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Oil, labour and revolution in Iran: a social history of labour in the Iranian oil industry, 1973-83

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Introduction

> *Crude oil is such a slow-forming substance it is almost ahistorical, the product of millions of years of sunshine expressed in unoxidized marine plant life. On the other hand, refineries can be seen as particular expressions of the historically specific relations between petroleum and society.*[1]

Oil workers constitute one of the few groups that have occupied a permanent and prominent presence in the history of 20th century Iran. This presence is manifest not only in academic milieus, but also in the popular imaginary of Iran's eventful history, and in works of art. In 1978–79, for instance, Nosratollah Moslemian drew a painting (Figure 1) that depicts oil workers' struggles in the centre of the frame, in the social realist tradition common among leftist Iranian artists of that period. The robust faces and bodies in a homogenous mass in the middle frame invoke the conviction that under the red flag workers will march to victory. The painting, however, also provides the historical background of suffering in the workplace (left frame) and within the community (right frame).[2] On the left, we see oil workers at a production site toiling above pipelines and valves. In the right frame, fragile female bodies mourn over a male corpse.

To invoke the sense that these are three different but related spheres, thin walls separate the workplace, the struggle and the community. All three spheres are enveloped in pipelines against the background of a dark industrial city. The combined effect of this is an image that resembles the hardship of coalmine workers in Émile Zola's novel (1885) that was quite famous in Iran's intellectual milieus.

Although this painting is obviously a work of art, it is also a particular representation of oil workers. This representation, common among leftist organisations, intellectuals, and artists, differs from the one provided by those who supported Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini, who was widely seen as the leader of the revolutionary movement. In this representation, exemplified by

[1] Matthew T. Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 70.

[2] On Moslemian and the paintings of the Iranian Revolutions, see Morteza Assadi and Ahmad Nad'aliyan, "Barresi-ye T'sir-e Iydologi Va Tafakor-e Siyasi Dar Be Kargiri-ye 'Anasor-e Tasviri Dar Asar-e Naqashi-ye Enqelab-e Islami [Study of Ideological Influence and Political Thinking on the Application of Images in the Paintings of the Islamic Revolution]," *Negareh, Scientific Research Journal*, no. 25 (2013/1392).

the poster at the left in Figure 2, workers are part of an undifferentiated Islamic multitude labelled the *mostazafin* (the downtrodden). This view is expressed in the Arabic text at the top of the poster: "He who toils for his family is like the *mujahid* in the way of God." In the Islamist representations, work is valued as a contribution to society and workers' struggle becomes meaningful only under the leadership of Khomeini and is mainly directed against imperialist control over Iran's oil resources.[3]

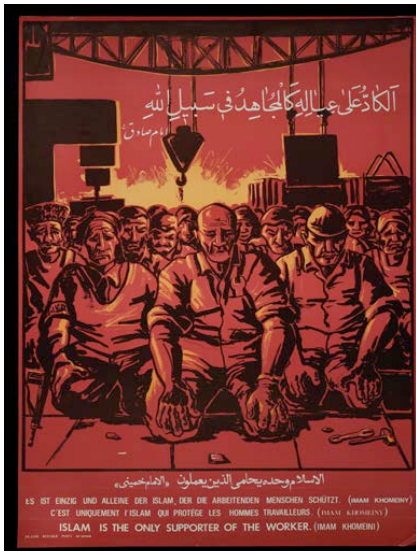
Both the leftist and the Islamist representation of oil workers in the late 1970s are diametrically opposed to the one provided by the state and the oil company in that period. In this representation, oil workers are joyful citizens who work in comfortable conditions and who are well taken care of outside the workplace. They are mainly secular and support the Pahlavi monarchy. As far as they are recognised as workers, they are represented as a "labour aristocracy." This image of the artistrocratic labourer is invoked by the poster at the right in Figure 2, and expressed by the comments below the individual pictures: "Every employee of the Iranian oil industry knows when he goes to work that… his child swims when it is hot in the summer… his child goes to school happily… his home is neat… the necessities of his household can be found in the consumptive cooperative stores."

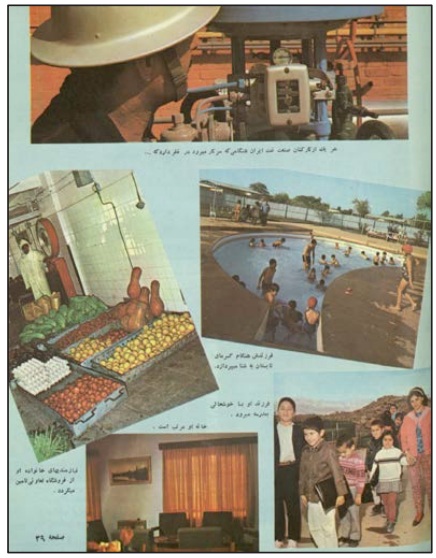
These influential representations are challenged in this study, which presents a more complicated picture. As in the painting described above, this study looks at three spheres: the workplace, the community and labour activism. Its goal is to provide a picture of Iranian oil workers in these areas, which is a daunting task, however, given the following paradox: Iranian oil workers have been always present as abstract and mythical figures in historical narratives, but they have rarely appeared as real human beings in a specific time and space.

[3] This description focuses on the main Islamist current associated with the leadership of Khomeini, as other Islamic inspired political currents, such as the Islamic liberation theology of Ali Shariati and his supporters provides more agency to workers and underlines exploitation in the workplace as well.

Figure 1 "Oil workers' strike," oil painting on canvass (200 x 405 cm) by Nosratollah Moslemian, 1978–79.[4]

Figure 2 Poster on the left: praying workers in a factory, early 1980s. The poster on the right shows a workplace, a swimming pool and shop for oil workers.[5]





[4] Retrieved from http://www.pellemag.com/?p=959 (2 April 2017)
[5] Poster on the left: Middle Eastern Posters. Collection, Box 2, Poster 24 (poster on the left) and Box 4, Poster 198 (poster on the right), Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library, Chicago. Poster on the right: *Nameh-ye Sa'at-e Naft-e Iran*, Tir 1352/June-July 1973, 39.

Cracking oil history with labour

Just as crude oil can be cracked thermically and chemically into dozens of products in refineries, its history has been intellectually processed into various narratives. Some of them have been told from the vantage point of the venture capitalists – mainly European and American men – who searched the bowels of the earth for "black gold" from the mid-19th to early 20th century.[6] These were the "oil men," so vividly depicted in Upton Sinclair's classic novel *Oil!* (1927), which formed the basis for the film *There Will Be Blood* (2007). In Iran, publications such as *Mardan-e Naft* (Oil Men) and the seven volumes of *Modiran-e San'at-e Naft* (Managers of the Oil Industry) are exemplary of this genre.[7]

Other historical narratives have been written from the vantage point of oil companies, including Standard Oil, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell, and Aramco.[8] The three volumes on the British Petroleum (BP) fall within this genre of business history. They start with the creation of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC), which was renamed the Anlgo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) in 1935, and transformed into British Petroleum in 1954. Covering the period from the early 20th century to the early 1970s, these three volumes provide an indispensible history of the oil industry in Iran.[9] Two important Persian sources also recount the activities of APOC, AIOC and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) after its creation in 1951 until the early 1970s.[10]

Yet another corpus has explored the economic aspects of oil, paying particular attention to oil income and oil prices in relation to (inter)national

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[6] See for instance Michael Wallis, *Oil Man: The Story of Frank Phillips and the Birth of Phillips Petroleum* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014); Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007).

[7] Ahmad Rasokhi-Langarudi, *Mardan-e Naft: Shakhsiyat-Ha-ye Tarikhi-ye Jahan-e Naft [Oil Men: Historical Figures of the World of Oil]* (Tehran: Kavir, 1385/2006). Abbas Torfi's *Modiran-e San'at-e Naft* [Managers of the Oil Industry] was published in seven volumes between 1996 and 2013 by Mardomak publishing house in Ahwaz.

[8] Wayne Henderson and Scott Benjamin, *Standard Oil: The First 125 Years* (Osceola: Motorbooks International, 1996); William E. Hale, Robert H. Davis, and Mike Long, *One Hundred Twenty-Five Years of History* (Irving, Tex.: Exxon Mobil Corp., 2007); Joost Jonker et al., *A History of Royal Dutch Shell*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Scott McMurray, *Energy to the World: The Sotry of Saudi Aramco*, 2 vols. (Houston: Aramco Services Company, 2011); Valérie Marcel and John V. Mitchell, *Oil Titans: National Oil Companies in the Middle East* (London; Baltimore: Chatham House; Brookings Institution Press, 2006).

[9] Ronald W. Ferrier, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: The Developing Years 1901-1932*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); James H. Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: The Anglo-Iranian Years, 1928-54*, 3 vols., vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 1994); James H. Bamberg, *The History of the British Petroleum Company: British Petroleum and Global Oil, 1950-1975: The Challenge of Nationalism*, 3 vols., vol. 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press., 2000).

[10] Mostafa Fateh, *Panjah Sal Naft-e Iran [Fifty Years of Iranian Oil]* (Tehran: Kavosh, 1335/1956); Fo'ad Rouhani, *San'at-e Naft-e Iran: Bist Sal Pas Az Melli Shodan [the Iranian Oil Industry: Twenty Years after Nationalization]* (Tehran: Sherkat-e Sahami-ye Ketabha-ye Jibi, 2536/1977).

economic and political developments.[11] Since the Iranian economist Hossein Mahdavi coined the concept "rentier state" in 1970, hundreds of books and articles have been published on the "oil curse" – oil's supposed ability to hinder democratisation and economic development and to cause civil war.[12] The role of oil in international politics and conflicts has received ample attention as well.[13] Finally, there are those ambitious monographs in which the different vantage points have been brought together to provide a global history of oil.[14]

Although there are multiple narratives about the history of oil, they all have one thing in common, a lacking attention for an essential ingredient, i.e. labour. "Essential," because the production, transportation and consumption of oil (products) is impossible without labour. A number of factors could explain this omission: the relatively small and declining number of workers in the oil industry due to technological innovation during the 20th century; the diminished activist role of oil workers due to the flexibilisation of the labour market; and the spatial isolation of oil and gas fields.[15] Although these factors go some length in providing an explanation, there is a more powerful factor in play.

The neglect of labour stems essentially from an understanding of oil as a magical subterranean substance with an agency of its own. It is perceived as the creator of wealth, political power, conflict, and authoritarian rule. This is, of course, a reified conceptualisation of oil, or as Marx would call it, commodity fetishism *par excellence*. Fetishism refers to the obscuring of the

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[11] Mahmoud Qasemzadeh, *Eqtesad-e Naft-e Iran [Economy of Iranian Oil]* (Tehran: Tehran University 1347/1968); Iraj Zoqi, *Masa'el-e Siyasi Va Eqtesadi-ye Naft-e Iran [Political and Economic Issues of Iranian Oil]* (Tehran: Daneshparvar, 1387/2008). Cyrus Bina, *A Prelude to the Foundation of Political Economy: Oil, War, and Global Polity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[12] Hossein Mahdavi, "The Pattern and Problems of Economic Development in Rentier States: The Case of Iran," in *Studies in the Economic History of the Middle East: From the Rise of Islam to the Present Day*, ed. Michael Cook (London, New York,: Oxford U.P., 1970); Michael Ross, *The Oil Curse: How Petroleum Wealth Shapes the Development of Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[13] Michael T. Klare, *Resource Wars: The New Landscape of Global Conflict*, 1st ed. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001); Peter R. Odell, *Oil and World Power*, 8th ed., Pelican Books (Harmondsworth and New York: Penguin Books, 1986); James Marriott and Mika Minio-Paluello, *The Oil Road: Journeys from the Caspian Sea to the City of London* (London; New York: Verso, 2012); Marian Kent, *Moguls and Mandarins: Oil, Imperialism and the Middle East in British Foreign Policy 1900-1940* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2013); L. Fischer, *Oil Imperialism: The International Struggle for Petroleum* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016). Greg Muttitt, *Fuel on the Fire: Oil and Politics in Occupied Iraq* (London: The Bodley Head, 2011).

[14] Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991); Brian Black, *Crude Reality: Petroleum in World History* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012). Matthew Yeomans, *Oil: Anatomy of an Industry* (New York: The New Press, 2010); Gavin Bridge and Philippe Le Billon, *Oil* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2013).

[15] Kaveh Ehsani, "Disappearing the Workers: How Labor in the Oil Complex Has Been Made Invisible," in *Working for Oil: Comparative Social Histories of Labor in the Global Oil Industry*, ed. Touraj Atabaki, Elisabetta Bini, and Kaveh Ehsani (Palgrave MacMillan, 2018).

social relations of production within which commodities are produced, and hence "appear as the natural properties of things in society."[16] Although all commodities are fetishized within capitalist relations of production, the magical power attributed to them varies in degree for various reasons. In the case of oil, there is a gargantuan gap between its immense impact on politics, economics, society and culture in the 20th century and its pervasive influence on the everyday life of the entire world population on the one hand, and the size of the industry and its workforce on the other hand. As Ryszard Kapuscinski wrote on 1970s Iran:

> Oil creates the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free… The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident… In this sense oil is a fairy tale and, like every fairy tale, a bit of a lie.[17]

Oil has created this "illusion", because it has become, more than any other commodity, a constituent part of modern capitalism, to an extent that we can speak of "petrocapitalism" and "oil modernity." In fact, the relationship between oil and capitalism has been mutually constitutive. To begin with oil, its use value, just as that of any other commodity, is defined historically. As Mathew Huber points out, oil's "material capacities were harnessed as useful in many different ways in different historical contexts (e.g. ship calking the ancient Middle East, lamp oil in China, illumination in late nineteenth century)."[18] It was only after the invention of the kerosene lamp in mid-19th century and the invention of the technology to extract oil in commercial amounts and to break it down in various products to be used in industry and transportation means that oil's biophysical capacities could be applied in new, revolutionary ways.

Approaching the oil-capitalism symbiosis from the other end, we can observe that capital accumulation has been historically entangled with fossil energy sources – coal in the 19th century, and increasingly oil and gas in the 20th century.[19] "Petrocapitalism" has been used to conceptualize this process in two different ways. "In its initial usage," Huber explains, "petrocapitalism referred to specific forms of accumulation tied up with the extraction of oil." A second approach is concerned with the embeddedness of oil in the reproduction

[16] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Harmondsworth; London: Penguin Books; New Left Review, 1976), 1005.
[17] Ryszard Kapuscinski, *Shah of Shahs* (London: Penguin Books, 2006 [1982]), 35.
[18] Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital*, 5. For an extensive history of the use of oil in the pre-capitalist period, see Gordon A. Purdy, *Petroleum: Prehistoric to Petrochemicals* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1958).
[19] Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London; New York: Verso, 2016).

of industrial societies and investigates "wider relations between capitalism and oil *consumption*."[20]

These two approaches lead to different strategies of demystifying oil. The goal of the first approach is to lay bare the social relations behind oil by looking into the process of production as oil flows from the wells into pipelines, arriving in refineries and petrochemical complexes, following its route into again pipelines, tanks, ports, distribution centres and gas stations. The second approach involves the social relations in which the consumption of oil is embedded and hence focuses on the lived practices and cultural meanings through which oil has come to be imagined as useful and inseparable from modern life.[21] Both approaches are not exclusive, of course, but feed into each other when the first enters the realm of social reproduction and the second builds on oil's material production.

Although the latter approach has emerged much more recently, only in the last decade or so, it has yielded an impressive body of literature around the idea of energy humanities that study the entanglement of energy resources, particularly oil, with everyday life cultural practices and meanings, and the arts.[22] However, the number of publications that articulate the role of labour in the production of oil is relatively small. Some early publications were centred solely on oil workers' official trade unions or, more broadly, around their workplace and political activism.[23]

It is only recently that a number of scholars have started to pay more attention to the role and agency of oil workers in a broad context that includes their workplace, urban environment, families, social policies, politics and labour organisations.[24] For instance, while Gavin Bridge and Philippe Le

[20] Matthew T. Huber, "Petrocapitalism," in *International Encyclopedia of Geography: People, the Earth, Environment and Technology*, ed. Noel Castree, et al. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), 5008.
[21] Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital*, 5.
[22] Imre Szeman and Dominic Boyer, eds., *Energy Humanities: An Anthology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2017); Stephanie LeMenager, *Living Oil: Petroleum Culture in the American Century* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press); Sheena Wilson, Adam Carlson, and Imre Szeman, eds., *Petrocultures: Oil, Politics, Culture* (Montreal & Kingston; London; Chigaco: McGuill-Queen's University Press); Ross Barrett and Daniel Worden, *Oil Culture* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); John Urry, *Societies Beyond Oil: Oil Dregs and Social Futures* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2013); Huber, *Lifeblood: Oil, Freedom, and the Forces of Capital*.
[23] Harvey O'Connor, *History of Oil Workers International Union (CIO)* (Denver, Colo.: Oil Workers International Union (CIO), 1950); Petter Nore and Terisa Turner, *Oil and Class Struggle* (London: Zed Press, 1980); Ray Davidson, *Challenging the Giants: A History of Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union* (Denver, Colo.: Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers International Union, 1988); Jimi O. Adesina, "Worker Consciousness and Shopfloor Struggles: A Case Study of Nigerian Refinery Workers," *Labour, Capital and Society* 22, no. 2 (1989).
[24] Myrna I. Santiago, *The Ecology of Oil: Environment, Labor, and the Mexican Revolution, 1900-1938* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Miguel Tinker Salas, *The Enduring Legacy: Oil, Culture, and Society in Venezuela* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2009). Robert Vitalis, *America's Kingdom: Mythmaking on the Saudi Oil Frontier* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford

Billon had very little to say about oil workers in the first edition of *Oil*, they included an entire chapter on the conditions of oil workers in the second edition that appeared in 2017.[25] Nevertheless, the role and agency of oil workers has remained marginal in many of the oil narratives.

Thematic focus and periodisation

Taking a novel stance, this thesis researches the history of oil in Iran through the vantage point of labour and opens up new perspectives on oil workers as a social class, and on the social and political developments of the 1973–83 period. Historians of Iran and similar countries have always been intrigued by the rapid and extreme transformations during the 20th century, usually referred to as "modernisation," which pose a number of questions: How did the rapid social, cultural, economic and political transformations in these countries change the lives of ordinary people, as individuals and as groups? How did they react to, cope with and resist these changes? The extreme character of the 1973–83 period makes these questions particularly relevant to this thesis. As we will see in Chaper 1, the 1970s began as a decade in which political stability, economic growth and the expansion of secular, "modern" culture seemed to be its future. The decade ended however, with a revolution that was followed by war, economic crisis and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. The oil industry, which stood at the heart of this "modernization" project, provides an excellent setting to research these aspects.

First, this thesis explores the lives of oil workers in the spheres of production and reproduction, their lived experiences, mentalities and cultures, and finally their relations to the state and the oil industry. It therefore provides essential insights that are largely missing from the literature on the social history of Iran in the 1970s. These include detailed descriptions and analyses of oil workers' numbers (size of the workforce), income, their distinctions and solidarities, their way of recruitment and training, their position on the labour market, and the concrete practices of their work and the features of their workplace. The thesis also looks beyond the workplace, into the sphere of reproduction, examining workers' leisure time and family structure, housing, healthcare, religion, and participation in political networks and activities. These insights lead to the thesis' first proposition: the 1970s were a crucial period for

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University Press, 2007); Bobby D. Weaver, *Oilfield Trash: Life and Labor in the Oil Patch*, 1st ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2010). Timothy Mitchell, *Carbon Democracy : Political Power in the Age of Oil* (London: Verso, 2011).

[25] Bridge and Le Billon, *Oil*.

Iran's social structures due to the process of class re-formation, to which I will return shortly.

Secondly, writing the history of oil workers enables us to arrive at a better understanding of the main problem of the 1970s: the Iranian Revolution. The thesis provides a detailed account of the networks and ideologies of oil workers, their activism and role in the revolution. This leads to the second main proposition of the thesis: the oil workers' strikes during the revolution are more central to the outcome of the revolution than the existing historiography acknowledges.

The period of this thesis, the decade between 1973 and 1983, was not chosen arbitrarily or for reasons of practicality. [26] Periodisation is an organisational principle of any historical work that needs justification by demonstrating that the act of "cutting" in a chain of events has been done for relevant reasons related to change and continuity, involving a development that can be viewed as a "milestone" or a moment that represents a "watershed."[27] Any periodisation is based on a criterion that emerges out of the overall theoretical or ontological approach applied by historians. As we will see below, major political events have been the core criterion in the historiography of Iran due to a state-centric approach. Given the social history approach of this thesis, the periodisation criterion applied here is related to the changes in the social aspects of the workforce in the oil industry. Political events are of interest if and when they have led to or followed from these changes, as is indeed the case in the periodisation applied here.

Thus, the starting point of 1973–74 is not so much interesting for the changes made to the legal status of Iran's oil resources in relation to the international oil companies. As we will see in Chapter 1, the size and

[26] This thesis is written as part of the project *One Hundred Years of Social History of Labour in the Iranian Oil Industry* based at the International Institute of Social History. While other publications resulting from this project have covered the period from the discovery of oil in Iran in 1908 to 1973, when oil was practically nationalized, this study looks at the period between 1973 to 1983. Robabeh Motaghedi, "The Impact of the Oil Industry on Chaing of the Subaltern Social Life in Southern Iranian Oilfields, 1908-1932" (PhD, Alzahra University, 2013). Touraj Atabaki, "From 'Amaleh (Labor) to Kargar (Worker): Recruitment, Work Discipline and Making of the Working Class in the Persian/Iranian Oil Industry," *International Labor and Working-Class History* 84, no. Special Issue -1 (2013); Touraj Atabaki, "Far from Home, but at Home: Indian Migrant Workers in the Iranian Oil Industry," *Studies in History* 31, no. 1 (2015); Kaveh Ehsani, "The Social History of Labor in the Iranian Oil Industry: The Built Environment and the Making of the Industrial Working Class (1908-1941)" (PhD diss., Leiden University, 2014); Maral Jefroudi, ""If I Deserve It, It Should Be Paid to Me": A Social History of Labour in the Iranian Oil Industry, 1951-1973" (PhD, Leiden University, 2017). Omid Maljoo is another scholar who has contributed to the history of oil workers in Iran. See for instance, Omid Maljoo, "Eqtesad-e Siyasi-ye Niru-ye Kar Dar San'at Dar Iran-e Pas Az Jang [the Political Economy of the Workforce in the Oil Industry after the War]," (1391/2012), http://www.ofros.com/maghale/maljoo_oillabor.pdf.

[27] Agnes Heller, *A Theory of History* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), 150-54. For an excellent wide ranging discussion of the problem of periodisation, see Jacques Le Goff, *Must We Divide History into Periods?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

composition of the workforce in the Iranian oil industry altered significantly in the following years; this trend was paralleled by new cultural and political affiliations among the oil workers. Studying the working and living conditions of oil workers and their agency is important in its own merits, but it also opens up new perspectives on the oil industry and its elites, the state and its policies and the socio-economic transformations that were taking place in the 1970s.

The period under consideration includes a major political event, the Iranian Revolution, which is studied through the vantage point of the oil workers. This thesis, therefore, studies oil workers' participation in the revolution and attempts to explain how that participation was affected by the social, cultural and ideological transformations among oil workers during the 1970s. In turn the revolutionary upheaval created important changes that opened up the possibility for an alternative organisation at the workplace level. This window of possibility closed as independent oil workers organisations disappeared during 1979–82, partly through repression and partly due to the effects of the Iran-Iraq war.

Oil workers are the main protagonists of this study, but they are situated in their triangular relationship with the oil industry, which includes a number of companies, and the state. When referring to *oil workers*, this thesis adopts a broad category that not only includes those involved in the direct production of oil along the vast network of production that runs from the rigs to pipelines, pumping stations, refineries and petrochemical complexes, but also those workers involved indirectly in activities that made possible the production and consumption of oil. These activities include maintenance and repair, transport, provision of healthcare, education, training, housing and leisure. The workers discussed in this thesis are not limited to drillers, operators, welders and electricians, but also nurses, carpenters, teachers, and typists. These direct and indirect activities were divided in the "basic" and "non-basic" divisions of the oil industry.

Oil industry refers to the institutions and firms involved in the production, transport, refining and distribution of oil and gas, regardless of their legal status. The oil industry thus includes the production, administration and ancillary facilities of NIOC, but also those belonging to the foreign companies. The majority of the oil industry is situated in the south-eastern part of Iran, in the Khuzestan province. Although this thesis focuses on the oil industry as the locus of production, it looks beyond its confines into the reproductive sphere of the household, the ubran space (company town), and the national and international processes in which oil workers' working and living experiences are embedded. *Labour relations* are an important aspect of these experiences that are studies as part of oil workers' relationship with the

company and the state. The living and working conditions of oil workers are also studied in relation to long-term processes like the uneven and combined development of capitalism in Iran, class formation, and contentious politics – concepts to which I will return to in the theoretical discussion.

Delving into the social history of labour in the Iranian oil industry, this thesis addresses a number of questions: What were the working and living conditions and experiences of oil workers in 1973–83? How did class, ethnicity, gender, culture and religion shape these experiences? In which ways did the relationship between oil workers, the oil company and the state change and why? Which forms for formal and informal labour activism did oil workers engage with? Did they participate in contentious politics outside the workplace? What was their role during the revolutionary events and how did they shape the outcome of those events? How were oil workers affected by the Iran-Iraq war? As we will see in the relevant chapters, the answer to each of these questions throws up new questions of a more analytical nature that are addressed in those chapters.

Historiographical context and relevance

By addressing these questions, this study makes four important contributions to the literature. The first contribution is the de-reification of the history of oil, which I have already discussed above under the heading "Cracking oil history with labour." To paraphrase E. P. Thompson, this thesis is a contribution to saving oil workers "from the enormous condescension of posterity.[28] The three other contributions are made to the literature on the historiography of the Pahlavi era, on labour history, and on the Iranian Revolution.

Social history of the Pahlavi era

Second, this study contributes to the social history of the Pahlavi era in general and particularly in the 1970s. The social transformations of the 1970s in Iran have received scant attention from historians, sociologists and political scientists alike. One reason is quite simple; this period stands in the shadow of two towering political events that have been the subject of dozens of publications. The 1970s is preceded by the so-called White Revolution, the reform program initiated by Mohammad Reza Shah in the early 1960s, and it is

[28] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991 [1963]), 13.

followed by the revolutionary overthrow of his regime in 1979, immediately followed by the Iran-Iraq war (1980–88). As a result, the historiography of the 1970s is quite political. The social transformations resulting from the White Revolution and feeding into the revolution have been studied in a number of publications, but these remain often at a level of generalisation.[29]

This reflects the more general weakness of the field of social history due to what Cyrus Schayegh calls the "methodological statism" in much of the historiography of the Pahlavi era (1926–78).[30] The important role of the state in that period led many historians "to see like a state."[31] It is useful here to quote in length Schayegh's objection:

> [t]hinking in a methodological statist mould has drawbacks that keep us from seeing a broader picture of Iran and from assigning the state a more realistic place in it. First, by replicating the Pahlavi shahs' and their elite bureaucrats' and technocrats' top-down perspective, it turns the state and, more broadly, politics, into the ultimate reference point of studies focusing not only on politics but also on societal action, the economy, and culture. Second, it reifies: the image of a detached state is a caricature of the complex practice of governing. We barely understand how societal actions forced the Pahlavi state to react or how societal reactions to policies subjected the latter to unintended changes once off the drawing board. In both cases, policymakers, regular government employees, and ordinary Iranians interacted more intensely than we commonly assume. Finally, we know very little about the diverse and intertwined social, cultural, economic, and political facets of everyday life. Whatever is ostensibly immaterial to the state-driven metanarrative of Pahlavi history – particular aspects of life, such as microhistories of specific villages, neighbourhoods, public spaces, and so forth – goes unnoticed and is left to anthropologists, almost all of whom stopped working on the Pahlavi period after1979.[32]

Although I concur with these objections, there are three points to be

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[29] Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); Nikki R. Keddie and Yann Richard, *Modern Iran : Roots and Results of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003).

[30] Cyrus Schayegh, ""Seeing Like a State": An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42, no. 1 (2010).

[31] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State : How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, Yale Agrarian Studies (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998).

[32] Schayegh, ""Seeing Like a State": An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran," 38. Whilst I endorse these points, I with Nikki Keddie's comment that Schayegh is overstating the extent of "methodological statism," partly by looking too much to the works of political scientists, and not enough to those by historians, anthropologists, sociologist and scholars of cultural studies. See Nikki R. Keddie, "Comment on Cyrus Schayegh, "'Seeing Like a State': An Essay on the Historiography of Modern Iran" (Ijmes 42 [2010]: 37-61)," ibid., no. 3. Moreover, the situation has improved somewhat in the last decade. See, for instance Touraj Atabaki, ed. *Iran in the 20th Century: Historiography and Political Culture* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris in association with the Iran Heritage Foundaton, 2009); Z. Pamela Karimi, *Domesticity and Consumer Culture in Iran : Interior Revolutions of the Modern Era* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); H. E. Chehabi, Peyman Jafari, and Maral Jefroudi, *Iran in the Middle East: Transnational Encounters and Social History* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2015).

made here, which help to specify three corresponding contributions of this study to the historiography of the Pahlavi era. First, "seeing like a state" hasn't prevented historians from analysing concrete state institutions, as Stephanie Cronin has pointed out, using the example of the Iranian army.[33] Although the focus of this study is on oil workers and not NIOC, this study provides essential insights into NIOC as well, referring to its internal organisation, bureaucracy, culture and relationship with the Shah.

Secondly the concrete state-society relations need to be examined, as Schayegh suggests, which I hope to do by looking to the relationship between the oil industry and the oil workers' communities. This contribution of the thesis is connected to the more general approach of this thesis, i.e. the combination of "history from below" and "history from above," that is inserting social history into political analysis, and inserting political analysis into social history. As Ira Katznelson has argued, "The fracture dividing social from political history not only made analyses of the domain between state and civil society impossible but impaired our understanding of the mutual constitution of institutions and culture, organisation and ideology."[34]

Thirdly, the problem in the historiography of the Pahlavi era is not so much or not merely "methodological statism," but a lack of empirical studies on delineated subjects rather than generalist approaches to "state," "society," or "class." If this study manages to fill a part of this lacuna by providing an empirical study in a concrete setting, then it will have made a valuable contribution to the social history of the Pahlavi era and, as I will explain below, to that of the Iranian Revolution.

Labour history

The third general contribution of this study concerns the historiography of labour in Iran. The urgency to develop this field becomes tangible when it is explored in the context of the evolution of labour history in general. As succinctly defined by Marcel van der Linden, labour history in a broad sense "comprises the history of the working classes at large, including the history of family life, demography, everyday culture, leisure activities, housing, religion, migration, and so on."[35] Until the 1960s, the field of labour history was dominated by a narrow approach on workplace struggles and organised labour

[33] Stephanie Cronin, "Writing the History of Modern Iran: A Comment on Approaches and Sources," *Iran* 36(1998).
[34] Ira Katznelson, "The Bourgeois Dimension, a Provocation About Institutions, Politics, and the Future of Labor History," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 46 (1994): 18.
[35] Marcel van der Linden, "Labor History," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (2nd Edition)*, ed. James D Wright (Oxford: Elsevier, 2015), 169.

(trade unions and political parties).[36] A "new labour history" emerged in the 1960s as its thematic scope broadened.

This development is associated with the publication of E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* in 1963, which challenged "old" labour history's essentialist, teleological and determinist approach through the inclusion of culture and everyday life; it provided concepts, themes and theoretical insights that moved social history into new directions.[37] The following two decades became, in the words of Eric Hobsbawm, "the golden age of labour history."[38] In this period, class functioned as the organizing category of studies in labour history, and Marxism provided some theoretical coherence to the field.[39] As McIlroy et al. have noticed, this Marxism was not only diverse, but also quite different from the dogmatic caricature often depicted of it.[40] They quote Thompson on Marxist historians' encounter with "an evidence which is not infinitely malleable or subject to arbitrary manipulation… there is a real and significant sense in which the facts are 'there'' and that they are determining, even though the questions which may be posed are various and will elucidate various replies," commenting that "[t]his 'empirical Marxism' provided common ground between Marxists and historians of different persuasions."[41]

In the late 1980s, however, the momentum of labour history was lost and it was replaced by a sense of crisis due to a number of criticisms that pushed labour historians in different directions.[42] Some argued that the old determinist approach had not been dismissed in "new labour history," it had been "turned upside down" by the new generation of labour historians' use of an "epistemology of absence":

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[36] Marcel van der Linden and Lex Heerma van Voss, "Introduction," in *Class and Other Identities : Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labor History*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel Van der Linden (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), 1-2. For an extensive overview of the early labour historiography, see Jan Lucassen, "Writing Global Labour History C. 1800-1940: A Historiography of Concepts, Periods and Geographical Scope," in *Global Labour History: A State of the Art*, ed. Jan Lucassen (Bern, Switzerland; New York: Peter Lang, 2006).

[37] Harvey J. Kaye and Keith McClelland, *E.P. Thompson: Critical Perspectives* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990); Bryan D. Palmer, *E.P. Thompson: Objections and Oppositions* (London: Verso, 1994).

[38] Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), x.

[39] John McIlroy, Alan Campbell, and Joan Allen, "Introduction - Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives," in *Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Joan Allen, Alan Campbell, and John McIlroy (Pontypool, Wales: Merlin, 2010), 8.

[40] See for instance Neville Kirk, *Social Class and Marxism: Defences and Challenges* (Aldershot; Brookfield, Vt.: Ashgate, 1996).

[41] McIlroy, Campbell, and Allen, "Introduction - Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives," 9.

[42] The sense of crisis was visible in the pages of various labour history journals. In April 1993, for instance, the International Review of Social History published a special supplement around the question "The end of labour history?" Given the iconic stance of Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class*, it shouldn't come as a surprise that many of the critiques were developed in response to it.

> Rather than seeking to explain the presence of radically varying dispositions and practices, [labour historians] have concentrated disproportionately on explaining the absence of an expected outcome, namely the emergence of a revolutionary class consciousness among the Western working class.[43]

Although teleological and structuralist approaches were indeed present after the 1960s as well, and many labour historians continued to view the social-economic paradigm as highly relevant, I concur with McIlroy et al. that "the assertion that labour historians as a group, or labour history as a category, assumed that values, consciousness or politics were predetermined by structure" is a highly exaggerated.[44]

Eurocentrism was another, closely related objection to "old" labour history as it took for granted the labour relations, class consciousness and activism among industrial workers in Europe and treated it as a universal standard. From this perspective, other forms needed explanation as a deviation. Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Studies were important currents that voiced these criticisms and formulated alternatives.

As we will see later, my own approach tries to avoid both teleology and the elevation of certain forms of class consciousness and activism into a "standard" for non-European regions. Class based forms of consciousness, solidarity and activism are not approached as pre-determined, but as historical possibilities, the presence and absence of which needs explanation. This approach is theoretically informed by the notion that capitalist development is uneven and combined, creating social, economic, political and cultural hybrid realities that are both universal and particular at the same time.

Another critique was directed against the class-centred approach of labour history, which ignored gender, ethnicity, religion and nation as identities that shape the lived experiences, solidarities and activism of workers.[45] Whilst some labour historians acknowledged the relative neglect of multiple identities and their interactions, and attempted to include them in their understanding of the past, others took a different direction that led to an ontological challenge to labour history's organizing concept: class. On the one hand, gender and ethnic

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[43] Margaret Ramsay Somers, "Workers of the World, Compare!," review of Working-Class Formation: Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States., Ira Katznelson, Aristide Zolberg, *Contemporary Sociology* 18, no. 3 (1989): 325. Quoted in van der Linden and Heerma van Voss, "Introduction," 15.

[44] McIlroy, Campbell, and Allen, "Introduction - Histories of Labour: National and International Perspectives," 11.

[45] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). Eileen Yeo, "Gender in Labour and Working-Class History," in *Class and Other Identities: Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of Labour History*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2002).

identities were given primacy over class, or alternatively, class was at best treated as just one among multiple identities. On the other hand, some historians took the "linguistic turn" and argued that class was constructed through discursive processes and targeted the historical materialist perspective that had informed the works of a number of important historians, including E. P. Thompson.[46]

Rooted in the theoretical approach of post-structuralism, the "linguistic turn" made two claims. First, it argued against the possibility of objective knowledge, the existence of social structures and forces, leading some to proclaim "the end of social history."[47] Secondly, they argued that labour history and social history in general had given primacy to the "social" instead of acknowledging the determinant role of the "political," which is not rooted in social-economic structures but in language. According to Gareth Stedman Jones, "It was not consciousness (or ideology) that produced politics, but politics that produced consciousness."[48] This was a break with the Thompsonian notion that experience is a mediator between social being and class consciousness, even if that experience is processed culturally, because language is conceived not as exterior to experience, but as constitutive to it.[49]

The post-modernist challenge to labour history did not transform the field as dramatically as one would have expected looking at the heat and fury produced during the debates of those years. Even some of those who drifted away from social history have come to take a more cautious approach. William Sewell, for instance, writes:

> I have increasingly come to worry that the triumph of cultural history over social history has perhaps been too easy – that social-historical methodologies of considerable power have been given up without much resistance and that important

[46] As Kirk has correctly pointed out, however, their critique targeting the alleged "social determinism" of historical materialists was based on a caricature, which could have perhaps applied to some works from the early 20th century, but which ignored a large number of studies that "rejected simple overarching models of development and linear teleologies (whether of class or politics) in favor of complexity, contextualisation, and patterned process in the midst of seeming chaos." Neville Kirk, "Decline and Fall, Resilience and Regeneration: A Review Essay on Social Class," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 57 (2000): 19.

[47] Patrick Joyce, "The End of Social History?," *Social History* 20, no. 1 (1995).

[48] Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 19.

[49] Bryan D. Palmer has noted, however, that aspects of Thompon's reading of experience opened the way for post-structuralist interpretations. Bryan D. Palmer, *Descent into Discourse: The Reification of Language and the Writing of Social History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 210. For other critiques of the "linguistic turn" in labour history see Neville Kirk, "History, Language, Ideas and Postmodernism - a Materialist View," *Social History* 19, no. 2 (1994); John Belchem and Neville Kirk, *Languages of Labour* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1997); David McNally, *Bodies of Meaning: Studies on Language, Labor, and Liberation* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001); Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, *The Future of Class in History: What's Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007).

> concepts, especially the fundamental social-historical notion of social structure, have been abandoned almost without argument.[50]

However, the critical debates of the 1980s and 1990s have made many labour historians more sensitive to gender, ethnicity, race, religion and nation and incorporated them into their studies.[51] Almost two decades after the "linguistic turn," Jürgen Kocka wrote that it is still correct "to study the political ambitions, activities and institutions in relation to economic, social and cultural moments, that is, not in isolation and absolutely… But perhaps we should be prepared to rethink the relationship, to be more open to the possibility that the political has greater autonomy and impact."[52]

The challenge to understand class in its complex relationship with other identities calls for historically specific studies that look at their interactions in the process of class formation. This thesis aspires to be one of them, looking at class and its concrete interaction with ethnic, religious, national and gender identities, although the latter aspect needs more research than could be undertaken in this study. Due attention is also given to a source of identity that has been often neglected in labour history – generational difference.[53]

Most importantly, this study pays close attention to politics and the state, not only because of the nature of the period under examination. Reacting against the narrow institutional focus of labour history, many labour historians turned away from politics in their writings in the 1960s and 1970s, prompting two eminent historians of that generation to ask: "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?"[54] The social history approach taken in this thesis will not be guilty of that charge.

Despite a sense of disorientation in the 1990s, labour history has diversified thematically and theoretically, with methodological nationalism and Eurocentrism giving rise to the concept of "global labour history."[55] The

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[50] William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 49.

[51] And many of the debates continue in new forms. See for instance the recent debates around "intersectionality", a theory for some and a heuristic device for others. Jana Tschurenev, "Intersectionality, Feminist Theory, and Global History," in *Intersectionality Und Kritik: Neue Perspektiven Für Alte Fragen*, ed. Vera Kallenberg, Jennifer Meyer, and Johanna M. Müller (Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, 2013); David McNally, "Intersections and Dialectics: Critical Reconstructions in Social Reproduction Theory," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017).

[52] Jürgen Kocka, "New Trends in Labour Movement Historiography: A German Perspective," in *Class and Other Identities : Gender, Religion and Ethnicity in the Writing of European Labor History*, ed. Lex Heerma van Voss and Marcel van der Linden (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002), 49.

[53] Aad Blok, *Generations in Labour History: Papers Presented to the Sixth British-Dutch Conference on Labour History, Oxford 1988* (Amsterdam: Stichting beheer IISG, 1989).

[54] Geoff Eley and Keith Nield, "Why Does Social History Ignore Politics?," *Social History* 5, no. 2 (1980).

[55] Marcel van der Linden, Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen and the International Institute of Social History have played a particularly prominent role in this regard. Marcel van der Linden and Jan

emergence of "global labour history" can be viewed as a further development within the "spatial turn" in history, which increased the sensitivity to the dynamics of space, and the processes, interconnections and scales – from the local to the global – that are involved in it. In labour history, this approach guided the historian's gaze beyond the workplace to the places and communities in which workers lived.[56]

The global spread of labour history has been very uneven, however. Until the 1960s, writes Zachary Lockman, "the scholarly literature on workers and working classes in the Middle East was… distinguished mainly by its sparsity. Orientalism as it was practiced as a scholarly discipline in Western Europe and the United States did not regard class as a relevant or meaningful analytical category in Muslim lands." Western scholars, who did write about class, were interested in the middle class "as the prime bearer of modernity." While scholars in the Soviet Union produced some valuable work on the history of the working classes in the Middle East, "it was in general marred by the need of Soviet-block scholars to conform to Stalinist dogma and to the requirements of Soviet foreign policy."[57]

More studies on labour history in the Middle East started to appear in the 1970s and 1980s, but many of them kept an institutional approach.[58] In the 1990s, however, a number of historians took a distance from reductionist and institutional approaches, which was expressed by the publication of *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories and Historiographies*.[59] This volume was heavily influenced by the "linguistic

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Lucassen, *Prolegomena for a Global Labour History* (Amsterdam: International Institute of Social History, 1999). Marcel van der Linden, *Transnational Labour History: Explorations*, Studies in Labour History (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003); Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden; Boston, MA: Brill, 2008); Leo Lucassen, "Working Together: New Directions in Global Labour History," *Journal of Global History* 11, no. 1 (2016).

[56] Talja Blokland and Mike Savage, "Networks, Class and Place," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 2 (2008).

[57] Zachary Lockman, "Labor History in the Middle East and North Africa," in *Global Labour History: A State of the Art*, ed. Jan Lucassen (Bern; New York: Peter Lang, 2008).

[58] Mahmoud Hussein, *Class Conflict in Egypt, 1945-1970* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973). Hanna Batatu, *The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq : A Study of Iraq's Old Landed and Commercial Classes and of Its Communists, Ba'thists, and Free Officers* (London: Saqi Books, 2004 [1978]); Ellis Goldberg, *Tinker, Tailor, and Textile Worker: Class and Politics in Egypt, 1930-1952* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Joel Beinin and Zachary Lockman, *Workers on the Nile: Nationalism, Communism, Islam, and the Egyptian Working Class, 1882-1954* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987); Marsha Pripstein Posusney, *Labor and the State in Egypt: Workers, Unions, and Economic Restructuring* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Donald Quataert, *Workers, Peasants, and Economic Change in the Ottoman Empire, 1730-1914* (Beylerbeyi, Istanbul: Isis Press, 1993).

[59] This edited volume grew out of a workshop convened by Zachary Lockman in 1990 at the Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies. Zachary Lockman, ed. *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

turn," but as its editor later admitted, it was also "affected by the decline in the social and political weight of labor movements and labor-oriented political forces (i.e. the left) across the region." Equally important was the impact of neoliberal restructuring and the rise of Islamist movements as an effective force for articulating and mobilizing popular grievances, leading to the recognition that "the spread of capitalist relations of production and of wage labor, were not in any consistent sense replacing 'precapitalist' forms of consciousness among workers with the identity and vision classical Marxist theory had predicted." [60]

The development of labour history of the Middle East has been quite uneven, however. Its development in Iran has been much slower than in a number of other countries, including Egypt, Turkey, and Algeria. Discussions of the social history of the working classes in modern Iran can be found in a number of sources, mainly in Persian, Russian and English, written from both Marxist and non-Marxist perspectives. Though a few of these take a broad social-economic approach and reference to workers' everyday lives, the overwhelming majority of them have a narrow focus on political organisations (of the Left) and trade unions.[61] These publications closely follow the themes and approaches of the old labour history discussed above. As Atabaki has argued, it wasn't until the publication of Ervand Abrahamian's *Iran Between Two Revolutions* in 1982, that the influence of the new labour history approach inspired by E.P. Thompson became visible in the Iranian context.[62]

Although the book influenced a number of Iranian historians by introducing them to the Thompsonian approach, it came out at a moment of

[60] Lockman, "Labor History in the Middle East and North Africa," 133-34.
[61] See for instance Charles Issawi, *The Economic History of Iran, 1800-1914*, Publications / University of Chicago Center for Middle Eastern Studies (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 1971). Julian Bharier, *Economic Development in Iran, 1900-1970* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1971). Homa Katouzian, *The Political Economy of Modern Iran: Despotism and Pseudo-Modernism, 1926-1979* (New York: New York University Press, 1981). Cosroe Chaquèri, *The Russo-Caucasian Origins of the Iranian Left : Social Democracy in Modern Iran*, Caucasus World (Richmond: Curzon, 2001); Willem Floor, *Labour Unions, Law and Conditions in Iran (1900-1941)*, Occasional Paper Series, (Durham City: Centre for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham, 1985); Habib Ladjevardi, *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1985); Jalil Mahmudi and Nasser Saeedi, *Shoq-e Yek Khize-e Boland. Nokhostin Ettehadiyeha-ye Kargari Dar Iran [the Excitement of a Great Leap. The First Trade Unions in Iran]* (Tehran: Qatreh, 1381/2002). Kaveh Bayat and Majid Tafreshi, eds., *Khaterat-e Dowran-e Separi Shodeh. Khaterat Va Asnad-e Yusuf Eftekhari [Memories of an Elapsed Period. Memoirs and Documents of Yusuf Eftekhari]* (Tehran: Ferdows, 1370/1991). Cosroe Chaquèri, ed. *The Condition of the Working Class in Iran: A Documentary History*, 4 vols. (Tehran: Antidote Publications, 1989). For an excellent overview of the labour historiography in Iran, see Touraj Atabaki, "Iran (Persia)," in *Handbook Global History of Work*, ed. Karin Hofmeester and Marcel van der Linden (Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2018).
[62] In my view, however, Atabaki overestimates the Thompsonian aspect of Abrahamian's *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, which is very much focused on class structure, political parties and trade unions, with marginal reference to family, culture, ideology of workers and more in general their subjectivity. Atabaki, "Iran (Persia)," 191.

political and intellectual rupture as the outcome of the Iranian Revolution – the Islamic Republic of Iran – and the start of the Iran-Iraq war diverted scholars' attentions to the study of religion, intellectual history, political Islam, the war etc. This coincided with the global shift away from the interest in labour history in general. As a result, the number of publications that picked up the challenge to further develop the history of labour in Iran in a new direction has been disappointingly meagre. Notable among them are Asef Bayat's works on the subaltern classes during the Iranian Revolution, and Valentine Moghadam's study on Tabriz industrial workers during the revolution as both include the role of culture and religion in shaping workers' consciousness and action repertoires.[63] In an important article, Moghadam also drew attention to the role of women workers in the history of modern Iran.[64] But only few others have attempted to explore the role of women workers or to provide more broadly a gender perspective on labour.

Asef Bayat also published a significant article in 1999, providing a critical overview of the historiography of labour in Iran, which he categorized according to four approaches.[65] First, the Orientalist and modernisationist approaches that dismiss class as a significant social aspect of the Iranian society and rather focus on the history of personalities, institutions and elites. Second, the "Marxist" or rather Stalinist historiography that provides an abstract, essentialist and teleological understanding of class. Bayat refers to the third category as "social democratic," including in it works such as Ladjevardi's study on labour unions and Abrahamian's *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, as they bring back workers' agency and situate it in a wider field than economic structures but fall short of including social and cultural dimensions.

The final category is the "Islamic historiography," which in its ideological dimension provides two views on workers: one "universal" and the

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[63] Asef Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran: A Third World Experience of Workers' Control* (London: Zed, 1987); Asef Bayat, *Street Politics: Poor People's Movements in Iran* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Valentine M. Moghadam, "Industrial Development, Culture and Working-Class Politics: A Case Study of Tabriz Industrial Workers in the Iranian Revolution," *International Sociology* 2, no. 2 (1987); Valentine M. Moghadam, "Making History, but Not of Their Own Choosing: Workers and the Labour Movement in Iran," in *The Social History of the Modern Middle East*, ed. Ellis Goldberg (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1996).

[64] Valentine M. Moghadam, "Hidden from History? Women Workers in Modern Iran," *Iranian Studies* 33, no. 3-4 (2000). For two other publications on the role of women workers, see Stephanie Cronin on the 1929 strike in the oil industry and Maryam Poya (Elaheh Rostami-Povey) on women workers in the formal and informal sector in the post-revolution era. Stephanie Cronin, "Popular Politics, the New State and the Birth of the Iranian Working Class: The 1929 Abadan Oil Refinery Strike," *Middle Eastern Studies* 46, no. 5 (2010). Maryam Poya, *Women, Work and Islamism: Ideology and Resistance in Iran* (London; New York: ZED Books, 1999).

[65] Asef Bayat, "Historiography, Class and Iranian Workers," in *Workers and Working Classes in the Middle East: Struggles, Histories, Historiographies*, ed. Zachary Lockman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

other "particular." In the former sense, the "human dimension" of workers is underlined to represent them as God's creation. Workers are subsumed in the category of the *mostazafin* (downtrodden), a broad category of subaltern groups that are repressed by the *mostakberin* (opressors). Thus, the element of exploitation is ignored and only repression is recognised. In the "particular" view, workers are presented as a commodity, the exchange of which should be regulated according to Islamic rules (*fiqh*).[66]

In this article, Bayat proposes an alternative conceptualisation of the working class, which is heavily influenced by the "linguistic turn." Class, he argues, is "a historically specific form of consciousness expressed, within the context of a certain (class structure), in a complex of discursive fields and practices. In this perspective, class and class consciousness are viewed to be identical." He agrees with Stedman Jones that "interests do not pre-exist their expression. In other words, class is the same as class consciousness, and class consciousness can be manifested only through language, 'since there is no social reality outside or prior to language.'"[67]

In the last two decades, Touraj Atabaki has given a significant impulse to historical studies on labour in Iran. In 2003, he co-edited with Marcel van der Linden a dossier of the *International Review of Social History* entitled "Twentieth Century Iran: History from Below," which besides his own article on migrant Iranian workers in the Caucasus in the 19th and early 20th century contains two fascinating contributions by Kaveh Ehsani and Willem Floor.[68] In 2010, the aforementioned project on the social history of labour in the Iranian oil industry, including this thesis, was started under the supervision of Atabaki.[69] In his own writings on labour, Atabaki has argued, following Lockman, that both material and discursive processes shape class identity and consciousness, which means that the level of analysis is geared towards self-representation and recognition. The question is how exactly material and discursive processes shape class identity, and what happens when there is a tension between self-representation and recognition, and between these two and the real social and material conditions of workers. This question needs to be addressed empirically and theoretically, if one is to avoid or embrace implicit post-structuralist assumptions.

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[66] Ibid., 181-83.
[67] Ibid., 186.
[68] Kaveh Ehsani, "Social Engineering and the Contradictions of Modernization in Khuzestan's Company Towns: A Look at Abadan and Masjed-Soleyman," *International Review of Social History* 48, no. 03 (2003); Willem Floor, "The Brickworkers of Khatunabad: A Striking Record (1953–1979)," ibid., no. 3.
[69] Although not part of this project, Serhan Afacan's PhD thesis supervised by Touraj Atabaki should be mentioned here as well. Serhan Afacan, "State, Society and Labour in Iran, 1906-1941: A Social History of Iranian Industrialization and Labour with Reference to the Textile Industry" (PhD, Leiden University, 2015).

As this brief overview of the historiography of labour in Iran makes clear, some important steps have been taken, but the underdevelopment of labour history in Iran puts serious limits to historians who wish to work in this field. In many respects, labour history in Iran is in its stage of primitive accumulation of knowledge, sources and methods. It is telling that despite the importance of the oil industry, no serious social history of oil in Iran had appeared until a few years ago. To paraphrase a well-known quote, historians write history, but not on the foundation of their own choosing. Take for example the emergence of global history, which has become possible partly because it can build on the enormous historical knowledge that national histories, with all their problems such as methodological nationalism, have accumulated. [70] Therefore, this thesis is both ambitious and realistic. It is ambitious in its goal to make a serious contribution to the labour history in Iran, but it is also realistic by acknowledging that it will not be able to cover all the debates and themes that have been raised in the labour historiography of the last four decades discussed above.

Historiography of the Iranian Revolution

The fourth historiographical contribution of this thesis is to the literature on the Iranian Revolution. The revolution started with small protests such as petitions and open letters in May–June 1977, developing into mass demonstrations from January 1978 and then in mass strikes from September 1978 to February 1979, when the Pahlavi monarchy was toppled. The revolutionary mobilisations continued more or less until early 1982, when the post-revolutionary state consolidated its power through the ideological and social effect of the Iran-Iraq war, the repression of all oppositional forces, and the partial incorporation of the subaltern classes in the new, populist state-society relations. Unlike labour history, these events have been dealt with in many publications, too many to list here. [71] In what follows, I limit myself to the discussion of four studies in

[70] The African historian Toyin Falola has even argued that global history is in fact nothing more than Eurocentrism and imperialism in disguise, which become evident in the pressure it exerts on historians in the periphery to seize writing national histories in order to produce global histories. Although I think this statement goes too far, as it totally counterposes national and global histories, it does remind us that the nation states as units of analysis have not become obsolete, certainly not for in the peripheral countries, even if historical analysis must go beyond them. Turning global history into an absolute virtue at the expense of national histories could remind one of the discourse around protectionism and liberalisation in economies. Peripheral countries often remind the Western countries that pressure them to break open their markets to global flows of capital and trade that before becoming global powers, Western countries had used protectionism in order to build their economies. Toyin Falola, "Writing and Teaching National History in Africa in an Era of Global History," *Africa Spectrum* 40, no. 3 (2005).

[71] Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Nikki R. Keddie, *Roots of Revolution : An Interpretive History of*

order to provide some background to the revolution and in order to flash out some of the main historiographical debates for this study to engage with. These debates are related to the causes, dynamics and the outcome of the revolution.

According to Abrahamian, "the revolution came because the Shah modernized on the socioeconomic level and thus expanded the ranks of the modern middle class and the industrial working class, but failed to modernize on another level – the political level," creating a widening gap between "the ruling circles and the new social forces…"[72] This analysis echoes Huntington's theory in which a revolutionary crisis emerges when rapid modernisation creates a mismatch between the political capacity of the state and economic transformations.

What triggered the revolution, Abrahamian argues, was a sense of relative deprivation: "The sudden fivefold increase in the oil revenues inflated people's expectations and thereby widened the gap between, on one hand, what the public expected, obtained, and considered feasible."[73] Abrahamian also points to the growing inequality in the context of a dramatic increase of the GDP: the share of the richest 20 percent of the population in the total household expenditures was increased from 51.7 percent in 1959–60 to 55.5 percent in 1973–74. In the same period, the share of the 40 percent poorest part of the population dropped from 13.6 to 11.8 percent.[74]

Abrahamian stresses the importance of the changes in the landscape of political organisations and ideologies in the 1960s and 1970s (the weakening of the Stalinist Tudeh party and the growing influence of Islamism), but ultimately analyses the collective actions of the protests in terms of class mobilisation: "Whereas the traditional middle class" of the bazaari merchants and clerics "provided the opposition with a nationwide organisation, it was the

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Modern Iran (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981); Theda Skocpol, "Rentier State and Shi'a Islam in the Iranian Revolution," *Theory and Society* 11, no. 3 (1982); Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, Studies in Political Economy (New Brunswick ; London: Rutgers University Press, 1989); Mansoor Moaddel, *Class, Politics, and Ideology in the Iranian Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992); John Foran, "The Iranian Revolution of 1977-79: A Challenge for Social Theory," in *A Century of Revolution : Social Movements in Iran*, ed. John Foran (London: UCL Press, 1994); Stephen C. Poulson, *Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Iran : Culture, Ideology, and Mobilizing Frameworks* (Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2005); Phil Marshall, *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Iran* (London: Bookmarks, 1988); Maryam Poya, "Iran 1979: Long Live Revolution!... Long Live Islam?"," in *Revolutionary Rehearsals*, ed. Colin Barker (London: Bookmarks, 1987); Charles Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004); Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1993).

[72] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 427.

[73] Ibid., 446.

[74] Ibid., 448.

modern middle class that sparked off the revolution, fuelled it, and struck the final blows," while "the urban working class was its chief battering ram."[75]

Abrahamian attributes the success of Ayatollah Rouhollah Khomeini's brand of Islamism in drawing the modern middle class into his political orbit to three factors: (1) the refusal of the Shah to negotiate with the secular opposition. (2) Khomeini's denial of desiring a theocracy, while focusing on goals that were shared by the modern middle class activists: the fight against capitalism and imperialism, and for social justice, and (3)[76] the popularity of Ali Shariati's brand of Islamic liberation theology among the young intelligentsia.[77]

Abrahamian attributes Khomeini's success in winning the sympathy of the working class to various factors. First, he used an anti-capitalist rhetoric and promised to bring social justice. Second, low-ranking clerics, unlike leftist activists, were allowed by the shah to work among the urban poor, organizing passion plays, funeral ceremonies, flagellation processions, and neighbourhood prayer meetings. Third, "religion provided the slum population with a much-needed sense of community and social solidarity – something they had lost when they left their tightly knit villages for the anomic atmosphere of the sprawling shanty towns." The fourth factor is the political vacuum created by the shah when he systematically repressed all the secular opposition. [78] Although accurate, Abrahamian's observations on the revolution remain relatively general, particularly when it comes to highlighting the role of the subaltern groups.

Farideh Farhi's comparative study of the Iranian Revolution is a step forward in two aspects. First, she links the uneven development in Iran to the

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[75] Ibid., 533-35.

[76] The commitment to social and economic justice was indeed a pervasive value that wasn't only articulated by Marxist-inspired ideologies, but also by an Islamic discourse that was in part formulated in reaction to Marxism. Atyatollah Mahmud Taleqani worte *Islam va Malekiyat* (Islam and Property) in reaction to the popularity of Marxist ideas among the youth, incorporating the notion of justice while defending the idea of private property. Mahmud Taleqani, *Islam Va Malekiyat [Islam and Property]* (Tehran: Enteshar, 1344/1965). According to Ayatollah Morteza Motahhari, justice has four dimensions in the Quran, "justice in creation, justice in religious laws, ethical justice and social justice," the latter being the most important in order to achieve an ideal Islamic society Morteza Motahhari, *'Adl-e Elahi [Divine Justice]* (Tehran: Entesharat-e Sadra, n.d.). Another popular treatise on a just economy according to Islamic principles was published in 1977 or 1978, Abol-Hassan Bani-Sadr, *Eqtesad-e Towhidi [Harmonious Economy]* (n.p.n.d).

[77] Building on the work of Mohammad Nakhshab, the intellectual leader of the Movement of God Worshiping Socialists that was formed in the 1940s, Shariati blended Islamic, Marxist and Third Worldist ideas and created an influential pro-poor discourse in the 1960s and 1970s. This discourse provided an alternative to the secular Marxist ideas, which he criticized as being materialist and lacking humanism. Khomeini later appropriated this discourse to distinguish himself from Left while appealing to the subaltern classes. For an excellent discussion of Shariati's Islamic liberation theology and Khomeini's Islamism, see Siavash Saffari, "Two Pro-Mostazafin Discourses in the 1979 Iranian Revolution," *Contemporary Islam* 11, no. 3 (2017).

[78] Abrahamian, *Iran between Two Revolutions*, 533-36.

country's position in the global political economy that shaped the character of its state and social structure. Second, she has a more detailed eye for the role of ideology and culture. Because of uneven development, she argues, the bourgeoisie is historically weak in the peripheral state and the state itself plays a major role in capital accumulation. These two factors, lead to a greater autonomy of the state in peripheral countries.[79] Iran's state formation under the Pahlavis developed along these lines, with the state taking the lead in industrialisation. Like Abrahamian, Farhi argues that the gap between the state and society widened. While the petty bourgeoisie of the bazaar and what Farhi calls the professional class were more or less supportive of the regime in the 1960s and early 1970s, the situation changed with the oil boom as a rift developed between those two classes and the clique around the shah, which was enriching itself publicly.[80] The shah's antiprofiteering and price control policies antagonized the petty bourgeoisie in particular.

Inspired by Antonio Gramsci's writings, Farhi argues that the uneven development of capitalism and the consequent role of the state as an agent of class formation in peripheral countries increase the importance of the "intermediate classes," which include the professional middle class.[81] This enables her to explain why in some peripheral countries like Iran, revolutions acquire an urban base. Using the empirical findings of Farhad Kazemi's *Poverty and Revolution* in Iran, she argues that the urban base of the Iranian Revolution was also provided by the migrant poor who had left the countryside for job opportunities.[82] In general, their communities lacked strong organisation and leadership despite the existence of "networks of reciprocal exchange." The only exceptions were the religious organisations such as *hey'ats* (see Chapter 5), which were often organised on the basis of ethnic or geographic origin of its members. While these organisations created organisational and cultural links with clerics, some of the migrant poor were employed in and around the small shops of the bazaar.[83]

Following Göran Therborn, she defines ideology as "that aspect of the human condition under which human beings live their lives as conscious actors in a world that makes sense to them to varying degrees."[84] Ideology is, as a highly articulated cultural model that tells humans how to live and act, different

[79] Farideh Farhi, *States and Urban-Based Revolutions : Iran and Nicaragua* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 12.
[80] Ibid., 38.
[81] Writing from a Marxist perspective, Tony Cliff was a pioneer of this argument. Tony Cliff, "Deflected Permanent Revolution," *International Socialism Journal* first series, no. 12 (1963).
[82] Farhad Kazemi, *Poverty and Revolution in Iran: The Migrant Poor, Urban Marginality, and Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1980).
[83] Farhi, *States and Urban-Based Revolutions : Iran and Nicaragua*, 69-70.
[84] Göran Therborn, *The Ideology of Power and the Power of Ideology* (London: NLB, 1980), 2.

from culture, which is a mix of conflicting symbols, stories, rituals, and world views from which actors select different strategies for action. However, ideology is embedded in culture. During periods of rapid change, like pre-revolutionary Iran, "cultural meanings wear the mask of ideology as they become highly articulated and explicit to promote patterns of action that are easily perceived."[85]

Three developments allowed Khomeini's Islamist ideology to become a force for political mobilisation. First, Islam was refashioned as a source of national identity and opposition to imperialism, or better anti-Westernism as it was mainly defined in cultural terms. Second, Shi'ism became an ideological basis for taking state power through the works of Khomeini. In the late 1960s, he developed the idea of *velayat-e faqih*, according to which the ulama should rule directly on behalf of the hidden imam. Third, the institution of Shi'a Islam such as religious schools, mosques, shrines and hospitals provided the clerics the organisation capacity for mobilisation and the charitable endowments (*owqaf*) given to these organisations, and religious taxes such as *khums* (one-fifth of agricultural and commercial profits), *zakat* (tax on wealth), and *sadaqeh* (voluntary charity) provided the economic resources.[86]

In Farhi's account, however, the relationship between uneven development and the global is not fully theorized, and the existence of hybrid structures, ideas and identities are ignored. Kamran Matin, drawing on Marxian accounts of uneven and combined development, provides a theoretical framework that conceptualizes capitalist development as a spatio-temporal phenomenon in which unevenness produces combinations, or in other words, hybrid structures and subjectivities, by pulling together pre-capitalist and capitalist phases of development (see below).[87]

One important instance of unevenness was the "direct juxtapostion of modern and traditional industries," leading to the emergence of "a structural and organisational disjuncture between the two sectors of the working class in Iran: one comparatively small and generally amenable to secular left politics and one large and generally exposed and amenable to Islamists' ideological appeal."[88] The most important instance of combination that Matin provides is the emergence of the "citizen-subject" subjectivity:

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[85] Farhi, *States and Urban-Based Revolutions : Iran and Nicaragua*, 84.
[86] Ibid., 90-96.
[87] Kamran Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013). In my own publications, I have also applied the concept of uneven and combined development to theorise the Iranian Revolution. See for instance Peyman Jafari, "Rupture and Revolt in Iran," *International Socialism Journal*, no. 124 (2009).
[88] Matin, *Recasting Iranian Modernity: International Relations and Social Change*, 118.

> a modern subject whose substantive socio-economic abstraction remains politically unconsummated due to its political constitution by a modern impersonal bureaucratic state. The 'citizen' part of this term signifies the traits and dynamics arising from 'primitive accumulation', i.e. disentanglement from precapitalist relations of personalised political dependency. And the 'subject' part signifies the consequential retention of traits and dynamics pertaining to precapitalist personalized political dependency, which were reproduced and valorized as a result of the political containment of the ramifications of the former transformation by the impersonal and extra-local political agency of the rentier state… [H]istorical and sociological contradictions associated with the citizen-subject as a hybrid agency were predominant and hegemonic in late Pahlavi Iran where other, arguably more or less organic and unitary subjectivities, also existed.[89]

According to Matin, political Islam became hegemonic during the Iranian Revolution because it resonated well with the hybrid "citizen-subject" agency: "through a series of semantic and semiotic substitutions. Shari'ati and Khomeini, the chief ideologues of revolutionary Islam in Iran, combined and infused traditional Islamic discourse with modern Western ideas and concepts and as a result obtained a privileged access to the political consciousness and ideological loyalty of the similarly hybridized master-agency of the Iranian Revolution, the citizen-subject."[90]

This is a powerful analytical account, which has two limitations, however. Firstly, the mechanisms through which the juxtaposition of differences is transformed into concrete amalgamations, or hybridities, remain unexplored and unexplained, as is the case with most studies based on the uneven and combined development approach. Secondly, Matin's approach tends to reduce the hegemonic role that political Islam came to play within the revolutionary movement to its "affinity" with the hybrid "citizen-subject." Matin argues that the "hybrid and the political tensions… largely account for the structural instability of the Pahlavi state. But they do not necessarily explain the political revolution it eventually generated and even less the religious form of the revolution."[91] Nevertheless, he explains the "the success of revolutionary Islamist discourse and imagination in achieving hegemony over the Iranian Revolution in terms of the ways in which militant Muslim intellectuals' reconstruction of Shi'a-Islamic thought in pre-revolutionary Iran turned it into a hybrid ideology that was most resonant with the hybrid and tension-prone constitution of the citizen-subject."[92]

The idea of resonance is valid but not sufficient, however, to explain the success of political Islam. As Misagh Parsa noted, "Ideologically driven

[89] Ibid., 118-19.
[90] Ibid., 141-42.
[91] Ibid., 120.
[92] Ibid., 126.

analyses of the Iranian Revolution tend toward the tautological and ignore the complexity of revolutionary processes. They cannot account for the various collectivities that entered the revolutionary struggles at different times and presented diverse claims."[93] There is little evidence that before the revolution, political Islam had a mass following; it in fact had to compete with its rivals, Marxism and nationalism. It was only during the revolution itself that it became hegemonic – an outcome that needs explanation through a historical study on the level of collective action of various groups, focusing not only on the nature of ideological discourse, but also on the friction between alternative discourses and on the role of resources, strategies and leadership skills.

The fourth and final study to be discussed here is Charles Kurzman's *The Unthinkable Revolution*, which he conceives as "a deviant case" that can only be understood through the approach of "anti-explanation." Kurtzman's approach is based on his critique of the method of "retroactive prediction: had we known A, B, and C ahead of time, we would have expected the event."[94] He proposes an alternative method that incorporates "unpredictability into an 'anti-explanation,'" and defines it as "an attempt to understand the experience of the revolution in all its anomalous diversity and confusion..."[95] Kurzman thus advocates the abandoning of retroactive prediction "in favour of recognizing and reconstructing the lived experience of the moment. For moments of revolution, this experience is dominated by confusion…"[96]

Kurzman develops his argument in two moves. First, he subjects political, organisational, cultural, economic and military explanations of the revolution to critical examination by comparing them to the "lived experience of the event" and argues that they all fail.[97] Then he moves on to present his alternative, arguing that what is essential in understanding the Iranian Revolution is the process and the moment of more and more people conceiving the revolutionary movement as "viable," similar to the critical mass effect.[98]

Although Kurzman's approach is a welcome antidote to the structuralist approaches to the Iranian Revolution, it has three weaknesses. First, he approaches each of the factors he discusses as if they can only be conceived as sufficient explanations for the revolution, ruling out the possibility of them

[93] Misagh Parsa, "Ideology and Political Action in the Iranian Revolution," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 31, no. 1 (2011): 53.
[94] Charles Kurzman, "Can Understanding Undermine Explanation? The Confused Experience of Revolution," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 34, no. 3 (2004): 340-41.
[95] Kurzman, *The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran*, 5.
[96] Ibid., 166.
[97] Ibid., 6.
[98] Ibid., 170.

being necessary but not sufficient factors.[99] Secondly, "viability" is an important concept that by introducing the elements of agency and contingency resonates well with my own historical approach. However, a sole focus on subjectivity amounts to throwing out the baby with the bathwater. The sense of the "viability" of the revolutionary movement can explain increased popular mobilisation, but it cannot explain why the state had lost social support in the first place, why it crumbled under the pressure of the movement, and it ignores the social structures from which the grievances, ideologies and organisations of the participants emerged. Moreover, the emergence of the sense of a viable movement seems to mystify the material, social and political changes during the revolutionary struggle, from which this sense emanates.

Having identified a number of themes and questions related to the Iranian Revolution, this study will address some of them, in hopes of contributing to the literature on this historical event. As such, this thesis not only studies oil workers in the Iranian Revolution, it also provides an empirical study of the Iranian Revolution in a specific context – the oil industry – uncovering details that are often lost. This is even more important, because as Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi wrote back in 1985, the literature on the Iranian Revolution has focused on "the long-term structural causes…, the role of the Shi'ite Islam in providing the revolution with an indigenous, powerful and coherent ideology, or particular foreign and domestic factors that may have influenced the course and outcome of the revolution." Less attention, however, has been given to the "methods and resources for revolutionary mobilisation, the social composition of the political coalition at different stages of the revolution, and the manner in which many diverse segments of Iranian society formed a united front against the Shah in the final phases of the revolution."[100]

Evaluating the historiography of the Iranian Revolution a decade later, Kurzman wrote: "the study of the Iranian Revolutionary movement is largely, one might argue, sound and fury, a lot of grand theorizing lacking a solid empirical basis. No work on the Iranian Revolution has made systematic use of all primary evidence that are currently available, though some are more thorough than others."[101] Since those words were written, the situation has not much improved, and we need more studies that go beyond generalisations to

[99] Although he concedes that it is possible to "combine several or all of the explanations in a holistic analysis, like 'combinatiorial,' 'conjunctural,' and 'contextual' approaches, he doesn't discuss or criticize this possibility. Ibid., 166.
[100] Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, "The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution," *State, Culture, and Society* 1, no. 3 (1985): 3.
[101] Charles Kurzman, "Historiography of the Iranian Revolutionary Movement, 1977-79," *Iranian Studies* 28, no. 1-2 (1995): 25.

provide historical accounts of the revolution at the level of specific communities, (work)places, industries etc.[102]

Theoretical considerations

The historiographical context discussed above raises a large number of themes, issues and debates. The most essential ones could be summarised as follows: state-society relations; uneven development; class and class formation; the relationship between class and other social relations (identities); the importance of politics and language; and finally, the role of class, politics (parties and ideologies) and Islam in the Iranian Revolution. This section provides a theoretical reflection on these issues, not as a rigid framework but as an open-ended way to select and evaluate empirical data.

As Katznelson once wrote, there is sometimes a polarisation among historians who fall in the camp of theory and history. "This polarisation has obscured the obvious, that theory is arid if not historically grounded, and that history, even if dedicated to discovering 'facts' alone, cannot be recovered without theory."[103] Thus historians regularly use concepts such as "state" or "revolution," which involve, of course, some level of generalisation. Historians should, therefore, make explicit their theoretical assumptions, use theoretical insights to shed light on their topic of research, and use their empirical study to test and refine theories.

Accordingly, various theories are invoked throughout this thesis to categorize facts and to clarify and explain events and processes. This is not a matter of eclecticism, however, as the theoretical insights and concepts that are used are compatible with the ontological and epistemological orientations of an open-ended version of historical materialism that seriously engages with other theoretical traditions and at times borrows from them. While most concepts and theories will be defined and clarified in the relevant chapters, a number of the more fundamental ones will be presented here, not only because they are

[102] One important improvement has been the publication of a series of volumes in Persian that narrate the revolutionary events in particular places and present a selection of primary documents, mainly SAVAK (the secret police) reports. Although these volumes are very useful, one has to take into consideration that they are published by the Islamic Revolution Documents Centre (IRDC), which is an official institution in Iran, aligned to the country's conservative military and political forces. More importantly, as of today, no volume has been published yet on Abadan, the city on which much of this thesis focuses. For a recent publication in English that successfully focuses on the local level, see Mary Elaine Hegland, *Days of Revolution: Political Unrest in an Iranian Village* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

[103] Ira Katznelson, "Working-Class Formation: Constructing Cases and Comparisons," in *Working-Class Formation : Nineteenth-Century Patterns in Western Europe and the United States*, ed. Ira Katznelson and Aristide R. Zolberg (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 12.

helpful to understand some of the issues raised in the historiographical discussion, but also to stage the overall theoretical approach of this thesis.

Class and other social relations

As labour history is essentially concerned with the history of the working classes, it is important to start with a basic question, "what is class?" Writing from a Marxian perspective, G. E. M. de Ste. Croix has provided one of the most concise and precise definitions:

> Class (essentially a relationship) is the collective social expression of the fact of exploitation, the way in which exploitation is embodied in a social structure. By exploitation I mean the appropriation of part of the product of the labour of others: in a commodity-producing society this is the appropriation of what Marx called 'surplus value.'
>
> A class (a particular class) is a group of persons in a community identified by their position in the whole system of social production, defined above all according to their relationship (primarily in terms of the degree of ownership or control) to the conditions of production (that is to say, the means and labour of production) and to other classes. . . . The individuals constituting a given class may or may not be wholly or partly conscious of their own identity and common interests as a class, and they may or may not feel antagonism towards members of other classes as such.[104]

This is, however, a synchronic approach that can (and must) be only a starting point, as it cannot explain why a certain shared location in the social relations of production can turn into a class-based collective identity. A fuller understanding of class necessitates a diachronic approach, as can be found in E. P. Thompson's writings on class as a *historical* social relationship, rather than a position within a social hierarchy. The historical dimension means that particular working classes emerge though a process of *class formation* in particular times and places. Thompson's conceptualisation of class formation has four elements.

First, class is the outcome of a historical process, and not an automatic expression of economic structures. "By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasize that it is a historical phenomenon. I do not see class as a 'structure', nor as a 'category', but as something which in fact happens (and can be shown

[104] G. E. M. De Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 43-44.

to have happened) in human relationships."[105] Second, that historical process is shaped by "class experience," which "is largely determined by the productive relations into which men are born – or enter involuntarily."

Third, "class-consciousness is the way in which these experiences are handled in cultural terms: embodied in traditions, value-systems, ideas, and institutional forms. If the experience appears as determined, class-consciousness does not," because the "cultural superstructure" mediates between experience and class-consciousness.[106] Therefore, "class happens when some men, as a result of common experience (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."[107] Moreover, working classes are formed "out of pre-existing social groups whose particular traditions, aspirations and cultural practices – modified by the devastating experience of proletarianisation – will be those of an emergence proletariat."[108]

Fourth, working-class formation is an "active process, which owes as much to agency as to conditioning. The working class did not rise like the sun at an appointed time. It was present at its own making."[109] This is very much related to the central role of class struggle in the formation of classes, which "do not exist as separate entities, look around, find an enemy class, and start to struggle. On the contrary, people find themselves in a society structured in determined ways (crucially, but not exclusively, in productive relations), they experience exploitation (or the need to maintain power over those whom they exploit), they identify points of antagonistic interest, they commence to struggle, around these issues and in the process of struggling they discover themselves as classes, they come to know this discovery as class-consciousness."[110]

Two additional points are important here. First, as a number of scholars have pointed out, classes are not static, but they go through "processes of decomposition, renovation or neo-formation,"[111] or put differently, they are "in a constant process of formation, reproduction, re-formation and de-formation. We will, therefore, have to distinguish crucial moments or periods of the

[105] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 8.
[106] Ibid., 9.
[107] Ibid., 8-9.
[108] Ibid., 11.
[109] Ibid., 8.
[110] E. P. Thompson, "Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class," *Social History*, no. 3 (1978): 147.
[111] Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (London,: Lawrence & Wishart, 1985), 52.

formative process," which is indeed an important analytical strategy employed in Chapter 5.[112]

Second, although class formation is forged at the point of production, it cannot be reduced to it. Class formation happens not only in the workplace, where we must analyse the labour process (see Chapter 3), it also takes place in the spheres of the family and the community/society, where the social reproduction of labour takes place (see Chapter 4). This perspective is crucial if we are to include not only women in the workplace in our analysis, but also women performing unwaged labour in families and thus, in a broad sense, gender relations. In order to theorise this perspective, and the relationship between production and reproduction, and class and gender, a number of scholars have developed the "social reproduction theory," which

> insists that our understanding of capitalism is incomplete if we treat it as simply an economic system involving workers and owners, and fait examine the ways in which wider social reproduction of the system – that is the daily and generational reproductive labor that occurs in households, schools, hospitals, prisons, and so on – sustains the drive for accumulation.[113]

Third, as social relations are not only shaped by class, but also by relations based on gender, ethnicity, race, nation, religion etc., our theoretical approach to class formation must incorporate the role of these relations as well. One way of doing this is to include these other social relationships, more commonly referred to as identities, in a historical analysis of any concrete class formation. However, we also need a deeper understanding of the how class, gender, ethnicity etc. are related to each other. While recognising that class has a "privileged causal role in historical change," David Campbell explains:[114]

> class is *mediated* through all other social relations, and vice versa… To say that class mediated by other social relations means that it does not exist outside of them. Class is not initially constituted in pristine isolation and then brought into contact. Rather, the relationship between class, race, gender and other social relations is an internal

[112] Göran Therborn, "Why Some Classes Are More Successful Than Others?," *New Left Review* I, no. 138 (March-April 1983): 39.
[113] Susan Ferguson, "Capitalist Childhood, Anti-Capitalist Children: The Social Reproduction of Childhood," (unpublished paper, 2015). Quoted in Tithi Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya (London: Pluto Press, 2017), 2.
[114] This causal privilege is explained well by Ellen Meiksins Wood, when she writes about the centrality of the "organisation of material life and social reproduction" to human history, arguing: "Class enters the picture when access to the condition of existence and to the means of appropriation are organised in class ways, that is, when some people are systematically compelled by differential access to the means of production or appropriation to transfer surplus labour to other." Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016 [1995]).

> one. Consequently, a host of social relations needs to be considered in the study of any working class as a concrete historical formation… Class must be studied concretely, with the understanding that social reality is multidimensional. In other word, class is never only about class.[115]

Mediating consciousness: culture, religion and ideology

Social being and class-consciousness are mediated by experience, which itself is handled in cultural terms, as Thompson has argued. At its most basic level, experience can be defined as "the practical and tacit knowledge that we as human beings generate about the material (social and non-human) world, through our encounters with and interaction with this material world. In other words, experience is what we know about how we can meet our needs – of whatever kind – in the specific world that we inhabit."[116] This knowledge, however, is not produced in a vacuum; it is shaped by pre-existing systems of meaning and systems of thinking about the world around us. Experience and consciousness are thus conditioned by culture and ideology.

Clifford Geertz defined culture as "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."[117] In this sense, culture is a web of meanings and symbols, a semiotic lens through which we experience the world. While acknowledging the autonomy of culture, the anthropologist William Roseberry emphasises its connection to historical material circumstances:

> people's activities are conditioned by their cultural understandings, just as their activities under new circumstances may stretch or change those understandings. Culture's autonomy, and its importance, rest on this dual character: although meanings are socially produced, they may be extended to situations where a functionalist might say they do not fit, or they may be applied even after the circumstances and activities that produced them have changed… Culture is at once socially constituted (it is a product of the present and past activity) and socially constitutive (it is part of the meaningful context in which activity takes place).[118]

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[115] David Camfield, "Re-Orienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations," *Science & Society* 68, no. 4 (2004): 425.
[116] Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen, *We Make Our Own History: Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2014), 7.
[117] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 89.
[118] William Roseberry, *Anthropologies and Histories: Essays in Culture, History, and Political Economy* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 42.

Culture is rooted in the material and social world in another sense, as Roseberry explains. The "differential access to political and economic power" means that dominant groups have an advantage in the production and dissemination of symbols and meanings.[119]

Culture, of course, is not the only lens through which workers make sense of their experiences. Ideology as a certain cognitive conceptualisation of the world is another important candidate, which also emphasizes the important role played by intellectuals and political parties as developers and disseminators of ideologies. Finally, religion can play this role as well. A brief discussion of religion in relations to both culture and ideology is warranted here, given its importance in the developments in Iran.

The conceptualisation of religion is, of course, an intensely debated issue. Clifford Geertz' understanding of religion as a "cultural system" that provides a worldview (what is) and an ethical orientation (what is good and bad, and what is ought to be) has been quite influential.[120] A purely culturalist approach to religion is problematic, however, as it does not distinguish clearly enough between religion, culture and ideology. Geertz defines ideology as an aspect of culture, claiming that it relates specifically to the political aspects of social relations, and that it arises in times of cultural crisis: "When received patterns of meaning (with regard to politics) fail to keep the world in some sort of interpretative order, ideologies are a cultural response." This "culture-ideology dichotomy basically replicates a stasis-change distinction."[121] History, however, contains many examples of religion functioning both as a conservative force, and as a means of protest and rebellion.

While recognizing the dual character of religion, Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is another important source of the religion-as-culture-approach. For Thompson, religious beliefs and practices are not isolated; they constitute part of the lived experience of popular culture. As such, religion, just as culture, is a field of contention, which shapes and is shaped by politics and socio-economic transformations. His approach to Methodism at the turn of the end of the 18th century and early 19th century is illuminating. He stated that Methodism oscillated between the two poles of millennialism and quietism, the latter being dominant most of the time, while the former raised it head during great political upheavals.[122] Thompson wrote: "The history of Methodism suggests that the morbid deformities of

[119] Ibid., 37.
[120] Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, 87-125.
[121] Rhys H. Williams, "Religion as Political Resource: Culture or Ideology?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 35, no. 4 (1996): 371.
[122] For a critical discussion of Thompson's approach to religion in general and Methodism in particular, see Stephen Heathorn, "E.P. Thompson, Methodism, and the "Culturalist" Approach to the Historical Study of Religion," 10, no. 2 (1998).

'sublimation' are the most common aberrations of the poor in periods of social reaction; while paranoiac fantasies belong more in periods when revolutionary enthusiasms are released."[123]

The cultural approach to religion was a welcome correction to the one-sided and narrow religion-as-ideology approach, which can be found in Marx's writings on religion, for instance. Marx's most famous statement on religion stresses its ideological dimension: "*Religious* suffering is, at one and the same time, the *expression* of real suffering and a *protest* against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people."[124]

For analytical purposes, it is much more useful to approach religion as a social process encompassing two dimensions or moments – culture and ideology. A Marxian understanding of religion as both culture and ideology can be found in Antonio Gramsci's *Prison Notebooks*: "Philosophy [ideology] is intellectual order, which neither religion nor common sense can be. It is to be observed that religion and common sense do not coincide either, but that religion is an element of fragmented common sense."[125] Gramsci's definition of "common sense" as "traditional popular conception of the world," which he sometimes describes as "folklore" to stress social practices, is quite akin to "culture."[126] The analytical distinction between ideology and religion depends on the level of cognitive articulation and coherence of ideas. In other words, "religion has both an affective and a cognitive component, and it can both reinforce and challenge extant relationships of power."[127]

Religion provides different sources for oppositional activities; these can be material (finance, meeting places etc.), or discursive (the language that expresses, shapes and justifies opposition), contributing to the social formation of oppositional networks and identities. Some studies of liberation theology have demonstrated that it is both a cultural process in the formation of symbols and worldviews and an ideological process articulating grievances and justifying desirable social and political change.[128]

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[123] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, 54.
[124] Karl Marx, "A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Introduction," in *Early Writings [of] Karl Marx* (Harmondsworth; London: Penguin; New Left Review, 1975), 244.
[125] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 325.
[126] Ibid., 197.
[127] Williams, "Religion as Political Resource: Culture or Ideology?," 374.
[128] Christian Smith, *The Emergence of Liberation Theology : Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

Politics and language

As discussed above, the notion of the "primacy of politics" has been one of the important critiques levelled at social history in general and its historical materialist interpreation in particular. At its extreme, this approach has led post-structuralists to deny that politics is connected to class struggle, which they situate within the dynamics of language. Although this critique correctly draws attention to the constitutive role of politics in class formation, there are alternative ways of doing this without uprooting politics from really existing class dynamics. As Adam Przeworski has argued:

> processes of class formation are seen as a necessary transition from a "class-in-itself" to a "class-for-itself," a formulation in which economic relations have the staffs of objective conditions and all other relations constitute realms of subjective actions. In place of this formulation we must think along the lines, also suggested by Marx, in which economic, political, and ideological conditions jointly structure the realm of struggles that have as their effect the organisations, disorganisation or reorganisation off classes. Classes must thus be viewed as effects of struggles structured by objective conditions that are simultaneously economic, political, and ideological.[129]

This approach is visible in more classic works as well. In his "methodological criteria" for the study of "subalterns classes" Gramsci, for instance, refers to "parties of dominant groups, intended to conserve and to maintain control over them; …the formations which the subaltern groups themselves produce, in order to press claims of a limited and partial character; …those new formations which assert the autonomy of the subaltern groups, but within the old framework; … those formations which assert the integral autonomy" of the subaltern.[130] These categories refer obviously to trade unions, reformist parties and revolutionary parties of the working classes.

When we related politics back to experience, it becomes clear that workers' experiences will be quite different dependent on the political context, e.g. the ones with or without the right to unionize or participate in formal and fair parliamentary elections. For the same reason, Gramsci does not treat political parties as mere expressions of class struggle, but as forces that shape them, and hence emphasizes the role of intellectuals.[131] As I hope to show in Chapter 5, the changes in the social-economic sphere in the 1960s and 1970s are of paramount importance to understand the changes that oil workers experiences in their workplace, in the society at large, and which shaped their

[129] Adam Przeworski, "Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's the Class Struggle to Recent Controversies," *Politics & Society* 7, no. 4 (1977): 343.
[130] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 52.
[131] Camfield, "Re-Orienting Class Analysis: Working Classes as Historical Formations," 432.

political ideas and collective actions. In turn, I demonstrate how the political and ideological shifts in that period were constitutive to the class re-formation.

The "primacy of politics" approach is associated with the "linguistic turn," in which written, spoken and symbolic utterances are treated as having their own agency. Language is thus reified and turned into a determinant factor. Philosophically, this approach is rooted in Ferdinand de Saussure's understanding of language as an independent self-referential system of signs, based on the link between signifier (word) and signified (concept). This structural approach conceived of thinking being determined by language. Jacque Derrida reworked this theory, breaking the link between signifier and signified, which means that signification (the act of creating meanings) is open to infinite possibilities.[132]

While language, referring here to verbal and non-verbal signs and symbols, is important as a medium through which workers can construct collective identities, a shared consciousness and collective acts of resistance, it cannot be detached from the social context in which they live in. Such an approach was, for instance, developed by Nikolaevic Volosinov, who argued:

> the sign is a construct between socially organised persons in the process of their interaction. Therefore, the forms of sign are conditioned above all by the social organisation of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction. When these forms change, so does the sign. Hence, ideology may not be divorced from the material reality of the sign. Nor must the sign be divorced from the concrete forms of social intercourse.[133]

This formulation evades Suassaurian structural linguistics and poststructuralist linguistic determinism through an understanding of the dialectical relationship between social reality and language. Moreover, Volosinov treats language as a terrain of contestation, instead of a self-contained system. "Sign," he argues, "becomes an arena of class struggle."[134] The result is struggle over meaning between dominant and subaltern classes and groups. But as David McNally argues,

> this does not mean that words (or signs generally) have entirely different meanings for members of different social classes. Voloshinov resists a simple-minded relativism…Words, he insists, have reasonably stable and abstract meanings of the sort that we find in a dictionary. But speech involves both meanings and themes. Themes have to do with the accents and emphases that members of specific social

[132] Matt Perry, *Marxism and History*, Theory and History (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave, 2002), 133.
[133] Valengin Nikolaevich Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (New York: Seminar Press, 1986 [1929]), 21.
[134] Ibid., 23.

> groups try to give to words in order to transmit their experiences. Indeed, in different contexts, individuals participate in distinct speech genres which have their own accents, norms, vocabularies, dialects, and so on.[135]

Building on this interpretation of language, Marc Steinberg has argued that groups of working people construct "collective characterisations of themselves and their opponents through their fighting words, the discourses of contention."[136] This contention is sometimes but not often about the use of different words, but it is about the way in which subaltern groups appropriate the discourse of the ruling class, giving it a twist of their own to voice their sense of injustice and solution. Through analysing this act of appropriation, we can arrive at a better understanding of class-consciousness. This analysis is most productive during strikes and other forms of collective action, when the struggle over meaning becomes most visible in discourses of collective identity and interest.

Uneven and combined development

The historical formation of the working class in the Iranian oil industry, and indeed in Iran as a whole, is intimately connected to the capitalist development that had started in the late 19th century. In its early stages, this working class was formed out of the pre-existing tribal groups that had their own cultural values and practices, particular social relationships based on gender and ethnicity, and ways of economic activities that were rooted in pre-capitalist relations of production.[137] Although this local context is important and needs to be recognised, the initiation of the oil industry by foreign capital and political intervention draws attention to the international aspect of capitalist development in Iran. From that point onwards, the formation of the working class in the oil industry proceeded within this dialectic of the local and the international.

The concept of uneven and combined development (UCD), formulated by the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky in the early 20th century, provides a fruitful way of understanding this dialectic in a non-Eurocentric way. [138] Three

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[135] David McNally, "Language, History, and Class Struggle," *Monthly Review: An Independent Socialist Magazine* 47, no. 3 (1995): 20.
[136] Marc W. Steinberg, *Fighting Words : Working-Class Formation, Collective Action, and Discourse in Early Nineteenth-Century England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999), 14.
[137] Atabaki, "From 'Amaleh (Labor) to Kargar (Worker): Recruitment, Work Discipline and Making of the Working Class in the Persian/Iranian Oil Industry."
[138] See for instance Kamran Matin, "Redeeming the Universal: Postcolonialism and the Inner Life of Eurocentrism," *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 2 (2013); Gilbert Achcar, *Marxism, Orientalism, Cosmopolitanism* (Chicago IL: Haymarket Books, 2013).

propositions form the core of UCD. First, there is "unevenness, the most general law of the historical process…" This unevenness derives from the spatial multiplicity and difference among societies as an ontological condition of human existence. Second, inter-societal interaction across space takes place in this universal condition of unevenness, leading to "the law of combined development – by which we mean a drawing together of the different stages of the journey, a combining of separate steps, an amalgam of archaic with more contemporary forms."[139] UCD conceives inter-societal interaction, which under capitalism often takes the form of geopolitical and economic competition, not merely as external pressure ("the whip of external necessity"), [140] but "interpolates" these pressures into the "sociology of capitalist development," which means that the inter-relationship of societies (the international) is constitutive to the social reality of individual societies.[141] This social reality thus becomes an "amalgam" of "native" and "foreign," "traditional" and modern," creating a condition of hybridity. [142] Third, unevenness and combination are expressed in development, which is not conceived as linear, unidirectional, homogenizing (the claims of modernisation theory), but as "multilinear" and producing "differentiated societal outcomes."[143]

The causal mechanisms connecting unevenness, combination and development have been aptly summarised by Alexander Anievas:

> (1) the 'whip of external necessity' (the military- economic pressures generated by interstate competition among a plurality of unevenly developing societies); (2) the 'privilege of historic backwardness' (the opportunities opened up to later-developing states to adopt the most cutting-edge technologies, institutions and practices from the leading states in the international system); (3) the 'contradictions of sociological amalgamation' (the time-compressed character of this development taking inorganic, spasmodic and destabilizing forms, unhinging traditional social structures in ways causally feeding back into the structures of the international system that produced them); and (4) processes of 'substitutionism', whereby later-developers, in attempting to developmentally supercharge their own societies, come to mobilize 'replacement' mechanisms for the various agents, institutions, technics and methods of earlier processes of development.[144]

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[139] Leon Trotsky, *History of the Russian Revolution* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2008[1932]), 25.
[140] Ibid., 32. As Marcel van der Linden has correctly argued, UCD shouldn't be viewed as a "law" but as a "mechanism.Marcel van der Linden, "The 'Law' of Uneven and Combined Development: Some Underdeveloped Thoughts," *Historical Materialism* 15, no. 1 (2007)."
[141] Justin Rosenberg, "Globalization Theory: A Post Mortem," *International Politics*, no. 42 (2005): 41.
[142] Alexander Anievas and Kamran Matin, *Historical Sociology and World History: Uneven and Combined Development over the Longue Durée* (London; New York: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016), 7.
[143] Ibid., 8.
[144] Alexander Anievas, "Revolutions and International Relations: Rediscovering the Classical Bourgeois Revolutions," *European Journal of International Relations* 21, no. 4 (2015): 846.

The latter causal mechanism can be understood more systematically through Gramsci's notion of the "passive revolution" as the transformative process in "countries that modernize the state through a series of reforms or national wars without undergoing a political revolution of a radical-Jacobin type." [145] Although the transformation does not take place through revolutionary mobilisation from below, it is nevertheless *revolutionary* because it introduces "molecular changes, which in fact progressively modify the pre-existing composition of forces, and hence become the matrix of new changes." [146] It can be argued that two episodes of passive revolution have taken place in Iran during the 20th century. First, from the late 1920s to the late 1930s under the authoritarian rule of Reza Shah, and then from the early 1960s to the mid-1970s under his son Mohammad Reza Shah, leading to molecular changes that in turn created the conditions for the 1978-79 revolutionary events.

Having discussed the main tenets of UCD, it is important to underline Van der Linden's observations that grand theorizing is not sufficient, because:

> ultimately, we need historical studies that carefully explore historical attempts to transfer particular innovations (ideas, technologies, organisations or institutions) from one social context (A) to another (B). Such studies should at least reveal: (i) context A's relevant (political, social, cultural, natural) features; (ii) the actors attempting the transfer from A to B and their interests; (iii) the characteristics of the 'channels' through which the transfer from A to B was attempted; (iv) the social and material factors determining the innovation's assimilation, non-assimilation or adaptation in context B; and (v) the transfer's later implications for the relationship between A and B. [147]

Sources and method

The biggest challenge most historians face is locating and gaining access to primary sources. The magnitude of this challenge depends on various factors, including the willingness of private individuals, state officials, and companies to keep and make public their materials, the existence of institutions that can collect and categorize available sources for the public, and the general legal

[145] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 107-11. Alex Callinicos has pointed out that the concept of passive revolution has been stretched out in many recent Gramscian perspectives and even in Gramsci's *Prions Notebooks.* In agreement with his comments, here I refer to passive revolution only to revolutions from above that entail a systemic transformation from pre-capitalist to capitalist societies, and not to reforms within capitalist societies. See Alex Callinicos, "The Limits of Passive Revolution," *Capital & Class* 34, no. 3 (2010).
[146] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 109.
[147] van der Linden, "The 'Law' of Uneven and Combined Development," 162.

and political conditions that can influence the access to these sources. Transparent regulations, for instance, make availability and access easier, while the occurrence of revolutions, wars, conflicts, securitisation and authoritarian polities create serious obstacles. Anyone who is faintly familiar with the recent history of Iran will recognise the latter factors and appreciate the difficulties in locating and accessing archival material, particularly when it comes to oil, the 1970s and the Iranian Revolution – all three sensitive topics for political reasons.

A personal note on my experience doing archival and fieldwork could provide a sense of the conditions that historians face working on Iran in general and give the reader an insight into the limitations and possibilities that have shaped the writing of this thesis. Visiting Iran for archival work is not without risk, as some officials in the country are suspicious of scholars nosing in archives and gathering data. However, the nature of the Iranian state and bureaucracy also means that they are not homogenous and that regulations can vary in different times and places. At many levels, one finds archivists and librarians who are dedicated to their jobs and helpful. Just as journalists, historians, or for that matter anthropologists, sometimes have to take risks in conducting their research. In my visits to various places in Iran (Tehran, Abadan, Ahwaz, Shiraz and Isfahan), I have certainly done so, although I have always sought to minimize these risks for myself, but particularly for those with whom I collaborated. I must admit that this has been at times a nerve-wrecking adventure, but one I am quite happy to have undertaken due to its results.

Outside Iran, I used the archives of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam and the Dutch National Archives in The Hague.[148] The former has a particularly rich collection of periodicals of political organisations that aided in uncovering the role of oil workers during the revolution and its immediate aftermath. The archives of British Petroleum at Warwick provide a rich source for historians and are easily accessible, but they only cover the period until the early 1970s. This is also the case for the National Library and Archives of Iran (NLAI) in Tehran, which harbours many documents and publications related to the oil industry in Iran, but here too, the number of documents declines when we move from the early 20th century to the 1980s. The main reason is that most of the archives from the 1970s onwards are still in possession of NIOC, and some have been lost during the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. Nevertheless, I have been able to collect a valuable number of documents from the NLAI, which are mainly related to the economic activities

[148] For a list of the archives, journals and periodicals consulted in this study, see the section "Sources" at the end of this thesis.

of NIOC, its internal organisation and the activism of oil workers during the revolution. However, access to some documents published by political organisations on oil workers during the revolution was denied.

Two other archives that have been very useful to this research are the Institute for Iranian Contemporary Studies (IICHS) and the Library, Museum and Document Centre of Iran Parliament (LMDCIR) in Tehran, where I was able to locate a number of oil workers' petitions, and oil company reports and other official publications. The latter institution is an example of what could be possible in Iran, in terms of providing access and professional assistance to researchers. The archives of the Islamic Revolution Documents Centre (IRDC) provided essential documents for my research on the activism and political and religious networks among oil workers during the 1970s, the revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. I also visited the archives of the public relations office of NIOC in Ahwaz, where I consulted a number of documents and collected a number of pictures.

Although far and difficultly accessible, the libraries of Shahid Chamran University of Ahwaz, and the NIOC libraries in Ahwaz, Abadan and Tehran were very helpful in locating documents and particularly the journals of NIOC that provided insight into the everyday life of oil workers, including gender relations, consumption, leisure, healthcare, education etc. Concerning these everyday life aspects of the research, the lack of sources formed a serious obstacle and severly limited my ambition to pay more attention to this aspect. Looking creatively through the available documents yielded valuable information, but this cannot fully make up for the lack of sources in this area, especially regarding gender relations. The composition of the labour force in the oil industry is almost fully male. But the oil industry journals tell us more about the gendered relationships in the oil industry.

In order to give more weight to the subjectivity of oil workers and include more of their experiences in and outside the workplace into my research, I devised three other strategies apart from following the trail of the official documents. First, I conducted approximately 20 oral history interviews with oil workers, often in public places or their homes, and in some cases, in their workplace (refinery and production site). As we will see in the following chapters, these interviews provide crucial insights into the life-world of oil workers, but there are also two problems.

First, I was only able to interview three women, two Iranian workers and one American-Dutch woman who working for the oil industry and was also married to an engineer of the oil industry. This low number of female interviewees is partly due to my focus on the workforce, which included only a small number of women, and due to practical and cultural obstacles in

interview women, particularly the wives of the oil workers. This problem could be resolved by more fieldwork, which I hope to conduct in the near future.

The second problem is related to the methodological nature of oral history. Retrospective data gathering based on oral history runs the risk of providing bad data due to the unreliability of the memories. Although these problems are real, I have tried to limit the margin of error by not relying primarily on oral history when providing accounts of events and conditions. In some cases, for instance the labour process in the workplace, I have relied more heavily on oral history given the absence of other sources at the moment. In most cases, however, I have used oral history as an additional source of data, and where possible, cross-checked them with both written sources and other interviews. I have also relied more heavily on oral history in order to retrieve subjective experiences of oil workers, but it is exactly at this point that another problem with oral history emerges: the risk of "presentism," i.e. the interpretation of the past through a contemporary lens. I have tried to limit the margin of error here by explicitly discussing this problem with my interviewees and cross-checking their narratives both internally (the coherence of the different elements of their own narrative) and externally asking them to try to remember their thoughts and emotions of the past.

My second strategy was the consultation of newspapers and periodicals published at the time, mostly in Persian and some in English. This was an extremely arduous project, not only due to the difficulty of finding these sources but also due to the effort it takes to filter the relevant information out of uncategorized, and in most cases, non-digitalized newspapers and periodicals. These primary sources were of essential importance to this study, however. They enabled me to retrieve basic information about events, chronologies, people, and networks. To give one example, despite the importance of the oil strikes during the Iranian Revolution, no publication has appeared up to now giving a full description of their chronology and the people, ideas and organisations involved in the strikes. This was a challenge that had to be addressed in this study. Moreover, newspapers provide interviews and in some cases pictures that enable us to retrieve the subjectivity of the relevant actors during the period under study. As a third strategy, I conducted a thorough search to find memoirs of oil workers or others who had worked or lived with oil workers. This resulted in a number of interesting findings that have been utilized in a number of chapters.

Finally, I have relied on a wide range of secondary sources. These include a wide range of theoretical and empirical publications in English, but also a large number of publications that are not only in Persian, but also have been published in Iran by scholars and journalists residing in the country. I am

emphasising this point, as I have drawn the conclusion that scholars outside Iran do not always seriously engage with publications that have appeared inside the country. This is sometimes for practical reasons, as books published in Iran appear in a very low circulation, making it hard to find them (having sometimes chased a book or a journal for days and sometimes weeks, going from bookshop to bookshop and library to library, I can attest to this obstacle myself). In other cases, however, scholars residing outside Iran have been very sceptical about publications appearing in the country. On the one hand, this is very understandable as a number of factors, including political and financial constraints on humanities and social sciences in universities have led to a large number of publications of a low quality. On the other hand, however, one can find among them solid works from scholars in Iran, which should not be overlooked, but again, finding them is admittedly a time-consuming process.

Outline of chapters

The first chapter provides important contextual information by situating oil workers in three fields that can be defined as social, institutional and spatial: the class structure of the Iranian society; the industrial and organisation development of the oil industry; and the urban living space of oil workers. The importance of this context lies with the observation made earlier, that class (formation) does not happen on a *tubula rasa*, but is shaped by the peculiarities of the society, institutions and spaces it is part of. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the workforce in the oil industry in terms of its size and distinctions, which create solidarities and divisions among oil workers. Recruitment to the oil industry and education are discussed in some detail as well, as they shape social mobility, mentalities (through processes of socialisation), networks, inequalities and identities among oil workers.

After providing essential background in the previous chapters, Chapter 3 delves into the workplace of oil workers, exploring a number of case studies to understand the labour processes in which oil workers were involved. These labour processes fell in two main divisions of the oil industry: its basic-operations that included the production, refining, transport and distribution of oil, and its non-basic operations that provided ancillary services such as housing and healthcare. The final part of this chapter deals with the mechanisms of creating control and consent in the workplace, linking this factory regime to the larger state-society relations.

In Chapter 4, we leave the workplace and the realm of production to explore how labour power was reproduced. It is argued that this reproduction is

provided by the unwaged labour of women in the family, by the oil company through its ancillary institutions and by the welfare policies of the state. The discussion in this chapter includes both material aspects such as wages and pension, but also ideational aspects that reproduce oil workers in ideological terms through what Louis Althusser calls the act of "interpellation," expressed in the ways in which the oil company addressed oil workers through specific discourses and symbolic representations.

Whilst most of the chapters take a synchronic approach to oil workers as a class, Chapter 5 incorporates a diachronic narrative in order to show how the analysis in the previous chapters merely captures a moment in the process of class formation. To be more precise, this moment (the 1970s), is in fact conceptualised as one of class *re-formation*. In line with the theoretical considerations above, this chapter demonstrated empirically the complex ways in which both social-economic changes, as well as changes in politics and ideological discourses played a constitutive role in the re-formation of oil workers as a class. Therefore, considerable attention is paid to the officially sanctioned political organisations and ideologies, as well as the organisations, networks and ideologies of the opposition (the Left and the Islamists) and their relations with oil workers – not despite, but as part of this thesis' overall historical materialist approach.

As a whole, this thesis pivots in Chapter 5, as it incorporates the insights of the previous chapters into a diachronic understanding of the changes in the 1970s, and uses these changes to understand the ways in which oil workers participated in the Iranian Revolution. Chapter 6 provides a detailed account of the oil strikes that erupted in September 1978 and continued until the fall of the monarchy in February 1979. In this chapter, I attempt to read into the strikes the multiplicity of the grievances and demands of the oil workers, and their ideological inclinations and networks.

Chapter 7 focuses on the moment of dual power that was created in the revolutionary process in December 1978. First, this chapter reveals the crucial role that the oil strikes and the oil workers' organisations played in the creation of dual power. It provides a novel insight into the revolutionary dynamics of late December 1978 to early February 1979, by showing how the oil strikes fuelled the creation of a network of organisations at both local and national levels. Second, the chapter gives a material and social explanation for the fact that oil workers were able to play such a disruptive role. Third, it tries to explain the outcome of the moment of dual power, in which the independent oil workers' organisations became subjugated to the emerging power around the Islamist forces that were soon institutionalised.

The final chapter sheds light on an understudied aspect of the (post) revolutionary period, i.e. the continuation of the mobilisation of workers and the emergence of *showras* (councils). This chapter explores the complex ways in which various groups of oil workers collaborated with or opposed the new state, and looks at the various forms of collective action, political organisation and ideological disputes involved in this process. Special attention is giving to the role and variety of Islamist ideologies, and the impact of the start of the Iran-Iraq war in September 1980. The chapter finishes with the repression of the oil workers' *showras* in 1982.