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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses how May Day posters, released by the Islamic Republican Party of Iran (which represented the core of Ayatollah Khomeini's supporters in terms of state power between 1979 and 1987), started to express a new socially constructed identity for workers within the factory. By tracking hidden meanings and the particular use of visual language, it investigates why various styles and symbols were woven together. Finally, it shows – through the analysis of discourse in posters – how a process of appropriation of leftist symbols developed, in order to nullify a perceived ideological threat to the Islamic Republic, represented by both secular Marxists groups and those who, in Khomeini's words, "mixed Islamic ideas with Marxist ideas and have created a concoction which is in no way in accordance with the progressive teachings of Islam" [Khomeini, Ayatollah Ruhollah. "We Shall Confront the World with Our Ideology." *MERIP Reports* (1980). doi:10.2307/3011306.].

1. Introduction

We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in *negative* terms: it "excludes", it "represses", it "censors", it "abstracts", it "masks", it "conceals". In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth.[1]

By traversing and "producing" reality, according to Michel Foucault, power is accepted: it generates knowledge. Researching workers and state–power relations in post-revolutionary Iran, and looking at posters released during May Day celebrations, two crucial questions arise. What values were assigned to specific representations of workers, in order to create, consent and allow Khomeinists to be accepted? What were the *regimes of truth* which surrounded the factory environment after the 1979 revolution?

The following article analyses posters as part of a broader set of *productive* aspects of power that came in contact with the Iranian industrial workplace throughout the 1980s. The goal here is to explore how the ruling clergy (organised politically, under the umbrella of the Islamic Republican Party (IRP), *Hezb-e Jomhuri-e Eslami* which was founded in 1979) was accepted in the field of labour relations, beyond disciplinary measures or repression. Therefore, this article seeks to decipher how power circulated within and outside the Iranian factory, in terms of the production of knowledge, meanings and signs.[2]

By producing and re-producing these meanings and signs of knowledge, through language and visual representations, three main players influenced the factory environment: workers as an inherent part, Ayatollah Khomeini and the IRP.

As Khomeini warned in his speech on the eve of the Iranian new-year in 1980, factories may represent, at that time, the places where "counterrevolutionaries" could "create tumult":

> The government is duty bound to provide the means of labour and production for workers, farmers and labourers. However, they too should know that strikes and slowdowns will not only strengthen the superpowers, but also cause the hope of the oppressed people in the Islamic and non-Islamic countries who have risen to be turned into despair. The people of each city, as soon as they learn of a strike at a factory, should go to that place and see what they want. You should identify the counterrevolutionaries and make them known to the people. The noble people of Iran can no longer pay unearned salaries to a number of ungodly people.

My dear workers, you should know that those who every day create tumult in a corner of the country and who basically come to the field with the logic of force are your headstrong enemies and wish to turn you away from the path of the revolution. They are dictators, who if they ever come to power will not allow anyone to breathe. You should fight against them in all fields and identify them to the public as your number one enemy and reveal their connection and dependence upon the aggressive East or the colonial West. The government is duty bound to severely punish those who are involved in such actions.[3]

Starting from the end of 1979, the IRP gradually permeated the factories through the establishment of the Islamic Associations (IAs).[4] The IAs represented a tool of intervention within the workplaces, in order to oppose and eventually replace the *shuras* (factory councils that emerged after the fall of the Shah in 1979, aiming at workers' control from below).[5]

A new identity of the worker as *homo islamicus* started taking shape in pictures (particularly in May Day posters) as well as in practices. First, it emerged through the *naskh* and *surat* Arabic calligraphies, which immediately connect the audience to Islam. Second, through written calls to action for workers, which never alluded to the working class (*tabagheh-ye kargar*), but always referred to the more general worker (*kargar*). Third, it did so by representing workers as unidentified black or white shapes in work suits, often in a socialist realist style. The IRP's intervention within the factory through the IAs and the daily response to the workers' ideological *threat* (by hanging up posters on the walls, by broadcasting State speeches during breaks, by identifying "non-conformist" workers) had a twofold meaning. On the one hand, it was a strategy to go beyond the discourse of class/working class and to incorporate the *kargar* into "the broader category of *mostaz'afin,* the downtrodden", who were all "slaves of God",[6] by weaving together the three dimensions of Khomeini's discourse: *religious,* r*evolutionary, populist.* On the other hand, it was a method to identify, incorporate and finally neutralise the threat.

In *Staging a Revolution. The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi affirm that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 in Iran was "a pictorial revolution, a revolution in full semiotic control of the representation of itself".[7] Accordingly, pictures started to "talk",[8] to tell their stories on walls, banners and money. They began to express dissent and to spread new messages. This article examines how the IRP utilised posters to communicate with industrial workers.[9] It also shows how the party exerted its power[10] over labourers in order to win their support during the revolutionary period and throughout all the 1980s.

Through the analysis and the comparison of seven different posters, distributed in Iranian factories and used during May Day celebrations, what becomes evident is the Islamisation of the concept of labour. This symbolic appropriation of the Iranian workers' desires and struggles was also made by incorporating a variety of political sources, some even including seemingly contradictory messages.[11] Clenched fists, industrial machinery elements, broken chains and flowers, often in red, were merged together with religious imagery and terminology, and Qur'anic verses written in traditional *naskh* Arabic calligraphic style. The outcome is what the philosopher Roland Barthes called a "myth".[12] It is a system of communication where images, objects and words become "natural" and eternal to the observer. All the above-mentioned elements are woven together in a way that is – using Barthes words – "perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason".[13] The intentions behind the use of every sign do not seem to be hidden or ambiguous. Yet, they result natural and normalised, as they were already suitable for communication.[14]

Posters became part of a larger discursive campaign, carried out by the IRP's subgroups closer to workers[15] that can be summarised in the oft-quoted saying of Ayatollah Khomeini: "Labour is a

[3]Khomeini, "We Shall Confront the World with Our Ideology," 88.

[4]Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, 100–1.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Bayat, "Does Class Ever Opt Out of the Nation?" 195.

[7]The authors explicitly refer to the "Islamic" aspects of the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Nevertheless, different secular forces participated in the fall of the Shah's regime. See Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 9–10.

[8]Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 9.

[9]Shortly after the Revolution, in the process of Khomeini's consolidation of power, leftist supporters were cut off from the new leadership as effective rivals. The IRP appropriated revolutionary political organs. See Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 71 and Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 17.

[10]Revolutionary political posters were not only a manifestation of the IRP's power, but also a tool of mobilisation for workers who were part of the discourse. See Foucault, "Subject and Power." See also Bayat, *Work Politics and Power*, 71–6.

[11]Ram, "Multiple Iconographies," 94.

[12]Barthes, *Mythologies*, 10.

[13]Ibid., 128.

[14]Ibid., 108.

[15]There were at least six factions within the IRP: (1) group from the clergy, loyal to Khomeini and engaged for a long time in anti-Shah political activities; (2) bazaari merchants; (3) supporters of the conservative Hojjatieh Society; (4) followers of the right-wing head of Toilers Party, Mozafar Baqa'i; (5) Members

manifestation of God."[16] The lack of political homogeneity in the party was clearly manifested in the support given by some of *Hezb-e Jomhuri-e Eslami*'s members to IAs in the factories, who supported the Khomeinist idea of class antithesis between the lower and upper class (*tabagheh-ye payin* and *tabagheh-ye bala*), oppressed and oppressors (*mostazafin* and *mostakberin*), poor and rich (*foqara* and *sarvatmandan*).[17]

2. Rhetoric and Discipline: The Double Task of the IRP

Ten days after the overthrow of the Shah, Khomeini gave his political blessing to the IRP's foundation – which emerged as the political core of his supporters in terms of state power – despite his initial disapproval of clergy's involvement in party politics. Although Khomeini never became a member of the IRP, he decided to support it because the main competitors in the struggle for power at that time, such as the communist Tudeh Party, the Islamic-leftist People's Mojahedin of Iran and the Liberation Movement of Iran, were all organised in political parties.

Starting from its establishment, the IRP rose up among other revolutionary forces to become the unified voice of Khomeinists within the Islamic Republic. The party began to represent: (1) a powerful political instrument against all other opponents and adversaries, among pro-revolutionary forces; (2) a fundamental player in the process of objectification of workers. Yet, the existence of factional divisions within the party since its foundation would have also affected discursive and political strategies related to labour. In order to better understand the subsequent developments, this following explains how the IRP's main wings dealt with labour discourses.

On 18 February 1979, Khamenei, Hashemi Rafsanjani, Bahonar, Beheshti and 'Abdul-Karim Mousavi Ardebili were put in charge of the party central committee.[18] They were all clerics and Khomeini's loyal supporters. With their guidance, the IRP gradually penetrated the Islamic Republic, by playing key roles in the newly established institutions. For example: (1) during the first parliamentary elections in 1980, it won the majority of seats in the Majles; (2) after the impeachment of Bani Sadr (deposed because of his attempt to reduce clerics' moves to gain space and power), and following the assassination of Mohammad 'Ali Rajal, 'Ali Khamenei became President.[19]

By trying to channel all the revolutionaries into one party with an explicit religious label, the party had a double function. On the one hand, it had to keep mobilising workers around the new Republic. On the other hand, it had to control and discipline the factory,[20] in order to protect the Islamic state from potential opponents or foreign plotters. Starting from labourers' everyday working life, the party sought to regulate workers' behaviour and penetrate their ideas by spreading the Islamic conception of labour.

A political purge of adversaries in and out of the workplaces was carried out by any means. The elimination of rivals was considered the first step towards the implementation of the Rule of Jurist, the *velayat-e faqih*. Between the end of 1979 and the beginning of 1982, a crackdown against workers' unions started.[21] Independent *shuras* were liquidated and, as Bayat explained, the Labour House or Worker's house (*khaneh-ye kargar*) "previously a free headquarters for workers' assemblies, became the centre of pro-IRP *shuras* and Islamic Associations".

As Iran's chronicles tell,[22] revolutionary collective enthusiasm and ardour characterised the immediate aftermath of the February 1979 revolution. From universities to factories, from the bazaar to the streets of Iran's main cities, the revolutionaries celebrated the fall of the Shah. Nevertheless, the sense of liberation and relief from monarchist repression for some groups was soon over. The pro-Khomeini clerics took *de facto* control at the helm of these new waves of repression. Moreover, by 1981 the People's Mojahedin, *Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq*, were banned and their offices closed: arrest warrants were issued and mass executions were carried out. In 1982, a harsh repression against the Tudeh Party[23] – accused of conspiring against the Islamic Republic – started and less than one year later, on 4 May 1983, the Islamic

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with a background in other religious groups of associations, with some followers, such as 'Abbas Poshtibani and Hosein Musavi. See also Behrooz, "Factionalism in Iran under Khomeini," 610 and Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 53–76.

[16]Bayat, "Does Class Ever Opt Out of the Nation?" 194.

[17]See Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 26–7.

[18]See Behrooz, "Factionalism in Iran under Khomeini," 600–1.

[19]Social Science Research Council, Princeton University and Syracuse University, *Iran Data Portal*, "1980 Parliamentary Elections" and "1981 Presidential Elections" and Bakhash, "Elections under the Islamic Republic."

[20]Here the concept of discipline is understood as in Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, 146, as follows:

Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an "aptitude", a "capacity", which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection.

[21]Rahnema, "Workers Councils in Iran," 69–93.

[22]See Gueyras, "Liesse populaire a Téhéran."

[23]See Mather, "Iran's Tudeh Party," 611–27.

Prosecutor-General officially dissolved the party, which actually survived and kept operating clandestinely.[24]

The Iranian power structure was in transformation, and it developed along a double-track system, according to the 1979 Constitution: President and Supreme Leader, *Majles* and Council of Guardians. The leading role of the clerics became soon evident in the newly established Islamic Republic, and the IRP gradually penetrated the core of the state with many of its members in key positions. Yet, as previously discussed, it was not a single party system. The IRP fiercely tried to remove any obstacle in its path to the consolidation of the Islamic-revolutionary rule. This project lasted until 1987, when the IRP was dissolved.

Although the central nucleus of the party agreed on the main strategy, from the very beginning the IRP hid divisions and controversies. In fact, when the party was established, there were five different groups, with distinctive political positions: (1) clerics which supported anti-Pahlavi protests, mainly supporters or former students of Khomeini, (2) bazaaris loyal to the Ayatollah, (3) conservatives from the Hojjatieh Society, e.g. ʿAli Akbar Parvaresh and Velayati, (4) other groups of conservatives-rightists, close to Mozafar Baqaʾi, (5) religious representatives of other small revolutionary groups, including Jalal al-Din Farsi, ʿAbbas Poshtibani and Mir-Hossein Mousavi.[25]

At the dawn of the second *Majles,* there were *de facto* three main factions.[26] First, the conservatives, close to President Khamenei and supported by the bazaaris, who praised private ownership and opposed the minimum wage for workers. Second, the radicals, followers of the Prime Minister Mousavi, who promoted a Labour Law able to "safeguard workers from capitalists", and pushed for decisive state intervention in the economy. The third wing was the domain of the pragmatists, driven by Rafsanjani and the new Iranian middle class, in favour of a dual or mixed economy.

At that time, the country was economically undermined by the Iran–Iraq war, and the state needed to increase the productivity of Iranian workers. In this context, the regulation of work became one of the main controversies between radicals and conservatives.[27] As Ashraf pointed out, the conservatives "even opposed a minimum wage, arguing that in the Islamic free market, labour accepted the proposed wage of its free will".[28] Referring to the radicals, Ashraf suggested that by advocating for "a ceiling on agricultural land, confiscation of lands in urban areas, nationalization of foreign trade, labour laws to protect workers against the owners of capital, their program added up to a form of statism or state socialism".[29]

Furthermore, in those years rivalry among factions was also centred on the interpretation of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). This issue would have affected IRP labour policies, and thus modes of workers' objectification. The conservatives were oriented towards a traditional interpretation, which considered the Qurʾan and Prophet Mohammad's derived ordinances the only ones to govern a Muslim state.[30] Conversely, both the radicals and the pragmatists were aligned to a dynamic understanding of religious jurisprudence. This latter group believed that Shiʾi jurisprudence also had to encounter the changing status of a society.[31] Although the IRP's main task was to implement the Khomeinist revolutionary discourse within Iranian society, the party's leadership did not conceal their oppositional political views and publicly admitted their position. For instance, on 21 August 1983, Khamenei declared, as reported by the IRP's newspaper *Jomhuri-e Eslami*:

> Many people are trying to say that this party belongs to a certain group. They say it is the party of the clergy because there are five clergymen on the top. They say it is the party of the *bazaaris*. Some believe that this is the party of the President [Khamenei], the Prime Minister [Mousavi] and the Majles speaker [Rafsanjani].

Moreover, he was convinced that there was no difference in having different ideas concerning Islamic jurisprudence or economy:

> There are differences of opinion among the members of the central committee but both follow the (doctrine) of [the] Imam and agree on main issues. It is ok for the two camps to think differently on issues related to *fiqh* or the economy.[32]

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[24]Jahanpour, "Iran: Rise and Fall of the Tudeh Party," 156–8.

[25]Ibid., 598–600.

[26]The second Majles lasted from 1984 to 1988. The key roles were in the IRP's hands, with the radical Prime Minister Mir-Hossein Mousavi and the more conservative President ʿAli Khamenei. This shared management, together with the *Majles* speaker Hashemi-Rafsanjani, resulted in open conflict between the different factions of the party, which ended only in 1987 with the dissolution of the party. See also Baktiari, *Parliamentary Politics in Revolutionary Iran*, 99–144.

[27]In the period between 1984 and 1988, the confrontation was mainly focused on domestic issues, and due to the conflict with Iraq, foreign policy was marginalised in the political debate. It is worth highlighting the pivotal role of IRP leadership in prompting Ayatollah Khomeini to accept the UN resolution for a ceasefire. See also Behrooz, "Factionalism in Iran under Khomeini," 607 and Amuzegar, *Iran's Economy under the Islamic Republic*, 34.
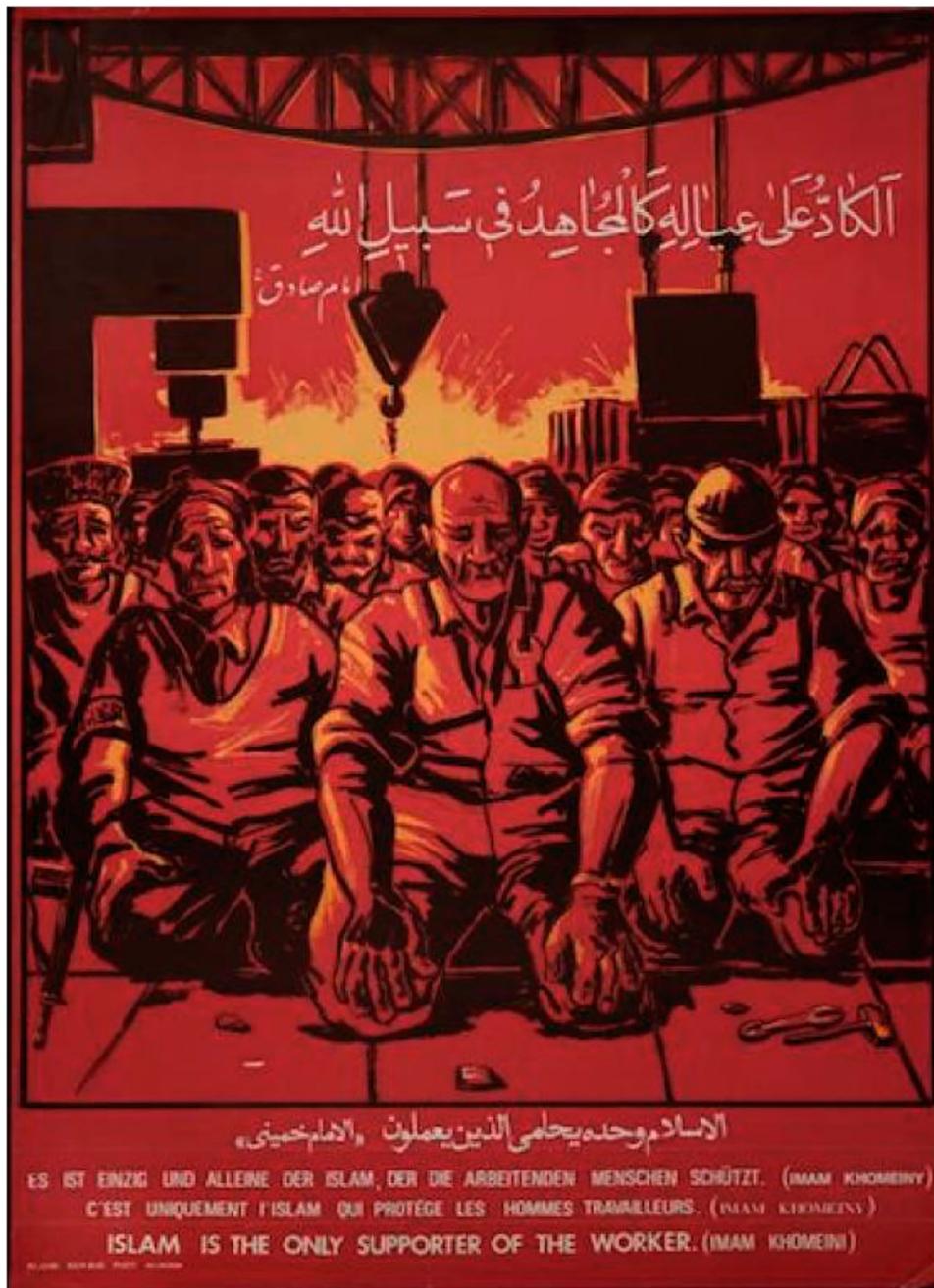
[28]Ashraf, in an interview with Abrahamian and Paul, "There Is a Feeling That the Regime Owes Something to the People," 13–18.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 49–50.

[31]Ibid.

[32]See *Jomhuri-e Islami*, August 21, 1983, quoted in Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, 67.

Figure 1. Workers as holy warriors. Issued by the IRP, 1980s. The University of Chicago Library.

Nevertheless, throughout the 1980s, the factional rifts became unbridgeable. In 1987, the IRP dissolved itself because the leadership did not succeed in merging all its disparate parts together.[33] The Labour law, as a disciplinary and partial instrument of state power,[34] was one of the crucial issues facing the party.

In Figure 1, issued by the IRP in the 1980s (the exact date is unknown),[35] the sentence "Islam is the only supporter of the worker", proclaimed by Ayatollah Khomeini, stands as the basis of the picture. It is written in four different languages: Arabic, German, French and English, in order to communicate the Islamic message to a variety of audiences and appeal to an international population.[36] The

[33]For the speeches of Rafsanjani and Khamenei on the failure of the IRP project, see also Arjomand, *After Khomeini*, 33–4.
[34]See Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 141.
[35]See "Guide to the Middle Eastern Poster Collection," University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/meposters-0002-024.pdf, box 2, n. 24.
[36]Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 254.

poster was distributed on the occasion of 1 May, International Labour Day, by the Islamic Republic Party as written in English in the bottom left corner.[37] By giving specific symbols as keys of understanding, it shows workers kneeling for prayer. In the foreground, the man in the middle represents the vertex of the poster for an imaginary observer. Yet, he is not a real centre: he is portrayed as one among others, who are all at the same level, all sitting on the ground. In his pocket, a wrench is clearly recognisable. Other work tools are visible on the floor: a spanner and a hammer. Just before them, there are three *mohr*, small blocks of clay, used by Shi'ite Muslims during their daily prayers' prostrations and symbolising the earth.[38] In a particular socialist realist style,[39] the workers' expressions on the poster transmit their strain and their toil. One of them wears a *papaq*, traditional Azerbaijani hat, reflecting the Azerbaijani background of many workers in Iran, especially in Tehran.[40] Labourers' facial features are drawn in thick black pencil sketches, against a red and yellow background of industrial scales, which symbolises justice.[41]

For the Khomeinists of the IRP, the dichotomy of justice/injustice was a crucial instrument for social demarcation between *mostakbarin* (the advantaged-oppressors) and *mostaz'afin* (the disadvantaged-oppressed part of the Islamic *ummah,* in Persian pronounced *ommat*).[42] It was a way of borrowing and then reformulating with an Islam terminology the same concept of social justice which has been part of the Iranian left for years, before the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the *Qur'an* (4:75) it is explicitly mentioned that the Muslim community has to fight for people subjected to tyranny and oppression: "Why is it that you do not fight in the way of God and in the way of the deprived?" Indeed, the workers, *kargaran* in Persian, were considered part of the *mostaz'afin,* ready to struggle against the oppressors. The fact that there is a weapon placed in the left corner of the poster is emblematic. Moreover, above the workers' heads, a saying of Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq stands out: "He who toils for his family is like the *mojahid* (holy warrior) in the way of God." It is written in Arabic, in *naskh* calligraphic style (the style used to copy the Qur'an) and with diacritical notes. It has been argued that text written in Arabic with this style is considered as the word of Allah.[43]
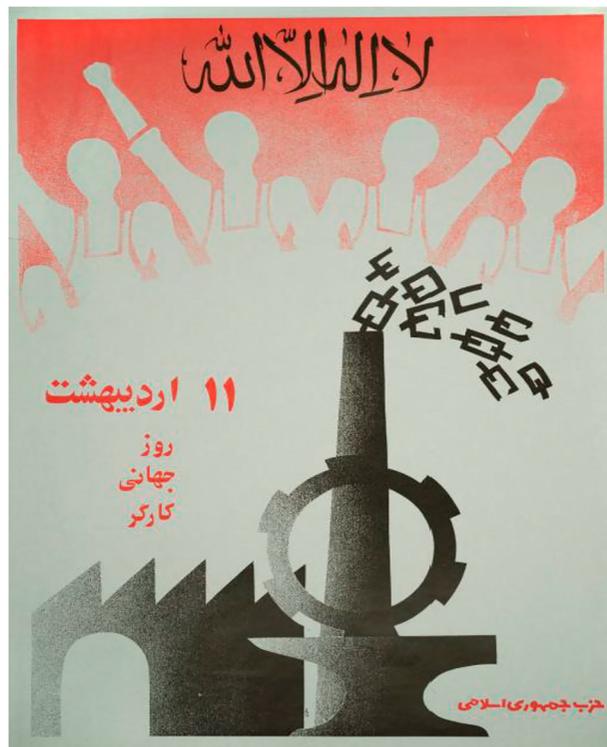

Figure 2. White silhouettes of workers with raised clenched fists. Issued by the IRP, 1980s. The University of Chicago Library.

Hence, calligraphy becomes crucial in conveying messages. It is immediately recognisable, even though the audiences are not always able to understand the meanings behind the sentences.[44] For example, the quotation by Khomeini is written in Persian, precisely in *nasta'liq* calligraphic style and without diacritical sings, and it is immediately comprehensible for all Iranians. Therefore, by visually making labour equate with religion (through the use of Arabic), workers were immediately brought into the Islamic sphere. This mechanism deactivated the iconographic power of secular motifs in the poster.

3. The Appropriation of Historical Leftist Symbols

Religious references are mixed with symbols of socialist realism (e.g. machinery) also in Figure 2, issued by the *Hezb-e Jomhuri-e Eslami,* as written in Persian in the right corner of the image.[45] Commemorating the

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[37]See "Guide to the Middle Eastern Poster Collection," University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/meposters-0002-024.pdf.

[38]The most favoured clay is that from Karbala in Iraq, where the martyrdom of Imam Husein occurred.

[39]Fischer and Abedi, "Revolutionary Posters and Cultural Signs."

[40]See Abrahamian's history of May Day in the Islamic Republic of Iran in *Khomeinism*, 73.

[41]See Fischer and Abedi, "Revolutionary Posters and Cultural Signs."

[42]See also Bayat, "Historiography, Class, and Iranian Workers," 183.

[43]As explained by Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 101.

[44]At the time of the Revolution, there was a 63.5% illiteracy rate among Iranian population over 15 years old. Among the rest of the society, not everybody was able to read Arabic. See Mehran, "Social Implications of Literacy in Iran," 194–211.

[45]See "Guide to the Middle Eastern Poster Collection," University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/meposters-0002-040.pdf, box 2, n. 40.

International Labour Day (the 11th of Ordibehesht in the Persian calendar), the poster combines black factory symbols, such as an anvil, a cogwheel and a chimney stack, with the Qur'anic verse that reads: "There is no God but Allah."

Here the Arabic language is an instrument utilised to fuse both the revolutionary movement and the workers into Islamicity. White silhouettes of workers with raised clenched fists, against a red background, appear on the top half of the image. What is once again worth noting is the merging of different graphic traditions, in order to create a new semiotic representation of workers. For example, broken chains, identified with oppression, come out from the smokestack.

On the one hand, this image appropriates the Marxist narrative related to the famous phrase: "Proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains."[46] On the other hand, it suggests a new key for interpreting the world of the factory, as a religious alternative to the other political actors who were in competition for the "property" of the Workers Day.[47] First, the poster brings the audience to this path by using the *surat* Arabic calligraphy, which is immediately linked to Islam. Second, it does not allude to proletarians or working class *tabagheh-ye kargar*, but it mentions the word *kargar*/worker only referring to May Day. Third, labourers in the poster are represented as unidentified white shapes in work suits. Thus, this specific use of symbols suggests that the *kargar*'s identity is not defined by belonging to a particular class. Khomeinists of the IRP incorporated the *kargar* into "the broader category of *mostaz'afin,* the downtrodden", who were – as Muslims – all "slaves of God".[48] Indeed, the Islamic revolution and the new Republic proved their legitimacy in the name of the oppressed, a large category which included not only workers but also urban and rural poor and the unemployed.[49] In this process of transformation, the concept of *tabagheh-ye kargar*, of a working class as a collective specific entity, was dissolved and placed under the Islamic umbrella.

4. Labour as a Religious Duty

By publicly presenting labour as a religious duty and as an expression of God, through posters, the IRP proposed a new framework for the workers' life and thusly for their

Figure 3. Work tools coming out of the soil together with a red rose. Issued by the IRP, 1980s. The University of Chicago Library.

control: the Islamic Republic. Figure 3 illustrates this new conceptualisation well.[50]

A wrench, a shovel and a hammer stand out in this poster, released for the Commemoration of International Labour Day during the 1980s. The three black work tools seem to come out of the soil, together with a red rose that ties them together. The caption which stands above reads: "Islamic Republic: Cultivator of the individuality and value of the worker."

Flowers have a lot of meanings in the Persian tradition and literature. The rose in particular was often used as a motif for beauty and love in Persian poetry.[51] Nevertheless, in this specific context, the red rose symbolises the sacrifice of workers, the blood split for their struggles. It is interesting to note that this meaning overlaps with the one conveyed by the socialist iconography. Furthermore, according to Abrahamian, the IRP preferred roses to carnations because the latter were even more frequently inserted into Iranian leftist groups' posters,[52] particularly those issued by the Tudeh Party, with a Soviet influence.

[46]Marx and Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 62.
[47]The competitors were: the Tudeh Party (the communist "Party of the Masses"), a coalition of leftist groups headed by the Fedayin and the Maoist Paykar, and the Mojahedin. The IRP's members initially paid scarce attention to International Labour Day and only in April 1979 they realised that the leftist groups were organising more important celebrations for International May Day. Thus, the IRP started its preparation for the occasion. See Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 510–25, and Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 71–87.
[48]See Bayat, "Does Class Ever Opt Out of the Nation?" 195 and Bayat, "Historiography, Class, and Iranian Workers," 197.
[49]Bayat, "Workless Revolutionaries."
[50]See "Guide to the Middle Eastern Poster Collection," University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/meposters-0002-034.pdf, box 2, n. 34.
[51]Hanaway, "Symbolism of Persian Revolutionary Posters," 31–50.
[52]Ibid. See also Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 71–87.

5. Between Iranian Particularism and Islamic Universalism

The above-mentioned recourse to multiple iconographies, by giving space to different layers of meaning, enabled the merging of national and international elements: the Persian–Iranian particularism with the Islamic universalism.[53] For instance, the process of assimilation of May Day into the Islamic calendar provided a global connotation to the IRP. By Islamising the Iranian calendar and in particular International Labour Day, the Khomeinists also wanted to redefine what, up to that moment, represented an important rhetoric emblem of the Iranian leftist groups in workers' minds. The IRP's ideologues did not create another labour day, but they instead integrated May First's symbolic force into the Islamic circle. In this sense, the *Hezb-e Jomhuri-e Eslami*'s posters "talk".[54] They are not just a mere manifestation of a new specific political discourse,[55] but they constitute the Islamic political discourse. By introducing discontinuities with the past with the large use of Islamic symbols in the public space, and by reassigning new meanings to the pre-existent, they suggest a new mode of thought.[56] As Sreberny Mohammadi pointed out, after the Revolution, "public space potentially heralded a public sphere".[57] Therefore, in analysing the conditions of emergence of this new discourse, one sees the pre-existing imaginary being redefined and reconstructed in a single new discursive field.

Figure 4[58] is representative of how the idea of a religious-inspired workplace was spread, through the use of predominant iconographic messages (two hands holding work tools and a red rose) over linguistic ones.

In fact, the only written messages are: on the upper part of the poster, the 11th of Ordibehesht, the International Labour Day in the Persian calendar; on the bottom, the signature of the *Hezb-e Jomhuri-e Eslami*.

In Figure 5, from the middle of stylised orange smokestacks, a black human arm emerges, as if it was another chimney.[59]

Holding a pink flower with its clenched fist, it reaches the orange sun behind it. The caption directly

Figure 4. Hands holding work tools and a red rose. Issued by the IRP, 1979–1987. Hoover Institution Archives.

"talks" to the *kargar* in Persian: "Worker: May your arm gain strength in the service of God and the people." There are three interesting elements to highlight. First, in Figure 5, the linguistic message is driven by the iconographic symbols. It is not central. It is located at the bottom of the poster. Second, the lotus flower, which stands against the awakening-sun instantly brings to mind the creator, God. Indeed, in the Persian tradition of art and architecture, the lotus flower, growing from water and opening up towards the sun, is a symbol of light and creation.[60] The sun also represents the light coming from God, the heart of the universe.[61] This amalgam between language and image and its consequent registration by the audience, represents, using Chelkowski–Dabashi's words, "the deepest ideological forces operative" in the revolutionary domain.[62]

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[53]See also Ram, "Multiple Iconographies," 97.
[54]As suggested by Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 9.
[55]See Ram, "Multiple Iconographies," 97.
[56]See Foucault, "Politics and the Study of Discourse," 53.
[57]Sreberny-Mohammadi and Mohammadi, *Small Media, Big Revolution*, 25.
[58]See Hoover Political Posters Database (Stanford), http://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/20468/11i-urdibihisht-ruzi-jihanii-kargar?ctx=ca270c86-f6ee-43e1-9811-f2f3e4bd7f76&idx=2 and Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 75.
[59]See "Guide to the Middle Eastern Poster Collection," University of Chicago Library, https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/ead/pdf/meposters-0007-269.pdf, box 7, n. 269.
[60]See Nazari and Adelzade, "Manifestation of Lotus in Art and Architecture of Ancient Iran, India and Egypt," 92–100.
[61]See *Qur'an* 10:5, 71:16, 24:35.
[62]Chelkowski and Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution*, 105.
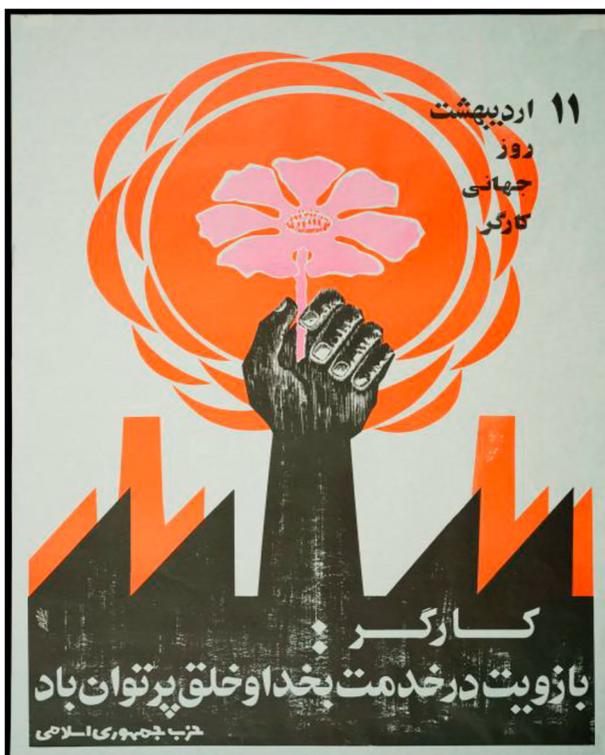
Figure 5. Worker: May your arm gain strength in the service of God and the people. Issued by the IRP, 1980s. The University of Chicago Library.

Figure 6. Worker's hands ready to struggle. Issued by IRP, 1980s. Hoover Institution Archives.

6. Transformations of the Workplace: The Construction of a New Field of Knowledge

If "power produces realities" and establishes "rituals of truth", as Foucault argued in *Discipline and Punish*, posters represent a manifestation of these rituals.[63] Then again, as "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge", posters are a segment in a broader field of knowledge.[64] In this sense, the IRP's visual political campaign, representative of the Khomeinist idea of a new Iran, was an important actor in the regime's celebration of the Islamic view of labour. It expanded revolutionary axioms into the factories and into the public spaces. Therefore, walls started to express struggles.

Nevertheless, it was not a question of mere manifestation of messages. Posters became a tool of intervention in the workplace. They were distributed in the factories, together with banners with recurrent slogans of the IRP,

such as "Workers, Toilers, Islam is For You", "Our Party is That of Allah, Our Leader is Ruhollah."[65] They were hanging on the walls, in order to remind the workers to perform what Khomeini called "the divine duty of production",[66] in a truly Islamised work environment. Throughout this process, the factory became more than a workplace: it turned into what Bayat defined as a "barricade" of *agirs* (labourers) against *koffar* (infidels), in other words, an imaginary battleground for Islamised labourers against the infidels.[67]

As written in Persian in Figure 6, a worker's hands (which are ready to fight with all their strength against the oppressors) will never go to hell.[68]

This religious transformation of the Iranian factories was put into practice by the members of theIAs for labour, which were supported by the IRP and conceived as an alternative to the independent *shuras* (workers' councils). IAs were established for educational and social purposes, as mandated by the Iranian constitution, but soon they became instruments of control over workers. They reshaped the factory and its atmosphere in different ways: by hanging up posters on the walls, by

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[63]Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 210.
[64]Ibid., 27.
[65]Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 73.
[66]The religious conception of work was widely employed by the IRP to guarantee workers' efforts in raising production, during Iran–Iraq war (1980–1988). Clergymen were sent to factories: their mission was spreading the Khomeini's idea of labour as a manifestation of God. See Algar, *Islam and Revolution*, 231–54 and Khomeini, "We Shall Confront the World with Our Ideology."
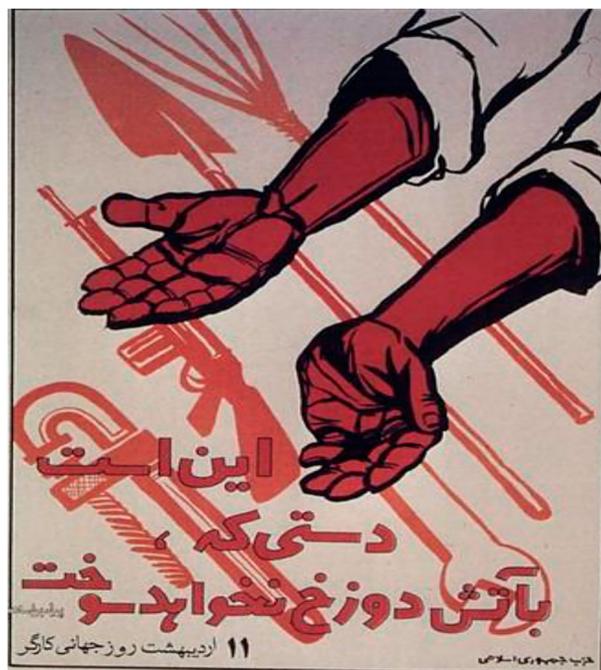[67]Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, 186.
[68]See Hoover Institution Political Posters Database (Stanford), http://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/20505/in-ast-dasti-kih-biatishi-duzakh-nakhvahad-sukht-payamba?ctx=ca270c86-f6ee-43e1-9811-f2f3e4bd7f76&idx=6 and Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 77.

Figure 7. Promises of happiness for workers. Issued by the IRP, 1980s. Hoover Institution Archives.

broadcasting State speeches during breaks, by identifying "non-conformist" workers and by calling up labourers for pro-regime rallies.[69]

7. Why the IRP Engulfed Historical Leftist Symbols

Along this line, the IRP's ideologues contributed to the redefinition of secular motifs historically related to the Iranian left. However, it was not a mere procedure of redetermination of certain symbols, but it was a process of engulfment and appropriation. By applying this systematic method, the IRP absorbed historical leftist icons into its political discourse.[70] The purpose was to annul their symbolic power in the eyes of the workers, exactly as it happened with the Islamisation of the International Workers' Day. For example, on 22 April 1982, *Jomhuri-e Eslami*, the newspaper founded by the Islamic Republic Party in May 1979, reported a statement released by an official of the Labour House: May Day "is a distortion that the Marxists of Second International

in Paris have committed". Then, the source added: "On the basis of our researches, we have found out the fact that the attitudes of the protagonists and the main participant force of the May Day were in fact religious."[71] Furthermore, a closer look at the slogans reveals another attempt to create distance between the IRP and the historical Iranian left. First, productivity was praised as a religious duty. Indeed, workers received promises of happiness in the present and in the future, as written in the inscription of Figure 7.[72] Second, accumulation of capital was not condemned as in the Communist narrative, even though it was not considered as an invitation to the free market, especially by the faction closer to Khomeini, which supported state-sponsored redistributive policies.

8. Conclusion

As discussed at the beginning of this article, the seemingly contradictory use of secular motifs was recurrent in the posters released immediately after the Revolution and over post-revolutionary period of the 1980s. The blending of various ideological sources was perhaps inevitable in the growth and consolidation of what Dabashi defined "a victorious utopia becoming an established ideology".[73] Yet, what is peculiar is how this heterogeneity of symbols was channelled into a single discursive field of power. The reference to a single discourse is not meant to say that the IRP, even though the expression of the Khomeini's ideology, was a monolithic entity. Nevertheless, the posters could be interpreted as a visual projection of the different souls of the IRP, which were all oriented towards an utter absorption of leftist imaginary, in order to politically nullify its potential ideological danger within the factory.

Throughout the 1980s, the different dimensions of discourse, concerning control over workers and the process of neutralisation of leftist organisations, evolved along three main phases: (1) the perception of a threat; (2) the reaction to the recognised danger; (3) and the assimilation of the enemy. Indeed, together with the West and the capitalists, the leftist groups, were perceived as threats against the success of the revolution.

Since the earliest strikes in 1978, workers (whose political ideas at that time were not close to Khomeini's message) were united against the foreign influence:

> In unity with the fighting people of Iran, the purpose of our strike is to destroy despotism and eliminate the

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[69]Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, 186.
[70]See also Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 71–88.
[71]Bayat, *Workers and Revolution in Iran*, 192.
[72]Here is understood as well-being in this and in the next world. See Hoover Institution Political Posters Database (Stanford), http://digitalcollections.hoover.org/objects/20511/saadati-kargar-dar-partavi-islam-va-iman-dastmuzd-va-ru and Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 76.
[73]Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 17.

influence of foreigners in our country, and create an independent, free and progressive Iran. These goals are the indisputable rights of the people. The people shall utilize all the means of self-sacrifice to achieve these goals.[74]

To overcome the difference between the Islamic-revolutionary discourse and that of the workers, Khomeini and IRP members reshaped the refrain against the "colonial" and "dictator" West by channelling the class struggle into the *religious* dimension through the dichotomies such as moral/immoral and godly/infidel. What happened was what Hall defines as "a re-articulation of the relations between the subjects and discursive practices"[75] and a new form of Iranian revolutionary identity emerged.

If the West was considered a threat, the Marxists ideas coming from the West were incorporated into a unique idea of the enemy. As a reaction, the perceived danger was isolated in the speeches within and outside the factory, as the "counterrevolutionary" Other, in other words, the enemy for all the revolutionaries, including the workers. Workers' May Day slogans began to wave together the *religious* dimension to the *revolutionary* one: "Islam is for equality and social justice", "the problems of the East come from the West, especially from American imperialism".[76]

The secular rhetoric was engulfed by absorbing its own symbols. Therefore, it can be argued that this process of assimilation was a clear reaction to nullify the leftist secular groups who initiated the fluid anti-Shah strikes among the workers. In fact, the Marxist slogan "Workers of the world, unite!" was turned into "Oppressed of the world, unite!" and workers began to shout it as a rallying-cry.[77] Furthermore, the IRP's May Day posters were an example of a visual counter-tactic to fight the perceived danger. The new identity of the worker as *homo islamicus* started taking shape in posters as well as in practices. First, it emerged through the *naskh* and *surat* Arabic calligraphies, which are recognised by the audience as the styles connected to Islam. Second, through calls to action for workers, referred to the more general *kargar*/worker. Third, it was expressed through the representation of labourers as unidentified black or white shapes in work suits. By incorporating the symbols and the imaginary of the perceived threat into another field discourse, the clerics of the IRP actually refashioned under an Islamic umbrella traditional signs which have been part of the leftist background for decades. They aimed at producing a *ritual of truth*

for all those who participated in the revolution. It was within this context that the *rituals of truth* circulated within the entire social body surrounding the factory, and thus, controlled it not only – as Foucault warned – in negative terms.

Disclosure Statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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[74]Oil workers syndicate quoted in Moaddel, "Class Struggle in Post-revolutionary Iran," 323.
[75]Hall, "Who Needs Identity?" 16.
[76]See Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*, 31.
[77]Ibid.

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