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## 'Precarize' and divide: Iranian workers from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Green Movement

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## CHAPTER 2

### Preparing for the '79 Revolution from Paris: Khomeini's Discourse on the Iranian Left and Workers



Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Neauphle-le-Château, 1978. (Photo: imam-khomeini.ir)

#### Introduction

Workers and labor *per se* played no role in the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's political discourse until late 1978. It would be impossible to grasp the narratives that developed under the Islamic Republic without first exploring the myths, imageries and linguistic tools employed by Khomeini to unify the polyphonic spectrum of Iranian society during the period when revolution was gaining momentum. Hence, in order to understand how discourses about labor transformed relations of power and domination in post-revolutionary Iran, the analysis of this dissertation ought to start from the words that were used so extensively in the process of creating the 1979 revolution. There were other voices emanating from the Iranian masses, but – because of Khomeini's central role in the future IRI – this chapter is devoted to the analysis of his language of revolt. In the eyes of the

world, the Ayatollah became the de facto spokesman of the movement that led to the overthrow of the Shah. In particular, this chapter examines the messages and interviews given to Iranians abroad and to foreign media during what Hamid Dabashi defined as the sixth phase of the Ayatollah's development and orchestration of revolutionary symbolics, that – by then – received substantial coverage.<sup>146</sup> On October 6, 1978, Khomeini arrived at Orly Airport in Paris.<sup>147</sup> Two days later, he started actively preparing the Revolution from the French village of Neauphle-le Château, outside Paris, where he stayed until his return to Iran on February 1, 1979, the day he landed at Tehran Mehrabad airport. From that location, where he was living in exile following his expulsion from Najaf (Iraq), where he had been developing his militant thoughts over a period of 13 years,<sup>148</sup> Khomeini attempted to define and influence the course of the Revolution in Iran. He launched a campaign of Islamization, which was meant to galvanize the masses against the Shah and draw them under the religious umbrella and his own peculiar ideology.<sup>149</sup> Moreover, he constructed a narrative directed toward the goal of minimizing, isolating, and eventually discrediting his political rivals. The Ayatollah gave daily interviews to foreign media and delivered messages to Iranians. In almost every meeting, the international reporters asked him about the other voices constituting the revolutionary opposition to the Shah. The journalists' questions systematically referred to "Marxists groups" and "the Communists." Khomeini's responses became sharper over the course of the months leading up to the Revolution.

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<sup>146</sup> Dabashi divides the development of Khomeini's revolutionary discourse that challenged the Pahlavi regime into eight stages, starting from the pre-June 1963 uprising to the 1979 revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent. The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 414-415.

<sup>147</sup> Khomeini's links in France were Abdol Hassan Bani-Sadr and Sadeq Qotbzadeh. The Ayatollah spent his first days in the southern suburb of Cachan before moving to Neauphle-le-Château. Bani-Sadr, talking to *The Associated Press* about the revolution, declared: "For me, it was sure, but not for Khomeini and not for lots of others inside Iran." See *Associated Press*, February 1, 2019 and Emadeddin Baqi, *Tarikh-e Shafahi-e Enqelab-e Eslami-e Iran: Majmu'eh-ye Bamameh-ye Dāstān-e Enqelāb az Radio BBC*, (Tehran: Nashr-e Tafakkor, 1994).

<sup>148</sup> Behrooz Ghamari-Tabrizi, "The Divine, the People, and the Faqih" in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam eds, *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 211-238.

<sup>149</sup> Khomeini's thought differed from the other understanding of Islam circulating in those years, such as the "red Islam" of Ali Shariati or the conservative Islamism of Ahmad Fardid. See Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, *Revolution and its Discontents: Political Thought and Reform in Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

As this study is concerned with discourses relating to workers and power dynamics since the Iranian Revolution, this chapter puts the evolution of these discourses into a historical perspective. After the Revolution, as chapter 4 will show, Khomeini successfully appropriated the symbolics of class struggle and social justice, through the explicit delegitimization of the Left. Drawing on the corpus of his interviews and messages while in France, this chapter gives an account of Khomeini's discursive mechanisms, which made this appropriation possible. As the introduction of this dissertation has already explored, the Tudeh party and several Marxist groups, such as the Fedayān, the Mojāhedīn-e-Khalq, and Peykā, represented the immediate *point of connection* with those realms of class and social justice, as well as with labor and workers. Although from 1953 until the height of the Revolution, Iranian workers had remained mostly unorganized and were put under the strict surveillance of the Shah's secret police and intelligence services, towards the end of 1978, Leftist organizations were attempting to regain their influence within the factories.<sup>150</sup> Khomeini viewed them with suspicion, as they could pose potential threats to the Islamic Republic project. For this reason, he began to publicly distance himself from them, without ever specifying their peculiarities or naming individual groups. He initiated a process of denying their impact in mobilizing the other revolutionaries. Moreover, Khomeini triggered a mechanism to appropriate the Leftist symbols that would be at the core of the Islamic ideologues' program under the IRI and will be examined in more depth in chapter 4. During his exile in Neauphle-le-Château, Khomeini used foreign media interviews as an echo chamber for his Islamic and revolutionary project. When addressing foreign audiences, as well as the Iranians abroad, he portrayed the Iranian revolutionary movement as unique and somehow monolithic.

Three main questions guide this chapter. How did Khomeini's narrative of revolt evolve during the making of the Iranian Revolution in his last phase of exile in the suburbs of Paris? What discursive practices caused this to become the hegemonic voice not only of Iranian Shi'ism, but also of the

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<sup>150</sup> See Introduction, and Haideh Moghissi and Saeed Rahnama, "The Working Class and the Islamic State in Iran," *Socialist Register*, 2001, 199-200; see also Touraj Atabaki, "Writing the Social History of Labor in the Iranian Oil Industry," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, No. 84 (2013): 154-158.

opposition to the Shah's regime? Why and how did Khomeini marginalize the Left, while appropriating the rhetoric of class and social justice? Tracing the modalities through which Khomeini emerged as a key figure among competing political ideologies, in particular the Left, enables a framing of the context within which the discourse about labor developed once the Islamic Republic was established. The explicit rejection of the Marxists and the discursive assimilation of some key themes of the Left is rooted in a process that started during the last months of 1978. By exploring Khomeini's voice of the Revolution in the making, this chapter shows how his project assimilated the issues of equality, class and social justice, while reducing the Left's potential to mobilize the masses over these core subjects. Nevertheless, throughout his speeches in Neauphle-le-Château, the Ayatollah avoided connecting any Leftist group directly to workers. By then, the appeal of these groups and their spread in the factories only potentially existed, as independent trade unionism – historically close to the Tudeh Party – had been eradicated.<sup>151</sup> When Khomeini moved to France, the Left's impact in the factories was weak for several reasons. As will be shown later through the analysis of Khomeini's words, the Ayatollah was more worried about the spread of Marxist ideas through universities.<sup>152</sup> However, he sought to leverage the religious sense of unity and belonging that was widespread among workers, who were mostly illiterate and were used to mosques as areas of public life.<sup>153</sup> To transcend the logic of Islam successfully silencing all voices to be absolute and determinant *tout-court*,<sup>154</sup> this chapter buttresses the argument that Khomeini's ability to neutralize the Left lay in his political stance rather than in a religious narrative. He was adroit in appealing to all classes through a populist and nationalist narrative. In particular, discrediting opponents was an integral part of the evolution of Khomeini's language: this transformed systematically as events were developing and a non-definitive exclusion of Marxists

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<sup>151</sup> See Ladjevardi, *Labor Union and Autocracy in Iran*, 193-206 and 233-234; Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 95-129; and Stephanie Cronin, "The Left in Iran: Illusion and Disillusion," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (2000): 231-243.

<sup>152</sup> See Misagh Parsa, "Ideology and Political Action in the Iranian Revolution" *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2011): 53-68.

<sup>153</sup> See Bayat, *Workers and Revolution*, 48-49.

<sup>154</sup> See Val Moghadam, "The Revolution and the Regime: Populism, Islam and the State in Iran," *Social Compass* 36, No. 4 (1989): 415-450.

would serve the tactical goals. The strategy of denying the existence of the Leftists, and at other times portraying them as a threat, accompanied vague declarations on their freedom of expression under the future Islamic Republic. In fact, as this chapter argues, a categorical dismissal of the Left would have created an unnecessary rift in the movement that by then needed to be united in its pursuit of its main declared goal: the Revolution.

**Disclosing Khomeini's discursive strategies: from response to action**

If one places discourse within a perspective of power relations seen as a struggle for hegemony, power invests language, and through discourse, a dialectic of ideology and structural events unfolds.<sup>155</sup> As Gramsci demonstrated, cultural hegemony forges alliances and constructs relations of domination and subordination. Furthermore, the creation of a hegemonic apparatus determines what Gramsci describes as “a reform of consciences and methods of knowledge.”<sup>156</sup> Hence, it is discourse that allows us to connect various domains and enhances language's role in the exercise of power as a tool of persuasion. Khomeini's interviews and messages, during his stay in the suburbs of Paris, are emblematic in this sense. Through his discourse, as will be explored in the next sections, he transmitted values and myths that invigorated the Iranian masses. His words spread new ideological meanings, drawing from collective practices, in order to achieve consent. This meaning comes into being through the interplay between the text and its form.<sup>157</sup> This is why the choice of vocabulary in Persian is particularly relevant to the study of the evolution of Khomeini's discourse. Moreover, a specific use of textual structures, as well as the switch between present and future tenses, fostered a precise agenda. In fact, these choices reflected Khomeini's relational values, knowledge, and way of judging, and thus, were – in Fairclough's words “ideologically significant.”<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> See Fairclough, *Discourse and Social change*, 86-96.

<sup>156</sup> Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere [Prison Notebooks]*, Q10, §12, 1249-1250.

<sup>157</sup> See Fairclough, *Discourse and Social change*, 95-98.

<sup>158</sup> Fairclough, *Language and Power*, 99.

Khomeini built his discourse on premises operating on several levels: context, goal, values and what Fairclough terms “means-goals” to achieve the final objective, such as the overthrow of the Shah regime.<sup>159</sup> Thus, the construction of Khomeini’s claims and counterclaims followed the above-mentioned pattern. The Ayatollah framed his responses and consequent calls to action on the basis of particular and shifting premises. He juxtaposed his claim with the construction of a counter claim, before envisaging a pattern for a solution. Hence, a situation was presented as a problem and was defined by a negative adjective in order to propose a revolutionary process of actions towards a positive and resolute outcome.

Therefore, discourse exposed the link between language and power, revealing the social practices of the revolution in the making. For this reason, this chapter will not only focus on the description of discursive tools put in place by Khomeini, but it will also engage with the interpretation of the modalities through which his ideology shaped the relations of power during the period of revolutionary momentum and eventually marginalized the Leftists in particular. Following Fairclough’s pattern, the discourse analysis of Khomeini’s interviews and speeches will try to 1) describe the linguistic level, 2) interpret the relation between the text and its discursive interactions, and 3) explain the discourses that were put in place and their connections to the social context.<sup>160</sup> Khomeini’s language of revolt, which drew on his experience in exile first in Turkey and then in Iraq between 1964 and 1978, developed along militant, Islamist, populist trajectories, but was not purposely revolutionary from the beginning.<sup>161</sup> In fact, Khomeini’s political stance was grounded in the Shia tradition of religious quietism that had frustrated him in the seminaries.<sup>162</sup> The radical figure that emerged over the course of the 1970s matured from Khomeini the constitutionalist of the

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<sup>159</sup> Isabela and Norman Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 35-78.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid, 110-112.

<sup>161</sup> See Hamid Dabashi, “By What Authority: The Formation of Khomeini’s Revolutionary Discourse, 1964-1977,” *Social Compass* 36, No. 4 (1989): 511-538.

<sup>162</sup> See Ghamari-Tabrizi, “The Divine, the People, and the Faqih” in Arshin Adib-Moghaddam eds, *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, 211-238.



earlier phases of his life.<sup>163</sup> Over the months spent in Neauphle-le-Château, he fueled the revolutionary fervor by promising radical changes. By then, there was no room for modest transformations.<sup>164</sup> His discourse, permeated by the concept of returning justice to those deprived (*mostaz'afin*), contained particular features as it was accessible to the masses, often repetitive in its use of words and clear in terms of grammar. It evoked shared values, building on the Iranian Shia tradition, such as martyrdom, and common historical or traumatic events. Dichotomies, such as good versus evil, a perceived threat versus the proposed defense strategy, salvation versus siege, served as persuasive tools to foment his followers and confound the more secular component of the Shah's opposition. Within this framework, Khomeini illuminated what he made out to be the path of God, demonstrating the "just" route to follow. In Khomeini's narrative, once the goal was reached, a future of freedom lay ahead, as the idea of happiness contrasted oppression. Pronouns, such as *we*, or epithets such as *children of Iran*, generated a sense of collective identity, whilst reinforcing national bonds, through the ideal of community. Indeed, metonymy, citing a part for the whole, was a recurrent expedient. Moreover, the transfer of meaning through metaphors, such as blood as a symbol of violence and death, made allusions to a constant situation of suffering. It stressed the suffering of the downtrodden.<sup>165</sup> The oppressed became an image designed to stimulate action, as they were invigorated to demonstrate strength instead of weakness.

By politicizing religion and casting it into a nationalist (antagonistic to that of the Pahlavi) and anti-imperialist framework (borrowed from the anticolonialism of the Left), Khomeini popularized the "Islamic ideology" as the one potentially able to bridge the gap between the various groups that made up the plethora of Iranian opposition to the Shah.<sup>166</sup> During his stay in Neauphle-le-Château,

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<sup>163</sup> See Mojtaba Mahdavi, "The Rise of Khomeinism. Problematizing the Politics of Resistance in Pre-Revolutionary Iran" in *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, eds. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 43-68.

<sup>164</sup> See Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, Introduction, in *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, eds. Arshin Adib-Moghaddam, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 1-18.

<sup>165</sup> On the evolution of pro-mostaz'afin discourses see Siavash Saffari, "Two Pro Mostaz'afin Discourses in the 1979 Iranian Revolution," *Contemporary Islam*, Vol.11 (2017), 287-301.

<sup>166</sup> See Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent*, 409-419 and Ervand Abrahamian, "Khomeini: Fundamentalist or Populist," *New Left Review*, Vol. 186 (1991): 102-119.

he never asked for obedience and did not define himself as a leader of the movement. Rather than a leader over the community, he portrayed himself as a source of inspiration. Furthermore, he managed to embody the epitome of sacred sentiments, anti-imperialist desires and militant needs, jettisoning the Leftist symbolics of class and social justice. Benefitting from an uncensored channel of communication in foreign newspapers and television reports, along with the tapes of his speeches that were smuggled into Iran, Khomeini sharpened his discourse of antagonism against perceived enemies: the Shah, foreigners (*ajaneb*, who were always linked to conspiracies), and capital. In this process of Othering, he employed specific adjectives in order to construct their roles. From the very first week of his stay in Paris, the Marxist Left was not among the main targets, because their impact on the revolutionary process and potential threat was still considered weak. As events unfolded, while navigating a terrain of ambiguous definitions and vague phrasing, Khomeini's language revealed the existence of the seeds of discontent and hatred that would reach maturity with the establishment of the IRI and would bring misfortunes and repression to the Iranian Left.<sup>167</sup>

**Constructing the enemy while building a community: October chronicles**

It was October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1978, when Khomeini delivered a message to university students for the start of the academic year in Iran.<sup>168</sup> In this message we see in play the discursive mechanisms that over the coming months would create a context in which the marginalization of the Iranian Left was made possible, indeed inevitable. By then, tens of thousands of university students had taken to the streets in Iran, and very soon, in response to martial law and the Shah's attempt at "national reconciliation," blue-collar and public employees would join the mass protests and strikes.<sup>169</sup> Addressing the students as the "children [*farzandān*] of Islam" and "children of Iran" to convey a sense of both Islamic community [*ommat*] and an extended national family, he warned them to denounce any "deviation" from the religious-nationalist path within which he framed the struggle

<sup>167</sup> In 1981 Khomeini called for the "purge of Leftist schoolchildren." *New York Times*, September 24, 1981.

<sup>168</sup> Khomeini's message to students, 8 October, 1978, (16 Mehr 1357) in *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol. 3, (Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1999), 383-388.

<sup>169</sup> Ashraf and Banuazizi, "The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution", 11-12.

against the Shah.<sup>170</sup> Khomeini talked about a shared cause under the Islamic umbrella, which was oriented toward the “establishment of the government of Islamic justice.”<sup>171</sup> Drawing on the language of martyrdom, so by using words such as “sacrifice/devotion” [*fedākār*] and “suffering [*ranj*],” “merciless killings [*koshtār-hā bi-rahmāneh*] and mourning,” he explicitly wanted to embrace the whole of Iranian society and “all classes [*tabaqāt*] of the dear nation.”<sup>172</sup> This strategy merged nationalist, religious, and social justice grievances into the same cause. In this first message from Neauphle-Le-Château, Khomeini sought to leverage the dichotomies such as good versus evil, that were constructing the enemy as a perceived threat, while proposing a strategy to fight it. Within this binary framework, he described Islam as the “guarantor of freedom, independence, happiness, as well as intellectual and practical growth [*roshd-e fekri va ‘amali*]” as being against the Shah and his army. The latter were labeled as “satanic” and “criminal” [*jenāyatkār*].<sup>173</sup> In Khomeini’s discourse, the Leftists represented a blurred entity. In fact, he never specified the different political elements that constituted the Left, such as the Tudeh Party, the Fedayān, the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq, and Peykār, among other groups. By not naming them, he perpetuated a tactic designed to undermine and dismiss the Left’s role and impact on the revolutionary movement that was taking shape at that time. In his words, the Leftists were complicit in the so-called “ploys” of the *ajaneb*, the foreigners. They were acting as “pawns” in the Shah’s hands.<sup>174</sup> Khomeini blamed them for “spread[ing] the foreign propaganda” from “Eastern and Western powers,” such as the Soviet Union, America, and Britain.<sup>175</sup> In Khomeini’s words, the Leftists were on the same level as “rightists.” Using the metaphor of siege, he accused them of “assailing” the country and perpetrating “daily massacres” of the Iranian people, who were described as victims of oppression.

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<sup>170</sup> Khomeini’s message to students, 8 October, 1978, (16 Mehr 1357) in *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, vol. 3, (Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1999), 383-388.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

Therefore, by casting the Left as part of the “domination” project against the “independence” of Iran, he attempted to diffuse the potential appeal of Leftist groups to students.<sup>176</sup>

Calling for unity against the perceived threats, both internal (the Shah) and external (foreign “conspiracy”), he began to sketch the “salvation” of Iran as a final goal, to galvanize the students into action and prompt the broader “nation” to keep struggling until victory was achieved. In peremptory tones – “you must” (*boyad*) – Khomeini urged the students to “end the chaos” in the name of the oppressed and deprived (*mostaz'afin*). Once again, he borrowed the language of siege. Although speaking of duties and giving instructions to “remove the obstacles” (the monarchy, the state apparatus, and links to foreign interference/powers) from the path to “freedom,” in this message he kept alternating the collective pronouns you/we, to construct and reinforce the idea of himself being part of the large community he was inspiring. Indeed, he announced: “Our duties and yours.” As a first moral obligation, he identified a potential Leftist threat within universities, asking students to follow a precise pattern: observe, report, denounce, protest, and ostracize.

If you see any deviation [*enherāf*] among professors and teachers from the national-religious aims, the most important of which is the downfall of the rotten regime, protest severely, and invite them to follow the path of the nation which is the path of God. If they do not accept it, restrain them [*ehterāz*] and report their deviationist intentions very clearly to the oppressed nation. They are traitors to the religion, nation, and country. They want the Shah.<sup>177</sup>

The construction of the enemy, seen as being a vague Leftist entity, passed through a sharp discursive paradigm. First, the Left was generically framed by Khomeini as a “deviation” from the path of the nation, implying a negative connotation. Second, it fitted the dichotomy “we versus them,” they (“the traitors”) “are against us” (“the oppressed nation”). Third, it was portrayed as

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

betraying Iran, conceived both as a nation and a religious community. Fourth, it was responsible for supporting the Shah and those blamed for the “robbery” of the country’s resources.

Furthermore, by the beginning of October 1978, exactly four months before the success of the Revolution, Khomeini did not in any circumstances explicitly connect the Left with the realm of labor or with the strikes. While announcing the roadmap of duties and main stages to follow, understood as means-goals to satisfy the initial demands, he admonished students to support workers’ strikes [you are “duty-bound”]. What is worth noticing in the context of this chapter is that Khomeini mentioned workers’ strikes:<sup>178</sup> first, as being part of the “Islamic movement”; and second, as activities carried out by both “deprived Muslim workers and employees [*kārgarān va kārmandān mahrum va mosalmān*]. Furthermore, no perceived threat within the factories arising from Leftist circles explicitly emerged in this first message of Khomeini’s from the small village 25 miles west of Paris. Workers’ grievances were not unique or specific within the broader movement, according to his narrative. Instead, Khomeini described workers’ unrest 1) as an act against the same enemy (the Shah) and, 2) as being for a common cause, so in solidarity with “their brothers.”

You, dear students, are duty-bound to support the rightful and valiant insurrection of the deprived Muslim workers and employees among whom the strikes are spreading. These are the deprived Muslims, who are aware of the Shah’s trampling on their rights. They have risen to uphold these in unison and sympathy with their brothers.<sup>179</sup>

Social justice epitomized a premise lacking in the Shah regime. At the same time, it constituted a goal that the revolutionaries could achieve through the strikes and the consequent establishment of

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<sup>178</sup> For a more detailed account of workers’ strikes see chapter 3. See also Asef Bayat, “The Industrial Working Class and the Revolution,” in *Workers and Revolution*, (London: Zed Books, 1987), 77-80; and Misagh Parsa, *Social Origins of the Iranian Revolution*, 126-188.

<sup>179</sup> Khomeini’s message to students, 8 October, 1978, (16 Mehr 1357) in *Sahifeh-ye Imam*, Vol. 3, (Tehran: Markaz-e Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1999), 383-388.

an Islamic government. The motif of oppression and plundering represented a tool of persuasion to encourage perseverance with the strikes. It was also a stimulus to attain justice and rights.

Everybody knows that as long as the regime lasts, social justice and redress of the plight of the deprived, hard-working people will never materialize. Tell them on my behalf not to be led astray by the deceitful establishment; tell them not to stop their strikes. Tell them to continue the Islamic movement, until the plunderers' hands will be away from what is yours and the nation's by right. With the help of the Islamic government, we will attain genuine justice and be blessed with God's bounties. Remind them to persevere with their strikes and make the Islamic slogans more widespread. Relying on God the Almighty, they can be sure of gaining their rights.<sup>180</sup>

Less than a week later, on October 14, Khomeini gave an interview to the French newspaper *Le Figaro*.<sup>181</sup> In response to questions concerning the existence of a religious movement and its connections to Leftist groups, Khomeini denied the importance and the political weight of the Left, to justify his distance from it. The discursive strategies to dismiss the Left through the process of Othering were three-fold: presenting it as being divided, as scarcely impactful, and as part of a conspiracy orchestrated by the Shah. Following his line of reasoning, which drew on the pattern of cause and effect, the disintegration of the Left represented a demonstration of the impossibility of it playing any role [“they cannot”] in the popular movement.<sup>182</sup> Khomeini was aware that the Left lacked the strength to act, because of the long shadow of SAVAK repression.<sup>183</sup> The use of the collective pronoun “we” – evoking one united group under the religious umbrella – against “they” reinforced this imagery.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid.

<sup>181</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Le Figaro*, 14 October 1978 (22 Mehr 1357) in *Talieh-e Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 21-24.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> See Ashraf Dehqani. *Torture and Resistance in Iran*, (London: 1976).

We have always avoided unanimity with these parties; today, all Iranian oppositions have become one and demonstrated together under the banner of religion, and in the name of Islam's true meaning. There is a good reason for that. The Leftist or Communist groups have almost disintegrated. They cannot have a share of this ongoing popular movement; so, naturally, the regime is trying to attribute Marxist remarks to those fighting against the Shah's dictatorship, to mislead the public opinion, particularly across the border.<sup>184</sup>

Khomeini went even further by denying the existence and relevance of any Leftist slogans within the movement. The strategy of denial needs a broader interpretation in context: he knew his words would reach a more general audience in Iran and also Iranian Leftists abroad, who were campaigning against the Shah. His denial of reality served as a way of blocking both awareness and fear. Ignoring the presence of the Left constituted a tool to neutralize a threat, and remove a potential obstacle in Khomeini's path to the Islamization of the Revolution. To underpin his argument and make it look more robust, in addition to the negative overlap of Leftist equals extremist, Khomeini relied on two other discursive techniques: the binary comparison of good versus evil, and numbers:

Take a look at the recent major protests. Religious people [*mazhabi-ha*] mobilized one million people, and always, and in every case, used religious slogans. That very same religion has always brought them together and organized them; not even once has a Leftist or extremist slogan been heard or seen.

Moreover, the process of neutralizing the Left developed further through the appropriation of discourses of progress, social justice, and freedom.

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

When we speak of Islam, it does not mean turning our backs on growth and progress; it is just the opposite. We believe that Islam is essentially a progressive religion. [...] An Islamic republic can naturally come into consideration as we think that a noble understanding of Islam will lead us toward the advancement of a society that is very talented, has a lot of manpower and social justice. Before anything, we have set our hopes on the social contents [...] Everyone will be free.<sup>185</sup>

On October 22, Leftist slogans spread in the streets of the Iranian capital. Tehran University's students chanted "communist slogans," as a journalist from the *Agence France Press* observed during an interview with Khomeini a few days later. The AFP reporter riled Khomeini arguing that "Communism is not a myth, it exists and is getting organized."<sup>186</sup> Hence, from the end of October 1978, as events were intensifying and protests kept erupting – with workers at Iran's largest oil refinery in Abadan going on strike on October 18<sup>187</sup> – Khomeini's revolutionary discourse began to develop accordingly. In this interview with AFP, he offered material and ideological tools to reject the rise of a Leftist momentum among the Iranian protestors. While continuing to make no distinction between Leftists, Marxists, and Communists, he took advantage of two factors: authenticity and the numbers of those involved. They were both meant to challenge the menace of Marxist slogans' penetration in the demonstrations:

If we suppose that all these fifteen hundred people, and even several times more, are real Marxists, they will not be considered as a power in comparison to the thirty million people who have risen in the name of Islam.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid. For him, it became clear that being a Muslim in the future Islamic Republic was to "be free."

<sup>186</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Agence France Press*, 25 October 1978 (3 Aban 1357) in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 25-27.

<sup>187</sup> See Iranian Oil Worker, "How we organized strike that paralyzed shah's regime: First-hand account by Iranian oil worker," in P. Nore & T. Turner, Eds., *Oil and class struggle*, (London: Zed Books, 1980), 293-301.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.



Thus, once the outright denial strategy proved impossible to apply, Khomeini emphasized the numerical proportions. He avoided mentioning the victimization or the repression of Leftists to explain their decrease in numbers.<sup>189</sup> Instead, he proclaimed the political and comprehensive dimension of Islam as capable of embracing “the people’s” longings and extending freedoms, using the sentimental metaphor of the embrace: “those seeking the truth and justice can be brought back into the arms of Islam.”<sup>190</sup>

Compared to the past, the Marxists have decreased dramatically in number. That is because Islam provides people with their needs in political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of life for real progress. [...] If an Islamic government gets established and freedoms become extended, and the facilities for the actual growth of people increase, those seeking the truth and justice can be brought back into the arms of Islam.<sup>191</sup>

Beyond denouncing the Shah regime’s so-called “ruthless” acts, Khomeini asseverated what was making his rhetoric work politically. He announced a more precise roadmap of hope and victory: “The victory of an Islamic nation is close,” a “transitional government shall be formed upon the fall of the Shah, and its terms will, of course, be announced.”<sup>192</sup> For the first time, he explicitly referred to his return to Iran, linking it to the overthrow of the Shah and his escape: “The Shah’s fall is announced [...] while he is in Iran I will not go back” to Iran.<sup>193</sup> Khomeini was assuming the burden of leading Iran towards a historical transition and showed himself well aware of the surge towards him becoming the leader. Furthermore, his refusal to see the Left as a distinctive political entity became clearer every day. Following the evolution of his thought through the interviews at Neauphle-Le-Château, it becomes evident that the Left’s room for manoeuvre would eventually be

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<sup>189</sup> See Ervand Abrahamian, *Iran Between Two Revolutions*, 305-317 and Maziar Behrooz, *Rebels with a Cause*, 34-94.

<sup>190</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Agence France Press*, 25 October 1978 (3 Aban 1357) in *Taliehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 25-27.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

limited. Responding to a Reuters journalist on October 26, 1978, Khomeini issued a warning to all the “opposition groups,” which could be interpreted as a message to the Leftists as well.

Nonetheless, he kept his phrasing vague enough: “All groups are free to express their beliefs [*dar bayan-e eqāyad khod*]. However, we do not allow any betrayal [*khiyānat*].”<sup>194</sup> Two reasons may explain this choice: on the one hand, Khomeini wanted to appeal to the fragmented opposition; on the other, it was a tactic that allowed him not to sound too divisive during a phase when the revolutionary body was taking shape and getting organized. Unity was essential. Interestingly, the use of the present tense crystallized Khomeini’s formulation in a dimension of ambiguity and yet timeless certainty, meant to set the stage for a collective struggle for the “independence,” of the “Iranian nation from the West.”<sup>195</sup> Following the same line of verbal indefiniteness, Khomeini employed negative conditional sentences, such as: “If we were conservative [*mohāfezeh kār*], we should not want a free vote and equal economic and political opportunities.”<sup>196</sup> Through this discursive loophole, he overcame the obstacle of clarifying how freedoms and opportunities would be framed in the future. Likewise, he returned the accusations of Islamic backwardness to those making them: “Islam is a religion of progress [*taraqi*].”

If Khomeini’s discursive ambiguity created the impression that there was room for Leftist groups to be included in his movement, this was undone only a day later. He abandoned his vague tone and harshly lashed out at the Marxists: “Not at all, [the movement] has not been, it is not being, and it will not be guided [*hedāyat shodan*] by them. And their support is not accepted by anyone.”<sup>197</sup> As Khomeini’s use of verb tenses demonstrates, for the first time, in addressing Leftists’ role in the revolutionary movement that was emerging, he projected them on a timeline flowing from the past to the future. This approach eventually erased their whole story in Iranian politics. Khomeini closed

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<sup>194</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Reuters*, 26 October 1978 (4 Aban 1357) in *Taliehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 29.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>197</sup> Khomeini, interview with *France Tv*, Channel 1, 27 October 1978 (5 Aban 1357) in *Taliehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 31.

the door to any chance of collaboration with the Leftists in Iran, and any support from Russia.<sup>198</sup> By then, he was discursively insisting on a goal premise, which advocated following an alternative path to solve the crises that were looming. It is worth noting that he used the plural [*bohrān-hā*], putting the economy and politics on the same level as a tool for depicting the downfall of the Pahlavi regime. The recommended course of action entailed the Shah abandoning Iran. Therefore, Khomeini linked reasons with results, following a cause-effect pattern in which the broader category of the “nation” represented the core.<sup>199</sup>

The political and economic crises will continue along with the Shah’s presence because the nation has nothing to do with him [*hamkāri na dārad*]. And this is what’s causing the crises.

If the Shah leaves, the crises will be solved [*raf’ mishavad*].<sup>200</sup>

By then, a strike by 37,000 employees of the National Iranian Oil Company had started, reducing oil exports to 1.5 million barrels per day, and 1,126 political prisoners had been released.<sup>201</sup> The Revolution seemed to be closer. In fact, as will be explored in chapter 3, oil strikes accelerated the process, delivering the final blow to the Shah’s apparatus.<sup>202</sup>

### **Envisaging the Islamic Republic: what was at stake for the Left? The November shift**

In November, as events were rapidly evolving in Iran – the Shah’s troops fired on various demonstrations across the country, while some rioters burned government buildings in Tehran –<sup>203</sup> Khomeini’s language of revolt developed alongside a more definite (although still blurred) vision of

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> See Norman Fairclough, *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*, (London and New York, Routledge, 2003), 8 and 121-134.

<sup>200</sup> Khomeini, interview with *France Tv*, Channel 1, 27 October 1978 (5 Aban 1357) in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 31.

<sup>201</sup> See *Ettelā’āt*, 23 Mehr 1357 (15 October 1978), and 30 Mehr 1357 (22 Oct 1978). See also Nicholas M. Nikazmerad, “A Chronological Survey of the Iranian Revolution,” *Iranian Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1/4, Iranian Revolution in Perspective (1980), 327-368.

<sup>202</sup> Ashraf and Banuazizi, “The State, Classes and Modes of Mobilization in the Iranian Revolution,” 3-40.

<sup>203</sup> See *Ettelā’āt*, 23 Mehr 1357 (15 October 1978), and 30 Mehr 1357 (22 Oct 1978). See also Nicholas M. Nikazmerad, “A Chronological Survey of the Iranian Revolution,” 327-368.

the Islamic Republic. Almost a month after arriving in France, the spiritual guide of what would become known as the Iranian Revolution revealed the plan he had in mind. During an interview with ATV Austria, Khomeini asserted that the future would bring a “democratic system” to Iran, although in an interview with Dutch television only a few days later, he would specify that it would be “an Islamic democracy, not like a Western democracy.”<sup>204</sup> He added that “an Islamic republic” would have been established “through the insurrection [*qyām*] of the nation” that “will chase out the Shah.”<sup>205</sup> Continuing to stress the dichotomy between past and future, as well as good and evil, he used the metaphor of a new “real” [*vāqe ‘y*] and “true” [*haqiqi*] life after the times of “cruelty” [*zolm*] that would be the future in the Islamic Republic.<sup>206</sup>

Khomeini’s increased explicitness about how he envisioned the future of Iran after the Revolution also extended to his statements about the Left. What role would the supporters of the Left play? On the same day, Khomeini began to circumscribe the concept of “freedom” for all that he had mentioned in previous interviews. Interviewed by *The Guardian*, he referred to the existence of “talents inside and outside Iran” that would collaborate in chasing out the Shah. However, he did not specify who he was referring to. Nonetheless, replying to a question about young Communists in Tehran and the possibility that the Tudeh party would be declared illegal, he said:

In Islam, the criterion is God’s satisfaction, not the personalities [*shakhsiyat-hā*]. Righteousness [*haq*] and truth [*haqiqat*] are the standards. [...] Unlike Islam, the Communists make idols [*bat*] out of personalities and focus on power. Our Islamic government will rely on public votes. All parties who will work for the interests [*masāleh*] of the nation will be free.<sup>207</sup>

<sup>204</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Radio tv Holland*, 5 November 1978 (14 Aban 1357), in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 49.

<sup>205</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Radio-Tv Austria*, 1 November 1978 (10 Aban 1357) in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 35.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>207</sup> Khomeini, interview with *The Guardian*, 1 November 1978 (10 Aban 1357), in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 38.

Here, Khomeini's position on the Left becomes increasingly clear. First, Khomeini reiterated the use of Islam as a comprehensive framework to guide the uprising, under God auspices. If God equaled the truth and what is just, everything outside of this dimension would have fallen automatically into a realm of negativity and exclusion. Therefore, the Communists were following values that lay outside of God's morality. Hence, they inherently represented the Other. Second, the possessive pronoun "our" used in conjunction with the "Islamic government" in this excerpt represented an expedient to restrict this further and constrain the Communists and the Tudeh. Third, Khomeini's suspicions and distrust towards them was rising and becoming more explicit. Fourth, no other specificity, group or class – beyond the Islamic, nationalist and populist umbrella – could gain any ground, because it lay beyond God's protection: "Nothing can be done against the nation and the people [...] Islam is moving with the people."<sup>208</sup> Furthermore, making Iranians hope for a better future was also a strategy to keep them waiting as this would turn the crisis into a lighter burden to carry. This indefinite morrow, also overlapping with "the victory," constituted the main goal to fight for, as the "revolution is approaching, it is close, towards freedom"<sup>209</sup>. In Khomeini's imagery, the people and the nation wanted to "change" and re-write their "destiny."<sup>210</sup> Thus, in this project, the only circumstances in which Leftist groups, but also labor unions – as a journalist from the Leftist newspaper *Paese Sera* inquired on November 2 – could be "free" lay in walking a blurred line of "work in the interests of the nation."<sup>211</sup>

A few days later, responding to the Arab Magazine, *Al-Mustaqbal*, Khomeini eventually slammed the door of the Islamic Republic-to-be in the "Marxists'" face, but it seemed that there were still "our conditions" at stake. The journalist was inquiring about the formation of an opposition front to

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid. 40-41.

<sup>209</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Radio tv Holland* 5 November 1978 (14 aban 1357), in *Taliehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 49. See also Khomeini, interview with *Radio Luxembourg* 2 November 1978 (11 Aban 1357), 43.

<sup>210</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Paese Sera* 2 November 1978 (11 Aban 1357), 4.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid. 46.

the Shah and asked Khomeini's opinion on the hypothesis of "Leftist groups" joining this potential alliance or coalition:

Iran's current Islamic movement has embraced the whole society, and it will carry on as it is. I should point out that we have not been and are not connected to any front or group. We will not accept anybody or any group that does not accept our conditions.<sup>212</sup>

Khomeini, always using the collective pronoun "we," was casting the Left as being under the Russian-Soviet influence, without making any distinctions between them and calling them interchangeably either Leftists, Marxists or Communists. In fact, by November the Soviet Union considered the situation in Iran perilous and warned the US against any interference.<sup>213</sup> During an interview with the *Associated Press*, the AP journalist asked Khomeini if he would endorse a pro-Russian Marxist government, as an outcome of a coup d'état.<sup>214</sup> His stratagem of dispersing Leftist sympathies in Iran within the conspiracy framework of the perceived enemy allowed him to neutralize them as a potential political threat. It also served the purpose of sending threatening messages not only to Iran, but also abroad:

The uprising of Iran's Islamic movement has not given any opportunity for this, and we will treat these conspiracies as we are addressing the Shah's current regime.<sup>215</sup>

Therefore, a determinant shift of narrative occurred by November. First, Khomeini openly acknowledged that there was no political space in the movement for the Leftists, and no discussions [*mozākereh*] between religious people [*mazhabi-ha*] and Marxists were ongoing, even though other

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<sup>212</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Arab Magazine Al-Mustaqbal*, 6 November 1978 (15 Aban 1357), in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 57.

<sup>213</sup> See Behrooz, *The Failure of the Left in Iran*, 101.

<sup>214</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Associated Press*, 7 November 1978 (16 Aban 1357), in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 63-64.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.* 63-64.

sources reported negotiations: “There have been no talks.”<sup>216</sup> Although it was only later that Khomeini would say that Marxism was against Islam, the Ayatollah had already refused to engage in any talks with the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq, for instance throughout the 1970s.<sup>217</sup> Here it is worth clarifying that, according to Ervand Abrahamian, the Mojāhedīn never used the terms Marxist, Socialist or Communist to define themselves. Nevertheless their ideology was considered by the Khomeinists to be close to Marxist thought.

In his interview with the AP, Khomeini – when asked about the Tudeh Party’s potential illegality in the future Islamic Republic – added: “The Communists will be free to express their beliefs.”<sup>218</sup> Second, the populist dimension of his discursive strategy progressed, as he identified himself as embodying the people’s will: “I say people’s words. We are on the same level, and we pronounce the same words [...] we do not want the Shah.”<sup>219</sup> Third, a binary depiction with no escape route was expanded in this interview. Fourth, the concept of economic justice – as opposed to exploitation [*estasmār*] – replaced that of social justice:

The political system will be appointed through people’s votes. Now the country is in between two paths of life and death, freedom and slavery [*esārat*], independence and colonization [*este’mār*], economic justice and exploitation.<sup>220</sup>

Although Khomeini stressed a dichotomic understanding of poor versus rich, oppressed versus oppressors and domination versus independence, he was gradually re-framing justice. Indeed, he was absorbing the historical Left narratives on social justice by broadening the focus on Islamic and economic justice. Furthermore, when for the second time in his Neauphle-Le-Château sojourn, he mentioned workers during an interview with *The Financial Times*, he juxtaposed workers

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<sup>216</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Der Spiegel*, 7 November 1978 (16 Aban 1357), in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 68.

<sup>217</sup> See Ervand Abrahamian, *Radical Islam. The Iranian Mojāhedīn*, 1-7 and 81-100. On the meetings between the Mojāhedīn and Khomeini between 1970 and 1973 in particular, see Behrooz, *The Failure of the Left in Iran*, 70.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* 71 See also Khomeini, interview with *de Volkskrant*, 7 November 1978 (16 Aban 1357).

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* 65

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

[*kārgarān*] and employees [*kārmandān*].<sup>221</sup> Although he underlined the “political nature” of their grievances, he did not frame the strike in terms of class, or explicitly focus on blue-collar workers. Furthermore, from the beginning of November, Khomeini no longer referred to any penetration of Leftist ideals in the factories. He did not have the same urge to deliver a warning against “deviation,” and a related call to action to contain (“ostracize”) the perceived threat, as he had in the universities a month before. Moreover, when referring to his request to people to support the strike, Khomeini interestingly kept using the word *mardom*, instead of *khalq*. The latter would have immediately linked to the Mojāhedīn-e-Khalq. Similarly, the word *tudeh* (masses), would have directly connected his message to the Communist party imagery. Furthermore, the question of the oil stoppage was looming, which would have been extremely costly to the economy of Western countries. Yet, this constituted Khomeini’s trump card.

The deprived [*mahrūm*]workers and employees of the Oil Company have gone on a strike for their legitimate political demands, and I have asked people to support their strike [...]  
The Muslim nation of Iran would do anything to achieve their legitimate rights, even at the price of destroying the interests of the West.<sup>222</sup>

From this moment onwards, Khomeini consolidated his role as the spiritual leader of the Revolution and tightened his focus on the means of fulfilling its stated aim. Hence, the metaphor of Kerbala and martyrdom, interwoven with nationalist rhetoric, boosted the discourse of resistance, where failure or defeat was not even an option. One again, the cause-effect pattern (a dictatorship that resulted in the oppression of the deprived) returned, overlapping with a problem-solution template (the Shah depicted as a “stubborn enemy” who had to be fought through Muslim resistance):

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<sup>221</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Financial Times* 7 November 1978 (16 Aban 1357), in *Talīehye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 75-76.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*



The nation of Iran has begun the holy Islamic movement to free itself from dictatorship and expansionism and to achieve an Islamic government. With God's help, it will continue until victory. Since the nation's enemies, the Shah and his supporters, do not want to step aside easily, therefore, the stubbornness of the nation's enemies, and the resistance of the courageous Muslim people against them, will cause damages [...] A Muslim knows that if he gets killed, he will join the martyrs of Karbala, and won't lose anything, this is why he will keep struggling until the ultimate victory.<sup>223</sup>

Within this framework, asked about future developments, Khomeini inserted the Leftist presence as a “solvable” problem. First, through a strategy of denial and exclusion, he disqualified them from the “unity of the opposition forces.”<sup>224</sup> Second, stating that all the slogans chanted in the streets were praising Islam, he refused to confirm reports of the use of Leftist slogans. Third, he minimized the Leftists' presence through quoting numbers. Fourth, Khomeini asserted that at an indefinite point in the future, there would be a solution. However, it was not clear when. Moreover, he used a double negation that kept an aura of mystery and uncertainty.

No, the number of Leftists is minimal [*qalili*]. There are thirty-five million Muslims in Iran who are all shouting Islam in the streets. Who can represent these thirty-five million conscious believers? In this regard, we don't have any problem that isn't solvable.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Ibid 77.

<sup>224</sup> This is how a reporter from the Japanese Radio-Tv introduced his/her question to Khomeini. Interview with Japanese Radio-Television, 8 November 1978 (17 Aban, 1357), in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 4 (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Āsar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 381.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

He went even further by stating that there are “no different forces, only one Iranian nation,” because almost “all Iranians are Muslim”<sup>226</sup> and “Communists in Iran do not have any power.”<sup>227</sup> If a few weeks earlier Khomeini had given assurances that everyone would be free in the future Islamic Republic, talking to journalists from France, Germany, Italy, and Spain on November 10<sup>th</sup>, 1978, he attacked the “Marxists.”<sup>228</sup> Once again, he did not specify which group he was referring to. Interestingly, in mentioning them, he always used the future tense, as in the current situation, the revolutionary (and polyphonic) movement was benefitting from the Leftists who were actively participating.

If their role is not harmful [*mozer*], they will be free [...] Marxists will be free but will not have any freedom of sabotage [*kharābkāri*].<sup>229</sup>

Provoked by a question from a *Reuters* journalist on November 16, inquiring if Khomeini was afraid of being a “cover” for “Marxists groups,” the Ayatollah seized this opportunity to finalize the process of isolating them.<sup>230</sup> He eventually discredited and delegitimized them for being: 1) small in number or non-existent; 2) not knowledgeable enough; and 3) supported by the Shah.

We do not know any Marxist groups or groups that have a base among people. There are no groups. [If you] leave aside a few guys [*nafar bacche*] that neither have any knowledge of

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<sup>226</sup> In an interview with the Arab publication *al-Bayraq*, a few days later, Khomeini said that 90 percent of the Iranian population was Muslim. See in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 4 (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Āsar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 481.

<sup>227</sup> Khomeini, interview with the Dutch Radio-Tv, 9 November 1978 (18 Aban 1357), in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 4 (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Āsar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 415-416.

<sup>228</sup> Khomeini, interview with journalists from Germany, France, Italy, and Spain, 10 November 1978 (19 Aban 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 92-96 and *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 4, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Āsar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 429-430.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>230</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Reuters*, 16 Nov 1978 (25 Aban 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 133-134.

the Iranian society nor have read more than two or three books, you will see that the Shah supports them.<sup>231</sup>

In the meantime, workers' strikes were spreading in different cities, from Abadan to Tehran, Ahvaz, and Aghajari. The effect was an oil stoppage, and the Shah sent the army to force workers to go back to work, accusing them of being "traitors" of the country. Some returned to their jobs, with about two hundred being arrested in mid-November.<sup>232</sup> Nevertheless, other workers continued their action. Until that moment, Khomeini had never linked labor and the Left, and in most of the interviews from Neauphle-le-Château did not particularly stress the issue of class allegiance in the factories. However, on November 20, during a speech to a group of Iranian residents abroad, he praised the workers' strikes. While explaining the reasons and goals of the uprising against the Shah, he urged everyone to keep the upheaval alive as a collective duty: "Keep this uprising, gentlemen. It is the duty of us all to do so."<sup>233</sup> Moreover, he turned workers' strikes into a discursive tool to attack the army violence in the factories.<sup>234</sup>

Oil workers have stopped their work as they do not want to give away their oil. Who is pushing them to go back to work? Why? Why is the violence used to try to force them back to work? The army is doing this. Why? Should these workers return to work so that this oil, this black gold, will flow again for other countries, for America? This is why the army is not our army! The army is not independent.<sup>235</sup>

The image of blood and suffering permeated his rhetoric:

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> See Nikazmerad, "A Chronological Survey of the Iranian Revolution," 327-368.

<sup>233</sup> Khomeini, speech to a group of Iranian residents abroad, 20 November 1978 (29 Aban, 1357), in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 55.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid, 49-50.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid.

Are the workers aware that the guns which tear open the chests of our beloved youth and cause our men, women, and children to bleed and suffer are funded by this oil, which is extracted by these extreme efforts?<sup>236</sup>

On November 29, 1978, when Khomeini's return to Iran was on the horizon, a journalist from the magazine *al-Iqtisad al-Arabi*, asked a fundamental question about the free labor unions: "One of the demands of these strikes is the establishment of free trade unions. What is your opinion about trade unions? What will be their role in your plan of the Islamic Republic?"<sup>237</sup>

The deprived workers of Iran, who are mainly the former poor, hungry peasants and farmers, have every right to struggle through any legitimate and possible ways [*tariq*] to achieve their rights. They will be allowed in the Islamic Republic to have any possible form to resolve their problems and difficulties. Hence, [this] will inform the cabinet [*dowlat*] of their problems and defend their professional rights.<sup>238</sup>

At the same time, Khomeini immediately cleared up any confusion or doubt about the potential role of the Left in the government of the Islamic Republic, as the political project of the IRI was taking shape with the movement being both more mature and more significant in numbers. The time was ripe for a straightforward rupture. Without explicitly mentioning the Tudeh Party, which de facto constituted the historical link between trade unions and the Left in the Iranian experience, he argued: "Every person will have the right to freedom of faith and expression in the Islamic Republic, but we will not allow any betrayal by any person or group depending on foreign

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<sup>236</sup> Khomeini, message to the Muslim nation, 22 November 1978 (1 Azar 1357), in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 75-78.

<sup>237</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Al-Iqtisadi al-Arabi*, 29 November 1978, 8 Azar 1357, in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 135-138.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid*

powers.”<sup>239</sup> The official line of demarcation was religion, thus an unchangeable premise based on ideological divergencies, that would block any further claim:

Our program is the Islamic government and originating from monotheism [*tohid*]. They do not agree with this belief and ideology. Therefore, we cannot move with them in the same direction.<sup>240</sup>

By now, Khomeini was removing any ambiguity about the future Islamic Republic. Yet, he remained vague while speaking about the present. The Tudeh Party, to Khomeini, represented the Communist threat and, therefore, overlapped with both the Soviets (seen as a foreign “oppressor” against Iran’s independence) and infidelity/atheism. For the Ayatollah, the Tudeh should not be allowed to mushroom among the revolutionaries with the aspiration of any political role in the future. Portrayed as small in numbers, having no integrity, compared metaphorically to a drop in the ocean: this was how Communism appeared in Khomeini’s words. “Communism will never find a way in Iran [...] Out of a population of about thirty million Iranians, only a few are Communists [...] I do not believe that they are genuine Communists [...] Everyone knows that if a short slogan is chanted somewhere and we presume that some (true) Communists have created it, it is still only a drop compared to an ocean.”<sup>241</sup>

Nevertheless, the revolution-in-the-making needed unity, in terms of mobilization and a counteraction to the army’s violence in the streets. Khomeini’s short-term strategy could be summarized in an answer that he gave to the Lebanese Newspaper *al-Hadaf* on the last day of November: “We agree with anyone who asks for the Iranian nation and the Shah’s downfall.”<sup>242</sup>

Muharram, the sacred month of Shia Islam, had already started. Even without pronouncing the word

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<sup>239</sup> Ibid 138.

<sup>240</sup> Khomeini, interview with a Danish Newspaper (name missing), in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 121-122.

<sup>241</sup> Khomeini, speech to Iranian students abroad, 26 November 1978 (5 Azar 1357), *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 129-30.

<sup>242</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Al-Hadaf*, 30 November 1978 (9 Azar 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 155.

*kārgar*, Khomeini's objective was to keep the strikes alive: "All the employees of the public (governmental) oil companies should continue their strikes [...] Capitalists that have sucked the blood of oil industry will not have any right to keep doing this anymore."<sup>243</sup>

**Walking towards victory: Khomeini's goal-oriented strategy in December**

December started with thousands of protestors marching through the streets of Tehran against the curfew imposed by the Shah a few days earlier. The army opened fire against the demonstrators. Oil workers went on with their strikes. Day after day, millions were taking to the streets across the country against the Shah. The revolution seemed to be closer. Khomeini continued to incite those participating in the strikes and demonstrations. His discourse over the course of December underwent a sharp transformation, as it began to focus on the one and only goal: victory. This comprised two main "means-goals" or achievements: the overthrow of the Shah's regime and the establishment of an Islamic Republic. Moreover, the strategy of ignoring the fragmentation of the Iranian opposition to the Shah, along with its political nuances, became more systematic and precise. In fact, in this phase, it served as a method to firstly, avoid any splits in the revolutionary movement and, secondly, to enhance popular unconditional support in the streets. Therefore, Khomeini declared: "In Iran, we have only classes and forces that all go in the same direction: destroy the Shah's regime, and they are united for this."<sup>244</sup> During an interview with the BBC on December 4, 1978, he combined the strategy of denial with that of conspiracy. He argued:

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<sup>243</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Farda Afrika* magazine, 5 December 1978 (14 Azar 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 174-175.

<sup>244</sup> Interview with Italian Television, 2 December 1978, (11 Azar 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 163.

In the current movement in Iran, all can see that people have planned Islamic themes, and no communist question is working in progress [...] this is something that the Shah has spread to protect himself.<sup>245</sup>

As these weeks coincided with the holy month of Muharram for Shia Islam, Khomeini's strategy of co-opting the Karbala narrative of martyrdom reached its culmination. He turned his interviews during the sacred month into an ideological battle between believers and non-believers. It resulted in a losing game for the Leftists.

First, talking to a Lebanese reporter from *Amal* daily, Khomeini reinforced the idea of the Leftists as “pawns” in the hands of the foreigners who were not only against Iran but against the broader concept of Muslim nations:

The slogan on the separation of religion from politics is colonial propaganda meant to hinder Muslim nations from playing a role in their destiny.

Second, answering a question from the *Los Angeles Times* about the Leftist groups, he emphasized an unbridgeable divide between “we” and “them”:

Our and their objectives are different. We lie in Islam and monotheism. They do not agree on both points [...] They do not believe (have faith) in Islam, and we do not have any interest in working or collaborating with them.<sup>246</sup>

Third, he framed this clash already envisaging a solution: assimilation under the Islamic aegis.

Using the present tense to project an imperative into a certain future, Khomeini, for the first time,

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<sup>245</sup> Khomeini, interview with BBC, 4 December 1978 (13 Azar 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 169-170.

<sup>246</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Los Angeles Times*, 7 December 1978 (16 Azar 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 181.

threatened all factions: “When the Islamic government is formed, all will obey the law of Islam and Islam is a united, uniform front.”<sup>247</sup> Elaborating on this paradigm and referring to Marxists, he made an explicit connection between the implementation of future Islamic law and the absorption of other “schools of thought,” because there will be only one option: Islam.

More than ninety-five percent of the Iranian people are Muslims and want the establishment of an Islamic government and the implementation of the progressive [*moterāqi*] Islamic laws. All the [social] strata in the country are united in seeking these demands. If some, whose number is minimal, raised a slogan other than Islam, they are biased, or they are taking orders from foreign powers if they are not the agents of the Iranian regime, or do not know Islam and what they have heard about Islam is from wrong or deviated [*enherāf*] propaganda. For this reason, they have found shelter in other schools of thought, and we believe that with the implementation of Islamic law, they will return to Islam.<sup>248</sup>

This last sentence expressing a vague plan for the future could be open to many interpretations, about how he meant to make people return to Islam through law. As will be explored in greater depth in the following chapters of this dissertation, this paved the way for the repression of Leftist ideas in Iran under the IRI. Nonetheless, until that moment, Khomeini had never conveyed any threat of elimination with regard to the Leftists. The message had been kept intentionally ambiguous with the concept of a whole community of believers pursuing a project with God's help and guidance being reinforced instead. Thus, when in mid-December, he called oil workers to go on strike, Khomeini referred to a religious obligation. He also strengthened the bond between the

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<sup>247</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Voice of Luxembourg*, 12 December 1978 (21 Azar 1357), *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 223.

<sup>248</sup> Khomeini, interview with *l'Unità*, 14 December 1978, 23 Azar 1357, in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 231-231.



religious and nationalist element, aiming to achieve the final goal (victory) through two means-goals (giving a universal dimension to the strikes and stopping oil exports):

They [oil workers] will respond to God and the nation. All of them should go on strike [...] not even one drop of oil will leave the country [...] It is their religious duty; it is their divine obligation to make their strikes universal and stop the export of oil.<sup>249</sup>

To inspire courage and cause a reaction, he emphasized the contrast with the fear that the Shah provoked:

Do not be afraid of him, he is on his way out [*raftani ast*] [...] Pay neither attention [*e'ttenā*] to their supplications [*eltemās*], nor fear their words. Do not be afraid at all. Continue your strikes.<sup>250</sup>

To increase his persuasiveness, Khomeini relied on another expedient to call workers to go on strike: rhetorical questions that juxtaposed an obvious answer with no alternative.

Are we speaking irrationally when we tell the workers to strike when we tell them that it is their religious duty to strike, that it is for the good of the country and the good of the nation? [...] Should we just give the oil away?<sup>251</sup>

As the main goal was victory, unity and support from all was essential. This is why Khomeini throughout December repeatedly addressed the Iranian “nation” both abroad and in Iran, asking everyone to support the oil workers with “housing” and all “their needs.”<sup>252</sup> On December 27, he used patience with God's path as an emotional lever – along with fear, as abovementioned – until

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<sup>249</sup> Khomeini, speech to Iranian students and residents abroad, 16 December 1978 (25 Azar 1357), in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 242-251.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Khomeini gave three different speeches on December 16, 22, and 27.

victory would be achieved. This latter was explicitly portrayed as a synonym of “independence, freedom and the Islamic Republic” [*esteqlāl, azādi, jomhouri eslāmi*], referring to a slogan chanted in the streets during the demonstrations.

The honorable nation must continue its Islamic movement until the achievement of the goal and remain patient in this way where the pleasure of God lies, and do not spare any effort to assist their brothers [...] They should not listen to the satanic temptations the diabolic agents of the Shah disseminate to create disappointment and indolence in the nation. They should rely on God in this path, which is the attainment of independence, freedom, and the Islamic Republic.<sup>253</sup>

Furthermore, even the economy became involved in this war between believers and non-believers. The barricades of anti-capitalism overlapped with those of Islam, eventually appropriating the class discourse championed by the historical Left. In fact, during an interview with an American professor in late December, Khomeini argued:

Many in Iran are involved in an economy that is against Islam, and it is capitalist. Now this will change because class distinctions [*fāseleh tabaqati*] should not exist anymore, but all should be on the same level [*sath*].<sup>254</sup>

### **Organizing the IRI before going back: shaping the strategies of ostracism and exclusion**

As the project of the Islamic Republic was materializing, in his interviews and messages from the suburbs of Paris in January, Khomeini gave more details about the future. By then, the need to make the final goal closer and more concrete seemed evident in his rhetoric. He re-adjusted his

<sup>253</sup> Khomeini, message to the nation of Iran, 27 December 1978 [6 Dey 1357], in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 283-285.

<sup>254</sup> Khomeini, interview with a professor from an American University, 28 December 1978 (7 Dey 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 222-223.

roadmap as follows: revolution, victory, elections,<sup>255</sup> Islamic government. By doing so, Khomeini triggered a crescendo of expectations and hopes.

After the revolution [...] after the elections, all duties and things to do about the government will be clear. Concerning the parliament, those who are not saboteurs will have the right to vote [*kasani ke kharābkār na bāshand haq-e ray dārand.*]<sup>256</sup>

First, he used the future tense to postpone the realization of this until after the revolution, which was yet to be successful. Second, he used the word “saboteurs,” previously used when referring to the Leftists, when talking about a future Parliament, which automatically gave to understand that Khomeini had reserved no place in the government for them. Third, he utterly changed the narrative and distanced himself from the previously stated pattern, “all will be free,” refusing the right to vote to those who wanted to “sabotage.” Fourth, the ambiguity of not clarifying who the *saboteurs* were, remained functional to maintaining unity until victory was achieved.

A few days later, Khomeini responded to a question from a German Radio-TV reporter on the Tudeh party and explained why no access to the Islamic government would be given to the Communists. What is relevant to the context of this chapter is the discursive logic of projecting the refusal and the fault onto the Tudeh, while rejecting it within a framework of “we” (believers) *versus* “them” (atheists):

<sup>255</sup> He talked about “free elections” during an interview with *Express English*, 3 January 1979 (13 Dey 1378), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris*, 235.

<sup>256</sup> Khomeini, interview with journalists from *AP*, *Le Figaro*, *Miami Herald*, 4 January 1979 (14 Dey 1378), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 241.

We organize an Islamic republic, an Islamic government relying on votes of the nation so that law will be Islamic. We will not allow a party that rejects the Islamic society to enter our government.<sup>257</sup>

Targeting and demonizing the Tudeh party, as the leading organized group on the Left, became a systematic move in the last phase of Khomeini's stay in Paris. For instance, when a journalist from *The Economist* inquired about legalizing the Tudeh, he responded: "Today, no group is as hated as the Tudeh Party, due to its terrible story in Iran."<sup>258</sup> Moreover, he declared: "No class or groups will be allowed to penetrate the elections." Answering a question on a potential Communist minister in the future, Khomeini replied: "If the people vote for the Islamic Republic, they will not accept a non-Muslim minister." He went even further by denying the idea that any of his supporters in the streets could be Marxist sympathizers.<sup>259</sup> The rest of the Leftist plethora was dissolved into the image of a young, inexperienced, and therefore insignificant group of people. This articulated and disclosed the strategy of minimization and represented the acme of it.

...a few boys that have a lack of experience and turned to the Left, as the Left, in its real meaning does not exist in Iran and among the Iranian intellectuals who know the Iranian society. In Iran, only Islam rules.<sup>260</sup>

Eventually, Khomeini acknowledged the fact that in his project, there was no space for non-religious representatives, at least in the government. As previously mentioned, the reason for exclusion lay – according to Khomeini - in an intrinsic incapacity of those marginalized parties to

<sup>257</sup> Khomeini, interview with German Radio-TV, Channel 2, 5 January 1979 (15 Dey 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 248.

<sup>258</sup> Khomeini, interview with *The Economist*, 8 January 1979 (18 Dey 1357), in *Talieh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslami. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangi, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 263-265.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.* 267.

<sup>260</sup> Khomeini, interview with *The Times*, 8 January 1979 (18 Dey 1357), in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 392.

serve the IRI's political project. He was shifting the blame onto those who were not believers.

Talking to Italian TV on January 12, he stated:

Our government is Islamic, and those who are not religious/pious [*gheyr-e mazhabi*] do not have any chance to enter (any road) because they do not attract votes.<sup>261</sup>

Towards the end of his stay in Paris, with the risk that the model of Islamic Marxism could penetrate the universities and constitute a variable that could possibly run out of control through the Mojāhedīn-e Khalq or the Tudeh, despite the divisions and the government repression of the 1970s,<sup>262</sup> Khomeini proceeded to the utter repudiation of any theoretical overlap:

About Marxism, no kind of relations exists among the Islamic movement and the impious Marxism. It is impossible to be both a Muslim and a Marxist at the same time.<sup>263</sup>

What paved the way to the silencing of the Left which occurred after the Revolution – as chapter 4 will explore – began to come to the surface in these last weeks before Khomeini's return to Iran.

Moreover, towards the end of his stay in Paris, the Ayatollah openly declared that he would have a role as a Guide [*naqsh-e hedāyat rahnemāy*] in the future Islamic Republic.<sup>264</sup> The revolutionary fervor was at its height. In response to the formation of Dr. Bakhtyar's government, Khomeini announced the establishment of a Council of the Islamic Revolution. The Shah left Tehran on January 16, 1979. Nonetheless, Khomeini encouraged the Iranians to keep struggling, as they had to achieve their final goal. Eventually, on January 23, 1979, talking to the Iranian newspapers *Kayhān* and *Ettelā'āt*, Khomeini unveiled his plan for the Left and the Tudeh in particular:

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<sup>261</sup> Khomeini, interview with Rai Italian Television, 12 January 1979 (22 Dey 1357), in *Talīeh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 309.

<sup>262</sup> See Ervand Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojāhedīn*, 128.

<sup>263</sup> Khomeini, interview with AFP, 14 January 1979 (24 Dey, 1357), in *Sahīfeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzīm va Nashr-e Āsar-e Imām Khomeini, 1389/2000), 447.

<sup>264</sup> Khomeini, interview with Abc America, 12 January 1979 (22 Dey 1357), in *Talīeh-ye Enqelāb-e Eslāmi. Mosābeh-hā-ye Emām Khomeini dar Pāris* (Tehran: Setād Enqelāb Farhangī, Markaz-e Nashr-re Dāneshgāhi, 1984), 312.

If it is to the detriment of the nation, it will be stopped, if not, and if it is only the expression of idea, there will be no restriction. All the people are free except a political party that is against the exigencies of the country [...] Islam will grant freedom and pay attention to the economy.<sup>265</sup>

Khomeini gave his last interview from Paris on January 27, 1979. By then, the Bakhtiyar government had closed the airport to prevent the Ayatollah's return. Three days later, 3 million people gathered to welcome Khomeini back to Tehran. "When we landed in Tehran, I could not see anything on the ground but people, a big flock of people. The airport was closed," remembered a journalist who travelled from France to Iran on February 1, 1979.<sup>266</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the symbolic universe of signs and meanings that the Ayatollah Khomeini created during the last phase of his exile, in particular relating to the Leftists' potential for mobilization and their impact on workers. Between October 1978 and February 1979, while preparing the 1979 Revolution from Neauphle-le-Château, Khomeini shaped a discourse that was eventually and collectively accredited at the height of revolutionary fervor in Iran. His narrative of revolt evolved over the months. His discursive strategies transformed to adjust to and take advantage of the developing events as well as the shifting context. In this process, Khomeini managed to marginalize the Left, which represented a potential competitor among the deprived, which included workers. As he was imposing himself as a leader of the popular discontent against the Shah, his figure played a crucial role in the context of the struggle for hegemony both in discourse and in practice. By absorbing the rhetoric of class and social justice under his Islamic and nationalist project he, on the one hand, embodied a counter-hegemonic actor against the Shah. On the other, his discourse became hegemonic for those pursuing class struggle, overshadowing the

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<sup>265</sup> Khomeini, interview with *Kayhān* and *Ettelā'āt*, 23 January, 1979 [3 Bahman, 1357], in *Sahifeh-ye Imam. Majmu'eh-ye Āsar-e Imām Khomeini*, Vol. 5, (Tehran: Moasseseh-e Tanzim va Nashr-e Asar-e Imam Khomeini, 1389/2000), 519-521.

<sup>266</sup> Nella Condorelli, journalist from the Italian newspaper *Lotta Continua*, who travelled with the Ayatollah Khomeini from France to Iran on 1 February, 1979. Interview with the author, 5 February 2019.

Left's appeal in this regard. Drawing on the language of martyrdom, Khomeini aimed to embrace all classes of Iranian society. He managed to weave together nationalist, religious, and social justice grievances under the same collective cause. In his discourse, the Leftists constituted a blurred entity. He referred indiscriminately to "the Marxists," "the Leftists," or "the Communists." The intention was to undermine and control any impact they might have on the revolutionary movement that was emerging against the Shah. On the one hand, although weakened by the Shah's repression and internally divided, the Left could pose a threat to the stability of the future Islamic Republic. On the other hand, they could be a resource in fomenting the Revolution. This means that Khomeini needed to tread carefully, limiting the potential harm Leftist groups could do to his project of the Islamic Republic, but simultaneously keeping them on board as long as he needed them.

Importantly, he did not connect them with labor or workers until late 1978, when – as the next chapter will explore in more depth – they attempted to gain ground and mobilize workers. While unfolding his strategy of minimization and denial, Khomeini was aware of the Leftists' fragile bases for action. Neglect was a way of controlling a perceived – yet limited – threat. According to the Ayatollah, workers' grievances should not be seen as unique within the revolutionary corpus. Although a dichotomic understanding of poor versus rich, oppressed versus oppressors and domination versus independence permeated his rhetoric, Khomeini broadened the focus to look at social justice, placing it under the umbrella of Islamic and economic justice. When talking about labor strikes, he did not frame them in terms of class, or explicitly focus on blue-collar workers. From his perspective, these actions represented, first, an act against a common enemy (the Shah) and, second, a necessary move for a shared cause. It was only when massive strikes erupted across the country, that Khomeini delivered his explicit attack to eventually isolate and contain the Left. He deemed it: 1) divided, 2) unable to influence the revolutionary movement, and 3) a "pawn" in the Shah's hands. Khomeini used two other discursive stratagems: the binary comparison [good/evil], and numbers. The use of the collective pronoun "we" – depicted as one united group under the religious umbrella – against "they" reinforced this imagery. Creating a discursive overlap

between the “ambiguous” Leftists and extremists was another recurrent expedient. In fact, Khomeini attempted to neutralize the Leftists by enhancing their bad reputation among parts of Iranian society, which had already spread under the Shah’s censorship and repression. Reinforcing his political, and by then hegemonic stance among the revolutionaries, when massive strikes started to economically paralyze the regime apparatus, Khomeini envisaged a more definite project of the Islamic Republic. His plan for the future, although not fully detailed, would exclude the Left, along with their understanding of class struggle and social justice. Emphasizing Islam as a comprehensive umbrella for the Revolution and its aftermath, he stated that there was no place for the Communists who were chasing values that lay outside God’s morality. Thus, the Leftist presence began to constitute a “solvable” problem. By the beginning of December, the strategy of discrediting reached its peak. Leftist groups were not worthy of the “unity of the opposition forces.” Khomeini even denied that any slogans chanted in the streets belonged to the Leftists’ symbolics and insisted that they were praising only Islam. Moreover, during the holy month of Muharram, Khomeini suggested that at an unspecified point in the future, there would be a “solution” to the Marxists. Was he envisaging the misfortunes and repression that would befall the Left after the establishment of the IRI? He certainly needed to defuse a potential political bomb, that could have left his populist grip on the masses and the deprived in tatters. When his premises seemed to be accredited and consolidated, Khomeini’s discourse became even more militant. Thus, he started to focus exclusively on the main goals: the revolution, the overthrow of the Shah’s regime and the establishment of an Islamic Republic. In this delicate phase, the strategy of describing opposition to the Shah as a monolith served, first, to avoid divisions in the revolutionary movement and, second, to enhance popular unconditional support for the most violent and challenging phase of the Revolution. Indeed, until that moment, Khomeini had never conveyed any direct threat of elimination or repression in respect of the Leftists. Instead, he had reinforced the concept of a whole community of believers, officially excluding (only) the “atheists,” and aimed to achieve the final victory. Day by day, preparing the last phase of the Revolution from Paris, Khomeini fueled an



escalation of hopes, prompting some authors – such as Adib-Moghaddam – to compare his impact to that of other leaders such as Lenin, Mao and Castro.<sup>267</sup> Just before returning to Iran, the Ayatollah declared that “those who are not saboteurs will have the right to vote.” The ambiguity in his discourse was part of his success, that eventually made him the hegemonic actor in the counter-hegemonic struggle against the Shah. This is what the analysis of Khomeini’s speeches and interviews so far has indicated. It has provided important insights into this figure, and how he conceived social justice and referred to workers. Nonetheless, part of the context is still missing. The next chapter will attempt to bridge this gap. If we view this dissertation as an imaginary tape, chapter 3 will hit the rewind button. It will retrace the various stages of the revolutionary journey from a different perspective. Adopting a bottom-up approach, it will tell the story of the making of the Iranian Revolution through workers’ words and memories in order to comprehend not only what they said, but – more importantly – how they constructed their slogans and why they took to the streets as a distinguishable group, until the final days of the Revolution, on the side of millions of Iranians chanting “Esteqlāl, Azādi, Jomhuri-e Eslāmi,” “Independence, Freedom, Islamic Republic.

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<sup>267</sup> Adib-Moghaddam, *A Critical Introduction to Khomeini*, 1-18.