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

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Citation
Morgana, M. S. (2021, March 31). '*Precarize*' *and divide: Iranian workers from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Green Movement*. Retrieved from https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3151771

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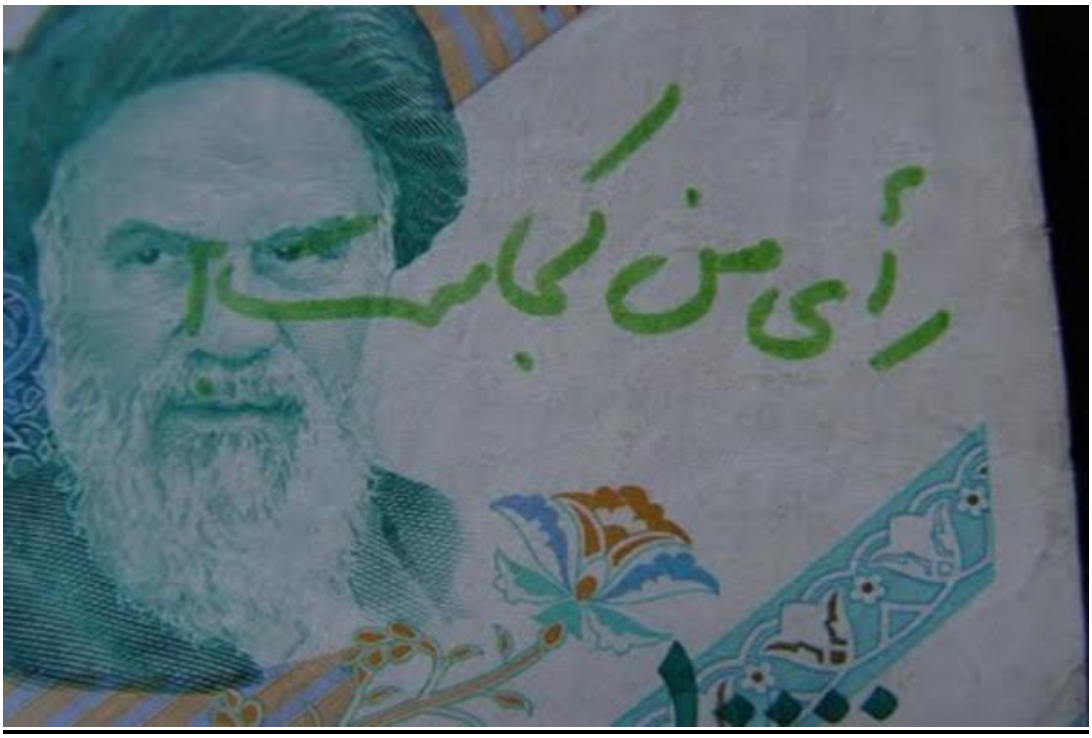
Title: 'Precarize' and divide: Iranian workers from the 1979 Revolution to the 2009 Green Movement
Issue date: 2021-03-31

CHAPTER 8

The Green Movement vis-à-vis Workers:

Missing Connections and Breaking Points within the 2009 Uprising



The slogan "Where is my vote?" written on an Iranian currency note (photo: UCLA Library)

Introduction

The processes of struggle and counter-hegemonic pushes that developed in post-revolutionary Iran culminated in 2009. It was June 13, a day marking the beginning of a hot summer of discontent in Tehran. On that morning, the streets turned into a site of confrontation. Once again, and for the first time since the 1979 Revolution, hundreds of thousands of people poured out onto the capital's main roads to protest. They questioned the election outcome, claiming their votes back. It was the beginning of a confrontation that exposed the fragilities of the Islamic Republic, as well as the popular strength of a "green wave" that over the following days eventually filled the streets of other cities, such as Shiraz and Isfahan, across the country. The Green Movement exploded with all its potency and weaknesses. It was mostly young men and women who demonstrated, holding up placards that read: *Rāy-e man kojast?* [Where is my vote?]. In the aftermath of Mahmoud

Ahmadinejad's victory in the presidential elections of June 12, they kept asking: "Where is my vote?". Nevertheless, the notable absentee was a cohesive opposition group of workers among the demonstrators, sharing the same slogans and common spaces. This does not mean that workers, as individuals, did not participate in the demonstrations. The point relates to the expression of an organic set of collective demands challenging the status quo and embracing different strata of Iranian society. In fact, a missing link was revealed, embodied in the lack of social justice grievances.

This chapter starts precisely from this breaking point. By exploring the discursive disconnections that led to the Green Movement's genesis and development, through the slogans and rallying-cries of the protestors, it traces the contours of the fragile identities that animated the uprising. Moreover, it contests two stereotypical interpretations that emerged both from the mainstream coverage of the protests in the international media, and during the author's interviews in Iran: the labeling of the Green Wave as an exclusively rich, middle-class movement; and the understanding that workers did not take to the streets because they were mostly Ahmadinejad supporters.[720] Building on interviews with both labor and Green Movement activists conducted in Tehran between 2017 and 2019, the chapter investigates why cross-class alliances did not solidify in the streets. It argues that both structural and discursive factors hindered the processes of solidarity-building between workers and the Greens. Drawing on the perspectives of both workers and Green Movement participants, it contends that ultimately the conditions for a general strike were not present, unlike in the 1979 Revolution, when processes of solidarity unfolded in the streets and paralyzed the economy. First, as chapter 6 showed, years of neoliberal policies had widened the economic gap between classes. During the *sāzandegi* period, the myth of the winner had given impetus to the spread of newly-constructed narratives around success and production, which had increased the class divide and marginalized workers. Second, despite Ahmadinejad's populist claims to speak for the dispossessed

[720] This refers to interviews with workers, labor activists and Green Movement activists conducted by the author in December 2017-March 2018 and March-October 2019.

and to guarantee social justice, his government had not abandoned the path of economic liberalism. Among other measures, at the start of its second term, it had embarked on a plan to reduce subsidies for fuel as well as other public goods, such as electricity.[721] As chapter 4 discussed, during one of his May Day speeches in 2006, Ahmadinejad had declared himself to be on the workers' side: "To solve the economic problem and create job opportunities is the absolute goal of my government. Our government is here for workers, and it is honored to be at your service, dear workers."[722] Yet, in the same year, his administration had sought to amend the Labor Law. It attempted to pass a series of provisions that would have seriously threatened to erode job security by eliminating the restrictions on the dismissal of workers in the event of a decrease in their productivity or alleged misconduct.[723] Ironically, Mohammad Jahromi, the then Labor Minister, campaigned to reform the legislation claiming to increase job security in the Iranian labor market. Furthermore, he argued that altering the Code's rigidity was the only way to boost productivity and foster job creation.[724] The Workers' House openly attacked the draft, accusing the government of enabling employers to fire workers easily and dismantling the protection of workers' rights.[725] Indeed, the draft failed to progress any further. Third, as chapter 5 explained, intermittent yet constant repression of independent labor activism constrained spaces for workers' dissent. Oppressive control and the fear of coercion undermined the chances of building strong political networks, both within the workplace, and beyond. Fourth, Khatami's era and his push to consolidate civil society in Iran represented a missed opportunity in terms of political connections between the new intellectual middle class and the labor realm, as explored in chapter 7. Fifth, as the traditional Left had been repressed and marginalized during the post-revolutionary years – also due to a deradicalizing trend

[721] See also Fariba Adelkhah, "The Political Economy of the Green Movement: Contestation and Political Mobilization in Iran" in eds. Negin Nabavi *Iran. From Theocracy to the Green Movement*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 17-38.
[722] *Ettelāʿāt*, 11 Ordibehesht 1385 (1 May 2006).
[723] Labor Law, Chapter II.
[723] *Kayhān*, 22 Shahrivar 1385 (13 September 2006).
[724] *Irān*, 22 Shahrivar 1385 (13 September 2006.
[725] Mahjoub openly confronted Ahmadinejad's policies from the columns of *Kār-o-Kārgar* and *Mardom-Salari* between 2006 and 2007.

championed by the reformists – the debate around social justice had been relegated to small political circles.[726] Furthermore, the majority of Leftist labor activists criticized the Green Movement's protestors for fostering mainly liberal demands and not paying attention to workers.[727] Therefore, this chapter answers new questions about how the Green Movement activists and workers experienced the politics of the everyday when the popular anger against the presidential elections erupted in June 2009. In particular, it reflects on what these experiences can teach us about the modalities and meanings of building broader coalitions, developing counter-hegemonic processes, as well as performing bottom-up collective actions. In fact, in the face of harsh repression and internal divisions, the Green Movement failed to reframe its demands. It did not involve social justice and failed to fully embrace workers. In so doing, it sealed its fate.

Navigating the breaking points: between discourse and collective awareness

In order to understand the evolution of the disconnections explored earlier in this dissertation, this chapter focuses on the breaking points that emerged when the Green Movement erupted with all its peaceful force. From a theoretical perspective, it builds on the links between: 1) the development of a counter-hegemonic project as a discursive practice through slogans, 2) Gramsci's concept of *awareness of duration*, which leads to conscious political acts and 3) new subjectivities emerging, which contest power, while demanding new forms of politics. As chapter 3 reflected in discussing the role of workers in the Iranian Revolution through their words of defiance, slogans convey grievances and dissent through their brevity and imperative tone. Representing tools of discourse as well as sociocultural practices, they reveal a multiplicity of layers of meaning, which are embedded in a specific context. As explored in the previous chapters, discursive practices

[726] This deradicalization process is not unique to Iran. In his analysis of the Arab Springs, Asef Bayat explores the penetration of neoliberalist elements and its effects on politics and activism. See Asef Bayat, *Revolutions without Revolutionaries. Making Sense of the Arab Spring*, (Stanford University Press, 2017), 1-27.
[727] Former labor activist, interview with the author. Tehran, April 30, 2019. Worker, interview with the author, April 15, 2019. Economist and independent scholar, conversation with the author February 2018. See also Mohammad Qarāgozlu, "Dar bāreh-ye gheybat tabaqeh-ye kārgar," 8 Dey 1388-December 29, 2009, *Alborz*, available here http://www.ofros.com/maghale/gharegozolo_gh-tabaghe.htm. Accessed 17 December, 2018.

function through mechanisms of causality and determination that eventually secure power relations.[728] In this sense, the production of slogans is interwoven with the specific historical and political context in which this takes place. It represents a mode of political practice: it expresses power. Therefore, as will be explored later in this chapter, slogans manifested the Green Movement's ideological foundations, showing the Greens' reinterpretations of and disconnections from the past. In fact, the vocabulary and lexical patterns explain the political strategies behind the construction of the slogans in 2009. Moreover, discourse unveils the processes of inclusion and exclusion at work in context, and can bring to light the breaking points. The latter are here understood as markers of political transformation and also as consequences of dissimilarities in class experiences and reciprocal representations. How does this analysis proceed to investigate the abovementioned dynamics of inclusion and exclusion? As Fairclough's work emphasizes, what is absent from discourse is as significant as what is present. Establishing whether absence exposes either a lacuna or a conscious choice of removal is central to the present reasoning. Thus, the next sections will follow this track, aiming to identify and delve into the multi-nuanced relation between the Green Movement and workers as a distinguishable group. As a tale of presences and absences, the analysis will emphasize tensions and reconciliations, illusions, disappointments and unfulfilled expectations. Therefore, the critical approach to discourse will go beyond language *per se*. Besides merely being assessed linguistically, slogans need to be contextualized in time, as symbols of transformations and discontinuities. In 2009, representing social determinations, they exposed the impulses to either change or maintain certain relations of power. However, a discourse analysis of their slogans cannot fully disclose – for the broader goal of this chapter – the Green Movement's political impact as a counter-hegemonic project. In order to appraise its political significance, as well as its boundaries and limits, this section continues by encouraging the reader to broaden their focus to the hegemonic dynamics that connect discourse to the political weight of counter-

[728] Norman Fairclough, *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language,* (London: Longman, 1995), 132.

hegemonic action. These links, according to Gramsci, should be examined in terms of their continuity and endurance. Whereas an uprising represents the explosive phase of collective action, and expresses itself through slogans, it is only when consciousness stands the test of time that the uprising evolves and consolidates. The *awareness of duration*, following Gramsci's argumentation, gives meaning to an endeavor. It "must be concrete and not abstract." Hence, time and continuous struggle allow actors to avoid what Gramsci labels as "distortions" and "deviations" from a movement's main goal. As Gramsci argued in writing about political parties, remaining crystallized and trapped in "action for the sake of action, struggle for the sake of struggle, and especially shabby, petty individualism, which is a capricious satisfying of momentary impulses" represents a concrete risk.[729] When engaging in activities that challenge what embodies hegemony, the actors involved need to trigger a declared collective action against a common target. Explicit assaults on the status quo, and other forms of peaceful resistance, materialize in what Gramsci refers to as "wars of movement" and "wars of position." Two conditions are necessary and sufficient to realize these "wars:" counterhegemonic consciousness and collective awareness. In this direction, discourse plays a crucial role: it potentiates the process of realization and fosters the cultural hegemony, which surrounds the counterhegemonic project. Nonetheless, in order to intervene in the mechanisms of solidarity-building and unleash the power of consciousness at a collective level, the praxis of constructing a new "common sense" constitutes the fundamental *trait-d'union*.[730] As Gramsci argued, the production of knowledge, ideas, and ideology is carried out by those – i.e., the intellectuals, representing the "organizers of hegemony" – who formulate an alternative formulation of the so-called "common sense."[731] Therefore, thought and action can merge in a cohesive and structured plan of counterhegemony where discourse is the expression of collective consciousness. However, the encounter does not always occur in these terms. Without *awareness of duration*, thus devoid of long-term goals and consciousness of the complexities that mark the development of

[729] Gramsci, *Selections from Prison Notebooks*, 146.
[730] See Gramsci, *Quaderni dal carcere [Prison Notebooks]*, Q27 (XI), §1, 2311-2314.
[731] Ibid. Q2, §45, 199 and Q4, §20-21, 441.

political transformations, a counterhegemonic project is unable to bind together an efficacious collectivity. It is exactly on this breaking point that a Foucauldian understanding of the subject versus power enhances the analysis. Beyond the effects of disciplinary power on subjects, Foucault dedicated part of his work to what he calls the "technology of the self."[732] He studied the mechanisms by which subjects pass from being passive to being active actors. Thus, he made a distinction between: 1) the effects of the technologies of power, determining "the conduct of individuals" and submitting to them to a certain extent; and 2) the operations that involve individuals, through which they express their own subjectivities and desires. What Foucault's reflections add to the understanding of the Green Movement lies in the practices of self-expression and self-production that will be uncovered through the analysis of the slogans, that are still largely influenced by the dominant narrative.

These theoretical reflections raise a series of questions that will be addressed throughout this chapter. Was the bulk of the Green Movement capable of critically reflecting on its inner disciplinary norms, understood in terms of intellectual and historical legacy? Did it manage to create room for the articulation of a wide collectivity's demands? What factors contributed to the shaping of the Movement over time and place? Along what lines did collective consciousness develop? Who were the actors involved in the processes of articulating discourses and actions during the months following the widespread street protests? Before delving into these questions, the next section will revisit those days of June 2009, when the streets became a site of confrontation, retracing the Green Movement's footsteps.

From the elections to the streets: chronology of an uprising

Most of the Iranians involved in this research work referred to the events of summer 2009 as *Entekhābāt-e hashtād-o-hasht* [the 1388 elections]. It was 22 Khordad, according to the Iranian calendar. On that Friday, June 12, a record 85 percent of the 46.2 million eligible Iranians cast their

[732] Michel Foucault ,"Technologies of the self", in L.H. Martin, H. Gutman and P.H. Hutton (eds.) *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*, (USA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18-20.

vote in the 10th presidential race of the Islamic Republic.[733] They had been called to choose between the incumbent president Ahmadinejad and the 68-year-old former prime minister, Mir Hossein Mousavi, leader of the reformist faction. According to the then Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki, participation among Iranians living abroad rose 300 percent.[734] People stood in long lines, particularly in Tehran and in other big cities. The polls remained open until midnight, later than usual. A general euphoria permeated the atmosphere, as people felt that they had a choice again and their vote could make a real difference. The youth that had energized Mousavi's campaign stayed up the whole night waiting, keeping their green ribbons on their wrists. The color of their strips and scarves was a symbol, marking the Seyyed status of Mousavi, as an heir of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam. The special nuance of green "was first tested in Mashhad in Mr. Mousavi's rally [in April]" but there was "no specific person as a strategist, and it was the fruit of a team work in Tehran," as Behzad Mortazavi, the head of Mousavi's campaign committee, explained.[735] Most of the students, women, and young people campaigning for Ahmadinejad's rival believed that victory was "in their hands."[736] Basiji paramilitary units and anti-riot troops were already on the streets during the voting process, close to the polling stations, and near the university dorms and the Greens' headquarters. Communications were intermittent throughout the night, as the IRI firstly slowed down and then interrupted the SMS messaging system, while blocking access to Facebook.[737] The preliminary results came late at night, earlier than expected. Suspicion circulated among activists and Mousavi's supporters. The speedy counts raised concerns about irregularity in the procedures. As in the previous elections, votes were counted by hand. This time, official data

[733] *Associated Press*, 15 June 2009. Retrieved through webarchive.org. Accessed 15 January 2020.
[734] *CNN* report, June 13, 2009. Retrieved via web.archive.org. https://web.archive.org/web/20090615071130/http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/06/13/iran.election/index.html#cnnSTCText . Accessed 10 January 2020.
[735] *Financial Times*, June 12, 2009. https://www.ft.com/content/4aef93a8-56c1-11de-9a1c-00144feabdc0
[736] Green Movement activist and Mousavi campaigner, Tehran section. Interview with the author, November 1 and 2, 2018.
[737] Green Movement activist, Isfahan section. Interview with the author, Tehran. March 2019. On SMS interruption and Facebook ban see also *New York Times*, June 13, 2009 https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html

were released the next day, after only 12 or 24 hours.[738] As the Iranian News Agency reported, Ahmadinejad had won his second term with 62.63 percent of the votes, while Mousavi had received 33.75 percent of the vote.[739] While the polling stations were still open, Kamrān Dāneshju, chairman of the electoral commission at the interior ministry, had already announced a wide gap between the candidates, with Ahmadinejad leading the race.[740] The other two competitors, Mehdi Karroubi for the reformists, and Mohsen Rezai, a former commander of the Revolutionary Guards who was standing for the conservatives, were far behind. Mousavi reacted immediately with a declaration on his website, denouncing "taqalob va dorough", "fraud and lies."[741] As dissatisfaction grew and discontent spread, protesters started gathering in small groups in northern Tehran throughout the election night. The gatherings increased almost spontaneously. A long series of acts of violence and punitive arrests commenced. Valiasr Street, Vanak Square and Mirdamad Boulevard turned into sites of confrontation. On the morning of June 13, peaceful yet "noisy" marches began.[742] Thousands took to the streets. Later that Saturday, the police attacked the protestors. Plainclothes security officers, dressed in *lebās-e shaksi*, carried out acts of violence against the demonstrators.[743] Clashes erupted near Mohseni Square in the Iranian capital. Video footage showing protests in Shiraz and Isfahan were shared on the internet, despite the government limitations.[744] While Mousavi was calling for calm and patience, a pressing unanswered question remained. With over approximately 39.2 million paper ballots cast during the elections, had all votes been counted? According to the newspaper *Kalemeh Sabz*, which was close to Mousavi, about 10 million votes

[738] Green Movement activist. Interview with the author, April 2019.
[739] *IRNA*, June 13, 2009. http://www4.irna.ir/En/default.aspx?IdLanguage=3
Retrieved through an activist's personal archive by the author, Tehran November 2019.
[740] *Al Jazeera*, 13 June, 2009. Retrieved via webarchive.org
https://web.archive.org/web/20090614054941/http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2009/06/2009612195749149733.html
[741] Mousavi's official website, June 13, 2009. Retrieved
https://web.archive.org/web/20090529044421/http://www.mirhussein.com/
[742] *Al Jazeera*, 13 June, 2009.
[743] Green Movement activists, conversation with the author. Tehran, January 2018 and November 2018.
[744] Most of the videos uploaded from Iran on opposition websites and Youtube have been removed or deleted. Some materials can be retrieved via web.archive.org. Two Green Movement activists shared their personal archive with the author.

could not be considered valid or traceable, because the national identification numbers on them were not registered.[745] In the meantime, the doubts of Mousavi supporters were turning into certainty of fraud. Until that moment, the Green Movement had not extended beyond the central-north neighborhoods of Tehran. The *New York Times* reported that "the working-class areas of southern Tehran where Mr. Ahmadinejad is popular were largely quiet."[746] What did that silence truly mean? It would be inaccurate to overlap the absence of protests in the south of Tehran, and broadly in the poorest or rural areas, with alleged unconditional support for Ahmadinejad, as will be discussed later in this chapter.[747] On June 14, when Ahmadinejad's supporters staged a rally to counterbalance the mass demonstrations of the day before, the semi-spontaneous impetus that had brought the Greens to the streets in the aftermath of the election turned into a more organized demonstration. It was early evening when a detailed post on Mousavi's Facebook page informed his followers of what is remembered as the "one-million silent march"[748] scheduled for June 15, all across the country.[749] That night (and over the following evenings), from Iran's rooftops, the sound of the chant of *Allahu Akbar* [God is the greatest] rose above the noise of the traffic, as it had done at the time of the 1979 Revolution.[750] The morning after, Tehran woke up already at boiling point, with people expected to march from Enqelāb Square to Azādi Square in the afternoon. Since

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[745] *Kalemeh Sabz*, as reported by the *Associated Press*, 15 June 2009. After the elections, the newspaper came under pressure, ceased publication and was raided by the security forces, as this written by Mousavi in an open letter. See *Iran Data Portal,* 25 June 2009, https://irandataportal.syr.edu/mousavis-response-to-the-attack-on-kalameh-sabz-and-other-limitations-imposed-on-the-iranian-media-25-june-2009. Accessed May 29, 2020.

[746] *New York Times*, 13 June 2009. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html. Accessed March 10, 2018.

[747] For the breakdown of votes for each candidate, see *Iran Data Portal*, https://irandataportal.syr.edu/2009-presidential-election. Accessed 19 January 2020. See also Eric Hooglund, "Iran's Rural Vote and Election Fraud," PBS-Tehran Bureau, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/06/irans-rural-vote-and-election-fraud.html. Accessed 22 May 2020.

[748] Asef Bayat, *Why did Iran's Green Wave not feel the Arab Spring*, Sadighi Annual Lectures, (Amsterdam: Institute of Social History, 2012), 33.

[749] Mir Hossein Mousavi, Facebook page, "Eʿtesāb, Rahpeymāhi va Tajammoʿ-e Fardā, Farmān-e Allah Akbar Emshab." Available here https://www.facebook.com/notes/mir-hossein-mousavi-%D9%85%DB%8C%D8%B1-%D8%AD%D8%B3%DB%8C%D9%86-%D9%85%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%88%DB%8C/%D8%A7%D8%B9%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8-%D8%B1%D8%A7%D9%87%D9%BE%DB%8C%D9%85%D8%A7%DB%8C%DB%8C-%D9%88-%D8%AA%D8%AC%D9%85%D8%B9-%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%AF%D8%A7-%D9%81%D8%B1%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%86-%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%84%D9%87-%D8%A7%DA%A9%D8%A8%D8%B1-%D8%A7%D9%85%D8%B4%D8%A8/96698427605

[750] *Youtube*, "Poem for the Rooftops of Iran," June 2009 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAXW-73qy1o&feature=related. Accessed May 18, 2019.

internet connections were often interrupted and too slow, protesters coordinated through face-to-face meetings and phone calls. More importantly, they knew that photos and videos could capture live the reality that they were experiencing, as it was ripe for sharing. As Kurzman underscored, "virtually every image of the Iranian Green Movement included, somewhere in the frame, a picture of someone taking a picture."[751] Furthermore, although no one could verify whether the election had been stolen, as Mousavi had claimed, what became crucial was the collectively shared perception that it had. Diverse segments of Iranian society were in uproar. Zahra Rahnavard Mousavi, Mousavi's wife, joined the demonstrations and became a source of inspiration for many women.[752] Between one and three million people are believed to have participated in the march.[753] On June 16, protesters gathered again and walked all the way from Valiasr Square to Parkway crossroad, in north Tehran. People demonstrated in other cities, such as Tabriz, Isfahan, and Shiraz, reclaiming their votes, denouncing the electoral fraud, the arbitrary rule of the system and the state media that had portrayed them as "tools of foreign propaganda" against Iran. As the next section will show, on the fourth day of protests, the slogans and the dynamics of participation evolved. Maintaining peaceful conduct and in almost total silence, on June 18, hundreds of thousands of Iranians marched in central Tehran.[754] Besides students and young people wearing green neckerchiefs and ribbons on their wrists, showing the V-sign for victory, people of all ages joined the demonstrators. It was a day of defiance and mourning, as Mousavi had called on his followers to commemorate the victims of repression during the clashes of the previous days.[755] Protesters flooded into Imam Khomeini Square at 4 pm. Paramilitary Basij militia violence did not stop. The

[751] Charles Kurzman, "The Arab Spring: Ideals of the Iranian Green Movement, Methods of the Iranian Revolution," *International Journal of Middle East Studies, 44*(1), (2012), 162-165.
[752] Hamid Dabashi, *The Green Movement in Iran*, (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 25.
[753] Pouya Alimagham, *Contesting the Iranian Revolution. The Green Uprising*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 84.
[754] Youtube, "Iran June 18 2009 – 28 Khordad 1388." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BdaGIdIQB0s Accessed 16 June 2020.
[755] *New York Times*, 18 June 2009 https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/19/world/middleeast/19iran.html. Accessed 22 May 2020.

University of Tehran's dormitories came under attack, while intimidation and arrests continued.[756] The next day, during his Friday prayers sermon, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei warned the protesters and dismissed the accusation of electoral fraud. He declared the June 12 presidential elections regular and valid. He called on the opposition leaders to stop the protests, warning that they "would be considered responsible for blood and chaos."[757] His move dispelled any hope of a political confrontation or compromise. By then, at least 13 people had been reported as killed in the aftermath of the elections. According to ISNA 457 people were arrested. Khamenei's words did not restrain Mousavi's political anger, as – through his website – he continued to accuse the system of lying. Moreover, he urged his supporters to avoid violence.[758] Nonetheless, June 20 changed the course of a critical moment of the struggle, turning the tide of the Green Movement. Videos showing a bleeding woman – Neda Agha-Soltan – being fatally shot by a sniper, during the demonstrations in central Tehran's Kārgar Street, began to circulate on the web.[759] They spread across the world. Neda Agha-Soltan became a tragic symbol of state brutality against protesters. As night-time raids of both Green Movement activists and ordinary protesters continued, fear of repression became mixed with a sense of solidarity against a common source of injustice.[760] The long shadow of violence cast over the Movement sought to demobilize the organized bulk of the protesters, divide the opposition and scare ordinary Iranians who had started to join the unrest. On June 28, before the Guardian Council officially certified the results of the elections, declaring them valid, the government allowed a mourning gathering. It was the commemoration of former chief justice Ayatollah Mohammad Beheshti's martyrdom. As Iranian state television reported, "supporters of defeated presidential candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi also marched down Tehran's

[756] "Dormitory Raids, video", 2009/1388. International Digital Ephemera Project, UCLA - University of California Los Angeles. https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/greenmovement:9376 and photo https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/greenmovement:11973 . Accessed 2 January 2020.
[757] Friday Prayer sermon in Tehran, Khamenei's website (Persian) https://farsi.khamenei.ir/speech-content?id=7190, 29 Khordad 1388/June 19, 2009. Accessed 10 November 2019.
[758] *New York Times*, June 21, 2009. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/22/world/middleeast/22iran.html
[759] "Last Moments of Neda," June 20, 2009/30 Khordad 1388 https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/greenmovement:8077, International Digital Ephemera Project, UCLA - University of California Los Angeles. Accessed 20 June 2020.
[760] Worker and student, interview with the author. Tehran, April 2019.

Shariati Street from north to south and silently gathered outside the Qoba Mosque, where the event was being held."[761] From the end of June and throughout the summer, national anniversaries and public holidays became opportunities for people to flood onto the streets. But gatherings became smaller and more scattered. At every new protest, the paramilitary Basij dispersed the crowd with tear gas, pepper gas, and "beating demonstrators with batons," as happened on July 9 at the commemoration of the 1999 protests by Iranian students.[762] This was a period of transition. In the words of Malekzadeh, "before there was a Green Movement in Iran, there came the Green Wave."[763] Hence, protests in the fall erupted more violently (on September 18 for Qods Day, November 4 for the anniversary of the U.S. Embassy takeover, December 7 for the Students' Day, December 19 for the anniversary of Ayatollah Montazeri's death, December 27 for the Ashoura).[764] With participants fewer in number yet more heterogeneous in composition, these events marked significant continuities and ruptures in the processes of the Greens' expressions of defiance. As the next section will explore, their demands developed, targets were sharpened, slogans evolved, repression intensified, and the grip of censorship tightened. Nevertheless, the political stance of the Movement weakened.

Evolving slogans, fragile identities

Tracing the evolution of the Green Movement's slogans allows us to grasp its particularities and weaknesses. As the theoretical section of this chapter already noted, the sentences on the placards held by demonstrators, along with their rallying-cries, expose the ideological foundations on which the fragile identities that constituted the crowd were based. As tools of discourse, they represented

[761] Press TV, 28 June 2009. Retrieved via webarchive.org https://web.archive.org/web/20090701111805/http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=99288&sectionid=351020101. Accessed 10 July 2019. See also *Youtube*, Qoba Mosque, 28 June 2009 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcvfXKe1y30
[762] *WSJ*, 10 July 2009 https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124714734408618155
[763] Shervin Malekzadeh, "Reliving The Ahmadinejad-Mousavi Debate," *Lobelog*, 10 June 2019 https://lobelog.com/reliving-the-ahmadinejad-mousavi-debate/. Accessed 20 June 2020.
[764] See Abbas Milani, "The Green Movement," Iran Primer, https://iranprimer.usip.org/sites/default/files/The%20Green%20Movement.pdf. Accessed 8 December 2019.

sites of confrontation, but also – and more importantly – of interaction with the sociopolitical context. They revealed both particular reinterpretations of the past and representations of the present. Thus, this analysis of the mechanisms of slogans' causality and determination functions aims to understand *the what*, *the how*, and *the why* of the Greens vis-à-vis workers.

It all started with a question that arose in the immediate aftermath of the elections: *Rāy-e man kojast?* [Where is my vote?]. Focusing on the individual citizen claiming their vote, "my vote," this request was framed with the first person possessive adjective. It implied the presence of an interlocutor. It was dialogic in nature. The addressee was the Islamic Republic's electoral system. Yet, the slogans contained both confrontation and interaction. As a rhetorical question, it already included the answer, which seemed to be obvious to those who chanted the slogan. In fact, it was mainly skepticism and suspicion over electoral fraud that gave impetus to the protests after the results were released. The slogan *Rāy-e man kojast?*, as time-specific, immediately developed further over a few hours. It became, *Rāy-e man ku? Doroughgu* [Where is my vote? Liar] with the rhyming word "ku" replacing "kojast." Interestingly, the implied answer carried an accusation, a definitive condemnation of what was perceived to be an unfair process. Following this line of reasoning, the sketch of the direct recipient of the message took shape. Throughout those hours, the conservatives were hailing the vote. Ahmadinejad celebrated in a nationally broadcast TV speech on Saturday night, declaring: "The people of Iran inspired hope for all nations and created a source of pride in the nation and disappointed all the ill-wishers […] This election was held at a juncture of history."[765] The response to Ahmadinejad's "intolerable hubris"[766] – as seen by Mousavi's supporters – condensed in the following comment. *Rāy-e sabz man esme siyah to nabud* [My green vote was not your black name,] as appeared in a sign held by a protester in Shiraz.[767] By using

[765] *CNN* report, 13 June 2009. Retrieved via web.archive.org. https://web.archive.org/web/20090615071130/http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/06/13/iran.election/index.html#cnnSTCText . Accessed 10 January 2020.
[766] Mousavi supporter and campaigner, conversation with the author. Tehran, November 2018.
[767] Elham Gheytanchi "Symbols, Signs, and Slogans of the Demonstrations in Iran" in Yahya R. Kamalipour eds., *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age. The 2009 Presidential Election Uprising in Iran*, (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010), 251. The chapter previously appeared online, Elham Gheytanchi, "A Revolutionary

colors, the slogan achieved a transfer of meaning through metaphor: it identified Mousavi's Green supporters and Ahmadinejad's conservative voters.

While independent investigators were being banned from entering the polling stations, protests rose. The opportunity for collective action promptly emerged. The motto of these moments summarizes the different layers of meaning, but also the shifting interpersonal relations. *Rāy-e mā rā dozdidand* [They stole our vote.] Beyond the fact that electoral irregularity was at the core of the confrontation, two other elements are worth highlighting. First, the use of the first person plural "mā," our" marked a transformation from the individual to the collective, as it evoked a common experience. Second, this was bound to the theft, a term which carries a strongly negative connotation in Iran, of a right. The step from individual to plural agency was taken through the perceived "blatant" appropriation of the elections, embodying a moment of collective hope. Indeed, this was the common thread that galvanized many people, who had not participated in the previous round of voting. Mousavi had envisaged "a leap toward high peaks of aspiration and progress." Thus, the impetus to demonstrate stemmed from the anger that arose from the perception of stolen hopes. The interaction was with those considered responsible for the electoral "theft." The fear had already been tangible even before the elections, as Mousavi's supporters created the slogan *Agar taqalob nashe, Musavi avval misheh* [If thre is no fraud, Mousavi will come first.][768] This persisted over the days following the vote, turning into *Agar taqalob besheh, Iran qiyāmat besheh* [If there is fraud, Iran will rise up.][769] Excitement at the increasing number of people joining the silent march of June 15 and 16 mingled with encouragement to fellow demonstrators to overcome their fear of repression. On the one hand, while recording videos on their cellphones, protesters' voices could be heard, commenting with surprise *Che qadr zyād shodim! Qashange* [There are so many of us!

Tradition: Shoars in Iranian Street Politics," *Words Without Borders*, October issue (2009), https://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/a-revolutionary-tradition-shoars-in-iranian-street-politics

[768] Alimagham, *Contesting the Iranian Revolution. The Green Uprising*, 73.

[769] Annabelle Sreberny, Gholam Khiabany, *Blogistan: The Internet and Politics in Iran*, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 177

Wonderful][770] On the other hand, on June 15, when crowds of people walked to Azadi Square, a powerful slogan was adopted as a social glue *Natarsim, natarsim! Mā hameh bāhamim* [Don't be afraid, don't be afraid! We are all together.] Processes of solidarity-building were underway. However, these proved to be seeds that would struggle to grow. On that day, some students sought to share the public places with older members of their families. Some workers and informal labor activists participated as well, although individually. The organizational backbone of the protests was in the universities and among those who had already been responsible for the electoral campaign.[771] Although the repressive apparatus had already demonstrated how cruel it could be, the videos from the demonstrations and the participants' memories mostly recorded a sense of relative safety because of the number of people present.[772] The young people energizing the protests managed to drag others, who were watching the crowd, into the march. Other participants remembered receiving help from shopkeepers and local residents when the security forces used tear gas and batons to disperse the protesters. As the days of defiance multiplied, the concept of falsehood became a refrain, and it was codified differently. Besides placards reading *Rāy-e man ku?* [Where is my vote?], other signs appeared, such as *Dorough mamnuʿ* [Lies are forbidden.][773]

[770] "Iran, silent protest in Valiasr street," *Youtube*, June 16, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVBZQCsqdjo. Accessed September 16, 2019.
[771] This point relies on several conversations with both workers and Green Movement activists and Mousavi supporters.
[772] Ibid.
[773] "Iran, silent protest, Valiasr street," *Youtube*, June 16, 2009. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GVBZQCsqdjo. Accessed September 16, 2019.

Tehran, June 16, 2009. "Lies are forbidden" (photo from a video)[774]

This accusation showed that the Iranians flooding into the streets were conscious that their discontent went beyond the mere mistrust of the IRI's system. The slogan was chanted while the crowd was walking close to the national television building. It represented a retort to the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB)'s coverage of the protests that dismissed the Green Movement, deeming it a group of "losers," "rioters," and "thugs." It also revealed an almost total lack of fear of directly addressing and naming the perceived enemy, as another placard communicated: "Ahmadi is not my president." Interestingly, this last sign was in English, as the Greens were aware that the world was observing them. They were walking on the brink, staging a public contestation, daringly interacting with Ahmadinejad. During a rally in Tehran's Vali Asr Square on Sunday 14, Ahmadinejad labeled the disappointed protesters as *khas o khāshāk* [dirt and dust.] Talking to his supporters, he stated: "The nation's huge river leaves no room for the expression of dirt and dust." Hence, once again, Mousavi's supporters expressed their dissent using slogans dialogically. As a direct response to the proclaimed president, they took a new catchphrase to the streets *Khas o khāshāk to-I* [You are dirt and dust.][775] A huge banner appeared in the first

[774] Ibid.
[775] Dirt and dust, footage from the Green Movement, 1388-2009. UCLA Library. https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/greenmovement:10566. Accessed 20 June 2020.
See also *The Guardian*, June 18, 2009 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/18/ahmadinejad-iran-insults-dirt-dust. Accessed November 2, 2018.

week of protests: "The Epic of dirt and dust." The expression became iconic, as ironic jokes pervaded the comments sections of news posts on the web. The newspaper *E'temād* published pictures of the demonstrators carrying the banner on its front page.

Tehran June 18, 2009. "Epic of dirt and dust" (photo from a video - UCLA archive)[776]

Therefore, in the first week after the results of the elections were released, slogans mostly conveyed instant reactions to the events and to Ahmadinejad accusing the protestors of serving "foreign propaganda," and spreading "lies" and "trash," as he repeatedly declared on national television. Expressing dissatisfaction with the results, they opposed the incumbent president's victory, targeting Ahmadinejad as the main enemy, labeling him a liar, who was deemed responsible for the perpetrated fraud. As the days of defiance accumulated and the debate became bitter, demonstrators' placards became more daring, especially in mocking Ahmadinejad, as the following sentence shows *Ahmadi gusaleh, bazam migi footballeh?* [Ahmadi, calf, do you still think this is a soccer game?][777] As explored above, the slogans sought to reclaim the Greens' votes, firstly as individual citizens, then collectively. Nevertheless, this process of Othering appeared incomplete. The different identities that made up the crowd were not immediately distinguishable. Beyond the

[776] Ibid.
[777] Gheytanchi "Symbols, Signs, and Slogans of the Demonstrations in Iran" in Yahya R. Kamalipour eds., *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age. The 2009 Presidential Election Uprising in Iran*, 255.

first person pronouns (*man* and *mā*), which referred to Mousavi's supporters, the slogans did not deal with more specific identities, failing to tighten the focus on the so far indistinct – although potentially polyphonic – social body that was revolting. As a result, what might have had the potential to be heterogenous and grow, remained stuck in its first articulation.

While addressing the urgent need for contestation, they lacked political articulation both in the short and the long term. The rallying-cry *Marg bar diktator, che shah bāsheh che doktor*, [Down with the dictator, either the shah or the doctor [Ahmadinejad], constituted a timid attempt to channel the popular actions towards more definite goals.[778] By pointing the finger at Ahmadinejad, it attempted to broaden the political focus. Evoking the time of the 1979 Revolution – when Iranians from different classes shared their struggle on the streets against the Shah Pahlavi's rule and managed to overthrow the monarchy – the abovementioned slogan contested the authoritarian rule. Yet, it did not develop over the days that followed, exposing the lack of political articulation and direction, beyond the mere rejection of a rule framed as a dictatorship. In contesting the Islamic Republic system, the slogans drew on the past, in particular the 1979 Revolution. As the *Allahu Akbar* chants from the rooftops indicate, this process was not meant to completely emulate and reproduce the revolutionary experience. These chants in 2009 can be understood not as a full appropriation, but more as a mechanism to redefine a past practice, by giving it new meanings. The conservatives minimized the impact of the *Allahu Akbar* chants in 2009 as the Shah's prime minister, General Gholam Reza Azhari, had done in 1978-79, when he minimized the extent of the phenomenon attributing it to cassette recordings.[779] Therefore, the Greens transformed the revolutionary cry, *Azhari gusāleh, bazam migi navāreh? Navār ke pā nadāreh!* [Azhari, calf,[780]do you still say that it is a tape? The tape does not have feet!] into *Ahmadi, gusāleh, bazam migi footballeh?* [Ahmadinejad, calf, do you still say it is football?], mocking Ahmadinejad's attempts to minimize

[778] *BBC*, 14 June 2009 http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/8099115.stm Accessed 15 June 2020.
[779] See Negar Mottahedeh, *#iranelection Hashtag Solidarity and the Transformation of Online Life,"* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015), 26.
[780] Also meaning "idiot" in Persian.

the demonstrations.[781] Furthermore, the Movement transformed the notorious motto *Esteqlāl, āzādi, jomhouri-ye eslāmi* [Independence, freedom, Islamic Republic,] into *Esteqlāl, āzādi, jomhouri Irani* [Independence, freedom, Iranian Republic.] Nevertheless, it would be misleading to argue that the Movement was secular in character. Although it tended to push towards civil rights and most of Mousavi's campaigners led a secularized life, there was no rejection of religion *tout-court* in the slogans. *Ya Hussein* [Oh Hussein] was chanted from the beginning, combining Mousavi's figure with the call for piety of Imam Hussein of the Shia tradition. Echoes of the concept of martyrdom recurred on June 18 when the crowd gathered to mourn those killed during the previous days' demonstrations. According to *Reuters*, one placard read: "Our martyred brothers, we will take back your votes," alongside others asking: "Why did you kill our brothers?"[782] Rallying-cries, such as *Ya Hussein* and *Salam bar Beheshti, dorud bar Mousavi* [Peace to Beheshti, long live Mousavi] were recorded on June 28 at the gathering at the Qoba Mosque.[783] Thus, the movement did not challenge the status quo, at least not to the extent it wished to overthrow the regime, following the example of the 1979 Revolution. De facto, the Green revolt politically identified with Mousavi. He was a Khomeinist, a revolutionary, a former Prime Minister. Thus, he was the embodiment of a man of the system, desiring to reform it from within.

Furthermore, the rallying-cries followed the news, and responded to the evolving events, striking back at leaders. Thus, they led the debate. Nonetheless, in this first explosive phase of the Green Movement they neither proposed an ideological alternative to the Iranian Revolution,[784] nor enlarged the spectrum of their demands to include structural themes. In fact, social justice, as well as the broader topic of political rights, was absent from the debate. Conversely, the Greens mostly

[781] Gheytanchi "Symbols, Signs, and Slogans of the Demonstrations in Iran" in Yahya R. Kamalipour eds., *Media, Power, and Politics in the Digital Age. The 2009 Presidential Election Uprising in Iran*, 255.
[782] *Reuters*, 18 June 2009. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iran-election-rally/big-crowd-masses-for-mourning-rally-in-tehran-idUSTRE55H3DF20090618
[783] *Press TV*, 28 June 2009. Retrieved via webarchive.org https://web.archive.org/web/20090701111805/http://www.presstv.ir/detail.aspx?id=99288&sectionid=351020101. Accessed 10 July 2019. See also *Youtube*, Qoba Mosque, 28 June 2009 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UcvfXKe1y30
[784] See Alimagham, *Contesting the Iranian Revolution. The Green Uprising*, 277.

circumscribed their broader goal to freedom, as these examples show: *Azādi, azādi* [Freedom, freedom]; *Azādi, Mousavi* [Freedom and Mousavi.]

After the summer of 2009, the slogans shifted and there was an attempt to reorganize the Movement that had met with harsh repression and was suffering from a lack of effective political support. During the fall, the confrontation remained alive. The grassroots sought to renegotiate their spaces of freedom, operating in parallel with reformist politicians, so starting from below.[785] The more active, cohesive, and collectively organized were students from Tehran University and Sharif University. Whereas protests became rarer and more diluted over time, three main trajectories of change are worth noting. First, slogans became more accurate and fearless. Second, women from different generations participated more actively. As several videos show, they challenged the violence of young Basij militia men against the protesters. Third, as activists were refining their strategies, they tried to reach a new consciousness of street politics. In terms of rallying-cries, they targeted the Supreme Leader, calling Khamenei a "murderer." The slogan read: *Khamenei qāteleh, Velāyatesh bi eʿtebāreh* [Khamenei is a murderer, his guardianship is invalid.][786] As some protestors remember, it felt like "crossing a dangerous red line."[787] Furthermore, in November, for the first time a slogan called for the separation of religion from politics, builiding on a nationalist sentiment based on race: *Nejād-e mā aryast, din az syāsat joddast* [Our race is Aryan, religion is separate from politics.] Another one contested Iranian foreign policy choices and the IRI's expenses to support allies abroad: *Na Gazā, na Lobnān, jānam fadāy-e Irān* [Not Gaza, not Lebanon, my life for Iran.] Activists remember that the dark and fear-filled atmosphere was palpable. Beatings and arrests were described as being perpetrated with "brutal violence, as they were animals."[788] Apprehension, mixed with despair and dismay for many, led the enduring group of students still willing to publicly protest to adjust their strategies. They eventually managed to: 1) move most of

[785] Green Movement activist, conversation with the author. January 2018.
[786] Ibid. See also *BBC*, eyewitness, December 7, 2009. http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/talking_point/8375866.stm
[787] Green Movement activist, conversation with the author. January 2018.
[788] Ibid.

their online activities to offline meetings; 2) go out in groups, aiming to better communicate any unfortunate event of someone's arrest; 3) in some (rarer) cases, even carry their own sticks for protection against violence. However, they did not succeed in broadening the spectrum of the unrest and guiding it towards a sharper politicization. Although most of the students and Mousavi's campaigners defined themselves as well aware of Iran's huge social gap and class differences, social justice was not among their immediate priorities. Freedom came first, as it was considered "more important."[789] This did not mean that they were not conscious of their precarity, or that they all came from the rich neighborhoods of north Tehran. Most of those who suffered violence and the harshest repression lived in the male dorms at Tehran University, where living conditions were very basic, housing students from other cities or villages who could not afford to live alone.
Furthermore, they felt a generational gap with those intellectuals who were close to the labor activists, criticizing them for being too liberal. found themselves the target of resentment, among those who labeled them as simply "privileged and spoilt."[790]
As this chapter does not aim to merely re-create the facts and establish whether labor and class mattered for the Greens, the next section will navigate how the abovementioned perceptions and discourses shaped the potential cross-class alliances that were oriented towards social justice.

Workers, social justice and the Greens

Chronicles of the one-million march towards Azadi Square recorded a vast cross-section of Iranian society walking through Tehran's streets on June 15, 2009. "For this was not just the trendy, young, sun-glassed ladies of north Tehran. The poor were here, too, the street workers and middle-aged ladies in full chador. A very few held babies on their shoulders or children by the arm, talking to them from time to time, trying to explain the significance of this day to a mind that would not remember it in the years to come that they were here on this day of days," wrote the journalist

[789] Ibid. and 1 November 2018; 28 December 2018; 29 April 2019.
[790] Ibid. 5 November 2018.

Robert Fisk who witnessed the demonstration.[791] On that day, pathways for solidarity-building that were at an embryonic stage spontaneously took shape. In particular, this section investigates how political participation developed, what obstacles and misconceptions hindered it, and through what lens labor activists and workers viewed the Green Movement. As confirmed by most of the Green activists and Mousavi campaigners consulted during the research conducted in Tehran for this dissertation, the community that was committed to the slogan-making consisted of students and the urban middle-class intellectuals. They effectively coordinated the calls to action through meetings, flyers, Facebook posts or emails, where possible.[792] These organizational practices did not suddenly emerge. They blossomed from the seeds of student activism and intellectual fervor, which went back to the 1999 students' protests.[793] They grew through informal networks throughout early 2000, even though during Ahmadinejad's first term dissent in universities was tracked through the so-called *Dāneshjuyān-e Setārehdār,* the "asterisked students," who were reported as potential threats to national security.[794] Beyond the explosive moment of the Movement, erupting with a shared sense of dissatisfaction at the electoral "fraud," were there any opportunities for cross-class alliances, generated by the common denominator of labor precarity processes? In order to address this question, some elements need clarification. In most of the media reports in English, and in some author's interviews with Green Movement activists, the south of Tehran, its suburbs (such as Eslāmshahr or Robāt Karim), the countryside, and Iran's peripheral regions were often assimilated into poor areas, all supporting Ahmadinejad.[795] This description coincided with the false dichotomy

[791] *The Independent*, 16 June 2009 https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/fisk/robert-fisk-irans-day-of-destiny-1706010.html. Accessed 29 May 2019.
[792] The internet was instrumental in activists reaching a broader audience, and crucial when they managed to overcome the ban. Nevertheless, the role of social media should not be exaggerated, as it was mainly used to organize off-line activities.
[793] See Paola Rivetti and Francesco Cavatorta, "Iranian student activism between authoritarianism and democratization: patterns of conflict and cooperation between the Office for the Strengthening of Unity and the regime," *Democratization,* Vol.21(2), 2014, 289-310.
[794] Navid Pourmokhtari, "Understanding Iran's Green Movement as Movement of Movements," *Sociology of Islam*, Vol.2 (2014): 144-177.
[795] *New York Times*, 13 June 2009. https://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/14/world/middleeast/14iran.html. Accessed 10 March 2018; *The Observer-The Guardian*, 14 June 2009 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/14/iran-tehran-election-results-riots; see also the point raised against these clichés by Eric Hooglund in "Iran's Rural Vote and Election Fraud," PBS- Tehran Bureau, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/06/irans-rural-vote-and-

of the "ignorant workers" (who had supposedly voted for the incumbent president)[796] versus the educated and rich intellectuals who endorsed Mousavi. According to this line of argument, first, it would be assumed that the sympathies of the poor and the workers were somehow naturally oriented towards the conservatives. Second, they would be devoid of the ability to adopt a critical attitude toward politics. Third, the absence of labor or social justice grievances in the Green Movement could be easily attributed simply to a question of income. Research conducted by the author in Iran and academic evidence proves the fallacy of these presumptions, which attribute Mousavi's supporters and the whole bloc of protesters to a narrow portion of Iranian society. Conversely, the situation in 2009 was more complex. Therefore, other discursive and socio-structural aspects should be considered in the analysis, such as education mixed with neoliberal narratives, workers' bargaining power, and political representation, as examined in chapters 6 and 7.[797] Furthermore, as the analysis of the support for each candidate showed, poorer areas and regions across the country did not choose Ahmadinejad *en bloc* on account of his populist campaign focused on reducing poverty and returning to the true value of the revolution for the downtrodden.[798] The equation between being poor or on low income and being conservative fails to explain why students living in dormitories, who came from small villages and modest family backgrounds, shared the same demonstrations with workers and laborers, especially after June 15. The assertion that workers – because of their lack of education – not only supported Ahmadinejad, but were also distant from the Green Movement, needs further explanation. First, it would be false to say that workers did not participate, albeit episodically. Beyond the evidence provided in the previous sections, the profiles of those arrested during the crackdown of June 2019 proves the

election-fraud.html. Accessed 22 May 2020. For a complete summary of the election results, see *Iran Data Portal*, https://irandataportal.syr.edu/2009-presidential-election.

[796] See Mohammad Qarāgozlu, "Dar bāreh-ye gheybat-e tabaqeh-ye kārgar," 8 Dey 1388-December 29, 2009, *Alborz*, available here http://www.ofros.com/maghale/gharegozolo_gh-tabaghe.htm. Accessed December 17, 2018.

[797] Kevan Harris in *A Social Revolution. Politics and Welfare State in Iran*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 209, argues that educated professional-technical workers of the public sector represented a substantial segment of the demonstrators, and they can be classified as "a new middle class."

[798] See *Iran Data Portal*, https://irandataportal.syr.edu/2009-presidential-election.

opposite.[799] Hence, concentrating on the motivations behind workers' absence as a collectivity with distinguishable slogans, instead of their presence *per se*, facilitates the reasoning. Consequently, it is central to consider whether opportunities to broaden the Movement existed, as contingencies useful to giving rise to a larger coalition between different groups and addressing a diverse spectrum of grievances.

Dissatisfaction at the electoral fraud, as well as discontent arising from the repression of spaces of expression and state surveillance policies during Ahmadinejad's first term, found a larger consensus among heterogeneous segments of the Iranian population. Nevertheless, the Green Movement exposed a deep rift within the potential bloc of forces. As chapter 5 demonstrated, labor activism had been weakened over the years, both politically – due to the purge of the Left – and practically, because of the security apparatus' repressive response to independently organized workers' protests. Thus, it did not have the chance to establish ties with other classes or groups, as it remained mostly confined to scattered unrest aimed at specific economic demands. Whereas Leftist intellectuals could have constituted a bridge in this regard, the IRI crackdown – especially during Ahmadinejad's first term – silenced any attempts involving journalists, independent syndicalists, and scholars. This was the case even before the 2009 presidential election and represents one of the reasons why labor issues were not represented in the uprising.[800] In particular, about 150 labor activists and supporters were arrested following a May Day demonstration in Tehran in 2009, a month before the Green Movement's unrest.[801] Furthermore, political antagonism and mutual misrepresentations hindered the potential for cross-class alliances and the creation of a broader coalition. On the one hand, labor activists who defined themselves as belonging to the radical Left perceived the Green Movement's younger activists as "too liberal," seeking only freedoms.[802]

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[799] Labor activist, interview with the author. Tehran, 29 April 2019.
[800] Ibid.
[801] Misagh Parsa, *Democracy in Iran. Why It Failed and How It Might Succeed*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2016), 166.
[802] Labor activist, interview with the author. Tehran, 29 April 2019. Journalist and human rights activist, interview with the author. Tehran, April 23, 2019. See also Qarāgozlu, "Dar bāreh-ye gheybat tabaqeh-ye kārgar," 8 Dey 1388-29 December 2009, *Alborz*, available here http://www.ofros.com/maghale/gharegozolo_gh-tabaghe.htm. Accessed 17 December 2018.

Indeed, from the perspective of some workers, it was "rich kids," ignoring the contours of class differences and social justice[803] who formed the backbone of those involved in Mousavi's campaign. Thus, political antagonism, accentuated by a generational gap and dissimilar experiences, emphasized the disconnections, precluding further encounters that would lead to working towards a common ground. Individual competition and the glamorization of success, spread through neoliberal narratives throughout the 1990s, widened the rift between the two generations. On the one hand, there were those who had participated in the 1979 Revolution. On the other hand were those belonging to the generation of the 1360s, that is children of the Iran-Iraq war era. The presidential campaign, and its aftermath, did not create the conditions to benefit the economically impoverished among both groups.[804] In fact, economic impoverishment and, more importantly, *precarization* processes were not at the center of the debate, despite the fact that both issues would have united generations and classes. Beyond mutual perceptions and actual class differences, the 1990s paved the way for narrowing the social gap between the new middle class and workers. [805] Through temporary contracts, the erosion of job security and rising unemployment, processes of *precarization* became intertwined with a progressive *proletarianization*. These latter affected *in toto* the active bulk of the Green Movement activists. How? Precarity had given birth to a new figure of the worker: not only the man or woman associated with the imagery of the factory, but also the educated professional or underemployed technician struggling to eke out a living, leave their family home in south Tehran or manage to marry.[806] Another trend in this direction is also worth mentioning: although impoverished, this figure often aspired to the status and lifestyle of the middle-class to escape stigmatization.[807] Nonetheless, the Movement did not evolve towards the

[803] Worker, interview with the author. Tehran, 2 June 2019. Worker and student, interview with the author, Tehran, April 2019. Scholar, conversation with the author, Tehran, March 2019.
[804] Mohammad Maljoo, "Hamrāhi Jonbesh-e Sabz va Kārgarān. Projeh nimeh tamām," Green Movement and Workers' Sodality: An Unfinished Project." *Alborz* http://www.alborznet.ir/Fa/ViewDetail.aspx?T=2&ID=237, retrieved. Available here http://www.ofros.com/entexabat1/maljo_hamrahi.pdf
[805] See Nomani and Behdad "The Rise and Fall of Iranian Classes in the Post-Revolutionary Decades," 377-396.
[806] Unemployed, film maker, former worker and Green Movement participant. Interview with the author. Tehran, 12 August 2017; 10 January 2018 and 9 March 2018.
[807] Manata Hashemi, "Tarnished work: dignity and labour in Iran," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 2018, DOI: 10.1080/13530194.2018.1552116, 1-16.

engulfment of social justice grievances, as it remained stuck in its post-civil society discourse based on political and human rights. The breaking point was unveiled. This is not to say that civil society and social justice narratives are mutually exclusive or that the debate among Leftist labor activists is to be fully dismissed.[808] However, as chapters 4 and 7 explored, during the Khatami era, workers and the economically impoverished were excluded from the mainstream discourse. Moreover, deregulation was supported by both reformists and conservatives and they benefitted from the increasingly precarious situation of workers.[809] With the Leftists being marginalized, social justice almost disappeared from the political debate, and neoliberal policies did not face strong opposition,[810] except from the Workers' House with all its limitations. While the state apparatus and the Khāneh-ye Kārgar were impeding independent trade unionism, the opening of spaces for expanded – albeit limited – critique produced a cultural frenzy. This atmosphere did not last long enough to generate cross-class alliances, beyond individual-centered and liberal demands. As a result, it increased the distances between social groups.[811] In a Gramscian understanding, civil society and the synergies between intellectuals and workers had the potential to forge new trajectories of solidarity. Nonetheless, the Green Movement did not succeed in shaping a project with long-term vision and goals. Overlooking social justice, neglecting the precarious status of a vast swathe of its supporters, failing to update its slogans beyond contesting the election results, and the system, it lacked what Gramsci called *awareness of duration*. A missed opportunity materialized in spring 2010 when demonstrations on May Day were held at Tehran University. Students chanted: *Azādi, Eʿdālat, in ast Shoʿar-e Mellat* [Freedom, Justice, this is the slogan of the

[808] See "Kārgarān va Jāmʿeh Madani. Goftogu ba Hossein Akbari, Hossein Nuriniya, Mohammad Maljoo" Workers and Civil Society. Roundtable with Hossein Akbari, Hossein Nuriniya, Mohammad Maljoo," *Irān Fardā*, Ordibehesht-Khordād 1397 (May-June 2018), 62-71.
[809] Paola Rivetti, *Political Participation from Khatami to the Green Movement*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 40.
[810] See Peyman Vahabzadeh, "Social Justice and Democracy in Iran: in Search of the Missing Link," in Peyman Vahabzadeh, *Iran's Struggle for Social Justice*: *Economics, Agency, Justice, Activism*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 289-306.
[811] See also worker and labor activist, interview with the author. Tehran, 30 April 2019.

nation.][812] It was a step in the direction towards radicalizing the movement, but the leadership and the reformists did not show any willingness to start pursuing this path.[813]

The intellectual debate discussed different options to overcome the obstacle of a Movement that, from workers' perspectives, was focused on factional rivalry. A strike that ultimately never happened emerged as an option.[814] As the experience of 1979 had taught, when public employees and workers had joined students and intellectuals on the streets to economically paralyze the Shah's regime, a collective strike could have turned the tide for the Green Movement pressing the Islamic Republic. Nonetheless, as this chapter has shown, there were not the political and safety conditions for this to happen. The strong current of Leftist activism connected to labor did not see any concrete goal in bonding with the Green Movement. The Greens were irreparably accused of representing bourgeois interests, as summarized in the following words: "The working class welcomes the creation of open political space. Without a doubt, in an open political space, there is more opportunity for labor activists and workers to organize. But the working class is not going to sacrifice in alliance with parts of the bourgeoisie to open up the political space of society. A change in government will not create a political open space for the working class. Because at the first opportunity, the same labor activists will be eliminated from the political relations of the society."[815]

Conclusion

The Green Movement constituted a potential opportunity for street politics in post-revolutionary Iran. Rich in protest tactics, but poor in long term strategies, it exposed the fragilities and

[812] Labor Day Protest at University of Tehran, May 1, 2010. UCLA, International Digital Ephemera Project, https://idep.library.ucla.edu/search#!/document/greenmovement:7886
[813] Arash Reisinezhad, "The Iranian Green Movement: Fragmented Collective Action and Fragile Collective Identity," *Iranian Studies*, 48:2 (2015), 193-222.
[814] See Saeed Rahnema interviewed by Ian Morrison on the Green Movement, "Not by street demonstration alone," *PBS*, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2010/03/not-by-street-demonstrations-alone.html, March 2010. See also Mohammad Maljoo, "The Green Movement Awaits an Invisible Hand," *Middle East Report Online*, June 26, 2010 https://merip.org/2010/06/the-green-movement-awaits-an-invisible-hand/.
[815] Tirozh Azād, "Ettehād-e Tabaqeh-ye Kārgar bā Jonbesh-e Sabz bā Kodām Hadaf? Pasokhi be Aqā-ye Māljoo," http://www.ofros.com/maghale/azad_maljo.htm 25 Abān 1391, 15 November 2012.

weaknesses of cross-class alliances under the Islamic Republic. This chapter has navigated the genesis of the Movement's protests and its development along three trajectories. First, it traced the evolution of the demonstrations chronologically. Second, it tracked the development of the slogans. Third, it assessed the relationship between the Green activists and workers. Whereas the protests started almost spontaneously, triggered by the rage of a perceived electoral fraud, they evolved and became gradually more structured. They began with a question, focusing on the individual citizen claiming their vote in the immediate aftermath of the elections: *Rāy-e man kojast?* [Where is my vote?] Dialogical in their nature, most of the Green Movement slogans developed and directly addressed the political apparatus, in particular Ahmadinejad. Moreover, it would be misleading to label the Movement as fully secular in character. Although it tended to push towards civil rights and most of Mousavi's campaigners lived a secular life, there was no rejection of religion *tout-court* in the slogans. Religion was more a tool to convey the continuities and discontinuities with the past, such as in the *Allahu Akbar* chants that were appropriated from the 1979 Revolution, but were absorbed and characterized by the new context.

As rallying-cries shifted, they kept their subject-centered focus, calling for freedom and civil rights. Economic or social justice-related grievances were kept out of the streets' demands. This represented the main limiting factor of the protests, beyond repression. While addressing the urgency to contest, they lacked political articulation, particularly in the long-term. Beyond severe repression, the Movement exposed the fragile results of years of repression, but also top-down narratives of individualism and neoliberal behaviors permeating the social body. These factors contributed to enlarging the youth's distance from politics and fueled a certain political antagonism and mutual misrepresentation between older and new generations of the weakened Left. They also blocked, beyond class belonging, the flux of ideas and hindered the chances of cross-class alliances. As the chapter explained, labor activists with Leftist ideas labeled the Green Movement's younger activists as "too liberal rich kids."

Although the Movement brought to light the transformative capacity of a vast swathe of Iranian society, it failed to pursue an alternative path where workers could have walked alongside students and the new middle-class members. Despite the fact that it demonstrated its ability to conceive and re-invent dissent, it was not able to generate new forms of politics. However, by remaining trapped in the confrontation modality of its early days, it did not manage to find trajectories of collective resistance. The breaking point was social justice. It missed the opportunity to draw the economic and social vulnerability of the people who participated in the demonstrations individually into a common channel: labor precarity. Workers' collective actions could have potentially empowered the Movement and impacted on its fate.

The Green Movement was the movement of the movements with all its diverse souls, significantly exposing the social and political gaps of the IRI. Indeed, as each group had already fought separately over the years, it failed the test of the state apparatus' "divide and rule" tactics. It fell victim to it. It did not bring justice to the fragile identities within it, all, once again *precarized* and divided.