From the Revolution to the Islamic Republic: The Books in Context*

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[p. 10] “Shah Raft” (The Shah has gone): these words, written in immense letters, were the headline of two of the major national dailies on January 16, 1979. They contain an implicit exclamation point: the delighted amazement of seeing a regime depart so very quickly and almost quietly. Its struggle to modernize the country had led to Iranian society being strangled under an iron rule that favored the cultural imperialism of the West. The cries of surprise and joy still resounded in the ears of Iranians when they gathered by the millions in the streets of Tehran to welcome the Ayatollah Khomeini back from his exile in Paris. “Imam Amad” (The Imam has come) was the sober but joyous declaration of the dailies on February 22.

Beneath the banner announcing the departure of the Shah, the newspaper Kayhan reported this quote of Khomeini’s directly from the press gallery: “Marxists are free to express their convictions.” This promise of freedom, uttered at the very moment when the Iranian Revolution proclaimed that its objectives had been attained, was not kept, either by the country itself, or by Khomeini. The history of the revolution is in fact that of the emergence of a new political identity and a new political regime forged in violence. The story did not end with the Iranians almost unanimously (over 98 percent) voting for the Islamic Revolution in the summer of 1979, but that is where it began, where it changed its hue, its sounds, and its emotional impact.

Ideological and Security Networks

In spring 1979, Khomeini issued a decree to create the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). The organization, dubbed Sepah-e Pasdaran-e Enghelab-e Islami, or simply Sepah, is distinct from the regular army and includes three branches — military, intelligence, and police. Simultaneously, citizen committees called Komitehs formed to maintain order during the revolution were instantly infiltrated and then taken over by Islamic militants who moved rapidly to create links with local mosques: the Basij, Hezbollah (Party of God), and the Sepah.

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Thus, even before the institutional form or political projects of the country could be defined, a system to maintain power and control was put in place. From that point on, the state adhered to a new ideology along with a powerful and complex security organization which combined arbitrary brutality with organized legality. This duality, which made the Iranian regime difficult to define, was illustrated most perfectly by the Revolutionary Tribunals, instituted as early as February 1979 in order to execute the officers of the former regime. These tribunals were quickly granted even more sweeping powers: their mandate became to purge society of the “enemies of Islam” and of the state.

The structure of the state was part of a preconceived architecture inasmuch as the actors and [p.11] institutions that were progressively implemented formed an operational and coherent whole in the service of a specific type of government. However, the progressive solidification of this political regime was not only the fruit of a premeditated will —it also depended upon the course of events that would determine the future of this unprecedented revolution. The ad hoc political groups such as the Sepah, the Revolutionary Tribunals, and the Basij, initially created by decrees of Khomeini, were subsequently integrated into the December 1979 constitution, or legalized after the fact in 1983 or 1984. Moreover, their exponential expansion in terms of size, means, and prerogatives, and the infiltration of their members into every branch of the administration took place against the backdrop of the conflicts that marked the birth of the Islamic Republic: the armed conflicts that began in the spring of 1979 in the autonomous regions such as Kurdistan, the Turkmen Sahra, and Iranian Azerbaijan, not to mention the ongoing war with Iraq. In these “laboratories of repression,” the apparatus of power perfected their techniques of counter-insurrection, intelligence, and surveillance of the civilian population.

Institutional Lockdown and Political Hegemony

The Interim Government, appointed right after the fall of the monarchy, did not last long. Before the end of 1979, Iranians adopted the constitution of the new Islamic Republic, which placed the Ayatollah Khomeini at the center of an institutional organization founded upon the concept of velayat-e faqih, or governance by a Supreme Leader. As of the spring of 1980, the dissent that arose among the various social and political actors of the revolution was quashed by the Cultural Revolution. Universities, hotbeds of leftist and liberal opposition, were closed for a period of two years. Students and teaching and administrative staff were “purged,” and academic and university programs were “Islamicized.”

The elections of the first National Assembly took place within a context of war and national mobilization against the Iraqi invasion of September 1980. The balance of power among the various political parties stabilized in favor of the Islamic Republican Party. They swept the legislative elections (denounced as rigged by the opposition) in a landslide. This party progressively imposed their hegemony over the revolution. In fact, no other party managed to transform revolutionary fervor into a political victory or even gain access to power, which was immediately co-opted by the party of the Islamic Republic, Khomeini’s party, which forged the new state upon a double-edged legitimacy: charismatic and rational, Islamic and republican. The political system was consolidated by a judicial branch presided over by the Shi‘ite clergy and a one-party political system. From State Formation to the Defense of the

Nation Consequently, the violence of the revolution was not linked so much to its insurrectional phase (1978– 1979), as to the following decade when the consolidation of the state took place within a dual context of violence against internal political enemies and the Iraqi threat from without. On June 20, 1981, in reaction to the dismissal of the President of the Republic Abu al-Hasan Bani-Sadr, demonstrations were organized nation-wide by one of the main opposition parties to Khomeini's regime, the People's Mujahedin (Mujahedin-e Khalq), an Islamic left-wing party. Tens of thousands of opposition members were imprisoned. That very evening, the People's Mujahedin formally declared a state of armed struggle against the regime. One week later, the headquarters of the Islamic Republican Party was bombed, killing several dozen party leaders. Responsibility for the attack was claimed by the People's Mujahedin; it was the first in a series of attacks that targeted hundreds of regime officials. In the name of an antiterrorist struggle, a wave of state violence was unleashed that lasted several years. Prisoners arrested during the demonstrations preceding the attack were collectively and summarily executed. A state of terror reigned. The use of torture and a policy of mass executions became widespread and cruel repression was the order of the day. Finally, during the summer of 1988, soon after the peace treaty with Iraq was concluded, the opposition members still in prison were liquidated over the course of a few weeks in a massacre that claimed thousands of victims.

The eight years of war against Iraq required total mobilization, and created an atmosphere of privation and fear, even as it cut a swath among a major demographic, claiming over five hundred thousand casualties on both sides, along with scores of wounded. The war was not only the context within which the revolution evolved, it also determined its direction, just as the revolution and the new regime determined the direction of the war. After two years of defensive fighting, the Iranian state decided to go on the offensive and refused all attempts at negotiating an end to the conflict. This allowed the regime to continue to treat any discordant voices as "traitors to the state" and to govern in a constant state of emergency. Iranians no longer had any way of opposing the state. The Islamic Republic positioned itself as the defender of a national identity under attack, whereas its point of reference until then had been Islam. The celebration of sacrificial death became intrinsic to the political reinvention of the notion of martyrdom, which was one of the fundamental precepts of the revolution. The war, rebaptized as "the Sacred Defense"— paradoxically as it ceased to be defensive — served as an ideological and political pivot for reshaping the country.

The Book in Iran: A Political History

[p.12] The period of tumult and instability of power that extended from the end of the Shah's regime in 1977 to the consolidation of the post-revolutionary state in 1983 provided a window—unique in contemporary Iranian history—of freedom for the production and distribution of books. Consequently, the books produced during this period played an essential role in the circulation of ideas and emotions. At a time when audiovisual technologies did not yet possess the flexibility, ease of use, and distribution that they do today, these works played a key role both politically and socially. This transitional period between two regimes provides an opportunity to observe Iranian society by freeing ourselves from the idea of the revolution as a clean break. This was a moment of uncertainty, when the outcomes which are now so obvious (the imminent fall of the Shah, and the true nature of the upcoming Islamic Revolution) seemed unlikely without the benefit of hindsight. It was a time when Iran became a proving ground in which new ways of articulating artistic, intellectual, and political activities were being tested. Some of these experiments provide us with insight into the foundations of contemporary Iranian society. Others were remnants of political practices that no longer exist and were ultimately destroyed. Even as they remind us of the richness and complexity of the past, these societal projects and modes of organization widen the scope of possibilities when it comes to the futures we can envisage.

The Paradox of the Book: Quality versus Freedom?

The publishing industry became solidly established in Iran in the 1920s, at the beginning of the reign of Reza Shah, the founder of the short-lived dynasty of the Pahlavis, which would be overthrown in 1979. His government encouraged the establishment of printing companies and entrepreneurs from the Westernized elite created the first publishing houses, which were subsidized by the state. The country, which supported the Nazis during the Second World War, was occupied as of 1941 by the Allies who maintained a presence—the Soviets to the north and the British to the south—when Reza Shah abdicated in favor of his son, Mohammad Reza. The presence of their Soviet neighbor a few hundred kilometers from the capital exercised a strong influence upon the Iranian elites, among whom circulated Marxist political ideas and cultural practices, such as the importance accorded to sociology, economy, and history, as well as the aesthetics of realism. Apart from the notable exception of Sadegh Hedayat, the major novelists of the period such as Bozorg Alavi, Jalal Al-e Ahmad, and Ebrahim Golestan were all marked by this influence.

It was at this time that a group of intellectuals founded the Iranian Communist party, the Tudeh. One of their main activities was the production of books. This flourishing "left-wing literature" had [p.13] a profound impact on the publishing world. Independent publishing houses sprang up and a relatively free intellectual environment prevailed until the coup d'état in 1953, a key moment of the twentieth century in Iran.

After the nationalist Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was deposed with the complicity of the CIA, the monarchical regime took an authoritarian turn. On the

one hand, the government moved to take control of the publishing world in an attempt to reduce the influence of independent publishers and Marxist thought. Subsequently, the Iranian cultural and intellectual scene, in full expansion due to the development of universities, sedentariness, a rural exodus, and the development of literacy, became a battleground within the context of the Cold War. In fact, until the early 1960s, transfers from the United States in the technical and editorial fields revamped the publishing scene, imposing both Westernization at an enforced pace, and an exponential improvement in the quality of the works. Even as intellectual and artistic activity lost much of its autonomy, through the conjugation of Western soft power and state control, the conditions of production and distribution improved in terms of professionalism, technical competence, and material means. The private publishing house Franklin, financed by Franklin Publications in New York, working alongside governmental cultural institutions, soon became a major actor in these developments. New care was taken and importance accorded to proofreading and typesetting books as Franklin gathered together and trained talented young people in the realm of graphic design, which would have a profound influence upon the culture of the book in Iran. Franklin also published the first paperbacks sold at an affordable price and collections of pedagogical books aimed at a wider audience. Other private publishing houses began to follow in their wake, such as Amir Kabir and Nile, who would exercise a major literary influence.

The constitution of professional associations— the powerful Union of Publishers and Booksellers and the Iranian Writers Association (Kanoon-e Nevisandegan)—was a major factor in this renaissance of the book and its uses. They became intrinsic to intellectual life and would retain their importance over the following decades. The Iranian Writers Association—which to this day does not have legal status and has never been recognized by successive governments—gained ascendance as a nexus of intellectual resistance to the reigning powers. This despite its glory being slightly tarnished by the political and artistic dissensions that have plagued it since its creation.

From the 1970s on, independent publishers such as Morvarid, Kharazmi, and Negah began to spring up, combining editorial rigor with the dissemination of critical thought and bringing about a literary renaissance. Negah, founded by Alireza Raïs Danay, published avant-garde leftist literature that profoundly influenced the intellectual and political life of the time, featuring authors such as Ahmad Shamlou, Siavash Kasrai, and Ahmad Golshiri. A simple, rapid system of registration numbers was implemented for books which required three copies to be donated to the National Library of Iran. However, this system enabled the state to monitor new publications and submit them to censorship. The latter became systematized and centralized, with the installation within the Ministry of Culture and the Arts of an office monitoring book publication which reported to the Shah's political police, the SAVAK[1], and the Ministry of the Interior. The printing and distribution of books was strictly monitored, particularly in the case of Marxist works or those critical of the government.

[1] SAVAK is an acronym for Sazman-e Ettela'at va Amniyat-e Keshvar, which translates literally as the Organization of National Intelligence and National Security. Over the course of twenty-two years under the regime of the monarchy of Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, it was a secret police responsible for both internal and international security.

White Covers

It was in reaction to this systematization of censorship that “unauthorized” works began to appear in the form of self-published works, or books published by tiny publishing houses working on a shoestring, linked to leftist opposition movements, working clandestinely, or sometimes from abroad. In fact, a portion of censored editorial activity was effectively moved to some European capitals where Iranian students would organize in “confederations.” These books, which came to be known as “white covers,” existed in a gray zone somewhere between selfpublished works and micro-publishing.

Quite often the publishers’ names and addresses, when they were mentioned, were false. The books had no formal publishing date, no author or translator name, or would simply feature their initials. Professional editorial standards of proofing, typesetting, etc. were not applied and printing techniques varied from printing to photocopying by way of the mimeograph. It was not unusual to see handwritten additions (important passages underlined, boxed text, sentences written in). The standard format consisted of A4 paper folded in half and sometimes the books were simply stapled, resembling more of a booklet, a typescript, or even course notes.

This profusion of anarchic activity broke all the editorial rules and was a response to censorship. The rudimentary means and amateurism into which the opposition was forced was a tangible affirmation of the stultifying political climate. The books, as tools of intellectual resistance, also indicate the repression against which those in the opposition struggled. The reader is constantly made aware of the precise context in which the ideas they contain were printed. Typos, even in the titles of the works, hasty publishing, the lack of typesetting, poor print quality, contradictions (of dates, transliterations, etc.) became the hallmarks of these intellectual and political outpourings, marked by a sense of danger, haste, disorder, and bare necessity.

The circulation of these books was linked to the creation of political subjectivities, that is to say to the rapport with oneself and the world which is constructed through our own experience of power relations—mainly linked to the state—and which determines our definitions of freedom, our values, [p.14] our choices, our desires, our will to conform or stand in opposition. The published works show the emergence of a political counter-sensibility in the Shah’s Iran, such as realist novels that revolved around themes of justice, theoretical works, translations, and popular books. As Chahla Chafiq emphasizes in this book [see p.339], their clandestine means of distribution and exchange, from hand to hand, are evidence of resistance tactics and a particular sociability through which one can perceive a political initiation, the creation of militant networks, and the recruitment by peers into clandestine political cells. This avid consumption of reading matter demonstrates a dual and sometimes even ambivalent movement that defined a generation: the desire to both reach out to the outside world and the need to affirm a modern Iranian national identity free of imperialism.

These desires, which were the basis of revolutionary passions, explain the symbolic power of the white covers and their proliferation in the public sphere after the overthrow of the Shah. In this respect, the revolution marks a clear break in the method of distribution of books rather than in their production. A major portion of what was read in 1979 and afterward had been published under the regime of the Shah and the success of political books after the revolution is linked as much to the

pertinence of their themes as to the cachet they acquired due to the degree of their dangerousness and subversion under the former regime. All the reading habits linked to political initiation through books, which marked the 1970s, were consequently upended. The books emerged from their clandestinity into the light of day when new publications were released on the events upon which they sought to shed light. Publishing activity intensified and became more independent.

1977–1983: An Alternate Chronology of the Revolution

Of course, most of the white covers published before the revolution did not have a national registration number. The fact that some nevertheless did have one is due to a paradox which is symptomatic of the ambiguities of contemporary Iranian history. In fact, a year or two after the appearance of the first white covers, the government of the Shah, whose support from the United States government was waning, was growing weaker and the once stringent control exercised by the censorship bureau was declining. From 1977 on, the publishing landscape once again acquired a certain diversity and critical dimension, but it cannot be said whether this was due to a specific attempt by the state to appease the political and social climate, or merely a symptom of its growing impotence.

Consequently, 1977 marks a turning point, inaugurating an era of prolific production, freedom, and confusion in publishing which accompanied the revolution in progress and would continue throughout the effervescence of the first post-revolutionary years. These few years stand out in terms of the country’s publishing history. The creation and distribution of books would never be as unfettered as it was during this period. Nevertheless, at the same moment, books were also progressively becoming instruments of political propaganda and publishing became the laboratory in which to experiment with every form of dissemination of emotions, ideologies, and opinions. This propaganda operated through the production of texts, but also, and especially as of 1979, through visual and pictorial production.

Photobooks

Before the revolution, photobooks consisted of collections of picture-postcard landscapes or decorative art books published in limited luxury editions—documentary photography did not exist as such. However, documentary practices did exist in Iranian society: the films The House is Black (1962) by the poet Forough Farrokhzad and Tehran is the Capital of Iran (1966) by documentarist Kamran Shirdel are among the most powerful documentary works known today. These forms of investigation of the real were echoed in photography with Kaveh Golestan’s Prostitute series shot in Tehran’s Shahr-e No quarter. Created in 1975, the series would have to wait until 1979 to be published in the magazine Tehran Mosavar. By then it was already a historical archive, since the prostitutes’ quarter of Shahr-e No was set on fire and destroyed during the revolution in the summer of 1979.

The first photography book on the revolution, Days of Blood, Days of Fire, was published in its aftermath by the independent publisher Zamineh in the spring of 1979. A plethora of works would follow: monographs of photographs or collective works, created either by publishers or photography collectives, inaugurating a new

genre of photography directly based upon realism. While the private publishing firms with ties to the West left the country amid much commotion, some publishing professionals (editors, writers, graphic designers), trained in their techniques and having acquired their level of artistic expertise, would implement this savoir-faire through new independent publishing houses and then within public cultural institutions, as the publishing sphere dwindled and increasingly came under state control.

While documentary photography certainly found its place in these books on the revolution, its value as documentation was not yet fully realized. The information that usually accompanied images, such as the place and date—sometimes even the name of the author—was missing. The image was used in the service of a political intent: to provoke, overturn, and, finally, to awaken the reader's desire to participate. The fact that today institutions that gather images on the revolution and the war with Iraq have adopted, [p.15] a scientific approach to the handling of their archives, devoting particular attention to the question of the value of photography as a document, underlines, by contrast, the singular use of documentary photography in the books of this period.

After the revolution, the propaganda of the new regime granted images a far more important place than ever before. Omnipresent, and in color, they spearheaded the regime's ideological construction, as several studies have shown (this subject is one of the most studied in the Islamic Republic).[2] Moreover, these photography books published between 1978 and 1983 with a vigor and passion that would soon be tamed or co-opted by the powers that be, provide valuable information on the motivations of a new political and aesthetic sensibility that was propagated through the iconography of propaganda.

Three salient points shed light on the beginnings of this visual propaganda. First, the lack of recognition of the authors: they are rarely mentioned. Some images by major photographers like Alfred Yaghobzadeh or Kaveh Golestan, made their way from books to posters, magazines to catalogues, known by all, even as their authors remained anonymous. The common practice of anonymous publishing was explained by the authoritarian context in which books and photographs were published in the 1970s. The autonomy of the image vis-à-vis its creator, its special place within a mass visual culture and the collective experience, became consolidated as a real cultural practice within the Islamic Republic, as shown by the lack of application of international conventions relative to private property in the artistic sphere in Iran.

Subsequently, the creation of the figure of the martyr spread through an art of the portrait that syncretized the leftist revolutionary aesthetic and the sacred imagery of the Shi'ites. The representation of the martyr, part and parcel of the ideology of the Islamic Republic, was anchored in the question of political desire—the seizing of the bloody face of the dead and its hypnotic reiteration calls to mind the deliberate emulation of acts of sacrifice. The mortal remains of the person killed become material support and proof of the repressive power (the Shah, the Iraqi enemy) and are transmuted into the ultimate testament of a political act in osmosis with the world, into which the martyr's existence is assimilated. It is this transition from a symbol of

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[2] See Peter Chelkowski and Hamid Dabashi, *Staging a Revolution: The Art of Persuasion in the Islamic Republic of Iran* (New York: New York University Press, 1999) and Pedram Khosronejad, ed., *Iranian Sacred Defence Cinema: Religion, Martyrdom and National Identity* (Canon Pyon: Sean Kingston Publishing, 2012).

injustice to a superior form, one that is existential and an exemplar of the incarnation of justice, that unfolds before our very eyes in these photographs of the revolution.

Finally, the aesthetic and ethical dimension of the images of the revolution confronts us with a representation of violence that is shocking in its directness and its morbidity. One might even say obscenity when one considers how the stage is consciously set with such a politically motivated, deliberate refusal to conceal any detail of the horror, and when the photographer's lens spends an inordinate amount of time dwelling in the morgues, children's hospitals, or revolutionary tribunals.

As it became increasingly widespread, this iconography of the martyr resulted in higher levels of insensitivity to the spectacle of suffering, a sort of normalization of horror never before seen in Iranian culture. One must imagine the consequences of being exposed daily and in a repeated manner to this visual vocabulary at the earliest age. This redefinition of the thresholds of the acceptable and the level of importance accredited to the spectacle of extreme violence became part of the declared aim of creating a new type of citizen as political subject. These photobooks were the instruments used to accomplish this.

The Return of Censorship and the Renaissance of Propaganda

With the progressive solidification of the institutions of the new Islamic Republic, the government once again acquired the means to exercise control over the production of books. Reconfiguring the publishing landscape was among the new political requirements, those of a nation totally immersed in a war effort, of an authoritarian regime with a new ideological framework, one which, for the first time in modern history, did not merely rely upon religion to govern, but rather instituted it as a political ideology. The tools of surveillance used by the former regime were quickly revived (under different names of course, since they remained a strong symbol of the illegitimacy of the fallen powers). As of October 1979, the former Ministry of Tourism and Information became the Ministry of Islamic Guidance (commonly referred to as Ershad). In 1983, this ministry took over the former Ministry of Culture and the Arts, finally becoming the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance. An interministerial policy of controlling cultural production was implemented, similar to the one which had existed under the Shah. The new Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance was in charge of censorship and the dissemination of a "code of conduct" for all cultural productions. The stable institutionalized form which has prevailed to this day began in July 1980 with the official establishment of censorship by decree of the revolutionary tribunal of Tehran—thereafter any document printed would require the seal of the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. The control of publications was taken to a new level by the end of 1981, with the advent of anti-terrorist laws and bloody repressions undertaken against anyone who produced, distributed, or even possessed books critical of the government or labeled as offensive against Islam.

During the summer of 1983, an official Book Office was created within the Ministry of Culture, then incorporated with the Ministry of Islamic Guidance. It granted licenses for required publications, along with phrases and words that required modification as needed. Beyond the political battle led through the repression of any opposition publications, this initiative, [p.16] refashioned the publishing landscape and the players within it. The small publishing houses did not survive and some major

houses were nationalized, as was the case with Amir Kabir, subsumed by the Islamic Propagation Organization. Only a small number of private publishers remained, side by side with powerful public cultural institutions who, as during the regime of the Shah, found themselves with a quasi-monopoly over book publishing.

The situation was not lacking in incongruity. The profusion of uneven, anarchic, and rapidly produced publications gave way to the narrower world of a happy few, homogeneous and strictly controlled, and yet the number of new titles rose exponentially. In fact, it went from around 1,500 per year between 1979 and 1982, to 5,000 per year in 1983. Print runs were also excessive, regularly approximating around fifty thousand copies. Even as the country was hit with a paper shortage due to the economic context of war and international sanctions, publications (both government-generated and related) became even more luxurious than ever before, with thicker coated papers, more color printing, more hard covers, and larger formats. These developments were the consequences of separating the publication process from the economics of publishing, and the demands of their readership. The uses, circulation, and distribution of books occurred within the context of a hegemonic, propagandistic regime. It was not until the end of Khomeini’s reign and the war with Iraq, at the beginning of the 1990s, that publishing counter-practices emerged as part of the resistance of civil society, recreating a movement reminiscent of the history of books under the Shah. But that is another story…

White Covers

[p. 289] The story of the "white covers" takes place against a series of backdrops. Under the Shah, these illicit books appeared under cover of night, in secluded mezzanines and student dorms. They were hidden under beds, in toilets, or buried in the mountains. Then, as of 1979, they burst into the light of day, in Tehran, opposite the university where bookstands were lined up by the dozen. This period of revolution was one of a blurring of the boundaries surrounding political books—the white covers were legally released by small, independent publishing houses, while state publications appropriated their aesthetic and artisanal form as photocopies, for propagandistic ends.

What defines this type of publication is not in fact its form, a particular theme or set of political convictions, but rather its method of production and distribution, which was basically, under the counter. The *xeroksi* (xeroxes or photocopies), the *mamnoueh* (forbidden works) and the *jeld sefid* (white covers) included political books, foreign novels, prisoners' memoirs, translations of theoretical (generally Marxist) reference works, popular works, party literature, news analysis, information booklets, or even manuals of state propaganda. Over the course of these different periods, and based upon the various genres, themes, and uses of the white covers, these books can be classed into three groups.

The first are part of the development of a counter-sensibility — a political sensibility which was a reaction against the dominant state culture under the Shah (somewhere between capitalist modernization and Western imperialism). The second is a change of question, from "*what* to do" to "*how* to do it?" This shift corresponds with an acceleration — the move toward a short production cycle and the rapid writing of books to shed needed light on the questions of the day. Finally, a third set deals with questions of the taking, challenging, and preservation of power, mainly consisting of analyses of contemporary politics and literature published by political parties (polemics, interviews, perspective pieces), including that of the Islamic Republic, which was already engaged in grabbing power.

From 1980 on, this plethora of books and these masses of paper were once again subject to destruction. Thrown into rivers or down wells, books were often thrown in piles of dead leaves on the sidewalks, buried in gardens, or hidden in suitcases abandoned on street corners. In 1981 it became dangerous to possess any literature linked to political parties belonging to the armed opposition; anyone found with it risked being put to death, as if they had been caught bearing arms. The era of the white covers was over and their symbolism changed. They became emblematic elements resisting an enterprise of destruction, a bit of reality that transcends the legal and political frameworks we create in order to make sense of our world. In either case, these "remnants" are the starting point of the journey of the historian who seeks to heed the voices of the vanquished in order to construct a history based upon their emotions and their hopes, a history that does not belong solely to the victors.

The Construction of a Counter-Sensibility

[p. 290] The white cover books reveal a fascinating world by providing a concrete answer to the difficult yet essential question of how a political conscience of oppression can establish itself within a dictatorship. In the Shah's Iran, it was elaborated through books— the basis of knowledge and information but also of values and perceptions. Consequently, even banned novels are important, more important one might even say, than critical and theoretical works. These novels, often inspired by social realism, highlight unjust situations and illustrate how anger can be transmuted into action through the use of a revolutionary romanticism, as was done in the autobiographical novel of the hero of the October Revolution, Nikolai Ostrovsky, *How the Steel Was Tempered,* which was first published in 1938 **[FIG.1].**[3] However, the novels were not all of the same genre, as is illustrated by Sadegh Hedayat's work, *Tup-e Morvāri* (*The Pearl Cannon*), written in the late 1940s **[FIG. 4]**. This satirical work, aimed at the monarchy as well as religious obscurantism, failed to obtain authorization for publication both before and after the revolution. It was not published until 1979, and then only clandestinely by the mysterious publisher 333 in a print run of one hundred thousand copies. To this day, this remains the only edition of the book available in the country. Its powerful, incisive content remains relevant to this day. This, as well as the long history behind its publication, illustrate the links between publishing and intellectual and political history over the last sixty years, a story which is still unfolding.

Political initiation through books works in concentric circles. The access to certain types of books are indicators of the reader's inclusion in a new circle, and indicate a step further into the realms of dissension and clandestinity.[4] This culture is based on the revolutionary ideas of the left, from the Soviet bloc or Maoist China to the nonaligned national liberation movement in what is still being called the "Third World." Political violence and the necessity of armed struggle enjoyed a sympathy that is foreign to us today.[5]

The first group consists of books that belong in all hands—novels and books on popular education inspired by Soviet intellectual works, such as the world-wide bestseller *How Man Became a Giant* by Mikhail Ilin and Elena Segal, a treatise on the Darwinian theory of evolution **[FIG. 5].** *Jashn-e Kargari, vije-ye aval-e aval-e māh-e meh* (Workers' Day: May 1st Special), published by an Iranian student organization in Chicago (date unknown, probably between 1976 and 1978), is another remarkable example **[FIG. 7]**. This mimeographed book which includes lithographic illustrations is part of a tradition of didactic works to commemorate May Day which show how important it was for leftist groups to establish a political calendar and transmit a cultural heritage. This brought about the promotion of a workers' culture particular to Iran and, in the present instance, the celebration of the icon of "Kaveh the Blacksmith" as depicted on the cover of the book. This reference, taken from the works of the novelist Siavash Kasrai, is of particular interest because it stems from the desire to represent epic heroes of ancient [p. 291] Persia as figures of struggle,

[3] Ostrovsky's book was translated by Bahram (Shabgir, 1938)
[4] This according to comments by readers of the time, particularly Chahla Chafiq and Hassan Makaremi, made during our discussions of their experiences with white cover books.
[5] See Jean-Paul Sartre's preface to Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963).

secular characters that speak to an entirely different national legacy than that of the Shi'ite martyr.

Apart from their content, these subversive works, even as they were not part of the context of direct political action, nurtured the pleasure of reading as opposed to the world of entertainment. The compulsion to read, which was at the heart of the success of the white covers, implies an attitude favorable to the politicization of minds, namely a desire for the profound, a form of discipline, and the refusal of the society of infotainment as promoted by state-run television.

A second group of works, for informed readers who share revolutionary convictions, explored the question of "what to do," in the words of Lenin, namely the forms that political action should take. Bizhan Jazani's book, *Nabard-e diktātori* (War Against Dictatorship) falls into this category **[FIG.10]**.[6] It is considered a veritable manifesto for the revolutionary group Fedayeen-e Khalq. Even though the organization was founded after the death of the author, assassinated in prison by the SAVAK in 1975, this book provided its founding principles by explaining how Trotskyist analysis and methods of action, namely urban guerilla tactics, were required within the specific context of Iranian society, as well as why it was necessary for them to divest themselves of both Soviet and Chinese influences and break with the Tudeh, the Iranian communist party.

This group of books also includes socio-economic and political analyses, and works inspired by or based on Marxism such as Mahmoud Askarizadeh's book *Eghtesād be zabān-e sāde* (Economics in Simple Words), published several years after its author was executed in 1972 **[FIG.11]**.[7] The book outlines the economic program of the People's Mujahedin, an organization inspired by the radical Islamism of Ali Shariati and which also borrowed from Marxism, in the form of a "lesson accessible to all, from the worker to the intellectual." This volume is valuable because books published by the People's Mujahedin are considered to be "terrorist literature" and are prohibited in Iran even today, even though, having been written during the early phase of this organization, it is far less dangerous than the works which have been published since 1979.

Moving from ideas to actions inspired by them, other books related to the history of the international left through the experiences of revolutionary figures, national liberations, or resistance movements, such as the memoirs of Ho Chi Minh, *Ba Ho Chi Minh dar tārikh* (With Ho Chi Minh through history) (Negah, 1979) **[FIG.14]**, or Ernesto "Che" Guevara, *Khāterat-e jang hāye rahāyi bakhsh-e kubā* (Memories of the Cuban War of Independence) (n.p., n.d.) **[FIG.17]**.

Other Iran-focused publications encouraged revolutionary opinions through political emulation, such as the prison memoirs of the Fedayeen-e Khalq militant Ashraf Deghani **[FIG.18]**.[8] She is moreover the only female author of a revolutionary book, a fact even more notable since the balance of men and women readers was relatively even.

Among the works that stand out are those on the defense of the political heroes of the left, published during their televised trials. These trials, intended by the Shah as spectacles for a wide audience, paradoxically provided a platform of free expression for the accused, who used their defense as an unhoped-for political soapbox. These statements would continue to circulate in the form of books even after their authors

[6] Bizhan Jazani, *Nabard-e dikt ātori* (Chaman, 1978).
[7] Mahmoud Askarizadeh, *Eghtes ād be zab ān-e s āde* (Tolou, 1978).
[8] *Ham āseh-ye mogh āvemat (An Epic of the Resistance).*

had been executed. Consequently, *Khosro Roozbeh's Zendeginâme va âkharin defâ'-e* (Life Story and Last Speech for the Defense), a mimeographed work with a simple red cover (published by the Tudeh party in 1958), disseminated strong rhetoric expressed in flowing prose while *Hamâse-ye Khosro Golsorkhi* (The Epic of Khosro Golsorkhi) (Pishtaz, n.d.) **[FIG. 22]** presents the poetry of this revolutionary, who was elevated to the status of an icon during his trial.

A third group of books, reserved for initiates who were part of a political group, recounts the internal debates of the left—dissensions, polemics but also dialogues between different movements. One example of this is *Stalinism*, published by the Saazeman-e Vahdat-e Kommunisti (Organization for Communist Unity) in 1977 **[FIG. 29]**. It contains a debate between this organization and the Fedayeen-e Khalq based upon a critique of bureaucracy in socialist regimes and Stalin's ideas.

All of the books depict the tensions that were ingrained in the leftist sensibilities propagated by their reading. On the one hand, they attest to the desire to tear down the walls erected between Iranians and the rest of the world—apart from the West—created by the Shah's dictatorship by becoming open to what was going on there and what was being written. On the other, they show the constitution of a leftist Iranian identity founded upon the syncretisms particular to this society. One instance of this singular political culture is the relationship with Islam which can be seen for example when a revolutionary militant like Golsorkhi cites the Imam Hussein and Imam Ali in his defense plea. This ambiguous relationship, out of keeping with the Marxist rejection of religion, can be seen in the notions of sacrifice and revolutionary martyrdom, or in the references made to Shi'ite concepts of justice.

Another equally important dimension of this political culture is the place occupied by literature, particularly poetry. Firstly, literature provides a field of political expression, as witnessed by the omnipresent poetry in the works of Golsorkhi, Roozbeh, or even the Workers' Day: May 1st Special. Moreover, the production of white covers involves both political militants and actors in cultural and literary worlds. Another example is the book *25 sâl sânsur dar Irân* (Twenty-Five Years of Censorship in Iran), published by the Group for the Freedom of Books and Thought, made up of writers and intellectuals who, in a series of articles, exposed forms of censorship and the figures involved in it since the 1953 coup d'état **[FIG. 32]**.[9] This work is interesting both because of its content and its format: a series of mimeographed articles is at times interspersed with handwritten notes. On the [p. 292] border between publishing and self-publishing, book and booklet, it illustrates the paradox of the proportionate increase in the freedom of writing and publication acquired at the expense of the editorial quality of published books.

Dah shab (Ten Nights), a comprehensive book on the commitment of intellectuals to freedom of expression, is an exemplar of the relationship between the literary and the political.[10] A story of ten "poetry nights" organized at the Goethe Institute (the German cultural organization) in December 1978, this book, which was not a white cover at the time of its publication, nevertheless remains banned today as a reminder of the essential role played by the intellectual sphere in the opposition to the Shah and his eventual downfall.

In 1979, after the revolution, all these subversive or banned books wound up side by side at makeshift bookstalls which appeared spontaneously all over the streets. Imbued with an aura of resistance, these books were highly coveted. At the

[9] *25 sâl sânsur dar Irân (Tufan, 1977).*
[10] Dah shab (Amir Kabir, 1978).

same time, the rationale of the different levels involved in organizing their distribution faded away. Once they became accessible to all and widely read, they elicited a myriad of contradictory currents and positions that resulted in the fragmentation of the Iranian left, which was consequently incapable of transforming its revolutionary victory into a political one.

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From What to Do to How to Do It

[p. 303] Oddly enough, the publication of white covers would continue through the post-revolutionary Spring of Freedom that lasted from fall to winter of 1979. Most of the published books share the common need to analyze the aftermath of the revolution and provide readers with the tools necessary to apprehend the situation, find their bearings, and act appropriately. The works published from that point on moved toward increasingly short cycles of production and consumption because of their immediacy.

Many types of works were included in the white covers and political books of this period. As in the former regime's last years, translations of foreign and popularized works that sought to disseminate leftist political ideas among a wider audience occupied pride of place, as attested by the publisher's epigraph in the book *Jang-e khalq, artesh-e khalq* (People's War, People's Army), the collected memoirs of the hero of the war for Vietnamese independence, General Võ Nguyen Giáp, published by the Fedayeen-e Khalq organization in 1979: "Inasmuch as books on the workers' movement and world liberation can be useful to the movement by producing a political culture to further the ideological struggle, we affirm our efforts to translate and edit this type of work." **[FIG. 43]**

Among the works of popularization, the book *Gām-e aval* (Phase One), published by Pishgam in three volumes, stands out as the product of an experiment in popular education [**FIG. 45/46**]. It seeks to "respond to questions of social, political, and current affairs that were being raised in pedagogical classes" led by the teachers' chapter of the Fedayeen-e Khalq with a group of adolescents from Karaj, an upscale suburb of Tehran. The courses were entitled "Pishgam," which means avant-garde.

Still other books, written in the 1970s but which had remained unpublished, were released as soon as the system of censorship collapsed in 1979. That was the case of *Eghtesāde siyāsi, shive-ye tolid sarmāye dāri* (Political Economy: The Capitalist Means of Production), a mimeographed manuscript with underlining done by hand, whose dry prose and absence of preface or any form of layout attest to the haste in which it was published during the early days of the revolution [**FIG. 52**].[11]

Alongside these works, other publications provided a critical analysis and put current affairs into perspective. This was the case of *Tahlili az melat va mas'aleh meli dar mobārzeh-ye khalq-e kurd* (Analysis of the Nation and the National Question Relating to the Issue of the Kurdish People) by Parviz Salehi, which researched the issues surrounding the conflict in Kurdistan, one of the keys to the question "What to do now?"[12] [**FIG. 55].**

Attempting to comprehend the issues behind the revolution and the future it held for institutions, these works, firmly anchored in the context of immediate events, remain today as precious evidence that shows how questions of public policy were being addressed and what points were being debated. They enable us to capture the spirit of the times and provide a useful bastion against anachronisms. For example, contrary to what the massive landslide vote (98 percent) [p. 304] in favor of the constitution of the Islamic Republic in December 1979 implies, the proceedings of the

[11] F. M. Jahangir, Eghtesāde siyāsi, shive-ye tolid sarmāye dāri (Tudeh Party, 1979).
[12] Parviz Salehi, Tahlili az melat va mas'aleh meli dar mobārzeh-ye khalq-e kurd (Ehya, 1979).

colloquium "What the Nation Expects From the Constitution," published by the Iranian Bar Association in 1979, serves as a reminder of the widespread anxiety about the projected constitution, which was rejected and criticized by civil society and liberal left-wing political parties and by the Mujahedin. Moreover, the book offers a multidisciplinary perspective on the civil society of the time thanks to the forty-eight groups from the religious, judicial, press, and political spheres who were all participants in the
colloquium.

A rich source for those who wish to gain an understanding of the underpinnings of Khomeini's rise to power, *The Taking of Kayhan* recounts the inside story of how the largest national daily fell under the control of the most radical Islamic fringe groups as of fall 1979, becoming a powerful instrument of state propaganda to the present day **[FIG. 61].**[13] This work, written under a pseudonym by a certain Younes Javanrudi, is actually the work of a collective of journalists coordinated by translator, writer, and journalist Mehdi Sahabi.[14] His analysis exposes the process by which censorship was reestablished and liberties restricted after the revolution. This painstaking and well-documented testimonial also provides information about how the press works in general in terms of its relationship with political and economic powers.
As its authors conclude: "The question of *Kayhan* is reminiscent of an iceberg whose visible tip sits atop a huge hidden mass which remains practically inaccessible. This part relates to questions concerning property, management, and the relationship between the *Kayhan* organization, its managers, and the state."

For today's reader these works provide an element that is essential to an understanding of this period: the huge uncertainty that prevailed regarding the probable outcome of events and the anticipated political form that the new regime would take. It also reminds us that, at the time, the leftist groups considered the revolution as their triumph, which lends credence to the perception of the Islamic Republic as the product of a conservative, counter-revolutionary coup d'état.

[13] Younes Javanrudi, Taskhir-e keyhān (Hashieh, 1980). The editor-in-chief of this daily is appointed directly by the Supreme Leader.
[14] See the interview with Mohammad Ghaed on p. 336.

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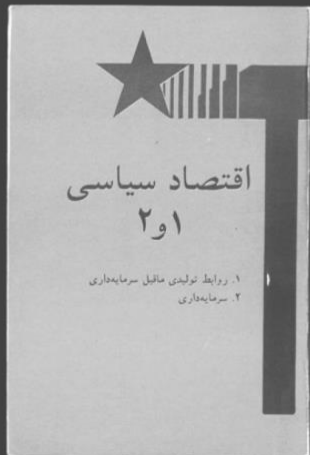

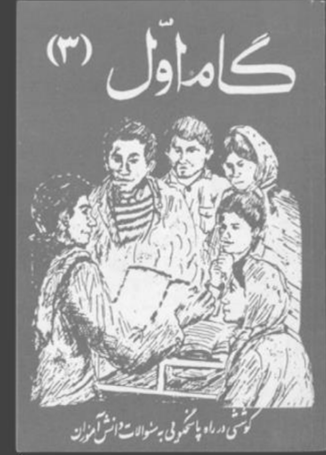

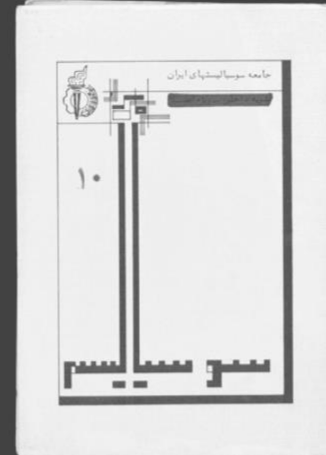

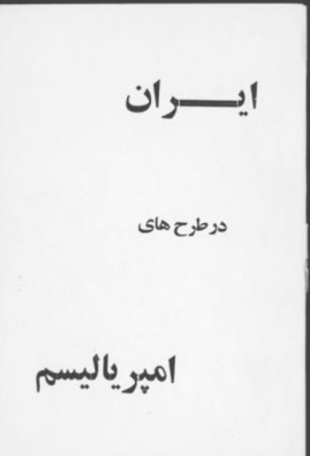

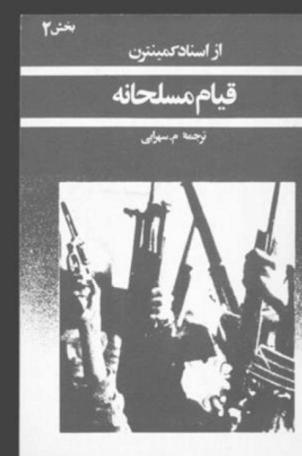

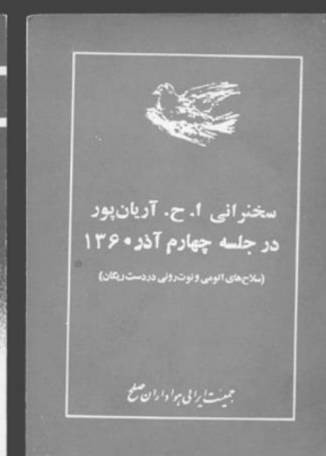

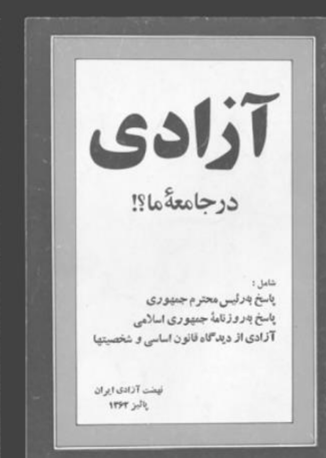

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Taking, Holding, and Contesting Power

[p. 313] Among the white covers, many works published by political parties offered opinions on current events, often providing analyses focused on the acquisition and use of power. These books outline the official "party lines" and often were more like fascicles or propaganda pamphlets. They multiplied from 1980–1983, while revolutionary fervor and disorder gave way to power struggles as the Islamic Republican Party became the main menacing, hegemonic actor in the construction of the new state. Moreover, Islamist fundamentalist groups made their appearance on the publishing scene, an area from which they had hitherto been absent.

Many works concerned the debates and controversies that reigned among the different groups that had participated in the revolution. Some are of great interest as sources for the understanding and writing of post-revolutionary history, such as *Enghelāb va kārnāme-e jebhe meli, nashriye komiteh-e shahrestān Shemirān* (The Revolution and the Status of the National Front. Review of the Shemiran Branch [Northern Tehran]) **[FIG. 73].**[15] The intent of this work was to provide an appraisal of the campaigns led during the first year of the revolution by this party for national independence created by Mohammed Mossadegh at the end of the 1940s. In fact, it is a critique of state institutions and political decisions, notably of the functioning of the Constituent Assembly and the creation of the constitution, to which the authors offer their counter-propositions.

Another book of note is *Mazhab, mārksisthā va hezbe Tudeh* (Religion, Marxists, and the Tudeh Party) by the Peyvand News Service, focusing on the role and the function of religion, which is defined as "an ideological problem of the Iranian revolution." [16] **[FIG. 75]** It questions the manner in which the Marxist left should integrate this religious dimension into its strategy, and emphasizes the necessity of finding a theoretical analysis that could lend meaning to this paradox. In theory, the revolution was essentially Marxist, however, in practice, the "oppressed" (*mostazafin*) leaned more toward religion. The book discusses dilemmas that are not solely the province of the revolutionary left — issues that the latter has often refused to confront, opting rather to retreat into a dogmatism at odds with reality. It shows how the key actors of the period gained awareness of the situation and attempted to cope with the new experimental nature of the Iranian revolution, a far cry from party manuals.

Some works focused upon internal dissension within the revolutionary left, which placed those who might question Islamic power at odds with each other at a time when the repressive and militaristic side of Islamists was becoming increasingly apparent, pitting those who contested them outright against those who advocated a strategic alliance with them.

While decisive elections were taking place (referendums and constituent and legislative elections), the various parties offered up their version of current events and analyses of these issues. *Barkhi masā'ele hāde enghelāb-e Iran* (Some Important Problems of the Iranian Revolution), for example, analyzes the [p. 314] social situation and the issues of the transitional post-revolutionary period **[FIG. 78].**[17]

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[15] *Enghelāb va kārnāme-ye jebhe meli, nashriye komiteh-ye shahrestān Shemirān* (National Front, February 1980).
[16] *Mazhab, mārksisthā va hezbe Tudeh* (Peyvand News Service, 1980).
[17] Ehsan Tabari, *Barkhi masā'ele hāde enghelāb*-e Iran (Tudeh, 1979).

It is written from the perspective of the Tudeh party, which was in favor of an alliance with the Islamic Republican Party in order to ensure the triumph of an anti-imperialist revolution. Its author was Ehsan Tabari, a writer, major intellectual figure, and member of the Tudeh Central Committee. Exiled and condemned to death in absentia by the Shah, he was arrested by the Islamic Republic in 1983 and, after a period of torture and coercion, subsequently announced his conversion to Islam. These televised forced confessions had a profound effect upon the morale of political opponents. They also revealed the abyss that separated the dictatorship of the Shah (where the political process was subverted by the accused into a soapbox to express the views of the opposition) and the new order, which consolidated its power by instrumentalizing these trials, making them into violent demonstrations of power and a means of intimidation.

Tabari's forced confessions were published in the form of a white cover book — a singular and mysterious object that still requires elucidation. This little stapled fascicle attributed to Tabari is entitled *Bāzgasht az mārksism* (The Return of Marxism). It is a transcription without prelude or explanation of the author's televised speech at his trial after having visibly been tortured. He begins with these lines:

> I, Ehsan Tabari, am sixty-seven years of age, and was once a member of the former Tudeh party. I was a member of its political council and secretariat, its ideological bureau and am now a prisoner. After suffering a stroke, I no longer can think or speak clearly. Consequently, I must read from my notes. I humbly apologize to my audience. This note is in two parts: I will read the first part today, and the second another day. First and foremost, I wish to enthusiastically salute the Supreme Leader and founder of the Islamic Republic, the Imam of the Ummah, and the people of Iran who are sacrificing themselves on the battlefield and at the workplace under the banner of Islam.[18]

Why is this work presented in the form of a white cover? It is difficult to say conclusively. Published in Rome by the Centro Culturale Islamico Europeo, it is possibly the independent initiative of an extremist group, created with whatever means were available, like the *xeroksi* under the Shah. But then why do the cover and the star which appears on the back cover imitate the publications of the leftist parties, even though it is a work of propaganda that specifically denigrates these very groups? This question points us to a feature of Islamist propaganda: the borrowing of certain visual and cultural symbols of the very opposition groups that they seek to eradicate, in order to hijack the influence of those groups on the public for their own ends and completely appropriate the revolutionary legacy.

In point of fact, the most remarkable aspect of this group of books is the appearance of works published by the party in power or by radical Islamist groups that supported it. While Islamist works among the white covers are virtually nonexistent, apart from a few rare exceptions before 1980, an increasing number of publications began to borrow their codes and editorial format in order to spread state propaganda. *Negareshi kutāh bar: enghlābe eslāmi-e Iran* (A Brief Look at the Iranian Islamic Revolution) proposes a factually inaccurate chronology of the 1978 – 1979 revolution **[FIG. 88]**.[19] This book, one of the only ones with an illustrated cover, also marks the beginning of the use of graphic elements and color as precursors of a new editorial code for political books, and is a harbinger of the end of the "white"

[18] Ehsan Tabari, *Bāzgasht az mārksism* (Rome: Centro Culturale Islamico Europeo, 1983).
[19] *Negareshi kutāh bar: enghlābe eslāmi-e Iran* (Mujahedin of the Islamic Revolution, 1980).

aesthetic. This reformulation of the landscape in the realm of political books marks the end of the period of turmoil and instability that began a few years before the fall of the Shah, along with the exceptional intellectual and political culture that had, however fleetingly, accompanied it.

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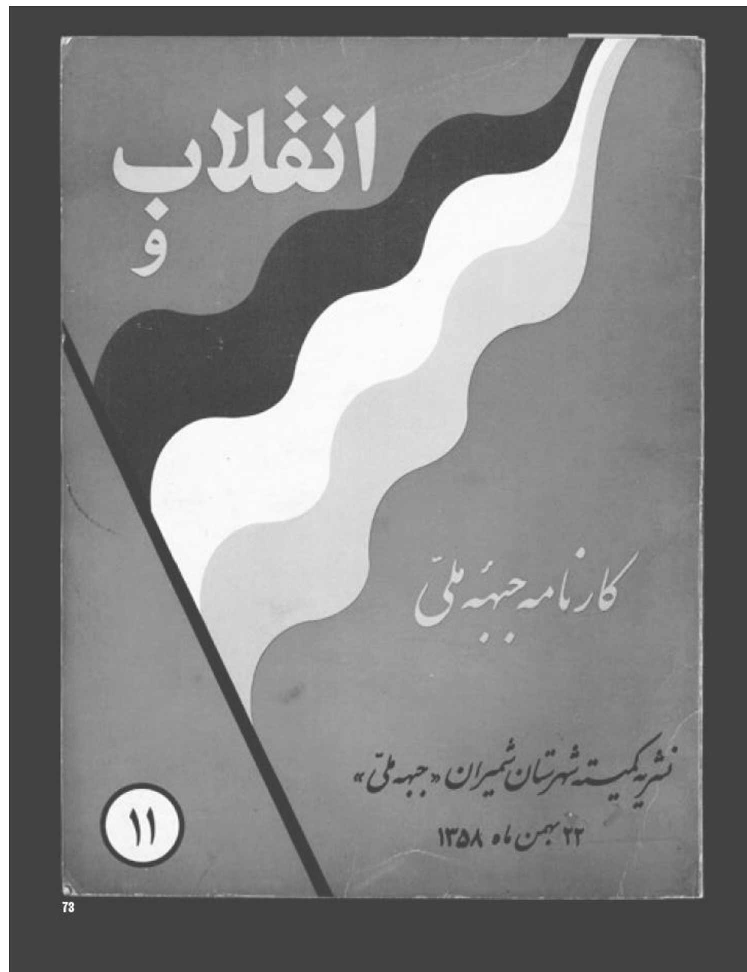

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