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

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CHAPTER 6

"Produce" and "Consume" in the Islamic Republic:

the 90s' Myth of the Winner and its Impact on Workers

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در دیدار نخست‌وزیر اوگاندا

رییس جمهوری: ایران برای کمک به حل مشکلات کشورهای آفریقایی آماده است

صفحه ۲

مرکز آمار اتحادیه اروپا، گزارش مبادلات تجاری سال ۹۴ این اتحادیه را با ایران منتشر کرد

موفقیت بزرگ اقتصادی ایران

مازاد تجاری ایران با اتحادیه اروپا به ۱/۷ میلیارد دلار رسید

● صادرات ایران به اتحادیه اروپا در سال ۹۴ به ۶/۶ میلیارد دلار رسید، در حالی که رقم واردات از این اتحادیه ۴/۹ میلیارد دلار بود

صفحه ۱۳

"Big successes for Iran's economy" (*Iran,* 1374-1995)

Introduction

"Produce to solve Iran's problems."[564] "Boost production to exit this labyrinth of difficulties."[565] "A new road [different] from the past" has to be taken.[566] "Big successes of our economy."[567] Iran's "new goals are: development, growth, efficiency."[568] "We should promote industrial research."[569] "The youth looking for a job needs to be skilled to succeed."[570] If newspapers are sites for the public sphere and can give any indication about the top-down narratives in Iran, the mantra behind

[564] *Kayhān*, 24 May 1993 (3 Khordad 1372).
[565] *Iran*, 26 July 1995 (4 Mordad, 1374).
[566] *Kayhān*, 23 May 1993 (2 Khordad 1372).
[567] *Iran*, August 1995 (Mordad 1374).
[568] *Iran*, 8 August 1995 (17 Mordad 1374).
[569] Ibid.
[570] *Iran*, 9 September 1994 (18 Shahrivar 1373).

these headlines was certainly *decide, produce, and succeed*. From the early 1990s, the dominant discourse within the Islamic Republic de facto customized the dictum "produce and consume" (*toulid va masraf*.) As already alluded to in both chapters 4 and 5, neoliberal narratives began to emanate from the new IRI administration led by president Rafsanjani.

The previous chapters gave an overview of discourses about labor from two different perspectives: top-down approaches that addressed workers, as well as bottom-up responses, such as expressions of dissent from both inside and beyond the factories. This chapter focuses on the 1990s, offering a new avenue for navigating the processes that led to workers' *precarization* in post-revolutionary Iran. The reason for concentrating on these years stems from my belief that they constitute a vantage point on some of the most critical historical transformations experienced by the Islamic Republic. Indeed, between 1988 and 1998, the chronicles reported a series of key events: the end of the Iran-Iraq war; the death of Khomeini, founder of the IRI and ideological leader of its apparatus; the approval of the first Labor Law under Islamic rule. Consequently, at the beginning of the 1990s, the IRI needed to reconstruct the country physically, economically, and ideologically. During the so-called reconstruction era (*sāzandegi*) following the Iran-Iraq war, a new narrative that boosted domestic production, fostered the idea of impressive career growth, and promoted the recognition of talent began to permeate the Iranian public space. The top-down rhetoric, which this chapter examines, was framed along the following lines: liberal market economy, consumer culture, an opening up of the country to the international arena. Although Iran's path towards liberalism has been "tortuous," when Rafsanjani took the helm of the presidency in 1989, the myth of the winner in an increasingly competitive society began to take shape.[571] Hence, workers became politically trapped in this new public arena. This chapter explores the factors that created the conditions for this impasse. It engages with the following questions: What were the mechanisms employed to boost the thirst for progress? On this path to economic liberalization, how and why were workers

[571] Ahmad Ashraf and Ali Banuazizi, "Iran's Tortuous Path Towards Islamic Neoliberalism," *International Journal of Culture, Politics and Society*, Vol. 15, No.2 (2001): 237-256.

marginalized from the dominant myth of the winner? Along what lines did the new generation of economic success take shape?

By reading through the pages of two leading newspapers published over the 1990s, *Iran* and *Hamshahri*, and by analyzing Rafsanjani's words, this chapter investigates the connections between the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony and the production of discourse through news, official speeches, and advertisements. As will be shown in the next sections, the IRI started to pave the way for social dichotomies such as classy/luxury (*bā kelās/luksi*) versus poor/cheap/provincial-kitsch (*bi kefyat/Javad/dehati-khaz*) to flourish.[572] The government's policies – intended to rehabilitate the Iranian economy after the destruction of the eight-year-long war with Iraq (1980-1988) – followed the production imperative. This process of rationalizing productivity as the only way to achieve national growth was fully appropriated into the public realm – and the labor dimension in particular – so that it eventually permeated Iran's social relations and narrowed workers' political space. Furthermore, the dominant discourse, voiced through newspapers and advertisements, sketched the ideal profile of success as belonging to those who dare, plan, and work hard.[573] This demonstrates the tight linkages between hegemonic relations and discourse: on the one hand, they determine it, on the other, they are reproduced in discursive practices.[574] Indeed, through a money-oriented discursive strategy permeating the public space, during the years of the Rafsanjani presidency, the Islamic Republic gradually institutionalized the hunger for success and addressed the new middle class. Navigating this context that encouraged rivalry and praised the accomplishment-based culture, this chapter argues that a crucial shift occurred: the political space was almost emptied of the revolutionary *collective* element and replaced by the rhetoric of the *individual*, eager to compete. The abovementioned process went hand in hand with two significant transformations: the

[572] This stigmatization in language emerged during the interviews conducted by the author during her research stay in Tehran between January 2018 and October 2019. See chapter 8 on the voices of 2009 for further elaboration. See also Shahram Khosravi, "The Precarious Status of Working-Class Men in Iran," *Current History*, (December 2017): 355-359.

[573] See *Kayhān*, 22 May 1993 (1 Khordad 1372); *Kayhān,* 14 September 1994 (23 Shahrivar 1373); *Iran*, 1-8-13 August 1995 (10-17-22 Mordad 1374); *Iran*, 30 December 1996 (10 Dey 1375); *Iran*, 25 July 1996 (4 Mordad 1375); *Iran*, 9 January 1997 (20 Dey 1375).

[574] Norman Fairclough, *Language and Power*, (New York: Longman, 1989), 40-42.

glamorization of the neoliberal subject, such as the successful individual, and the dismissal of the 1979 revolutionary slogans claiming social justice. On the one hand, the winner – understood both as a consumer open to the international arena and a wealth producer – entered the public space of competition. On the other hand, the figure of the worker as "the revolutionary oppressed" became marginalized from the public discourse in news headlines, slogans, images, and advertisements. Thus, an alienated workforce, trapped in a domain of social stigmatization, emerged as a product of the neoliberal discourse. This, from the 1990s and throughout the 2000s, created conditions for: 1) the erosion of the political centrality of workers as the *mostaz'afin*; 2) their detachment from the neoliberal subjects; 3) providing a breeding ground for practices of blaming or isolating those victims of increased inequality.

Analysis of representation: framing change and projecting success through discourse

In his "Prison notebooks," Gramsci pointed out that innovation, "at least in its first stages," has no chance of becoming mass-spread unless it is conveyed by an elite.[575] On its path to reconstructing the country, the dominant discourse within the Islamic Republic started framing change as innovative, new, projected to the future and no longer looking to the past.

How relations of power and domination manifested, while the IRI was pursuing this path towards liberalization, success and productivity, is – as mentioned above – at the core of this chapter. Particularly, analyzing the strategies employed to present neoliberal discourse allows us to understand why certain policies were established, as well as how they came to be accepted. Therefore, exploring representation here means assessing to what extent neoliberal narratives became crucial to the establishment and endurance of certain political choices. The contexts of actions, as well as values and goals, were expressed as part of a precise strategy that sketched the contours of cultural hegemony, as understood by Gramsci and elaborated in Fairclough's critical discourse analysis.[576] If discourse contributes to delineating relations of power and reproduces

[575] Gramsci, *Quaderni dal Carcere [Prison Notebooks]*, Q11, §17b, 1387.
[576] Fairclough and Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 80.

asymmetries between classes, it also serves as a tool for understanding political dynamics and even the contrasting aspects of the IRI's ideology in play. As the introduction of this dissertation explored, through a Gramscian lens, it is possible to see language as a tool of power but also as a metaphor for the way power operates. Thus, studying language is directly bound to the study of political and cultural processes, as language is also a metaphor for political positions.[577] This means that power manifests itself in particular bodies of text, in speeches, in intertextuality, as already explained in the previous chapters. However, it is in assumptions that it reveals its implicit meanings. Building from these concepts and drawing on the close connection between language and power, this chapter identifies the discursive practices that paved the way for the normalization and, consequently, the implementation of certain policies. It acted as a driver for the institutionalization of certain neoliberal values, ideas, and beliefs, despite the IRI's claims of speaking for the downtrodden. Following this line of reasoning, the analysis of representation sheds light upon the processes that eventually created the conditions for these beliefs to shape public practices. Maintaining this approach will allow us to identify the continuous conjunctions between discourse and other historical/structural factors. Going beyond the examination of ideology in merely descriptive terms, this chapter concentrates on how the *dowlat-e sāzandegi* (government of the reconstruction) framed aspects of realities as premises to achieve its political and economic goals, leveraging post-war circumstances and values of national cohesion.[578]

This chapter enhances the analysis of this dissertation by navigating the discourses glamorizing success that eventually impacted the dynamics of social change. Drawing on Fairclough's methods, it examines a claim firstly as relating to its premises and then to its contextual beliefs (and structural factors.)[579] Moreover, broadening the lens and building on Foucault's conception of power as productive and circulating, it contends that the thirst for success began to spread from the top and – through mechanisms of persuasion – permeated certain segments of the social body, such as the

[577] Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere [Prison Notebooks]*, Q11, §28, 1438-1439.
[578] Fairclough, *Political Discourse Analysis*, (2012), 80-86.
[579] Ibid.

youth. However, comprehending how the winner became a myth – hegemonic in its potential – entails exploring the linkages between shared beliefs, common objectives, and what Fairclough terms "means-goals."[580] In fact, means-goals are represented as necessary steps to reach a goal, but are also framed discursively as alternative choices. Under Rafsanjani, the dominant narrative introduced the IRI's goals along two trajectories: first, as a reaction to a problem; second, as belonging to a dimension of values. This means that *Iran* and *Hamshahri* presented the government's goals as inextricably linked to consequences, described as positive and inevitable. Therefore, here it is interesting to note that potential effects or repercussions embodied both "reasons for actions" and "reasons for believing."[581] Consequently, throughout the newspapers' pages reporting official speeches or economic agreements, almost every claim related to what to undertake and what to avoid. They proposed a specific to-do-list to follow, in order to achieve the intended outcomes ideologically, politically, economically, or socially. Therefore, in their audiences' messages, they projected a potential – yet seemingly certain – future, implying their perspectives and their own conclusion already in their premises. As will be shown later, verbs such *boyad* (must, should) served this intention, denying any alternative. On the one hand, the top-down discourse presented the road to take in order to solve a specific problem. On the other hand, it reached a conclusion based on its own assumptions, thus not including all the potential consequences of a claim or call to action. Consequently, once navigating the realm of uncertainty and an objectively unknown future, it resorted to a hierarchy of values that could be broadly shared according to the shifting context. Ideology and morally accepted norms became tools for justifying both claims and consequent actions. In fact, as already explored in chapter 4 and as will also be demonstrated in the next sections of this chapter, framing a requested action as a necessary/sufficient condition for the country and concurrently justifying it as a religious duty or a moral obligation for Iran's reconstruction was a recurrent strategy. Furthermore, by choosing

[580] Ibid. 35-78.
[581] Ibid.

specific photos or advertisements, this commitment engaged people's emotions, in an attempt to establish relations of trust.

Moreover, the context was framed according to the changing structural factors, as mentioned above. Bound to values, the commitment of the Rafsanjani administration was also presented in a context of data and institutional facts, intended to underpin the power of the message being conveyed. Thus, following Fairclough's pattern of discourse analysis, it became a concern for the future, a need, a goal to aim for within a framework where circumstances necessarily led to the presumptive claim. This shows how the range of potential actions to take, which developed from a particular context, values and perspectives that all validated a certain claim, became restricted. The actions *should* systematically fit the framework. Consequently, what the analysis of representation tells us is that the agents tended to present the steps to take as coinciding with their decision and as being just, fair, and right, in order to overcome an obstacle or a standstill.[582]

Therefore, these theoretical reflections have clarified how, under the auspices of a claimed truth, the IRI's dominant discourse made premises and conclusions that mirrored each other, eventually overlooking all other steps in the process.

The next section will focus on the historical context, as well as the economic premises that fostered the *produce and consume* dictum during Rafsanjani's presidency, which gives the title to this chapter.

"Veiled capitalists?" in context: the "second republic" on the road to production

When Rafsanjani - previously Iran's Parliamentary Speaker – obtained nearly 95 percent of the votes cast in the presidential election, the Iranian news agency *IRNA* announced the news in triumphalist tones.[583] It wrote that 16.4 million Iranians had cast their ballots to elect Rafsanjani in the race against his challenger, Abbas Sheibani. It was less than two months after Khomeini's

[582] Ibid. 44-45.
[583] *Reuters* and *IRNA*, 30 July 1989.

death.[584] The country was slowly getting back on its feet after a devastating Iran-Iraq war that had deeply compromised its economy. Private consumption expenditure per capita had declined by 30 percent. [585] Capital accumulation, due to the war and because of the populist Islamic Republic's post-revolutionary approach, had dropped.[586] Five south and south-western provinces - Khuzestan, Bakhtaran, Ilam, Kurdestan, and West Azarbaijan - had reported huge damage. According to official data, there were about 300,000 casualties, 2.5 million people had been displaced, and 52 cities had registered various levels of damage, 6 of them at the high rate of over 80 percent.[587] Most rural areas were devastated. Class inequalities had been exacerbated. The old state class and technocrats were poised to gain political space and to shift the dominant discourse from revolutionary commitment (*taʿahhod*) to praising professionalization and expertise (*takhasos*).[588] In Rafsanjani's entourage, most were technocrats with degrees obtained in Western universities.[589] The reconstruction era started with a Five-Year Development Plan (1989/1990- 1993/1994) pledging the implementation of neoliberal measures (without ever calling them such) along with reforms aimed at boosting productivity, efficiency and growth, and intended to encourage private capital, stimulate new investment, reform currency-exchange rates, and reduce oil dependency and state-controlled economic sectors.[590] The plan had already been drafted in 1986, two years before the ceasefire with Iraq. The Parliament finally approved it at the end of January 1990. The debate around agreeing a strategy to address the war damages did not go smoothly, as the approaches of

[584] Abrahamian, *History of Modern Iran*, 182-183.
[585] Sohrab Behdad, "From Populism to Economic Liberalism: The Iranian predicament," in Parvin Alizadeh ed. *Economy of Iran: Dilemma of an Islamic State,* London: I.B. Tauris, 2002, 112.
[586] See also Jahangir Amuzegar, "Iran's Economy: Status, Problems, and Prospects," Wilson Center, 2004, 3-4 https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/JahangirAmuzegarFinal.pdf , and Farhad Nomani and Sohrab Behdad "The Rise and Fall of Iranian Classes in the Post-Revolutionary Decades," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 44:3, (2008): 377-396, DOI: 10.1080/00263200802021558
[587] See Hooshang Amirahmadi, "Economic Reconstruction of Iran: Costing the War Damage," *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 12, no. 1 (January 1990), 26–47 and Rafsanjani's Friday Sermon 28 Mordad 1367, 1988, cited in Amirahmadi, *Revolution and Economic Transition: The Iranian Experience*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 240-242.
[588] As noted by Kaveh Ehsani in "Survival through Dispossession: Privatization of Public Goods in the Islamic Republic," *Middle East Report*, No. 250, The Islamic Revolution at 30 (2009), 26-33.
[589] Said Amir Arjomand*, After Khomeini. Iran under his successors*, 56-65.
[590] First Five-Year-Development Plan (Tehran, 1989), full text available here http://www.maslehat.ir/Contents.aspx?p=17e0f3f3-5988-4069-a89b-73ad17f87e9d

the different factions within the Islamic Republic diverged, particularly concerning ways to revive the national economy, the opening of the nation to foreign investment, and social welfare measures towards either a more populist or state-centered economy or a free market-oriented model.[591] The de-regulation of economic activities and de-nationalization of industry represented the main requests of the pragmatist faction supporting Rafsanjani, and championing liberalization policies. For example, ten key car industries were soon set to be included in the plans for privatization: Iran Kaveh, Iran Khodrow, Iran Vanet, Khavar, Khodrowsazan, Moratab, ParsKhodrow, SAIPA, Shahab Khodrow, and Zamyad.[592]

The first Five-Year Development Plan was approved under the auspices of achieving an average annual growth rate of 8 percent in GDP and reducing fluctuations in oil revenues from 21 billion to 6 billion dollars. It committed to reducing Iran's dependence on oil revenues, eliminating the government budget deficit, improving industrial efficiency and productivity, as well as implementing fiscal reforms.[593] Nearly 28 billion dollars of foreign borrowing were projected over the five years. This open-door project included the activation of the Tehran stock exchange and free trade areas. In a country very vulnerable to the external effects of oil markets, two other key steps embodied the core of the Plan: the reduction of state control on prices and a gradual subsidy reduction. [594] This latter move was quite controversial, as it generated discontent among the poorer strata of the population. Nevertheless, the state kept prices of primary goods low, even though, as Harris pointed out, "electricity and other public utilities were so cheap that many households let their bills run up for months."[595] This was only the case for the middle classes, as in some cases the

[591] On economic policies, the debate within the IRI apparatus and the process of isolation of the Left, see Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 163-175.
[592] Anoushirvan Ehteshami, *After Khomeini: The Iranian Second Republic*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 27-44.
[593] First Five-Year-Development Plan (Tehran, 1989), full text available here http://www.maslehat.ir/Contents.aspx?p=17e0f3f3-5988-4069-a89b-73ad17f87e9d. On fiscal development strategies see M. R. Ghasimi, "The Iranian Economy after the Revolution: An Economic Appraisal of the Five-Year Plan," *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (1992): 599-614
[594] For a more detailed elaboration on this, see Djavad Salehi-Isfahani, "Labor and the Challenge of Economic Restructuring in Iran," *Middle East Report*, No. 210, (1999): 34-37.
[595] Kevan Harris, *A Social Revolution*, 144-174.

prices of electricity, gas, telephone and public transportation actually doubled.[596] Therefore, the lower classes were profoundly affected by these measures.

However, when navigating the announced policies and assessing their effects in the IRI, it is important to contextualize the neoliberal turn of Iran under Rafsanjani as a hybrid. Two main aspects are worth taking into consideration: 1) the rigidity of the Iranian economy; and 2) the Islamic-populist ideological dimension where these neoliberal measures flourished. The discourse over taxation is emblematic of the complexities of neoliberalism in Iran. In fact, unlike the Western liberalization model, the *dowlat-e sāzandegi* did not chase after tax reduction slogans. Conversely, it pushed on with improving the tax collection system. As extensively noted by Mohammad Maljoo and Parviz Sedaghat – among other scholars[597] – neoliberalism in the Iranian context took a more mitigated form, occupying a middle ground between welfare policies and neoliberal measures.[598] Furthermore, with regard to privatization, it is more accurate to refer to semi-privatization and to see Iran as a "subcontractor state" employing a specific, yet a non-exceptional, form of capitalism.[599]

When the *Wall Street Journal* reporter Geraldine Brooks reported from Tehran, on September 16th, 1991, she referred to new forms of capitalism in Iran. Her piece was titled "Veiled Capitalists: The New Revolution in Iran Is Taking Place on an Economic Front." The sub-heading read: "Moves Toward Free Market Pit Rafsanjani Against Religious Hard-Liners. A Spate of Suspicious Fires." When the article went on sale, Rafsanjani had been president for two years. There had been

[596] Behdad, "From Populism to Economic Liberalism," 150-151.
[597] Arash Davari, Peyman Jafari, Ali Kadivar, Zep Kalb, Arang Keshavarzian, Azam Khatam, Saira Rafiee, and Eskandar Sadeghi-Boroujerdi, "Roundtable: Iran's Domestic Politics and Political Economy," *Jadaliyya*, 26 November 2019. Available here https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/40287/Roundtable-Iran%E2%80%99s-Domestic-Politics-and-Political-Economy-Part-1
[598] Interview with Mohammad Maljoo and Parviz Sedaghat, "Neoliberalism dar Iran: afsaneh ya vāqey'at?" *Akhbār Rooz*, December 14, 2019, https://www.akhbar-rooz.com/%d9%86%d8%a6%d9%88%d9%84%db%8c%d8%a8%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%84%db%8c%d8%b3%d9%85-%d8%af%d8%b1-%d8%a7%db%8c%d8%b1%d8%a7%d9%86%d8%8c-%d8%a7%d9%81%d8%b3%d8%a7%d9%86%d9%87-%db%8c%d8%a7-%d9%88%d8%a7%d9%82%d8%b9-2/?fbclid=IwAR2kNlEGRc77X-L7SjuCZjTjT2J0CqK5Sr-4BesdXwAiZDvmkkIyScibFnE. See also Kayhān Valadbaygi, "Hybrid Neoliberalism: Capitalist Development in Contemporary Iran," *New Political Economy*, (2020), DOI: 10.1080/13563467.2020.1729715
[599] Kevan Harris, "The Rise of the Subcontractor State: Politics of Pseudo-privatization in the Islamic Republic of Iran," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies,* 45, 1 (2013): 45-70.

frequent scattered disturbances protesting the rising prices.[600] As chapter 5 extensively explored, sources of discontent were mainly erupting from the irate poor, along with workers. "Death to the anti-people regime of Rafsanjani," and "Hashemi Shah" were some of the expressions of dissent chanted.[601] The bazaar was one of the arenas in which the scattered protests took place. Some demonstrators marched with their pockets turned inside out, signaling their lack of money. The above-mentioned article commented: "The rich, by contrast, already are beginning to feel benefits. Iran's gross domestic product surged more than 10% last year, wheat production almost doubled and light-industrial output trebled. But for the poor, reforms so far have brought nothing but pain. Elimination of price controls and food subsidies has left some families struggling to buy staples such as rice and bread."[602] What was the political strategy behind these economic choices? Behdad interpreted them as a push for Iranians to invest their money in domestic consumption, reduce demand for imports and channel all the other products that commanded a high price – such as Persian rugs or pistachios – toward exports. Another objective was to attract foreign investment. Yet, at what price? In the Majles, Rafsanjani's opponents accused him of profiting at the expense of the living standards of ordinary Iranians. [603] The president was accused of "masterminding" the exclusion of the Leftist faction from Parliament to avoid any criticism of his strategy of reducing the state's official role in the economy.[604]

A cure for pain in discourse: economic and industrial "achievements"

As the previous section showed, it was no easy task to advocate for the "structural adjustment" (*taʿdil*) and attempts at privatization (*khosousi sāzi*) .[605] The IRI needed a strategy of persuasion and

[600] Geraldine Brooks, *The Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 1991.
[601] Ibid.
[602] Ibid.
[603] As reported by Elaine Sciolino in April 1992, some were asking for "government-run economy, self-sufficiency, price controls, Government subsidies." New York Times, April 13, 1992. Available here https://www.nytimes.com/1992/04/13/world/iranian-president-appears-to-beat-anti-west-rivals.html
[604] Bahman Ahmadi-Amui, *Eqtesad-e Syasi-ye Jomhouri-ye Eslāmi (Political Economy of the Islamic Republic),* (Tehran: Gam-e Now, 2003), 392-395.
[605] For further details on the difficult context in which Rafsanjani's government started see Mas'ud Safiri, *Haqiqat-hā va Maslahat-hā. Goft-o-u ba Hashemi Rafsanjani*, (Tehran, Nashr-e Ney, 1378- 1989),105-106, 128-129 and 130-132.

a myth to believe in. In Rafsanjani's words, 1989 (1368 in the Persian calendar) was the year when Iran *should* find its "calm after the storm" (*arāmesh baʿd az tufān*). He framed the reconstruction project as an overlapping premise and goal to restore the country. Boosting production was presented as a collective need to improve living standards. Beyond "breathtaking negotiations with Saddam Hussein to implement resolution 598," the country – he wrote –*needed* to "meet the consumer needs of the country, that people are waiting for after the war."[606] "Given heavy government debt and the deficit in the country's budget," he continued, the goal was to "safeguard the budget for reconstruction costs and expenses, as well as the living needs of society and the raw materials for production." Rafsanjani added: "Supply what is needed for production in agricultural, industrial and service sectors." Therefore, following the logic of the urgency and emergency, a pressing lack expressed in the envisaged roadmap dictated the imperatives: produce and meet the consumer demands to "safeguard" the country. Thus, the wellbeing of Iranians, who were understood as consumers, was at stake together with Iran's security. Rafsanjani appealed to the nationalist sentiment of Iranians who cared about protecting their country. Less than three years later, in 1992, the president announced a thirty-point bullet list. He introduced the remedy for Iran's pain in terms of "economic and industrial achievements."[607] This goal-oriented terminology, devoted to wealth creation and improvement, shaped the dominant discourse throughout the early 1990s. To reduce the Central Bank debt, the recipe provided suggested converting "loss to profit" (*az zarar-e dehi be sud-e āfarini*). Development and growth in GDP, as well as impacting the national budget and credits, went along with attracting foreign currency and adjusting subsidies to lift restrictions.[608] Rafsanjani put them conceptually on the same strategic plan, as they were

[606] Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Sāzandegi va bāzsāzi*. *Ketāb Khāterāt 1368*, moqadameh. (Reconstruction and renovation, Book of Memories 1368, introduction. https://rafsanjani.ir/records/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-1368?q=%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C

[607] Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, *Sāzandegi va Shokufāiy*. *Ketāb Khāterāt 1370*. (Reconstruction and blooming, book of Memories, 1370). https://rafsanjani.ir/records/%D9%85%D9%82%D8%AF%D9%85%D9%87-%DA%A9%D8%AA%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%AE%D8%A7%D8%B7%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA-%D8%B3%D8%A7%D9%84-1370?q=%D8%B3%D8%A7%D8%B2%D9%86%D8%AF%DA%AF%DB%8C

[608] Ibid

coordinated actions to be performed in tandem. Every goal was a sacrifice under the banner of Iran's wellbeing. Reducing the role of the state (*kam kardan-e bār-e dowlat*), starting a process of privatization (*khosousi sāzi*), and the profitability of capital (*soud āvar nemudan-e samāyeh-ha*) were represented as three *means-goal* to achieve national competitiveness. Rafsanjani, interestingly, depicted the price liberalization of most goods in opposition to the black market. Picturing the reconstruction plan as a sequence of growth (*roshd*), development (*touseh*), liberalization (*azad kardan*), adjustment (*taʿdil*), abundance (*vofur*), increase (*bālā bordan*), activation (*fa'āl kardan*), acceleration (*tasri'*), and strengthening (*taqviat kardan*) meant also focusing the government's gaze on producers. Rafsanjani argued that "special attention [must be given] to the development of the industrial sector, in order to remove any problems for the producers."[609] Newspapers, as mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, played a fundamental role in spreading this new narrative with headlines, such as: "Boost production to exit this labyrinth of difficulties."[610] "A new road [different] from the past" has to be taken.[611] "Big successes of our economy."[612]

Marginalizing workers discursively and legally

While the appetite for productivity and success was pervading the public spaces, the notion of labor – and consequently that of workers and the working class – was being profoundly altered. In official speeches, newspaper interviews and public discourse, the expression "working class" (*tabaqeh-ye kārgar*) almost disappeared. As chapter 4 showed, it was replaced by the concept of a "workforce" (*niru-ye kārgar*) or "labor stratum" (*qeshr-e kārgar*).[613] In Rafsanjani's words, workers represented the "country's force of production" (*niru-ye kār va toulid keshvar*) and "had a fundamental role in the reconstruction era after the war imposed by force (*jang-e tahmili*): therefore, the Revolution

[609] Ibid.
[610] *Iran*, 26 July 1995 (4 Mordad, 1374).
[611] *Kayhān*, 23 May 1993 (2 Khordad 1372).
[612] *Iran*, August 1995 (Mordad 1374.)
[613] *Kayhān*, 30 April 1990 (10 Ordibehesht 1369). See also Morgana, "Talking to Workers: From Khomeini to Ahmadinejad," 133-158.

belongs to them." Likewise – he added – they need to be educated because "this increase in education will raise production."[614]

۱۵ طرح بزرگ برای افزایش تولید فولاد، مس، آلومینیوم و روی، در دست اجرا است

گروه اقتصادی. با راه‌اندازی ۱۵ طرح بزرگ معدنی و فلزی، ظرفیت تولید مس، آلومینیوم، روی و فولاد به چندین برابر ظرفیت فعلی خواهد رسید.

به گزارش خبرنگار ما، این طرحها با صدها میلیارد ریال اعتبار و با حداقل ارزبری در دست اجرا است که طی ماههای باقیمانده امسال و نیز در طول برنامه دوم توسعه بتدریج مورد بهره‌برداری قرار می گیرند.

مهمترین و بزرگترین طرحهای یادشده که علت ارزبری پایین آنها، توانمندیهای بالای فنی و مهندسی ساخت در داخل کشور اعلام شد در بخش صنعت فولاد شامل: کارخانه فولاد آلیاژی یزد، فولاد خراسان و آذربایجان و طرح توسعه ذوب آهن اصفهان، فولاد خوزستان و مجتمع فولاد مبارکه است.

همچنین در زمینه افزایش ظرفیت تولید مس، آلومینیوم و روی، طرح اکتشاف، استخراج و فرآوری مهمی مانند مجتمع مس میدوک و سونگون، تولید کنسانتره روی در زنجان، مجتمع تولید آلومینیا در آذربایجان و تولید الکترود گرافیتی در منطقه آزاد قشم در دست اجرا است و پیشرفتهای فیزیکی این طرحها از برنامه زمان بندی شده، جلوتر است.

از دیگر طرحهای مهم، ایجاد کارخانه آهن بریکت در کرمان با ظرفیت تولید سالانه یک میلیون تن، ایجاد کارخانه تولید پیگمنت تیتانیوم با ظرفیت تولید سالانه ۱۲۰ هزار تن کنسانتره ایلمینیت و ۲۵ هزار تن پیگمنت تیتانیوم است. طرح اخیر ازنظر هزینه اجرا و اعتبار ارزی مهمترین طرح درمیان ۱۵ طرح یادشده است که هزینه ریالی آن ۳۰۲ میلیارد ریال و اعتبار ارزی آن ۲۸۴ میلیون دلار برآورد شده است.

یکی از هدفهای مهم این طرحها که در نقاط مختلف کشور در دست اجراست، محرومیت زدایی، ایجاد اشتغال مولد و کمک به توسعه مناطق محروم اعلام شده است.

"15 large-scale projects to increase the production of steel, copper, aluminum and zinc" (*Hamshahri*, 1375-1996)

As May Day became marginalized throughout the 1990s, its media coverage and public echo decreased. What made the headlines over the years were Iran's economic performance and all new goals for the *country to be*. While words such as "progress" (*pishraft*), "production" (*toulid*), "successes" (*movāffaqyat-hā*), "development" (*touseh*) and "growth" (*roshd*) started to dominate the front pages of newspapers such as *Iran* and *Hamshahri*, workers – here understood as a group with specific grievances or demands – were almost entirely absent from the government-filtered public arena. When announcing Iran's successes or discussing data about production or new projects, photos usually represented industrial settings.

[614] *Salam*, 1 May 1994 (11 Ordibehest 1373).

"Iran has developed a technology for the production of refractory materials." (*Iran* 1376 – 1987)

News about rising social inequalities, inflation and general discontent among the lower classes occupied very little space or indeed none at all.[615] In fact, as chapter 5 investigated, between the end of 1991 and 1995, protests and expressions of dissent erupted against Rafsanjani's neoliberal agenda, subsidy cuts, and wage decreases.[616] Yet, coverage of such events almost faded away. One of the few exceptions was in summer 1995, when *Iran* newspaper reported on workers' demonstrations all over the country, dedicating only a few lines to them at the bottom of the economy section page. Another compelling case occurred at the end of 1996, when – for the first time – the Ministry of Labor explicitly mentioned non-wage-based activities (*faʿalyat-ha ye gheyr-e dastmozd*) as a potential solution to reducing unemployment. This last case actually constituted a first step towards a debate about short term contracts and the flexibilization of labor.[617] As the next chapter will discuss in more detail, after the approval of the 1990 Labor Law, a series of legal mechanisms initiated a process that eventually caused workers to become both precarious and alienated. Workers' alienation in discourse took place alongside structural measures.[618]

[615] *Iran*, 26 July 1995 and 16 August 1995 (4-25 Mordad 1374) and *Hamshahri*, 29 June 1996 (9 Tir 1375).
[616] *Kār-o-Kārgar,* 2 January 1992 (12 Dey 1370); 7 October 1993 (15 Mehr 1372;) 4 August 1996 (14 Mordad 1375); *New York Times*, 1 June 1992. Accessed 20 September 2019, available https://www.nytimes.com/1992/06/01/world/violence-spreads-in-iran-as-the-poor-are-evicted.html. See also Asef Bayat, *Street Politics. Poor People's Movements in Iran*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 97-99.
[617] *Iran*, 2 August 1995 (11 Mordad 1374) and 24 November 1996 (4 Azar 1375).
[618] Labor Law, 1990. *Iran Data Portal*, Syracuse University. Chapter six, https://irandataportal.syr.edu/workers-and-employers-organizations.

Constructing the "successful" through a culture of competition

The IRI, from the *sāzandegi* period onwards, moved its focus from the 1979 Revolution's "downtrodden" (*mostaz'afin*) – which included workers and the poor who were all cast under the Islamic umbrella – to the new middle classes. This shift profoundly enlarged the socio-economic divide and affected the already precarious lives of ordinary Iranians, particularly those who could not participate in the social-climbing race.[619] For instance, when Rafsanjani thanked his voters for their renewed trust after his re-election in June 1994, he also expressed his full intention to "give answers to the needs and problems of the people."[620] What he meant by "the people" became clear immediately afterward, as he traced the perfect pattern of the ideal citizen as being: hardworking and dedicated to the production mantra, oriented towards personal independence and eager to develop specialized skills. Thus, social worth started to be measured through numbers and data, as well as financial fulfillment or personal achievements. At the end of July 1995, the newspaper *Iran* went to press with a frontpage praising the industrial sector successes: "403,000 people are working in the Iranian industry." The article added: "The most developed sector is the food sector, which consists of 78,595 factories;" in the whole country "12,432 factories are considered big, with more than 50 employed workers;" "more than 1,308,000 families are participating in the economic activities."[621] Pictures of men working hard with heavy machinery accompanied the article. A few months later, "48 plans are ready to improve production all over the country."[622] However, development was not running in tandem with other key concepts associated with the 1979 Revolution and the labor realm, such as social justice: e.g. "Iranian industrial sector: 8 million tons produced, 100 million dollars of products exported. In 1373 (1994), the production of oil products reached 35 percent" and "Iran is among the 10 most productive countries in the world oil sector."[623]

[619] See Khosravi, *Precarious Lives. Waiting and Hope in Iran*, 11-12 and 214.
[620] *Kayhān*, 14 June 1994 (24 Khordad 1373).
[621] *Iran*, 24 July 1995 (2 Mordad 1374).
[622] *Iran* and *Hamshahri*, 1 August 1995 (10 Mordad 1374).
[623] *Iran* and *Hamshahri*, 23 August 1995 (1 Shahrivar 1374).

In the same year, the government-aligned newspaper quoted the president encouraging the boost in domestic production, announcing "90 billion capital to be invested in the electronics sector," and setting out the roadmap to development which would pass through industrial companies and production companies as well as national and international transportation.[624] Hence, electronics was constructed in the public space as a distinctive sign of progress, perfectly overlapping – within the context of this rhetoric – with job security and individual success: "90 billion rials invested in the industry of electronic screens" and "25 thousand new job positions for experts."[625] Furthermore, the culture of competition and the *glamorization* of success was spread through prizes, races, awards for exemplary individuals and new entrepreneurs: e.g. "Tax waiver announced for 117 new activities."[626]

Moreover, the hunger for progress manifested through a conscious strategy to also imbue and appropriate the public discourse with exhibitions, such as a fair aimed at "showing the progress of the country," announced to be held in autumn 1995.[627] Planning for a neoliberal industrial future was the refrain of Rafsanjani's second term, which occupied the news with examples such as the following, structured into eight main goals, which were introduced - as mentioned earlier in this chapter - in a bullet list of achievements (with no alternatives): 1) increase of industrial exports to 4-5 billion dollars; 2) average value added growth of 6 percent; 3) increase of specialized labor force (*niru-ye ensāni motekhasses*) to 15 percent; 4) annual growth of efficiency (*roshd-e sālane bahrevari*) up to 3 percent; 5) increase of research/investigation expenses to 1.5 percent of the value of the increase of the industrial sector (*afzāyesh-e tahqiqat dar sad arzesh afzāyesh-e bakhshe sanʿati*); 6) increase of the proportion of the added value to industrial production 2 percent (*afayesh-e nesbate arzesh afzoode be toulidate sanʿati*); 7) improvement of production standards by 15 percent (*afzayesh-e estandard*); 8) increase in industrial production, capacity utilization, and

[624] *Iran*, 26 July 1995 (4 Mordad 1374).
[625] *Iran*, 28 July 1995 (6 Mordad 1374).
[626] *Hamshahri*, July-August 1995, (Mordad 1374). See also Adelkhah, *Being Modern in Iran*, 139-160.
[627] *Iran* and *IRNA*, 2 August 1995 (11 Mordad 1374).

growth of trade levels, upgrading of quality (*afzayesh-e toulidat-e sanʿati, bahrebardari az zarfiat-ha, behboud-e teraz-e tejari va erteghay-e kefiat*).[628]

Youth as an element functional to the neoliberal project and the praise of technology

The daily media provided a perfect setting in which to spread the myth of success. Therefore, while the adjective "new" was abundantly used in contrast with the past, the youth – in other words the generation born in the 1980s in the aftermath of the Revolution and during the war – began to be bombarded by these messages. The inner life of a successful youth was functional to the broader picture of a developed country. Essays and analyses on the young Iranians "looking for a job and the necessities of a specialized training" multiplied, as they were connected to "IT skills," "progress", "growth" and "success."[629] The neoliberal project did not address the lower classes or young workers who were willing but unable to study or had no chance of becoming entrepreneurs. These were overwhelmed by a political phase where their existential meaning within the IRI's dominant framework was directly incorporated into the "produce and consume" dictum. Within that dimension, the "new" entrepreneur or engineer represented the bridge in the labor realm between the new achievement-oriented government policies and the factories. For this reason, the universities as public spaces were transformed into practical tools of discursive intervention. Indeed, news about the increasing number of students in the Iranian public universities systematically appeared throughout the 1990s under Rafsanjani's rule. Relying on a young, educated and specialized population equaled projecting success. Constructing the myth of the winner, by boosting competition and praising success among young Iranians, operated as a tool of progress to brandish at home as well as abroad. In fact, Iran was trying to open up to the international arena after years of economic isolation: "Big successes of Iran in the international market," proclaimed *Iran* in September 1995, referring to trade export to Europe that had reached 6

[628] *Iran* and *IRNA*, 8 August 1995 (17 Mordad 1374).
[629] *Hamshari* and *Iran*, August 1995 (Mordad 1374), December 1996 (Azar 1375), January 1997 (Dey 1375), May 1997 (Ordibehesht 1376).

billion dollars. Furthermore, feeding the consumer generation through the praise of technology operated as a *means-goal* to galvanize the population and make them participate in the national endeavor of the *toulid va masraf* mantra. The new sections for technology and state-of-the-art products in *Iran* for example, as well as the growing advertisement section in *Hamshahri*, from the 1990s onwards represented a step in this direction.


گوناگون

چهارشنبه ۲۵ مرداد ماه ۱۳۷۴ - ۱۸ ربیع الاول ۱۴۱۶ - ۱۶ اوت ۱۹۹۵ - صفحه ۹

«اتومبیل تاشو»

مصرف الکل حتی به مقدار کم، زیان آور است

«اثر انگشت» موجودات میکروسکوپی!

A smart and foldable car called Ludo (*Iran*, 1374-1995)

Newspapers became sites for spreading the myth of progress through technology and innovation. Thus, the reader was directly projected to an imagined future they would achieve once the route to production was taken. The recourse to technology and novelty functioned as a tool to foster a new *habitus* in the eyes of young generations, pushing them to dream of a tangible goal. The rhetorical construction of production was linked to a certain understanding of modernity where the concept of progress overlapped with one of novelty. This meant that the electronic frontier encompassed the opening-door and neoliberal discourse. Hence, symbols of the public realm (such as newspapers close to the government) fostered the spread of products that were at the cutting-edge. Nevertheless, these products were beyond the reach of most Iranians, because they were either impossible to import or too expensive. However, promoting technology as being connected to words such as success, growth, development, and innovation represented a stimulus for raising aspirations as an all-encompassing solution for a country in need of reconstruction. Advertising and promoting hi-tech products discursively

sold as classy or luxury (*ba kelās, luksi*), therefore, embodied the myth of those who dare. Consequently, aspiration began to represent a sort of *sine-qua-non* condition in the process of creating the ideal neoliberal citizen, who should be continuously committed to self-improvement.

New sensors against accidents, a special Japanese device against falling asleep while driving and GPS technology (*Iran*, 1374-1995)

Technologically-mediated spaces framed social and cultural truths, continuing to break new ground for the involvement of people as forward-looking consumers. What is interesting to note here is the progressive nature attributed to technology. It became appealing and was therefore supported, as it was conceived of as producing results that would make Iran progress. Therefore, the 1990s' modern-day framework in Iran launched a message to the youth, telling them where to look and what they should aim for (i.e.: technical universities, science faculties.) Another element, which was discursively relevant, was the new relation taking shape between the addresser (the IRI) and the addressee (the winner, the new neoliberal and Iranian subject who had success.)[630] According to this logic, those who were economically disadvantaged were unable to fulfill the social requirements. Tragically, they did not fit the new trend.

[630] Mohammad Amouzadeh and Manouchehr Tavangar, "Decoding pictorial metaphor Ideologies in Persian commercial advertising," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2004): 147–174.

Connecting spaces: normalizing the modes of middle classes through urban transformations

The previous sections explored the connections between language use in the newspapers and the process of *glamorizing* success, within the broader context of Iran's power and labor relations. *Hamshahri* (fellow-citizen) represented a crucial link in this chain. Its story deserves further explanation. Published by the Tehran Municipality since 1992, throughout the 1990s the newspaper projected the Rafsanjani administration's plan for the transformation of the public realm. It envisaged the future of Iran's capital as a metropolis. "Tehran's population will increase to 20 million", a headline from January 1997 read. Iran's capital represented the field of action for the new neoliberal subjects as well as the heart of the reconstruction economy. The transformations in public spaces that occurred in Tehran over the course of the 1990s under mayor Gholamhossein Karbashi, who was also the founder of *Hamshahri*, profoundly impacted social relations. If the statistics of over-population were worrying particularly during the first Five-Year Economic Plan (1989-1994), the Rafsanjani/Karbashi solution was soon presented: the new administration geared itself up to focus on construction. The business of construction made its appearance as a new response to housing scarcity. An ambitious plan of urban renewal boldly transformed the capital, with the headlines fostering this narrative: "A new plan for the housing sector," "New development construction policies," or "Rise of 48 percent of private capital in the construction sector."[631] Most of these plans concentrated on the northern area of Iran's capital, falling short of tackling the overpopulation in the southern neighborhoods. In 1999, Ehsani described the socio-geographic discrepancy between the two areas as a developed and prosperous north juxtaposed with a lower-working class south described as "over-crowded, hotter and more polluted with smaller lots."[632] With considerable investment in urban planning, the direction followed during those years was not one of leaving the poorer districts of the south behind. Instead, the strategy was to provide new

[631] *Hamshahri, Ketāb-e Sāl 1375 and 1376* (Tehran: Hamshahri Publications, 1999). See also *Iran*, 13 August 1995 (22 Mordad 1374), 1 January 1997 (12 Dey 1375), and 26 August 1997 (4 Shahrivar 1376).
[632] Kaveh Ehsani, "Municipal Matters: The Urbanization of Consciousness and Political Change in Tehran," *Middle East Report*, No. 212 (Autumn, 1999): 22-27.

urban spaces that fashioned the south as a reflection of the north.[633] Although sharp distinctions of class and status diminished, these spaces first, fully mirrored the myth of success and second, began to normalize the social modes and practices of the middle, bourgeois, new entrepreneur-oriented classes.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored the mechanisms through which the thirst for progress, success and competition became a hegemonic myth in the IRI's dominant narrative over the 1990s. Through the analysis of newspaper headlines (in *Iran* and *Hamshahri)*, and in particular the economics and technology sections, along with Rafsanjani's words and memories, it has shown how the discourses of change and production took shape. The reconstruction era carried the burden of conveying Iran to economic and ideological rehabilitation following the end of the devastating Iran-Iraq war and in the aftermath of Khomeini's death. The new government managed to discursively construct a new potential future for Iranians, by championing neoliberal narratives in support of liberalization policies. Encouraging progress and growth through the projection of an advanced and competitive future was one of the first mechanisms employed to push Iranians to produce more and to participate in the national sacrifices required to overcome the economic disruptions caused by the war and the Islamic populist anti-capitalist posture adopted after the 1979 Revolution. The idea of public space was conceptually transformed from one dedicated to the oppressed and the poor to an arena devoted to producers and consumers. Values of national cohesion or the Islamic dedication to labor[634] were directly linked to goals such as "increasing" the GDP, "advancing" the industrial sector, following the "efficiency" imperative, and converting "loss to profit." The dominant discourse of pragmatists, therefore, presented innovation and forward-looking subjects as both goals and premises to improve the country's successes even more. On the one hand, technological development represented one of the goals in the various bullet lists distributed by the government.

[633] Ibid.
[634] See chapter 4, "Labor as a religious duty."

On the other hand, it was also the premise for the expansion of the industrial sector. Thus, it also constituted a means-goal to achieve a rise in terms of national growth. Language played a crucial role in the processes of establishing cultural hegemony. Verbs such as *should* or *must* went along with requests to increase production workloads or the privatization of some industries, without ever mentioning the negative consequences. Terms such as growth (*roshd*), development (*touseh*), liberalize (*azad kardan*), adjustment (*taʿdil*), abundance (*vofur*), increase (*bālā bordan*), activate (*faʿāl kardan*), accelerate (*tasri' kardan*), and strengthen (*taqviat kardan*) became a constant refrain. Premises such as "heavy government debt and deficit in country's budget," constituted necessary and sufficient conditions for calls to action, which were justified by the concepts of "safeguarding" or the "protection" of the country. Although advocating for *individual* achievements, the mythology of success was systematically framed and re-invented as fostering a *collective* need to improve living standards. Nevertheless, this resulted in the conceptualization of the exact opposite, as the thirst for progress also imposed specialization, and personal improvement instead of collective goals. Social worth became a value to be measured in numbers, along with financial fulfillment or individual achievements. Data and stated structural factors underpinned the same logic. Therefore, context was framed accordingly to reinforce the message being conveyed. Workers were almost entirely absent from the government-filtered public arena, with no place remaining for any working-class focused political plan. Only on the path to production were they part of the triumphalist and "big successes of Iran in the international market."

As partly investigated in chapter 4 and elaborated in more depth here, the 1990s marked a fundamental paradigm shift: the IRI chose to overlook social justice and move its gaze to the middle classes. Indeed, this chapter has explored how the existence of a successful youth was functional to the open-door policy championed by Rafsanjani. The self-made man or the young entrepreneur "looking for a job" made the headlines and the calls for "specialized" employees

multiplied, as they were connected to "IT skills," "progress", "growth" and "success."[635] In the broader neoliberal framework, the lower class's only role was as the brawn and muscle for the supposedly brilliant minds committed to conjuring up the "big successes." If the dominant discourse glamorized goals as money-oriented and projected towards wealth creation, this created the public arena and the political space that: 1) marginalized discourses of social justice; 2) paved the way for the sharpening of the social distance between classes; and 3) created the space for liberal reactions to the repressive mechanisms of the IRI to flourish.

More importantly, this chapter has made two main points, which are useful for understanding the changing context. First, by boosting production while encouraging competition, advertising new prizes at university and in workplaces for "exemplary individuals," the IRI opened up to private investment, while glamorizing the neoliberal subject. Gradually spreading the culture of entrepreneurship and the private sector, it drew up a profile of the ideal citizen who aspired to self-improvement and was committed to achieving. Hence, it institutionalized a certain mentality fostering the implementation of potentially divisive policies.

Second, this chapter has contended that the transformations that occurred in discourse mirrored structural changes. Thus, the transformation that made workers precarious did not lie only in economic explanations or legal factors. Starting with precisely this phase, precarity and precarious employment began to widen the social gap, both in terms of perceptions of class belonging and in reality. To a certain extent it is possible to argue that the 1990s era paved the way for the social stigma that became attached to those who were not productive, depicting them as an obstacle to the development of the whole society. Through these mechanisms, neoliberal language, even if top-down imposed, actually circulated in the social body and permeated the younger generations. Therefore, the accusations of championing "neoliberal" causes, which part of the organized labor

[635] *Hamshari* and *Irān*, August 1995 (Mordad 1374), December 1996 (Azar 1375), January 1997 (Dey 1375), May 1997 (Ordibehesht 1376).

movement would make against the Green activists in 2009 as chapter 8 will show, had their roots in the processes of individualization started in the 1990s.