 Sept 2009. Accessed 13 Mar 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/1653/>>

segments of the people in order to legitimize its regime. Now, if the Green Movement could show that its sympathy for the Palestinians is devoid of any personal or political benefit and is genuinely rooted in humanistic ideals and against the racist and oppressive Israeli government, then it can disarm the regime by depriving the state of one its most effective instruments used for acquiring legitimacy.⁵⁰³

To put it plainly, subverting the regime's meaning and uses of Palestine as a symbol amounted to an attack on the *vilāyat-i faqīh*, the essence and cornerstone of the Islamic Republic.

Interestingly, Salehpour labeled such a strategy as “political jiu-jitsu,” explaining,

“Among the martial arts, jiu-jitsu is a method of fighting in which one fighter neutralizes the opponent by turning the opponent's attack against himself while expending the least amount of energy. Using symbols associated with the Israel-Palestine issue can likewise be an example of this political jiu-jitsu. Green activists can use these legitimated symbols in order to de-legitimize the state.”⁵⁰⁴

The following day, Quds Day—the government-sanctioned day of solidarity with Palestine and Jerusalem—tens of thousands of Iranians deployed such “political jiu-jitsu” in a multitude of ways in order to “disarm” the state on an ideological basis.

Demonstrators marched through one of Tehran's main thoroughfares, Vali Asr Street, and harnessed the emotive force of Palestine for their own fiery political ends by asking the explosive and highly suggestive question, “People, why are you sitting down when Iran has become Palestine?” (*mardom cherā neshastīn, īrān shodeh felestīn?*)⁵⁰⁵, as well as affirming: “Whether Iran or Gaza, stop the killing” (*che īrān che ghaze, koshtan-i mardom baseh*).⁵⁰⁶ Furthermore, one protester hoisted a sign that read: “My Palestinian

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ tysfood. “Iran...Tehran...Quds Protest (13)...18.09.09”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 September 2009. Accessed 24 September 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A8R1Z3FEvKc>>.

⁵⁰⁶ penguinswillfly. “Stop Killing People, in Iran and Gaza”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 September 2009. Accessed 24 September 2013. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzRCxIKdl6A>>.

friend, now I better understand your pain.”⁵⁰⁷ The power of such slogans and signs undoubtedly lies in the belief that if what is happening in Palestine is unjust, as the Iranian government has stressed for three decades, then how is it possible to accept the injustice transpiring in Iran? By giving voice to such discourse, Green activists equated the Iranian government with Israel, a state that the former has long viewed as an illegitimate usurper oppressing the Palestinians. In doing so, the opposition challenged the government’s ruling ideology to its very core in an unprecedented manner. In other words, if Mottahari argued that if Iranians wanted to properly mourn Husayn’s 7th century martyrdom then they should battle the Shimr of today—Israel—then Green activists situated the Iranian government alongside both Shimr and Israel on the most potent of days.

Artist Golrokh Nafisi affirmed Salehpour’s sentiment through her artwork that placed the Palestinian struggle in the same breath as the protesters’ struggle in Iran in 2009 (Figure 3.10).⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁷ AbuKhalil, As’ad. “Protesters’ slogans in Iran”. *The Angry Arab News Service*. 22 Sept 2009. Web. Accessed 24 Sept 2013. <<http://angryarab.blogspot.com/2009/09/protesters-slogans-in-iran.html>>.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*



Figure 3.10. “This land is ours, Tehran – Quds”

Nafisi’s drawing emphasizes the transnational solidarity between the people of Palestine and the Green Movement—a solidarity that is mirrored in the aforementioned history of the 1970s—by wrapping the wrists of both activist women, one Palestinian and the other Iranian, with bands made from the color of the Green Movement. Their faces are covered to symbolize the necessity of concealing their identities from the repression of their respective rulers—one a brutal military occupation and the other a militarized state

confronting unarmed demonstrators with paramilitaries, police units that looked more like battalions, and its praetorian guard—the IRGC. In contrast, the white doves signify the nonviolent resistance of the two movements.⁵⁰⁹ That both are women underscores the critical role Palestinian and Iranian women play in their respective movements. Lastly and most importantly, Nafisi’s caption “This land is ours, Tehran – Quds,” highlights that the land and sovereignty ultimately belong to the people, not the state—whether Islamic or Jewish in name. In doing so, she emphasizes that such solidarity is rooted not in Islamist ideology—as prescribed by the state—but in humanistic ideals that transcend religion, ethnicity, and nationalism. To put it plainly, Palestinians and Iranians are bound together not by religion but by their shared humanity in resisting their rulers.

For Nafisi and her counterparts on the streets of Iran shouting against the killing in Iran *and* Palestine, the struggle against state repression did not recognize borders: “In my opinion, the Green Movement does not only support the people of Palestine, but all oppressed peoples of the world”⁵¹⁰—a sentiment that was relayed in other poignant images of the Green Movement that conveyed a powerful Palestinian-themed message of resistance and camaraderie. One image in particular warrants special attention because it is rooted in the work of political cartoonist Naji al-‘Ali.

One of the most emotionally charged and well-known symbols of the Palestinian movement, which likewise was employed by Green Movement activists, is Handhala, the signature character in Naji al-‘Ali’s political cartoons. Al-‘Ali’s work, which always included Handhala, was published daily in Cairo, Beirut, Kuwait, Tunis, Abu Dhabi,

⁵⁰⁹ Palestinian resistance against the Israeli occupation, despite media portrayals, is largely nonviolent. The mainstream media, however, typically prefers sensationalist news stories, which predictably have the cumulative effect of depicting Palestinian resistance as exclusively violent.

⁵¹⁰ Nafisi, Golrokh. “Re: Palestine-Green Movement Artwork”. Message to Pouya Alimaghani. 5 May 2013. Facebook Message.

London, and Paris, garnering widespread popularity thereby prompting *The Guardian* in 1984 to designate him as “the nearest thing there is to an Arab public opinion.”⁵¹¹ He was indeed “the most famous (and best paid) cartoonist in the Middle East” until his assassination in 1987⁵¹², and Handhala was his signature—“an icon of Palestinian defiance.”⁵¹³ Handhala was a 10-year-old refugee with his back to the viewer, barefoot and raggedy, all of which symbolized Palestinian dispossession, poverty, and a refusal to accept their dreadful fate. Al-‘Ali specifically chose the age of 10 for his character because the cartoonist himself was forced from his Palestinian homeland at that age and Handhala will “always be 10 years old” until he’s able to return “and then he will start growing up.”⁵¹⁴

Handhala has become an international symbol for the Palestinian cause to such an extent that his image can be found on “keyrings and posters and other Palestinian memorabilia, and in recent years on the concrete slabs of the ‘separation wall’ that divides Israel from the West Bank.”⁵¹⁵ Handhala likewise adorns the walls of Palestinian refugee camps (Figure 3.11)⁵¹⁶ and pro-Palestinian student groups sell t-shirts emblazoned with his recognizable image on their respective American campuses.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹¹ Haifaa, Khalafallah. “This pen is mightier...”. *The Guardian*. 21 Sept 1984, pp. 17.

⁵¹² There has been much speculation behind al-‘Ali’s assassination, prompting one writer to say that he is “the Tupac of cartooning.” Al-‘Ali had many powerful enemies, including Arab heads of state, Yasser Arafat, and the Israelis. That the Scotland Yard arrested the assassins, who turned out to be double agents working both for the PLO and the Israeli Mossad, only made it more difficult to determine who ordered the murder. See Lashmar, Paul and Shraga Elam, “MI5 was feuding with Mossad while known terrorists struck in London”. *The Independent*. 19 June 1999. <<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/mi5-was-feuding-with-mossad-while-known-terrorists-struck-in-london-1101024.html>>.

⁵¹³ Black, Ian. “Drawing defiance”. *The Guardian*. 10 March 2008. Accessed 25 Sept 2013. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/mar/10/israelandthepalestinians1>>.

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵¹⁶ Alimaghham, Pouya. “Shatila-1”. 2008. JPEG File.

⁵¹⁷ As an undergraduate, I went to the first Palestine Solidarity Conference at UC Berkeley in the spring of 2002 and purchased one such t-shirt.

Although Handhala has been transformed partially into a commodity, Green activists reaffirmed his original message of defiance when they carried his image onto the streets of Iran in 2009. In other words, if pro-Palestinian activists painted images of Handhala to show their opposition to the ‘separation wall’ in the West Bank, then pro-Palestinian Iranian activists lifted his image above their heads to show their opposition to the Islamic government on the most meaningful of days.



Figure 3.11. Al-'Ali's Handhala inserted in the text of a wall in the Shatila refugee camp in southern Beirut, Lebanon. The slogan repeatedly states: "All the territory is the Palestinian national home."

On Quds Day 2009, Iranian activists wielded Handhala's emotive power and all the history of the Palestinian movement behind it in order to attack the legitimacy of the

state. They foisted images of Handhala wrapped in green⁵¹⁸, the color of the protest movement, inscribed with four dramatic words: “Palestine is right here” (Figure 3.12). Alongside the image, activists provocatively wielded green-wrapped rocks⁵¹⁹, the quintessential David and Goliath symbol of Palestinian resistance (Figure 3.13). What’s more, social media enabled activists to continue their Palestine-themed protest even after they were forced to withdraw from the streets. Digital activists took the same image of Handhala wrapped in a green scarf and displayed it as their default profile pictures (Figure 3.14).⁵²⁰ In doing so, they equated the justness of the Palestinian cause—a justness laboriously aggrandized by the Islamic Republic—with their own protest movement, and equated the government’s treatment of the protesters with that of Israel’s treatment of the Palestinians.

⁵¹⁸ Semienejad, Mojtaba. “Palestine is right here”. Tehran. *twitpic*. Web. 18 Sept 2009. Accessed 25 Sept 2013. <<http://twitpic.com/i5b41>>.

⁵¹⁹ Sabzphoto. “Palestine is right here”. 18 Sept 2009. Online image. Flickr. 25 Sept 2013. Member since 2010 <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/sabzphoto/4916927633/>>. Tellingly, the account holder covered the one noticeable face in the image in order to protect the identity of the protester.

⁵²⁰ Dastan, Hezar. “@samand352”. Twitter. N.d. Accessed 25 Sept 2013. <<https://twitter.com/samand352>>.

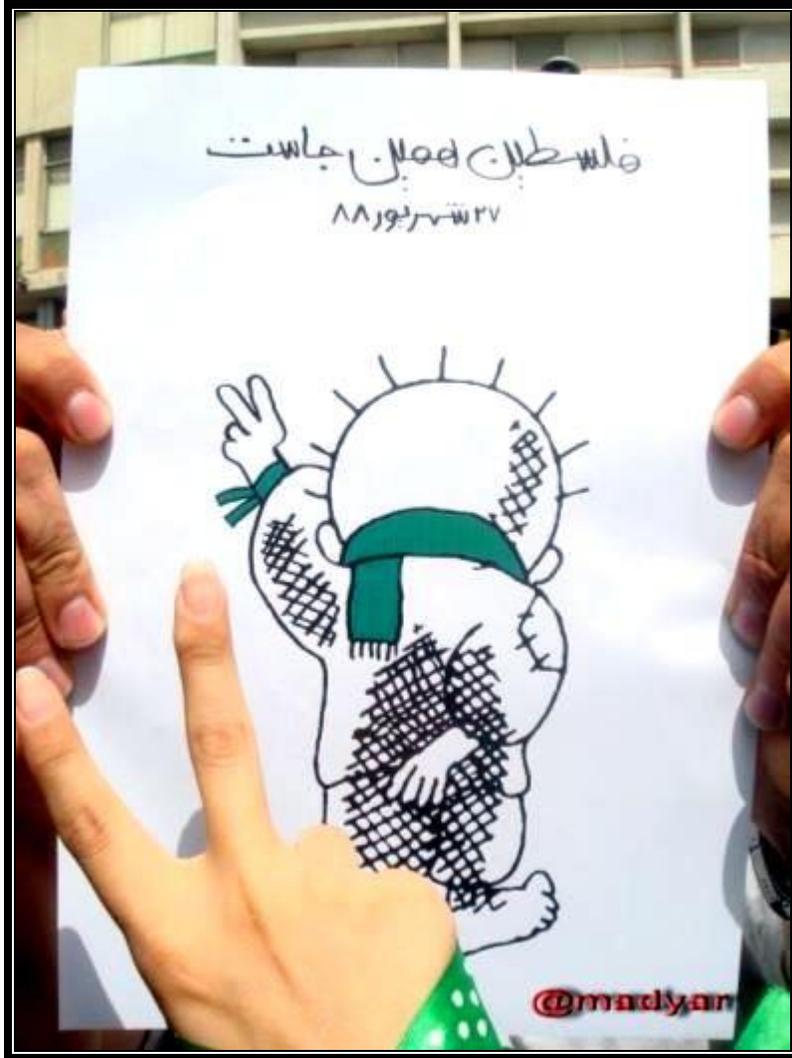


Figure 3.12. "Palestine is right here"



Figure 3.13. The Green Movement's Palestinian symbols of resistance



Figure 3.14. Green Handhala as a Twitter profile picture

Just as Jamal Irani explained the rationale behind the slogan “No to Gaza, no to Lebanon, I sacrifice my life only for Iran,” Foad Shams penned a searing piece leaving

little doubt as to the meaning behind their Quds Day message of “Palestine is right here.”

The brevity yet forcefulness of the piece warrant its full quotation:

“Handhala does not only symbolize Palestinian refugee children. Handhala does not just originate in Palestine. Handhala has not only turned his back on Israelis and the Arab collaborator regimes. Palestine is not just a sliver along the Mediterranean Sea. Palestine is anywhere where oppression and tyranny exists. Palestine is right here.

Handhala represents all peoples who are displaced due to tyranny and oppression and whose eyes can only see the tall cement block wall from the Gaza Strip to [Iran’s] Evin Prison.

Handhala is born everywhere where people have lost their homes and livelihoods at the hands of history’s tyrants. Today, Handhala is born on the streets of Tehran. If yesterday Handhala was shouting for freedom, prosperity, peace, and equality for all of humanity from Gaza, Bethlehem, and Beirut then today Handhala is shouting beside us on the streets and alleys of Tehran.

Handhala symbolizes our long lost idealism and radicalism, which, thankfully, the awakened people of Iran have once again found. Today, Handhala is beside us not only turning his back to Israel, imperialism, and the Arab collaborator regimes, but is beside us turning his back against all of history’s tyrants under any name or uniform. Today, it is not us staring at the television screens in shock as we watch the crimes taking place in Palestine. Today, it is Handhala beside us on the streets of Tehran staring in shock shedding tears as he understands that he is not alone in his displacement. It is not just him and his Palestinian sisters and brothers who have been served with bullets and tear gas. He sees that his Iranian sisters and brothers are not excluded from the same table of tyranny. Handhala knows—as we do—that peace, prosperity, and freedom will prevail in Palestine only when the interference of the Israeli occupation and its imperialist supporters and the Arab collaborationist regimes, and most important of all, the undue and harmful meddling of the Iranian government in Palestine, comes to an end.

Handhala is standing beside us and we are beside him shouting together that we only want peace and freedom for all the people of the world and the Middle East, regardless of their race, language, ethnicity, nationality, or religion!”⁵²¹

⁵²¹ Shams, Foad. “Ḥanzāleh dar kenār-i māst”. *Akhbar Rooz*. 12 Sept 2009. Accessed 25 Sept 2013. <<http://www.akhbar-rooz.com/article.jsp?essayId=23831>>.

Rather than repudiating Palestine in order to condemn the state as Jamal and many like-minded activists had done, Shams used the potency of Palestine to offer a far more severe condemnation of the government. Utilizing “political jiu-jitsu,” he argued that Iranians like their Palestinian counterparts are “not excluded from the same table of tyranny,” thereby placing the Iranian state in the same category as “Israel, imperialism, and the Arab collaborationist regimes.” Furthermore, his concluding statement echoed Jamal’s message but in a different manner. While Jamal criticized the Iranian state’s support of Palestine because “the people of Iran are in need of that support,” Shams calls for an end to Iran’s support of the armed resistance to Israel because that patronage amounts to “harmful meddling” and is an obstacle to “peace, prosperity, and freedom.”

Shams did not question the legitimacy of the Palestinian issue. On the contrary, he affirmed the cause of Palestinian liberation in order to condemn the government and its interventionist role as counterproductive and harmful. In doing so, Shams attacked the legitimacy of Iran’s support of the Palestinians. Thus, if the Iranian state legitimated itself by showcasing its support of the Palestinians, then Shams negated that support as “harmful,” in order to “disarm the regime by depriving the state of one its most effective instruments used for acquiring legitimacy”—the strategy that Salehpour outlined the day prior to Quds Day.⁵²²

A year later, the president of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmoud Abbas, relayed Shams’ blistering attack on the Iranian state. After Ahmadinejad, whose election “win” sparked the protests, criticized Abbas for negotiating with Israel, the PA’s spokesman retorted:

⁵²² Salehpour, Jalal. “Cheh ghazeh cheh īrān”. *Rahesabz*. 17 Sept 2009. Accessed 13 Mar 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/1653/>>.

"He who does not represent the Iranian people, who forged elections and who suppresses the Iranian people and stole the authority, is not entitled to talk about Palestine, or the President of Palestine...We have fought for Palestine and Jerusalem and the Palestinian leadership has provided thousands of martyrs and tens of thousands wounded and prisoners (and) did not repress their people, as did the system of Iran led by Ahmadinejad..."⁵²³

That the rejoinder came from the head of the PA, the internationally recognized representative of the Palestinian people⁵²⁴, bolsters Shams' accusation that the Iranian state does not have the credibility to talk about justice in Palestine when its conduct mirrors that of the Israeli military occupation.

Foad Shams, a journalist and University of Tehran student, was arrested nearly three months later on another day of action, Student Day. His file contained around 30 such provocative articles, of which his piece on Handhala was counted amongst them.⁵²⁵ Consequently, he was convicted of such Orwellian crimes as "spreading propaganda against the state." Interestingly, the charge and Shams' piece affirm a fascinating aspect of what transpired in the protests in 2009. The Iranian government had drilled an entire generation in the tenets of Palestinian liberation. Through the story of Palestine, the state taught young pupils political concepts of injustice, usurpation, occupation, and the righteousness of resistance. Children's grammar books, for example, taught these concepts as instances of historical injustice warranting heroic and steadfast opposition.

⁵²³ The CNN Wire Staff. "Palestinian leader blasts Ahmadinejad over Mideast peace comments". *CNN*. 4 Sept 2010. Accessed 25 Sept 2013.

<<http://www.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/meast/09/04/west.bank.abbas.ahmadinejad/index.html>>.

⁵²⁴ That is not to say that the PA does not face enormous credibility issues inside the Occupied Territories. However corrupt, inefficient, and unpopular the PA may be, it is representative—at least in theory—of the Palestinian people. It is worth noting that many argue that the PA should disband as it is the government of a non-state whose territory is still largely controlled and increasingly encroached upon by Israel and its expanding settlements.

⁵²⁵ Shams, Foad. "Re: 'Ḥanzaleh dar kenār-i māst'". Message to Pouya Alimagham. 16 Sept 2013. Facebook Message.

Moreover, it empowered them with the discursive language to articulate such concepts. That political education backfired when the same discourse was now being employed in the service of a movement that was targeting homegrown injustice—what the protesters effectively equated to be a usurping power that robbed them of their election victory.

Shams, for instance, first learned of Handhala through a state-televised documentary dubbed into Persian and broadcast to the entire nation.⁵²⁶ Equipped with that knowledge, which the state sanctioned and popularized, he wielded the emotive power of Handhala in a subversive manner that put to flames Iran’s ideologically-laden Palestine rhetoric. The question implicitly asked in the piece, and reiterated by Arafat’s successor, is how can the Iranian state champion justice in Palestine when it has abandoned it at home?

VI. Conclusion

In pre-revolutionary Iran, Iranians from various walks of life ranging from student and armed guerrilla groups to the militant Islamist clergy and even bureaucrats in the monarchy’s Foreign Ministry viewed the Palestinian movement with great sympathy and, in terms of the guerrilla groups, as a source of inspiration. Some guerrilla fighters went so far as to go to Lebanon to receive guerrilla training from various Palestinian factions. Thus, it made perfect sense that the PLO leader, Yasser Arafat, came to Iran after the revolution to salute its victors.

After the triumph of the revolution, the state institutionalized Palestine as a central ideological pillar. In doing so, the state derived legitimacy from an

⁵²⁶ Shams, Foad. “Re: ‘Ḥanzaleh dar kenār-i māst’”. Message to Pouya Alimagham. 17 Sept 2013. Facebook Message.

internationally recognized and vaunted movement, one in which millions in the Islamic world exalt because of the “sacred” issue of Quds. The Iranian government raised an entire generation in the importance of the liberation of Palestine and Quds, instilling in them the discourse of justice and the righteousness of resisting tyranny.

In 2009, such lessons came to bear in unprecedented and consequential ways, which become all the more apparent after circumventing the false win-lose and start-finish binaries. Deconstructing these binaries creates the space to unpack important happenings throughout the uprising, including the Green Movement’s ingenuity in harnessing Palestine’s emotive power, history, and the Iranian discursive focus on Palestinian liberation in order to challenge the state on its own terms—quite literally.

The Green Movement did not voice its demands or objectives in unison. Some wanted the election results to be annulled while others wanted the ouster of Iran’s supreme leader—the personification of Iran’s Islamic system. In terms of Quds Day, there were two very distinct strands, one declaring “No to Gaza, no to Lebanon, I sacrifice my life only for Iran,” and another, which in effect said: “Yes to Gaza, yes to Lebanon, and yes to the Green Movement; no to Israel, no to the Islamic Republic, and no to oppression.” Both slogans and approaches, however, took aim at a central tenet in Iran’s state ideology: the liberation of Palestine and Quds and the Iranian government’s vanguard role in that endeavor. One Quds Day slogan negated Palestine in order to negate the state that championed it, and the other employed a wider approach encompassing slogans, artwork, powerful articles and symbolism in order to co-opt Palestine in a subversive manner thereby equating the state with Israel in a form of “political jiu-jitsu.”

The disparity between the two slogans underscores the futility in trying to categorize such a multi-faceted movement. It can be said, however, that it was revolutionary not necessarily because of what it wanted in terms of Iran's governing system, but through the methods it employed to criticize the government and undermine and "disarm" its ideology. To put it plainly, activists took the most prized international symbol of the Iranian state, one in which the authorities championed and showcased for three decades, and turned it on its head—a revolutionary act in itself. In doing so, the Green Movement used new and creative forms of digital media to continue their protests even when the streets became unsafe for their presence. Both physically on the streets and on the Internet, they contested the meaning and ownership of Palestine as a symbol in order to contest the Islamic Republic—the outcome of the Iranian Revolution.

Despite the IRGC's warnings, Khamenei's cautionary sermon a week prior, and the presence of security forces in large numbers, the anti-regime rallies on Quds Day did not result in major clashes like the ones that immediately followed the June 12th election.⁵²⁷ As the movement endured, however, the crackdown intensified in the months after Quds Day (September 18). The increasing repression both on the streets and through the arrest of countless activists, forced confessions, publicized trials, reports of rape and torture in Iran's prisons—most notably Kahrizak—and even executions all resulted in a hardening of views within the movement. Before December, 2009, voices within the movement calling for the cancellation of the elections existed side-by-side with calls for the complete destruction of the Islamic system. The continued repression, however, served to marginalize the moderate demands of the former tendency in favor of the

⁵²⁷ Timothy Richardson, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al, September 20, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI386_a.html.

radical calls of the latter persuasion. By the time of *'Ashura* (December 27th), the subject of the following chapter, the severity of the state crackdown sidelined moderate forces in favor of more radical calls for a revolutionary change in the government, specifically, the ouster of Ayatollah Khamenei—the “Leader of the Islamic Revolution.”

Chapter 4: Montazeri the Post-Islamist and Challenging the State through Mourning Ceremonies

I. Introduction

If Palestine—the Islamic government’s most valued foreign policy prerogative and a central tenet in the state’s Islamic ideology—was appropriated in its historical totality and subversively deployed with all its symbolic value against the government and its ideology, then there is no surprise that *‘Ashura*, the anniversary of Imam Husayn’s martyrdom, likewise became an occasion for protest and confrontation. In other words, just as activists made common cause with the occupied Palestinians by depicting the Iranian government as an oppressive usurper akin to Israel, they made common cause with the righteousness of Imam Husayn and his band of followers by equating the Islamic Republic with Yazid—the Caliph who ordered the massacre in Karbala. In doing so, they provoked the backlash of the authorities more than any other day of action *because* they harnessed that day’s sacred and emotive power to imbue their protest with a potent discursive force.

Just as the history of Palestine with regards to the Iranian Revolution and its ideological institutionalization in revolutionary Iran are important to understanding the gravity of the Jerusalem (Qods) Day protests on September 18, 2009, the history of *‘Ashura*, its role in the historic mobilization during the climactic days of the Iranian

Revolution, and its institutionalization are similarly necessary to understanding the resilience of the Green Movement's dramatic protests on December 27, 2009.

The *Ashura* protests of 2009 are especially infused with historical importance because they coincided with the culmination of the 7-day mourning period for Grand Ayatollah 'Ali Montazeri—a regime architect who turned into one of the state's most powerful and influential critics, employing religious discourse to level scathing critiques of the government that transcended Iran's borders and delved into the wider Shi'ite Muslim world. In other words, he used his authority not only to condemn the Iranian government in the eyes of his Iranian followers, but also in front of Shi'ite Muslims around the world, specifically in Iraq—the abode of Shi'ite Islam's most important shrines.

Montazeri's stature and legacy are important not only because his death became another critical juncture for the Green Movement to resurface and renew its protests, but also because his transformation from a regime architect to foremost dissident underscores what Asef Bayat calls “the post-Islamist turn.”

This chapter affirms how the protest movement in 2009 constitutes a historic phenomenon unfolding in Iran known as post-Islamism. By exploiting the occasion of Montazeri's death and *Ashura* 7 days later, which coincided with Montazeri's 7th day of mourning, the Green Movement utilized and deployed the state's Islamists symbols—as it did on Jerusalem Day—against the very state that derived its Islamic legitimacy from those symbols. In doing so, they highlighted the central thesis of this work: although the Green Movement failed to cancel the election results or overturn the system that ratified them, the protesters nevertheless found success in failure. A non-linear approach to the

events of 2009 demonstrates how Green activists succeeded in drawing upon a wider Iranian and Islamic history in order to create a new discourse in which Islamic symbols are not used to legitimate but to condemn the Islamic government. To put it plainly, they denounced the system by successfully subverting the ruling Islamist ideology through the appropriation and subversion of important Iranian and Islamic history as well as the state's own symbolism.

This chapter also argues that Montazeri is the quintessential post-Islamist, illustrating how his death became another day of protest, and outlining how and why *'Ashura*—the annual mourning of Imam Husayn's 680 CE martyrdom—became the most fiery and violent day of action in the post-election turmoil. The two events, Montazeri's funeral and the *'Ashura* protests, are combined into one chapter for a number of reasons. First, they are separated by only 7 days and Montazeri's 7th day of commemoration fell on *Tasu'a* and *'Ashura*, the 9th and 10th day of mourning in the holy month of Muharram. Moreover, both his funeral and *'Ashura* are intrinsically religious in theme and orientation. Montazeri was a senior religious leader and the observance of his death was naturally replete with ritual. Secondly, *'Ashura* is likewise a day of mourning rooted in Shi'ism. Thus, the two provide opportune examples of how religiously imbued events were subverted as days of action against a state that is ideologically rooted in religion. In other words, they are prime instances in which Iran's post-Islamist trend came to the fore.

This section begins with Montazeri since his death occurred a week before the *'Ashura* protests. Subsequently, the chapter will outline a detailed history of *'Ashura*'s pre-revolutionary and transnational history, which is intertwined with modern interpretations of the legacy of Imam Husayn and the Battle of Karbala, in order to place

'*Ashura* in its proper modern political context. In doing so, such foregrounding helps illuminate the gravity of one of the most momentous occasions of the Green Uprising in a manner that affirms the '*Ashura* day protests' historic nature, potency, and post-Islamist overtones in 2009 and beyond.

II. Montazeri as a Post-Islamist

In his seminal work, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*, Asef Bayat argues that post-Islamism marks the stage in which “once-ardent supporters” of Islamism undergo a qualitative shift after a period of trial-and-error. They spend years and copious amounts of energy and resources to erect a much theorized Islamic government. Through hands-on experience, however, they learn that an Islamic government as an actual tangible experiment is very different from the blueprint they envisioned on paper. As a consequence of popular pressure from below and mistakes from atop, these ardent supporters transition from being architects and proponents of an Islamic system to becoming reformists—often times dissident reformists—who seek “to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom, with democracy and modernity (something post-Islamists stress), to achieve what some scholars have termed an ‘alternative modernity.’”⁵²⁸ As such, they abandon rigidity and call to question the “monopoly of religious truth” in favor of “religiosity and rights.”⁵²⁹ They do not shed their personal religious beliefs, but seek to emphasize civil rights and empowerment while respecting their own religious convictions. They focus on “faith and freedom” and

⁵²⁸ Bayat, Asef. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007, pp. 10-1.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

attempt to “turn the underlying principles of Islamism on its head by emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scripture, and the future instead of the past,” all of which constitute a qualitative shift from the state-espoused Islamism.⁵³⁰

Mir Hussein Mousavi and Mehdi Karroubi, the two reformist candidates who alleged election fraud in 2009, are not only early proponents of Islamism but they constitute the Islamic Republic’s founding leadership. Mousavi is famously referred to as the “Imam’s prime minister”⁵³¹ since he was the longest serving premier during Ayatollah Khomeini’s *vilāyat* (guardianship). Ayatollah Montazeri, however, is a better case study than Mousavi or Karroubi because he was not only designated to be Khomeini’s heir in 1985 but was also a senior cleric, unlike Mousavi—a layperson, and Karroubi—a junior cleric. Most importantly, Montazeri is the co-founder of the Islamic Republic.

So close was Montazeri to Khomeini and his worldview that the latter mandated him to serve as his top lieutenant and main representative in Iran during Khomeini’s 14-year exile in neighboring Iraq.⁵³² The 1970s witnessed the height of repression in Iran

⁵³⁰ Bayat, pp. 11

⁵³¹ “Faryād-i āzādi-ye nakhost vazīr-i emām dar dāneshgāh-i amīr kabīr”. *Kaleme*. 14 April, 2014. <<http://www.kaleme.com/1393/01/25/klm-180544/>>.

⁵³² Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: vekālat nāmeḥ az ṭaraf-i emām khomeini”, pp. 281. It is worth noting that Khomeini spent the first few months of his exile in Turkey, where he saw first-hand the Kemalist state’s imposed secularism. Doubtless, his experience in Turkey helped shape his political worldview. He spent the next 14 years in Najaf, Iraq, where he formulated his theory of Islamic government—until Saddam Hussein, in collaboration with the Shah, both of which had reconciled by the late 1970s—pressured him to leave so he wouldn’t be so close to Iran, Iranian visitors, and pilgrims. Through the contacts of his aides, he famously found temporary residence in a Paris suburb in the final months of the revolutionary uprising. Although he was farther from Iran geographically, he nonetheless had better access to world media, which inadvertently provided him with an amplified voice to direct the revolution underway in distant Iran. Incidentally, Bani Sadr notes in his memoirs that it was Sharif-Emami’s decision to have Saddam deport Khomeini to Europe so that once there, he could expose his retrograde views to the liberal opposition based in Europe, specifically in Paris, and would thus deprive himself of some of his luster.

under the Shah's rule, and Montazeri, who was on the frontlines in the struggle against the monarchy, was swept up in the state's dragnet. The cleric was imprisoned for four years in 1974 during which time he was tortured.⁵³³ He was amnestied in 1978 in a failed attempt to placate the opposition during the protracted revolutionary uprising.

After the revolution, Khomeini entrusted his most ardent supporter and dedicated Islamist revolutionary to head the body tasked with writing Iran's Islamic constitution—a duty he loyally performed when he “championed enshrining the principle of [the] ‘Supreme Jurisprudent’ in the Constitution.”⁵³⁴ The referendum on the Islamic constitution, held in throes of the hostage crisis⁵³⁵, gave Iran's Islamic Republic its critical Islamic framework in which Ayatollah Khomeini served as the Supreme Jurisprudent.

Khomeini, who by 1985 was 83 years of age, spent much time pondering the future of the Islamic Republic in the event of his passing, and appointed Montazeri as his designated successor. Montazeri was one of a handful of clerics who enjoyed both the

Whatever the reason for Khomeini's arrival in Paris, it proved to be immensely consequential nonetheless. See Abolhassan Banisadr. Interview recorded by Zia Sedghi, 21, 22 May 1984, Paris, France. Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University, Transcript 5 (seq. 100). Accessed 22 April 2015.

⁵³³ Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: zendān-i qazal qal'eh va shekanjehhāyeh vaḥshihāneh”, pp. 333. Montazeri sustained permanent partial hearing loss in his left ear as a result of the abuse (see page 376). He also underwent psychological pressure when he was made to listen to the beating of his imprisoned son next door—a tactic the cleric believed was designed to crush his spirit (see page 340).

⁵³⁴ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 20, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI539_a.html.

⁵³⁵ It is worth mentioning that countless analysts and historians have argued that Khomeini exploited the frenzy of the hostage crisis in order to rush through his constitution. The hostage crisis occurred against the backdrop of Iranian fears that the US would try to stage a coup through the US embassy—much as it had done in 1953—against the revolution in favor of royalist forces. Thus, when the Shah was admitted into the US for cancer treatment on October 22, revolutionaries in Iran feared that this was the first stage in a counter-revolutionary coup to be spearheaded by the US through its embassy in Tehran. Consequently, militant students sacked the embassy and held its staff hostage in order to ward off any such conspiracy. Khomeini did not order the seizure but capitalized on its popularity and sanctioned it afterward. Furthermore, exploiting anti-imperialist sentiment, he argued that voting against the Islamic constitution would be a vote in favor of imperialism.

highest religious and revolutionary authority, and perhaps most important of all, recognized and respected the authenticity and legality of the *vilāyat-i faqīh* as an Islamic institution.

Vilāyat (or *wilāya* in Arabic) means ‘guardianship’ and it was commonly employed to denote clerical guardianship over orphans, for example. *Vilāyat-i faqīh* (*wilāyat al-faqīh* in Arabic) was coined by Mullah Ahmad Naraqi (d. 1828) who expanded the purview of the *vilāyat* by arguing “forcefully for the right of the *mujtahid* [an Islamic scholar capable of interpreting Islamic law] to act as a successor to the Imam and vest him with all the power of the Imam.”⁵³⁶ The idea rested on the notion that the only legitimate authority in the absence of the Hidden Imam—the Prophet Muhammad’s twelfth direct descendant who went into a State of Occultation in the 9th century—is “vested” in a leader who is most familiar with the Imam’s will:

“If the sole legitimate successor of the Prophet, if the sole wielder of legitimate authority after him is no longer present on the earthly plane, that means that inherently any worldly power that claims to exercise authority must *ipso facto* be illegitimate unless it can demonstrate in a clear and indisputable fashion that it exercises on behalf of the absent imam.”⁵³⁷

Accordingly, only the Hidden Imam has the right to rule and all worldly authority is illegitimate in his absence. A qualified *mujtahid*, a learned Islamic scholar who has the skill to engage in “independent reasoning with respect to legal questions”⁵³⁸ can, however, exercise authority “on behalf of the absent imam.” In other words, with the Hidden Imam in a State of Occultation, such a *mujtahid* is the *least* illegitimate authority because he is most in tune with the will of the Hidden Imam. Thus, in the era of the

⁵³⁶ Jabar, Faleh. *The Shi’ite Movement in Iraq*. London: Saqi Books, 2003, pp. 164.

⁵³⁷ Algar, Hamid. *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*. Oneonta and New York: Islamic Publications International, 2001, pp. 15.

⁵³⁸ Algar, pp. 20.

Occultation, the just and knowledgeable *faqīh*, according to Khomeini, “has the same authority as the Most Noble Messenger and the Imams... and it will be the duty of all people to obey him.”⁵³⁹ Khomeini does not suggest that the *faqīh* enjoys the same status and the infallibility of the Prophet and the Imams, of course. Rather, he argues that the *faqīh* serves the same temporal function, especially with regards to implementing the Sacred Law.⁵⁴⁰

Naraqī intended for the position to serve as a counter-balance to treacherous monarchs, not as a substitute.⁵⁴¹ Khomeini, however, radically expanded Naraqī’s concept by giving it a modern application when he developed *vilāyat-i faqīh* “beyond the legal-religious to the political sphere within the context of the modern nation-state.”⁵⁴²

Montazeri, as head of the body that drafted Iran’s modern constitution, ensured that Khomeini’s controversial theory of the *vilāyat-i faqīh*, a concept that enjoys the support of a minority⁵⁴³ of senior clerics in the wider Shi’ite Islamic realm, was codified into the constitution.⁵⁴⁴ The constitution empowered the *faqīh* with vast legislative, executive and judicial powers ranging from the right to appoint the judiciary chief, who must be a *mujtahid*, six of the twelve members of the powerful Guardian Council—the

⁵³⁹ Khomeini, Ruhollah. *Ḥokūmat-i islāmī: vilāyat-i faqīh*. mu’aseseh-ye āmūzeshī-ye pazhoeshī-ye emām khomeinī, 1970, pp. 39.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁴¹ Jaber, pp. 181.

⁵⁴² Jaber, pp. 181.

⁵⁴³ Jaber, pp. 183. Many of the most senior religious leaders in the Shi’ite world including Ayatollah ‘Ali Sistani, who is based in Najaf, Iraq, and is probably the most senior and influential Shi’ite leader, do not accept the legitimacy of the *vilāyat-i faqīh* as an institution in its current form. Sistani’s predecessor, Ayatollah Abu al-Qasim al-Khoe’i, likewise took issue with the institution as it is implemented in Iran.

⁵⁴⁴ Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: gonjāndan aṣl-i vilāyat-i faqīh dar qānūn-i asāsī”, pp. 455-58. Montazeri, however, argues in his memoirs that he never envisioned the *faqīh* having such expansive constitutional powers: “Of course, my opinion was that the other clauses of the constitution meant that the jurist had a more supervisory role over legislation and the management of the country in order to ensure that system is Islamic. The limitations on the authority of the jurist were determined in the constitution but they [other members of the Assembly of Experts such as Beheshti] added the word ‘absolute’ when the constitution was being reviewed.” (see page 455).

other six of which are appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council, which is headed by *faqīh*-appointed chief of the judiciary—to endorsing the election of the president or dismissing him from office. He is also empowered with appointing the heads of the country's radio and television networks. Perhaps most important of all, the *faqīh* and not the elected president is the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces, appoints all the military commanders, and is the final arbiter of matters related to declaring war and suing for peace.⁵⁴⁵

Montazeri was the cleric responsible for enshrining Khomeini's version of the *vilāyat-i faqīh* in Iran's Islamic constitution, though amendments to the constitution in later years augmented the *faqīh*'s powers.⁵⁴⁶ Despite Montazeri's efforts to create the Islamic framework by which his mentor would rule Iran, he was not an exact replica of Khomeini. Although both leaders had spent time as political prisoners, Montazeri experienced the unforgettable torment of torture. What's more, he was among a small group of leading ayatollahs⁵⁴⁷ who had the opportunity to share prison time with fellow political prisoners, spending hours with leftist dissidents discussing philosophy, ideology,

⁵⁴⁵ All such powers are stipulated in one very consequential clause of the constitution, Clause 110. See *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Trans. by Hamid Algar. Berkeley: Mizan Press, 1980, pp. 67-8.

⁵⁴⁶ Montazeri, until his final years, remained adamant that his intention was always to empower the citizenry to "elect" the *faqīh* and "supervise his work." See Montazeri, Hossein. "Payām-i āyatollāh al'ozmā montazerī beh marāje'-i 'ezām-i taqlīd, 'olāmā' va hozeh hayeh 'elmīeh". Personal Website. 13 September 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://goo.gl/vbg6jq>>.

⁵⁴⁷ Montazeri notes in his memoirs that Taleqani was famously warm towards other political prisoners, regardless of their beliefs. See Montazeri, "Khāterāt: khāterāt rāje' beh zendegī-ye āyatollāh tāleqanī", pp. 381-382.

and armed struggle⁵⁴⁸, such exchanges of which enabled him, according to one biographer, to “acquire a better understanding of their causes.”⁵⁴⁹

Thus, these experiences caused Montazeri to differ with Khomeini in terms of implementing the Islamic government. The former was more sympathetic to the plight of political prisoners in revolutionary Iran and had a bitter disagreement with Khomeini over the mass execution of political prisoners in 1988. That Montazeri opposed the executions, of which the majority were members of the MKO, is all the more astounding given that Montazeri’s son—a veteran of the revolutionary struggle—was killed at the hands of the MKO.⁵⁵⁰

Historian Ervand Abrahamian opines that one plausible explanation for the executions of at least 2,800 prisoners⁵⁵¹ was part of Khomeini’s strategy to

“Leave behind disciples baptized in a common bloodbath. The killing would test their mettle, weeding out the halfhearted from the true believers, the weak-willed from the fully committed, and the wishy-washy from the resolute. It would force them to realize that they would stand or fall together.”⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁸ Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: bāztāb-i taghīr īde’olozhī-ye sāzemān-i mojāhedīn-i khalq dar zendān”, pp. 381-382.

⁵⁴⁹ Moin, Baqer. “Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri”. *The Guardian*. 20 Dec 2009. <<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2009/dec/20/grand-ayatollah-hossein-ali-montazeri-obituary>>.

⁵⁵⁰ Montazeri even invoked Muhammad’s peaceful conquest of Mecca, which the Prophet completed by showing mercy to his long-time enemies, in order to provide the Islamic Republic’s leadership with a precedent to stop the massacre. See Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: payvast-i shomāreh 155”, pp. 628.

⁵⁵¹ The mass execution was carried out in revenge of the MKO’s invasion of Iran from Iraqi territory and with Saddam’s support in the final stages of the Iran-Iraq War. Many of the prisoners who were executed out of vengeance had long been imprisoned and had no knowledge or involvement in the MKO’s assault (Operation Mersad). What’s more, many weren’t even members of the MKO and were caught in the crossfire of the MKO’s invasion and the government’s retributive mass execution, which Montazeri estimated to be between 2,800-3,800 victims. See Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: e’terāz beh e’dāmhāye bī ravīeh”, pp. 628. An annual event is held in Berkeley, California, to mark the executions, the commemorators of which estimate the death toll to be 8,000 political prisoners—more than double Montazeri’s estimate. Many participants are former activists or survivors of the revolutionary power struggle now living in exile decades after their struggle helped defeat the monarchy.

⁵⁵² Abrahamian, Ervand. *A History of Modern Iran*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press 2008, pp. 182.

Montazeri, as history can attest, was not a “true believer” in such a vision and dissented when thousands of political prisoners were executed without proper trials.⁵⁵³ He registered his protest by writing a series of strongly worded letters to the Ayatollah and the judiciary in which he provocatively asked:

“... We are upset with the Mujahidin’s crimes in the west [of Iran], but we are bringing their original verdicts and the entire judiciary into question by exacting vengeance upon the prisoners of old without them having committed any new crimes. Under what criteria is a prisoner who was sentenced to a lesser punishment now being executed? Now that they have cut off the prisoners’ visits and telephone calls, what will they tell their families tomorrow [after their executions]?”⁵⁵⁴

Montazeri’s criticism dropped like a bombshell, provoking Khomeini to write a searing response in which he accused his would-be successor of being “naïve” and for believing the “lies of the foreigners.”⁵⁵⁵ However “broken-hearted” Khomeini claimed to be as a result of Montazeri’s criticism, he went on to threaten him of the fate that awaited him in both the afterlife and in the temporal realm if his apprentice didn’t change his ways:

“Since you became a mouthpiece of the hypocrites⁵⁵⁶ and your speeches have conveyed their wishes to the people via the mass media, you have inflicted heavy blows on Islam and the revolution. This is a great act of treason against the unknown soldiers of the Lord of the Age [the Hidden Imam], may our souls be sacrificed for him, and against the sacrifices made by the illustrious martyrs of Islam and the revolution. If you wish to save yourself from hellfire, you had better confess to all your sins and mistakes and maybe then God will help you... If you continue your deeds

⁵⁵³ Montazeri’s relative, Mehdi Hashemi, was also executed by the regime in 1987 for leaking secrets to a Lebanese newspaper that ultimately evolved into the “Iran-Contra Affair.” His execution certainly brought the reality of such post-revolutionary political executions to Montazeri’s home and personal life.

⁵⁵⁴ Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: payvast-i shomāreh 155”, pp. 636.

⁵⁵⁵ Khomeini’s letter is reprinted in Persian both in Montazeri’s memoirs (pp. 673-4) as well as the collection of Khomeini’s letters and proclamations (pp. 330-1).

⁵⁵⁶ “Hypocrites” is a derogatory euphemism that has been part of the state lexicon for the past three decades to describe the Mujahidin-i Khalq.

I will definitely be obliged to do something about you. And you know me,
I never neglect my obligation.”⁵⁵⁷

Subsequently, Montazeri was demoted from being the designated successor to Khomeini to enemy of the state.

Had Montazeri refrained from issuing such historically consequential condemnations of the mass executions, he would have assumed office after Khomeini’s passing a year later and would have been empowered to end such malicious and irreversible practices with a simple stroke of the pen. Understandably, many continue to ask why Montazeri didn’t keep quiet when he was the designated successor to Khomeini, an increasingly frail cleric in his late 80s who was fast reaching his end. Montazeri answers the timeless question, positing that as a man of religion he had an Islamic duty to act then and not later, especially since he felt partially responsible as a senior founding member of an Islamic system that was carrying out the executions in the name of his faith: “I was part of this revolution. Thus, I too felt responsible for any innocent person that was executed under the Islamic Republic.”⁵⁵⁸

As such, Montazeri’s *official* political career ended—a demise best visualized by the removal of his image from all state institutions and political occasions.⁵⁵⁹ Before his

⁵⁵⁷ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “‘adam-i ṣalāḥiāt barāye taṣādī-ye rahbarī-ye neẓām-i jomhūrī-ye eslāmī”. 26 Mar 1989. Tehran. Vol. 21, pp. 331. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=21&tid=196>>.

Incidentally, pro-government media heartlessly re-published Khomeini’s letter dismissing Montazeri on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the latter’s passing. See “Beh monāsebat-i sālgard-i fot-i āyatollāh montazerī, nāmeḥ-ye ‘azl-i āyatollāh montazerī tavaṣoṭ-i emām khomeinī”. *Qabas*. 22 Dec 2014. <http://tnews.ir/news/E0C434837011.html#>. The historic nature of the letter prompted Princeton University to translate it into English, see Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Letter Dismissing Montazeri”. Iran Data Portal (Princeton University). 26 March 1989. <<http://www.princeton.edu/irandataportal/laws/supreme-leader/khomeini/dismissing-montazeri/>>.

⁵⁵⁸ Montazeri goes into considerable detail in his memoirs as to why he wrote such consequential letters. See Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: ‘eterāz beh e’dāmhāye bī ravīeh”, pp. 628-644.

⁵⁵⁹ Even soldiers during the Iran-Iraq War prepared for battle by ritually beating their chests to Shi’ite hymns while holding pictures of both Khomeini and Montazeri. See, ipouya. “Shi’ism: From Defeat to

demotion, it was commonplace to see pictures of Montazeri beside those of Khomeini, especially in public institutions—a gesture that extended Khomeini’s legitimacy onto Montazeri and prepared the country for the continuity of the Islamic Republic in the persona of Montazeri. After stripping Montazeri of any future in government, the state ordered all public institutions to remove his pictures.

As a result of Montazeri’s fall from grace, Khomeini in the twilight of his life and rule orchestrated the amending of the constitution that allowed for junior clerics without the requisite clerical authority but with the necessary political and revolutionary acumen to succeed him and serve as the *faqīh*. In doing so, he paved the way for Iran’s longest serving president during the tumultuous 1980s, then-Hojjat al-Islam ‘Ali Khamenei—a junior cleric—to become the next “Leader of the Revolution” in 1989.⁵⁶⁰

Montazeri’s criticism of the political executions of the late eighties, which also claimed the life of his son-in-law Mehdi Hashemi,⁵⁶¹ ensured that his break with the government was total and permanent. Over time, Montazeri grew more outspoken about the Islamic republican system, attacking its figurehead—Khamenei—the political role of the clergy as a whole, and the overall authoritarianism of the state.

Defiance”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 9 January 2009. Accessed 2 June 2015. <<https://youtu.be/HbHAQwZXPaY>>.

⁵⁶⁰ Iran experienced two short-lived presidencies in the early years of the Islamic Republic. One was chased out of the country and the other was assassinated while in office. Khamenei’s presidency became, relatively speaking, the most stable and lasting during the 1980s.

⁵⁶¹ Hashemi was executed for leaking information about Iran buying American weapons through Israel during the Iran-Iraq War. The leak ultimately led to the “Iran-Contra Affair” that almost brought about the impeachment of President Ronald Reagan. The Hashemi leak has been attributed to internal power struggles in which Hashemi sought to embarrass political rivals such as Rafsanjani. The objective backfired when Hashemi was executed for leaking vital state secrets and embarrassing the Islamic Republic—a state that had long been championing anti-imperialism and anti-Zionism yet was exposed to be buying American weapons through Israel during the war.

He criticized expanding the powers of the Guardian Council from only ensuring that parliament's legislation was in compliance with Islamic law and supervising elections to also vetting candidates for the presidency, which effectively hindered and narrowed the republican aspects of the system.⁵⁶² He also opposed state control of the radio and television stations as well as the government's intolerance of political parties. Furthermore, in an embarrassing blow to Khamenei's legitimacy, Montazeri—one of the most senior clerics in the Shi'ite realm—argued that Khamenei did not have the religious authority to rule.⁵⁶³ More importantly, he opined that the clergy should “guide” the people while “allowing them to decide matters that affect them.”⁵⁶⁴ Such extraordinary and unnerving criticism from a scion of the revolution garnered the wrath of the state, which consequently put him on house arrest from 1997 to 2003—only lifting his house arrest because of ill health.⁵⁶⁵

Montazeri's opposition represents the “qualitative shift” that Bayat noted when he wrote that “once ardent supporters” transition through the process of trial-and-error into reformists who seek “to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom, with democracy and modernity... emphasizing rights instead of duties.” This transition is best encapsulated in the words and actions of Montazeri when he broke with the regime over

⁵⁶² See Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: moshārekāt-i vāqē'ī-ye mardom dar ḥokūmat, ramz tadāvom-i enqelāb”, pp. 783. The version of the constitution that Montazeri helped formulate did not grant such intrusive powers to the Guardian Council. They were added in revisions years later.

⁵⁶³ Moin, Baqer. “Grand Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri”. *The Guardian*. 20 Dec 2009. <<http://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2009/dec/20/grand-ayatollah-hossein-ali-montazeri-obituary>>.

⁵⁶⁴ Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: moshārekāt-i vāqē'ī-ye mardom dar ḥokūmat, ramz tadāvom-i enqelāb”, pp. 783.

⁵⁶⁵ House arrest commonly puts undue psychological pressure on the sentenced, which, in the case of senior prisoners, often leads to a decline in health. Thus, the state did not want Montazeri to die while under house arrest because then it would have been partially responsible for the death—or at least it would have been perceived to be partially responsible—and the opposition would have hailed Montazeri as a martyr.

the mass executions, and in subsequent years argued that the clergy should advise the people while entrusting them with the “reason and intelligence” (*‘aql va hūsh*) to decide “matters that affect them.” Perhaps none of Montazeri’s criticisms and stances affirm Bayat’s theory more than Montazeri’s views on the Bahá’í Faith.

The Bahá’í Faith was founded in the mid-19th century as a new religion for the new age, or what Bahá’ís call “progressive revelation.” Rooted in the millenarian Babi movement, believers posit that the Almighty sends a new prophet every one thousand years or so to establish a new Abrahamic religion based on similar tenets, of which foremost among them is *tawhid* (monotheism), for a new era. As with its forerunners, the Bahá’í Faith’s roots reside with the preceding religion, which in this case is Shi‘ite Islam. Predictably, Muslim clerics in Iran and elsewhere believe that the Prophet Muhammad constitutes the Seal of the Prophets—the final prophet for all mankind—and consider the Bahá’í Faith, a religion that is effectively post-Islamic inasmuch as it supercedes Islam and its predecessors, a heresy and is heavily persecuted in Iran. In the eyes of the state belonging to the Bahá’í Faith in Iran amounts to apostasy, which is a capital offense in the same league as murder, rape, sodomy, and drug trafficking.⁵⁶⁶

As such, members of the Bahá’í Faith exist in a state of limbo in which they are born in Iran, speak one or more of the country’s various languages, know the culture and history just as any Iranian does, and whose faith is not discernible through their attire or appearance⁵⁶⁷ on the streets of the country, yet suffer from legal restrictions and penalties that uniquely apply to them. The state, for instance, does not recognize Bahá’í marriages

⁵⁶⁶ Human Rights Watch. “World Report 2013: Iran”. New York, NY: 2013. <<http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/iran?page=1>>.

⁵⁶⁷ Bahá’í women just like all the other women in Iran, irrespective of faith, are mandated to wear the *hijab*.

thereby effectively calling into question the dignity of women who consummate their unrecognized marriages.⁵⁶⁸ Thus, the state situates Iranian Bahá'ís in a dubious place beneath that of full citizens:

“Iran’s theocracy...defines members of the nation by their willingness to accept the rule of the supreme jurispudent and to be subordinate to the apparatus of Islamic law, over which he presides. In a sense, only Shi‘ite Muslims are full citizens (only a Shi‘ite may be president), with minorities being ranked in the following order: Sunni Muslims, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians. Baha’is and secularists have at many points been defined as persons outside the nation altogether because by definition they cannot sincerely accept the rule of the jurispudent and because he cannot define a legitimate Islamic niche for them to occupy.”⁵⁶⁹

It is precisely this issue of Bahá'ís and their due rights under the Islamic government that allows for an informative lens by which to assess Montazeri as a case study in post-Islamism.

On May 24, 2008, Montazeri re-affirmed his belief that the Bahá'í Faith, unlike Zoroastrians, Jews, Christians, and Muslims, does not have a divinely inspired “heavenly book” and is “not considered one of the religious minorities” recognized by the Islamic constitution, which affords only such officially recognized religious minorities civil rights and representation in the Iranian parliament. Breaking with the rigidity of the theocracy, however, the one-time Islamist revolutionary and one of the most senior Shi‘ite clerics in the world, conceded: “Since they [Bahai’s] are the citizens of this country, they have the right of citizenship and to live in this country. Furthermore, they must benefit from the Islamic compassion, which is stressed in the Qur’an and by the

⁵⁶⁸ Cole, Juan R.I. “The Baha’i Minority and Nationalism in Contemporary Iran”. In *Nationalism and Minority Identities in Islamic Societies*. Edited Maya Shatzmiller. Montreal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2005, pp. 142.

⁵⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 128-9.

religious authorities.”⁵⁷⁰ With such a pronouncement, he attempted to alter the basis of Shi‘ite jurisprudence that protected the right of the Shi‘ite faithful in favor of protecting the rights of the citizens, regardless of their faith. In doing so, Montazeri championed the “individual choice and freedom” of all Iranians as matter of “rights” and “citizenship.” In other words, Bahá’ís, according to Montazeri, may believe in a heretical religion, which clerics pejoratively refer to as a “deviation,” but they are nonetheless Iranian citizens deserving equal rights on par with the “faithful” and must enjoy the same protection by the law without prejudice.

Montazeri’s affirmation of the citizenship of Iranian Bahá’ís stands in stark contrast to the state narrative best exemplified by a 2013 *fatwa* issued by Khamenei that called upon the “faithful”—Shi‘ite Muslims—“to avoid any sort of interaction with the deviant and misleading cult [the Bahá’í Faith].”⁵⁷¹ Montazeri, who after Taleqani’s death turned down Khomeini’s offer to become Tehran’s Friday Prayer leader—one of the most influential positions in post-revolutionary Iran—and instead recommended Khamenei for the position thereby facilitating his meteoric rise,⁵⁷² defied the state that Khamenei personified in 2008 by opposing such state-sanctioned Islamist discrimination in favor of equal rights for all—including those with whom he disagreed as a matter of faith. As such, Montazeri’s position underscores the evolutionary process unfolding in Iran

⁵⁷⁰ Montazeri, Hossein ‘Ali. “Pāsokh beh so’ālāt-i sīāsī”. *Website for the Office of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri*. 24 May 2008. <http://www.amontazeri.com/farsi/pop_printer_friendly.asp?TOPIC_ID=27>.

⁵⁷¹ “Tāzehtarīn fatvā-ye rahbarī darbāreh-ye estefādeh az enternet, māvāreh, mo’āmeleh bā sherkathāye šahūnistī, ežāfeh kāri va...”. *Tasnim News Agency*. 30 July 2013. Accessed 19 May 2015. <<http://www.tasnimnews.com/Home/Single/107422>>.

⁵⁷² Montazeri, “Khāṭerāt: takīd bā eqāmeḥ-ye namāz jome’h dar sarāsar-i keshvar”, pp. 441-5. According to Ahmad Khomeini, his father reacted in astonishment when he heard Montazeri admit that Khamenei’s sermons were “stronger” than his own, reportedly saying of Montazeri: “This is what is called being simple.”

through a new post-Islamist discourse that stresses rights over “duties” and individual freedom and democracy.

While Montazeri’s position on Bahá’ís was indeed a watershed moment in Islamism in Iran, his continued opposition to the Islamic system in Iran in the run-up to the 2009 presidential election and during the post-election turmoil cemented his legacy as an opposition stalwart.

Montazeri not only openly condemned the state in his capacity as an Iranian citizen, but he also used his standing and eminence in the Shi‘ite Muslim world to question the government’s religious legitimacy in the eyes of senior clerics outside Iran—especially after the 2009 presidential elections—and urged them to vocalize their discontent with the regime. More than a year after proclaiming his new stance vis-à-vis Iranian Bahá’ís, he wrote a letter addressed to the “Honorable marja‘s and scholars of Qom, Najaf, Holy Mashhad, Tehran, Isfahan, Tabriz, Shiraz and all other corners of the Islamic world,” rallying senior Islamic clerics to join the opposition against the Islamic government three months after the elections:

“Under these circumstances, the honorable marja‘s and the Shi‘ite clerics have greater responsibilities... they must see to the added task of defending the dignity of the religion and cleansing from it the illicit acts performed by the government in its name. These illegitimate acts have been done under the banner of religion and Islamic law and are also against the goals of the revolution... The honorable and respected marja‘s understand the power and influence of their words, and the government needs their approval for the sake of its own legitimacy...The marja‘s are also aware that the government takes advantage of their silence to its own benefit. Thus, is it advantageous to remain silent on such important issues including dignity and respect for religion, concern for the rights of large groups of people, and the survival of religious beliefs among our youth,

especially since the people could consider such silence, God forbid, as amounting to the marja' s' approval of the aforementioned acts?"⁵⁷³

It was through such clarity coupled with his emphatic opposition to the mass executions of the late eighties—an opposition that cost him his political future—that prompted Shirin Ebadi, Iran's first Nobel laureate, to refer to Montazeri as “the father of human rights in Iran,”⁵⁷⁴ and Green activists to exalt him as the “spiritual leader” of their protest movement.⁵⁷⁵

Montazeri's political and religious authority gave his dissent a weight and sanction that constituted an unavoidable thorn in the eye of the Islamic Republic. For the Iranian government, that thorn was only sharpened when he died in the most untimely moment.

III. Mourning Montazeri as Protest

On December 19, 2009—20 years after the death of Khomeini—Montazeri passed in his sleep as a result of heart failure at the age of 87—virtually the same age as his would-be predecessor. While Khomeini's death in 1989 became an internationally-televised event in which millions of the Islamic Republic's supporters chaotically⁵⁷⁶

⁵⁷³ Montazeri, Hossein. “payām-i āyatollāh al'ozmā montazerī beh marāje'-i 'ezām-i taqlīd, 'olāmā' va ḥozeh hayeh 'elmīeh”. Personal Website. 13 September 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://goo.gl/vbg6jq>>. So important is this letter that *Rahesabz*, a key opposition website, marked the anniversary of its writing. See M., Maysam. “nakhostīn sālgard-i nāmeh-ye āyatollāh montazerī khaṭāb beh marāje'-i taqlīd”. *Rahesabz*. 13 Sept 2010. Accessed 3 June 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/23215>>.

⁵⁷⁴ Spencer, Richard. “Mourners shout anti-regime slogans as clashes mar Ayatollah Montazeri's funeral”. *The Telegraph*. 21 Dec 2009. <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/6857034/Mourners-shout-anti-regime-slogans-as-clashes-mar-Ayatollah-Montazeris-funeral.html>>.

⁵⁷⁵ “Yādnāmeh-ye panjomīn sālgard-i dargozasht-i pedar-i m'anavī-ye jonbesh-i sabz”. *Rahesabz*. 28 Oct 2014. Accessed 4 June 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/87270/>>.

⁵⁷⁶ *The New York Times* observed that “So huge and so emotional were the crowds, estimated at three million, that there was doubt whether the authorities would be able to push through them to bury the

mourned his passing, the death of Khomeini's one-time designated successor manifested an altogether different emotion. Indeed, Montazeri's death could not have been more opportune for the opposition looking for yet another occasion to continue their uprising, and, conversely, his passing could not have been more ill-timed for the government that was struggling to suppress it.

Although the government marked his death by recognizing him as a leader of the revolution and founder of the system it had birthed, official announcements attempted to minimize his role at the same time. Some state media rather disrespectfully omitted his clerical rank and did not acknowledge any of his scholarly or political activities after he was unceremoniously removed as Khomeini's successor in 1989.⁵⁷⁷ *Fars News*, the agency associated with the Revolutionary Guards, briefly mentioned Montazeri's passing while noting that he was once Khomeini's chosen heir, and then reduced Montazeri's demotion as consequence of him "taking positions against"⁵⁷⁸ the Islamic government—a vague attempt to avoid the fact that Montazeri broke with the regime over the mass political executions. Khamenei himself issued a brief statement begrudgingly recognizing Montazeri's personal and physical contributions to the revolution as well as his clerical stature, only to offer a sanitized summation regarding Montazeri's falling out

Shiite Muslim patriarch... As the Ayatollah's body, transferred to an army helicopter when the refrigerated truck carrying it was unable to get through the crowds, first arrived at the burial site at about 11 this morning, a shrieking crowd fell on the coffin... as the excitement grew, the body of the Ayatollah, wrapped in a white burial shroud, fell out of the flimsy wooden coffin, and in a mad scene people in the crowd reached to touch the shroud. But even as the soldiers pushed the body back into the helicopter, the crowd swarmed over the craft, dragging it back down as it tried to take off." Kifner, John. "Amid Frenzy, Iranians Bury The Ayatollah". *The New York Times*. 6 June 1989, pp. A1, A7. On the 26th anniversary of the funeral, the *BBC* reported that several hundred were injured and 8 were crushed to death in the flurry of mourners who tried to touch the body of their deceased leader, noting that the funeral grounds hosted several million mourners who constituted a "sea of black." "The Death of Ayatollah Khomeini". *BBC World Service*. 2 June 2015 <<http://bbc.in/1ANjZYI>>.

⁵⁷⁷ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 20, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI539_a.html.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

with the state: “Montazeri failed a difficult and dangerous test near the end of Imam Khomeini's life, yet I ask God to show him mercy by accepting his other positive deeds.”⁵⁷⁹

Such words illustrate how there was certainly a part of Khamenei that was relieved that Montazeri was no longer alive to offer such scathing criticisms of both the Islamic Republic and Khamenei's political and religious authority. As recently as the month after the June 12th presidential election Montazeri, a religious figure whose stature towers over Khamenei's, offered an edict that many construed to be an indirect challenge to Khamenei's legitimacy to rule. After concluding that the election was rigged, witnessing the post-election state crackdown and the show trials, Montazeri—without specifically naming Khamenei—effectively judged that the “unjust” supreme leader is “illegitimate” and, therefore, automatically dismissed from his position.⁵⁸⁰ Montazeri's scathing criticism, however, did not only target Khamenei. In the same summer, Montazeri went on to argue that the Islamic Republic was “neither a republic nor was it Islamic.”⁵⁸¹ In other words, one of the most senior Shi'ite leaders in the world invoked

⁵⁷⁹ Khamenei, 'Ali. “Payām-i tasliyat-i rahbar-i mo'azam-i enqelāb-i eslāmī dar pay-ye dargozasht-i faqīh-i bozorgvār āyatollāh montazerī”. *leader.ir*. 20 December 2009.

<<http://www.leader.ir/langs/fa/?p=contentShow&id=6231>>.

⁵⁸⁰ “Āyatollāh montazerī: velāyat-i kesī keh bā shar' va 'aql va mīšāq hāyeh mellī mokhālefat konad jā'erāneh ast”. *BBC Persian*. 11 July 2009. Accessed 3 June 2015.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/07/090710_op_ir88_montazeri_kadivar.shtml>. Also, see Sahimi, Muhammad. “Grand Ayatollah Montazeri's Fatwa”. *Tehran Bureau*. 12 July 2009. Accessed 3 June 2015. <<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2009/07/grand-ayatollah-montazeris-fatwa.html>>.

⁵⁸¹ The original article was first published on Montazeri's personal site but is no longer available, probably as a result of government pressure. Western Persian language services, however, ensured that his forceful words remained online. See “Āyatollāh montazerī: mas'ulān cheshm va gūsh va del bar haqāyeq bastehand”. *Radio Farda*. 27 Aug 2009.

<http://www.radiofarda.com/content/o2_montazeri_intellectuals_response/1808375.html>. “Āyatollāh montazerī: īn hokūmat nah jomhūri ast nah eslāmī”. *VOA*. 27 Aug 2009.

<<http://ir.voanews.com/content/a-31-2009-08-27-voa8-61545592/567831.html>>. The full letter can be found on *Gooya News*: “Pāsokh-i āyatollāh montazerī beh nāmeḥ-ye 293 nafar az roshanfekrān va

his learned knowledge of Islamic law in order invalidate Khamenei's authority as well as that of the entire system of governance in Iran.

Khamenei's relief that Montazeri was no longer alive to issue such forceful declarations was short-lived, as Green activists appropriated his death and used the occasion of his passing to honor and defend Montazeri's legacy, repudiate Khamenei's words, and denounce the elections and the state as a whole. Moreover, that they organized demonstrations around one of the state's founders attests to the symbolic power imbued in this one figure. Montazeri was an integral part of the regime's origins yet the final stages of his life, death, and burial ensured that his legacy became integral to the Green Movement's negation of the very state and ideology he labored to establish.

According to Katherine Verdery,

“Dead people come with a curriculum vitae or résumé—several possible résumés, depending on which aspect of their life is being considered. They lend themselves to analogy with *other people's* résumés. That is, they encourage identification with their life story, from several possible vantage points. Their complexity makes it fairly easy to discern different sets of emphasis, extract different stories, and thus rewrite history.”⁵⁸²

For the regime, Montazeri's résumé couldn't have been more problematic as he was one of the most important architects of the Islamic system and who became its most relentless and authoritative critic. The opposition extolled the “set” of facts that “emphasized” how one of the state's forefathers now stood and died in opposition to that very state. To put it plainly, they didn't mourn him only as a senior religious scholar who made significant contributions to Islamic thought, but paid their respects to him as a revolutionary who fought both the Shah's regime and the Islamic Republic, the former of which imprisoned

nokhbeḡān: e'lām konand in ḡokūmat nah jomhūrī ast va nah eslāmī va hīch kas ham ḡaq-i e'terāz nadarad”. *Gooya News*. 26 Aug 2009 <<http://news.gooya.com/politics/archives/2009/08/092747.php>>.

⁵⁸² Verdery, Katherine. *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 28-9.

and tortured him, and the latter of which monitored, harassed, and placed him on house arrest for six years. That he rebelled against the latter—the state he co-founded—only adds to his political bona fides in the eyes of a movement that championed him as one of its own as it stood in steadfast opposition to the state he bequeathed.

As such, crowds spontaneously came out onto the streets in Tehran the night of his death in order to poignantly congratulate him on obtaining his freedom through death from a government that went to great lengths to silence him, chanting: “Montazeri the honorable, congratulations on your freedom” (*montazerī-i bā ghayrat, āzādīet mobārak*). Invoking the protest color of green, they declared that “Today is a day of mourning, the green nation of Iran is mourning” (*‘azā ‘azāst emrūz, rūz-i ‘azāst emrūz, mellat-i sabz-i īrān šāhīb ‘azāst emrūz*).⁵⁸³ Such mourning-as-protest was a prelude of things to come.

Tens of thousands (some accounts put the number at hundreds of thousands)⁵⁸⁴ of people commemorated his death on December 21, 2009, by attending his popular funeral in Qom at the shrine of Fatima Ma’sumeh, the sister of the only one of the twelve Imams to be buried in Iran, Imam Reza.⁵⁸⁵ At the shrine, activists held pictures of Montazeri with a black stripe on the edge to symbolize mourning and a green backdrop to highlight his identification with the post-election protest movement. They drowned out

⁵⁸³ Mehdi Saharkhiz. “Iran 20 dec 09 (29 Azar) Tehran Mohseni Sq Protest After death of Ayatollah Montazeri P2”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 20 December 2009. Accessed 14 August 2010. <http://youtu.be/ogadF_IzJtC>. They also chanted, “This is the month of blood, Seyyed Ali will be overthrown” (*īn māh māh-i khūn ast, seyyed ‘alī sarnegūn ast*), variations of which were common as the holy month of *Muharram* began and *Ashura* drew near. A more detailed discussion on the topic and slogan is to follow.

⁵⁸⁴ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 22, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI543_a.html. Footage from the event corroborates that there were indeed at least tens of thousands of mourners commemorating Montazeri’s death while chanting anti-regime slogans. See Video Blog of the Green Movement. “The Funeral of Grand Ayatollah Montazeri – Qum, Iran – Part 1”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 23 December 2009. Accessed 14 August 2010. <http://youtu.be/_KwSHb8cwkl>.

⁵⁸⁵ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 22, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI543_a.html.

Khamenei's pre-recorded statement of condolence broadcasted on the shrine's loudspeakers by chaotically jumping up and down with their hands raised, chanting "Death to the dictator" and "Khamenei is a murderer, his *vilāyat* [guardianship] is null and void" (*khāmeneī qātele, vilāyatash bāṭele*).⁵⁸⁶ They held the hands of the person standing next to them above their heads while giving voice to the popular Arabic slogan: "We will never submit" (*heyhāt mennā zella*)⁵⁸⁷ and condemned the Islamic Republic with slogans from the revolution that brought it to power: "Assistance from God [leads to] imminent victory, death to this deceptive government" (*naṣron min allāh faṭḥon qarīb, marg bar īn dowlāt-i mardom farīb*).⁵⁸⁸

Montazeri's death and funeral occurred in the holy month of *Muharram*, the month in which the Battle of Karbala occurred in 680 AD. In that fateful year, a massive Umayyad⁵⁸⁹ army surrounded the rebellious Imam Husayn—the third holy Shi'ite Imam and the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad—and his 72 companions⁵⁹⁰ in the city of Karbala—what Washington Irving, the 19th century historian, referred to as "The Sepulchre of Hosein"⁵⁹¹—in modern-day Iraq. The Damascus-based caliph, Yazid, offered the Imam two choices: Pledge allegiance (*baī'ah*) to his authority or perish.

⁵⁸⁶ Mehdi Saharkhiz. "Iran 21 dec 09 (30 Azar) Qom Funeral of Ayatollah Montazeri p18". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 21 December 2009. Accessed 14 August 2010.

<<http://youtu.be/AUIUZkj8q3Y?list=PLB4DB22F42A4DD1DA>>.

⁵⁸⁷ The Persian pronunciation renders the transliteration as such. The Arabic pronunciation only slightly differs.

⁵⁸⁸ Mehdi Saharkhiz. "Iran 21 dec 09 (30 Azar) Qom Funeral of Ayatollah Montazeri p19". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 21 December 2009. Accessed 14 August 2010.

<<http://youtu.be/4tWAm4dyrm0?list=PLB4DB22F42A4DD1DA>>.

⁵⁸⁹ The Umayyads were the first dynasty in the Islamic era. After the death of the Prophet, four successors had been chosen through consensus. After the death of 'Ali, the fourth caliph or successor, the Umayyads took control of the caliphate and turned it into a dynasty, ruling between 661-750 CE.

⁵⁹⁰ Fischer offers a breakdown of the number, noting that 30 of the 72 were horsemen and the remaining 42 were on foot. See Fischer, Michael. *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, pp. 19.

⁵⁹¹ Irving, Washington. *Lives of Mahomet and His Successors*. Paris, A. and W. Galignani and Co., 1850, pp. 350.

Preferring death over what he considered submission to tyranny and a perversion of Islamic rule, Husayn revolted and was killed alongside his companions thereby giving real-life application to the mantra: “It is better to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees”—doing so more than a millennia before the timeless phrase entered the lexicon of resistance.⁵⁹² What’s more, Husayn did not force his family and followers to make the supreme sacrifice for his ideals. On the contrary, when Husayn urged his supporters to flee before the final battle, it is reported that his half-brother, ‘Abbas, responded: “We shall not do that, for how can we live after your death?”⁵⁹³

According to the Shi‘ite account, he died because “he refused to acknowledge the sovereignty” of the Umayyad’s who had usurped the caliphate and turned it into a hierarchal “godless” dynasty.⁵⁹⁴ Michael Fischer argues that Husayn’s death and defiance is “the third part of the origin legend of Muhammad, ‘Ali, and Husayn,” and constitutes “The Karbala Paradigm,” which is

“...the part that is the most emotionally intense and concentrated, and is the reference point for almost all popular teaching. It is, however, only intelligible as the climax to the story of ‘Ali. Its focus is the emotionally potent theme of corrupt and oppressive tyranny repeatedly overcoming (in this world) the steadfast dedication to pure truth; hence its ever-present, latent, political potential to frame or cloth contemporary discontents. The complete origin legend, which might be called the paradigm of the family of the Prophet, focuses rather upon model behavior. Muslims should model themselves on the behavior of Muhammad, ‘Ali, Fatima, Husayn, and Zaynab (the Prophet, his cousin and son-in-law, his daughter, his grandson, and his granddaughter).”⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² The quote is attributed to Emiliano Zapata (d. 1919), a leader of the Mexican Revolution. The Zapatista Army of National Liberation, which emerged onto the political landscape of Mexico in the mid-90s as a resistance force, takes its name from Zapata.

⁵⁹³ Nakash, Yitzhak. *The Shi‘is of Iraq*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 144.

⁵⁹⁴ Heglund, Mary. “Two Images of Husain: Accommodation and Revolution in an Iranian Village”. In *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi‘ism from Quietism to Revolution*. Ed. by Nikki R. Keddie. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983, pp. 226.

⁵⁹⁵ Fischer, pp. 13.

Husayn exemplified an integral part of that model by the fact that, “knowing he would die, went to Karbala to witness for the truth, knowing that his death would make him a martyr, an enduring, immortal witness, whose example would be a guide for others.”⁵⁹⁶ His legacy indeed endures more than millennium later.

Green activists in 2009 invoked “The Karbala Paradigm” in order to exalt Montazeri as a fighter of truth and justice in the same vein as Imam Husayn, and to challenge Khamenei’s sovereignty and “corrupt and oppressive tyranny”—a sentiment they conveyed by equating “the Leader of the Revolution” with Yazid, the caliph who ordered the massacre at Karbala in 680 CE, by declaring outright: “This month is the month of blood, Yazid will be toppled” (*īn māh, māh-i khūn ast, yazīd sarnegūn ast*).⁵⁹⁷ In doing so, activists were once again decisively using the state’s Islamic discourse against itself.

The mourning ceremony inside the shrine compound concluded with Montazeri’s body placed atop a truck covered in black mourning drapes and driven slowly through the streets so the immense crowd outside could pay its respects. Affording Green activists the opportunity to continue their anti-government protests, the crowd again invoked Islamic history to affirm its fiery message. Carrying Montazeri’s portrait, the crowd pledged: “We are not from Kufa to stand behind Yazid” (*mā ahl-i kūfeh nīstīm, posht-i yazīd baīstīm*)⁵⁹⁸—a powerful slogan in reference to the Kufans of 680 CE who had invited Imam Husayn to Kufa to receive their pledge of allegiance to him, but failed to come to his support in his hour of need when he was surrounded *en route* and eventually

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid, pp. 25.

⁵⁹⁷ Mehdi Saharkhiz. “Iran 21 dec 09 (30 Azar) Qom Funer of Ayatollah Montazeri p19”.

⁵⁹⁸ Mehdi Saharkhiz. “Iran 21 dec 09 (30 Azar) Qom Funeral of Ayatollah Montazeri p15”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 21 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <http://youtu.be/sq-MyQza_Zc?list=PLB4DB22F42A4DD1DA>. “Kufeh” is the Persian rendering of the Iraqi city of Kufa.

massacred at Karbala.⁵⁹⁹ A similar quote was famously utilized during the Iranian Revolution when Saddam Hussein, as a favor to the Shah, deported Khomeini from Najaf to Paris, where Iranian revolutionaries anticipated his incoming by hanging a banner in Neauphle-le-Château, declaring: “We are not the people of Kufa” (*mā ahl-i kūfeh nīstīm*).⁶⁰⁰ The implication was that the movement in 1978 would continue until it succeeded in the revolutionary overthrow of the monarch—the Yazid of the time. Mourners in 2009 used the promise from 1978 to likewise pledge that the movement will not abandon its leaders and persevere until the “toppling” of Khamenei—the new Yazid, “the Leader of the Revolution, and the personification of the Islamic Republic.” One political analyst inside Iran affirmed the parallel between then and now by stating: “Today we had a very great demonstration in Qom, a small provincial city and the ideological centre of the Islamic regime... The slogans people were chanting were indirectly against the Islamic regime and similar to what was chanted before the revolution against the Shah.”⁶⁰¹ Not all the chants were so indirect.

Although there were reports of skirmishes between the crowd and the hardline Basij militia, security forces were able to take control of the streets only after the mourners dispersed on their own. In order to prevent further collective action, they blocked all the roads around Montazeri’s home and took control of the grand mosque in

⁵⁹⁹ The guilt with which these Kufans were afflicted is famous. In subsequent years, many such Kufans engaged in a suicidal military campaign against the Umayyads in order to redeem abandoning Husayn. See Ostovar, pp. 24.

⁶⁰⁰ Dabashi, Hamid. *Shi'ism: A Religion of Protest*. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 15-6.

⁶⁰¹ Tait, Robert. “Funeral of Iranian cleric Montazeri turns into political protest”. *The Guardian*. 21 Dec 2009. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/dec/21/iran-funeral-ayatollah-montazeri-protest>>.

Qom.⁶⁰² Consequently, Montazeri's family cancelled "the traditional prayer ceremony, scheduled to be held in Qom's Azam Mosque the night of December 21, after it learned that the mosque had been filled in the hours leading up to the ceremony by Basij and IRGC-affiliated persons."⁶⁰³ Furthermore, regime supporters attacked the homes of both Ayatollah Sane'i—another high-ranking critic of the government—and Montazeri, going as far as tearing down mourning posters commemorating his death and smashing the windows of his office, both of which were done reportedly in revenge for the fiery anti-regime and anti-Khamenei slogans voiced during Montazeri's funeral.⁶⁰⁴ Thus, after failing to control his mourning procession, the government prompted the cancellation of the traditional prayer ceremony immediately after his mass-attended and politically-infused funeral,⁶⁰⁵ and the attacks on Montazeri's home and office further prompted his son, Ahmad, to cancel the customary 3rd and 7th day of commemorations.⁶⁰⁶ As in life, however, Montazeri refused to be silenced and the government's cancellation of semi-private indoor commemorations only facilitated the opposition's ability to observe his mourning cycle on the streets. Thus, the opportunity to protest provided by Montazeri's death persisted despite the government's best attempts. This is especially the case as his

⁶⁰² Worth, Robert F. and Nazila Fathi. "Cleric's Funeral Becomes Protest of Iran Leaders". *New York Times*. 12 Dec 2009. Accessed 15 Aug 2010.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/22/world/middleeast/22cleric.html?_r=2&hp>.

⁶⁰³ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 22, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI543_a.html.

⁶⁰⁴ Ghazi, Fereshteh. "Qom dar āstāneh-ye jang-i moqaledān-i āyāt". *Rooz Online*. 23 Dec 2009. Accessed 3 June 2015. <<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem/archive/2009/december/23/article/-7361f881e6.html>>. Also see, "Rāhpaymāi-ye havādārān-i dowlat dar qom va ḥamleh-ye tāzeh beh daftar āyatollāh yūsef-i šāne'ī". *Radio Farda*. 23 Dec 2009. Accessed 3 June 2015. <http://www.radiofarda.com/content/o2_hardliners_hit_dissident_ayatollah/1911057.html>.

⁶⁰⁵ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 23, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI545_a.html.

⁶⁰⁶ Ghazi, Fereshteh. "Qom dar āstāneh-ye jang-i moqaledān-i āyāt".

7th day of mourning converged with 'Ashura thereby creating an explosive day of passion and spirited defiance.

In Shi'ite Islam, grieving families and friends come together to commemorate the 3rd, 7th, and 40th day of mourning.⁶⁰⁷ Until as early as half a century ago, these gatherings were often apolitical. As Islamist opposition grew against the monarchy in the run-up to the Iranian Revolution, elements within Islamic culture were politicized in order to mobilize against the Shah. Charles Kurzman, a sociologist and expert on modern Iran, argues that

“... the forty-day mourning cycle is a cultural resource that exists in Shi'i Islam but does not exist in some other cultures. It is part of the cultural context out of which Iranian protest grows. In more strategic terms, it is part of the 'tool kit,' 'repertoire,' or 'cultural reservoir' on which Iranian protest can draw.”⁶⁰⁸

That it is not to say that Shi'ism is inherently revolutionary. During Qajar rule, which spanned over a century, Shi'ite clerics—the self-styled guardians of Shi'ism—often acquiesced and defended the status quo of the feudal monarchy.⁶⁰⁹ It does, however, mean that there are certain aspects within Shi'ite history, culture, and discourse that can be organically drawn upon and invoked to inspire political mobilization. The politicization of the mourning cycles in 1978, for example, were instrumental in ensuring that the Iranian Revolution continued to build momentum in the face of severe government repression. These 40-day mourning periods, known by their Arabic terminology as *arba'in*, brought more people onto the streets in protest, which ultimately devolved into clashes with the Shah's military resulting in the deaths of scores of

⁶⁰⁷ This ritual is akin to the *shiva* and the *shloshim* mourning periods in Judaism, which last 7 and 30 days respectively.

⁶⁰⁸ Kurzman, pp. 56.

⁶⁰⁹ The Tobacco Revolt of 1890-1892 is when many Shi'ite clerics began to challenge the status quo and played a decisive role in the revolt's success.

activists. These “martyrs” in turn had their 40th day of mourning which tragically produced more “martyrs” who would then have their 40th day of mourning thereby facilitating another day of action. Three of these Shi‘ite mourning cycles, which the Shah bemoaned as “bereavement tactics,”⁶¹⁰ helped bring the revolution to a crescendo in 1978.

The innovative and strategic revolution-era mourning cycles were appropriated and utilized in 2009 to politicize Montazeri’s passing and protest the very state that came to power through such tactics. Fatefully, Montazeri’s 7th day of mourning fell on *Tasu‘a* and *‘Ashura*, the two days of commemoration that coincided with the anniversary of Imam Husayn and his half-brother’s 7th century martyrdom. As with the mourning cycles, *‘Ashura* is a part of the Shi‘ite Iranian repertoire of action that can readily be activated in order to mobilize the population.

Before the discussion proceeds to outline the *‘Ashura* day uprising in 2009, it is first important to show what *‘Ashura* means in terms of the modern history of political mobilization for Shi‘ites in general and Iranians in particular. The politicization of *‘Ashura* precipitated the most important day of action in the history of the Iranian Revolution. After the revolution’s triumph, the state incorporated *‘Ashura* and Husayn’s legacy as central tenets in Iran’s Islamist ideology. Only after that historical context is taken into consideration can the gravity and potency of the Green Movement’s appropriation of *‘Ashura* to renew their uprising on December 27—the final and perhaps most consequential major day of action in the history of the movement—be properly unpacked and appreciated.

⁶¹⁰ Pahlavi, Mohammad Reza. *Answer to History: By Mohammad Reza Pahlavi The Shah of Iran*. New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1980, pp. 163.

IV. Revolutionary *‘Ashura* in the 1970s

As noted above, Shi‘ism is not automatically revolutionary but it has a discourse, culture, and history that are laden with defiant symbolism that can be easily activated in order to mobilize people for political purposes. No other aspect of Shi‘ism is more readily available for such activation than *‘Ashura*, the annual commemoration marking the 7th century martyrdom of Imam Husayn—the grandson of the Prophet Muhammad and the third Imam that the Shi‘ites believe to be infallible, just, and the rightful heir (after his father Imam ‘Ali and older brother Imam Hassan) to the leadership of the burgeoning Muslim community after the Prophet’s passing in 632 CE. In the 1960s and 70s, Shi‘ite leaders across the Muslim world began to harness the power of Husayn’s martyrdom in order to inspire their followers to mobilize against the injustice that many of their communities faced in the Middle East—often times because they were Shi‘ites.

The customary mourning of Husayn’s martyrdom is usually confined to believers⁶¹¹ gathering for sermons and eulogies, partaking in rituals of weeping and self-flagellation⁶¹², and providing food and refreshments in the name of Imam Husayn. There is an important cleansing component to the weeping as well as a strong machismo aspect to the self-flagellation, as Yitzhak Nakash explained: “A man participating in a procession of flagellation would feel lofty and proud for doing so, knowing that he was

⁶¹¹ I use the term “believers” reluctantly as even the nominally pious partake in what is often considered a cultural event as well as a religious one.

⁶¹² The flagellation ranges from simple chest beating to the striking of foreheads with dulled swords known as the *qamāt* (*qameh* in Persian), which can result in the profuse bloodletting. Clerics have prohibited the more severe forms of self-flagellation such as the cutting of the foreheads, though it is still practiced in places such as Iraq or rural Lebanon.

being noticed by the crowd.”⁶¹³ Most importantly, it is believed that such activities place the pious “on good terms with the imams or imamzadehs (the imams’ progeny) so as to increase the chances of receiving assistance from them when it is needed.”⁶¹⁴ Believers hold that the most critical form of assistance can come on the Day of Resurrection. The closer one is to the Imams then the likelier that they will intercede on their behalf on the Day of Resurrection.⁶¹⁵ The devout especially believe Imam ‘Ali to be “the most effective protector, aide, and intercessor on behalf of believers, both immediately after their death, when their acts were judged by the two angels Munkir and Nakir, and on the day of resurrection.”⁶¹⁶ This is the main reason why the Wadi al-Salam cemetery near Imam ‘Ali’s mausoleum in Najaf, Iraq is one of the largest if not the largest cemetery in the world; the closer spiritually and physically to Imam ‘Ali, the higher the chances of his assistance at such critical junctures.⁶¹⁷

Millions of Shi‘ites across the Muslim world commemorate *‘Ashura*, and such observances vary by local customs and circumstances. For dispossessed Shi‘ite minorities in Lebanon and Iraq, for example, it was an occasion to express group identity and solidarity throughout much of the modern period. In the 1970s, however, Shi‘ite clerical leaders across the Muslim world imbued *‘Ashura* with a modern political meaning in order mobilize their constituents for political purposes. In other words, “it became practical to stress that the Karbala paradigm is not a passive weeping for Husayn

⁶¹³ Nakash, Yitzah. *The Shi‘is of Iraq*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 151.

⁶¹⁴ Heglund, pp. 222.

⁶¹⁵ Nakash, pp. 185.

⁶¹⁶ Nakash, pp. 186.

⁶¹⁷ Many Afghan Shi‘ites believe that Imam ‘Ali was ultimately interred in the Afghan city of Mazar-i Sharif, where they believe his remains are laid to rest at the famous Blue Mosque.

but rather an active fighting for Husayn's ideals, and it is not merely a personal and individual commitment but a social one."⁶¹⁸

In the religiously diverse Lebanese context,⁶¹⁹ Shi'ite Muslims were the most disenfranchised of all the religious groups. Iranian-Lebanese cleric, Imam Musa al-Sadr, launched a movement, *ḥarakat al-muḥrimīn* (Movement of the Downtrodden) in order to organize and empower Lebanese Shi'ites to have a greater share of political and economic power in a system that deprived them of both. On the occasion of 'Ashura in 1974, for example, al-Sadr gave Husayn's martyrdom modern political application in order to inspire his constituents:

"A great sacrifice was needed to... stir feelings. The event of Karbala was that sacrifice. Imam Hussein put his family, his forces, and even his life, in the balance against tyranny and corruption. Then the Islamic world burst forth with this revolution. This revolution did not die in the sands of Karbala; it flowed into the life stream of the Islamic world, and passed from generation to generation, even to our day. It is a deposit placed in our hands so that we may profit from it, that we draw out of it a new source of reform, a new position, a new movement, a new revolution, to repel the darkness, to stop tyranny and to pulverize evil."⁶²⁰

He affirmed that simply mourning Husayn's martyrdom was a disservice to his legacy, proclaiming: "Husayn had many enemies, but those who wish to confine the anniversary of his death simply to mourning and lamentation are the most dangerous for they threaten to erase his legacy and motivation to die fighting tyranny."⁶²¹ Such political interpretations laid the groundwork amongst many Lebanese Shi'ites to heed Khomeini's call for Islamic Revolution half a decade later. Although al-Sadr officially founded the

⁶¹⁸ Fischer, pp. 213.

⁶¹⁹ Lebanon is one of the most religiously diverse countries in the Middle East with nearly 20 religious communities registered in a country of about 4.5 million people.

⁶²⁰ Translation in Ajami, Fouad. *The Vanished Imam: Musa al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986, pp. 143.

⁶²¹ Ajami, pp. 144.

Shi'ite group Amal (meaning "Hope" in Arabic), he is considered the father of all Lebanese Shi'ites. Indeed, Seyyed Hassan Nasrallah, the secretary-general of Hizbullah—the Shi'ite militant group⁶²² that was co-founded by militant Lebanese Shi'ites and Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps—referred to al-Sadr as "the imam of the Resistance, the imam of the homeland, the imam of freedom, and the imam of liberation..." and most significantly, as the "founder of the Resistance [Hizbullah] in Lebanon."⁶²³ In the same year of al-Sadr's fiery 'Ashura speech, Iraqi Shi'ites likewise used the occasion of Husayn's martyrdom to register their protest against a state that marginalized their community both politically and economically.

Iraqi Shi'ites, although constituting a "numerical majority, had to [sic] all intents and purposes, the disadvantaged status of a minority,"⁶²⁴ mirroring the lack of political power of their counterparts in Lebanon. Iraqi Shi'ites were prevented from having any real voice in government virtually from the onset of the country's establishment as a modern nation-state. Iraq's founding monarch, King Faisal, attested to this political reality when he callously said, "taxes and death are for the Shi'i and government positions for the Sunnis"⁶²⁵—a reality that was intensified with the rise of the Ba'ath Party:

⁶²² I use the phrase "militant group" because there's no consensus on how to describe Hizbullah. Nasrallah simply calls it "The Resistance" while some call it a party because it is a dominant force in the Lebanese government. Sunni extremists call it the "Party of the Devil" and Israel and the United States use loaded political terminology by referring to it as a "terrorist organization."

⁶²³ Nasrallah, Hassan. "Prisoner Release Speech". *Now Lebanon*. July 18, 2008. Accessed on July 30, 2008. <<http://www.nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=51603&MID=91&PID=3>>

⁶²⁴ Bengio, Ofra. "Shi'is and Politics in Ba'thi Iraq". *Middle East Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1. Taylor and Francis Group. Jan. 1985, pp. 1-14, pp. 2.

⁶²⁵ Translation in Mallat, Chibli. "Religious Militancy in Contemporary Iraq: Muhammad Baqer as-Sadr and the Sunni-Shia Paradigm". *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 10, No. 2. Taylor and Francis Group. Apr., 1988, pp. 699-729, pp. 723.

“Out of a total of the 53 members of the top command that led the Ba‘ath party from November 1963 to 1970, 84.9 percent were Sunni Arabs, 5.7 percent Shi‘i Arabs, and 7.5 percent Kurds, whereas the period up to November 1963, the comparable sectarian composition for the population was 38.5; 53.8; and 7.7 percent.”⁶²⁶

What’s more, the nominal percentage of Shi‘ites in positions of political power decreased as the Ba‘ath Party tightened its grip on power. For instance, there wasn’t a single Shi‘ite in the Ba‘ath Party’s most powerful body, the Revolutionary Command Council, between July 1968 and September 1977.⁶²⁷

As a consequence of such marginalization, Iraqi Shi‘ites in 1974 transformed ‘*Ashura* from a day of mourning to a day of action against the government.⁶²⁸ That the Baghdad regime consequently banned the annual processions in 1977 attests to ‘*Ashura*’s growing political potency, which by then became synonymous with anti-government agitation. In other words, observing the anniversary of Husayn’s martyrdom became a revolutionary act in Ba‘athist Iraq in the late 1970s.

Upholding ‘*Ashura*’s defiant message, al-Da‘wa—the main Shi‘ite opposition group in Iraq at the time—organized a march of 30,000⁶²⁹ “mourners” from Najaf to Karbala, the site of Husayn’s martyrdom. These “revolutionary mourners” or mourners-turned-protesters gave real-life application to “The Karbala Paradigm” by harnessing the power of Husayn’s death as a means by which to demonstrate their anti-state anger on the most potent of days. Reminiscent of Yazid’s forces cutting off Husayn *en route* to joining his followers in Kufa in 680 CE, an armored division cut the marchers off *en route* to the

⁶²⁶ Ibid, pp. 724.

⁶²⁷ Ibid, pp. 725.

⁶²⁸ Ibid, pp. 724.

⁶²⁹ Aziz, T.M., “The Role of Muhammad Baqir as-Sadr in Shii Political Activism in Iraq from 1958 to 1980”. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. Vol. 25, No. 2. May, 1993, pp. 207-222, pp 214.

holy city in 1977. The “mourners”—defiant in the face of the desecration of their politicized Shi‘ite ritual—stormed a police station shouting: “Saddam clear off! The people of Iraq don’t want you” and “The memory of Husayn cannot be obliterated.”⁶³⁰ The demonstration was violently dispersed and scores were killed—at least several hundred⁶³¹—with even more arrested, prompting two days of rioting that engulfed much of Iraq’s southern Shi‘ite heartland. Iraq, the hallowed grounds of Husayn’s martyrdom, was now producing a new resistance that marched under the banner of his legacy—a legacy that was born in Iraq but had a timeless transnational impact that even reached the shores of Saudi Arabia—the modern-day bastion of anti-Shi‘ite ideology.

Saudi Shi‘ites, a restive minority in Saudi Arabia’s eastern oil region, likewise have a long history of political, social, and economic marginalization. Since the establishment of modern Saudi Arabia in 1932, the ruling Saudi royal family discriminated against its Shi‘ite subjects as a matter of state policy, considering them heretics worse than non-Muslims. No quote better exemplifies this sentiment than the words of the founder of the Saudi state, Ibn Saud, to his British confidant, John Philby: “I should have no objection in taking to wife a Christian or a Jewish woman...The Jews and Christians are both people of the book; but I would not marry a Shi‘a... [who] have been guilty of backsliding and shirk [polytheism]...”⁶³² Such prejudice was not confined to the Saudi state’s early years but was echoed in the 1990s by Abdul Aziz ibn Baz, the chief state cleric who issued a “ruling against the Shi‘ites, reaffirming that they were

⁶³⁰ Translation in Soeterik, Robert. *The Islamic Movement of Iraq (1958-1980)*. Amsterdam: Stichting MERA, 1991, pp. 20.

⁶³¹ *The Guardian* notes as much as 2,000 could have been killed. See Hirst, David. “Bagdad reaps a religious whirlwind”. *The Guardian*. 1 Mar 1977, pp. 2.

⁶³² Translation in Nakash, Yitzak. *Reaching for Power: The Shi‘a in the Modern Arab World*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 44.

infidels...” thereby “prohibiting Muslims from dealings with them.”⁶³³ The ultra conservative clerics in Saudi Arabia are partners in the country’s power structure and such an edict is legally binding.⁶³⁴

Saudi Shi‘ites like their brethren across the Muslim world utilized the potent symbolism of *‘Ashura*, the commemoration of which was forbidden in Saudi Arabia⁶³⁵, in order to march in the streets of cities and villages in protest against the government during the heyday of the Iranian Revolution—1979 and into early 1980. Under the banner of Husayn’s defiant martyrdom, they flouted the government ban on *‘Ashura* by raising “pro-Khomeini placards”⁶³⁶ as they demanded “an end to... discrimination,” the release of detained Shi‘ite activists, and that the oil from their eastern province remain in the ground since “the revenues are not coming back to those [Shi‘ites] who work in the oil fields.”⁶³⁷ The uprising continued sporadically for nearly four months in Dhahran province, the nerve center of the peninsula’s eastern oil region, ending only after government forces rushed in twenty thousand troops⁶³⁸, killed several protesters, arrested hundreds more, and pledged to improve Shi‘ite living conditions.⁶³⁹ For Saudi Shi‘ites to face down a powerful state that battled them because of their Shi‘ite identity only enlivened the Karbala Paradigm thereby sanctioning their resistance with Husayn’s

⁶³³ Ibid.

⁶³⁴ Ibid, pp. 50.

⁶³⁵ Goldberg, Jacob. “The Shi‘i Minority in Saudi Arabia”. In *Religion and Politics in Iran: Shi‘ism from Quietism to Revolution*. Edited by Nikki R. Keddie and Juan R.I. Cole. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983, pp. 239.

⁶³⁶ Andrews, John. “Islamic fact and friction in Saudi Arabia”. *The Guardian*. 4 Feb 1980. pp. 7.

⁶³⁷ Dorsey, James. “Saudi minority sect is restive”. *The Christian Science Monitor*. 20 Feb 1980. <<http://www.csmonitor.com/1980/0220/022048.html/%28page%29/2>>.

⁶³⁸ Goldberg, pp. 240.

⁶³⁹ Nakash, *Reaching for Power*, pp. 50.

legacy in which their spilt blood empowered real-life potency that transcended mere slogans that invoked the Third Imam.

While Shi‘ites in Lebanon, Iraq, and Saudi Arabia rallied under Husayn’s flag to defy their marginalization, Iran—the most populous Shi‘ite country in the world—harnessed the discursive power of Imam Husayn not only to resist one of the third world’s most powerful states, but ultimately to bring it to a definitive end. In his exile in Paris, Khomeini invoked Husayn and the start of the holy month of *Muharram* to sanctify and embolden the uprising in Iran a week before the historic ‘*Ashura* revolutionary march:

“Our people are the followers of the greatest man in history [Imam Husayn] who with only a few followers launched the great ‘*Ashura* movement and forever buried the Umayyad dynasty in the graveyard of history. God willing... the dear people [of Iran], the true followers of the Imam [Husayn], will likewise sacrifice their blood and bury the satanic regime of Pahlavi, and raise the flag of Islam throughout this country and elsewhere.”⁶⁴⁰

According to Khomeini, the revolting Iranian people—largely unarmed and who fell in droves—were akin to Husayn and his band of rebels, while the Shah and his supporters constituted the modern-day “regime of Yazid.”⁶⁴¹ As such, if Husayn sacrificed his blood to resist Yazid, and if Iranians believed in Husayn’s example, and their blood was no more precious than the “Lord of all Martyrs,” then continued resistance was similarly a must and compromise an impossibility.⁶⁴² The more the Shah intensified his crackdown,

⁶⁴⁰ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Koshtār-i mardom-i mosalmān – lozūm-i farār-i sarbāzān az sarbāzkhāneh-hā va edāmeḥ-ye e‘tesābhā”. 11 Dec 1978. Paris. Vol. 5, pp. 153. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=5&tid=31>>.

⁶⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 152.

⁶⁴² Khomeini specifically concluded: “On seeing that a despotic and cruel tyrant rules the people, the Lord of All Martyrs asserted that the despot must be confronted with whatever number of men available. He resolved to revolt and give his blood in order to reform society—until Yazid’s rule was toppled—and he [Husayn] lived up to his own words. He gave everything, including his blood and that of his children. Is

the more Iranians exemplified Husayn's legacy through their spirited and revolutionary sacrifice.

Almost two months after the Jaleh Square massacre on Black Friday (September 8, 1978), Muhammad Reza Shah appointed a military government on November 6 to stem the growing tide of the revolutionary movement. Armed forces "flooded Tehran with armored vehicles and deterred street protests around the country."⁶⁴³ The opposition, however, adjusted to the new security climate and waited for the arrival of the holy month of *Muharram* a month later.

The 9th and 10th (*Tasu'a* and *Ashura*) are the holiest days of Muharram, the month on the Islamic calendar in which Shi'ite processions commemorate the 7th century martyrdom of Imam Husayn and his valiant half-brother 'Abbas. The opposition sought to utilize the occasion of these two holy days not only to continue the struggle against the Shah, but also to mobilize an immense march that would serve as an unofficial referendum⁶⁴⁴ on the monarchy in Iran. In other words, since the government continued to cling to power after nearly a year of uprising, opposition leaders planned to organize a massive demonstration in which the street would serve as the ballot and the people would decide the Shah's fate by voting with their feet.

our blood more valuable than that of the Lord of All Martyrs? Why should we fear offering our blood and lives, especially in the path of resisting a cruel monarch who claims to be a Muslim. Yazid was as good a Muslim as the Shah. But, as he treated the Muslims oppressively and cruelly, the Lord of All Martyrs deemed it necessary to resist him even at the cost of his own life." See Khomeini, Ruhollah. "Qorbānī dādan dar rāh-i khodā sīreh-ye anbīā ast". 25 Oct 1978. Paris. Vol. 4., pp. 151-2. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=4&tid=20>>.

⁶⁴³ Kurzman, Charles. *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004, pp. 105.

⁶⁴⁴ Khomeini, Ruhollah. "Rāhpaymāi-ye tāsū'ā va 'āshūrā – referāndom-i ghayr-i rasmī būdan-i ḥokūmat-i shāh". 14 Dec 1978. Paris, Vol. 5. pp. 227. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=5&tid=54>>.

The Khomeini-appointed Revolutionary Council, a body tasked with commandeering the revolution, mandated liberal opposition leaders to negotiate with the military government for permission to stage the historic march-turned-referendum. The military government relented two days before the arrival of the holidays, and agreed to ease the start of the curfew to 11:00 PM instead of 9:00 PM.⁶⁴⁵

There was, however, the real fear that the military government permitted the marches in order to gather as many of the revolution's supporters in one place and put a violent end to the movement in one fell swoop—a massacre analogous to Black Friday two months prior but on a much more decisive and larger scale. *The New York Times* affirmed this fear in the run-up to the demonstrations by noting:

“There remains the potential for bloodshed... In a show of strength this afternoon, more troops rolled into town and British-built Chieftain tanks and Soviet-built armored personnel carriers took up positions on the airport road. Helicopters buzzed back and forth above downtown roots.”⁶⁴⁶

The military government also informed the opposition that it would station troops nearby in case they “were needed to quell violence,”⁶⁴⁷ and demanded that the processions remain “religious and peaceful, not political—a risky proposition considering that the Shah’s principal foe is the nation’s principal religious leader, Ayatollah Khomeini.”⁶⁴⁸ Furthermore, thousands of Iranians left the capital out of fear of a potential military onslaught. The Tehran traffic department recorded that at least “130,000 automobiles

⁶⁴⁵ Apple, R.W. “Iran Regime and Foes Act to Avert Violence Today: Marchers to Start at 8 Points Tension Mounting in the Capital”. *The New York Times*. 10 Dec 1978, pp. 3.

⁶⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ “Present Tense: Teheran Braces for Still Another Test of Strength”. *The New York Times*. 10 December, 1978, pp. E1.

had left the capital during the day.”⁶⁴⁹ Rumors abounded that thousands of activists prepared for martyrdom by purchasing their burial shrouds.⁶⁵⁰ In anticipation of a possible bloodbath, the American embassy warned all of its citizens in Iran “to stay home during the two-day holiday...”⁶⁵¹ Ayatollah Bahu’uddin Mahallati in Shiraz likewise cautioned: “Maybe we’ll be killed tomorrow. We’re facing guns, rifles and tanks. Whoever is afraid shouldn’t come.”⁶⁵² One activist, however, underscored both the enormous cost that might be incurred by attending the march and the potential benefit: “Yes, yes, it may go up in smoke. Liberty does not come at no cost... and one generation is only a drop in the life of a nation.”⁶⁵³

Perhaps no quote captured the tension, the real possibility of death, and the militancy of that historic ‘*Ashura*’ than a banner that hung in the famed Tehran bazaar that invoked Husayn’s defiance: “Every day is *Ashura* and everywhere is Karbala.”⁶⁵⁴ The captivating implication is that Husayn’s 7th century martyrdom was timeless and not confined to the desert of Karbala. Like the unforgettable words of Imam Musa al-Sadr in 1974 when he invoked Husayn’s sacrifice to inspire his followers to confront modern-day “tyranny,” the Tehran banner effectively proclaimed that to believe in the justness of Husayn’s struggle as an exemplar of action, then one must be prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice in the face of tyranny anywhere and at any time—including Iran in 1978. To put it differently, the ‘*Ashura*’ of the Iranian Revolution is especially historic

⁶⁴⁹ Apple, R.W. “Iran Regime and Foes Act to Avert Violence Today: Marchers to Start at 8 Points Tension Mounting in the Capital”. *The New York Times*. 10 Dec 1978, pp. 3.

⁶⁵⁰ Kurzman, pp. 120.

⁶⁵¹ Ibrahim, Yusef. “While Iranians Demonstrate, Americans in Tehran have Quiet Day: Servants Attend Protest”. *The New York Times*. 12 Dec 1978, pp. A13.

⁶⁵² Translation in Kurzman, pp. 121.

⁶⁵³ “Million join Iran’s peaceful protest”. *The Guardian*. 11 Dec 1979, pp. 2.

⁶⁵⁴ Ibrahim, Youssef. “Teheran Is Decked With Symbols of Death”. *The New York Times*. 2 Dec 1978, pp. 3.

because it marks how Shi‘ites transformed what was typically a day of reflection, self-flagellation, weeping and mourning into a day in which the proper observance of Husayn’s martyrdom necessitated a revolutionary march. Thus, the Karbala Paradigm had developed into a force whereby “passive weeping for Husayn” gave way to “active fighting for Husayn’s ideals”—to live, struggle, and, if necessary, to die resisting tyranny.⁶⁵⁵ Consequently, the ‘Ashura of 1978—a time of total mobilization—became one for the ages.

On December 10, possibly the single largest protest event in world history until that point unfolded on ‘Ashura to mark the climactic revolutionary upheaval in Iran. The opposition put the number of marchers at 7 million (Dabashi puts the number at 17 million⁶⁵⁶)—anywhere between a fifth to half of the country’s total population.⁶⁵⁷ The estimates are all the more staggering considering that many stayed away because of the prospects of a military crackdown. Nevertheless, with military helicopters circling above, millions participated in an unofficial referendum on the monarchy by braving the possibility of bloodshed to vote with their feet, prompting *The New York Times* to note: “...It is widely agreed that the size of the processions, even though they were peaceful, dramatized the lack of support for the monarch...”⁶⁵⁸ That the protest began from eight different starting points in Tehran and converged in the square near the airport “that bears the name “Shahyad – ‘Remembrance of the King’ – symbolizes Iran’s 2,500 unbroken

⁶⁵⁵ Fischer, pp. 213.

⁶⁵⁶ Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran, the Green Movement and the USA*. London & New York: Z Books, 2010, pp. 207.

⁶⁵⁷ Gage, Nicholas. “Protesters March for 2D Day in Iran; Violence is Limited”. *The New York Times*. 12 Dec 1978, pp. A1. Massive protests also occurred in Mashhad, Tabriz, Shiraz, Qom, Shiraz, Abadan, and Sanshan. See “Million join Iran’s peaceful protest”. *The Guardian*. 11 Dec 1979, pp. 1.

⁶⁵⁸ Gage, Nicholas. “Protesters March for 2D Day in Iran; Violence is Limited”. *The New York Times*. 12 Dec 1978, pp. A1.

years of monarchy,”⁶⁵⁹ only underscored the meaning and demands of the marchers. In other words, millions of mourners-turned-protesters used the occasion of ‘*Ashura* to stage what *The Guardian* called “the Great March,”⁶⁶⁰ which culminated at the very square devoted to the monarchy thereby negating the 2,500-year-old institution. The Shah was left with little choice but to prepare for his departure—the second instance where he was forced to flee the country. This time the US and the UK—however much they had subverted public will in 1953 with the coup—would not be able to restore him to his throne.

V. Shi‘ism: A Shared Emotive Universe

It must be noted that although millions took to the streets on ‘*Ashura* in order to challenge the monarchy, it doesn’t mean that every revolutionary believed in Husayn’s martyrdom or was pious or even Muslim. The revolution was triumphant because all the various classes and factions such as the Islamists, liberals, communists, and many ethnic and religious communities came together in what Mansoor Moaddel calls “fantastic harmony” in order to demand “the overthrow of the monarchy...”⁶⁶¹ They did so using a shared emotive universe that included ‘*Ashura*, nighttime chants of “Allahu akbar,” and even the *hijab*, all of which in the context of the uprising provided a discourse ripe with revolutionary fervor. In terms of ‘*Ashura* specifically, whether the revolutionary was Muslim or Christian, Communist or Islamist, he or she was raised in a country in which Husayn’s martyrdom was part of the social fabric of the culture. A communist may not

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁰ “Million join Iran’s peaceful protest”. *The Guardian*. 11 Dec 1979, pp. 1.

⁶⁶¹ Moaddel, Mansoor. *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 14.

have believed in Husayn’s infallibility, the Imamate, or the existence of God, but they understood the emotive force of the Imam’s sacrifice—especially when it was politicized in order to spearhead the revolution in 1978. Such religiously themed discourse created a “sacred canopy”⁶⁶² under which Iranian revolutionaries of all worldviews gathered to rally against a relentless and powerful government that enjoyed the financial, political, and military backing of the more dominant superpower of the time—the US.

One Jewish Iranian, for example, recounted the days when millions of Tehran’s residents heeded Khomeini’s call and went to their rooftops to shout the quintessential Islamic slogan, “Allahu akbar,” in support of the revolution. He and his family “found themselves up on their rooftop shouting the same words as forcefully as their Muslim compatriots.”⁶⁶³ “Allahu akbar” is a phrase especially powerful in the context of Islam’s early days when the Prophet Muhammad’s message of monotheism—that God is one and the greatest (*Allahu akbar*)—challenged the polytheism of his clan and the city of his birth, Mecca.⁶⁶⁴ In 1978, Iranians regardless of worldview proclaimed the distinctly Islamic slogan, “Allahu akbar,” as a potent show of support for an uprising whose undisputed leader was an aged religious scholar-turned-revolutionary. That is not to say that all Iranian Jews supported Khomeini and the revolution, but it does highlight that many Iranians, irrespective of their faith and proclivities, “found” themselves employing such Islamic discourse as a means by which to express their solidarity with the revolution and negate the ideology of the monarchy.

⁶⁶² Dabashi, Hamid. *The Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundation of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2008), pp. 247.

⁶⁶³ Majd, Hooman. *The Ayatollah Begs to Differ: The Paradox of Modern Iran*. New York: First Anchor Books (Random House), 2009, pp. 4-5.

⁶⁶⁴ “There is no god but God,” the other equally important Islamic profession of faith, complements the phrase “Allahu akbar.” Together, the two challenged the pre-Islamic polytheism and status quo in Mecca (and beyond).

Perhaps the most effective example of the political utility of Husayn's martyrdom as an integral part of Iran's emotive universe and revolutionary discourse can be found in Khosrow Golsorkhi's military trial. Golsorkhi, a journalist, and 11 others were accused of plotting to kidnap the Shah's son, and were consequently put on trial in the spring of 1973. One historian who followed the trial contemporaneously considered the proceedings to be a farce:

“Not all the members of the group were in contact with each other, or even knew each other. It seems that the trial of the group was an attempt by the shah's secret police (SAVAK) to exaggerate the danger of the armed opposition and to achieve a perceived success against the guerrilla movement, with accompanying propaganda value.”⁶⁶⁵

Under pressure from international human rights groups, the government decided to televise the trial in order to show a semblance of transparency. While many of the other defendants admitted⁶⁶⁶ to all the allegations, plead for their lives, and were given light sentences, five of the defendants including Golsorkhi used the opportunity of the televised trial not only to reject the charges but also to condemn the regime in the eyes of the nation. Golsorkhi employed the shared Shi'ite symbolism of Imam Husayn (and Imam 'Ali) to connect to his national audience in order to denounce the state.

He began his defense by deploying a popular Arabic proverb that “Life is to have a belief and to fight for it” and invoked “Husayn the great martyr of the peoples of the Middle East,”⁶⁶⁷ declaring that he is a “Marxist-Leninist” and that he “first learned about social justice through Islam,” which ultimately served as a conduit for him to adopt socialism. He promised to “not beg” for his life and that he “hails from a brave and

⁶⁶⁵ Behrooz, Maziar. “A biography of Khosrow Golsorkhi”. *The Iranian*. 20 March 2003.

<<http://iranian.com/History/2003/March/Golsorkhi/p.html>>.

⁶⁶⁶ There is little doubt that these defendants were coerced beforehand to “confess” to the allegations.

⁶⁶⁷ Various sources attribute the famous phrase to Ahmed Shawqi, the famous Egyptian poet.

struggling people.” He emphasized universal Islamic discourse by noting: “I started my words with Islam” because “true Islam... is a mandate for the liberation movements in Iran.” Invoking Husayn’s father, ‘Ali, he offered his Marxist critique of Iranian society:

“Marx says that in a class society wealth concentrates on one side and poverty and hunger on the other side... while those who produce the wealth are the deprived class, and Imam ‘Ali said, ‘No palace is built unless thousands go poor.’ Thus, one can cite ‘Ali as the world’s first Socialist.”

Husayn’s sacrifice, however, was the overarching message in his defense, which Golsorkhi intertwined with his fate:

...Our lives mirror that of Husayn’s who put his life on the line for the deprived... and our lives are likewise in jeopardy in this court. Husayn was in the minority, and Yazid had palaces, armies, rule and power. Husayn resisted and was martyred. Even though history mentions Yazid but what continues in the dynamics of history is Husayn’s path and resistance... People followed and are following Husayn’s path. In a Marxist society, true Islam is compatible. We affirm ‘Ali and Husayn’s Islam.”⁶⁶⁸

Golsorkhi poignantly argued that his life as well as that of all the accused “mirror that of Husayn’s.” In doing so, he placed his battle alongside Husayn’s struggle against the powerful Yazid, who “had palaces, armies, rule and power.” In the context of a military trial in which the head of state also had “palaces, armies, rule, and power,” Golsorkhi inescapably implied that the Shah was the modern-day Yazid, and that the Karbala Paradigm provided the discourse for even a Marxist-Leninist to condemn the state in a manner that was understood by every witnessing Iranian, regardless of their faith, ideology, and ethnicity.

⁶⁶⁸ Manjanigh12. “manjanigh 12 Khorsrow Golesorkhi and Keramat Daneshian’s Full Defense”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 16 February 2013. Accessed 1 August 2014. <<http://youtu.be/jyvjhUsJyNg?list=PLPyPwMMrlbHNfQbr27ly6LaUNlgdaAefT>>.

Five years later, millions of Iranians echoed Golsorkhi's rhetoric and marched on 'Ashura against a monarch whom they identified "with the murderers of Hussein..."⁶⁶⁹ The politicization of 'Ashura provided an oppositional discourse in which Iranians harnessed its potency in order to negate the ideological universe of the monarchy. Thirty years later, the next generation of Iranian activists would do the same but this time against the very state that rooted its ideology in Islam and the Imamate.

One final point must be addressed before the discussion proceeds to the electric and explosive 'Ashura protests of 2009. The Islamic government came to power through the politicization of 'Ashura in the 1970s, culminating in the largest demonstration in the 14-month long revolutionary movement—the massive 'Ashura commemorations-turned-referendum. After the triumph of the revolution, the Islamic Republic institutionalized 'Ashura—as it did Palestine through the establishment of the annual Quds Day rallies—as a central tenet of the government's ideology and discourse. It raised an entire generation of Iranians to learn not only about Husayn's sacrifice, but to take inspiration from it and to view the Islamic Republic as carrying forth Husayn's righteous struggle. In 2009, they deployed those lessons not to legitimate the state, as the government intended, but to castigate it.

VI. The Islamic Republic and Husayn's Martyrdom

Husayn's death, according to Hamid Dabashi, solidified defiance and resistance as an integral component to Shi'ism that can be activated at any juncture. The death of the Prophet's grandson cemented a legacy in which Shi'ism's moral authority is based on

⁶⁶⁹ Apple, R.W. "Religious Ferment in Iran: A Long History: 'A Strong Mutual Attraction'". *The New York Times*. 12 Dec 1978, pp. A12.

its posture of resistance. Once it achieves power, it ceases to be the Shi‘ism of Husayn’s martyrdom—one of defiance against power and oppression—instead assuming the mantle of those that slayed Husayn. Shi‘ism is “morally triumphant when it is politically defiant, and that it morally fails when it politically succeeds.”⁶⁷⁰ In other words, Shi‘ism thrives on failure and fails upon success. This in part explains why Shi‘ism has a long history of revolt—from the time of Husayn and those who after his martyrdom sought to avenge his death to subsequent Shi‘ite uprisings like the Nuqtavi and the Hurrifiyya and against the Ilkhanids in Sarbedaran, and the relatively recent Babi revolts, which were rooted in Shi‘ite millenarianism. Dabashi affirms that in order for Shi‘ism to remain morally potent, it “must always be in a posture of resistance.”⁶⁷¹

Perhaps this perspective offers a *partial* explanation of the Islamic government’s long history of foreign policies that challenged the Israeli occupation and the growing American military presence in the Middle East—an anti-status quo posture shared between Syria, Hizbullah, and Islamic groups in the Palestinian Territories—constituting what is known as the “Resistance Bloc.” The Iranian government, however, framed this resistance language long before groups such as Hizbullah came into existence.

During the Iran-Iraq War, for example, world powers including virtually all the Arab states⁶⁷² supported Iraq’s war with Iran. The US navy even intervened on Iraq’s behalf and sank much of Iran’s naval forces. Yet, the Iranian government did not surrender, and instead embraced the David and Goliath struggle by naming many of its

⁶⁷⁰ Dabashi, Hamid. *Shi‘ism: A Religion of Protest*. Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011, xvi.

⁶⁷¹ Dabashi, *Shi‘ism*, pp. 313.

⁶⁷² Syria and Libya are important exceptions, especially the former as it prevented Iraq from exporting its oil through the pipelines that ran through Syria. In doing so, the Syrian government inhibited to an extent Iraq’s ability to finance the war with Iran.

military operations after Imam Husayn, Karbala, and 'Ashura.⁶⁷³ Propaganda videos from the war drilled Iranian audiences—civilian and military alike—in such a worldview thereby affirming that the Islamic Republic and the Leader of the Revolution were the flag-bearers of Husayn's legacy. One such archival video includes footage of Iranian soldiers courageously and selflessly mobilizing for the war effort while an orator hypnotically recites, "Whosoever obeys Khomeini's orders is swearing by God to walk the path of Husayn."⁶⁷⁴ The implication is that Iran's Islamic soldiers, who are under Khomeini's righteous command, are carrying forth Husayn's struggle against tyranny in the "Holy Defense"—the phrase the Iranian state employed in reference to its 8-year military campaign against the "imposed war" (Figure 4.1). Other videos, for instance, include Iranian soldiers ritually beating their chests to Husayn's name in preparation for combat. Chest-beating, a religious custom typically reserved for the annual commemoration of Husayn's martyrdom, morphed under the direction of the Islamic Republic into a potent means by which to inspire soldiers to internalize the belief that they were exemplifying Husayn's legacy by carrying forth the banner of the Islamic Revolution in battling the Yazid of the post-revolutionary era: Saddam Hussein. During and after the war, the government instituted public commemorations marking the anniversary of Husayn's death in order "to mobilize support for the regime"⁶⁷⁵—a sentiment the state visualized in propaganda murals throughout the country (Figure 4.2).

⁶⁷³ See Efraim Karsh's *The Iran-Iraq War 1980-1988*. (Oxford: Oxprey Publishing, 2002).

⁶⁷⁴ ipouya. "Shi'ism: From Defeat to Defiance". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 9 January 2009. Accessed 5 August 2014. <<http://youtu.be/HbHAQwZXPaY?list=UUte8CGBvRwAlSrni5gP9Zvg>>.

⁶⁷⁵ Kurzman, pp. 55.

Khomeini often even referred to the Islamic Revolution as the “‘Ashura Movement” or “Imam Husayn’s Movement.”⁶⁷⁶

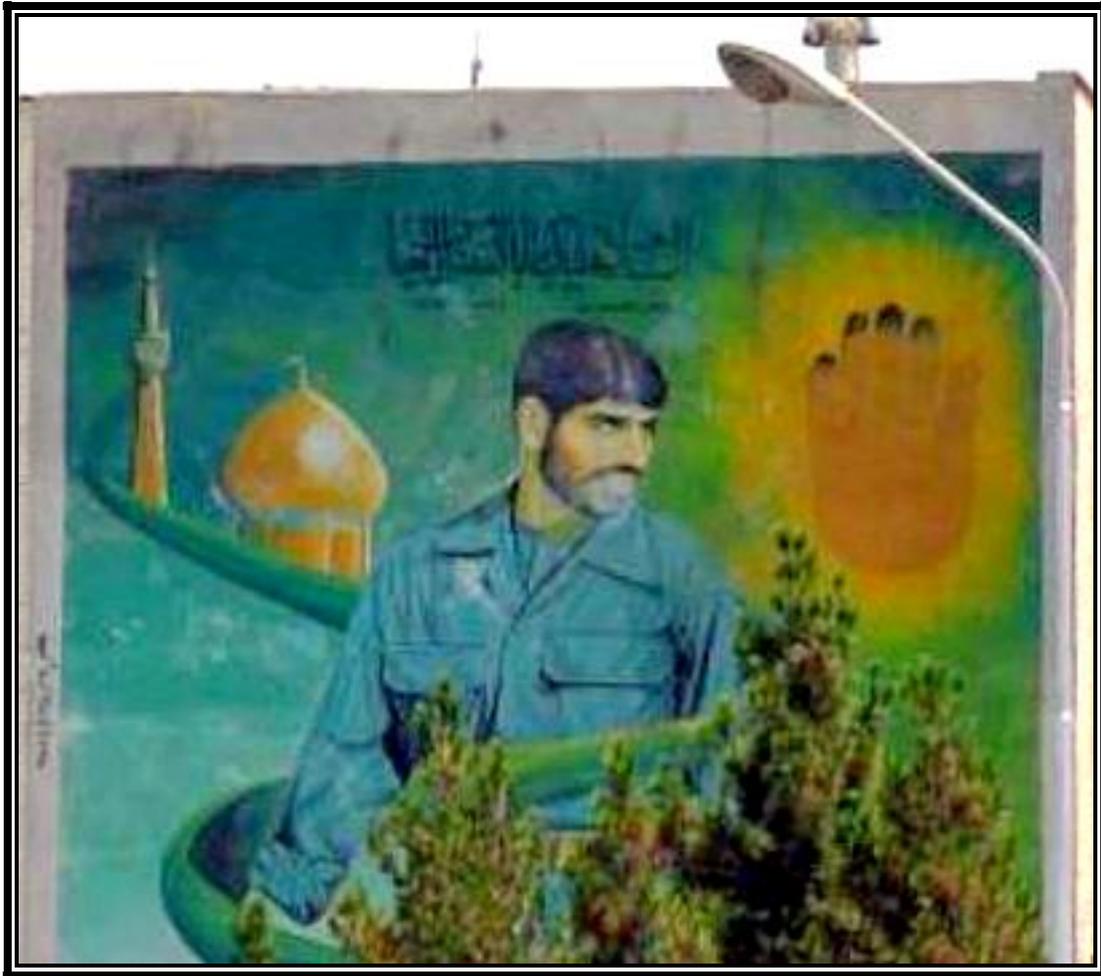


Figure 4.1. By placing the famous Shrine of Imam Husayn in the background while including the tribute to ‘Abbas, the mural situates a martyred Iranian soldier (center) in the same breath as the martyrs of the Battle of Karbala.⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷⁶ Khomeini, Ruhollah. “Bayān-i ‘elal-i mokhāletfat hāyeh doshmanān – pāsokh beh ettehāmāt – falsafeh-ye gīyām-i emām ḥusayn”. 14 Dec 1978. Qom. Vol. 10. pp. 315.

<<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=10&tid=84>>.

⁶⁷⁷ Fotini, Christia. “Peace be with you Abu al-Fazl al-Abbas”. Tehran propaganda mural collection. July, 2006. JPEG File. <<http://goo.gl/7yFJAv>>.



Figure 4.2. This Tehran mural similarly places a lifeless Iranian soldier literally in the hands of the quintessential Shi'ite martyr figure, emblazoned with the caption: "Martyrdom is the inheritance of the Prophet and his family to their followers."⁶⁷⁸

More than half a year after the victory of the revolution, Khomeini reminded Shi'ites that although the Shah was indeed a modern-day Yazid, oppressors abound nonetheless:

"The great phrase 'Every day is 'Ashura, and every land is Karbala,' is often misunderstood. Some incorrectly think it means lamenting every day. What was the role of the land of Karbala on 'Ashura? All lands should serve that role inasmuch as the Lord of all Martyrs accompanied by a few men stood against the oppression of Yazid's regime. With only a few, they confronted the emperor of the time, and sacrificed themselves instead of submitting to his oppression. Their refusal was a defeat for the tyrant. The mantra, 'Every day is 'Ashura' means that we must all stand and fight oppression every day, the command is unlimited in terms of time and

⁶⁷⁸ Fotini, Christia. "Martyrom is the inheritance of the Prophet and his family to their followers". Tehran propaganda mural collection. July, 2006. JPEG File. <<http://goo.gl/n6nny5>>.

place. Karbala is right here and we must enliven Karbala's example. The example of the Battle of Karbala is not confined to its actual location or its participants... All lands should perform the role that Karbala served, that is, people must resist oppression whenever and wherever it occurs, and fight it without regard to forces available."⁶⁷⁹

In sum, according to Khomeini and his followers, it was the revolutionary reading of *'Ashura* that inspired millions to mobilize for the revolution and brave the Shah's vaunted army. Yet, the struggle continues as many equivalents of Yazid persist. Furthermore, as the one giving voice to such a worldview, Khomeini implicitly casts himself and the government that he personifies—especially since Shi'ite Islamism is the state ideology—in the same breath as Husayn. Thus, supporting and fighting alongside Iran under the Islamic Republic is the modern-day equivalent of righteous struggle beside Husayn. Conversely, opposing or challenging the Islamic Republic is akin to siding with the oppression of Yazid.

Israel, various Middle Eastern governments, the UK, and above all, the United States are embodiments of modern-day Yazids who oppose the Islamic Republic, therefore, warranting steadfast Husayn-like resistance. In 2009, the year of the Green Uprising, Iran was surrounded by the armed forces of the world's sole remaining superpower, spanning dozens of American bases in Iraq and Afghanistan—Iran's two largest neighbors—as well as in the Persian Gulf⁶⁸⁰ region, notably Qatar and Bahrain but also in the waters of the gulf. For three decades, the Iranian government has portrayed itself, especially to its domestic audience, as the outnumbered righteous defender of truth

⁶⁷⁹ Khomeini, Ruhollah. "Moqāyeseh-ye rezhīm-i pahlavī bā dowlat hāyeh ommavī va 'abbasī – falsafeh-ye 'azādārī-ye emām ḥusayn ('a) – żarūrat-i ḥefz jomhūrī-ye eslāmī bā mohtavā-ye eslāmī". 26 Sept 1979. Qom, Vol. 10. pp. 122-123. <<http://farsi.rouhollah.ir/library/sahifeh?volume=10&tid=26>>.

⁶⁸⁰ Dabashi is right to ridicule the debate between Arabs and Iranians about the historical name of the Persian Gulf. In reality, Dabashi, argues, it's an "American Gulf."

similar to Husayn in the face of a superior and “arrogant”⁶⁸¹ global enemy—the United States and its “local agents.” Three months after ordering a crackdown on the nonviolent uprising, Khamenei continued to present the Islamic Republic in such a paradigm by which it represented resistance to oppression, and not its perpetrator:

“All the governments in the world have enemies and they have friends. This has been true throughout history. Everyone has some friends and some enemies, both domestic and abroad... The prophet's government and ‘Ali's government both had friends and enemies... The Islamic system also has some friends and some enemies. But the issue is who are the enemies and the friends. If the government is such that all those cruel and unjust governments and the Zionists are enemies of it, then this is something to be proud of... All the Shimrs of the world oppose the Islamic Republic, and all the oppressed support it. There are indeed enemies like America, Britain, which has a 200 year history of animosity against Iran, and the Zionists. Let these enemies be the enemies.”⁶⁸²

This worldview was visualized when a mural was hoisted in Iran before ‘*Ashura* in 2013, portraying President Obama as Shimr—Yazid’s commander who massacred Husayn and his followers (Figure 4.3).⁶⁸³

⁶⁸¹ Government officials often refer to the US as the embodiment of “global arrogance.” See Khamenei’s speech marking the anniversary of the US embassy seizure: Ayatullah Khamenei Speeches English. “[English Sub] National Day Against Global Arrogance-Ayatullah Ali Khamanei speech 2013”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 16 November 2013. Accessed 6 August 2014. <<http://youtu.be/8VYEsbv-U2s>>.

⁶⁸² “Khoṭbeh-ye namāz jome’h-ye tehrān.” *Khamenei.ir*. 11 September 2009. <<http://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=8033>>. Also, see Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., September 14, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI379_a.html.

⁶⁸³ “Naṣb-i tāblo-ye bozorg-i “bārāk obāmā” dar maydān-i vali’asr-i tehrān (+ ‘aks)”. ‘Asriran. 15 Jan 2013. <<http://goo.gl/Aqwjb5>>.



Figure 4.3. The Tehran mural was located on one of the capital’s main thoroughfares, Vali Asr. The caption reads “Be with us, be safe,” implying that US sanctions on Iran were as unjust and harmful as Shimr’s unacceptable invitation to Husayn’s followers to abandon their leader in return for safe passage. In other words, to abandon the Islamic Republic in favor of President Obama was analogous to siding with Shimr against Husayn.

Domestically, however, the government has much more difficulty in deploying Husayn’s symbolism to legitimate itself. The inherent calculus between the ruler and the ruled places the government—irrespective of the fact that it is a Shi’ite theocracy—in a position of power, which is diametrically opposed to Husayn’s legacy of resistance and martyrdom in opposition to power, especially unjust power. In other words, while the Islamic government in Iran is doctrinally rooted in Shi’ism via the *vilāyat-i faqīh*, it is paradoxically and counter-intuitively assuming the mantle of those who murdered the

Prophet's grandson, the cornerstone of Shi'ism's martyrology. In sum, the Iranian government is in a "posture of resistance" internationally but loses that posture domestically because it is the ultimate arbiter of power. This domestic paradigm becomes especially pronounced when it faces homegrown resistance that invokes that same Islamic discourse.

The Green Movement's slogans espoused during Montazeri's funeral invoked the holy month of *Muharram* thereby underscoring the doctrinal contradiction inherent in a system of governance that is rooted in Shi'ism. As mentioned above, slogans such as "We are not from Kufa to stand behind Yazid" and "This is the month of blood, Yazid [Khamenei] will be overthrown" are obvious examples, but none is more scathing than the one that highlights the paradox of a government that represses in Husayn's name: "Husayn, Husayn is their slogan, yet Kahrizak is their pride" (*husayn, husayn, sho 'āreshūn, kahrīzak eftekhāreshūn*).⁶⁸⁴

Kahrizak is the detention center that became a lightning rod for criticism after reports emerged that several activists died in custody, probably under torture. The occurrence of such abuse became increasingly undeniable for the government when the son of a prominent conservative advisor to presidential candidate Mohsen Rezai, a former Revolutionary Guards commander, died in prison.⁶⁸⁵ The reality of prisoner abuse in post-election Iran caused activists to give voice to a slogan that poignantly contrasted the source of the state's legitimacy—one that is theoretically rooted in the justice of the 12

⁶⁸⁴ Mehdi Saharkhiz. "Iran 21 dec 09 (30 Azar) Qom Funeral of Ayatollah Montazeri p55". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 21 December 2009. Accessed 14 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/v3pOiaRU-mM>>.

⁶⁸⁵ Timothy Richardson, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al, July 27, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI301_a.html. For the results of the commission tasked with investigating prisoner abuse, see Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., January 12, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RPODUBAI11_a.html.

Imams—with that of the injustice delivered by the same state via Kahrizak—the symbol of how far the government was from the self-professed “‘Ashura Movement” of resistance against oppression.

It is often said that repressive governments get the enemies that they deserve, and the Islamic government produced a resistance to it in the form of the Green Movement that was not necessarily “Islamic” but utilized the emotive power of Shi‘ism in order to legitimate its defiance and discredit the totality of the state. Furthermore, according to Dabashi, the uprising in 2009 is in keeping with a long history in which avowed Islamic states breed opposition movements on exactly the same Islamic terms:

“From the Umayyads (661-750) to the Abbasids (750-1258) down to all other major and minor Islamic empires and dynasties, there has never been an Islamic form of government that has not been radically challenged and opposed in precisely Islamic terms. As soon as a dynasty has come to power in Islamic terms of legitimacy, a revolutionary movement has arisen to challenge it in precisely Islamic terms.”⁶⁸⁶

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, the dynamism of the Green Movement certainly cannot be reduced and categorized as “Islamic,” but it arose to challenge the Islamic Republic “in precisely Islamic terms.” Strategically appropriating and subverting the core Islamic symbols of the state such as ‘*Ashura*, the uprising in 2009 dealt an ideological attack on the state more powerful than any weapon. The potency of the Green Movement’s nonviolent challenge, especially on ‘*Ashura*, is precisely why the government dealt more harshly with protesters arrested on that day than on any other day of action. The state accused captured demonstrators with “waging war on God”⁶⁸⁷ and

⁶⁸⁶ Dabashi, Hamid. *Iran: A People Interrupted*. New York and London: The New Press, 2007, pp. 218.

⁶⁸⁷ “Ezheī az e’dām-i 3 nafar az dastgīrshodegān-i ‘ashūrā khabar dād”. *Rahesabz*. 1 Jan 2009 <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/6865/>>.

“desecrating”⁶⁸⁸ the anniversary of Husayn’s 7th century martyrdom simply because they used Husayn’s Islamic legacy—a legacy of steadfast and exemplary resistance against unjust power—to castigate a government that laid claim to his mantle.

VII. Repression, Radicalism, and Revolutionary Mourning in ‘Ashura 2009

The first week after the elections witnessed the largest protests in post-revolutionary Iran prompting international news agencies to refer to the uprising as “the largest and most widespread demonstrations since the 1979 Islamic revolution...”⁶⁸⁹ There were few clashes during that first week. Only after Khamenei’s Friday sermon—what activists refer to as “The Sermon of Blood”—did the state launch a systematic and comprehensive crackdown. The following day, mobile-phone camera footage captured the dramatic death of Neda Agha Soltan, the 27-year-old bystander. The footage was subsequently uploaded onto YouTube, the video sharing online service, and spread like wildfire across the world causing one journalist to opine that her death was “probably the most widely witnessed death in human history.”⁶⁹⁰

The video captured the moment after she was struck in the chest by a bullet, forcing her onto her back. Lying on the ground, activists and her music teacher screamed her name while trying to stop the bleeding by placing their hands over her chest-wound.

⁶⁸⁸ “Rāhpaymāi-ye mardom sarāsar-i keshvar ‘alayh-i bīhormatī be ‘ashūrā”. *KhabarOnline*. 30 Dec 2009 <<http://www.khabaronline.ir/detail/33396/>>.

⁶⁸⁹ Hafezi, Parisa. “Thousands mourn Iranians killed in protests”. *Reuters*. 19 June 2009. <<http://in.mobile.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idINIndia-40437520090618>>.

⁶⁹⁰ Mahr, Krista. “Top 10 Heroes: 2. Neda Agha-Soltan”. *Time*. 8 Dec 2009. <http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1945379_1944701_1944705,00.html>.

The bullet had cut through her lungs filling them with blood, which consequently and vividly came gushing out of her mouth and nose.⁶⁹¹

The footage of her violent death brought international condemnation of the state's brutal crackdown. The subject of countless documentaries and articles, her life and death helped people all over the world identify with the uprising as she became a rallying point and the face of the movement. Concurrently, her death also symbolized the brutality of the government crackdown, striking fear into the hearts of thousands of Iranians—especially parents who didn't want their sons and especially their daughters to suffer a similar fate—which caused many parents to prevent their children from continuing to participate in such protests.⁶⁹²

Under the weight of such repression, the protests evolved from daily events to ones staged under the cover of political holidays dispersed between 6 consecutive months. Yet clashes continued and scores were arrested throughout the period. Predictably, the repression had a deleterious effect on the continuity and vitality of the movement. Misagh Parsa, in his *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, notes:

“Repression is a key factor affecting opportunities for action. In general reduced repression increased the likelihood of insurgency, while an upsurge in repression reduces the likelihood of protest by raising the cost of mobilization and collective action. Under repressive situations, victims of social processes find themselves incapable of overcoming their adversaries, not because they cannot conceive of alternative possibilities, but because they are unable to maintain their resources, networks, and solidarity structures in the face of repression.”⁶⁹³

⁶⁹¹ FEELTHELIGHT. “Iran, Tehran: wounded girl dying in front of camera, Her name was Neda”. *YouTube*. 20 June 2009. <<http://youtu.be/bbdEf0QRsLM>>.

⁶⁹² Rezaian, Jason. Telephone interview. 26 July 2010.

⁶⁹³ Parsa, Misagh. *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1989, pp. 24.

Perhaps no quote captures the severity of the government repression better than the words uttered by Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, a conservative stalwart and head of the powerful Guardian Council: “If you show weakness now, the future will be worse. There is no room for Islamic mercy.”⁶⁹⁴

By the time of the *Ashura* protests in December 2009, which culminated on the 7-day mourning period for the death of Ayatollah Montazeri⁶⁹⁵, the repression had significantly reduced the number of participants ready to brave the government’s threats and come onto the streets. According to one activist, many stayed home because the state had warned protesters that any protest on *Ashura* amounted to ‘waging war against God’⁶⁹⁶—a crime that could carry a death sentence.⁶⁹⁷ Those who did come forth, however, were the most committed and radical; therefore, they were able to withstand family pressure to avoid the protests.⁶⁹⁸

It is important to note that many parents were sympathetic to the cause of their activist children, not only because they agreed with them in the belief that the government was unjust, repressive, and had stolen the election, but also because they

⁶⁹⁴ “Aḥmad jannatī: do nafar rā e’dām kardīd, dastetān dard nakonad”. *Radio Farda*. 29 Jan 2010. <http://www.radiofarda.com/content/F11_Iran_postelection_Janati_Executions_Dissidents/1943483.html>.

⁶⁹⁵ “Nakhostīn vākonesh-i rahbar īrān beh ḥavādeš-i rūz ‘ashūrā”. *BBC News*. 30 Dec 2009. <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2009/12/091230_ap_iran_khamanei_alamolhoda.shtml>.

⁶⁹⁶ V., Shahin. Personal interview. 15 April 2014.

⁶⁹⁷ *Mohārebeh* is an Islamic concept rooted in the Qur’an in which verses call for death against those who wage war on God, his final prophet, or sow corruption in society. Many Islamic scholars believe that the intention of such verses was to protect civilians and property in times of war. The Iranian government has deployed the charge against anyone who threatens the Islamic Republic.

⁶⁹⁸ Doostdar, Alireza. Email interview. 2 August 2010. This very important point is echoed in the leaked US diplomatic cables: “...ongoing regime violence against protesters has decreased GPO [Green Party Opposition] turnout, from the millions of June 15 to a smaller committed core of (at most) hundreds of thousands...Although the number of GPO’ers willing to take to the streets has decreased from the days immediately following the June election, those remaining on the streets seem to have radicalized...” See Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., January 12, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RPODUBAI13_a.html.

themselves participated as impassioned youth in a historic revolutionary uprising that claimed the lives of thousands of their fellow compatriots three decades prior. Many parents simply saw their children as continuing a process they started thirty years ago and understood the power of their conviction. One organizer who was expelled from the University of Tehran for her activism aptly captured such continuity when she summarized what her mother told her: “I don’t want you go to but I am not going to stop you because you’re standing up for what you believe in and I’m not going to stop you for doing that because I would’ve and I did the same thing.”⁶⁹⁹

While the pro-government forces were able to disrupt Khatami’s speaking engagement on *Tas’ua*, the state was unable to cancel *Ashura* commemorations. *Tas’ua* is typically a day of private mourning in which Iranians stay indoors. Khatami—a reformer and former president who emphatically supported the uprising—was scheduled to give a *Muharram* speech at Jamaran Mosque, which is famous for hosting Khomeini for his many speeches. Yet, the sanctity of the event and its locale did not stop his opponents from shouting down the speaker thereby prompting the event’s cancellation.⁷⁰⁰ *Ashura*, however, was a major public event steeped in Shi‘ite and Iranian culture and could not be cancelled.

Consequently, Green activists used the occasion of Imam Husayn’s annual commemoration in order to harness the power of his fabled and defiant martyrdom to renew their fiery protests. On December 27, 2009, the emotive universe of Shi‘ite Islam was brought to the fore in a common language that equated the activists with Husayn, and

⁶⁹⁹ T., Golnar. Personal interview. 22 October 2013.

⁷⁰⁰ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 28, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI547_a.html.

the government with his murderers. In no way is this more apparent than the chant, “O’Husayn, Mir Hussein”—the mantra of Mousavi’s candidacy in the run-up to the elections that was transformed into a resistance slogan in the post-election uprising. “O’Husayn, Mir Hussein”⁷⁰¹ was especially poignant in the month of *Muharram*, the month of Husayn’s martyrdom, because it directly placed Mousavi and the movement’s struggle with the government in the same breath as Husayn’s battle with tyranny fourteen centuries earlier. What’s more, the slogans also symbolized how the demonstrators who came onto the streets on that specific day were emboldened to confront the violence of the security forces. In other words, these activists emerged on a day enshrined in the legacy of spirited resistance and martyrdom, and faced off against a state that was undoubtedly intensifying its crackdown on such gatherings; they came to resist and were in no mood to absorb the government’s attacks.

In one battle, an angry crowd pinned down a sizeable contingent of riot police against shuttered stores and pelted them with stones and bottles while shouting. When one of the policemen fired a shot that struck a protestor, the crowd descended upon the policemen in a rage of fury. With their backs against the wall, the security forces swung their batons as the crowd threw projectiles from close range. Outnumbered and overwhelmed, the riot police took a defensive posture and refrained from using their batons as the crowd torched all of their motorcycles. With car alarms wailing, the demonstrator’s blood on the ground, and the flame from the motorcycles flaring ceaselessly and spreading to nearby stores, they chanted a slogan that captured the militancy of the day: “I will kill the one that killed my brother” (*mīkosham, mīkosham*,

⁷⁰¹ GREENUNITY4IRAN. “Iran 27 Dec 09 Tehran Hafez Talaghani Protest”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/RDfEXvDuaSU>>.

ānkeh barādaram kosht)⁷⁰² —another slogan appropriated from the era of the revolution—and proceeded to engage the policemen in fist fights.⁷⁰³ One policeman was separated from the group and beaten badly while other demonstrators tried to stave off the crowd in order to save his life—a scene that was replicated elsewhere when another policeman was captured, beaten, and then rescued from the rest of the crowd.⁷⁰⁴

In another skirmish, an angry crowd chased down a group of riot police on motorcycles throwing two policemen off of their motorcycles. Before they could flee, the crowd quickly set their motorcycles ablaze and pummeled the policemen. In another incident, the crowd attacked a police van, shattering the windshield as others kicked and rocked the van and pulled the driver out of the vehicle in order to beat him.⁷⁰⁵

In yet another clash, men and women faced off against riot police. With some distance separating them, they threw stones and were consequently put to flight by riot police. One man, however, urged the crowd not to flee, and they halted their flight. ‘*Ashura* was the quintessential day in which the crowd faced its enemy. As such, one protestor emerged in front of the crowd waving a green Husayn flag while another man in front urged them to “come forward” (*bīyān jolo*). Many heeded his call with chants of “Death to the Dictator” emerging from the crowd. Emboldened, they rushed forward

⁷⁰² One interview subject opined that of all the slogans from the movement, this one resonated with her the most: “In that moment the thing I wanted to do most, and it’s interesting because I’m extremely opposed to killing, violence, and even capital punishment, but this particular slogan really resonated with me... At that moment I felt like, not kill them, but I felt like I could do something to them [security forces] because I had seen so much death in front of my eyes and felt that I could use my hands to transmit the pain that they have given me right back to them.” T., Golnar. Personal interview. 22 October 2013.

⁷⁰³ Sohrab1901. “Nabard-i tan beh tan va nafas gīr-i mardom bā gārd-i vīzheh - ‘ashūrā”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/JZ2urTPUGf0>>.

⁷⁰⁴ GREENPOWER0. “Ātash zadan-i lebās-i nīrū-ye entezāmī – Tehran dec 27”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <https://youtu.be/kN1FDnz3P_0>.

⁷⁰⁵ IranDoost09. “27 Dec 09 Tehran People stop a police car and free protesters from Inside it”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/-ihMFrNcUkM>>.

towards the riot police, invoking Imam Husayn as they shouted “O’Husayn.” Inspired, protestors in the back of the large crowd began chanting “Death to Khamenei.” Once the chants reached the front of the crowd who were squaring off against the riot police, the chanting became unanimous—as if a wave had moved through the ocean until it reached the shore.⁷⁰⁶

Had the riot police not antagonized the protestors or had the motorcyclists not tried to break up the demonstrations, it is easy to assume that ‘*Ashura* 2009 would not have been so violent. Montazeri’s son in an interview affirmed that much of the violence on ‘*Ashura* was responsive: “Ordinary people have no interest in setting property on fire. They wanted to demonstrate for their legitimate interests. They were provoked by the state.”⁷⁰⁷ Unable to prevent the ‘*Ashura* protests, security forces worked to ensure that they would come at a physical cost to the protestors, often attacking demonstrators without being provoked. Footage from one procession, for example, clearly showed thousands of revolutionary mourners marching through the street with their hands up in the form of the victory sign, only to reach a blockade of security personnel who quickly assaulted them with batons and tear gas.⁷⁰⁸ Opposition websites reported that the wailing of ambulance sirens could be heard in central Tehran with flames and columns of smoke changing the skyline.⁷⁰⁹ Not all events, however, were overtaken by violence.

⁷⁰⁶ IranDoost09. “27 Dec 09 Tehran Clashes between protesters and security forces in Iran”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/Y68hw0a6CDA>>.

⁷⁰⁷ “Saeed Montazeri on Protests in Iran.” *Spiegel Online International*. 5 January 2010. Accessed 16 August 2010. <<http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,670071,00.html>>. Also, see Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., January 3, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RPODUBAI1_a.html.

⁷⁰⁸ sherlock72. “Police attack peaceful procession of mourners – Iran 27 Dec 2009 Ashura”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 2 January 2010. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/xwv6VtHtoSI>>.

⁷⁰⁹ “Sotūn hāyeh dūd va ātash bar farāz-i khīābān hāyeh markazī-ye tehrān”. *Rahesabz*. 27 Dec 2009. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/6364/>>.

In one Tehran street march where no security personnel were present to antagonize demonstrators, several protestors carried Husayn flags as they chanted, “We love Husayn, we are supporters of Mir Hussein” (*mā āsheq-i husaynīm, yāvar-i mīr husseinīm*), and again invoked Kahrizak in order to criticize the state that rules in the name of Islam yet commits such atrocities: “Rape in prison? Is this also in the Qur’an?” (*tajāvoz tūye zendān, īnam būd tūye qu’rān?*).⁷¹⁰ As they marched near Polytechnic University, they reminded the government of the legitimacy it had lost after its dramatic murder of Neda Agha Soltan: “Coup government, you are Neda’s murderer” (*dowlet-i kūdetāī, to qātel-i nedāī*).⁷¹¹ In another march, a large crowd walked past the offices of the Petroleum Ministry and, in a gesture of defiance, asked: “What happened to the oil money? It was spent on the Basij” (*pūl-i naft chī shodeh, kharj-i basījī shodeh*),⁷¹² implying that the oil wealth was financing the repression of the very population that should be benefiting from the “black gold.”

The slogans that invoked Husayn’s martyrdom, however, were the most forceful, to the point, and befitting his annual commemoration, such as “This month is the month of blood, the regime will be toppled” (*īn māh, māh-i khūneh, rezhīm sarnegūneh*),⁷¹³ which was aired by a marching crowd on Revolution Street, or “This army of Husayn supports Mir Hussein” (*īn lashkar husayneh, yāvar-i mīr husseineh*)⁷¹⁴, which was voiced on Azadi (Freedom) Street. In the same vein, these radicals gathered under a bridge to

⁷¹⁰ Millioniolim. “27-12-2009-IRAN-TEHRAN-650”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/Djo7QRALhqc>>.

⁷¹¹ *Ibid*.

⁷¹² GREENUNITY4IRAN. “Iran 27 Dec 09 Tehran Hafez Talaghani Protest”.

⁷¹³ GREENUNITY4IRAN. “Iran 27 Dec 09 Tehran Enghelab St”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 15 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/PKJtj61F5FA>>.

⁷¹⁴ UNITY4IRAN. “Iran 27 Dec 09 Tehran Azadi St Protest”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 5 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/dKbDojql4c>>.

recognize the significance of the holy month by chanting: “Today is a day of mourning, the green nation of Iran is mourning” (*‘azā ‘azāst emrūz, rūz-i ‘azāst emrūz, mellat-i sabz-i īrān sāhib ‘azāst emrūz*). Furthermore, the crowd trampled a banner-size picture of Khamenei while proclaiming “Death to the dictator,”⁷¹⁵ and destroyed a street sign named in honor of “the Leader of the Revolution.”⁷¹⁶ Such acts and slogans intertwined with the symbolism of the day to ensure that there was no doubt about the subject of their wrath—a man of power cast as the symbolic manifestation of Yazid facing “Husayn’s army” of unarmed marchers in 2009’s *Ashura*.

What’s more, crowd participants in another scene observed the importance of the day as coinciding with the 7th day of mourning for Montazeri, commemorating, “Montazeri is alive, long live the Source of Emulation” (*montazerī zendeh ast, marja ‘ pāyandeh ast*), and appropriated one of the most famous slogans from the revolution to denounce Ahmadinejad: “Mahmoud the traitor, you’ve abandoned and destroyed your country, God is greatest, you’ve put hundreds of youth in burial shrouds, God is greatest, death to you, death to you, death to you, death to you” (*maḥmūd-i khā’en, āvāreh gardī, khāk-i vaṭan rā, vīrāneh kardī, koshtī javānān-i vaṭan, allāhu akbar, kardī hezārān tū kafan, allāhu akbar, marg bar to, marg bar to, marg bar to, marg bar to*).⁷¹⁷ Such demonstrations and slogans were not confined to Tehran with protests reported in Tabriz, Shiraz, Arak, Mashhad, Ardebil, and, of course, Najafabad—Montazeri’s hometown.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁵ GREENUNITY4IRAN. “Tehran Hafez Talaghani Protest”.

⁷¹⁶ Esteqlāl, āzādī, jomhūrī īrānī. “27-12-2009-IRAN-TEHRAN-310”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 5 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/V7nLezMYAT4>>.

⁷¹⁷ Millionoillim. “27-12-2009-IRAN-TEHRAN-270.” Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 16 August 2010. <<http://youtu.be/XbUTK6oNp7M>>.

⁷¹⁸ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 28, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI549_a.html.

The protests continued into the night with people shouting nighttime chants of “Allahu akbar” from their rooftops—just as they had done in the first weeks after the election results when they co-opted and subverted the 30-year pro-government and revolution-era ritual. The Iranian government long used the legacy of that revolution’s symbolism to create its discursive hegemony through which it legitimated itself. In 2009, Green activists appropriated those symbols and re-programmed them in a manner that legitimated their protests while undermining the state ideology that rested on that symbolism. The rooftop chants were an integral part of that strategy and were widespread for several weeks after the elections, continuing sporadically throughout the uprising. On ‘*Ashura*, however, they were “markedly more extensive than in recent memory”⁷¹⁹ and were especially potent given the highly emotive and religious nature of the day. Furthermore, the anonymity of the nighttime chants enabled the countless sympathizers and supporters of the Green Movement to participate in the ‘*Ashura* uprising without fearing the state’s retribution, which was fully underway almost immediately after the historic day of action.

The spontaneity of the ‘*Ashura* protests cannot be overstated. Not only did the authorities fail to anticipate such an uprising, but the *de facto* leader of the opposition, Mir Hussein Mousavi, was likewise surprised:

“For the commemoration of ‘*Ashura*, despite several requests, neither Karoubi, Khatami, myself nor any other friend issued any statement. Yet, people spontaneously came to the scene and showed that the extensive social networks formed spontaneously during and after the election, would not wait for statements and announcements.”⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁹ Ibid.

⁷²⁰ Mousavi, Mir Hussein. “Bayāneh-ye shomāreh-ye 17 mīr ḥusseīn mūsavī va rāh-i ḥal hāyeh bīrūn raft az boḥrān”. *Kaleme*. 1 January 2010. Accessed 16 August 2010. <<http://www.kaleme.org/1388/10/11/klm-7047>>.

'Ashura proved that although Mousavi had used preceding holidays on Iran's political calendar to call for protests, they would have happened without his direction. Activists were indeed their own organizers and they did not rely on any one leader to coordinate events.

After the dust settled, state media tallied the torching of "9 residential buildings, 9 vehicles, 7 shops, 2 banks and 3 power stations" as well as "18 garbage bins."⁷²¹ Eight protesters were killed including Mousavi's 42-year-old nephew, Seyyed 'Ali Mousavi. Some even believed that his death was "intentional, to increase pressure on Mousavi."⁷²² The government, however, was unapologetic. On the contrary, the state considered the events of 'Ashura a desecration on par with the greatest of sins. The conservative Guardian Council released a statement condemning the incidents, which it believed "showed that the rioters are against the religious beliefs of the nation."⁷²³ The IRGC-affiliated *Fars News* quoted a senior official who accused protesters of being "seditionists,"⁷²⁴ while another affirmed that "our revolution has its roots in 'Ashura and Imam Husayn..." and 'Ashura's "desecration" was the outcome of a foreign plot, the masterminds of which were the US, UK, Zionists, and Bahá'ís.⁷²⁵ Consequently, the authorities threatened a "crushing response" was in order for "those who show no respect to religious sanctities," while other conservative bodies accused those who "resorted to

⁷²¹ "In Iran, extent of unrest damage determined". *PressTV*. 28 December 2009. Accessed 16 August 2010. <<http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=114838§ionid=351020101>>.

⁷²² Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 28, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI549_a.html.

⁷²³ "Widespread condemnation of 'Ashura protests". *Tehran Times*. 29 December 2009. Accessed 16 August 2010. <http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=210803>.

⁷²⁴ "Shekastan-i ḥormat-i 'ashūrā chehreh-ye ašlī-ye jāhelān va fetnehgarān rā āshkār kard". *Fars News Agency*. 29 Dec 2009. Also, see Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 28, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI549_a.html.

⁷²⁵ "Ahamiāt-i rāhpaymāi-ye emrūz labbayk be rahbarī ast". *Fars News Agency*. 30 Dec 2009. <<http://www.farsnews.com/newstext.php?nn=8810081569>>.

insults on ‘*Ashura*’ as “not [being] Muslim or Shia because they would respect ‘*Ashura*’ rituals even if they had objections.”⁷²⁶ Furthermore, the state arrested scores of political leaders from the opposition—to say nothing of the activists—in what amounted to the largest wave of arrests since the uprising’s early days.⁷²⁷

The government’s fierce reaction was a result of two factors: the state was increasingly frustrated that the movement endured despite the government’s best efforts to suppress it—especially after an explosive December in which Student Day, Montazeri’s funeral, and ‘*Ashura*’ coalesced to renew the movement’s momentum; and the Islamic Republic, which rode to power atop the massive ‘*Ashura*’ protests of 1978, was now being equated with Yazid on the most potent of days. To put it in the words of one prominent reformist, “‘*Ashura*’ is never a good day to be seen as an oppressor.”⁷²⁸

VIII. Conclusion

The history of ‘*Ashura*’s politicization during the 1970s and especially during the Iranian Revolution is especially instructive. Shi‘ite Muslims in Lebanon, Iraq, and pre-revolutionary Iran harnessed the defiance inherent in ‘*Ashura*’ by invoking Husayn’s legacy of resistance and martyrdom in order to confront the homegrown tyranny of the day. Thus, while the Islamic government alleged blasphemy in 2009, the demonstrators were in keeping with ‘*Ashura*’s recent history of political mobilization. For the

⁷²⁶ “Widespread condemnation of *Ashura* protests”. *Tehran Times*. 29 December 2009. Accessed 16 August 2010. <http://www.tehrantimes.com/Index_view.asp?code=210803>.

⁷²⁷ Alipour, Farahmand. “Sedāye pāye kūdetā dar tehrān; mowj-i jadīd va gostar-deh-ye dastgīrī-ye fa‘ālān-i sīāsī āghāz shod”. *Rahesabz*. 28 Dec 2009. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/6517/>>. The *BBC* noted that Iran’s police chief, Ismail Ahmadi Moghaddam, claimed that over 500 people were arrested in the 3 days after ‘*Ashura*’. See “Supporters of Iran’s government stage big rallies”. *BBC News*. 30 Dec 2009. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8435007.stm>.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*

authorities, however, the protesters' most unforgivable crime was their appropriation of 'Ashura in order to condemn the Islamic Republic. In doing so, Green activists were abiding by 'Ashura's political message of resistance in the face of unjust power thereby situating the Islamic Republic in the same breath as the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, the Lebanese state's marginalization of its Shi'ite community, the US-backed monarchy in pre-revolutionary Iran, the Israeli occupation⁷²⁹, and, most importantly, Caliph Yazid, his commander Shimr, and those who beheaded the Prophet's grandson in the Battle of Karbala in 680 CE. This was an intolerable insult of the highest order for a government that came to power through the historic and revolutionary 'Ashura of 1978 and which professed to rule in accordance with the justness of the Imamate and Husayn's righteous example.

On December 27, 2009, the 'Ashura protests created an entirely new discourse in Iran, asserting that although the Iranian government, specifically the institution of the *vilāyat-i faqīh*, derives its legitimacy from Shi'ism and the 12 Imams (the Imamate) it does not have a monopoly on their uses and meanings. Iran and Shi'ite Islam's emotive universe is a shared discourse, and the activists effectively appropriated the state's

⁷²⁹ As noted in detail in chapter 3, Mottahari's famous speech forcefully argued: "What would the Prophet of Islam do if he was still alive today? What issue would occupy the Prophet's thoughts? By God we are responsible regarding this crisis. By God we have responsibility. By God we are being ignorant. By God this very issue would break the heart of the Prophet today. The problem that would fill Husayn ibn 'Ali's heart with sorrow today is this issue. If Husayn ibn 'Ali was here today, he would say 'if you want to mourn for me today, if you want to lament over me, your slogan today must be 'Palestine.'" The Shimr of 1300 years ago is dead and gone. Get to know the Shimr of today. Today the walls of this city should tremble to the slogan of Palestine. And what efforts have we Muslims exerted for Palestine? By God it's a shame for us to call ourselves Muslims. It's a shame to call ourselves Shi'ites of 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. The enemy has ravaged our fellow Muslim's land, murdered and imprisoned their men, violated their women and took their jewelry from their ears and hands... Are they not Muslims?" The full text of his speech is posted online and the actual audio clip can be found on *YouTube*, see Ruh. "Shahīd morteżā moṭaharī va feleštīn". *Doshmantarin*. 15 Nov 2010. Accessed 24 Sept 2013. <<http://doshmantarin.blogspot.com/1389/08/24/post-10/>>, and Bahmanpour, 'Alireza. "Ayatullah's Historical Speech about Palestine". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 18 June 2010. Accessed 24 September 2013. <<http://youtu.be/-SxOUMlfX7c>>.

language and its revolutionary credentials, both of which have roots in that same emotive universe, in order to castigate that very state on its own terms. This is most apparent in an online discussion regarding the meaning of *Ashura* in the modern context. Summing up what *Ashura* meant, one user rather poignantly opined: “Oppression, oppressor, Zeinab’s patience, the children’s thirst, freedom, chivalry, courage, morning prayers, and... O’Husayn, Mir Hussein.”⁷³⁰ The social media user placed Mir Hussein Mousavi’s struggle against the Iranian government in the same breath as Husayn’s rebellion in 680 CE not only by situating Mousavi’s name alongside Husayn’s, but also by including vivid and iconic moments of the Battle of Karbala in which Yazid’s forces surrounded Husayn and his followers in the arid desert and prevented them from accessing the wells—an unforgivable act that insults long established customs. The parched lips of the children symbolized Yazid’s “oppression.” Imam Husayn and his half-brother’s sacrifice in their resolute refusal to accept the sovereignty of the “oppressor” exemplified their “chivalry” and steadfast “courage.” Zeinab’s endurance in surviving the battle and traversing the Islamic world to share the story of her brother’s martyrdom ensured that Husayn’s legacy did not perish with him in the land of Karbala but transcended time and place, so much so that activists in Iran invoked Husayn in their uprising against “oppression” both in 1978 and again in 2009.

Just as their predecessors had done in 1978, Green activists used the occasion of *Ashura* in order to empower their discourse with a revolutionary meaning. Unlike 1978, however, they used *Ashura* not to negate the ideological universe of the state the way revolutionaries did three decades prior. Rather, activists in December 2009 used the

⁷³⁰ Iranpour, Mohammad. 15 Nov 2013. 10:12 a.m. Google+ Comment.

state's own discourse to legitimate their struggle and condemn the government that ruled in the name of Islam and Husayn's legacy. In doing so, they reminded the Islamic Republic that Husayn—the quintessential Muslim rebel—never held power but died fighting it thereby becoming Shi'ite Islam's martyr *par excellence*.⁷³¹

The 'Ashura revolt coincided with Ayatollah Montazeri's 7th day of mourning, which undoubtedly added to the intensity of the day. His death on the 19th along with Student Day on the 7th ensured that December was the most explosive month of protest after June when the post-election results marked the launch of the uprising.

In life and even in death, Montazeri constituted a dangerous threat to the legitimacy of the Islamic government. A deeper look at his transition from regime-architect to foremost dissident exemplifies a trend in Iran that constitutes an even bigger threat to the state. In what Asef Bayat calls the “post-Islamist turn,” many such leaders and supporters of the Islamic Republic have shed their once-ardent ideological beliefs in favor of a system that focuses on civil rights instead of doctrinal rigidity. That protesters used much of the state's own discourse to challenge the state on 'Ashura of all days only underscores this historic development in “Islamic Iran.”

Above all, Montazeri's life as a religious scholar and revolutionary, transition from state co-founder to opponent in his final years, and consequential death all coalesce with the Green Uprising and its potent use of Islamic symbolism to illustrate that although Islam can be exploited to serve power, the Abrahamic faith can also be harnessed to produce a powerful discourse of popular resistance—the cornerstone of

⁷³¹ This phrase is borrowed from Fischer, who wrote: “The theme of martyrdom was of course central to the revolution. Husayn is the martyr *par excellence*.” Fischer, pp. 214.

Husayn's transnational and undying legacy. In doing so, Montazeri and the Green Movement saved Islam from the banditry of the republic that rules in its name.

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion

I. Introduction

Iran has a long and storied history of resistance both against the autocratic state and its foreign backers. Mossadeq's oil nationalization campaign (1951-53) epitomizes mobilization against the latter, while the Tobacco Revolt (1890-92) and the Iranian Revolution (1978-79) exemplify popular revolts against a combination of both colonial control and its local agents—monarchs beholden to imperial powers—that facilitated both foreign and domestic political repression and economic exploitation. The Green Uprising, however, centered almost exclusively on defying the repressive state. In doing so, all of the movement's multi-faceted energy was harnessed to level a focused and devastating attack on the state's ideology thereby undermining the legitimacy of not only Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, but of the entire political system governing Iran.

This work has argued against the false and narrow win-lose binary by noting that although the Green Movement failed to cancel Ahmadinejad's election "victory" or the state's overthrow, both of which at certain junctures were expressly the aims of the movement, it nonetheless succeeded in that "failure." Indeed, the Green Uprising succeeded in challenging the Islamic Republic in a manner unprecedented in its thirty-year history. The government's power lies with its highly organized and efficient security apparatus as well as its potent ideological foundations, which are rooted in a combination

of Islam and the Iranian Revolution. While the Green Movement did not contest the government in military terms, it did contest it on an ideological and discursive level amounting to a post-Islamist challenge. Green activists appropriated and subverted the totality of the state’s ideological symbolism and used it against that very state on its own terms. Even the government’s praetorian guard, the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps—the state’s most loyal, ideological, and powerful line of military defense—did not evade the movement’s nonviolent ideological assault.



Figure 5.1. Emblems of the (from left) Badr Brigade, Hizbullah, and the IRGC. The far right is a Green Movement appropriation of the IRGC banner.

Among the many Green Movement attacks on the state’s Islamist ideology, chapter two also outlined how students sang revolutionary songs on Student Day (December 7) to an image of the Iranian flag that was purposefully devoid of the Islamic Republic’s emblem. Just as Iran’s flag was contested, so was the banner of its main ideological military force—the IRGC. On October 14, 2009, Mousavi’s Facebook page, a key organizing tool for those who could access the social media website, published a

forceful image in which the IRGC's iconic logo had been subverted with a new message (Figure 5.1).⁷³²

The original IRGC emblem (second from the right) includes as its focal point a defiant fist clutching a rifle, above which is a Qur'anic verse in Arabic that reads: "Prepare against them whatever arms and cavalry you can muster..."—a call to arms in the path of "righteous militancy."⁷³³ Underneath the rifle is a representation of the Qur'an from which an olive branch extends, representing both "the desire for peace and the garden of heavenly paradise."⁷³⁴ The globe, likewise a feature of various Iranian guerrilla groups' banners, symbolizes the fact that both the IRGC and the Islamic Revolution are not confined to Iran's borders, but are international in terms of their outlook. The year of the military force's establishment—1979—is noted at the bottom and its full name is inscribed in Persian on the right. The IRGC's role in the founding of Lebanon's Hizbullah and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq⁷³⁵ and its armed wing—the Badr Brigade—is evident in the configurations of their respective banners (the left two), which are modeled after the IRGC logo.

The Green Movement's appropriation of the IRGC banner (right) includes a defiant hand clenching a pen instead of a rifle thereby highlighting both the movement's peaceful nature and its ideological challenge through the power of the written word. Such a preference for the pen over "righteous militancy" is affirmed by the Qur'anic verse enshrined above the pen: "By the pen, and what they inscribe." The year of the

⁷³² Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. "qalam". 14 Oct 2009. 12:30 p.m. Facebook Post. <<https://www.facebook.com/mousavi/photos/a.82250529453.75658.45061919453/154196369453/?type=1&theater>>.

⁷³³ Ostovar, pp. 112.

⁷³⁴ Ibid.

⁷³⁵ The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq was originally known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq until it changed its name in 2007 to reflect Iraq's new post-Ba'ath reality.

movement's historic uprising—2009—is noted at the bottom and an unofficial name is given to the digital force rebelling against the state on the Internet: “The Online Resistance Unit of the Mobilized Green Pen Corps.” Furthermore, green—the color of the movement—predominates in the image, and the Qur'an remains situated to the right of the arm thereby refuting claims that the movement is anti-religion. Lastly, the entire logo is superimposed on a globe, underscoring the movement's transnational and diverse support base, the global Iranian community, many members of which identified with the uprising, and certainly its worldwide audience via increased global connectivity.

The co-option of the IRGC's banner highlights the common theme outlined throughout this study—how the uprising ingeniously used the government's own discourse and symbolism against itself. After the climactic month of December, the Green Movement looked ahead to the state's most prized political holiday—the anniversary of the Iranian Revolution's victory—to likewise appropriate the day in order to deliver a final ideological blow to the state. This concluding chapter will show how the government defeated the uprising's street presence on February 11, 2010, while also showing how the Green Movement endures even though the state prevented it from co-opting yet another state-sanctioned political holiday. In doing so, this chapter will ask and propose an answer to the very important question: What does it mean for the Green Uprising to be “over”?

II. Repression and the Crowd's Failure to Appropriate Revolution Day

The *Ashura* protests on December 27 represented both a hardening of the movement as well as the state's resolve to crush it. Eight died on Husayn's

commemoration, amounting to one of the bloodiest days in the course of the uprising. What's more, the state intensified its crackdown afterwards in order to discourage continued protests, especially with the upcoming Revolution Day holiday (22 *Bahman*)—an annual political event in which the state's supporters march in step with the government.

To dissuade activists from likewise hijacking 22 *Bahman* (February 11), the regime began trying detained protesters, of which those arrested on 'Ashura were dealt with especially harshly—nearly a dozen were even sentenced to death for “waging war on God.”⁷³⁶ More to the point, the state started executing prisoners—including Arash Rahmanipour and Mohammad Reza Alizamani, both of which were convicted of political crimes that likely took place before the uprising. The timing of their executions prompted many to believe that their punishments were hastened to terrorize a mobilized population.⁷³⁷ What's more, televised forced confessions—a mainstay of modern Iran both before and after the revolution when it reached unprecedented heights in the early post-revolutionary period—were revitalized during the government's crackdown on the uprising thereby humiliating such victimized activists in order to sow fear in the hearts of the audience.⁷³⁸

⁷³⁶ “Ārash raḥmānīpūr va moḥammad rezā ‘alīzamānī, e’ dām shodand”. *Rahesabz*. 28 Jan 2010. Accessed 10 July 2015. <<http://rahesabz.net/story/8919/>>.

⁷³⁷ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., February 2, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RPODUBAI27_a.html.

⁷³⁸ One such victim of these forced confessions speaks about it in length in his memoirs, noting that as an international journalist of dual Iranian and Canadian citizenship, he was forced to admit to the falsehood that he was part of an international conspiracy whereby the foreign media worked in tandem with foreign governments in order to pave the way for a velvet revolution in Iran much like the ones that swept through Georgia in 2003 or Ukraine in 2004. See Bahari, Maziar. *Then They Came for Me: A Family's Story of Love, Captivity, and Survival*. New York: Random House, 2011, pp. 162-173. Although he was never tried, Bahari had this to say about the show trials he observed: “A number of sources told me that the trials were produced on Khamenei's direct orders, meant to show the strength of the regime and disgrace the reformist leaders who were paraded in front of the press in their prison uniforms.” (Bahari, 225).

What's more, just as the Internet was a weapon in the hands of the activists who harnessed it either to coordinate action through social media or to broadcast raw footage of events to a global audience via YouTube, the medium was also a weapon in the hands of the state that used it to suppress the revolt. Disturbingly, the government published photos of protesters and invited fellow citizens to identify them so they can be arrested.

Mehdi Saharkhiz, the point man for activists' footage from the uprising, responded to the forced confession of his father—a journalist imprisoned before the election after publishing letters critical of Khamenei—by co-opting and subverting the state's tactic of televising such confessions with his own "confession" in which he stated: "I confess. I confess that I am the son of a prisoner, my father is a prisoner. I confess that I am not ashamed that my father is in prison and I am proud of him. I confess that my father is not a thief, he is not a murderer, he is not a looter nor a rioter. He is one of the "Dirt and Dust" and a friend of the "Dirt and Dust." I confess that my father disrupted the comfortable sleep of some people, and gave them nightmares. Those same people who filled their own pockets by stealing the nation's wealth and left people in nightmares. I confess that my father is famous for his honesty. And I confess his bravery had made life harder for the cowards in power in our time. I confess that they kidnapped my father and broke his ribs. I confess that they did not even take him to a hospital, and instead took him to solitary confinement. I confess that my father was denied the right to an attorney. He was not even allowed to phone his daughter on Father's Day. I confess that for weeks we had no word from him and even on my mother's birthday we did not receive any news. I confess that my mother spent her wedding anniversary in loneliness. And I confess that this year, my father could not visit my martyred uncle's grave because he was in jail. I confess that Isa Saharkhiz is a soldier of war and a brother of a martyr. I confess that he did not use his positions to gain money or power in this regime. I confess that he has worked for years either when he was an official in the Ministry of Culture or when he was the head of the news department in the *Islamic Republic News Agency* or even when he was working for the *IRNA* office in the United Nations. I confess that my father works in a country where the representative of the judiciary system bit him. I confess that in my country the person who bites gets a promotion and later becomes a minister. I confess that the wolves that are running the country now don't even think the savage who bites should be fired. I confess that my dad's greatest sin is being innocent. I confess he is guilty of speaking justly. I confess that he has already expressed his views and beliefs before he was kidnapped and whatever they have him confess is a pure lie and not his opinion. I confess that I am proud of having a father like him. I confess that I wish maybe someday I can be just a little like him. That would be the greatest achievement of my life. I confess that my father and his friends were not only detained but tortured. We confess that we voted and they stole our votes. We confess that this one was not an election but a coup d'etat. We confess that no court was assembled and what was shown on State TV was nothing but a movie of big lies. We confess that our brothers and sisters were not only tortured but were raped in the most savage way possible. We confess that Kahrizak was not a jail but a place for torture and rape. We confess that those who are running the country are far from being human. We confess that we are fighting together for our rights and will not back down. We confess that it is you [the government] that is scared of us as we are not scared because we are standing together. We confess that we will fight until the very last drop of our blood for our absolute right to a free Iran. We confess that we have faith in victory and getting our rights." Mehdi Saharkhiz. "I Mehdi Saharkhiz Confess for Isa Saharkhiz (please make your own". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 15 August 2009. Accessed 17 May 2015. <<https://youtu.be/AZjdLq3H1S8>>. For a detailed history of forced confessions in modern Iran, see Abrahamian, Ervand. *Tortured Confessions: Prisons and Public Recantations in Modern Iran*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.

As early as June, *Gerdab*—a news outlet tied to the IRGC—published 28 photos with protesters’ faces encircled, beseeching state-supporters to identify the “rioters” who served the agenda of “the hypocrites, monarchists, terrorist groups, and counter-revolutionaries.”⁷³⁹ The state’s tactic of encouraging citizens to reveal the identities of their neighbors continued throughout the uprising and came to a head in the post-*Ashura* crackdown when the commander of the security forces announced that 70 percent of *Ashura* “rioters” were identified and arrested after the publication of such photos.⁷⁴⁰ Although the percentage is almost certainly an exaggeration designed to intimidate activists, there should not be any doubt that many were indeed identified and detained through such an approach.

The government’s use of the Internet to suffocate the movement is an ominous sign of things to come. Iran in 2009 is an early example of how governments around the world are using the Internet and mobile phones to monitor their own citizens. This is not a phenomenon unique to “those people over there,” but also a growing reality in the United States—the so-called “Beacon of the Free World.” As revealed by Edward Snowden, the analyst who defected from National Security Agency (NSA) and leaked a massive trove of classified information about the government’s shadowy techniques to intrude into the lives of its citizens, government surveillance is indeed a reality not just “over there.” Accordingly, the ever-expanding surveillance state in the US has the ability and authorization to activate the microphones on Americans’ cellular phones and listen to

⁷³⁹ “Eghteshāshgarān rā shenāsāi konīd (līst-i avval)”. *Gerdab*. 21 June 2009. Accessed 9 July 2015. <<http://gerdab.ir/fa/pages/?cid=407>>

⁷⁴⁰ “70 darṣad-i eghteshāshgarān bā mo’arefi-ye mardom dastgīr shodand”. *Mehr News*. 11 Feb 2010. Accessed 9 July 2015. <<http://goo.gl/JCvmsn>>.

personal conversations, and monitor online and phone activity—including text messages as the person is typing in real-time:

"As you write a message, you know, an analyst at the NSA or any other service out there that's using this kind of attack against people can actually see you write sentences and then backspace over your mistakes and then change the words and then kind of pause and — and — and think about what you wanted to say and then change it. And it's this extraordinary intrusion not just into your communications, your finished messages but your actual drafting process, into the way you think."⁷⁴¹

Furthermore, in an unnerving article, Ana Marie Cox at *The Guardian* noted that governments and companies collect our online activity in the form of “data.” In doing so, they can predict and possibly influence our behavior:

“The masters of modern spycraft have learned from the masters of marketing the science of predicting human behavior. One of the main reasons for ‘bulk’ collection, one that seems less alarming on its surface, is to watch for patterns of behavior that indicate possible terrorist activity. But when an organization is sufficiently skilled at predicting human behavior, the next phase, almost inevitably, is to try to influence it.”⁷⁴²

In sum, one of the legacies of the Green Uprising is to both demonstrate how effective the Internet is in coordinating protest activity as well as suppressing it, the latter of which is only an ominous sign of things to come both in Iran and elsewhere.

In addition to the ever-widening security net that by February was ensnaring opposition members of all strata, the state also implemented measures designed to neutralize Green activists on Revolution Day. It disrupted the Internet, SMS and telephone services in order to prevent coordination, lined the main street of the pro-

⁷⁴¹ Edward Snowden. Interview by Brian Williams. 28 May 2014. Moscow, Russia. *NBC News*. Accessed 9 July 2015. <<http://www.nbcnews.com/feature/edward-snowden-interview/edward-snowdens-motive-revealed-he-can-sleep-night-n116851>>. Also, see Greenwald, Glenn. *No Place to Hide: Edward Snowden, the NSA, and the U.S. Surveillance State*. New York: Metropolitan Books, 2014; as well as Morozov, Evgeny. *The Net Delusion: The Dark Side of Internet Freedom*. New York: Perseus Books Group, 2011.

⁷⁴² Cox, Ana Marie. “Who should we fear more with our data: the government or companies?”. *The Guardian*. 20 Jan 2014. Accessed 6 Sept 2011. <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/jan/20/obama-nsa-reform-companies-spying-data>>.

government march with thousands of security personnel, and, for the first time, installed loudspeakers along the 6-mile (10 km) march route to drown out potential anti-government slogans.⁷⁴³ The government even took advantage of Revolution Day falling on Thursday—the day before Iran’s day of rest—and a religious holiday at the end of the weekend to announce a long holiday in order to encourage would-be protesters to go on vacation.⁷⁴⁴

The state’s systematic measures were not the only means by which it ensured that the Green Movement would not be able to co-opt Revolution Day. The authorities coupled their crackdown and attempts to control the day’s message with a relentless effort to encourage its supporters to flood the streets of the country, specifically in Tehran where the day’s events were planned to culminate at Azadi Square—the scene of the unofficial referendum on *Ashura* in 1978 and the Green Movement’s most impressive gathering on June 15, 2009. The state-led coordination aimed to produce a colossal show of force in support of the revolution, “the Leader of the Revolution,” and to take a physical stand by hammering “the last nail in the seditionists’ coffin.”⁷⁴⁵ To put it differently, the “opportunity” to co-opt another political holiday in order to rally against the state—a tactic the opposition employed to great effect on previous holidays to circumvent state repression and renew its protest—was no longer available.

While the government was preparing the death knell for the uprising’s street presence, Green activists still hoped that they would evade the state’s efforts to stop them and successfully hijack the government’s most politically potent holiday: Revolution

⁷⁴³ Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., February 10, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10RPODUBAI33_a.html.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

Day—the day in which a protracted popular revolution brought the Shah’s seemingly all-powerful state to a definitive end thereby precipitating the rise of the Islamic Republic. In doing so, many hoped the appropriation of such an important day would amount to the beginning of the government’s end—a hope best visualized by an image posted on Mousavi’s Facebook page (Figure 5.2).⁷⁴⁶

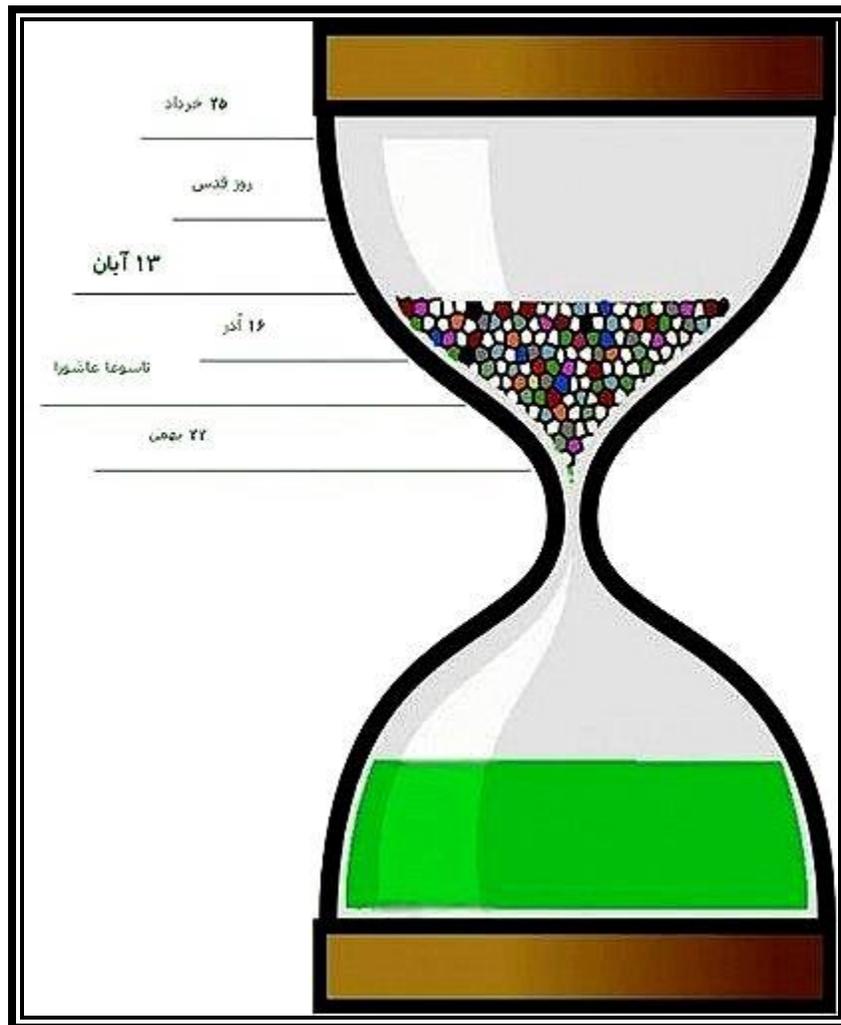


Figure 5.2. The hourglass of the movement’s major days of action

⁷⁴⁶ Mir Hossein Mousavi Facebook Page. “Green hourglass”. 26 Nov 2009. Facebook Post. <<https://www.facebook.com/mousavi/photos/a.172726419453.118347.45061919453/186592339453/?type=3&theater>>.

The image noted all the uprising's main days of action: June 15, Quds Day (September 18), National Struggle Against Global Arrogance Day (November 4), Student Day (December 7), *Tasu'a* and *Ashura* (December 26 and 27), and the last of which was going to be Revolution Day (February 11). All but June 15—the single largest day of protest in the history of the uprising—were state-sanctioned holidays, which the Green Movement appropriated and subverted. More to the point, the hour glass ended with Revolution Day, symbolizing the forthcoming victory of the uprising, or as one observer noted, the Green Movement's "D-Day."⁷⁴⁷

If the struggle between the Green Movement and the government was a poker game, then both sides went "all in," leaving one winner, which was undoubtedly the government. The state's repressive measures coalesced with its efforts to amass its supporters thereby ensuring that the day went off as the government planned. State media boasted that 50 million people across the country, 5 million of which were in Tehran, marched to "burst" the "bubble of America's seditious plot."⁷⁴⁸ While such estimates from *Kayhan*, the editor of which is personally chosen by Khamenei, are highly exaggerated, helicopter footage does provide an aerial view confirming an undeniably massive and unprecedented show of force for the government.⁷⁴⁹ More tellingly, the state's most conservative daily, *Kayhan*, proclaimed that the "epic march" demonstrated

⁷⁴⁷ Win Dayton. Istanbul, to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, January 29, 2010, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/10ISTANBUL40_a.html.

⁷⁴⁸ "Hobāb-i fetneh-ye āmrīkā tarakīd hamāseh-ye bi sābeqeh-ye mellat dar 22 bahman". *Kayhan*. 16 Feb 2009. Accessed 11 July 2015. <<http://kayhanarch.kayhan.ir/881127/14.htm#other1401>>.

⁷⁴⁹ zelzalosolh. "[MUST SEE | Part 1 | Bahman 22 2010] Helicopter over Tehran 5 Million Dawn". Online video clip. *YouTube*. 12 February 2010. Accessed 15 May 2015. <<https://youtu.be/HbYqckFvUJI>>.

the people's affirmation of Khomeini's ideals by renewing their oath of allegiance (*baī'ah*) to Khamenei's authority (*vilāyat*).⁷⁵⁰

Baī'ah is an Islamic concept that goes back to the time of the Prophet Muhammad who, along with his successors, secured loyalties not through written agreements but via such powerful and binding oaths. So important were these pledges that their violation amounted to perjuring oneself before God.⁷⁵¹ That state media framed its victory on February 11 using such terminology only demonstrates its self-legitimizing reliance on Islamic symbolism, history, and discourse, all of which the Green Movement co-opted and subverted to legitimate itself and condemn the Islamic Republic using its very own terms.

Subsequent to Revolution Day, however, the opposition was shocked and demoralized after viewing such footage, which the state broadcast to the nation. Many simply could not fathom that the state enjoyed such support. Others argued that the attendees either didn't know any better, were lured with the promise of a free lunch, or were simply coerced to participate. The truth is, however, that the government endured a storm that inundated many of its counterparts in neighboring Arab countries two years later in the Arab Uprisings *because* of such support, which cannot so easily be reduced to such generalizations.

In comparison, the Shah's government lacked such organic roots when the revolutionary upheaval began to shatter his authority in 1978-79. The few supporters the Shah had simply transferred their wealth abroad, packed their suitcases, and left the

⁷⁵⁰ "Ḥobāb-i fetneh-ye āmrīkā tarakīd hamāseh-ye bi sābeqeh-ye mellat dar 22 bahman".

⁷⁵¹ Mottahedeh, Roy. *Loyalty and Leadership in an Early Islamic Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980, pp. 42.

country when it became apparent that the revolution would triumph. Indeed, historians often remark that the Shah's dictatorship can be fixed with a "one-bullet solution," in which one assassin could potentially cause the destruction of the state since so much power and decision-making was vested in one man. In other words, once decapitated with the death of the monarch then the state would crumble. The Islamic Republic, on the other hand, has been building institutions from the onset throughout the country and, consequently, has an enormously entrenched state that reaches deep into society. A prime example can be found in the IRGC, which was established to protect the leadership of the revolution and now controls a large percentage of the Iranian economy—investments that amount to billions. Such business ventures coupled with its ideological zeal and institutional capacity for violence ensure that it has a vested and unshakable interest in maintaining the status quo. In contrast, the Shah's vaunted army continuously unraveled in the face of the revolutionary uprising in 1978, barely maintaining a semblance of cohesion by early 1979—until various guerilla groups in tandem with revolutionary volunteers delivered its *coup de grace* on February 11, 1979, or Revolution Day.⁷⁵²

Thus, the Islamic government was able to harness that institutional power along with its corresponding support base in order to shut down the opposition's plans to co-opt the state's most important political holiday. The mere fact that it was also able to

⁷⁵² Kurzman notes: "Each military operation exposed the troops to fraternization and further appeals from protesters. Dissident officers therefore encouraged more deployment of soldiers in the streets, while loyalists such as the head of the ground forces proposed keeping the soldiers away from nefarious influences: 'We should round up the units and send them someplace where [the demonstrators] won't have any contact with the soldiers. Because yesterday they came and put a flower in the end of a rifle barrel, and another on the [military] car... The soldiers' morale just disappears.' On several occasions, eyewitnesses reported that large throngs of protesters had persuaded soldiers to give up their arms, throw off their uniforms, and join the demonstrations." (Kurzman, pp. 115).

commandeer such a massive display of support prompted many Green activists to believe that changing the status quo through street action was becoming a hopeless endeavor.

In his analysis of the causes of the Iranian Revolution, Charles Kurzman argues that there is too much confusion in a revolution to try to explain with complex theories. Rather, it's a real-time decision on the ground in which "fence-sitters" decide at a critical juncture that revolution is viable and that an alternative to the regime is possible—an epiphany that subsequently prompts their participation. According to Kurzman, until that point was reached when those fence-sitters—the bulk of the people who ultimately made the Iranian Revolution—crossed that mental threshold, only the die-hard revolutionaries were on the streets fighting for change. His explanation or what he calls the "anti-explanation... runs counter to the project of retroactive prediction... Instead of seeking recurrent patterns in social life, anti-explanation explores the unforeseen moments when patterns are twisted or broken off."⁷⁵³

A number of factors came together to cause many sympathizers to cross that mental threshold in the early winter of 1978, believing that the victory of the revolution was a very real possibility and that their personal participation made it all the more likely. Consequently, the *Ashura* protests of December 10, 1978, were undoubtedly the largest protest event in modern Iranian history. In contrast, severe government repression in February 2010 coupled with an immense public outpouring of support for the state provoked the opposite sentiment; that the Green Uprising may not win and that one's personal participation may not make a difference—in fact it could come at great personal cost.

⁷⁵³ Kurzman, pp. 138

III. The Uprising Endures: Complicating the Claim of its Finality

What does it mean to say that the Green Uprising is “over”? What does it mean when *The Economist* echoes the sentiment of Iran’s leaders by referring to the revolt as a “failed” revolution?⁷⁵⁴ It is certainly true that the movement failed to abrogate Ahmadinejad’s election “win.” It is also undoubtedly true that it did not succeed in overthrowing the state. The win-lose and start-finish false binaries, however, are simply too narrow a lens by which to analyze the uprising, especially since it is this study’s contention that it is far from over in many ways.

In his seminal book, *The Other Cold War*, Heonik Kwon supplants the dominant Cold War paradigm that focuses on the two superpowers of the day in favor of examining how the global struggle impacted the people on a grass-roots level. In doing so, he argues that the Cold War didn’t end for many of its victims with the fall of the Berlin Wall or the implosion of the Soviet Union. The war’s end or a sense of closure, for instance, didn’t come to families with sons who fought and died for both sides of the American war in Vietnam until the communist state finally allowed those families to administer the proper burial rights—rituals previously banned as feudal superstitions. Thus, it was only after the revolutionary state relinquished and allowed such families to formally acknowledge their dead that empowered them with a sense that the war was finally over—a feeling realized several years after the formal end of the Cold War.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵⁴ “The revolution is over”. *The Economist*. 1 Nov 2014. Accessed 11 July 2015
<<http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21629338-changes-iran-make-nuclear-deal-more-likely-not-month-perhaps-eventually>>.

⁷⁵⁵ Kwon, Heonik. *The Other Cold War*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

The Iran of today likewise continues to grapple with the ramifications of the events of 2009. Three of the uprising's leading personalities, Mir Hussein Mousavi, Zahra Rahnava, and Mehdi Karubi have been under house arrest since early 2011. Furthermore, the state ordered the press not to mention the name or publish the image of Khatami—the popular reformist former president who publicly backed the movement.⁷⁵⁶ Many activists still wither away in Iran's political prisons, and more continue to reel from the physical and psychological trauma of those tumultuous days. Furthermore, the uprising is a daily lived experience full of grief for those families who lost loved ones—especially if they never obtained a sense of closure because the state prevented them from having a proper burial out fear that it would serve as a rallying cry for the opposition.⁷⁵⁷ More counter-intuitively, a closer look at modern Iranian history is instructive in analyzing the supposed finality of the Green Uprising.

When the Shah's military violently crushed the June 1963 Uprising, many young activists who were members of opposition groups such as the Liberation Movement became radicalized as a result, and broke from their organizations' peaceful approach in favor of the belief that such a crackdown proved that nonviolent struggle against the Shah's regime was futile:

⁷⁵⁶ Qazi, Fereshteh. "Ja'fari-dowlatabadi modiran-i nashriat ra tahdid kard". *Rooh Online*. 10 Feb 2015. Accessed 13 July 2015. <<http://www.roozonline.com/persian/news/newsitem2/article/-cc06e1f063.html>>.

⁷⁵⁷ Makhmalbaf accused the government of seizing the dead body of Mousavi's nephew in order to prevent "both an impartial examination of the corpse and a burial." See Director Alan Eyre, Dubai, to Central Intelligence Agency, et al., December 28, 2009, Wikileaks, https://search.wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09RPODUBAI549_a.html. Other instances abound, such as when the families of Mostafa Kashani Rasa and Fatemeh Semsarpor were disallowed from observing customary mourning practices. "Enteshar-i asami-ye 112 tan az jankhtegan-i havades-i b'ad az entekhabat". *Rahesabz*. 12 June 2012. Accessed 11 July 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/54490/>>. There is also much information about how the state tried to or succeeded in suppressing Neda Agha Soltan's burial. I am reluctant to include a citation because much of the sources rely on the testimony of her fiancé, Caspian Makan, whose credibility has been undermined. There should not be any doubt, however, that the state succeeded to a certain extent in controlling the funeral of the uprising's most famous martyr.

“The Uprising of 5 June (15 Khordad) is one of the most important events in all Iranian history and the most bloody event in contemporary Iranian history. It has forced us to draw the following...conclusions: ...that the unarmed struggle – however popular and widespread – cannot possibly succeed against such a bloodthirsty regime. The only way to bring down this detestable regime is through a concerted armed struggle.”⁷⁵⁸

Consequently, such spirited activists were baptized in the blood of the 1963 Uprising and went on to eventually establish guerrilla groups that fought an earth-shattering guerrilla war with the Shah in the 1970s. Their war demonstrated to a population that however high-powered the Shah’s military may have been—especially in terms of perception—it was not invincible. In doing so, their bold attacks helped foster the belief that revolution was possible, even going so far as to lead the insurrection that precipitated the state’s final collapse on Revolution Day (February 11, 1979).

That is not to say a guerrilla uprising is on Iran’s political horizon in the aftermath of 2009. On the contrary, the circumstances that gave rise to such ferocious groups in the 1970s are wholly absent today. Rather, the point is that the end of the uprising in 1963 constituted only the beginning of a new kind of struggle for many. For Khomeini, the leader of the 1963 Uprising, it was only the opening salvo in a protracted struggle that culminated more than 15 years later in the revolutionary overthrow of the monarchy. History can indeed be non-linear with the conclusion of one event igniting the start of the next chapter.

Likewise, the defeat that the Green Movement faced on Revolution Day in 2009 may well be the beginning of an entirely new page in Iran’s modern history, one that may

⁷⁵⁸ Translation provided in Abrahamian Ervand. *The Iranian Mojahedin*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989, pp. 85.

well be, but is not limited to, a cyber war—quite possibly the future (if not the present) of nonviolent underground resistance.

There are already numerous examples after Revolution Day that refute the claim that it is “over.” First, many in the Arab world looked to Iran in 2009 as an exemplar for action, as articulated by an Egyptian activist:

“During the Iranian elections, we Egyptians were surprised to find out that Iranian women, who we’ve heard of as being oppressed and covered from top to bottom, have gone to streets demonstrating against the elections, asking for their political rights. Young university students, who we are told are marginalized and oppressed by the Islamic government, are also demonstrating against the system and the Mullah. And so, we were all, without exception, fascinated by the situation in Iran and wanted to support this call for change. At the same time, there was a recurring thought in the media and in people’s minds that, I remember, was clearly articulated by an Iranian activist, living and studying in the USA on CNN. He said: ‘If it happened in Iran, it would happen in Egypt.’ That is exactly what was on our minds, if Iranians could stand up to its extremely oppressive and theocratic government, then we Egyptians can easily break the vicious cycle of our autocratic government. We can do the same. In helping Iranians, we were helping our dream for a democratic nation to come true, we were helping ourselves. We thought that this was the time to garner the attention of the international community to the Middle East to Iran first then to the rest of the countries there that still suffer from oppressive governments.”⁷⁵⁹

She and many of her revolutionary counterparts had a vested interest in seeing the Green Uprising succeed and, consequently, used Google Translate to translate into Persian and post alerts on Twitter pertaining to which embassies in Tehran were offering first aid to injured demonstrators.⁷⁶⁰ After the Iranian government succeeded in crushing the uprising, Egyptians found their inspiration in the inferno of revolution that started in Tunisia two years later and spread like wildfire across the region. Once Tunisia’s

⁷⁵⁹ Dalia Ziada (Egyptian blogger and human rights activist). Interview by Sherine El-Taraboulsi. 18 April, 2010. Accessed 14 July 2015. transcript.

⁷⁶⁰ Ibid.

strongman, Zine El ‘Abidine Ben ‘Ali, fled the country on January 14, 2011, Egyptians and Yemenis quickly mobilized to follow suit. On February 11, 2011, 32 years after Iran’s Revolution Day, Egypt’s dictator was ousted. Three days later, protests caught fire in Libya, Bahrain, and Iran—the first non-Arab country inspired by the Arab Uprisings to revolt. As such, Iranian demonstrators harnessed the energy of their neighbors, and declared, “Mubarak, Ben ‘Ali, now it’s the turn of Seyyed Ali [Khamenei]” (*mubāarak, ben ‘alī, nowbat-i seyzed ‘alī*)⁷⁶¹—prompting the state to place Mousavi, Rahnavard, and Karroubi on indefinite house arrest.

Another example of the movement belying claims that it is “over” can be found in the election of centrist candidate, Hassan Rouhani.⁷⁶² Explicitly, activists gathered in Tehran at night to mark his election win in 2013—a full four years after the June 2009 election turmoil—declaring: “The Green Movement is not dead, it has brought Rouhani to power (*jonbesh-i sabz namordeh, roḥānī ro āvordeh*), “Long live the Green Movement, long live Mousavi” (*jonbesh-i sabz zendeh bād, mūsavī pāyāنده bād*)⁷⁶³,

⁷⁶¹ Mardomak News. “Mubāarak, ben ‘alī, nowbat-i seyzed ‘alī”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 14 February 2011. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/QqmkvTsH1FY>>.

⁷⁶² Worried about disillusionment in the political process after the 2009 post-election crisis, Khamenei beseeched citizens for the first time to vote in the election even if they did not agree with the Islamic Republic: “My first and most important recommendation is participation in the election as the most crucial thing for the country. It is possible that some—for whatever reason—will not support the Islamic Republic but should still want to support their country. Thus, they should go and cast their vote. Khamenei, ‘Ali. “2 rūz māndeh beh entekhābāt – nokāt-i entekhābātī-ye rahbar-i enqelāb”. *leader.ir*. 12 June 2013. <http://farsi.khamenei.ir/package?id=22298&news_id=22904>. What’s more, it can be argued that the state permitted Rouhani to run in an attempt to make amends with the opposition. It is also worth noting that the government learned from the experience of the 2009 election when it loosened restrictions on the Internet in order to facilitate interest in the elections but then had to also contend with activists using online mediums for coordination. In 2013, however, the authorities encouraged voter participation but “throttled” the Internet in order to “preserve calm”—a euphemism meaning to prevent another uprising. See, “Vazīr-i ertebeātāt: dalīl-i oft-i sor‘at-i īnternet dar ayyām-i entekhābāt amniātī būd”. *Tasnim News Agency*. 25 June 2013. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<http://www.tasnimnews.com/Home/Single/85703>>.

⁷⁶³ Kaleme.com Official YouTube Channel. “barādar shahīdam rayeto pas gereftam”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 15 June 2013. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/fGwga1VErN4>>.

“Mousavi, Mousavi, we have retrieved your vote” (*mūsavī, mūsavī, rayeto pas gereftīm*)⁷⁶⁴, “Martyred brother, we have retrieved your vote (*barādar shahīdam rayeto pas gereftam*)⁷⁶⁵—the fulfillment of a promise pledged on the streets four years ago⁷⁶⁶—and demanded the release of political prisoners⁷⁶⁷ and an end to the house arrest of the movement’s leaders.⁷⁶⁸ Likewise, when Rouhani’s foreign minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, returned from negotiations with western powers over Iran’s nuclear program, citizens welcomed his triumphant return after he secured a preliminary deal by greeting him at the airport with slogans that offered condolences to Israel and *Kayhan*, the two critics of the agreement, and invoked the Green Uprising, “O’Husayn, Mir Hussein.”⁷⁶⁹ When the deal was finalized three months later in Vienna on July 14, 2015, activists celebrated on the streets of Iran by chanting: “The next deal shall be about our civil rights” (*tavāfoq-i ba’dī-ye mā hoqūq-i shahrvandī-ye mā*)—more than 5 years after the uprising supposedly “ended.”⁷⁷⁰

The demand for civil rights serves as an important reminder that the history of modern Iran is one in which political movements as far back as the Tobacco Revolt

⁷⁶⁴ Erfan Salehi. “Mūsavī, mūsavī, rayeto pas gereftīm”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 15 June 2013. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/ZGZPqASKxDw>>.

⁷⁶⁵ Kaleme.com Official Youtube Channel. “barādar shahīdam rayeto pas gereftam”.

⁷⁶⁶ Ninashnash864. “Barādar shahīdam rayeto pas migīram”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 17 July 2009. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/O-ha8NrexQA>>.

⁷⁶⁷ Ali adabi. “Jashn-i mardom shab-i 25 khordād dar moḥavateh-ye farhangestān-i honar”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 17 June 2013. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/8zsi8YJzDXU>>.

⁷⁶⁸ Sabzjamehgan. “Mūsavī, mūsavī, parcham-i īrānamo pas gereftam/dar jashn-i pīruzī-ye roḥānī rouhani tehran election june 2013”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 16 June 2013. Accessed 14 July 2015. <https://youtu.be/O7HI_5CrKQs>.

⁷⁶⁹ “Esteqbāl az zarīf dar forudgāh bā sho’ār ‘ya husayn mīr hussein’”. *Kaleme*. 3 April 2015. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<http://www.kaleme.com/1394/01/14/klm-212990/>>.

⁷⁷⁰ khabarnet info. “tavāfoq-i ba’dī-ye mā hoqūq-i shahrvandi-ye ma”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 14 July 2015. Accessed 14 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/iDnoGcMTe04>>. Although American politicians credit the debilitating sanctions for prompting Iran’s participation in the negotiation process, it should also be mentioned that the government, which has a long history dealing with sanctions, was undoubtedly more willing to negotiate because it feared that the economic situation would so deteriorate as to re-ignite the uprising. Thus, the Green Uprising can also be credited for indirectly facilitating a compromise.

(1890-92) and moving through to the Constitutional Revolution (1905-11), Mossadeq's nationalist movement (1951-53), the Iranian Revolution (1978-79), and the Green Uprising (2009)—the latest chapter in this history of resistance—all share an important attribute. Each constitutes a renewed struggle by which the next generation of Iranians rose up against the country's leadership that either refused to establish the rule of law—as with the last Qajar shahs—or operated as if it were above it—as with the Pahlavi dynasty and the Islamic Republic.

IV. Conclusion

The “history from below” or “grassroots history”—the vantage point by which the history of the uprising was chronicled in this work—empowers the reader to see beyond the win-lose binary in order to observe other important and consequential developments, such as the uprising's post-Islamist challenge and its unprecedented discursive attack on the Islamic Republic's symbols and ideology. Such a window allows for a more unpacked reading of the uprising thereby illustrating that the revolt is not over in a way, especially its repercussions and its impact on Islamism in the Islamic Republic of Iran and possibly elsewhere. Indeed, how can the state persist in its current form and argue that it leads by carrying forth Husayn's banner when it killed over 112 unarmed activists throughout the uprising, 8 of which died resisting the powerful state on 'Ashura in 2009?⁷⁷¹ How can the authorities continue to distract their citizenry from internal issues

⁷⁷¹ *Rahesabz* published a complete list of the profiles for all the deceased on the third anniversary of the election. Admittedly, the list cannot encompass the entire death toll as some names have yet to be released. A breakdown of the age and gender of the dead offers a window into the demographics of the uprising. Of the 112 who died in the uprising, 12 were female and 100 male, the youngest of which was 12. 14 were teenagers, 33 were between 21 and 25 years of age, 22 between 26-30, 11 between 31-40, and 7 were 41 years or older. The breakdown does not reflect the percentage of female involvement in the

by invoking the specter of external enemies such as Israel when it was accused on Quds Day 2009 of being as unjust as Israel’s military occupation of the Palestinians?⁷⁷²

This study began by noting the Islamic Republic’s preferred slogan to summarize its reading of the Iranian Revolution: “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic”—signifying how the revolution marched onwards in order to wrest its independence from the United States, its freedom from the tyranny of the Shah, and how the Islamic Republic constitutes the guarantor of both prized ideals. This powerful mantra was given mundane normality when the state emblazoned it on the country’s early 5000 and 10000 rial bank notes whereby an image of Islamic revolutionaries march under such a banner (Figure 5.3).



Figure 5.3. Iranian banknote underscoring “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic”

revolt, especially since they were far less aggressive in engaging offensive security forces, therefore, amassed fewer casualties. The percentage of youth dead, however, does affirm that the youth comprised the bulk of the protesters. What’s more, the number of people dead over the age of 40 illustrates that it was not exclusively a youth movement but a multi-generational one. See “Enteshār-i asāmī-ye 112 tan az jānbākhtegān-i ḥavādeṣ-i b’ad az entekhābāt”. *Rahesabz*. 12 June 2012. Accessed 11 July 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/54490/>>.

⁷⁷² Iran is but one example of governments using external threats to distract from internal issues and justify the state’s encroachment on civil liberties.

Fittingly, this work now concludes with the most potent mantra of the latest chapter in Iran’s storied history of resistance—“Independence, Freedom, Iranian Republic” (*esteqlāl, āzādī, jomhūrī-ye īrānī*)—which Green activists voiced on a number of occasions throughout the uprising,⁷⁷³ and which they relayed in similar form on the country’s bank notes (Figure 5.4).⁷⁷⁴ Money indeed “talks.”



Figure 5.4. The bank note in the back tellingly has a question mark above the “Islamic” in “Islamic Republic of Iran” and has the “Republic” crossed out to emphasize the anti-democratic nature of the system, especially with regards to the outcome of the presidential election—a point affirmed in the other bank note that has “Republic” crossed out in favor of the “dictatorship” handwritten above. To the left is a quote

⁷⁷³ See, for instance, the footage from the protests on November 4, the anniversary of the US embassy seizure, GREENPOWER000. “Esteqlāl āzādī jomhūrī-ye īrānī 13 ābān-i sabz”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 4 November 2009. Accessed 13 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/FLvFaCPYrM>>; or this clip from ‘Ashura: GREENPOWER0. “Tehran dec 27 - esteqlāl āzādī jomhūrī-ye īrānī =6dey”. Online video clip. *YouTube*. 27 December 2009. Accessed 13 July 2015. <<https://youtu.be/tGWrbjQHVtI>>.

⁷⁷⁴ *Rahesabz* innumrated the reasons as to why people were writing slogans on Iran’s currency, of which the fourth point is especially telling as the author argues that it’s a form of “popular media” in which the anonymity of the citizen journalist is guaranteed thereby securing their protection from the state’s ubiquitous crackdown. Nowruzi. N. “9 dalīl barāye eskenās nevīsī”. *Rahesabz*. 21 Jan 2010. Accessed 13 July 2015. <<http://www.rahesabz.net/story/7005/>>.

attributed to the anti-clerical Islamist ideologue, ‘Ali Shari‘ati (d. 1977), noting: “Don’t believe what a government says if that government is the only entity that has the right of expression.”⁷⁷⁵

Just as the state’s favored slogan encapsulated its understanding of the Iranian Revolution, this motto epitomizes the Green Movement’s post-Islamist challenge, stipulating that independence and freedom are not synonymous with an Islamic Republic. Rather, Iran enjoys “independence without freedom”⁷⁷⁶ *because* it is governed by an Islamic Republic, and that a post-Islamist republic—it is so forcefully argued by the uprising—aspires to succeed where Iran’s experiment with Islamism has woefully “failed.”

⁷⁷⁵ This image along with 13 others were posted on *Payvand*. See “Exhibit: Iranian banknotes uprising”. *Payvand*. 16 November 2009. Accessed 13 July 2015. <<http://payvand.com/blog/blog/2009/11/16/exhibit-iranian-banknotes-uprising/>>. That the government even managed to stamp out this innovative tactic illustrates the severity of the crackdown. The central bank announced that it would no longer accept currency with such writing on it thereby preventing such “popular media” from circulating in the first place. See “Neveshteh hāyeh eskenās-hā pāk mīshāvānd”. *Tabnak*. 7 July 2009. Accessed 13 July 2015. <<http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/pages/?cid=79871>>. The government’s measures are probably in response to a public recommendation made by Morteza Talaei in October, 2009. See, “Vākonesh-i ṭalāi beh sho‘ārnevīsī ru-ye eskenās va dīvār”. *Aftab News*. 11 Oct 2009. Accessed 13 July 2015. <<http://aftabnews.ir/vdcbzb9.rhb59piuur.html>>

⁷⁷⁶ To quote the title of R. K. Ramazani’s *Independence without Freedom: Iran’s Foreign Policy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2013).

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