THE WOMAN WITH A GUN
A History of the Iranian Revolution’s Most Famous Icon

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To my sister, the ultimate revolutionary woman
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There were no grandmothers. Fathers have sons and grandsons and so the lineage goes, with the name passed on; the tree branches, and the longer it goes on the more people are missing: sisters, aunts, mothers, grandmothers, great-grandmothers, a vast population made to disappear on paper and in history…

... What stories are told by the worn jeans, the kids’ clothes, this size underwear, that striped pillowcase?

Preface

In January of 2015, a month before I left the country to “travel the world,” I visited my grandmother’s house in Riverdale, NY. I had not been there for some time, perhaps two years or more. Her dementia was worsening and, sitting with her in the living room, I felt a sudden need to extract as many stories as possible and archive them somewhere in my mind, for fear she would never again be able to access them.

My Savta (our name for her) was somewhat of a hoarder, a quality I had always taken as a sign of the clutter in her mind (a clutter that seemed to characterize her mentality for as long as I had known her). In her closet, amidst stacks of other unused items she refused to throw away, were two large boxes filled with a host of source material for my task of archivization.

In the boxes were photographs of my Savta as a seven-year-old with long flowing hair, and the next year as an eight-year-old with a bowl cut. When I asked about it, she insisted that chopping off all her hair in favor of the bowl-cut – which her mother forced her to do – was one of the most traumatic moments of her life.

The boxes also held portraits of my grandmother’s mother, Lena, on her wedding day. The story goes my great-grandfather – Lena’s husband – couldn’t repay a debt he had taken out from Lena’s father, and the two were forced to marry to settle the whole affair.

Next to the photographs were the 1968 court records of Savta’s divorce from my grandfather. The pages revealed her bitterness, and helped explain her depression in the aftermath.

There were portraits of my own mother as a young child, on the Brooklyn bridge at sunrise, taken by my amateur photographer-grandfather. He dabbled in many hobbies in those days, and even developed the prints in a dark room himself.

I found letters my grandmother had received from her overseas lovers in the 1970s and 80s, in which one Israeli soldier wrote that he wanted to propose to both my grandmother and my then-fifteen-year-old mother at the same time.

It was an overflowing archive of my grandmother’s life stories, and by extension my mother’s stories, and by extension my own. It was a rich collection. A historian’s dream.

Over the next few weeks, I took up the task of gathering memories from my other grandparents. My Poppy (my mother’s father who was briefly married to my Savta) recounted the tale of his mother (my Bobby) and how she made her way from Poland to New York in the early twentieth century. Apparently, Bobby’s father had come to America in the early 1900s, with the intent of sending for them, and her mother had died soon afterward. Convinced that he would not send for his children if he discovered that his wife had passed, Bobby’s older sister Lily – then twelve years old – took to writing him love letters as if she were their mother, so he would not suspect a thing. (Lily was always said to be mentally unstable from that point on). Years later, when acquaintances from Poland reached New York, they told Bobby’s father of his wife’s passing, of which he had no clue. He sent for his children – my Bobby and her siblings – immediately afterward.

My grandmother on my father’s side had her own things to tell. She showed me pictures printed in a local paper in the late 1950s, of two girls from Brooklyn who had made their way to Tijuana, Mexico and went to the parties of the international businessmen. The girls, both in their early twenties, had on tight fashionable miniskirts and hair in a slick coif upon their heads. One of them was my grandmother.

I already knew some of her stories – how she was nineteen when her mother Lillian died and had to take care of her younger brother; how she was only eight years into her marriage
when her husband had a stroke, all while raising three wild sons; how she worked multiple jobs to send all of her children to Ivy League universities. Her stories had fewer thrills in them, but still teemed with grit, tenacity, and unflinching resolve.

I left on my travels, during which I worked with women’s groups in Kathmandu, Nepal, and heard the stories of survival from women who had experienced a civil war and revolution (which had ravaged the country for a decade) and brought the Maoist political party to power in the new government. I listened to these women (who affectionately called me Rani-Bahini when they spoke to me), ate dinner at their homes, and watched as they maneuvered through the politics – of gender, of religion, of caste, of nationality – in their own every day lives.

Then an earthquake happened, and I saw firsthand the ways the collapse of infrastructure brought to the fore these various schemas in a whole new situation. How Indian and Nepali men lurked by the Bagmati river, where young girls and their families slept in tents. (The trafficking of Nepali girls would drastically elevate in the aftermath of the earthquake). How women my age who were enrolled in university were forced to drop out as they took care of their injured family members. How the government’s cautious restrictions on NGO aid prevented whole families from access to water. These were drastic and unexpected moments, in which I was both an observer and a participant.

When I returned to the U.S. in August, I began preparations for writing my senior thesis. Inspired by the lives of my grandmothers and great-grandmothers, I wanted to write a family history, replete with the scandal and the hidden secrets. I soon realized, however, that I did not have the means nor the knowledge nor the time to conduct the research – which would require extensive interviews and multiple archival trips to unknown locations – in order to write the story of my lineage as it should properly be written.

So I chose a different topic altogether: how was the Iranian Revolution inspired by the other revolutions happening at the same time? It was neutral enough – I knew about Iran and I knew about revolutions, after having studied both extensively during my time at Brandeis.

But in my preliminary research on the contemporaneous movements during the 1960s and 1970s, I discovered an interesting phenomenon: every single conflict during the period yielded photographs of women fighting in the guerrilla organizations. What’s more, almost all of the political imageries featured these women – and, surprisingly, the women across the geographic spectrum were depicted in very similar manners. This was an intriguing discovery: the visual codes that governed the appearance of militant women in Nicaragua were nearly identical to the visual codes of women in Vietnamese imagery. The same could be said for female fighters from Palestine to El Salvador. I also came upon photographs and posters of Nepali women who fought in the Maoist rebel factions in the 1990s – I was invested in this link. What did revolutionary women look like during this time that made them all appear so similarly, and why were they pictured with such prevalence? There had to be something that connected all of these images in one way or another.

The following thesis is a product of that initial connection I drew in the late days of September 2015. It is not what I initially thought I would write, but there are some similarities. In all of the cases that served as my inspiration – the stories of my grandmothers, the lives of my friends and their families in Nepal, the badass photographs of guerrilla girls – existed a uniting
logic: they all featured women who were radical, not for the sake of radicalism, but for the sake of survival. They were stories of women who had butted their foreheads against the odds, in the faint hopes that through sheer will they could somehow vanquish those odds.

At the same time, they were also women whose stories had sometimes been stripped from them – often violently – by the productions and unfoldings of history. They were women whose own narratives were deployed often for political purposes, whose images were no longer their own, but the property of larger, grander historical patterns. The stories of my grandmothers were no different – I was hardly interested in them until they began to thrill me, and only then did I find use in reconstructing the experiences of their lives.

The following pages are for my grandmothers, Sylvia (Grandma) and Shirley (Savta), but also Sadie, Gertrude, Lillian, and Lena. It is a story of lineages – where things come from, and how both the “where” and the “coming” affects their present existence. It is a story of radical women, and how they are pictured, and how those pictures communicate meanings that were often never intended by the radical women themselves. It is a project of inquiry, of intrigue, and of excavation. Ultimately, it is a story of families, of origins, of bloodlines, and of memory.
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Sometimes I think these pretenses at authoritative knowledge are failures of language: the language of bold assertion is simpler, less taxing, than the language of nuance and ambiguity and speculation.

Introduction

Toward a New Genealogy of the Iranian Revolutionary Woman

In 1980, a year after the success of the Iranian Revolution, one scholar noted something striking about the images of the Revolution. She wrote: “The image of the Iranian woman clad in the traditional chador, pointing her fist in the air or carrying a machine gun, has become one of the hallmarks of the most recent revolution in Iran.”

Indeed, the image of a veiled woman raising her fist or strapped with a gun (often both at the same time) was so salient, it circulated in photographs, newspapers, and posters inside and out of Iran. In this December 1978 photograph (figure 1), women raise their fists in the spirit of imminent victory. Other photographs showed gun-toting women standing guard over the Khordad rallies in June of 1979, or marching in support of the U.S. hostage crisis the following November (figure 2).

By the time 1979 had come to a close, the picture of a veiled woman with a gun was not only prevalent – it was iconic.

For historians of the Iranian Revolution, these depictions have become so familiar that it seems obvious they would be central to the iconography of 1979. However, in their familiarity with the representation of women in these pictures – and the sentiment that these representations are meant to convey – historians have overlooked the fact that most of the elements of these pictures hardly align with the usual explanations of revolutionary imagery.

Scholars have long analyzed the aesthetics of the Iranian Revolution through two channels: the ta’ziyeh passion plays, which staged the historic Battle of Karbala and glorified the martyrdom of Imam Hussein (a central component to Shi’i doctrine), and the Ashura processions during the month of Muharram, a ritual in which Shi’i men and women publically mourn the death of Hussein, sometimes through self-flagellation. Many hold that these cultural performances spawned revolutionary symbols like blood, to represent the blood of the Shi’i

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Figure 1. Iranian women raise their fists as they protest the Shah. December 1978. Source: AP Photos

Figure 2. Kaveh Kazemi. Iranian women march in “Mobilization Week.” Tehran, December 1979. Source: Getty Images
martyrs. They also maintain that these public rituals provided apt metaphors for revolutionary themes like martyrdom and anti-imperialism, and offered heroic figures like Ali, Imam Hussein, and his devoted mother Fatimah (the daughter of the prophet Mohammad), whom Ali Shariati, the preeminent theorist of the Iranian Revolution, puts forth as the ideal model of the Iranian woman.²

Yet the elements of the above images of women contain little to no references of these supposedly Shi’i tropes. In these images, the symbolic object is not the blood of martyrs, but a fist and a gun.³ For an event that completely upended the social and political order in the country, the Iranian Revolution was surprisingly nonviolent. Most of the armed confrontation with the regime had occurred at the beginning of the decade, when urban guerrillas attacked an armed gendarmerie post in a village in the northern village called Siahkal, in February 1971. Afterward, the Shah’s repression had effectively succeeded in squashing the opposition, and there had been very few armed confrontations between the opposition and the regime until the revolutionary rumblings of 1978 – and even then, the death toll was surprisingly low.⁴ Compared


³ In her research on the experience of the Iranian Revolution as it was unfolding, Naghmeh Sohrabi notes the ubiquity of the “gun” symbol in the memory of the revolution. She remarks that in her dozens of interviews, one of the most prevalent objects that consistently appeared in the stories of her interviewees – regardless of their age, gender, or political affiliation – was a gun. On a doorstep, at a neighbor’s house, in the kitchen, with a friend – somehow, somewhere, a gun would materialize in their accounts. Naghmeh Sohrabi, “The Experience of the Iranian Revolution,” (presentation, Animating the Archive: Retracing the Revolution, Hagop Kavorkian Center at NYU, December 3, 2015)

⁴ Ervand Abrahamian estimated that the total number of Iranian opposition members who were killed under Mohammad Reza Shah to be less than three thousand. This is not to say that there had been no confrontation with the regime in the months leading up to the revolution’s victory. One of the powerful turning points in the revolution was a massacre of peaceful protesters on September 8th, 1978, after the Shah had instituted a military curfew in the cities. Memorialized as “Black Friday,” the event was pivotal in convincing the populace of the brutality of the regime and the necessity of revolution. Yet, the numbers of the dead on Black Friday were often heavily exaggerated in the subsequent accounts of the incident. BBC correspondent Andrew Whitley declared the number to be in the hundreds. Michel Foucault, then a
to other revolutionary movements of the era, the upheaval of the Shah’s regime had required very few military engagements. In that context, the proliferation of “the gun” in the majority of photographs and posters from the Iranian Revolution is quite striking. They were evidently not being used for battle – why, then, did “the gun” materialize with such powerful visual significance?

The same can be asked about the ubiquity of “the fist” in Iranian revolutionary imagery. If one were to look at any photograph from the anti-Shah demonstrations of 1978, one would find that the gesture of the raised fist was consistently enacted by protestors across the political spectrum. To all, the raised fist unequivocally signified the spirit of revolution. One thing is certain: “the fist” had not been learned through Shi’i imageries or performances of martyrdom. Yet, everyone – from the radical clerics to the traditional bazaaris to the industrial oil workers to the leftist university students – affected the gesture without fail. Where did they learn it from?

Furthermore, images of gun-toting or fist-raising women were not only ubiquitous, but also served as irrefutable evidence that a social revolution was indeed unfolding in Iran. If the cultural performances of Karbala, through ta’ziyeh and Ashura, had glorified the revolutionary martyrs of Shi’i history, then why was the persona of the “militant woman” so pervasive – more prevalent, even, than portraits of the Shi’i Imams, Hussein or Ali?

Shariati had offered the image of Fatimah as a model for women, but his interpretation had not been particularly militant, praising her for being “a model of a daughter before her father, a wife before her husband, a mother before her children…” According to Shariati, Fatimah was revolutionary in her humility and dedication to the cause, *not* because she was a

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fighter herself. In the streets of the revolution, there were certainly no images of Fatima with a fist or a gun.

Some scholars offer the explanation that it was not Fatimah but rather Zeinab, her daughter and the sister of Imam Hussein, who served as the archetypal model for women to participate in the revolutionary space. They argue that the ta’ziyeh passion plays, in which Zeinab stands by the side of her brother in the battle at Karbala, turned Zeinab into “a cultural and historical icon… a political symbol to encourage women’s participation in the events of the revolution.” I might be inclined to agree with this argument, if it weren’t for the fact that I have not come across one political poster or pamphlet before 1980 that posits Zeinab as women’s revolutionary model. Yes, Shariati had also offered Zeinab as an archetype for women of Iran to follow, but the figure of Zeinab did not enter political iconography until long after the revolution had already been won.

At the same time, scholars also assert that “the visual representations that accompanied the revolution systematically portrayed men as warriors and combatants and women as mourners of the martyrs,” and maintain that “revolutionary events were narrated through Shiite mythology, and the role of the hero warrior was attributed to men, while women were included only as wives, mothers and daughters.” It is true that if revolutionary events were only narrated through a Shi’i mythology, then women were perhaps only included as wives, mothers, and daughters. However, if the photographs and posters above show us anything, it is that women were not systematically portrayed as “mourners of the martyrs” in revolutionary imagery.

Women possessed a militancy within visual representation that is simply undeniable, and the “Zeinab/Fatimah” explanation for this phenomenon clearly falls short. It is evident that

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7 ibid., 93
simply categorizing women as “revolutionary mothers” or “revolutionary sisters” does not suffice when assessing the significance of the “militant woman” icon. The rigor of analysis regarding the revolution’s symbology has been inadequate because of our preoccupation with analyzing the imagery of the revolution solely through “Shi’i” cultural discourses.

Perhaps we need a new framework to understand women’s place and representation in the revolutionary sphere.

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This thesis aims to offer such a framework, by asking two central questions:

First, why do women appear so prevalently in the iconography of the Iranian Revolution?

Second, how do we account for their visual representation, if it cannot be explained by the existing historiography?

We can begin to answer these questions if we recognize that the symbolism of women’s bodies have a history in the sphere of Iranian revolutionary politics, a history that far precedes the imageries of 1979.

Since the start of the Pahlavi monarchy, women’s bodies had been at the center of political contestations. Reza Shah’s dress code laws in the early years of his reign – a product of his desire to “modernize” Iran – had culminated in the forced unveiling of Iranian women in 1936. For decades to come, women’s “public” bodies would become one of the main indicators of Pahlavi brutality and corruption. The unveiling decree of 1936 had done more than make women “public” – it had placed their bodies at the center of oppositional politics under the regime.

By the 1960s, women’s bodies and what was on them (or what was not on them) had become central to the dissident writings of pre-eminent theorists like Jalal Al-e Ahmad and Ali Shariati. They highlighted the burgeoning cosmetics industry, and women’s predilection for
wearing revealing clothing (so they called it), as indicators of Iran’s cultural pollution by the West (*gharbzadegi*). Images of Pahlavi sexual corruption – embodied by the increasing prostitution in the urban centers, and the rumored sexual scandals of the Shah’s twin sister Ashraf Pahlavi – only served to corroborate the charge that the state destructed the bodies of Iranian women. Women’s bodies highlighted the abjection of Pahlavi “modernization,” and were considered the channel through which such cultural imperialism (or “West-struckness” as it was called) infiltrated Iranian society. The supplication of Al-e Ahmad and Shariati for women to return to humility was at once a call for women to resist the state’s corruption of their bodies, but even more than that, it was a solution to the “toxins” that the Pahlavi monarchy had imposed upon the country, which had plunged Iranian society into a condition of inauthenticity and cultural decline.

At the same time that Iranian intellectuals contemplated the maladies of Pahlavi society, a different kind of political dissidence began to emerge in Iran – one that advocated guerrilla warfare. The 1960s had seen an intensification of state repression, and certain circles of politicized Iranians slowly arrived at the conclusion that the initiation of armed struggle was the only way to weaken the regime’s intensifying grip on the social and political sphere. They also believed that by inaugurating armed struggle, they could prove to the Iranian populace that the notion of Pahlavi omnipotence was in fact a myth, and that the overthrow of the Shah was possible. Clandestine political groups formed in the universities and urban intellectual centers, where they discussed Aimee Cesaire’s and Frantz Fanon’s notions of authenticity, and studied the writings of Che Guevara and Regis Debray as road maps to initiate a guerrilla movement within Iran. In order to prepare for the revolution that they planned to initiate, members of these clandestine circles had to travel outside of Iran to receive their military training.

The 1960s had also seen Cuba, whose 1959 revolution irrevocably altered the international landscape, devote itself to fulfilling a promise of “Third World” revolution. By the
end of the decade, Cuba committed itself to aiding the liberation movements of Africa and the Middle East through military assistance and training. In addition to providing weapons, Cuba set up training camps in Jordan and Lebanon where Palestinian, Lebanese, and Nicaraguan guerrillas could receive military and tactical education.

It was to these training camps that, at the turn of the decade, Iranian opposition members went to prepare and train for the inauguration of a guerrilla movement in Iran. Some Iranian guerrillas also fought directly within the Palestinian liberation movement. The time that Iranian opposition members spent in the training camps allowed them to gain direct contact with the other liberation movements of the era and learn the era-specific codes of “Third World solidarity.” Upon their return to Iran, many cited their exposure to other liberation movements as the inspiration for their own decision to take up armed struggle against the Pahlavi state.

It was not only men, however, who were radicalized by the political culture of the universities and intellectual circles. A large number of women also participated in leftist political groups. Influenced by the heroism of the “female fighters” in the Algerian and Palestinian revolutionary movements, they adopted the ascetic guerrilla lifestyle and dedicated themselves to the cause of overthrowing the regime.

The entrance of women into these political spaces was underwritten by the codes already set for how a “revolutionary woman” was to present herself. For women in leftist circles, to truly be revolutionary was to discipline one’s own body in order to appear both anti-bourgeois and anti-gharbzadeh (anti-“West-struck”). They were to wear clothing that ensured their chastity and obscured their bodies – or rather, the dangerous sexuality their bodies necessarily implied. Just as women’s appearances were indicative of the cultural demise under the Pahlavis, so they also were sites to map anti-Pahlavi sentiment.

Yet, the presence of women in the militant groups also provided new models for politicized Iranians of what women’s activism could look like in the scheme of Iran’s revolution.
As female guerrillas were martyred alongside their male comrades, they generated a kind of mythology of their own – remembered for their heroism, but memorialized for their virtue and transcendence in the face of a regime that was growing more corrupt by the day (so said the discourse of the opposition). The circulation of their martyrdom portraits reinforced a rhetoric of the Shah’s brutality, for it reminded the expanding class of politicized Iranians that the situation was indeed dire if even women were forced to take up arms. These guerrilla women became legends in their own right, and by the end of the 1970s most politicized Iranians knew the names and faces of the famed female fighters of the Iranian opposition.

With the rumblings of revolution in 1978, the era-specific codes of militancy – which had been learned through the wide exposure of the Iranian opposition to other revolutionary movements around the globe – materialized in the streets. Protestors needed only to see a camera before they raised a fist or threw up V-for-Victory fingers at the lens.

As demonstrations filled the streets, schools of Iranian artists – who had been educated in the same urban intellectual spaces that had radicalized the opposition – turned to designing political posters in support of the anti-Shah movement. The posters reflected the mood of uprising brewing within the population. Many of these artists who were trained in the universities had been deeply influenced by the aesthetic traditions that came out of the Soviet, Cuban, and Mexican revolutions. Some of them had studied in Europe and the U.S. during the 1960s, where they had witnessed the height of the antiwar movement and the protests of 1968 that swept the globe. The influence of the global aesthetics of revolution was written all over the imagery they produced. In the middle of 1978, these artists set up a workshop in the center of Tehran for poster-production in support of the revolutionary movement. The idioms of revolution acquired a new currency in this visual realm.

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8 When a person was “martyred,” portraits of their face would be published to commemorate their martyrdom. The significance of martyrdom portraits acquired a currency in the visual culture of revolution, and served remind the viewer of the youth that were killed under the brutality of the regime. The visual culture of “martyrdom portraits” still exists in Iran today.
Beyond the clenched fist or the V-for-victory fingers, there was an even more powerful symbol of revolution that abounded during the era: the woman with a gun. The figure of the “militant woman” had proliferated in the iconographies of the Vietnamese, Nicaraguan, and Palestinian revolutionary movements. The “woman question” in general had also been central to the discourses of revolution in Algeria and Cuba. These quasi-nationalist movements had aimed to posture themselves as “egalitarian” in their message of social justice, and images of militant women served to reinforce that claim. Yet, the representation of women’s bodies also did a very specific type of visual work, for at once they served as tropes of nationalism as well as indicators of insuperable revolutionary spirit. Images of women were used both consciously and unconsciously as tactics of recruitment and to mobilize the population into fighting for the cause.

As revolution in Iran accelerated in 1978, protestors had a rich visual vocabulary from which to draw as they expressed their discontent – at the center of which was the figure of the “militant woman.” And women, having been centered in political discourse throughout the entirety of the Pahlavi reign, entered the streets with a history of revolutionary contestations already mapped upon their bodies. Photographs of women, both veiled and unveiled, throwing up their fists in defiance, became a staple of revolutionary imagery. They appeared everywhere – in circulating leftist pamphlets, on posters being sold outside of the universities, and were published in the newspapers. The “militant women” did not have to be Iranian for their images to be significant. Posters of Palestinian female guerrillas were sold on the streets outside of the universities right beside large placards of Shariati and Khomeini. The widely read magazine *Tehran Musawwar* published a photograph of Kurdish female guerrilla fighters on their front cover. Other leftist pamphlets circulated images of Iranian guerrilla women clutching a gun and throwing up V-for-victory fingers. Whether or not the women were actually Iranian was not specified, for these images were presented as if the women inside them were indeed the famed female fighters of the opposition who were now coming alive in the streets of revolution.
A month after the revolution’s victory in February 1979, Khomeini gave a speech stating that women who worked in government offices should wear the veil. The remark sparked intense debate across the political spectrum. Two days after the speech, women poured into the streets to protest what they considered to be a top-down imposition of dress code, something that smacked terribly of 1936 under Reza Shah. Intense debates were printed in the country’s newspapers between clerics and theorists on whether the veil should be compulsory in the new postrevolutionary state.

There had already been women in the streets of revolution who had indeed appeared “veiled”: most of them were Mojahedin women, university students who had been radicalized by Shariati’s Islamic-socialist teachings, or leftist women who donned the chador as the “uniform of the people.” 9 Many women in the streets of 1978-9 had also increasingly covered their hair with loose scarves, a move that functioned in a revolutionary culture in which “chastity” was a political act. However, before the debates of March 1979, the question of the veil itself had not been central to revolutionary discourse.

Yet, in the months following Khomeini’s veiling speech, photographs of these “veiled” gun-toting women abounded in the press. The proliferation of such images, in the context of the debates of March 1979, seemed to corroborate Khomeini’s assertion that true “revolutionary women” wore the veil.

The notion that the true revolutionary women wore the veil – and that they had always worn the veil at the helm of religious devotion – was in fact a product of teleology. It was only through the discourse generated by March 1979 that images of militant women who wore the veil were centered in political imagery by the fact of their veiled-ness. The inclusion of images of gun-toting women who had worn headscarves before March 1979 in the published debates over

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9 Before Khomeini’s veiling speech, women who wore the chador in their daily lives were predominantly traditional bazaar women or migrant peasant women. Neither demographic had been particularly militant before the revolution, nor had many of them been radicalized by the leftist circles that had made prominent the symbol of “the gun.”
the veil after March 1979 – as if to show their veiled-ness as evidence of their religiosity or devotion to Khomeini’s wishes, rather than a product of politicized chastity – projected a category of “veiled-ness” onto images that had simply not been informed by the post-March 1979 distinctions between “veiled-ness” and “unveiled-ness.” By centering pre-March 1979 images of scarved women in the March 1979 debates over the \textit{hejab}, such images served to generate a kind of counter-memory of what revolutionary women had always looked like – it made it seem as if the “militant woman” of the Iranian Revolution had always been “veiled,” and veiled in the way that only came to be understood after March 1979.

With the postrevolutionary project of national consolidation, images of the leftist-inspired “unveiled” militant woman began to disappear from revolutionary iconography, for, as the veil itself became increasingly centered in revolutionary discourse, the viewer was now made aware of her “unveiled-ness.” The “unveiled” militant woman was now associated more and more with the anti-\textit{hejab} protestors, who were increasingly marked as “bourgeois” or “deviationist,” for they were protesting an issue that most organizations did not deem to be a cause that was sufficiently “revolutionary.” By contrast, the “veiled” gun-toting woman could fit into an official state discourse that prioritized Khomeini’s vision of the revolution. Both “veiled” and “unveiled” militant women had originated from the same lineage – through the transnational visual codes that centered the figure of the “militant woman” in revolutionary imagery. However, the emphasis that the events of March 1979 had placed on the veil, and the proliferation of images in its aftermath that increasingly showed militant women who were “veiled,” worked to concretize the \textit{chador}-clad, gun-toting woman as a separate iconographic figure.

With the establishment of the Islamic Republic in April 1979 and the subsequent dissolution of the Provisional Government the following November, it was this new version of the “militant woman” – the one wearing a veil as she toted a gun – that was centered in state iconography and featured in public performances of nationalism. She could be seen marching in
the parades of Mobilization Week, or guarding the U.S. embassy during the hostage crisis. She came to be emblematic of this new, even more radical, Khomeini-controlled direction of the revolution.

With the start of the Iran-Iraq War, the figure of the “militant woman” proved to be a salient symbol in the attempts at mobilizing an army for the Islamic Republic. Gun in hand, she could be seen defending her town from Iraqi aggression and aiding the wounded. It was in this wartime context that the “militant woman” was given the name Zeinab, and heralded as an integral part of the Islamic Republic.

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This thesis exists within a large body of scholarship that recognizes that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was not an “Islamic Revolution,” as many have come to term it. Calling the Revolution of 1979 an Islamic Revolution is itself a reading backwards of history, reducing its varying lineages and origins to an ahistorical narrative that would explain the end result of the “Islamic Republic.” The wide body of work produced by pre-eminent scholars of Iran – including but not limited to Ervand Abrahamian, Ali Ansari, and Houchang Chehabi – serve to show us that the Iranian Revolution was both initiated and mobilized by organizations, networks, and ideologies that cannot be accurately described as “Islamic,” and many of which were not religiously “Islamic” at all.10 Hamid Dabashi also reminds us that what came to be known as an “Islamic” intellectual discourse was in fact not in the convention of “traditional Islam” but was itself a version of liberation theology – informed heavily by notions of social justice, and pushing against perceptions of cultural imperialism – like that which influenced the “Third Worldist”

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liberation movements in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s.\textsuperscript{11} The works of Negin Nabavi and Mehrzad Boroujerdi, which both focus on the creation of the political intellectual in pre-revolutionary Iran, demonstrate that the question plaguing political circles in Iran in the 1960s and 1970s were those of culture and authenticity; and to answer these questions, Iranian theorists looked to other revolutionary movements and a discourse of “Third Worldism” – not to religion.\textsuperscript{12} Even revolutionary theorists like Ali Shariati, who many categorize as an Islamic intellectual, in fact utilized Islam as a metonym for cultural indigeneity and as an “authentic Iranian” means to achieve social justice. Shariati was as much a critic of the traditional \textit{ulema} as he was of “Western” capitalism and consumerism.\textsuperscript{13} The works of Peyman Vahabzadeh and Ervand Abrahamian are also crucial to tracking how the guerrilla movement in fact created and was based on a network of revolution that extended far beyond Iran itself.\textsuperscript{14}

Additionally, this thesis exists within a genre of historical literature that utilizes visual sources as fruitful texts through which we can better understand transformations in history and culture. It recognizes that imageries do not exist in a vacuum, that they are generated by existing tropes and lineages and generative themselves of new tropes and discourses, and that our interactions with the visual realm informs affect and gesture as well as ideology and idiom.

Within the study of the Iranian Revolution, the works of Peter Chelkowski, Haggai Ram, Shiva Balaghi, and Hamid Dabashi on the iconography of the revolutionary movement lay the


\textsuperscript{13} Additionally, the argument that the over-riding revolutionary motif of “martyrdom” was derived solely from Shi’i mythologies needs to be further interrogated, for themes of “martyrdom” in the pre-revolutionary period were made most visible by the martyred Iranian youth of the leftist guerrilla opposition, and a culture of martyrdom under the Pahlavi regime came to the fore through the facial portraits of those martyred guerrillas.

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Scholars like Joan Landes and Madelyn Gutwirth, who study representations of women in the iconography of the French Revolution, demonstrate that the depiction of women’s bodies often serve as tropes of nationalism, and are thus immensely potent in revolutionary symbolism, but also themselves produce new discourses of nationalism and revolution.\footnote{Joan B. Landes, Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Madelyn Gutwirth, The Twilight of the Goddesses: Women and Representation in the French Revolutionary Era (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992)
}

Anne McClintock’s work reminds us that the gendering of nationalism often serves and is reinforced by the specific political projects of the colonial and postcolonial context.\footnote{Anne McClintock, Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest (New York: Routledge, 1995)
}

In her study of narrative engagement and address, Robyn Warhol reminds us that intertextual interactions are always gendered, which
affects both how the author produces a text, as well as the way the viewer reads a text. The aforementioned scholarship forms much of the academic basis of this thesis.

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One obstacle that presented itself in the research of this thesis was my lack of Persian language skills. This prevented me from accessing a wide array of primary sources that were only published in Persian. If sources appeared in English, it often meant they were intended for an international audience, and as such limited my comprehension of how certain texts addressed a local political culture. I was able to bypass this issue in several ways. First, I read and understand Arabic, and was thus able to read Persian writing and look for cognates (of which there are many), as well as look out for certain key words that I recognize. This allowed me to identify the sources that were most important to translate for this project. For translation of shorter texts, I utilized the aid of Google Translate, and my basic familiarity with Persian language sources (after studying Iranian history for four years) guided me through such brief translations. For longer translations, I utilized the language skills of my advisor, Naghmeh Sohrabi.

Additionally, various translation projects of Persian language texts conducted over the past two decades allowed me to draw from local Iranian sources even as I read them in English. In her 1998 dissertation on the Post-Revolutionary Woman, Zjaleh Elizabeth Hajibashi translated every article from the newspaper *Ettela’at* (one of the two most circulated newspapers in Iran) that reported on Women’s Day in Iran from 1979 to 1989. Additionally, in 2001, the Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Work published translations of every one of Khomeini’s speeches concerning women. Such translation projects assisted me in tracing the transformation in the discourse surrounding women in the aftermath of the revolutionary period.

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Fortunately, many books and manifestos written by members of the anti-Shah opposition were translated into English in the 1970s to circulate among an international audience, so I was also able to access a variety of primary sources that had already been published in English.

However, one of the upsides to doing a history with visual sources is that the written texts are not the end all and be all of historical analysis. My ability to “read” visual texts, which itself is its own language, allowed me to place them and historicize them with and without the aid of written sources.

My inquiry into representations of women in the Iranian Revolution, which I contend has not yet been explained by the existing historiography, requires that I engage with both “official” and “un-official” archives to cull together imageries that have not been adequately analyzed by the scholarship. To do so, I traveled to the International Institute of Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam, which holds the Siagzar Berelian Collection on Social and Political History of Iran. The collection contains pamphlets and publications from the guerrilla movement both within the country and in exile, and also contained a host of documents on students, women, and various political parties. It is from the Siagzar Berelian Collection that I collected many of my photographs and images of “leftist” militant women in the revolution, images of militant women during the Iran-Iraq War, as well as rare pamphlets and booklets on women in the anti-Shah opposition. Additionally, the digital archives of the Middle Eastern Posters Collection at the University of Chicago Library allowed me access to a variety of posters and political images produced by the wide spectrum of the opposition before 1979, as well as under the Islamic Republic. The online archive of the Palestine Poster Project offered a variety of “solidarity posters” and aided in mapping the transference of iconographies. The publication of posters in books such as Chelkowski and Dabashi’s Staging a Revolution (1999) and Balaghi and Gumpert’s Picturing Iran (2002) provide another wealth of political imageries. Additionally, the photographs featured on the websites of Iranian photographers Kaveh Kazemi, Kaveh Golestan,
Maryam Zandi, Alfred Yaqobzedeh, and Abbas Attar allow me to date and locate the imageries captured by said photographers. I also collected photographs from online media publications like BBC News, Getty Images, CNN.com, Iranian.com, The Guardian, and other news outlets.

However, the “unofficial” archives often proved to be just as, if not more, fruitful in my task of collecting undocumented images. Sites like pinterest.com, flickr.com, and twitter.com provide a relatively democratized space for the collection of primary sources, for on these sites individuals can post private family photographs and personal documents that historians would not otherwise have access to. In a sense, such websites turn what have often been preserved as “personal history” into public domain. Additionally, radical Marxist-Leninist blogs often feature photographs that have perhaps not been preserved in other spaces, but in which the manufacturers of these blogs have an investment in preserving and publishing. These sites make accessible the collection of images that would otherwise not appear in the official archives.

The argument that the collection of historical sources on such online sites and Pinterest and Twitter strip them from their historical context is a valid one. Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain exactly where these images would have circulated and in what time periods unless specified on the website, and even then, these online sources have never been known for their historical accuracy. That being said, these issues of methodology are not limited to online websites – the same problems of locating and contextualizing primary sources often manifest in the “official” archives as well. We must remember that the archives are also collected, and they do not represent an “objective” presentation of historical sources as we often believe them to do. In both spaces, historians must be aware that neither archive can truly indicate where such documents were circulated and how they were viewed.

One of the ways I attempted to circumvent this issue of locating and dating sources was through a close associate who was present in Iran during the 1979 Revolution and participated in leftist political organizations at the time. She possessed an instinctive sense of where documents
and pamphlets had been circulated, at what time they would have been produced, whether or not they were smuggled into Iran or produced inside the country. Through my connection with her, she was able to give these sources a context that neither the archives nor my own historical training could offer.

It is easy to dismiss sites like Pinterest, Twitter, and online blogs as unreliable forums through which to access primary material. The perceived ephemerality of “links” and URLs, and the concern that anyone with a computer can access the internet sites, promotes a notion that sources that surface on the internet are not “real” sources, and are not to be taken seriously the way real historical material is to be taken seriously. The crux of this dilemma resides in what we perceive as “serious” versus “amateur” historical production. In his study of the historiography of the Haitian Revolution, Michel Rolph Trouillot argues that the investment of historians in the “legitimacy” of the archive (in contrast to the illegitimacy of sources found elsewhere), and the belief that only the archive and the collectors of the archive can be the true guardian of history, leaves a trail of historical silences in its wake. Trouillot writes:

Unequal control over historical production obtains also in the second moment of historical production, the making of archives and documents… By archives, I mean the institutions that organize facts and sources and condition the possibility of existence of historical statements. Archival power determines the difference between a historian, amateur or professional, and a charlatan. Archives assemble. Their assembly work is not limited to a more or less passive act of collecting. Rather, it is an active act of production that prepares facts for historical intelligibility. Archives set up both the substantive and formal elements of the narrative. They are institutionalized sites of mediation between the sociohistorical process and the narrative about that process… In short, the making of archives involves a number of selective operations: selection of producers, selection of evidence, selection of themes, selection of procedures – which means, at best, the differential ranking and, at worst, the exclusion of some producers, some evidence, some themes, some procedures. Power enters here both obviously and surreptitiously…

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Trouillot reminds us that there is specific power in archival production, and that the assembly of the archive itself is a historical process that is influenced by the sociocultural and political constructions of power in the time that the archive is assembled. While the archive often claims to be authoritative and above the machinations of society, it is in fact a selective mediator between reality and the historical narrative. Trouillot makes a case for the fact that this reliance on the archive as an “objective” collection of truth often skews the construction of narrative, for it omits the historical textures and voices that cannot be drawn upon through the “empirical” forum of the archive. In this way, it is often necessary to look beyond the traditional “gatekeepers” of history – that is, the archive and those who assemble it – in order to recover many of these silences in the narrative.

Thus, the work of this thesis challenges the conventional notions of the archive and historical production. Throughout the research of this thesis, I assembled roughly nine hundred photographs and visual texts collected from various internet sources. As I utilize texts from “unofficial” repositories, I begin to construct my own archive of sorts through these new forms of historical production, to which a wider range of individuals have contributed. Many of my conclusions and interpretations of the “militant woman” come from this form of archival collection.

One of the main issues that plagues every historian is the usage of categories and the problems of terminology. It is the tendency of historians to tidy up narratives in order to make them legible and to allow them, effectively, to operate as narratives.21 In their efforts at “tidying up,” historians have often divided the spectrum of the Iranian opposition into “Leftists” and

“Islamists,” or “religious” and “secular” as they attempt to divide a political Right and a political Left. However, these categories do not accurately represent the political spectrum of the opposition, for the distinction between Leftist and Islamist is a retroactive one, colored to a degree by our perception of the “Islamic Republic” and its repression of “dissidents” in the years following the revolution.

In reality, the revolutionary movement was not so orderly. Many of the people who were later termed “Islamists” – such as Sadeq Qotbzadeh and Mostafa Chamran – had in fact come out of the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI), a group that subscribed to “hybrid” ideologies of Islamic socialism and Iranian nationalism. The LMI was also the predecessor to the Islamic-Marxist guerrilla group the Mojahedin-e Khalq, an organization many would describe as part of the “militant Left.” This was a revolutionary landscape where Marxist-inspired guerrillas also wore headscarves and cited Quranic verses, where the mothers of “secular” opposition members still prayed five times a day. The line drawn between “Leftist” and “Islamist” is not only anachronistic, but also largely unhelpful.

Having said that, it is difficult to re-invent language in order to have it accurately describe exactly what we mean.22 There is a limit to how much we can avoid the use of categories, no matter how many complications they pose for us. Throughout this thesis, I use descriptors like “left-leaning” or “in Khomeini’s circle,” and I try to keep from clumping the political spectrum into a Left and a Right. The obstacles of terminology is not one that I can wholly avoid, but it is one of which I am continually conscious and aim to challenge.

My second note on terminology involves the use of the designators “female,” “feminine,” and “woman.” I am cognizant of the fact that the term “female” implies qualities of biology, whereas “woman” signifies the identity and performance of gender. This distinction is certainly right and important in the conversation regarding constructions of the gendered and sexed body.

22 Just ask any feminist revisionist poet of the 1970s.
However, for the purposes of syntax, I sometimes use “female” (an adjective) and “woman” (a noun) without distinguishing between the two, in order to maintain a grammatical ease in my sentence structure. For example, I use phrases like the “female fighter” and the “militant woman” somewhat interchangeably. I use descriptors like “feminine” to connote the way a body is marked and gendered by existent discourses, and I use “femininity” and “womanhood” somewhat interchangeably. While the complexity of and distinction between how bodies are both gendered and sexed – through essentialist discourses of biological determinism and “nature,” as well as discourses of identity – is integral to any conversation regarding gender and sexuality (and any conversation in general), the obstacles of language sometimes force us to use these pre-existing descriptors at the expense of semantic nuance. Such is the case in my use of these categories in the following pages.

On a similar note, I also use the terms “woman” and “girl” somewhat interchangeably. Still, there is a distinction to be drawn between the two terms, and it is important to note their cultural uses and political implications. The use of diminutive descriptors like “girl” play into and reinforce the connotation of the female fighter as a love object and not an agent of her own right. For example, the female soldaderas of the Mexican Revolution were memorialized as adelitas, and incorporated into corridos (folk songs) as a romantic figure for which to yearn, instead of a warrior herself. (The word adelita itself is the diminutive form in Spanish.) However, using the descriptor “woman,” also takes away from the fact that many of the women fighting in the guerrilla organizations were in fact in their teens, an age in which we might still describe someone as a “girl.” For example, in El Salvador, most women had a novio and children by the time they were twenty, and were thus sent to the refugee camps instead of being recruited to the guerrilla forces. This logistical fact meant that the women in the FMLN were very young, and to call them “girls” is to also imply their youth and age in the organizations. Neither of these terms are fully devoid of political and historical implications. Although the problems inherent in
the usage of these descriptors undoubtedly manifest throughout this thesis, I attempt to use “woman” and “girl” according to the specificity of each case study.

Lastly, although my thesis hinges on the argument that the Iranian revolutionary woman was informed by the transnational codes of women’s militancy during the era, it is important to state here that I do not suggest any causal link between the two. In other words, I do not purport that Iranian women looked the way they did simply because they had seen a photograph of a Palestinian or Nicaraguan guerrilla woman, or that such an instance gave rise to the appearance of Iranian women in political imagery. This is not how ideas are transferred nor how visual cultures come to generate meanings and tropes. Additionally, when I talk about the inter-textual interaction between the image and the viewer, I do not imply a temporal relationship wherein the viewer sees and then a reaction is elicited – the connection between the performance and the reception of visual codes is constant and fluid, and does not unfold in a linear fashion.

While this thesis attempts to draw links and unearth crucial correlations, it does not presume that any of these relationships are sequential or one-directional. However, what I do suggest is that there is a reason the same idioms appear in multiple places during the same time period, and a reason for the fact that they are visually legible in similar ways. I talk about the figure of the “militant woman” within a visual tradition, in which relationships are not causative, but they are certainly informative and interconnected.

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That ideas travel and have movements of their own is an accepted concept by historians. The transmission of ideas in the Iranian Revolution has been widely documented by scholars of the intellectual and political culture in the pre-revolutionary era.

This thesis proposes that just as ideas can travel across nations and borders, so, too, do images.
Introduction

The first two chapters of this thesis work to establish a visual culture of resistance that defined the revolutionary expression of the 1960s and 1970s. In Chapters One and Two, I outline several distinct symbols, gestures, and poses that came to construct this visual repertoire. I trace the movement of these imageries across nations and regions, and examine how their revolutionary meaning altered as they moved through times and places. I identify the most significant of these symbols to be the clenched fist, the V-for-Victory fingers, the guerrilla’s gun, and the militant woman – it was these images that formed a transnational aesthetic, which coded what revolution was to look like during that era. Chapter Two looks specifically at the construction of the “Militant Woman” symbol in the sixties and seventies: how she came to be centered in political imagery, and how her figure made legible the various political, ideological, and social discourses during the era of liberation movements.

The last three chapters examine how this transnational repertoire of aesthetics informed the imagery of revolution in Iran. Chapter Three maps the global network of the Iranian revolutionary movement in the decades leading up to 1979, and maintains that the language of revolution in Iran was expressed predominantly through the era-specific codes of uprising, even as they signified multiple meanings at once. Chapter Four investigates how the figure of the “militant woman” came to be centered in political discourse and iconography in twentieth century Iran. This chapter argues that a preoccupation with the appearance of women’s bodies was pivotal to the revolutionary politics under the Pahlavis, and traces how the symbolism of women’s appearance was transcribed into the sphere of revolution in 1978-79. Chapter Five follows the figure of the “militant woman” into the creation of the Islamic Republic, and investigates how her image was deployed in the postrevolutionary phase of national consolidation and during the wartime era.

Ultimately, this thesis maintains that the militant woman – arguably the most famous icon of the Iranian Revolution – has a rich and lengthy history of her own, a history that extends far
more deeply than historians have yet acknowledged. As such, the excavation of her genealogy requires us to look beyond Iran as we write her place into history.
And now I must stop saying what I am not writing about, because there’s nothing so special about that; every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales... I must get back to my fairy-story, because things have been happening while I’ve been talking too much.

PART ONE

A REPERTOIRE OF RESISTANCE
Meet good deeds with good and be patient with me until I finish my tale. Afterwards, if it crosses your mind to throw my book into the fire, or the water, go ahead.

– Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, *Al-Saq ‘ala al-Saq* (1855)
CHAPTER ONE

The Fist, The Gun, The V-for-Victory
Mapping a Visual Vocabulary of Resistance in the Era of Liberation Movements

The twentieth century witnessed a striking phenomenon in the sphere of revolutions. No longer did revolutions happen in one country or one nation. They reverberated across borders. They echoed in the language of theorists, in the gestures of protests, in the actions of the discontented. As individuals became aware of their global counterparts, they began to perform revolution differently: for themselves and their comrades in struggle, yes, but also for the international eyes that they knew were upon them. The emergence of a “Third Worldist” discourse of solidarity changed the way revolutions were both enacted and expressed, for they were now performed for a global audience in a way they had not been previously.

This chapter maps what that expression looked like in the visual realm of revolution. It asks how symbols came to acquire legibility across borders, how the tropes of imageries worked to translate common meanings, even across continents. It examines where these images traveled, and how they transformed as they traveled. Within the chapter, I examine three specific aesthetics that were expressed in various manners: the fist, the gun, and the V-for-victory symbol. I trace the way these symbols moved between contexts of worker’s struggle, discourses of anti-imperialism, counter-culture movements, and guerrilla warfare. I look at how these symbols came to speak not only to fellow fighters, but to comrades across the globe. Ultimately, this chapter aims to construct a visual vocabulary of revolution, from which the expression of resistance in the twentieth century drew its symbols and icons.

The Fist and What it Held

The clenched fist has a lengthy history in signifying revolution. One of its earliest uses as an explicitly communist sign was when Karl Marx raised his fist in salute at the first conference
Figure 1. Soviet Poster for the Fourth Congress of the Comintern (Communist International), c. 1922. Top caption: “Welcome the Five Year Plan of the great Proletarian Revolution!” Source: The Guardian

Figure 2. Industrial Workers of the World, 1917. Published in the socialist newspaper Solidarity. Source: Antiwar and Radical History Project, University of Washington <https://depts.washington.edu/antiwar/WW1_reds.shtml>
Chapter 1: A Visual Vocabulary of Resistance

of the International Workingmen’s Association in London 1864. Initially designated as the “Red Salute,” the clenched fist was widely used as a greeting by Bolshevik soldiers during the 1917 Russian Civil War. After the October Revolution, the clenched fist, along with worker’s tools the hammer and the sickle, quickly became an international symbol of class struggle, and communist parties throughout Europe soon adopted the symbols as their emblems (figure 1).

In the fledgling antiwar movement during World War I, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) published this widely circulated poster of a fist growing out of the worker’s land (figure 2). The IWW claimed that if the US were to go to war, it would be the workers who would die at the helm of capitalist profits.\footnote{Rutger Ceballos, “Reds, Labor, and the Great War: Antiwar Activism in the Pacific Northwest,” \textit{Antiwar and Radical History Project}, University of Washington (2014). Web.} The image thus exhibited the fist as a symbol of anti-capitalist struggle and worker’s solidarity.\footnote{Gottfried Korff and Larry Peterson, “From Brotherly Handshake to Militant Clenched Fist: On Political Metaphors for the Worker’s Hand,” \textit{International Labor and Working-Class History}, 42 (Fall 1992), 77}

The clenched fist of the worker’s struggle was often pictured as a segment of a larger image that evoked worker’s struggle in an industrial world. In Soviet iconography, the fist usually clutched a hammer and sickle, emerging out of the bulging arm of the masculine Soviet worker (figure 4). Workers who raised their fists often held in their other arm the red flag of Communist revolution, and were often backgrounded by an assenting mass of “the people”, or by silhouettes of industry and factories, as in figure 2.

The Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 popularized the clenched fist as a specific gesture of revolution, when Republican forces fighting against the Francoist Nationalists employed it as a salute, widely used as an expression of anti-Fascism and revolutionary greeting (figure 3). One American woman, Mary Rolfe, visiting Spain at the time observed that “the raised fist which greets you in Salud is not just a gesture—it means life and liberty being fought for and a greeting
of solidarity with the democratic peoples of the world.” Rolfe identified that the raised fist of the Republican militia forces was not just an anti-Fascist salute, but an expression of solidarity directed toward “the democratic people of the world”. In 1930s Spain, the clenched fist was becoming an international symbol of resistance and left-wing politics.

The clenched fist re-emerged most notably during the 1960s as a ubiquitous symbol of the protests, liberation movements, and full-scale revolutions that rocked the world. The period of decolonization in Africa and liberation struggles in Latin America and the Middle East produced a sense of transnational solidarity that permeated the revolutionary sentiment of the era. Fists were pictured not just as a worker’s symbol, but as a gesture that would knock down the oppressor to its knees. The fist became an express icon of the anti-imperialist struggle.

A 1958 cover to the Egyptian political magazine *Rose El Youssef* depicted a larger-than-life fist knocking the Orientalist tourist out of the land (figure 4). The fist represented the United Arab Republic (the short-lived unification of Syria and Egypt into a singular country to realize Nasser’s dream of Pan-Arabism) coming together to combat foreign aggression. This *Rose El Youssef* magazine cover reflected an era-specific transformation of the raised fists, as the worldwide symbol for the enduring fight against imperialism.

The counter-culture movements of the 1960s in Europe and the U.S. quickly adopted this symbol with their own anti-imperialist zeal. In many ways, they were referencing its anti-Fascist connotations and usage during the Spanish Civil War, sometimes ironically. Whereas previous imageries of the fist contextualized it in a worker’s setting, the imageries of the sixties often

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4 Gottfried Korff and Larry Peterson, “From Brotherly Handshake to Militant Clenched Fist: On Political Metaphors for the Worker’s Hand,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 42 (Fall 1992), 81

5 Gottfried Korff and Larry Peterson, “From Brotherly Handshake to Militant Clenched Fist: On Political Metaphors for the Worker’s Hand,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 42 (Fall 1992), 81
Figure 3. Anarchist Militia Fighters, Spanish Civil War 1936-39 (n.d.). Source: Libcom.org

Figure 4. Front cover of the Egyptian political magazine *Rose El Youssef*. c. 1958. Source: Palestine Poster Project

Figure 5. *La Lutte Continue*, Paris 1968. Published by Atelier Populaire. Source: Hayward Gallery

Figure 6. Tommie Smith and John Carlos raise their fists at the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City. Source: Washington Post
isolated the figure of the fist into a single silhouette, floating on the page as if its stand-alone power spoke for itself. By 1968, the fist had become synonymous with the student protests around the globe, the anti-draft movement in the US, the Black Power movement, and the feminist movement. The 1968 Olympics in Mexico City, in which African Americans Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their right hands in a fist during the singing of the Star Spangled Banner, became one of the most notorious images of the year. Many identified it as a black power salute, but Tommie Smith insists the salute was also intended to express solidarity with human rights abuses around the world, especially in the aftermath of the massacre of students by the Mexican government three weeks earlier (figure 6). The Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), one of the main organs of the New Left and the collective that initiated the massive student protests across the US at Columbia, Berkeley and San Francisco, also adopted variations of the clenched fist as their symbol. During the May 1968 protests in Paris, the artist’s coalition Atelier Populaire (The Popular Workshop), established by striking university students and faculty, generated this image of a clenched fist arising from a brick factory chimney (indicating worker’s solidarity) as an icon of the group, and emblematic of the larger nation-wide protests (figure 5). At the same time, captioned with the logo “la lutte continue [the struggle continues],” it was a distinctive message of solidarity with the protests popping up that year around the globe.

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The Guerrilla’s Gun

The Raised Gun Aesthetic

While the “raised fist” was widely used in the anti-imperialist movements of the era as both a gesture and an icon, the reality of guerrilla warfare that the era of liberation movements had shepherded compelled the clenched fist to undergo transformation. The fist was still raised in solidarity and resistance, but it now gripped the gun – the object that embodied the militancy of the era.

The fist had gripped revolutionary objects before. Soviet posters often presented fists with tools in hand, namely the hammer and the sickle (as in figure 1). However, by the 1970s, the “tools” of socialist revolution had quite noticeably transformed. Whereas in 1917 worker’s struggle was represented by hammer and sickle, by the 1960s worker’s struggle had taken on a new meaning: it implied quite specifically the necessity of armed struggle. Influenced by theorists who advocated rural and urban guerrilla warfare, such as Che Guevara and Regis Debray (respectively), this generation of socialist revolutionaries identified intensely with the undisputed icon of armed struggle: the guerrilla’s gun.

The discourse of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 synthesized previous notions of worker’s solidarity with the methodology of armed guerrilla struggle. And its imagery mirrored this ideological change: Cuban iconography employed the symbol of the clenched fist of worker’s struggle, but with the guerrilla’s gun growing from the palm.

Take, for example, this 1960s poster promoting a unified Cuba under Fidel Castro (figure 7). The fist, which at this point in time is universally legible as signifying some version of Marxist revolution, is completed with the barrel of a rifle, as if the rifle grows through the revolutionary’s fist. In the body of the fist and rifle are the Cuban people who filled the Plaza de
Figure 7. “Firmes junto a Fidel.” Promoting a unified Cuba in support of Fidel Castro. C. 1960. Source: Sam L. Slick Collection of Latin American and Iberian Posters


Figure 9. Palestinian Poster in Solidarity with Anti-Apartheid Movement in South Africa. c. 1980. Published by International Artists Group. Artist: Abdul Hay Musallam. Source: Palestine Poster Project
la Revolucion during the Revolution. In the image, the gun becomes inseparable from the
aesthetic tradition of the revolutionary’s fist, a mere extension of this long resistance-filled
symbol. The poster demonstrates the way the lineage of the worker’s fist – so central to
Communist solidarity in late 19th century/early 20th century Europe – is transposed specifically
to a context of guerrilla warfare as the way to execute the people’s revolution. The goal of a
proletarian revolution is now inextricably intertwined with the method of armed warfare. And the
tools of proletarian revolution, which had once been a hammer and sickle clutched in the hand of
the Russian revolutionary, was now replaced by the guerrilla’s gun.

This 1970 Cuban poster celebrating the International Week of Solidarity with Latin
America similarly transposes the clenched fist aesthetic to a guerrilla context (figure 8).
Translated into English, Spanish, French, and Arabic, this poster was intended for an
international audience far beyond Latin America. It would have been disseminated and seen in
Palestine, Algeria, and among certain European communist parties. Whereas in the previous
poster, the fist of the revolutionary clutched the guerrilla’s rifle, in this poster, the revolutionary
is not any specific person, but the entire continent of South America; it calls on the whole of the
region to pick up arms and engage in armed struggle as the method to revolution, and also
wholly supports those who already have.

In this 1980 Palestinian poster (figure 9) expressing solidarity with the struggle against
South African apartheid, we can also see the step by step transformation from clenched fist to
gun-clutching fist. Two guerrillas stand next to each other, one behind the other, gazing up to the
sky at victory. The back figure holds their empty hand up into a balled fist, engraved with a dove
on their suit. The front figure (most likely a woman) is strapped with a vest of bullets, also
holding their hand up like the back figure, but clutching a gun. The two figures, pictured as part
of a metal sculpture, are physically melded together, as if representing two sides of the same fighter, the same fight. In one step, the back figure melds into the front figure, the dove becomes the bullet vest, the man becomes the woman, the fist becomes the gun.

The raised gun aesthetic of the 1970s, which I argue emerged from the tradition of the raised fist in earlier revolutions, was indeed the marker of impending victory, or of liberation having been won. This photograph of Fidel Castro waging guerrilla warfare in 1957 became an iconic representation of armed struggle (figure 10). Castro, in the foreground, raises his gun with a large group of comrades behind him. Noticeably, the figure to the left of the photograph raises her fist in revolutionary zeal. This figure is most likely Haydee Santamaria, a close associate of Fidel Castro, and one of the women who attained high-ranking positions in Castro’s guerrilla army. The famous photograph was turned into a poster in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the revolution (figure 11). The extraordinary production and dissemination of Cuban poster art – which was especially conscious of its transnational legibility – compelled the visual dimensions of Cuban guerrilla victory to a universal level of recognition.7

The “gun-raised-above-the-head” aesthetic of guerrilla victory, such as that in figure 11, would permeate the cultural aesthetic of socialist revolution in the coming decades. When the Sandinistas marched into the capital of Managua on July 19, 1979, they held in their hands a flag and several guns, which they raised proudly above their heads to the throngs of people below them, indicating the success of the revolution. In the photograph that captured that moment (figure 12), those without guns shoot up their fists, the pose to convey the same era-specific sentiment of socialist victory. When Daniel Ortega (the current president of Nicaragua) posed for a picture with his guerrilla comrades on that July day, he, too, raised his gun above his head in the spirit of revolutionary victory (figure 13).

7 See *Cubaanse Affiches* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1971)
Figure 10. Fidel Castro and comrades cheer for revolution. The figure to his left is most likely Haydee Santamaria. 1957. Source: CBS Photo Archive/Getty

Figure 11. Rene Mederos. Tenth Anniversary of the Cuban Revolution, 1969. Source: The Guardian
Figure 12. The Sandanistas enter Managua. July 19, 1979. Source: Getty Images/Bettman Archive

Figure 13. Daniel Ortega (far left) raises his gun above his head in the spirit of revolutionary victory. July 19, 1979. Source: AFP/Getty Images
Chapter 1: A Visual Vocabulary of Resistance

Flower Power and the Carnations Revolution

On October 21st, 1967, 100,000 Americans gathered in Washington D.C. for a march on the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam War, an issue that had served as a rallying cry among protesters and revolutionaries across the globe in the 1960s. A young photographer Bernie Boston sat on the ledge of a nearby wall and watched 2,500 U.S. Army troops surround the Pentagon with M-14 guns in hand.

Two years earlier, Beatnik poet Allen Ginsberg had published a set of guidelines in the Berkeley Barb on how to properly conduct a protest march in the midst of hostile policemen and pro-war thugs like the Hell’s Angels motorcycle gang. He suggested that, to spread peace and diffuse hostile situations, activists bring with them “masses of flowers – a visual spectacle – especially concentrated in the front lines.”

The usage of props like flowers were conceived in order to transform anti-war rallies into a kind of theater, a staged performance of resistance instead of an actual threat of revolution, intended to diminish the fear and anger of both the activists and their adversaries. Protesters took this suggestion seriously, and carried with them bundles of flowers to distribute to agitators at the front lines. “Flower power” had been born.

As Bernie Boston sat and observed the 1967 march on the Pentagon, flowers populated the front lines. When 18-year old aspiring actor George Harris stuck a carnation in the muzzle of one trooper’s rifle, Boston snapped a picture (figure 14). When the march on the Pentagon finished, George Harris got in his car and drove to the Haight Ashbury district of San Francisco, the epicenter of the hippie movement and LSD trips. And Bernie Boston sent the photo to his

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8 Allen Ginsberg, “Demonstration or Spectacle as Example, as Communication or How to Make a March/Spectacle,” in The Portable Sixties Reader, ed. Ann Charters, (New York: Penguin Group, 2003), 209

editor at the Washington Star. That year, the photograph won the Pulitzer Prize, and quickly came to represent antiwar protest and resistance. Even after the “flower power” movement had withered away, the photograph maintained its significance as embodying the civic resistance of the era.

The symbolism of flowers was soon represented in the imageries of socialist movements across the world. In 1972, the Socialist International (SI), a worldwide coalition of socialist political parties founded in 1951, adopted as their insignia a drawing of a fist clutching a red rose, which was created by the Movement of Young Socialists in France and designed by Yan Berrier (figure 15).10 The logo combined the long standing symbol of the fist as an emblem of socialist movements with the emerging icon of the flower as a metaphor for peaceful resistance of the era.

The morning of April 25th, 1974, a military coup in Lisbon, Portugal overthrew the authoritarian regime of Marcelo Caetano, prime minister of the Estado Novo. Led by the Armed Forces Movement (Movimento das Forcas Armadas, MFA), a pro-Communist coalition of lower-ranking military officers in the Portuguese Armed Forces, the coup successfully ousted Caetano within the day. Some of the officers in the MFA had fought in the pro-independence guerrilla factions in Portugal’s African territories; most of them were responding to Caetano’s failure to begin the process of decolonization, having been engaged in the Portuguese Colonial War with independence movements in the colonies since thirteen years prior. By mid-day, thousands of civilians had taken to the streets, distributing carnations from the flower markets to soldiers and among themselves. What began as a military coup had become an enormous demonstration of civic protest.

Figure 14. Bernie Boston. George Harris slips carnations into the muzzles of U.S. army guns during an antiwar demonstration at the Pentagon, 1967. Source: Washington Post

Figure 15. Logo of the Socialist International (SI), adopted in 1972. Created by the Movement of Young Socialists, Paris. Designed by Yan Berrier. Source: Socialist International Website
What did the soldiers do with the flowers that were given to them? They immediately stuck them into the muzzles of their rifles. The similarity to George Harris’ move at the 1967 march on the Pentagon was uncanny. Photographs of the rebel Portuguese soldiers with carnations in their rifles gained widespread attention outside of the country, and the bloodless uprising came to be known as the Carnation Revolution, a clear reference to the ubiquity of carnations throughout the day (figure 16). That carnations were placed in the muzzle of the gun, and not merely held in hand, symbolized the bloodlessness of the day: carnations would obstruct any bullets from the gun, and the decorative nature of the carnations diminished the very real threat of violence that guns represented. The flowered guns were themselves turned into a sort of stage prop of the bloodless protest, analogizing the peacefulness with which Portugal transitioned political governments that day amidst a very real threat of turmoil. Flower Power had had the effect that Allen Ginsberg intended for it, as a method of civic protest meant to maintain peacefulness in the midst of hostility. Flowers, and carnations specifically, had become the signs of bloodless political revolution, a successful attempt to transition to socialist democracy, and civic resistance in the face of fascist governance.

The next day, Portugal signed an accord with the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) in Algiers, agreeing to withdraw all Portuguese administrative and military bodies by the end of October. With the signing of the 1975 Alvor Agreement, Portugal had initiated the process of decolonization in Mozambique, Cape Verde, and Angola, formally ending the independence wars in Portugal’s former colonies and resulting in the success of the liberation movements in the African countries.\textsuperscript{11} The Carnation Revolution of April 25th had set the ball of decolonization in motion, had signified the beginning of the end of Portugal’s

\textsuperscript{11} Stewart Lloyd-Jones & António Costa Pinto (eds.), \textit{The Last Empire: Thirty Years of Portuguese Decolonization} (Portland & Bristol: Intellect Books, 2003), 22
Figure 16. The Carnation Revolution, Lisbon, Portugal, 25 April 1974. To the left, a child places a carnation in the gun of an MFA soldier. To the right, members of the MFA with carnations in their guns. Source: Getty Images

Figure 17. An 87-year-old veteran of the first Sandino rebellion stands with an 18-year-old Sandanista guerrilla in Leon, Nicaragua, 19 June 1979. Source: Richard Cross/AP
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brutal era of colonialism. Flowers in the muzzles of guns, in the rifles of the pro-decolonization factions of the Portuguese military, had thus come to symbolize the beginnings of decolonization, and solidarity with the national independence movements in colonized Africa.

*Face Forward Gun Grip*

However, the gun was not just for show – it was not merely a prop to adorn with carnations. The gun, as an icon of armed struggle, had acquired a significance of its own, and a new set of poses emerged to highlight the presentation of the guerrilla’s gun. True, the “raised gun” aesthetic signified many things: an impending victory, a battle that had just been won, a cheer for comrade solidarity. But the affective nature of the raised gun aesthetic clearly indicated a celebratory sentiment: one of enthusiasm, of joy, of revolutionary love even in the dark times.

But what about the graver side of guerrilla warfare? How would revolutionaries convey the intensity of the struggle, the perils of the battle?

In this era of guerrilla warfare, militants adopted another pose to convey both their weapon and its gravity: what I call the “face forward gun grip”. In this pose, the revolutionary gripped the gun with both hands just in front of their torso, pointed their gaze directly at the camera’s lens, and stood with solemn faces, their bodies unmoving. In one snap of the camera, this pose conveyed the nature of the warfare and the gravity of the cause.

See, for example, this photograph (figure 17) of an eighteen-year old Sandinista in June 1979 (a month before the revolution was won), posing beside an eighty-seven year old veteran who had fought in the first guerrilla rebellion with Augusto Sandino in 1927 against the U.S.
occupation of Nicaragua. They both intentionally strike this intense pose, with the younger of the two holding a semi-automatic rifle and the veteran holding the rifle that would have been used during his guerrilla fighting of 1927. In the photograph, this pose is at once a sign of their affective connection of revolutionary brotherhood, bonded by the bridge of time between 1927 and 1979: the predecessor and the descendent, the initiator of history and the guardian of its legacy. The paralleled pose serves to connect them in a lineage of revolution and a shared heritage, as well as a shared investment in the future.

Liberation movements across the globe adopted this very era-specific pose, as a legible gesture of their revolutionary cause and the gravity of their struggle. In this 1969 Cuban poster in solidarity with the people of Venezuela (figure 18), an orange pictorial graphic of a guerrilla fighter stands with their feet planted, their eyes straight forward, and their gun held across their torso. The “face forward gun grip” had become a pose of international solidarity among guerrilla organizations, a nod toward the reality of armed struggle that all liberation movements shared. This pose was also widely adopted in the iconography of the Viet Cong, permeating Vietnamese political posters and pamphlets (figure 19).

The 1960s and 1970s were not the first time the guerrilla’s gun was displayed in this manner. The Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920, arguably the first socialist revolution in Spanish America, extensively employed the imagery of the guerrilla’s gun in Latin America. In almost every photograph and poster of the Mexican Revolution, every campesino is pictured with a gun of some sort. Heavily influenced by Marxist revolutionary ideas, the Mexican Revolution in some ways predated the 1917 October Revolution as an embodiment of the worker’s struggle (in this case, the peasant laborer) and was one of the first twentieth century revolutions to utilize the

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12 From his time in exile in Mexico (1921-1926, 1929-1930), Augusto Sandino was exposed to Communism and Bolshevism. Sandino became an idol of other radical militants in Latin America, such as Che Guevara, Hugo Chavez, and Fidel Castro.
Figure 18. Day of Solidarity with Venezuela. 1969. Designed by Faustino Perez. Source: The Guardian/Docs Populi

Figure 19. Viet Cong Propoganda Poster. “Enemies Will Certainly Be Defeated! (France-USA-China)” Undated.

Figure 20. Emiliano Zapata, 1911. Photograph by Hugo Brehme. Source: Library of Congress

tactics of guerrilla warfare, and the first in Spanish America. The legacy of the Mexican Revolution undeniably influenced future revolutionaries of the region: many of Che Guevara’s most famous slogans were actually taken from the words and writings of Emiliano Zapata, one of the most influential generals of the Mexican Revolution. This iconic photograph of Zapata (figure 20) shows him to be just that: with one hand on his sword, and the other hand holding his gun in front of him, with his intense eyes and dignified stance, Zapata reveals himself to be a powerful and menacing populist hero of the Mexican peasantry.

However, noticeably, although most photographs of Zapata and militant campesinos during the Mexican Revolution always reveal some sort of gun to be present, they are rarely in the “face forward gun grip” pose we saw earlier.

Now, take this reincarnation of Zapata in this 1984 Palestinian revolutionary poster (figure 21). Zapata is pictured next to Abd al Kader al Husseini: both are the “heroes” (batl al-thoura) of their respective revolutions. Still pictured in sombrero and bullet vest, alongside al-Husseini’s kaffiyeh and bullet vest, he adopts a completely different pose than any that adopted during his time fighting in the Mexican Revolution. Zapata and al-Husseini are both reimagined in the “face forward gun grip” which undeniably indicated the guerrilla-style revolutions of the era, a pose that neither he nor Husseini would have assumed in the aesthetic of their own revolutionary times. The transformation of Zapata in this poster indicates two important element regarding the aesthetic of revolution at this time: First, it demonstrates that the heritage of Latin American revolutionary culture maintained notable relevance within the culture of revolution in the Middle East – the heroes of Latin American revolution were imported as analogous to the heroes of their own struggles. Second, the transformation in pose reveals the way the “face forward gun grip” had become so ubiquitous, that even the heroes of revolutionary lore would
were pictured adopting it. The historical accuracy of the pose almost certainly did not cross the mind of the artist: since this was the pose that every serious revolutionary assumed for their picture, why wouldn’t Zapata?

**V-for-Victory**

The final gesture of resistance to examine during this era is the V-for-victory fingers, thrown up by every protester across the globe as a sign of international solidarity.

Although variations of the two-fingered V had been in use for some time, especially as an insult, it wasn’t until World War II that the sign became widely associated with the anti-fascist sentiment of the Allied Forces. In January 1941, Belgian BBC radio host Victor de Laveleye proposed to his listeners that they use the letter V as a rallying emblem to spread pro-Allied Forces sentiment and as a symbol against the Nazis. He reasoned that V was the initial for “victory” in English, French and in Flemish, and thus could unite peoples occupied by the Nazis despite language. Within weeks, chalked markings of Vs began to appear in Belgium, Holland, and northern France, a definitive metaphor for resistance in the Nazi-occupied territories.13 That summer, the BBC ran an extensive campaign around the symbol, forming a “V committee” to coordinate British broadcasts in Nazi-occupied territories regarding actions against the Germans. The voice of this campaign, Douglas Ritchie, determined to “splash the V from one end of Europe to another.”14 Over the radio, they also played the coded sound of three dots and a dash: the Morse code for V.

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Figure 2. The V-for-Victory sign on a postage stamp in Allied Europe, 1941. Other postage stamps with the sign would reach America in August 1941. Source: Smithsonian National Postal Museum

Figure 23. Vocal Group The Ink Spots promote the Double V campaign, 1942. Source: The Root
That summer, Winston Churchill endorsed the sign over the radio, stating that V-for-Victory was “the symbol of the unconquerable will of the people of the occupied territories and of Britain; of the fate awaiting Nazi tyranny. So long as the peoples of Europe continue to refuse all collaboration with the invader, it is sure that his cause will perish and that Europe will be liberated.”  It is ironic that Churchill so greatly loved the institution of British Empire, since his statement regarding the V symbol was decidedly anti-imperial: it spoke of liberation, and of refusal to collaborate with invaders. By that fall, even before Pearl Harbor, the V-for-Victory symbol had reached America, and by the time America had entered the war, the gesture became the sign of a united home front (figure 22).

Yet, the gesture soon acquired a revised meaning on the American home front. In January of 1942, James Thompson, a black cafeteria worker, wrote to the Pittsburgh Courier, contemplating what it meant to be patriotic while black. He wondered why he should sacrifice his life for his country if he was only living as “half American.” He suggested instead to use the V sign both as a symbol of fighting external aggression, and of fighting racism at home:

The V for victory sign is being displayed prominently in all so-called democratic countries which are fighting for victory over aggression, slavery and tyranny. If this V sign means that to those now engaged in this great conflict, then let we colored Americans adopt the double VV for a double victory… the first V for victory over our enemies from without, the second V for victory over our enemies from within.

In the next week’s issue, the Courier published the first drawings of the Double V, and the week after announced its new Double V campaign. In the coming months, the newspaper published a number of photographs of smiling African Americans holding up their Double V sign, and

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15 Diane DeBlois & Robert Dalton Harris, “Morse Code V for Victory: Morale through the Mail in WWII,” Smithsonian National Postal Museum (September 2008): 1
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devoted large amounts of space to promote the project (figure 23). While the campaign had fizzled out by 1943, it demonstrated a remarkable revision of the V symbol that would have an enduring legacy: as one that combated racism, at home and abroad.

Although prominent American politicians like Truman and Eisenhower (and infamously Nixon) would use the symbol to signify their electoral victories after 1945, by the 1960s, the symbol had been claimed by the domain of American counterculture, of draft resisters and anti-war activists, of black liberation members and feminists, of hippies and student protesters. By 1968, “the year that rocked the world”, the V-for-victory symbol had become irrevocably associated with anti-war activism and resistance (also became known as the “peace sign” because so many peace activists employed it), and Victory fingers were thrown up at every student protest across America (figure 24), and Europe, especially in the May 1968 Paris protests.

The Paris May 1968 protests also resulted in massive strikes in the factories in addition to the universities, mobilizing several million workers and nearly crippling the French government.\(^\text{17}\) Although the student protests of that year were often dismissed as the instigations of “entitled hippie students”, (especially in the U.S.), the worldwide 1968 protests were undeniably associated with worker’s struggle and anti-imperial activism, and the widely used V-for-victory symbol had become synonymous with it all. The tumultuous year of 1968 also saw wide scale protest movements in Mexico, Uruguay, and Brazil, which – although fomented by university students – at its core centered class struggle and advocated a worker’s uprising (most successfully in Uruguay).\(^\text{18}\)

Figure 24. Cover page of an SDS pamphlet about the Columbia students strike, an unprecedented antiwar demonstration. April 1968. Source: NYU Archives Collection

Figure 25. Yasser Arafat gives the V-for-Victory sign at the Arab Summit Conference in Rabat, 21 December 1969. Source: Bettman/CORBIS

Figure 26. Poster celebrating the seventh anniversary of the establishment of the DFLP, 1976. Source: Palestine Poster Project

Figure 27. UN conference on the Question of Palestine, 1983. Publisher: United Nations Public Information. Source: Palestine Poster Project
Figure 28. A Victory for International Solidarity, c. 1985. Publisher: Japanese Red Army; Artist: Marc Rudin. Source: Palestine Poster Project
Within a year, the sign reached the Middle East. At the 1969 Arab Summit Conference in Rabat, which convened all the Arab countries to map a military strategy against Israel in the wake of the failure of June 1967, Yasser Arafat flashed the V at a nearby camera, with an ebullient smile plastered on his face (figure 25). By the early 1970s, the various factions of the Palestinian Liberation Organization had incorporated the symbol into their own liberation iconography (figure 26). The V-for-victory fingers denoted more than just resistance: they described an international culture of solidarity. At once it was a symbol as well as a message to other movements, a message of mutual support and a sign of anti-imperial unity.

Through these images, we can see that the V-for-victory symbol was often utilized as an affective gesture of enthusiasm, and impending victory, and common struggle (similar to the affective sensibilities of the “raised fist” aesthetic). It was very often used in explicitly transnational settings, such as internationalist conferences like the Arab Summit Conference of 1969 (figure 25), or the UN conference of 1983 on the question of Palestine (figure 27), establishing it as an undeniable gesture of solidarity with other liberation movements. (figure 28).

Conclusion

Through tracing various poses and symbols that make up the visual culture of revolution during the 1960s and 1970s, we find that many of the symbols which originated in early twentieth century Marxist and anti-Fascist struggle assumed renewed significance in the revolutionary struggle and counterculture movements of the sixties and seventies. Through the advent of “armed struggle” in the late 1950s and 1960s, many of these earlier symbols were translated to a specific context of the era that emphasized guerrilla warfare. More than just a sign
of “worker’s struggle,” these gestures were now a means of communication and expression with other movements throughout the world. The era of transnational solidarity had shepherded more than a “Third Worldist” discourse – it had made revolutionary movements legible across borders and continents.

The following chapter will examine a final symbol of this era: the militant woman. Just as the visual vocabulary of this chapter served to construct an aesthetic of resistance, so too would the militant woman map a variety of revolutionary discourses and expressions during the era of liberation movements.
In fact, as a woman, I have no country.

– Virginia Woolf, “Three Guineas” (1938)
In 1960s and 1970s, as those discontented under repressive regimes mobilized for guerrilla warfare, a striking phenomenon occurred. It was not only men who took up arms – women enrolled in the guerrilla organizations en masse.

It was not the first time that women were present in the uprisings of the twentieth-century. The Russian Revolution of 1917 witnessed battalions of women fighting for the Bolsheviks. Militias of Anarchist women could be found in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-9 (figure 1.5). Women had been active members of the Partisans in World War II, and participated in the underground resistance movements in Soviet-occupied Hungary. The participation of women in early twentieth-century warfare was not limited to the European continent: the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1920 had mobilized women on a massive scale as they followed the camps of revolutionary generals like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata.

Yet, participation of women in the guerrilla organizations of the sixties and seventies coincided with a notable development in the ideology of the guerrilla organizations: all of them subscribed, in some form or another, to notions of “social justice,” which required that they present themselves as an “egalitarian” movement as they called for social reform. A rhetoric of “women’s equality” was central to the appeal of these Marxist-inspired liberation movements – many of them explicitly postured themselves as the “protectors” of women in the face of the sexual violence of the existing regime. Stories of women who had been raped by government forces gained a currency of their own, as they compelled women to join the guerrilla organizations as the only way to “protect” themselves.¹ Such posturing directly contributed to the enlistment of women in the guerrilla groups.²

¹ One woman recalls the incident that pushed her to join the Cuban guerrilla movement:
Chapter 2: The Symbol of the Female Fighter

Women were not only physically present in the guerrilla groups – images of revolutionary women were featured on propaganda posters, painted into political art, circulated in solidarity pamphlets. The figure of the “militant woman” was immediately recognizable as a symbol of anti-colonial liberation and the armed struggle that such liberation necessitated.

The representation of women in political imagery has a lengthy history in revolutionary iconography. Scholars have long noted that depictions of women in political imagery often served as tropes of nation and the newly forming state. Both the French Revolution of 1789 and the American Revolution of 1776 invoked a version of “lady Liberty” leading the revolutionary armies to triumph. Yet, the representation of women had been largely allegorical: in iconography, they represented the feminine body of the nation, which the new citizenry was entreated to protect. In reality, they were expected to assume their duties of citizenship as mothers, raising the children of the nation to be the properly educated guardians of the modern state. That’s not to say that women hadn’t participated in the French Revolution – just that they weren’t encouraged to.

Yet, with the acceptance of women in the guerrilla organizations, depictions of women were no longer limited to the allegorical – they represented real fighters who were both resisting and dying at the hands of colonial governments or authoritarian regimes. Additionally, the high mortality rates that accompanied life in the guerrilla groups meant that the organizations could

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I'll never forget how two compañeras in Yara were raped by the dictatorship’s forces: Amelia Puebla, a relative of mine, and Georgina Barban. They were raped by all the soldiers from the Manzanilla barracks. It was said that about fifty soldiers took part. The two of them subsequently dedicated their lives to the revolution. Things like this made us join the fight. Just about all the young people in town did so.


Cuban solidarity poster with the El Salvadoran guerrilla struggle. “We Make War to Win Peace” in Spanish, English and Arabic. c. 1980s.

Sandinista guerrilla girl, undated.

Viet Cong militia woman, early 1970s

An El Salvadoran militia woman, early 1980s.
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not afford to be selective in their recruits – the mobilization of women assuaged the personnel shortage that many guerrilla groups experienced in their early years. At the time of the July 1979 Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, an estimated 30% of combatants were women.4 UN statistics indicate that during the El Salvadoran Civil War, women made up 38% of FMLN demobilized combatants.5 Photographs of female fighters showed that women fought alongside their male comrades, and also signified the direness of the situation if even women were forced to take up arms. Poster imagery of the late 1960s and 1970s made heavy use of this transformed figure of the “militant woman,” who could now represent a very real class of women – they were the mothers, sisters, and daughters of the viewer; they were real, and familiar, people who had taken up arms at the helm of the cause.

Within the figure of the “militant woman,” I identify two visual lineages that informed her representation in the imagery of the revolutionary movements of the 1960s and 1970s. The first aesthetic is the “heroic woman leading the comrades to victory,” palpable in quasi-nationalist movements in Vietnam, Nicaragua, Algeria, and the Palestinian liberation struggle. The second aesthetic is the “militancy of the guerrilla girl,” which showed women, with gun in hands, often staring directly into the camera’s lens – this proliferated in Marxist-Leninist groups that more heavily ascribed to a global/“Third Worldist” socialist ideology.6 Oftentimes, these two tropes are difficult to distinguish, and appear more often in conjunction with each other than in separate visual realms. The following section traces the construction of the “militant woman”

6 The distinction between “nationalist” and “socialist” is a fuzzy one, and not the most constructive, for such movements often drew from multiple discourses at once in their ideology of liberation. Nevertheless, in identifying nationalism versus transnational-socialism, we can better understand what tropes served which political discourses, and where they were intended to serve them.
of the era of liberation movements through mapping these multivalent imageries and symbolisms across the globe.

The Girl Gets Her Gun

The Women of Europe’s Resistance Movements

In 1956, fifteen-year old Erika Szeles, a soldier and nurse in the Hungarian Resistance, appeared on the cover of the Danish magazine *Billed Bladet* (figure 1). In her hand she held a gun, and pointed it toward at the camera lens. Her gaze was direct and unwavering. The photograph was powerful, almost shocking. Within weeks, it was reprinted on several covers of European magazines and in the international press. Erika was a symbol – that was for sure. But of what, exactly? Was she indicative of the demise of Soviet imperial power, especially over its satellite countries? Did she signify an impending revolution?

Whatever “revolution” there was only lasted for three weeks – after which the Soviets rolled in their tanks and restored Cold War-era order in Hungary. In November, Erika was gunned down by Soviet troops in the center square of Budapest. But the image of the young girl – the valiancy of whom had emerged in the streets of Hungarian uprising – was unforgettable.

Erika’s image as a “woman with a gun” fit into a long visual tradition in Europe of depicting female fighters who rose up against a fascist state. Photographs of female snipers and militia women proliferated in the Spanish Civil War of 1936-39 (figure 1.3). The organization *Mujeres Libres* (founded in 1936 by Lucia Sarnil, Mercedes Comaposada, and Amparo Poch y Gascon) used the context of revolutionary Spain to embark on a two-pronged strategy of women’s liberation and social revolution. The *Mujeres Libres* had formed a wide network of

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Figure 1. Photograph of Erika Szeles on the cover of Billed Bladet. November 1956. Source: <http://historum.com/european-history/48757-erika-1956-revolution.html>

Figure 2. Mujeres Libres mobilization poster for in the Spanish Civil War. (n.d) Source: HistoricalMoments.com

Figure 3. *Women Workers, Take Up Your Rifles!* World War I Soviet mobilization poster, 1918.

Figure 4. Eighteen-year-old French Resistance fighter, whose nom de guerre was Nicole Minet. Near Chartres, August 1944. Source: NARA
activists in Spain who dedicated themselves to the ideals of Spanish revolution, and centered the
figure of the militant woman in the imagery of this kind of activism. The organization published
mobilization posters, entreating the Spanish populace to participate on the side of the anti-
fascists, in which the militant woman held up her gun as she looked directly at the viewer and
pointed, as if to remind the viewer of their inaction and urge them to take up arms (figure 2).

Such mobilization posters were informed directly by the aesthetic of WWI recruitment
posters from two decades prior, in which the depicted figure would stare directly at the viewer,
as if exposing them for their inaction, in order to arouse the viewer for the war effort (such as the
aesthetic of Uncle Sam). This 1918 Soviet poster (figure 3), produced at the tail end of WWI,
shows a militant woman imploring the viewer: “Women workers, take up your rifles!” In such
images, the “militant woman” existed at the center of political iconography as a tactic of
mobilization. She often raised her gun, as if to remind the viewer that if she had to take up arms
in the struggle, so too did the viewer.\(^8\) The “woman with a gun” could be found in the following
decade of resistance in Europe, as the Partisan woman who fought against the fascist Third Reich
of Nazi Germany. Strapped with a vest of bullets, or standing guard on the street, she was
prepared at any moment to confront the enemy of totalitarianism. In the visual sphere of
Europe’s resistance movements throughout the beginning of the twentieth century, the “militant

\(^8\) Robyn Warhol’s examination of narrative interventions in Victorian novels reminds us that engagement
with the reader (as opposed to distance from the reader) is a particular strategy intended to produce
certain results. The strategies do not always succeed in their intent, but they almost always have a
purpose. She argues that in using direct address, a strategy of engagement wherein the narrator speaks
directly to “you”, the narrator effectively invites the reader into the scene, inside which she or he can
imagine their self as a participant. By manipulating direct address, “the narrator places ‘you’ on the same
plane of reality that she herself occupies, a plane which, she seems to suggest, could place ‘you’ within
the world of the fiction… she suggests that ‘your’ presence could have been possible.” This logic can
similarly be applied to visual texts, wherein the “direct gaze” of the militant functions as an immediate
strategy to engage the viewer and mobilize her or him into action. See: Robyn Warhol, Gendered
Interventions: Narrative Discourse in the Victorian Novel (New Brunswick & London: Rutgers
University Press, 1989), 64
woman” was a powerful and legible symbol of the anti-fascist cause and the necessities of its war effort.

Thus, by the time Erika Szeles appeared on the cover of *Billed Bladet* – with her gun cocked and ready, with her gaze direct and unnerving – the image of the militant woman taking up arms in the name of righteous resistance was a familiar one to both Europe and to an international audience that had witnessed the transpiration of these movements and their imageries.

*Las Marianas of the Cuban Revolution*

Three years after Erika’s photograph appeared on *Billed Bladet*, a different revolution rocked the globe – and this one had resulted in victory. The Cuban Revolution of 1959 transformed the Cold War landscape, for it brought the reality of Communist governance to the backyard of the U.S., but it also proved that “Third World” revolution and socialism was indeed possible. Women had been active in the Cuban revolutionary war effort throughout the 1950s, transporting weapons under their wide skirts or in their shirts under the guise of pregnancy, allowing the guerrilla movement to transport items largely unhindered, since “nobody would touch the belly of a pregnant woman.”  

Figure 5. TOP RIGHT: Haydee Santamaria (left) and Celia Sanchez (right), guns in hand, await an attack on a Batista brigade. Circa 1957. TOP LEFT: Santamaria and Sanchez on a march in the Sierra Maestra, c. 1957.


Chapter 2: The Symbol of the Female Fighter

In September of 1958, Fidel Castro organized the first all-women’s squadron in the revolutionary movement, called the Mariana Grajales Women’s Platoon (figure 6), which allowed women to fight in combat. In its initial creation, only thirteen women comprised the platoon. Tete Puebla, a brigadier general in the Revolutionary Armed Forces and a founding member of the Marianas Platoon, described Fidel’s response to a male soldier who protested women’s place in the armed forces, recounting: “To the men who complained – ‘How can we give rifles to women when there are so many men who are unarmed? Fidel answered: ‘Because they’re better soldiers than you are. They’re more disciplined.'”10 In Tete Puebla’s memory, Fidel’s response contained a sort of chastisement, that some men would not get rifles because they did not measure up to the bravery of the women soldiers. In a letter to Fidel Castro, even Eddy Suñol, a commander who was initially one of the main opponents to a woman’s battalion, wrote of the Marianas: “When the order was given to advance, some of the men stayed behind, but the women went ahead in the vanguard. Their courage and calmness merits the respect and admiration of all the rebels and everyone else.”11 In a 1981 speech commemorating the battle at Holguin in 1958, Fidel recalled: “When a platoon leader was wounded the men had the habit of retreating – which is not correct but it had become practically a habit. The women’s platoon had attacked a truck loaded with soldiers. When the platoon leader was wounded, they weren’t discouraged. They went on fighting, wiped out the truckload, and captured all the weapons. Their behavior was truly exceptional.”12 In this statement, Fidel prefaced the heroism of the Marianas with the fact that the “men had a habit of retreating,” contrasting their fearlessness with the failures of men whose cowardice had become “practically a habit.” All of these statements

highlight the political significance of women’s presence in the Cuban guerrilla movement. References to the bravery women soldiers almost always contrasted with the cowardice of their male counterparts, and alluded to a need for men to step up to the plate. The bravery of women in the guerrilla forces functioned discursively to “shame” the men into increasing their commitment to the cause. The disciplinary effect of women’s presence was immensely productive, for it worked to galvanize the retreating men into action.

The presence of women in the guerrilla forces had proven to be to the benefit of the entire movement. As Fidel Castro expressed shortly after the victory: “A people whose women fight alongside men – that people is invincible…”

In the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, Fidel’s government was forced to mobilize women on a mass scale in order for the new state to survive, in a way he never had to do before the revolution. The creation of the Federation of Cuban Women in 1960 provided the state with an official channel through which to recruit Cuban women for the revolutionary cause. During this period, images of the Marianas and other militant women began to circulate, as if to prove that women were an integral part of the movement. By May of 1960s, the Las Marianas platoon had expanded from thirteen women in 1958 to several times that size (figure 6). Photographs of women battalions throwing their fists up in support of the revolutionary government and marching with guns were indicative of the progress of the post-revolutionary state.

Chapter 2: The Symbol of the Female Fighter

Las Soldaderas of the Mexican Revolution

The Cuban Revolution had not been the first time that women picked up arms for revolution in twentieth-century Latin America. The Mexican Revolution of 1910-20 had mobilized masses of women who followed the camps of Poncho Villa, Venustiano Carranza, and Emiliano Zapata. The figure of the woman warrior, or soldadera, was a powerful one, who existed in stories of the revolution as insuperable and unafraid (figure 33).15 In her book Las Soldaderas, Elena Poniatowska describes women such as Petra Ruiz and Carmen Velez (known as “La Generala”) who both participated in pivotal battles of the revolution. Ruiz and Velez were both reported to have cross-dressed in men’s clothing in order to move about freely on the warfront.16 Yet, the soldadera (also termed “Adelita”) was also memorialized nostalgically in campesino songs as the lovers and caretakers of male soldiers in the folklore of the revolution. As Alicia Arrizón writes:

As a historical figure, Adelita was a soldier-woman, attracting attention with her military uniform—cartridge belts slung across her chest, a rifle hung on her shoulder—and her bravery. Adelita’s revolutionary subjectivity represents the feminist spirit of the Mexican Revolution, but in many well-known renditions of the “La Adelita” song, that spirit has been distorted by the romanticization of her subject position as a lover of men.17

Some images of the soldaderas indeed portrayed them as such love objects, with their faces resting on their arms and their smile soft and alluring (figure 9). Nonetheless, the many images of the soldadera shows us that the aesthetic potency of the “woman with a gun” was one that

15 “The soldaderas screamed, not out of pain, but out of rage. There were no moans coming from the women’s mouths, only insults. They didn’t plead for mercy, instead they threatened an impossible revenge. The most blunt, vile and violent insults were heard coming from those piles of women pressed tightly against each other by the ropes. Sixty mouths cursing at once, sixty hatreds aimed at a single target, sixty imaginations searching for the cruelest, most bitter and searing phrase – a veritable symphony of curses and imprecations…” See: Elena Poniatowska, Las Soldaderas: Women of the Mexican Revolution, trans. David Dorado Romo (El Paso: Cinco Punto Press, 2006), 9-13
Figure 8. Agustin Casasola, Soldadera. Some say her name was Valentina Ramirez, and that she was Pancho Villa’s lover. Sinaloa. c. 1910. Source: Poniatowska, Las Soldaderas (2006), 69

Figure 9. Agustin Casasola, Soldadera. Her name is Herlinda Perry, and is a Maderista revolutionary c. 1911. Source: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/382102349604522724/>

Figure 10. Algerian guerrilla woman, or Moudjahidat. (n.d) Source: <http://forums.fatakat.com/thread5221393>
existed in Latin American revolutionary visuals since the beginning of the twentieth century.

In the 1940s, Mexico City served as a hub for left-wing political dissidents throughout Latin America. Intellectual figures from the region – the likes of Che Guevara, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Adolfo Gilly, as well as members of the Sandinista movement like Ernesto Cardenal – travelled to Mexico to plan their revolutionary activities and find support from other dissidents in the region. It was to Mexico that Fidel’s July 26th Movement relocated after the failed 1953 attack on the Moncada Barracks. It was also in Mexico that Fidel Castro and Che Guevara actually met each other for the first time. David Craven contends that much of the imagery that informed later revolutions in Latin America actually derived from the visual traditions established by artists of the Mexican Revolution, such as Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco. Craven also reminds us of “the vital intellectual role played by Mexico in sanctioning the Cuban Revolution.”

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to map the genealogy of the soldadera of the Mexican Revolution or las Marianas of the Cuban Revolution, but Craven makes a case for the notion that there is a definite road map to be drawn between the imageries of the revolutionary movement unfolding during this period. Both the Cuban Revolution and the Mexican Revolution were central to placing the object of the gun in the hands of the militant woman in the culture of resistance in Latin America. The fact that the “gun” in the hands of the “woman” was a pre-existing aesthetic in the resistance movements of both Europe and Latin America in the early twentieth century lays an important foundation for the emergence of the “militant woman” aesthetic in the revolutionary culture of the 1960s and 1970s.

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Chapter 2: The Symbol of the Female Fighter

Heroic Woman Leading the Comrades to Victory

Moujahidat of the Algerian Independence Movement

The Algerian War of Independence, which unfolded between 1954 and 1962, was one of the first anti-colonial movements that roped in the attention of the international world and provoked deep intellectual thought as to the effect of colonial systems around the globe. It engaged French theorists like Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir with new ideas about the role of the intellectual in the sphere of activism, and both wrote lengthy pieces about the systemic use of torture by the French colonial regime during the war.20 The anti-colonial movement in Algeria also gave new significance to the works of the 1930s Négritude intellectuals, especially Aimé Cesaire, whose writings had long been scathingly critical of French colonialism. Some 1960s philosophers criticized Cesaire for being insufficiently militant, but much of his work on authenticity formed the intellectual basis of later theorists like Frantz Fanon.

With the start of the anti-colonial movement, many women from both urban and rural Algeria joined the ranks of the movement, conducted principally by the umbrella organization the National Liberation Front (Front de Liberation Nationale, here on referred to as the FLN). They participated in both direct combat and by aiding the soldiers as nurses, cooks, or laundresses. Photographs of militant women in FLN uniform and marching with guns in hand became commonplace in resistance-aligned newspapers (figure 10). As Natalya Vince writes:

The figure of the feisty female combatant was a regular feature in El Moudjahid, which included photographs of women in military uniform bearing arms in the maquis. Such images accompanied newspaper reports by sympathetic foreign journalists. This new model of the

“liberated Algerian woman” counteracted racial stereotypes of both the submissive Arab woman and the barbarous Arab man for the political purpose of gaining international sympathy, especially among the left-wing and liberals in Europe and North America.\(^{21}\)

Vince’s statement attests to the fact that images of women in the guerrilla movement were not only documentary, but served a political purpose in the representation of the Algerian Independence movement to the international world. Such images translated the racial politics of the Algerian independence movement through the legible symbol of the militant woman, who served as a visual conduit between the reality and the perception of the anti-colonial movement.

As war intensified under French colonial rule, the guerrilla movement in Algeria increasingly titled itself as the site of women’s liberation. In the main organ of the FLN, *El Moudjahed*, they published multiple articles on the conditions Algerian women were forced to endure under the colonial regime, calling the regime’s affront on women “psychological warfare.” Indeed, rape was often used as a systematic method of interrogation and torture, which Judith Surkis contends was used to produce shame among the Algerian population.\(^{22}\) In the same breath, the FLN postured itself as the challenger of such affronts to women.\(^{23}\)

Indeed, the women who had experienced torture at the hands of the brutal regime soon became the causes célèbres of the international community. Djamila Bouazza, Zora Drif, and Djamila Bouhired, all of them members of the FLN, were arrested in 1957, implicated in different bombings that had occurred that year (figure 11). None of them denied being part of the FLN, but their trials exposed the torture they endured in prison at the hands of the regime.

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\(^{21}\) Natalya Vince, “Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Race, Religion, and ‘Francaises Muasulmanes’ during the Algerian War of Independence,” *French Historical Studies* 33:3 (Summer 2010): 455


Figure 12. Verdict of death sentence announced for Djamila Bouazza and Djamila Bouhired. Resistance Algerienne No. 46, July 1957. Source: Chapitre.com
Bouhired had called the French legal system in Algeria a “parody of justice,” and this critique resounded loudly throughout the globe. All three women became internationally known as the faces of the independence movement and the violence that the French authorities enacted upon the Algerian people. FLN-affiliated organizations in India circulated pamphlets with Bouhired and Bouazza as their subject, imploring the international world to save the “two young girls” and the “two young patriots” who had been sentenced to death row. The revolutionary newspaper *Resistance Algerienne* published the photographs of Bouhired and Bouazza on its front page when it announced the legal verdict that they would be sentenced to death (figure 12). Bouhired, who was now a national and international icon, served as the subject of Youssef Chahine’s 1958 historical film *Djamila the Algerian*. The film was produced in Nasser-era Egypt, a global center for the non-alignment politics of the 1950s, and it attracted worldwide attention for highlighting the brutality of the French colonial regime. Films such as Chahine’s gave the figure of Algeria’s militant women a world-wide exposure, but also served to canonize them in a sort of mythological narrative of heroism. Bouhired’s “character” was also featured in Pontecorvo’s famous 1966 film *The Battle of Algiers* as the militant woman who planted the bombs in the European quarter. Other women like Hassiba Ben Bouali became symbols of heroism through their martyrdom at the 1957 Battle of Algiers.

These female fighters (moujahidat) were themselves somewhat aware of the international eyes upon them. In an interview later in her life, Zohra Drif conceded to the fact that she


tempered her writings based on the audience in which it would circulate: “There was a French fringe group that supported the Algerian struggle and that had asked me to write what I wanted to express for the journal *Temps modernes*...I wanted to present the experience and position of Algerians in this struggle in a journal that held sway over a certain section of the [French] population.” This statement acknowledges that female fighters like Drif were aware of the way their image presented to an audience outside of Algeria, and understood its political potency in affecting attitudes toward the war and public opinion.

Yet, it was the arrest and trial of FLN guerrilla Djamila Boupacha in 1959 that reignited the international fervor surrounding French colonial brutality. Prominent French writers Simone de Beauvoir and Françoise Sagan took up her story not just as an indicator of colonial repression, but as critique that de Gaulle’s policy in Algeria was corrupt by the very fact that it ignored “the screams of a young girl.” To de Beauvoir, this proved that violence under the French colonial regime had indeed become banal (a not-so-veiled reference to Hannah Arendt’s essay of a similar subject). The virginity of Boupacha during her torture played heavily into the accounts. The criticism was manifold: it exposed the violence of the colonial government, but central to this revelation was the fact that they had violated the “purity” of Boupacha. It was this violation of purity that really proved the “banality of violence” in colonial Algeria. Such discourse

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27 “Il y avait une frange française qui soutenait le combat des Algériens, et qui m’avait demandé d’écrire ce que je voulais dire pour la revue *Temps modernes*. Je voulais d’abord faire un témoignage de l’aspect le plus terrible de la prison... ces exécutions de très jeunes patriotes. Deuxièmement, je voulais faire part de l’expérience et des positions des Algériens dans ce combat dans une revue qui avait un impact dans une certaine partie de la population” Interview with Zohra Drif, Algiers, June 11, 2005. Cited from: Natalya Vince, “Transgressing Boundaries: Gender, Race, Religion, and ‘Francaises Musulmanes’ during the Algerian War of Independence,” *French Historical Studies* 33:3 (Summer 2010): 454


Figure 13. Djamila Bouphacha, early 1960s. Source: Le Matin d’Algérie

Figure 14. Pablo Picasso, Sketch of Djamila Bouphacha, 1961. Source: <http://dzactiviste.info/quest-djamila-boupacha-venue/>

Figure 15. (Above). Photograph of Djamila Bouhired (n.d.).
<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/147141112802726204/?from_navigate=true>

Figure 16. (Right). 1961 poster for the Algerian Independence Movement, protesting the “fascism” of the OAS against Algeria. Published by a printing house that called itself “La Guerre” (The War).
surrounding Boupacha’s experience served to mark her as an image of virtue and transcendence, contrasted with and constitutive of the unthinkable brutality of the French colonial regime.

Images of Bouhired, Boupacha, and Bouazza, served to reinforce this aura of transcendence and virtuosity surrounding the public perception of their figures. In this famous photograph of Bouhired (figure 15), she seems as if she is about to float from the frame. She is heroic and ephemeral, all at once. After Boupacha’s widely publicized trial, Spanish artist Pablo Picasso took her up as a subject of a drawing, in which he depicted her with large, expansive eyes and a humble demeanor (figure 14). These women were not only heroic because of their militancy, but also because of their ability to embody the virtuosity and purity of the revolutionary cause.

The transcendent quality of Algeria’s “revolutionary woman” is captured in this 1961 political poster (figure 16). The image shows a young girl suspended above her male comrades, her body elevated to the point that she appears to be blending into the flag of independence. The similarity of the pose of the girl in the poster to Bouhired’s pose in figure 15, which was taken prior to 1961, is uncanny, and speaks to the way images of such female fighters directly informed the aesthetic of the “revolutionary woman” in political posters. The flag in the poster invokes many of the virtues of the 1789 French Revolution, such as “independence” and “intégrité.” Such images reveal the influence of the French Revolution on the Algerian independence movement, and especially the influence of the representation of women in the French Revolution on the gendered imagery of the Algerian liberation movement. The trope of the “woman leading the comrades to victory” — most specifically transmitted through Marianne of the French Revolution, made iconic by Delacroix’s 1830 painting of a similar name (figure 17) — surfaces in the figure of the revolutionary woman in Algerian liberation imagery. The
Figure 17. Eugene Delacroix, *Liberty Leading the People*, 1830. The painting depicts the victory of the July Revolution. Source: Louvre Museum

Figure 18. Cover of “Rebel Woman” by Harry Whittington, which takes place during the Cuban Revolution. 1960. Source: Pyramid Books

Figure 19. Cover of “Guerrilla Girls” by Harry Whittington, which takes place in the Algerian liberation movement. 1961. Source: Pyramid Books
“transcendent” aesthetic of real female fighters like Bouazza, Boupacha, and Bouhired are informed by such tropes as the “goddess Liberty leading to victory.” In the same way, the discourse of purity surrounding their bodies also informs the re-emergence of such tropes.

By the early sixties, the figure of the “militant woman” had become so culturally familiar to the observing globe that she even made appearances in American pulp fiction (a genre that had reached its height of popularity the decade before). Harry Whittington, a prominent pulp writer at the time, crafted adventure thrillers around the guerrilla girls who seemed to appear everywhere. His 1960 lesbian-themed pulp Rebel Woman, written a year after the Cuban revolution, revolved around an American who gets washed ashore in Cuba, to find that his former fiancé has taken a female lover who is a lieutenant in Castro’s military. The next year, in 1961, Whittington wrote a similarly themed pulp – titled Guerrilla Girls – about an Algerian female fighter who was also involved in a lesbian subplot.30 (Keep in mind, this was a year after Boupacha’s case gained international attention). These books were circulated both in the U.S. and in France. The cover art of Rebel Woman showed two female fighters in era-specific guerrilla uniforms – the first woman in the “face forward gun grip,” staring directly at her viewer, and the second woman gazing at the first with palpable desire (figure 18). The cover of Guerrilla Girls similarly showed three militant women, some in uniform and some unclothed, in an Algerian army camp as a masculine-looking woman soldier looks on (figure 19). (Even in the realm of American popular fiction, the militant woman was both a warrior and a love object.) The sexualization of the guerrilla girl in the realm of erotica is a story for another project, but it is fascinating to see the way, at the beginning of the decade, both the Algerian and the Cuban female fighter were tangible enough to a global audience that they seamlessly entered into this American literary

30 Susan Stryker, Queer Pulp: Perverted Passions from the Golden Age of the Paperback (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2001), 66
The female fighter had traversed the lines of political imagery into the world of popular culture. And popular she was.

The World of 1968: Re-Emergence of Marianne and the Soldadera

The sixties and seventies not only experienced the growth of liberation movements, but also saw the height of the antiwar movement in the U.S. and the worldwide protests of 1968. During these periods, solidarity with Vietnam and the rhetoric of global liberation emerged as a uniting rhetoric of protests and movements both in the “Third World” movements as well as the resistance groups in the Europe and the U.S.

Inside of the protests of 1968, both the “soldadera” and “Marianne” materialized explicitly as emblematic of the “revolutionary woman” in the visual sphere of resistance. With the emergence of the Chicano/a and Brown Beret movement in the U.S. in the 1960s, Chicana feminists explicitly adopted the figure of the soldadera as their revolutionary predecessor, as a strategy to center themselves in a discourse of Chicano/a nationalism and Mexican-American memory.31 The aesthetic of the soldadera was integral in forming an iconography of la Nueva Chicana. Women appeared in the protests of 1968 with the militancy of the re-invented soldadera printed on their bodies. In this photograph (figure 20), titled “La Soldadera” and first published in a 1968 Chicana Student Movement newspaper, a Brown Beret woman presents herself in a vest of bullets – the uniform of Zapata’s women soldiers – as she appears in the space of demonstration. The photograph was reproduced in numerous leftist publications in the

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U.S., including *La Raza* magazine, where it appeared as a political poster. In the case of the Chicana/o movement, the early twentieth-century tropes of women’s militancy were directly transmitted through the figures that had generated such aesthetics, like that of the *soldadera*. Other photographs which became emblematic of the Brown Beret “blowouts” (high school walkouts) of 1968 showed Chicana women standing at attention in military-like rows, getting handcuffed by policemen, and raising their fists in protest.

Photographs of protesting women also proliferated in the May 1968 student demonstrations in Paris, throughout which worker’s struggle and antiwar sentiment was a rallying cry. On May 13th, 1968, twenty-three year old Caroline de Bendern – a French model and heiress who ran with in circles with the likes of Salvador Dali, Lou Reed, and Amanda Lear – decided to participate in the student protests that had begun to rock Paris. Tired of walking, her friend – activist/artist Jean-Jacques Lebel – hoisted her onto his shoulders. In exchange, he asked that she wave the flag he had been holding throughout the demonstration, a flag of Vietnam’s National Liberation Front. Photographers quickly surrounded – they recognized the aesthetic and were intent on capturing it. This photograph (figure 21), taken by Jean-Pierre Rey, was published in *Life* Magazine less than two weeks later, with the title “the Marianne of May 1968” (*La Marianne de Mai 68*). The trope of “lady Liberty leading the people” was complete with flag in hand, as her body hovered over the swarms of comrades below. The photograph of de Bendern was reproduced in numerous publications, as representative of the mood and message of May 1968.

Of course, it is obvious that the trope of “Marianne leading the comrades” would be visually significant in the protest movements of France and within its colonial territories like Algeria, as they were both consciously and unconsciously informed by the aesthetic history of the previous French revolutionary movements. (The figure of Marianne was deployed in the French Revolution of 1789, the July Revolution of 1830, as well as in the Marxist-influenced Paris Commune of 1871). However, while the images of de Bendern or of Bouhired were certainly informed by the pre-existing figure of Marianne, the publicization of their images in the 1960s worked to generate new visual codes of resistance for the movements of the era. The 1968 global protests was one of the most prominent moments when a discourse of “international solidarity” converged within the same time frame, even as it transpired in multiple locations around the globe. Mark Kurlansky demonstrates that, even as different types of movements emerged in different nations and cultures, 1968 served to form a united mood of rebellion throughout the globe, mapping the origins and networks of this mood and its expression.34 (There is a reason he calls 1968 “the year that rocked the world.”) The image of de Bendern, as well as those of the female combatants of Algeria, would have circulated and been viewed internationally during this period. These circulating aesthetics worked to code an emerging visual vocabulary of what both “resistance” and “anti-colonial sentiment” looked like at the turn of the decade, imbuing the heroic woman with new meaning in this new era.

*The Militant Woman of 1970s Liberation Struggle*

In the iconographies of the Vietnamese and Palestinian revolutionary movements – both of which incorporated some form of nationalism in their doctrine – the tropes of “guerrilla girl militancy” and the “transcendent woman leading to victory” became nearly

Figure 22. *Vietnam’s Ultimate Triumph,*” published by the NVA. Undated.

Figure 23. Ahmad Hegazi, “*Liberation, Victory, Return.*” 1978. Published by al-Fatah. Source: Palestine Poster Project

Figure 24. Palestinian solidarity poster picturing Leila Khaled, c. 1975. Published by Committee for a Free Palestine in the U.S. Source: Palestine Poster Project

Figure 25. *The Martyr Dalal Mughrabi,* c. 1978. Source: Palestine Poster Project
indistinguishable from each other. In this NVA poster (figure 22), a woman – gun in hand, fist raised in affective protest – leans forward with the words of rebellion stretched upon her mouth. Behind her waves the flag of the movement, the flag that will lead the comrades to victory. The written text on the poster reads “Vietnam’s Ultimate Triumph.”

In this 1978 poster (figure 23), produced by al-Fatah, the militant woman also hovers above the faces of her comrades, as she holds up her gun in one hand and a dove and olive branch in the other. Surrounding her are three ideals of the movement: Liberation (tahrir), Victory (nasr), and Return (‘awdah), which her image is meant to embody. Yet, the inclusion of the dove and olive branch references a very specific visual code of anti-colonialism which was legible to an international audience. In the mid-1970s, the olive branch assumed new meaning in the legibility of the Palestinian liberation movement, when Yasser Arafat displayed both a holster and an olive branch at the 1974 UN General Assembly and stated: “Today I have come bearing an olive branch and a freedom-fighter’s gun. Do not let the olive branch fall from my hand.”35 The rhetoric was theatrical, and the olive branch and gun were stage props to convey Arafat’s message. Yet, both items were also ominous signifiers of the very real prospect of Palestinian uprising. In figure 23, both the olive branch and the freedom fighter’s gun of Arafat’s veiled threat appear in the hands of the heroic woman, whose “leading to liberation” visually translates these multiple symbols through one potent figure.

The Palestinian liberation movement, which was central to rallying solidarity within the Middle East in the 1970s, also generated heroic icons of its own. Palestinian female fighters like Dalal al-Mughrabi and Leila Khaled (who was killed when she attempted to hijack an airplane with Sandinista member Patrick Arguello) were memorialized on both national and international

Figure 26. Solidarity poster with the Palestinian liberation movement, published by the Committed de Soutien Au Peuple Palestinien. Geneva, Switzerland. 1974. Source: Palestine Poster Project Archives
Chapter 2: The Symbol of the Female Fighter

posters as martyrs of the cause. They were usually pictured with some sort of gun depicted in their aesthetic, and often stared directly into the camera lens (figure 24, 25). Just like the gaze of the women in figures 1, 2, and 3, the aesthetic of “direct address” (wherein the subject of the text engages directly with the reader of the text) was still a potent one in creating a relationship between the depicted militant woman and the viewer whom she aimed to mobilize. Photographs of non-descript female fighters also abounded on the solidarity posters in the leftist organizations of Europe and the U.S. (figure 26). The circulation of the “Palestinian female fighter” in the political posters of international leftist organizations (the rhetoric of which rested upon global solidarity and in which pro-Palestinian sentiment was a rallying cry) served to synonymize the “female fighter” with the struggle of liberation; but even more so, it made her an incredibly legible symbol in the international arena – one that indicated global resistance just by virtue of her being a woman and her holding a gun.

Conclusion

This chapter has traced the ways the militant woman of the sixties and seventies was heavily informed by the visual codes of women’s militancy in earlier twentieth century revolutions. At the same time, she also invoked the tropes that have long governed the picturing of women in national and revolutionary iconography, specifically the “heroic woman leading the comrades to victory.” Through her figure, she made legible revolutionary symbols like the guerrilla’s gun, the olive branch, and the flag of revolution, while also embodying the ideals of “purity” and “virtuosity” in the heroic cause of the liberation struggle.

Through figures like Djamila Bouhired, Djamila Boupacha, and Leila Khaled, the plight of the liberation movements drew international attention, and served to valorize the heroism of its fighters and its martyrs. As we will see in Chapter 4, these figures would play crucially into
Chapter 2: The Symbol of the Female Fighter

the framing of women’s militancy in the Iranian Revolution, and the visual codes generated through the women of this era would inform the aesthetic of Iran’s revolutionary woman.
PART TWO

IRAN AND REVOLUTION
Where did it happen, I asked? Which country? Ah, said Tridib. That's the trick. It happened everywhere, wherever you wish it.

CHAPTER THREE
How 1979 Came to Look The Way It Did:
*The Transnational History Of Iran’s Revolutionary Movement*

The clenched fist thrust itself into the Iranian Revolution with a fury.

More than any other symbol, it was plastered onto posters, pamphlets, and photographs. Demonstrators in the streets needed only to see a camera before they threw their fists up and shook it at the lens.

With the first rumblings of revolution in 1978, the fist was the first gesture on which everyone in the country could agree irrevocably signified revolution. Some of the very first images of demonstrators in the street showed them with fists held high and mouths stretched back with the slogans of revolution. A crowd raising their fists served as the backdrop of numerous posters and murals. Often, the fist was depicted as a stand-alone symbol, detached from the body that had raised it. As a gesture, its meaning was indisputable: everyone knew it meant a rage-against-the-oppressor version of revolution (figure 1). In this intimate photograph, even Ayatollah Khomeini lifted his fist in the spirit of revolution (figure 2).

![Image of demonstrators with fists](image-url)

*Figure 1. Demonstrations in front of Tehran University. December 11, 1978. Source: BBC News*
Why, in the earliest stages of the revolution, did protestors in the street universally enact this pose? Why, with a coy grin upon his mouth, did Khomeini raise his fist to the camera lens, as if trying to send us a secret message?

Why, across the nation, did the fist look like revolution?

Scholars of the Iranian Revolution have noted other visual elements that indeed did look like revolution in Iran: the passion plays (ta’ziyeh) of Hussein’s martyrdom at Karbala and the Ashura processions during the month of Muharram all served to allegorize revolution within a recognizable Shi’i framework of martyrdom and uprising. Many argue that it was these Shi’i aesthetics that mobilized the Iranian populace to enact revolution in the streets.¹ But the fist was not a Shi’i symbol, so why was it so powerful?

Chapter 3: The Transnationalism of Iran’s Revolutionary Aesthetics

There is an evident disjuncture: if we look at the imagery of Iranian Revolution as the historiography tells us to look at it – solely through the embedded roots of cultural Shi’ism – we would not be able to understand symbols such as the fist that proliferated in the streets of uprising. To truly understand how 1979 came to look the way it did, we need to investigate an additional lineage of revolution that would account for this gap in the historical narrative.

This chapter argues that the visual landscape of 1979 in fact owes its roots to the transnational aesthetics of the era of liberation movements in the 1960s and 1970s. It demonstrates that the Iranian revolutionary movement – in terms of its geography, ideology, and aesthetics – belongs to the traditions of this era.

To trace this transnational lineage, this chapter draws a map of the Iranian revolutionary movement in the 1960s and 1970s. It sketches a geographic outline of revolutionary activity that Iranian dissidents underwent, examining the kinds of direct contact that the Iranian Revolution had with other liberation movements at the time.

The ultimate goal of this chapter, however, is to trace a lineage of the visual dimensions of the Iranian Revolution, to understand from where Iran drew its symbols, and how it was incorporated into the iconography of the anti-Shah opposition.

It is no doubt that the utilization of Shi’i symbols was monumental in both the visual imagery and the mobilization of the Iranian Revolution. Yet, this chapter proposes that the roots of Iran’s transnational lineage extends so deeply that by the time of revolution, the aesthetics that have been traditionally recognized as “Shi’i” images were in fact indistinguishable from the visual codes of the era of global uprising.
The Geographic Transnationalism of Iran’s Revolutionary Movement

A Network of Guerrilla Internationalism in the 1960s

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 had significant consequences for the global conception of revolution. The overthrow of dictator Batista and Cuba’s successful transition to socialism had shown guerrilla movements around the world that socialist revolution was possible. And Cuba remained committed to their duty toward the promises of that internationalism.

The 1960s were a time of political uncertainty and consolidation for Cuba. A communist revolution had taken place across the Atlantic Ocean, and the Soviet Union could not simply pull Cuba into their global bloc, and roll their tanks in to keep them there (as they had done in 1956 Hungary and would repeat again in the future). Fidel had certain decisions to make that could have lasting implications for Cuban autonomy: With whom was Cuba to ally?

Cuba had become increasingly disillusioned with the Soviet Union’s policy toward liberation movements around the world. Fidel Castro and Che Guevara had long been proponents of armed struggle to achieve their revolutionary ends, whereas the Kremlin preferred to work discreetly through the already established Communist parties in each country. Cuba believed that the Soviet Union had failed to adequately confront American aggression in North Vietnam, and felt compelled to create “several Vietnams” to counter U.S. imperialism in the Third World.2

Turning its attention to the liberation movements in the Middle East and Africa, Cuba established a connection with al-Fatah at the 1965 Afro-Asian Conference in Algiers, and cohorts from the Palestinian Liberation Organization attended the 1966 Tricontinental Conference in Havana that January.3 With both committed to creating a common political

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strategy to combat colonialism and imperialism, a partnership between the two organizations had been born.

By the late 1960s, guerrilla groups in Colombia and Venezuela had accused Cuba of selling out to the Kremlin (Castro had announced in 1968 that it would serve as a partner with the Soviets), condemning Castro of having “betrayed proletarian internationalism” on the Latin American front.4

In the midst of increasing isolation within its own region, Cuba sent its first military instructors to Palestinian military bases in Jordan in 1968, where they would train liberation fighters from the various factions of the PLO, including the PFLP and al-Fatah.5 As we will see, these training camps would serve as spaces of extensive transnational contact between the Iranian revolutionary movement and the liberation movements around the globe.

In September 1970, a civil war broke out between the Palestinian fedayeen and the Hashemite monarchy in Jordan in September 1970 after a failed coup led by Yasser Arafat and the PLO. What became known as Black September effectively expelled the Palestinian liberation fighters from Jordan, and the PLO-Cuba training camps went with them. By 1970, most had relocated to Lebanon, where the 1969 Cairo Agreement between Yassir Arafat and Lebanese army commander Emile Bustani had allowed Palestinian guerrillas to establish training camps in southeast Lebanon, and effectively guaranteed Palestinian fighters security within Lebanon’s borders.6

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5 Domingo Amuchastegui, “Cuba in the Middle East: A Brief Chronology,” U.S. State Department (July 1999); http://www.state.gov/p/wha/ci/cu/14745.htm
Palestinian guerrillas were not the only militants training in these camps. In 1969, the first contingent of Sandinista guerrillas arrived in Lebanon, to also receive training at the Cuba-PLO camps. Many of the Sandinistas who arrived in Lebanon would be the same ones to foment the revolution in Nicaragua ten years later and serve in the government of the post-revolutionary state, including Pedro Arauz Palacios, Eduardo Contreras, and Tomas Broge, the present Nicaraguan Minister of the Interior and one of the nine commandantes of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) National Directorate. The next year, after a meeting between FSLN official Benito Escobar and three PLO representatives in Mexico City, roughly fifty to seventy additional FSLN guerrillas were sent to train at PLO-Cuban training camps in Lebanon, Algeria, and Libya. Rene Vivas, Henry Ruiz, and Enrique Schmidt were among the Sandinistas trained by the PLO within the decade. One former Israeli intelligence officer estimated that throughout the 1970s, at least one hundred and fifty Sandinista guerrillas were trained at the PLO camps in Lebanon alone.

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8 Hoffman, “The PLO and Israel in Central America” (1988): 4
The Sandinistas also maintained a presence within Palestine itself, fighting with the PFLP and George Habash, whose global revolutionary aim appealed greatly to the Sandinistas. FSLN member Patrick Arguello, who was one of the Sandinistas trained in the PLO camps near Jordan between April and June 1970, notoriously participated in the September 1970 hijacking of an Israeli El-Al flight with PFLP guerrilla Leila Khaled.10

Iranian Guerrillas in the Training Camps: Fedaiyan-e Khalq

Sandinistas were not the only guerrilla members attracted by the PFLP. In 1968, the first Iranian militants arrived in the Palestinian territories, with a plan to acquire guerrilla training and then return to Iran to foment revolution against the monarchy.

10 Jon B. Perdue, The War of All the People: The Nexus of Latin American Radicalism and Middle Eastern Terrorism, (Dulles: Potomac Books, 2012), 49
The 1960s in Iran had been a time of renewed crackdown on political dissidents. The Shah established a secret police in 1957, and by the next decade SAVAK, as it was called, had acquired a reputation for brutal torture in order to maintain acquiescence under the regime. The increasing repression of the political climate served to radicalize many politicized Iranians. By the latter half of the decade, certain urban intellectual circles arrived at the conclusion that the only way to achieve political transformation was through the methods of armed struggle.

One of the most prominent of these urban intellectual circles was the Jazani group, initiated in 1964 by five students of Tehran University – Abbas Sourki, Ali Akbar Safa’i Farahani, Muhammad Ashtiyani, Hamid Ashraf, and their leader Bijan Jazani. In January of 1968, a SAVAK raid on the Jazani group dispersed the circle: Hamid Ashraf managed to flee and remain underground, Safa’i Farahani and Mohammad Saffari Ashtiyani escaped and crossed the border into Iraq, and the rest of the group was arrested or captured within the coming weeks. Although they encountered some obstacles in Iraq (arrested by SAVAK affiliates at the border but serendipitously released soon after when the July 17th Ba’athist coup thrust the country into political transformation), Farahani and Ashtiyani made it to Palestine by the end of 1968.

For the next two years, they would train in the PLO-Cuban camps in Jordan and fight with the PFLP in the Palestinian liberation movement, with whom the Sandinistas were also fighting. Safayi Farahani would later command a post in Habash’s organization under the alias Abu Abbas Ramas.

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11 The official name of SAVAK was the Organization of Intelligence and National Security (Sazman-e Ettela’at va Amniyat-e Keshvar).
At the end of 1970, having spent two years fighting with the PFLP, the two returned to Iran and rejoined Hamid Ashraf, who had been recruiting political dissident from underground for two years. The remainder of the Jazani group then joined forces with the circle of Massoud Ahmadzadeh and Amir Parviz Pouyan, another clandestine political group in Tehran. In 1970, both Ahmadzadeh and Pouyan had published manifestos on the necessity of guerrilla warfare in Iran, and were prepared to begin planning an attack on the regime. With the merging of the two circles – which were now both committed to armed struggle – Iran’s first guerrilla organization was formed, and called the Organization of Iranian People’s Feda’i Guerrillas (Sazman-e Cherikha-yi Feda’i Khalq-e Iran; from here on referred to as the Fedaiyan-e Khalq or the OIPFG). The following February of 1971, the group staged the first armed insurrection against the monarchy at a gendarmerie post in the Caspian city of Siahkal. Although the attack was a tactical failure, it served to make the Iranian populace aware of the fact that there was a budding resistance movement within Iran. Widely referred to as Siahkal, or Bahman 19 [8 February 1971] (the date of the attack), the confrontation between the OIPFG and the regime marked the beginning of the guerrilla movement within Iran.

Iranians in the Training Camps: Mojahedin-e Khalq and the Liberation Movement of Iran

In the mid-1960s, a group of left-leaning university students split from the pro-Mossadeqist Islamic-socialist organization the Liberation Movement of Iran (Nahzat-e Azad-e Iran, from here on referred to as the LMI). Influenced in general by the problem of landless peasant in the aftermath of the Shah’s land reforms and by the rural uprising in Kurdistan in 1967, these students believed that the only way to confront the regime was through tactics of
Chapter 3: The Transnationalism of Iran’s Revolutionary Aesthetics

They called themselves the People’s Mojahedin of Iran (Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq Iran, from here on referred to as the Mojahedin-e Khalq, or the MKO).

In the early months of 1970, the leadership of the Mojahedin-e Khalq reached out to al-Fatah in Qatar, and al-Fatah agreed to provide military and technical assistance. In July 1970, the first official cohort of Iranian militants arrived in Jordan to be trained in the PLO-Cuban military camps. (Farahani and Ashtiyani had joined the PFLP in their efforts to flee SAVAK authorities; this cohort of militants was the first to be formally sent to the training camps). The delegation was funded by money collected by the LMI.

Among the delegation to be sent to the camps in Jordan was Massoud Rajavi, the future leader of the Islamic branch of the Mojahedin-e Khalq, as well as Reza Rezai, Ali Bakeri, Abdol-Rasul Meshkinfam, Torab Haqshenas, Mohammad Bazargani, and Ali-Asghar Badizadegan.

After Black September, which expelled the PLO guerrillas from Jordan, Rajavi and his comrades relocated to the Lebanon camps. Over the course of the next decade, roughly thirty Mojahedin members would train in the PLO camps, alongside Cuban instructors and Sandinista guerrillas.

By the beginning of 1971, the majority of Mojahedin guerrillas had returned from their training in the Palestinian camps with the intent to begin guerrilla activity in Iran. In support of the attack on Siahkal in February, the Mojahedin aimed to conduct an attack for that August, but were discovered by SAVAK before they could carry out their plans. Dozens of Mojahedin members were arrested and put on mass trials in February of 1972. At the trials, Mojahedin members did not hold back in declaring the factors that had catalyzed them to take up arms against the regime. Said Mohsen, one of the initial founders of the organization, stated resolutely

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15 Abrahamian, The Iranian Mojahedin (1989), 127
16 ibid., 127
before the tribunal: “We advocate armed struggle because we have examined carefully both the revolutionary experiences of other countries… What is more, the revolutionary experiences of Vietnam, Cuba, Algeria, and the Palestinians have shown us the new road… We have two choices: victory or martyrdom.” Both Massoud Rajavi and Ali Mihandust reiterated the impact that the revolutionary movements in both the Middle East and in Latin America had on their decision to undertake armed struggle.18

In 1971, the same year that Massoud Rajavi and other Mojahedin members would return to Iran, LMI-founder Mostafa Chamran arrived in Lebanon. Chamran had been part of the more radical wing of the LMI, along with Ebrahim Yazdi, Sadeq Qotbzadeh, and Ali Shariati. He had

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17 Abrahamian, *The Iranian Mojahedin* (1989), 134
18 ibid., 134-135
trained in Cuba in the early 1960s, worked with al-Fatah in Cairo between 1964 and 1966 to establish an anti-Shah organization in the country, and in 1971 moved to Lebanon to head a school founded by Musa Sadr, whom he had known from their time together at university.\textsuperscript{19} Working closely with the Lebanese Shi’i resistance movement \textit{Amal}, Chamran witnessed the establishment of a Shi’i training camp in southern Lebanon by al-Fatah instructors, at which he claimed “hundreds of Iranians” were also trained.\textsuperscript{20} Other revolutionaries like Jalaleddin Farsi and radical cleric Mohammad Montazeri would settle in Lebanon and train in these same camps supervised by Chamran.\textsuperscript{21} Amid rumors of strained ties between Ayatollah Khomeini and \textit{Amal}, Ahmad Khomeini (his son) would visit this camp in 1977, where Amal staged a publicity campaign to diffuse the rumors, taking several pictures of Khomeini and Chamran together holding guerrilla machine guns (in the “face forward gun grip”), and training with the Cuban instructors, PLO guerrillas, and other Amal members (figures 5, 6, 7).\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{19} Sepehr Zabih, “Aspects of Terrorism in Iran,” \textit{The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science} 463 (September 1982): 90
\textsuperscript{21} Chehabi, “The Anti-Shah Opposition in Lebanon” (2006), 190-194
\textsuperscript{22} ibid., 196
One Mojahedin member Mohsen Nejathoseini, who was imprisoned in Lebanon for attempting to smuggle weapons to Iran in the early 1970s, explained the importance of these bases in Lebanon:

Lebanon was, because of the relative freedoms it afforded, the most appropriate country for semi-clandestine activity in the Middle East, and so we chose Lebanon to be the centre of our international contacts and communications. Many of our initial contacts with militant and revolutionary organizations in other countries took place in Lebanon. Moreover, our comrades and sympathizers in Iran always came to Lebanon if they wanted to get in touch with the external organization. 23

Nejathoseini identified the training camps in Lebanon as the epicenter of the Mojahedin’s “international contact and communication.” He describes the camps as a space of strategic exchange and transnational contact. If there were one place that the Iranian guerrilla faction would have come into direct contact with the liberation movements of the era, it was in Lebanon.

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As Nejathoseini attested, the training camps in Lebanon and Jordan served as unique sites of revolutionary transference, one of the few places where Iranian militants had real exposure to members of other liberation movements, specifically Cuba, Nicaragua (Sandinistas), Lebanon (Amal), where they discussed ideology and practiced combat alongside each other. Leftists, Islamic Marxists, and Islamists alike all circulated through these camps at some point or another. Iranian militants also had experience fighting within the Palestinian liberation movements, where they also came in contact with other guerrilla movements, specifically the Nicaraguan Sandinistas. In the years leading up to the 1979 Iranian revolution, the geography of the opposition was truly transnational in essence.

The Intellectual Transnationalism of Iran’s Revolutionary Movement

However, politicized Iranians needed not to leave Iran to be influenced by the larger culture of internationalism and Third Worldist liberation of the time period.

One of the central questions plaguing Iranian intellectuals during the 1960s and 1970 was the question of cultural authenticity. As we will explore further in the next chapter, the charge that the Pahlavi monarchy had plunged Iran into a state of cultural decline through their upholding of “Western” styles was central to the political discontents of the period. In their desire to return to rebuke the cultural artificiality that had pervaded society, Iranian writers looked to Third Worldist intellectuals as models for the stand against imperialism that they sought in their own society. As Negin Nabavi writes:

Considering the successful examples of the Algerian and Cuban revolutions and the moral dilemma that Vietnam had created for the United States, the perception of the Third World was that of a revolutionary world, and Iranian intellectuals wanted to be a part of this movement… By
taking the side of the third world fighting imperialism, they could gain an authenticity that had been denied them until then.\textsuperscript{24}

It was in this context that the writings of Jean Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, and Aimee Cesaire (to name a few) assumed a new significance in the intellectual discourses of the period. Sartre’s concept of the “engagement” and “commitment” of the intellectual provided a model for revolutionary activism even within the limits of discourse.\textsuperscript{25}

Additionally, some of the most prominent Iranian theorists of the period had in been directly exposed to the contemporary liberation movements. Ali Shariati, an Iranian philosopher who many describe as the ideological father of the Iranian Revolution, studied at the Sorbonne in Paris in 1959, where he was deeply influenced by the Algerian Revolution. There, he translated Jean Paul Sartre’s \textit{What Is Poetry?}, Che Guevara’s \textit{Guerrilla Warfare}, and Fanon’s \textit{Wretched of the Earth}, which were all widely disseminated among Iranian university students and dissidents in the 1970s. Shariati also published articles in the official organ of the Algerian FLN, \textit{El Moujahed}, and read the radical Catholic journal \textit{Espirit}, which published a number of left-wing thinkers like Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, to which his mentor Louis Massignon introduced him.\textsuperscript{26}

Mostafa Sho‘iyan, a highly prolific Iranian intellectual who one scholar calls the “maverick theorist of the Iranian Revolution”, also preferred Che Guevara’s ideological credo to Soviet ideologues like Lenin. Sho‘iyan praised Guevara’s theory of “enduring revolution” (\textit{engelab-e dirpat}) over what he calls Lenin’s “theory of uprising” (\textit{te’ori-ye khizesh}), which he claimed fails Third World revolutions and undermines the “rebellious essence” of armed

\textsuperscript{24} Negin Nabavi, \textit{Intellectuals and the State in Iran: Politics, Discourse, and the Dilemma of Authenticity} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 83-84
\textsuperscript{25} Negin Nabavi, \textit{Intellectuals and the State in Iran: Politics, Discourse, and the Dilemma of Authenticity} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 71
\textsuperscript{26} Abrahamian, \textit{The Iranian Mojahedin} (1989), 106-108
uprisings among exploited peoples around the world. He described Guevara as the “international guerrilla of the proletariat”, and was deeply affected by Guevara’s February 1965 speech in Algeria, which acknowledged that the Soviet Union acted in as exploitative a manner to Third World countries as capitalist countries.

With an oppositional discourse that had been profoundly shaped by the “Third Worldism” of the period, it was nearly impossible to escape the writings of such revolutionary theorists as Fanon and Cesaire by the 1970s. Many of the left-leaning clandestine groups during this period were far more influenced by the intellectual works coming out of Latin America than from the Soviet tradition of Marxism. Almost every clandestine student group and intellectual circle within Iran had read the works of Che Guevara and Regis Debray, who had both advocated armed struggle, in the rural and urban settings respectively. Both Guevara and Debray were formative in the decision of the Fedaiyan-e Khalq to take up guerrilla warfare by the end of the 1960s. The Pouyan-Ahmadzadeh faction of the Fedaiyan paid close attention to the activities of the Tupamaros in Uruguay. The Group for Communist Unity (GCU) in Iran had also translated Carlos Marighella’s 

Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla, which

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28 ibid., 53-54
Ahmadzadeh had read and lauded.30 All of these works circulated among student groups, opposition members, and in the streets of the revolution (figure 36).

These texts were more than just “political reading” – they were the objects around which dissidence was formed and understood. In her research on the experience of the Iranian Revolution as it was unfolding, Naghmeh Sohrabi observes the way the mere possession of these texts was considered to be a form of revolutionary activity in and of itself. She recounts: “When I asked one interviewee who self-identified as a Marxist-Leninist with Maoist leanings what it meant to be *siyasi* or be political in the late 1960s, he said it meant to read illegal books and discuss them.”31 To read Lenin and Guevara was not just to acquaint oneself with revolutionary history – it was to perform the revolution in a current reality.

The various guerrilla groups also published a variety of pamphlets highlighting the armed struggle of the era and revolutions of history, urging young guerrillas and Iranian youth to follow in the footsteps of their revolutionary predecessors. One pamphlet by the *Mojahedin-e Khalq* called “Total Resistance” (*Moqavemat-e hameh janebeh*) sketched a history of armed resistance movements, from the Spanish Civil War and the Russian Revolution of 1917 to the more recent Vietnamese, Algerian, and Cuban revolutions.32 They also published a pamphlet of Palestinian revolutionary songs called *Sorudha-ye engelabi-ye Felestini*. Members of the left also sang Latin American protest music, like Salvador Allende’s campaign song *Venceremos* (We Shall Triumph), which had been sung in the late 1960s in support of Allende and had become so popular in the period leading up to the coup that many considered it the unofficial anthem of

30 ibid., 158
Chile. In her prison memoirs, Ashraf Dehqani recalls stories about Cuban guerrilla Camilo Cienfuegos (one of Castro’s top commanders) as a technique to survive tortures and solitary confinement during her time in prison. The culture of revolution and solidarity in the Iran had undoubtedly been produced through the transnationalism of the era, and Iranian opposition members also placed themselves within such traditions of resistance and uprising.

The Aesthetic Transnationalism of the Iranian Revolution

It is in this context of transnational revolution that we turn to the visual codes of Iranian revolutionary culture.

The art community in Iran had been deeply shaped by the broader anti-colonial aesthetic of revolution emerging internationally at this time, and these contemporary artists produced the majority of revolutionary posters and murals in the streets of Iran. Many of these artists had studied in the Saqqakhaneh school of art in Iran during the 1960s, which had been highly influenced by revolutionary art from the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and above all Mexico. As one painter who produced political art in the revolution stated regarding the founders of Mexican muralism: “We knew them better than Picasso.” Known as hunar-i mardumi, a collective/democratic art in the social-realist style, most of the foundational imageries of the revolution (posters, murals, and graffiti art) had been produced by the artists of the Saqqakhaneh school, and influenced by their influences, namely the revolutionary art of the twentieth

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33 Ashraf Dehqani, Torture and Resistance in Iran (New Delhi: The Iran Committee, 1978), 72-74
34 Dehqani, Torture and Resistance in Iran (1978), 79
35 Talinn Grigor, Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 32-33
36 Cited from Grigor, Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 33
century. The *mardumi* aesthetic would later be adapted by the Islamic Republic as one of the official artistic styles of postrevolutionary propaganda and art.

Morteza Momayez, the artist behind some of the most famous poster art associated with the imagery of 1978-79, in fact studied art production in Paris, and had been present for the Paris student movement and the protests of May 1968, where he was influenced by the poster-production of the activist/artists in the l’Atelier Populaire. Additionally, Momayez’s own work travelled outside of the borders of Iran throughout the 1960s and 1970s, appearing in magazines and journals in Germany, Japan, Poland, London, and the U.S. In 1978, Momayez, along with artist Arpik Baghdasarian, Ara group of Iranian artists opened a workshop on poster production at the University of Tehran, where they exhibited their own political art and taught attendees how to produce their own revolutionary imagery. The workshop and exhibition drew in roughly five thousands Iranian viewers per day. Such spaces as Momayez’s 1978 workshop served to translate many of the era’s aesthetics of revolution into the iconography of 1979.

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38 Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art: From the Street to the Studio* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 33
Many posters produced through the guerrilla organizations utilized the “raised gun” pose that had become famous as an affective gesture of victory in armed struggle. This pose was often replicated to commemorate the attack at Siahkal on Bahman 19. The “raised gun” pose was often used in singular reference to the attack at Siahkal and the guerrilla movement, because of its meaning as a pose that referenced the specificity of sixties- and seventies-era guerrilla warfare. This poster, published by the Fedayin-e Khalq to commemorate Siahkal (figure 9), copied directly from a poster produced by Marc Rudin for the PFLP, which he published in Beirut, Lebanon in 1976 (figure 10). Such direct visual transferences demonstrate the way the exposure

![Figure 9. Fedayin-e Khalq poster celebrating the eighth anniversary of the Siahkal uprising, 1979. The poster may have been produced in Germany. Source: Hamid Dabashi](image1)

![Figure 10. PFLP poster, 1976. “Glory and immortality to the martyrs and fighters of Tel Azaatar.” Artist: Marc Rudin. Source: Palestine Poster Project](image2)
of the Iranian revolution to the other liberation movements of the era, both physically and intellectually, directly impacted the incorporation of symbols in Iranian political aesthetics. The raised gun aesthetic was also the focal point of the insignias of the *Mojahedin* and the *Fedaiyan*, replete with the hammer and sickle of Communist imagery.

Figure 11. Revolutionaries guard the National Radio and TV Building with carnations in the muzzle, February 1979. Source: Maryam Zandi
When the revolution was declared victorious on February 11th, 1979, one of the first objectives that revolutionaries carried out was taking control of the National Radio and Television Building in order to have direct access to the Iranian public in the broadcasting of information. Outside of the building, revolutionaries stood guard with guns in hand. Yet, the presentation of the gun was quite notable, for the militants had placed carnations in the muzzle as they stood guard outside the building (figure 11). The symbolic effect of the 1974 Carnations Revolution was palpable. The symbolism of carnations in the muzzles of rifles was multifold. First, it plainly reference to a visual code that had been borne out of anti-imperial struggle, and reproduced that code in the streets of 1979. But, perhaps more significantly, the carnation had served the purpose of turning the gun into a kind of “stage prop” – an object that was important for its theatric significance, but was meant to prevent the gun from being used for violent ends.
Indeed, the proliferation of “guns” in Iranian imagery did just that – it served a symbolic purpose, but were infrequently used for actual battle. In this Mojahedin poster (figure 12), published to celebrated the organization’s “founding fathers”, a rifle appears to grow out of the ground, and a carnation growing out of its muzzle (figure ). Such posters served to define the aesthetic of the “carnation in the gun” as one that was representative of the Iranian revolution. It turned the carnation-in-the-gun from a reference of other movements to an indicator of the revolution in Iran itself.

The V-for-victory sign, which had swept the protests of 1968 and quickly spread to the Palestinian liberation movement, was also an enormously popular hand gesture in the later days of the revolution. The V-sign was used chiefly as a message of internationalism – as if to say to the viewer “Look, we are doing revolution here, too.”

Figure 13. Students prepare to set fire to a bank in Tehran in October 1978. Published in November 1978 issue of Resistance Magazine, organ of the ISA in the U.S. Source: IISH, Berelian Collection, Box 24

Figure 14. Crowd holding up V-for-victory signs around a toppled statue of Mohammad Reza Shah, 1980. Artist: Abbas Attar. Source: University of Chicago Library, Middle Eastern Posters Collection, Box 2 Poster 20
It was both a signal of impending triumph and revolutionary glee as well as a gesture of affective solidarity and an anti-imperial message. In these photographs, Iranian street protestors invoke the sign when they had toppled a monument of the Pahlavi regime (figure 14), set fire to a national bank (figure 13), or were headed to a rally celebrating the departure of the Shah from the country (figure 15). They consistently assumed the pose once they had become aware that they were being photographed, as if aware of the international eyes upon them.

The clenched fist quickly became an icon in and of itself. This May Day poster published by the Cherika-ye Fedayi-e Khalq shows a singular floating fist (in the 1960s tradition of representations of fists), back-grounded by the cog of a machine out of which an oil factory emerges (figure 16). Representations of the oil industry in revolutionary iconography served to link the Marxist opposition groups in Iran, who quite often referred to themselves as the “vanguards of the proletariat”, with the oil workers for whom they claimed to fight. The nation-
wide strike of the oil workers in November of 1978, which effectively crippled the Shah’s regime, solidified industrial workers as a vital component of the revolutionary struggle, beyond their obvious rhetorical appeal to the Marxist-inspired group.

This poster also reveals a second notable mutation of the “clenched fist” icon. In this version, the fist clutches tightly to a bouquet of tulips, where it had once clenched the hammer and sickle, the guerrilla’s gun, and the carnation. Tulips had long been associated with martyrdom and heroism in Persian literary culture. A number of verses in Ferdowsi’s Shahnameh, the most famous of Persian epic poems which recounted the mythical and historic
past of the Persian empire, repeatedly compared the color of tulips with the color of blood.\textsuperscript{40} The red tulips of blood, death, and love came to signify the martyrdom within Shi’i culture, sanctified by the mythic memory of Husayn’s martyrdom at the battle of Karbala, and ritualized through the passion plays (\textit{ta’ziyeh}) during Ashura in which Husayn’s martyrdom was performed on stage to a captive audience. In this image, the symbols of revolutionary Shi’ism are constituted \textit{through} the aesthetics of international revolution. Such posters showed the ways even historically Shi’i tropes became indistinguishable from the transnational visual codes of revolution.

\textbf{Figure 17. Shahada, outlined by raised fists, c. 1980. Source: University of Chicago Library, Middle Eastern Posters Collection, Box 4 Poster 188}

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The poster “Silhouette of Crowd with Shahada” very much encapsulates this mergence of Shi’i expressions with the aesthetic of international revolution (figure 17). Because of their political ambiguity, such “Islamic” expressions acquired a specific revolutionary currency that was to a degree devoid of religious identification, able to unite Iranian dissidents based on their mere ability to be uttered in the face of the monarchy. One scholar notes how during the military curfew in the cities, Iranians could not protest outside of their homes, so they went up to their rooftops at a set time of night and shout sayings like Allah-u Akbar (God is Great) in protest of the Pahlavi monarchy, which, because it wasn’t explicitly revolutionary language, could pass in the face of authorities.41 In this poster, the Shahada itself (la illaha ila Allah) is outlined by a crowd of raised fists, and the red/black color code mirrors that of Cuba’s July 26th Movement (figure 49), and had also been adopted as the revolutionary flag of the FSLN in Nicaragua (figure 50). The internationalist influence of the Cuban 26 of July color code, of the clenched fists of 1960s/70s era revolution, is undeniable in this presentation of the Shahada.42

41 Minoo Moallem, Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister (University of California Press, 2005), 90
42 Red and black was also Ali Shariati’s color code of revolution, who called his brand of revolutionary Islam “Red Shi’ism”, the religion of martyrdom, transformed from the “black Shi’ism” of the clerical establishment, the religion of mourning. It also spoke to the color coded framing of dissidence by the...
By 1980, the newly founded Islamic Republic was increasingly conscious of what constituted “authentic” forms of revolutionary art. The image-making machine of the post-revolutionary state, a highly funded ministry called the Art Bureau of Islamic Propagation Organization that employed contemporary Iranian artists (many of whom were from the *Saqqakhaneh* era) for the specific purpose of making revolutionary art for the Islamic Republic, drew heavily from what had become the visual language of the Iranian revolution, an indistinguishable immersion of transnational aesthetic and Shi’i imageries. Mural art was considered the most authentic medium of the revolution, and the postrevolutionary state drew from these imageries which had been produced through the *Saqqakhaneh* school and through the visual traditions of the anti-colonial twentieth century movements.43

The poster production of the early 1980s showed the way the state effectively co-opted the imageries of workers struggle, and postured Islam as the new “vanguard of the proletariat” in its official discourse. This poster, produced by the Party of the Islamic Republic (*Hizb-i Jumhur-i Islami*), is a nearly identical reproduction of the background of the “fist and red flowers” poster by the *Fedayin-e Khalq* which we saw earlier, depicting the clenched fist of revolution and the flower of 1960s antiwar activism and anti-colonial symbology, backdropped by the smokestacks of Iran’s oil factories (figure 20). This May Day poster of the Party of the Islamic Republic Pahlavi monarchy in the 1960s, when Mohammad Reza Shah had labeled the landowning clerics of the ulama (who had objected to his land reforms) “black reactionaries”, and the leftist dissidents “red subversives.” Ali Shariati, “Red Shi’ism versus Black Shi’ism,” *The Union of Islamic Associations of Iranian Students in Europe* (1972)

43 Talinn Grigor writes on the incorporation of workers rhetoric in the post-revolutionary state: “Contrary to common belief, the clerical leadership embraced the lower classes in their revolutionary rhetoric and formulated a discourse on the downtrodden and the oppressed after the establishment of the Islamic Republic. Residual Marxist components of the Iranian revolution as revolution (*enqelab*) and republic (*jomhuri*) were subsequently kept in a state of flux, moving between subordination and rejuvenation depending on who gained key positions in the leadership.” In Grigor, *Contemporary Iranian Art* (2014), 42
similarly displays the cog of an industrial machine, a smoke stack, backgrounded by a crowd of workers raising their fists in revolution (figure 21). Other posters claim the imagery of the oil workers, with quotes like: “Islam is the only supporter of the worker.” May Day, the fist and flower, and the plight of the oil worker had been arrogated and incorporated into the symbolisms of the Islamic Republic. In their production of imagery, the co-option by the Islamic Republic of the language and imagery that was traditionally “Marxist-Leninist” or “Third Worldist” worked to diminish the symbolic power of the left-leaning opposition.

Figure 20. Commemoration of International Workers’ Day. “Worker: May your arm gain strength in the service of God and the people.” 1980s. Publisher: Party of the Islamic Republic. Source: University of Chicago, Middle Eastern Poster Collection

Figure 21. Commemoration of International Workers Day, 1970s-1980s. “There is no God but God.” Publisher: Party of the Islamic Republic. Source: University of Chicago, Middle Eastern Poster Collection
Conclusion

This chapter works to establish a lineage of Iranian revolutionary history that emerged from the era-specific vocabulary of “Third Worldist” resistance and revolution. It does so by tracing transnational networks of revolution, such as the Cuba-initiated training camps or experience fighting in the Palestinian liberation movement, in order to outline the kind of physical exposure that members of the Iranian opposition had to other movements of the era. It also traces the movement of ideas in and out of Iran in the creation of the Iranian intellectual, the works of whom – as we will see in the following chapter – were integral in constructing the political discourses of discontent in the decades leading up to 1979. Lastly, it maps the movement of images and symbols within the visual culture of the Iranian revolution, and explores the way expressions of protest and revolution in Iran were channeled through the vocabulary of resistance outlined in Chapter 1.

Yet, you may have noticed that there is one symbol that is missing from this chapter – a symbol that, as we saw in the previous chapter, was central to the vocabulary of revolution during this era. Where are the women?
I am in this thing / Well, they say a body remembers it

CHAPTER FOUR

“This Girl’s Whole Being Is Dedicated to Their Organization”¹
The Construction of Iran’s Revolutionary Woman, 1936-1979

On the evening of February 9th, 1979, a group of air force technicians and cadets rose up in mutiny at a military base in Tehran’s Jaleh Square.² The name of the base was Eshrat Abad, and it held a large stockpile of the monarchy’s weaponry. When the Imperial Guard attempted to suppress the uprising, various guerrilla organizations arrived to aid the mutinous cadets in combat. By early the next morning, February 10th, the opposition had overtaken the military base, and the Imperial Guard was forced to withdraw. Revolutionaries confiscated the cache of weapons and ammunitions from the garrison and set up street barricades around the area. One onlooking French journalist described the barricaded Jaleh Square as a kind of “Paris Commune.”³

Now in possession of a mass of weaponry, the guerrillas headed to Tehran University, where they joined protesting students in assaulting police stations and other arms factories.⁴ Throughout the day, they issued guns and ammunition to the protesting Iranian populace. As one Iranian newspaper observed: “Guns were distributed to thousands of people, from ten-year-old children to seventy-year-old pensioners.”⁵

¹ Ashraf Dehqani reports one of her torturers, Javan, to have said this about her.
² After the revolution, the square was renamed Shohada Square (Martyr’s Square). This was also where the Black Friday massacre of September 1978 took place.
⁴ Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions (1982), 528
⁵ Kayhan (11 February 1979); cited from Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions (1982), 528
The attack on the Eshrat Abad garrison had given the opposition a decisive upper hand. For many, the events of the week signified the inevitable success of the revolution.  

Outside of the garrison on that day was a woman named Mandana, a student at Tehran’s Melli University. Mandana had worn denim jeans and a baggy jacket to the streets, beneath her bob-length hair. She had not participated in the attack but had demonstrated along with other students against the Shah. A friend of Mandana’s recognized her at the garrison, and handed her a machine gun. The two made their way to the front of Tehran University, where revolutionaries were selling pamphlets of oppositional texts on the sidewalk.

At the gates of the university, a man approached Mandana. He wanted to take her photograph – atop the tank. Flanked by two male anti-Shah protestors, Mandana climbed the tank and posed. She raised her left arm to the sky and threw up V-for-victory fingers. In her right arm, she clutched the weapon tight against her body. Before that day, Mandana had never held a gun in her hands.  

She might not have known this, but the man who asked to take her picture was Mehdi Sahabi, a prominent author and translator who worked at the newspaper Kayhan, one of the

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6 Such attacks included the overtaking of radio and television stations, and assaults on the Shah’s notorious prisons. Many accounts from that day described the freed prisoners being carried on the shoulders of protestors to the demonstrations.

7 Mandana’s story is featured in a book by former SAVAK agent Amir Hossein Fetanat who claimed to know Mandana and her husband. All of my information on Mandana’s whereabouts on the day of the Eshrat Abad attack comes from Fetanat’s book. He states that, to his knowledge, Mandana had never before held a gun, although there is no way to verify that claim. For the purposes of this story, I take portions of his narrative at face value, although I am still critical of his reliability as a narrator of her story. Amir Hossein Fetanat, “The Jean D’Arc of the Iranian Revolution,” A Poorly Timed Cup of Tea: The Footsteps of a Revolution; The Confessions of Amir Hossein Fetanat (Ketab Corporation, 2014), 120-122; See also: <http://www.amirfetanat.com/blog/archives/185>
mostly widely read newspapers in the country. At the time, Kayhan had a circulation of more than one million papers, and was published in both London and Iran. 

Four days later, Mandana’s photograph appeared on the front page of Kayhan (figure 1). The caption read: “Machine guns and victory are the anthem of the people.” The brief paragraph below the image also described the photograph: “The two fingers, like the seven, rises – the signs of victory… Their hands raised in victory sign – gun in hand, and the other holding faith.” The front page did not mention Mandana’s name, nor did it reference her image specifically. But it did repeatedly reference what was in her hands: her V-for-Victory fingers and her gun.

Mandana quickly became an icon of the revolution’s victory. Her image was printed onto pamphlets and published in Fedaiyan newspapers. Yet, in these versions, the photograph in its original form was cropped, so that only Mandana’s figure remained (figure 2). In some reproductions, the heads of the men beside her would appear as if they floated below her (figure 3). Her body hovered above them, as if she were leading them to the victory that her fingers symbolized. It was not the machine gun nor the victory fingers, but Mandana’s entire image that seemed to be “the anthem” of the revolution.

The story of Mandana – how she came to be pictured, and what that picture came to mean – offers us several points of inquiry into the representation of women in the Iranian Revolution.

First, how Mandana came to appear in the picture is worthy of questioning. What was it about Mandana that prompted Mehdi Sahabi to ask if he could photograph her? Was it her appearance: her uniform of loose clothing and short hair? Was it her apparent militancy, her gun? Why did Sahabi frame her so prominently in the center of the image? Next to Mandana, the male

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9 Author’s translation, from: Kayhan, No. 10368, Bahman 25, 1357 [February 25, 1979]
Figure 1. Mandana’s photographs appears on the front page of Kayhan, 15 February 1979. Source: Maryam Zandi, The Revolution of Iran 79 Photographs (2014), 175
Figure 2. Kar. 1980. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 24

Figure 3. Mandana’s photograph reproduced in a 2010 article in BBC Persian about women in the Fedaiyan-e Khalq. Source: BBC Persian <http://www.bbc.com/persian/iran/2011/02/110204_113_siahkal_nahid_qajar.shtml>
comrades appear lackluster. Once atop the tank, how did Mandana know to pose as she did, as if she herself were a famed female fighter of the militant opposition?

Second, how Mandana’s image came to be used is also curious. Why did Kayhan print Mandana’s picture on its cover page on February 25th, even though it had no corresponding stories about the attack on Eshrat Abad? Dozens of revolutionary photographs appeared on the front pages of Kayhan and other newspapers during the time of the revolution’s victory. Why was it Mandana’s image that was taken and reproduced by other organizations and publications? And perhaps the most peculiar: why was Mandana cropped to appear as the only figure in the picture, hovering above the elusive head of the man below her?

Perhaps the answers to all of these questions seem obvious. Even if we are not conscious of it, this thesis reminds us of the way we are familiar with the “heroic woman leading the comrades to victory,” serving as a trope of nationalisms and revolutions. Yet, I do not take the significance of Mandana’s image for granted. To do so would be to deny her historical specificity, her lengthy lineage, and her immense importance in the scheme of Iranian revolutionary discourse and iconography.

The present chapter argues that there is a history to Mandana’s photograph: a history to her presence, a history to her pose, and a history to its subsequent political utilities.

Images of women had been central to political contestations since the beginning of the Pahlavi reign. The modernization program of Reza Shah hinged largely on the refashioning of women to appear “modern”; the unveiling of their bodies was central to his project. Women’s bodies remained at the center of social and cultural negotiations under the monarchy, and Mohammad Reza Shah often drew upon a rhetoric of “women’s emancipation” for his own political projects. Intellectuals of the era often evidenced the maladies of Iranian society through
the immodest West-stricken (gharbzadeh) woman that the regime had produced. To counter the regime’s dominance, women had to counter its control over their bodies, and that meant a return to modesty and the indigenous mores that existed before the imperialism of the Pahlavis, so the theorists suggested.

The presence of women in the guerrilla movement provided a counter to the corrupted womanhood of the monarchy. In their clothes, appearance, and behavior, they embodied the antithesis of the gharbzadeh woman, that is the “West-struck” woman who represented the toxins of the Pahlavi state. They were not to wear makeup, nor were they to fix up their hair or eyebrows, and they certainly were not to wear clothing that revealed their bodies. Additionally, the martyrdom of female fighters served to remind the populace of the monarchy’s brutality, and the direness of the political situation.

The heroism of female guerrillas in the revolutionary legends also provided women with a model of the ideal “revolutionary woman”. The personae of these female fighters fit into a lineage that extended far beyond Iran. As we have seen, the discourses and imageries of the contemporary liberation movements hinged largely upon the figure of the female fighter. The Iranian who had watched the liberation movements unfold across the globe could similarly imagine the guerrilla women in Iran within a set of other heroic women who could be found in other revolutions around the world.

By 1978, revolutionary imagery yielded pictures of women that were distinctly militant, fist raised in protest or strapped with a gun. This aesthetic hadn’t come from within Iran, for before 1978, the only pictorial depictions of guerrilla women – to my knowledge – had been their martyrdom portraits (hajleh shahid). If we reframe the revolutionary movement in Iran within the tradition of the era of liberation movements, it is clear that the visual construction of
the Iranian Revolutionary Woman was informed by the era-specific image of the “militant woman”, a transnational figure that would have been familiar to any politicized Iranian. Thus, women’s bodies entered the iconography of the Iranian Revolution through the historic centrality of women in revolutionary politics, but the militancy of the “Revolutionary Woman” was visually legible because of the familiarity of Iranians with the ubiquitous “militant woman” of the era.

**Women’s Bodies and Pahlavi Modernization**

*Reza Shah and State Centralization*

The political significance of women’s images has a long history in the discourses and contentions of Pahlavi Iran. From the start of Reza Shah’s assumption of power in the early 1920s, his central mission had been to fashion a modernized Iran. Within the first years of his reign, Reza Shah promoted European-style education institutions, and industrialization within the cities. Inspired by Ataturk’s reformations in Turkey, Reza Shah had set out to create a uniform body politic with a “modern” appearance. His emphasis on appearance was not because he longed to mimic European style, but rather to replace the “backward traditionalism” of the Iranian country with the modern citizen-soldier. Still, “modernizing” meant following the codes set by the arbiters of the “modern,” and in his attempts to homogenize the body politic, Reza Shah imposed a Europeanized dress code upon Iranian men. It had become stringently enforced

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10 In 1921, Reza Khan (his then-title) staged a coup against the pro-British Qajar government, but it was not until 1925 that he was named the monarch of Iran.

11 Najmabadi writes of Reza Shah’s dress code laws: For Reza Shah the army was a model for the construction of a nation-state. His ideal was to create a nation of disciplined, obedient, efficient citizens…This vision of the army-as-model implied a strong drive towards the creation of uniformities. The dress code for civilians (men and women) was just one aspect. So was the abolition of traditional aristocratic titles and the requirement for registering under a surname. The imposition of the dress code has often been simply regarded as the emulation of European gear. But for
in 1928, and the brutality with which Reza Shah enforced these codes distinguished him from Ataturk. Reza Shah insisted on obedience in his program of uniformity and centralization.\(^{12}\)

Reza Shah’s 1936 decree mandating the unveiling of women reinforced the notion that the newly centralized state had a monopoly on the bodies of its citizens, and also linked the regime’s brutality to the way it treated Iranian women. Reza Shah’s police enforced the decree with a rigor, chasing down veiled women in public and tearing off their veils.\(^{13}\) Some women who refused to be seen unveiled did not leave the house for years to come, until the nullification of the law with the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941. Authorities were instructed to arrest anyone protesting the decree, especially clerics. Exposed women, however, also ran the risk of street harassment by men who had not yet trained their eyes to see unveiled women as anything but sexual.\(^{14}\) To alleviate the concerns produced by unveiling, a new type of body cover was enacted: that of the *hejab-i ‘iffat*, a metaphorical veil of chastity.\(^ {15}\) It was understood that unveiled women in the public sphere would discipline themselves, their bodies, by containing

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\(^{12}\) Reza Shah’s dress code mandated European garb, such as the frock coat, and the “Pahlavi cap”, modeled after the French *kepi*. The Pahlavi cap was the most contentious matter of the sartorial imposition, since its brim prevented devout Muslims from touching their forehead to the ground during prayers.\(^ {12}\) The policy thus forged a distinct rift between the monarchy and the clerical establishment (*ulema*). See: Ali M. Ansari, *Modern Iran: The Pahlavis and After* (London & New York: Routledge, 2\(^{nd}\) ed., 2007), 59

\(^{13}\) Afsaneh Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches* (2005), 152


\(^{15}\) Najmabadi, *Women with Mustaches* (2005), 152
their own sexuality and limiting their “public-ness”. With women’s unveiling came a new demand for women’s self-disciplining of their own bodies.

Women and men for decades to come would remember the forced unveiling of 1936 as a traumatic moment in their lives, and the event left a larger, unforgettable mark on the psyche of the Iranian nation. The events of 1936 made clear that the newly centralized state had a monopoly on the bodies of its citizens, and linked the modernization program of Reza Shah with the corruption of Iranian womanhood.16

Forced unveiling also marked clothing as a point of political contestation under the monarchy. Minoo Moallem writes: “Fashion became an important site of both gender and national identification… The signs of modernization were written on the body, as dress became the focal point of such identification.”17 These new forms of identifying markers were departures from old social hierarchies based in wealth, land ownership, and family name.18 Aesthetic came forth as an indicator of both hierarchy and transformation. Garb and uniform now served as the barometer of positive political progress and change. Clothing became a transcript to map political departures and contestations.

Gharbzadegi: Illness and Cure

In the 1960s, revolutionary intellectuals drew upon concerns over the condition of women’s bodies and the nature of their appearance to frame a discourse of morality that postured the Pahlavi state as corrupt by stripping women of their modesty. Jalal Al-e Ahmad’s seminal

16 The notion that the body was at the center of the modernized state was central to Pahlavi allegories of nationalism. The Pahlavi regime’s national anthem was “Cho iran nabashad tan-e man mabad” meaning, “Without Iran, my body would not exist.” See: Moallem, Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister (2005), 59
17 Moallem, Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister (2005), 65
18 ibid., 65
text *Gharbzadegi* (West-struckness), published in 1962, identified the Iranian nation as a body which had been “struck” by the plague of the West. The West (*gharb*) was a disease which had been transmitted through the Pahlavi monarchy by its complicity in imperialism. Images of disease and illness proliferated in the writings and political critiques of the period. Al-e Ahmad and his intellectual contemporaries viewed themselves as social physicians, who diagnosed the body politic and also offered its prescriptive solution. The “disease” of the Iranian citizenry was very literally manifest upon their bodies. In the opening line of the text, Al-e Ahmad asserted: “I speak of *gharbzadegi* as of tuberculosis… It is something more on the order of being attacked by tongue worm. Have you ever seen how wheat rots? From within… I am speaking of a disease; an accident from without, spreading in an environment rendered susceptible to it. Let us seek a diagnosis for this complaint and its cause – and if possible, its cure.”

The text offered the Iranian populace a concrete image to represent the plague of the regime upon Iranian society: the *gharbzadeh* (West-struck) woman, created by Reza Shah and intensified by his son. The *gharbzadeh* woman was often described as a bourgeois housewife whose only interest was in painting her face and for the sexual interest of men. Intellectuals of the era interrogated women’s appearance to an excessive degree, with fashion and cosmetics bearing the brunt of intellectual ire. While Mohammad Reza Shah had laid claim to Women’s

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19 The concept of *gharbzadegi* had been taken from Iranian intellectual Ahmad Fardid, who had coined the term in the 1940s. It was Al-e Ahmad’s publication, however, that was adopted as the “manifesto” of Iranian dissidence. Dabashi notes that the centrality of the text was evident by the fact that in the 1960s and 70s, entrance into political cliques in Iran often relied on one’s ability to recite passages of Al-e Ahmad verbatim. See: Hamid Dabashi, *Theology of Discontent: The Ideological Foundations of the Islamic Revolution in Iran* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1993), 76


21 Al-e Ahmad, trans. R. Campbell, *Occidentosis* (1984), 26

Emancipation as a cornerstone of his reform programs, Jalal Al-e Ahmad argued that the only “liberation” Iranian women had received was “the right to parade themselves in public.” The *mini jupe* (miniskirt) became a symbol of everything that was wrong with Pahlavi “progress”: women could wear less clothing, but they still did not have the right to divorce or the right to serve as judges or in government offices. The cure would be found through a remedy of women’s bodies – by addressing the “disease from within,” that is the cultural imperialism that was manifest in their appearances. If women stopped painting their bodies for the sexual desire of men and pushed back against their West-struckness, if they donned the *hejab-i ’iffat* once more (as they should be expected to) and began to dress modestly, they would diminish Pahlavi power over Iranian society and the toxins of “the West” that the Pahlavis had allowed to pervade quotidian life within Iran. The argument was one of culture, not of religion: women had to return to an indigenous, traditional mores (not an Islamic one) in order to reverse Iran’s cultural decline.

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24 The amendment of the Family Protection law in 1975 would give women the right to divorce under the Pahlavi state.

25 On the revolutionary significance of “cultural authenticity” in Iranian political discourse, Negin Nabavi writes:

“Culture” came to be a relatively loaded word. Not only did the propagation of Western culture enable the colonizer to continue to exert influence in a subtle and invisible manner, but the latter’s denial of the native culture was thought to have allowed him to instill a sense of inferiority in the native and thus render him submissive. This was the new face of imperialism, which, as far as the Iranian intellectuals were concerned, had to be countered... It was thus in the atmosphere of third-world rhetoric [of anti-imperialism] that the theme of *gharbzadegi* or Westoxication became radicalized. The affliction Al-e Ahmad had detected in the Iranian society was now interpreted quite bluntly as an imposition from the outside, a deliberate attempt on the part of the colonizer to control the colonized.

The sense that women’s modesty would alleviate the ills of society was echoed by other prominent theorists of the time. In his 1971 speech *Fatima is Fatima*, which offers Shi’i figure Fatimah as a model for Iranian women, Ali Shariati laments that women have been put to work to fill every empty moment of the life of society. Art quickly joins the market so that they can meet the orders of the capitalists and the bourgeoisie… Women are presented only as creatures who are sexy and, other than this, nothing. In other words, woman is used as a one-dimensional creature. She is places in advertisements and used as propaganda for creating new values, new feelings and drawing attention to new consumer products… Now she has taken the form of an instrument employed for serving social and economic purposes.26 To Shariati, the *gharbzadeh* woman who made herself sexy to please the capitalists and the bourgeoisie acted as an instrument of the regime in its attempts to alter Iranian society for the worst. He lambasted the Pahlavi attitude toward women’s liberation, in which a Woman will be freed, not by books or knowledge or the formation of a culture or clear-sighted vision or by raising the standard of living or by common sense or by a new level of vision of the world, but rather with a pair of scissors. Yes. Putting scissors to the modest dress! This is how they think that women will all at once become enlightened!

Like Al-e Ahmad, Shariati deplores the Pahlavi version of “women’s emancipation” in which the only change seemed to be the lessening of women’s clothing, or as Shariati puts it, “putting scissors to the modest dress.” To both theorists, the cultural failures of the era could be plainly seen upon women’s appearances.

*A Dangerous “Progress”: Corrupt Femininity within Pahlavi Modernization*

“The shah is a moral pervert in the widest sense of the word.”27 – Ashraf Dehqani

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26 Ali Shariati, *Fatima is Fatima* (originally published in 1971; English translation through the Iran Chamber Society, Part 2), 11

27 Dehqani, *Torture and Resistance in Iran* (1978), 104
Al-e Ahmad’s charge that Pahlavi governance had corrupted Iranian women resonated deeply in the gendered images of the monarchy during the era. The rumors that circulated within Iran claimed that Ashraf Pahlavi (figure 4), the Shah’s twin sister, was sexually depraved, that she had sex with innumerable men, so many that she could not keep count. Even more egregious, she murdered the men who refused to succumb to her advances, sometimes out of jealousy, sometimes out of rage, with no regard to who was killed in her wake.28 Many believed she was a gambler and drug smuggler. One fedaiyan guerrilla remarked that she was a “traitor and filthy tart… Everyone in Persia knows that [Ashraf Pahlavi] leads a crime and drug smugglers syndicate.”29 Whereas the accusations against the Shah’s wife Queen Farah had always been economic in nature – Farah adorned herself with diamonds while the urban migrants starved – the charges against Ashraf Pahlavi were almost always sexual when referencing her corruption.

The idea of the regime’s “corrupt femininity” also served as a foil to the “failed masculinity” that was associated with the Pahlavi state. Among the Iranian population, circulating rumors claimed that during the twins’ youth, their father Reza Shah surmised there had been a mix-up of genders in the womb – that it was Ashraf who was meant to be born a boy, and Mohammad Reza to be born a girl.30 The public gossip of the era also implicated the whole of the Pahlavi court in charges of effeminacy, and also worse – enjoying homosexual penetration (kuni).31 The charge against the Westernized elite of the Pahlavi court was not that they had

30 The Rise and Fall of the Pahlavi Dynasty, trans. Dareini (1999), 116-117
31 In her book on transsexuality and in contemporary Iran, Najmabadi examines closely the cultural work that images of non-heteronormative men generated during this time period. See: Afsaneh Najmabadi, Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2014)
reverted to practices of Western sexuality, but rather that they had become kuni, that is, recipients of anal sex.\(^{32}\) Prime Minister Amir ‘Abbas Hoveyda was often the target of such rumors, with articles in publications like Kayhan questioning his secretive whereabouts. The humor of this gossip often ended in a punchline about his predilection for young men.\(^{33}\) Public figures and entertainers like Faridun Farrukhzad – a poet, singer, and actor who was associated with the cultural decadence of 1960s Iran – was also the subject of many such jokes and speculations.\(^{34}\) The linking of the Pahlavi state with a predilection for homosexual penetration served not only to reinforce anxieties over the emasculation of the Iranian body politic, but perhaps also allegorized a type of “penetration” that the Iranian state was subject to in the face of Western imperialism. The meanings generated by the failed masculinity of the Pahlavi state operated on multiple levels, and served to reinforce the association between Iran’s West-struckness and the state’s pollution of Iranian bodies. Westoxication not only thrust Iran into a condition of inauthenticity and decline, but also threatened to turn the entire citizenry into kuni, a nation of penetratees.

In the midst of the effeminate weaknesses of the state, Ashraf Pahlavi’s monstrous womanhood had emerged as a result – to the peril of all. Many Iranians attributed the events of

\(^{32}\) The charge that “Westernized men” enjoyed homosexual penetration is rooted deeply in the cultural transformations of modern Iran. In the nineteenth century, men who sported shaved beards in imitation of Western style were often associated with the beardless adolescent male, the \(amrad\), a figure who embodied homoerotic love in pre-twentieth century configurations of desire. Beardless men at the turn of the twentieth century were thus at risk of being perceived as mimicking young male love objects (\(amradnuma\)), appearing not only deviant but also as a penetratee, as the \(amrad\) appearance was accepted only in the transitional state before achieving manhood. By the 1920s, with the heterosexualization of desire and the erasure of the \(amrad\) from configurations of sexuality, the beardless Westernized man ran the risk of appearing as a woman. The figure of the “Westernized man” (\(farangi ma’ab\)) came to signify a feminized ambiguity that colored the fragility of transition into Iranian modernity. See: Afsaneh Najmabadi, Women With Mustaches and Men Without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005)

\(^{33}\) Najmabadi, Professing Selves: Transsexuality and Same-Sex Desire in Contemporary Iran (2014), 138-139

\(^{34}\) ibid., 141-144
1953 – the repression of the nationalist movement and the removal of Mossadeq – to Ashraf’s urging. She was thought to have been the one to assemble a team of ministers to suppress the Mossadeqist coup. Ashraf Pahlavi was the reason the regime was still in power, so many believed. Some concluded that Mohammad Reza Shah would have abdicated from the throne (or been removed by the British because of his ineptitude and indecision) had his sister not intervened. The same person who was thought to have sustained the regime’s autocratic power was also considered to be the epitome of sexual depravity. The link between the two was unavoidable.

The evidence of the state’s corruptive/corrupted womanhood could be seen throughout the capital, Tehran. The most famous manifestation of this was Tehran’s Red Light District. The 1960s and 1970s had seen massive urban migration from the countryside to the cities due to the Shah’s land redistribution programs of 1963. The White Revolution, as it was called, was intended to diminish the power of the landed elites and create a political support base among the peasantry. In reality, however, a large portion of the rural population never received land (or not enough to sustain themselves), generating landlessness in a large segment of the rural population. In the aftermath of the White Revolution, landless villagers flooded the streets of


36 The logic behind the White Revolution was such that the Shah would pre-empt any revolution from below by “black reactionaries and red subversives” if he could successfully carry out a revolution from above through his top-down program of reforms. In reality, however, the White Revolution set the stage for many of the discontent that mobilized the Iranian populace in 1979. For an analysis of the ideological basis of the White Revolution, see: Ali M. Ansari, “The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, ‘Modernization,’ and the Consolidation of Power,” Middle Eastern Studies 37:3 (July 2001): 1-24

Figure 4. Portrait of Ashraf Pahlavi, the twin sister of Mohammad Reza Shah, undated. Source: Wikimedia Commons

Figure 5. Kaveh Golestan. Portrait of a woman who lived inside “The Citadel” at Shahr-e No, the Red Light district of Tehran. 1977. Source: Kaveh Golestan Website

Figure 6. Abbas Attar. Revolutionaries pass around the burnt body of a prostitute, immediately after the burning of Tehran’s Red Light District in Shahr-e No. January 1979. Source: Magnum Photos
Tehran. Some settled in shantytown slums on the outskirts of the city. Most migrant men got by on temporary jobs such as construction workers, peddlers, or hawkers.

Yet, an ever-growing number of women turned to prostitution to provide for themselves and their children. In attempts to bring the burgeoning prostitution under state control, the government relocated the city’s prostitutes within a walled citadel called Shahr-e No in the southern part of Tehran, regulated by various state agencies including the police department. The commerce of sex was not the only thing that abounded within the citadel; heroine, syphilis, and violence were rampant. The majority of men who frequented Shahr-e No were also rural laborers working in the city, who would then return to their homes in the shantytowns and spread venereal disease to their wives.

Thus, “the citadel,” and the perverse female bodies within it, came to embody the abjection that accompanied Iranian modernization and Pahlavi “progress”. To most, Shahr-e No encouraged the unrestrained sexual deviance that was associated with the Pahlavi state. It reflected the debauched morals that the intellectuals of the era were keen to point out, and induced a corrupted/corruptive womanhood at an exponential rate. With the physical threat of venereal disease accompanying the social threat of moral disease, this version of “modernity” was at the expense of the entire citizenry. The Shah’s White Revolution had not only uprooted Iranian women from their homes, but also turned them into bodies of sexual degradation and imprisoned them in the ghetto of the state’s capital. In this sense, Shahr-e No served as a reminder of the state’s monopoly on the bodies of women, dislocating them and depraving them at its will, so it appeared to those discontented with the monarchy.

38 In 1966, the Women’s Organization of Iran (WOI), which was headed by Ashraf Pahlavi and chaired by upper-class women, began production on a film depicting the women in Shahr-e No. Almost immediately, the film was banned by the government, even as shooting was still happening. A fellow historian pointed out to me that it was notable that the film got banned for showing images of poor
In fact, one of the most iconic images of the 1979 revolution was that of Iranian demonstrators passing around the body of a burnt prostitute in the street (figure 6). In the weeks leading up to the revolution’s victory, revolutionaries set fire to the citadel, burning alive most who were trapped inside. The burning of Shahr-e No signified the eradication of the Shah’s decadence and sexual depravity. Yet, it represented more than a stand against social “toxins.” The destruction of Shahr-e No burnt into oblivion the abject bodies of Pahlavi modernity. In the famous photograph, revolutionaries hold up the burnt body of a prostitute woman like they might hold up a poster of Khomeini: they crowd around it, raising it high, as if the body itself were an image of revolution.

Women in the Guerrilla Forces

The Anti-Gharbzadeh Dress Code: Reconciling Women’s Presence in the Left

The inauguration of the guerrilla movement in the late 1960s reframed what resistance to the monarchy was to look like. “Resistance” no longer existed merely in the writings of Iranian theorists like Shariati and Al-e Ahmad. Influenced by the revolutionary texts of Che Guevara and Frantz Fanon, a new generation of intellectuals advocated for armed struggle against the regime.

It was not just men who participated in these new dissident circles. Mohammad Reza Shah’s education reforms had increased women’s literacy and enrollment in universities. Between 1959 and 1971, the literacy of women over seven years old increased from 8% to 26%, and between 1960 and 1975, women’s enrollment in secondary education grew from 7% to women, as if highlighting poverty was a form of state critique. In the first years of the Islamic Republic, the government allowed the filmmaker to finish her project – as if images of prostitution during the pre-revolutionary era were politically cogent in consolidating the legitimacy of the postrevolutionary state. See the footage here: Qaleh – Women’s Quarter (1966-1980), Directed by Kamran Shirdel (Tehran: 1966-1980, Ministry of Culture and Art), <https://archive.org/details/Qaleh-WomensQuarter1966-1980>
48%. By 1978, women made up roughly 30% of student enrollment at universities. The developments in women’s social standing and education meant that women were similarly politicized by the circulation of oppositional writings. Their increasing enrollment in Iranian universities meant that, just like men in the universities, they were also radicalized by the leftist politics of the urban intellectual circles and professional centers.

Women’s participation in leftist politics, however, demanded that they heed the codes already written for how an “anti-Pahlavi woman” was to present. Women were expected to be militant but modest, to be committed to the cause but not to distract from their male comrades. Since theorists of the time had lambasted the West-struckness of Iranian women, the leftist woman had to be the antithesis of Al-e Ahmad’s _gharbzadeh_ woman. They were not to wear makeup. They were to wear modest, baggy (_goshad_) clothing to obscure their figures (and the unrestrained sex that their bodies implied). One activist explained: “You’ve got to think of Iranian culture at that time. Shah had imposed a culture on people, and everyone was always talking about _mini jupe_ [miniskirts].” Women in dissident circles understood that they were to counter the Pahlavi championed “woman-doll” (_zan-i ‘arusaki_) as a point of their resistance, and that meant obscuring their bodies and shying away from any sexuality it might suggest. Leftist women often wore oversized t-shirts or jackets and jeans. There began to emerge a kind of

41 Ervand Abrahamian, _Iran Between Two Revolutions_ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 480-81
physical presentation that indicated what a militant woman was to look like, a uniform of sorts, one that served as a foil to the appearance of corruptive Pahlavi womanhood.

The supposed egalitarianism of the Left demanded that women be allowed to participate in the political organizations; yet the apprehension surrounding women’s bodies was only amplified by their proximity to their male comrades within the revolutionary organizations. These ideas about sexuality were specifically gendered: men’s presence was inherently non-sexual; they could only be affected by the fundamental sexuality that emanated from the presence and appearances of women. Iranian Marxist intellectuals very evidently incorporated this gendered notion of sexuality into their writings. One pamphlet by the Confederation of Iranian Students, a left-leaning organization of Iranian students that had chapters in European and U.S. universities, derided the advocacy of sexual freedom as a “bourgeois deviation.”43 Bijan Jazani himself castigated “promiscuous” intellectuals who were sexually loose and used “foul language,” and characterizing them with “impudence,” he charged them with engaging in the tradition of the lumpen proletariat (the “lower orders” of society who are deemed uninterested in revolutionary advancement).44 Many revolutionary participants recount this type of discomfort at the mixture of women and men in the revolutionary setting. Samira, who was nineteen when she became politically active, recalled:

When I became politically active we had mixed meeting in our organization. I did not feel comfortable. Lots of traditional thoughts were still there. Even if they were talking about equal rights, tradition was still intact. I was brought up with that culture. It was true that we had meetings and discussed different matters, but that was very difficult, even for the boys. I remember that when there was a meeting and I was alone with a boy we both felt uncomfortable.

I think that boys were even more uncomfortable. In the mountains I did not talk to everybody. It was difficult, I had lots of limitations, and for myself I did not feel comfortable.\textsuperscript{45}

Samira specifically repeats the unavoidable “traditional thoughts” that emerged among both women and men during dissident discussions. Such traditionalism, she regards, imposed on her a variety of limitations, which prevented her from fully engaging in revolutionary activism the way she had hoped. The notion of “discomfort” is a recurring theme in her statement, permeating her memory of co-ed political activity more than two decades after the moment. Another teenage girl who was active in political groups during the revolution echoes this sentiment: “Despite all my boyish talk, I was and still am a very traditional woman. Up until recently, it felt as if I had some chains on my feet. When other women talked about their sexual urges, I thought they were shallow and impatient.”\textsuperscript{46} Thus, the disciplining of women’s bodies through their garb (baggy clothing) and behavior (expected not to be “loose”) marked leftist women not only as the anti-Pahlavi woman, but also to mitigate concerns over women’s presence in the groups. The baggy clothing of women was simultaneously thought to be anti-bourgeois even as it reinforced traditional notions of modesty, necessary to alleviate the anxieties over sexual contact within the political organizations.

To combat the sexual apprehensions that their bodies apparently portended, women in the militant left often distanced themselves from the category of “womanhood” altogether. As Nasrabadi writes:

\begin{quote}
Gender sameness, as an ideology of women’s liberation, rested upon the idea that by transcending gender difference and abandoning the degraded category of the “feminine,” women could also transcend gender-based oppression… By adjusting their aesthetic choices and bodily
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{45} Halleh Ghorashi, “From Marxist Organizations to Feminism: Iranian Women’s Experiences of Revolution and Exile,” \textit{Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies} 6 (Winter 2003): 95
comportment, Iranian women activists believed they could increase the likelihood of the movement’s success, helping to forge unity between men and women.47 By “de-gendering” themselves, they could effectively fight alongside their male counterparts without presenting any of the threats that they, as gender-differentiated women, had posed. In his study of women in dissident groups before the revolution, Shahidian called this de-sexed revolutionary woman a “leftist prototype.”48 An anecdote of two sisters, interviewed in Shahidian’s study, whose parents were generally progressive and had always supported their political activity, keenly demonstrates this vision of gender transcendence. The sisters had asked to participate in a mountain-climbing trip with their organization for three days, which their father emphatically opposed:

We had our mother’s implicit agreement at the beginning, but our father was very much against it. Because we were going to be away for a few days. “You don't know what these boys are up to,” he said. We pleaded with him that they are all our comrades; we are not men and women, we are revolutionaries...49

In this anecdote, the two sisters reject the binary categories of “men and women” in favor of the unifying term “revolutionaries”, a category that allowed for their inclusion by implicitly nullifying the concerns over their woman-ness. These sisters opt for the discursive strategy of “gender-sameness” to allow them to navigate the boundaries of the home and the revolutionary space, in order to mollify their father’s apprehension about their exposure in public among men. This testimony demonstrates that a central factor informing how a “leftist woman” was to exist was the keen awareness of how she presented her body and her self in relation to the category of “womanhood.”

Chapter 4: Iran’s Revolutionary Woman

The Famed Female Fighters of the Militant Opposition

The presence of women in the guerrilla organizations, however, also spawned new images to frame women’s significance in the Iranian revolutionary movement. Militant women often became known to the public through their martyrdom, for their images often appeared solely through the publication of their martyrdom portraits (hajleh shahid) in pamphlets and on oppositional texts. The face of Mehrnoosh Ebrahimi, the first woman to be martyred in the guerrilla movement in October 1971, was printed on the back cover of the 1975 edition of Amir Parviz Pouyan’s *The Necessity of Armed Struggle*, one of the most widely read guerrilla texts in Iran (figure 7). It advertised the fact that “women have increasingly joined the revolutionary struggle,” and emphasized Ebrahimi’s heroism and self-sacrifice. Portraits of other martyred women like Marzieh Ahmadi Oskouei (killed in armed confrontation in 1974) and Shirin Mo’azed Fazilatkalam (tortured to death in 1975) were printed beside the martyred faces of *fedayi* founders Bijan Jazani, Pouyan, and Massoud Ahmadzadeh in leftist newspapers (figure 9). The fact that pictures of guerrilla women only surfaced in their martyrdom also served a myth-making project of the Left, reminding the viewers of the brutality of the Shah and the direness of the struggle if even women were dying at his hands. Yet, these images also made it clear to


51 While Ebrahimi, Fazilatkalam, and Oskouei gained the most notoriety through their martyrdom, a number of other guerrilla women were also killed by the regime during this period.

- MKO member Fatemeh Amini was arrested and tortured in 1971, which paralyzed her and eventually caused her death.
- Pouran Yadaholli, a student at the University of Tehran, was killed in an attack in February 1973.
- Nezhat-ossadat Rouhi Ahangaran was killed in armed confrontation in June 1975. Her sister, Azam-ossadat Rouhi Ahangaran was executed by firing squad in August 1976.
- Parvin Fatemi, a student at the University of Tehran, committed suicide by cyanide after her arrest in September 1975 in order to avoid revealing information under torture.
- Pari Sabet was killed in armed confrontation in October 1975.
- Fatemeh Hassanpour Asil and Fatemeh (Shamsi) Nahaei were executed by firing squad in January 1976.
Figure 7. Third Edition of Amir Parviz Pouyan’s *The Necessity of Armed Struggle*. The martyrdom portrait of Mehrnoosh Ebrahimi is pictured on the back cover. 1975.

Figure 8. Martyrdom portrait of Mehrnoosh Ebrahimi in the leftist publication *Iran al-Thawra*, 1976. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 24.

Figure 9. Martyrdom portrait of Marzieh Ahmadi Oskouei in the leftist publication *Iran al-Thawra*, 1976. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 24.
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politicized Iranians that women too were fighting for the cause. The publicization that women were part of the guerrilla movement served to bolster the image of egalitarianism in the guerrilla movement, but it also offered a different model for what women’s revolutionary activism could look like. To women in the universities, who were increasingly made aware of the discontents under the regime, the images of female fighters like Ebrahimi and Oskouei were instrumental in familiarizing them with a notion of women’s militancy, despite the fact that they didn’t directly participate in the armed activities of the opposition.

The most famous of the guerrilla women, however, was the one who lived to tell the tale: Ashraf Dehqani (figure 10). Inspired by the writings of Massoud Ahmadzadeh and the late Samad Behrangi,52 Dehqani became involved in the guerrilla movement with her brother Behrouz in the late 1960s, and joined the ranks of Pouyan’s group by 1970. In May of 1971, months after the attack at Siahkal, Dehqani was arrested, imprisoned and tortured by the Shah’s

- Manijeh Ashrafzadeh Kermani and Fatemeh Afdar Nia were killed in armed confrontation in January 1976.
- Ladan Al-e Agha, Mahvash Hatami, Zohreh Modir Shanehchi, Mitra Bolbol Sefat, Maryam Shahi, Mina Talebzadeh, Ezzat Gharavi and her daughter Farideh Gharavi were killed in armed confrontation in May 1976.
- Nastaran Al-e Agha (sister of Ladan Al-e Agha), Afsar-ossadat Hosseini, Nadereh Ahmad-Hashemi, and Golrokh Mahdavi were killed in June 1976. The same month, Fatemeh Hossein and Tahereh Khorram were killed in an attack along with infamous fedaiyan founder Hamid Ashraf. Simin Tavakkoli was executed by firing squad on June 29.
- Zohreh Aghanabi-Gholhaki was executed by firing squad in December 1976 after a year of imprisonment and torture.
- Ferdows Agha-Ebrahimian and Anousheh Mo’azed (Fazilatkalam’s sister) was killed in armed confrontation in February 1977.
- Ghazal Paridokht Ayati and Simin Panjehshahi were killed in March 1977. Simin’s sister Nasrin Panjehshahi was killed a month later.
- Raf’at Bonab-Me’maran was killed in armed confrontation in May 1978.

For more information about the martyrdom of female fighters under the Shah, see: Muhammad Sahimi, “Iranian Women and the Struggle for Democracy I,” The Tehran Bureau pbs.org (15 April 2010)

52 Samad Behrangi was a famed writer in Iran throughout the 1960s, known most widely for his short story “The Little Black Fish,” which allegorized the flaws of the regime. (Like Reza Baraheni, Behrangi compared the regime to body-eaters, for the end of the Little Black Fish came when he was swallowed by a heron.) Behrangi drowned in the Aras River in 1968 under mysterious circumstances, and many believed the regime to have killed him.
police force and SAVAK. She escaped Qasr Prison in March of 1973 with MKO guerrilla woman Nahid Jalali. Soon after her escape, she published a memoir detailing her torture during her imprisonment. In her memoir, she also reflected on the tactical mistakes of the guerrilla movement, and included techniques to survive torture for other members of the opposition who might be captured. The memoir circulated widely among political circles, and was read often on oppositional radio stations. In 1978, the book was translated to English and published in New Delhi for an international readership. By the late 1970s, every politicized Iranian knew the name of the self-proclaimed “Woman Guerrilla.”

It is easy to dismiss Dehqani’s memoir as theatrical because of the sensationalism of her captivity narrative (which fixated on her tortures) and subsequent escape. Yet, the memoir is also immensely informative. It is virtually the only piece of writing that offers us the voice of an Iranian guerrilla woman, which allows us to observe how Dehqani frames herself and her resistance within the movement. The way she negotiates her gender is subtle, but certain moments within the text reveal how she locates her own woman-ness in relation to her perception of the category of “woman.”

One of the most instructive aspects of the memoir is the way Dehqani postures herself against her female jailers. Aside from the torturers, the “shrews” who guarded Dehqani were often characterized as Dehqani’s main antagonists. They slap Dehqani until she bleeds, they prohibit her from falling asleep, they prevent her from going to the toilet, and exert control over most aspects of Dehqani’s whereabouts. Dehqani describes them as “vain” and “shameless.” These descriptors work to associate them with the looseness of Pahlavi womanhood, and charge them with being complicit in such corruption.

The literary function of the “shrew” in Dehqani’s memoir is very similar to the role of the “Aunts” in Margaret Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale.*
Although she generally ridicules their presence, there are instances when Dehqani frames the sexuality of the “shrews” as perilous: she recalls a time when one woman jailer danced naked in front of a comrade under torture, who suffered a panic attack as a result. The memoir very plainly juxtaposed the corrupt Pahlavi-created woman of the shrew against the virtuous revolutionary woman of Dehqani, reinforcing the dominant narrative of anti-Shah critiques, and thus consolidating the image of the Iranian revolutionary woman as the righteous of the two. Even more so, it characterized the shrews by the language used to describe the “Western” cultural imperialism (gharbzadegi), transmitted through sexual looseness. When her memoir was read over the radio station of the opposition in the 1970s, the listener would have understood this juxtaposition within this familiar rhetoric of both corruptive womanhood and Western pollution, and would have understood the “guerrilla woman” of Iran to be the counter to these all-encompassing maladies.

Dehqani’s memoir also highlights the ubiquity of the concept that women’s issues were a problem of super-structure, not culture. In the first pages of the text, Dehqani asserts:

When a woman attains class consciousness, and together with a man who has also regained class consciousness, and awareness and understanding that leads them to uproot the corrupt class structure, then she is no longer the “woman” of reactionary standards and values but a “human being.” She helps to build a structure, a society, in which humans beings regain their just and glorious place… She helps to build a society in which the question [of] how much freedom for women is irrelevant, a society in which all human beings, men and women, have attained true freedom; and for the progress of which, women and men work side by side.

Dehqani also recounted spending time with women who were jailed for prostitution. She framed their “prostitution” as a form of exploitative labor at the hands of wealthy aristocrats, and insisted on the women’s virtuousness: “The terms ‘corrupt’ and ‘depraved’ should be applied to

54 Dehqani, *Torture and Resistance in Iran* (1978), 23
55 ibid., 20-21
the SAVAK agents themselves, not these unfortunate women who have landed in prison because of social injustice, inequality, and poverty.”56 Dehqani’s encounters in the prison with the “toiling women” of Iran provide her with an additional framework for a powerful, and gendered, critique of capitalism. Such critiques remind us that, ultimately, notions of “gendered corruption” were often a metaphor for the infiltration of “Western” capitalism and the harmful effects of the Iranian bourgeois class on the fabrics of Iranian culture and society. The encounter with the “prostitutes” in prison makes clear the kinds of destruction that such capitalism leaves in its wake.

At times, Dehqani is explicit in revealing the political projects of the memoir. She clearly states that one of her main goals “at this stage in the struggle… [was] to shatter the regime’s myth of invincibility.”57 Indeed, since the creation of SAVAK (the Shah’s secret police) in 1957, the regime had worked to cultivate an image of its own omniscience and omnipotence through its vast network of informants and infamous reputation for torture. Implied in this aura of omniscience was that the regime knew where the bodies of its citizens were at all times.58 Even outside observers had picked up on the buttressing of this image – one US visitor wrote in an article: “SAVAK intensifies this fear by giving no account of its activities. People disappear in

56 ibid., 98
57 ibid., 24
58 This image had resonance in Pahlavi history, since one of Reza Shah’s lasting legacies was to settle the various nomadic tribes in the Iranian countryside onto plots of land in order to diminish tribal authority and bring them under central control. The project of detribalization was more or less completed by the land reforms of 1963, which effectively relegated a nomadic lifestyle to the annals of the past, made possible by the massive expansion in bureaucracy in the 1960s. In essence, one of the central significances of this project was that previously detached bodies in Iran – living within Iran but moving at their will – were now officially corralled into the state’s eye. Once all of the peoples of Iran had been forcibly settled, the state could know where they were at all times, and control them accordingly. See: Ansari, Modern Iran (2007), 60-61
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Iran, and their disappearances go unrecorded…” 59 If people did return from their “disappearances”, they often bore with them horrific marks of the torture they had sustained during their disappearance, and even worse stories of the ordeal to boot. In her essay on the discursive systems that the practice of torture works to constitute and reinforce (using the case study of the Guatemalan Civil War), Irene Matthews writes: “The strategy was not to hide the bodies, or pretend they were accidental deaths, but to produce them openly, obviously tortured and obviously executed: symbol of the authorities’ impunity.”60 A similar strategy was used by SAVAK to project an image of the regime’s supremacy. Many who had never seen the inside of a torture chamber felt they knew exactly what it was like based on the narratives of survivors. There was a sense that torture would either break you or kill you – you could not hope to survive if you did not tell SAVAK your secrets.

Portraits of women and men martyred at the hands of the regime (hajleh shahid) began to circulate widely during this time: the framed faces of the nation’s youth served to remind the Iranian populace of what the regime had done to their out-of-frame bodies. Of the Iranians “disappeared” and tortured to death by the regime, one Iranian writer asks: “Where are their bodies? The government has not returned a single one to the bereaved family.”61 Whereas Reza Shah had demonstrated that he could determine the appearance of the nation’s bodies (dress code laws), and also locate them where he saw fit (detribalization and settlement of nomads), the torture regime of Mohammad Reza Shah indicated that the regime could very literally invade any body at will and then vanish it to oblivion if necessary.

61 Baraheni, The Crowned Cannibals (1977), 64
Contemporary writer Reza Baraheni parodied the regime’s notoriety for torture by framing the state’s intrusion into bodies in the most literal of fashions. In his essay “Masculine History” (tarikh muzakar), Baraheni argued that the Pahlavi Shahs had come from a long lineage of monarchs in Iran who had literally eaten the bodies of their subjects. He called them the “Crowned Cannibals.” Baraheni likened the Shah’s sadistic torture regime to the tendencies of Mohammad Reza’s so-called predecessors to “find the flesh of young men and women more palatable.”

The book opens with a story of the King of Medes – the grandfather of Cyrus the Great (the Shah’s mythological forefather) – who punished a disobedient minister by feeding him the cooked body of his grandson, and when the meal was finished, presented the minister his grandson’s severed head on a plate. The notion that Pahlavi history was in fact a history of cannibalism was satirical in many ways. Since the White Revolution, Mohammad Reza Shah had sought to consolidate the foundational myths of the dynasty, claiming that the Pahlavi monarchs were the rightful descendents of the Persian Empire that could be traced back to the establishment of the empire by Cyrus the Great 2,500 years prior. Yet, according to Baraheni, the only legacy that Mohammad Reza Shah had inherited from his Aryan past was the tendency

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62 Baraheni, *The Crowned Cannibals* (1977), 64
63 ibid., 19-21
64 The oil boom of the early 1960s had given the Shah enough political and economic capital to herald what he called the Great Civilization – a future of Pahlavi monarchy that would not only match the greatness of their Persian past, but exceed it. In 1963, he crowned his new wife Farah Diba as Shahbanou, a Sassanid title translated to “Lady Shah”. From then on, Queen Farah would be known as Empress, a title never before used in Pahlavi Iran (or Qajar Iran for that matter). In 1971, the same year that the guerrilla movement in Iran was officially initiated at Siahkal, the Shah put on a grand display of festivities celebrating the 2,500 year anniversary of the Persian Empire and the founding of the Iranian monarchy. A multi-million dollar affair (some put the figure at upwards of $200 million), the celebration only served to highlight to the Iranian population the ever-widening wealth disparity within the state. So invested was Mohammad Reza in the myth of his monarchy’s origination that he even staged parades of Achaemenid-styled military re-enactors. On the final day, the Shah inaugurated the Shahyad Tower, inside of which the Cyrus Cylinder was displayed. In 1979, this same tower would become one of the most prominent architectural symbols of the Shah’s demise and the Revolution’s victory.
to devour the bodies of his subjects in the most perverse of fashions. In this context, Baraheni’s retelling of the Pahlavi foundational myths is even more potent: the very history that the Shah was so keen to identify himself with was in fact a “history of infanticide.” The state’s “monopoly on bodies” was not an abstract idea to Baraheni, who had been previously imprisoned by the regime: the notion that the monarchy physically consumed its citizens was, indeed, one of the basic cornerstones of the Pahlavi coercive apparatus, as it had been for their supposed 2,500 year history, so Baraheni argued.

Consequently, in the 1960s and 70s, the question of regime brutality changed from how the bodies of the citizenry existed (unveiled) to whether those bodies could exist at all (disappeared/tortured to death). Mohammad Reza Shah had made it clear that the most private of domains could in fact be penetrated by the state. The fiction of the state’s omniscience was so pervasive that during this period, many Iranians did in fact believe that the innermost parts of the Iranian home were under surveillance by SAVAK, just as the regime had shown that the innermost parts of the Iranian body could be accessed by their torture methods. It did not matter whether or not the Shah actually had this power (he did not), for the swirling and rife rumors of SAVAK whereabouts had nevertheless persuaded the majority of the populace of the “regime’s myth of invincibility” (as Dehqani puts it), both over the knowledge of its citizens and the bodies of its citizens.

Baraheni goes on to speak of the man-eating tendencies of later Shahs further down the monarchical lineage, such as Shah Abbas the Great, who filled his courtroom with actual cannibals, so that when the Shah did not like a minister, a poet or a writer, he would simply turn to his right or left and say: “Eat him!” The ritual would take place there an then. The King’s orders could not be delayed. In fact, one of his courtiers at this time told the French traveler Chardin that whenever he left the court he would go home and stand in front of the mirror to see “whether his head still stood on his shoulders.”


Baraheni, *The Crowned Cannibals* (1977), 64
Thus, in her ability to both withstand torture and also outsmart the Shah with her escape, Dehqani acquired a renown for having defied the regime’s monopoly on the bodies of its citizens, and especially the bodies of women. In a 1980 publication by an unnamed revolutionary organization in Ireland, Dehqani is described as “a symbol of resistance, admired even by many who opposed her communist organization, for her refusal to break under torture by the SAVAK after her arrest in May 1971, and for her daring escape from prison in March 1973.”67 In the foreword to the English publication of Dehqani’s memoir, left-wing Indian journalist Romesh Thapar also describes her as possessing a “purifying passion” in the face of the authoritarian regime.68 In the subsequent memory of her experience, outsiders spoke of Dehqani’s revolutionary purity in the face of the regime’s invasive characteristics. Similarly to Algerian guerrillas Bouhired and Boupacha in the aftermath of their tortures, Dehqani was also characterized by an aura of transcendence, with a “purifying passion,” by her ability to withstand and rise above the unthinkable brutality of the regime.

Indeed, the stories of Dehqani’s refusal to break under torture had served to construct her as a kind of invincible human. At the beginning of her tortures, men throughout the jail “had all come to watch. They presumably found the torture of a revolutionary girl interesting.”69 After Dehqani survives an enema of boiling water without uttering a word, she recounts that her torturer Hossein Zadeh walked away muttering, “Tonight I hated myself.”70 Although the retelling might be an embellishment, Dehqani’s apparent resistance to torture imbues her with a certain kind of power over her torturers, one in which their inability to break her diminishes them.

67 “Ashraf Dehqani Speaks” in International Newsletter: Iran, Revolution in the Making, (Dublin, Ireland, November 1980); IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14
68 Romesh Thapar, “Foreword,” in Dehqani, Torture and Resistance (1978), ix
69 Dehqani, Torture and Resistance in Iran (1978), 12
70 ibid., 22
to the state of the vanquished. Dehqani continues to describe the effect her “superhuman-ness” has on her other jailers:

They had created a powerful picture of me in their minds. I was told later that in the first few days, the mercenaries of the Police Intelligence Department had been waiting in line to come in and take a look at the monster who had survived Evin without breaking. They had also speculated that I am a karate or judo expert, an untruth they had come to believe. Later, I heard one of the women jailers gossiping to a friend of hers, mocking an officer who, passing my bed, would keep a hand on his gun and walk a large semi-circle not to get close?71

In the subsequent readings of her memoir within leftist circles and over oppositional radio stations, such descriptions posited Dehqani as the ultimate resistor to the regime’s gendered tortures like rape and penetration, appearing as a kind of superwoman in the face of the Shah’s supposed monopoly on women’s bodies. Her story served as a reminder that the regime was not omnipotent, it was not invincible, and with enough dedication to the cause, the regime itself could be broken.

The image of Dehqani as a “superwoman” – or rather, as a woman whose valiance had exposed the regime for its weaknesses – also seemed to yield its own consequences in the gender politics of the opposition. When it came time to appear in court for their military tribunal, neither Dehqani nor her female comrade Roqiyeh Daneshqari were allowed to appear in court with their male comrades, in the worry that their presence would keep the men from receiving their sentences quietly. The jailers feared that the men would be incited to action by the presence of the militant women. Dehqani reports one of her jailers asking: “Are you ready to be on good behavior in court and not to repeat slogans? Then we will let you appeal in court together with your male comrades.”72 That her jailers worried about her appearing in court next to her male comrades, for fear that her presence would rouse them into action, speaks to the productive work

71 ibid., 23
72 ibid., 92
of disciplinary emotions like “shame” in the presence of women’s perceived heroism. Similar to the Marianas of Cuba, Dehqani’s presence would work to mobilize the men of the court into action, inciting them in a way that wouldn’t otherwise occur were they not to be made aware of her. Her heroism exposes them for their inaction, and works to dishonor them unless they step up to the plate. The jailers refuse to allow Dehqani to appear in court with her male comrades – as if they are aware of the effect of her image in the galvanization of revolutionary spirit.

In prison, Dehqani imagined herself and her comrades within a long line of revolutionary heroes. In order to survive torture, she conjured the actions of Cuban general Camilo Cienfuegos who launched the insurgency against Batista.\textsuperscript{73} She compared a comrade’s resistance under torture to the self-immolation of the Buddhists in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{74} The revolutionary anthems that Dehqani and her comrades invoked were also utterly transnational. With her fellow imprisoned guerrilla women Roqiyeh Daneshqari and Shahin Tavakkoli, Dehqani recited the poetry of Viet Cong martyr Nguyen Van Troi.\textsuperscript{75} She recalled instances when political prisoners communicated with each other by knocking the beat to Salvador Allende’s campaign song “Venceremos” on the walls.\textsuperscript{76} They passed figurines made of bread to each other in the shape of clenched fists, daggers, machine guns, rifles, tulips, and black fishes.\textsuperscript{77} Such details demonstrate that the vocabulary and images of resistance both in and out of prison were acquired from a global repertoire of revolution. The symbols that had the most potency among political prisoners were the ones that spoke to the era-specific global traditions of revolution and liberation.

\textsuperscript{73} ibid., 79
\textsuperscript{74} ibid., 59
\textsuperscript{75} ibid., 73
\textsuperscript{76} ibid., 74, 80
\textsuperscript{77} ibid., 74
Dehqani and her comrades, however, were not the only ones with a transnational imagination. Her torturers repeatedly compared her to Palestinian guerrilla Leila Khaled, who had martyred herself the year before by hijacking an airplane with Sandinista member Patrick Arguello. Referring to her resistance under torture, Dehqani reported her torturers mocking: “She’s trying to do a Leila Khaled on us.”\textsuperscript{78} Sometimes they would refer to her as “dear Leila.”\textsuperscript{79} They often invoked this comparison to mock Dehqani; perhaps because Leila Khaled was an Arab/Palestinian (which played into the cultural tensions between Persians and Arabs) this comparison was meant to belittle Dehqani. Nonetheless, it is clear that the famed guerrilla women of the era provided her torturers with a frame of reference to understand Dehqani’s own militancy.

Indeed, Leila Khaled, and before her, Algerian freedom fighters Djamila Bouhired and Djamila Boupacha, provided Iranian women with a powerful image of possibility for women’s activism. As one \textit{Fedaiyan}-aligned activist explained: “Leila Khaled… she was really big for a lot of women… Djamila Boupacha. She was a symbol of women’s resistance. Really [there was] a window of opportunity for us to learn about other women and how they have participated in the struggle. It was really inspiring for us.”\textsuperscript{80} Iranian women were not only inspired by these figures, but understood their own activism within this broader lineage of revolutionary women. They had seen their images in the newspapers and the circulating leftist texts; they knew what these women of global revolutionary fame looked like, how they appeared, the legends surrounding their very existence. Djamila Boupacha and Leila Khaled were not only archetypes – they were

\textsuperscript{78} ibid., 26
\textsuperscript{79} ibid., 41
\textsuperscript{80} Interview with ISA activist Zohra Khayam, from: Manijeh Nasrabadi, “‘Women Can Do Anything Men Can Do’: Gender and the Affects of Solidarity in the U.S. Iranian Student Movement, 1961-1979,” \textit{Women’s Studies Quarterly} 42:3-4 (Fall/Winter 2014): 140
Figure 10. Portrait of Ashraf Dehqani, n.d. Source: <http://alchetron.com/Ashraf-Dehghani-495208-W>

Figure 11. Young Iranian Woman raising her fist in the streets of revolution. 1979. Source: Maryam Zandi (2014)
predecessors, who had offered politicized Iranian women with a vision of what they, too, could look like in revolution.

Chapter 4: Iran’s Revolutionary Woman

The Entrance of the Leftist Woman into Revolutionary Imagery

With the beginnings of revolution in 1978, women took to the streets in droves. At first, they did not appear with guns, but rather raised their clenched fists in protest (figure 11). Photographers like Maryan Zandi, Kaveh Kazemi, Abbas Attar, Kaveh Golestan, and Hengameh Golestan captured some of the most iconic photographs from this period. A large portion of these women had not been militant before the Revolution. Some had been politicized by their universities and urban intellectual circles. Others had merely joined the expanding throng of people demonstrating against the Shah’s imperialism. Some women wore headscarves, like wives and daughters of the clerics or the bazaaris, and women politically aligned with the MKO. Many wore the uniform that had become widely associated with leftist politics: the goshad (baggy) garb of loose-fitting t-shirts and jeans. Others were draped in the kaffiyeh associated with the Palestinian liberation movement. If they didn’t raise their fist, they linked their arms with their male comrades and shouted the slogans of revolution (figure 12).

The return of many Iranian students in 1978 from abroad to join the revolution served to reinforce what a woman’s “leftist uniform” and appearance looked like. Most Iranian students studying abroad had been active in the Confederation of Iranian Student’s National Union (CISNU) at their European and American universities. The Confederation was arguably the largest and most active anti-Shah organization in the decades preceding the revolution, precisely because of its existence outside of Iran, which allowed it to grow unhindered by the Shah’s
Figure 12. Iranian women and men marching in demonstration. 1979. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14

Figure 13. University-age girls at the book-seller stands in the street in front of Tehran University, February 1979. Source: Maryam Zandi (2014)
repression. Students who had participated in the Confederation, and its affiliate the Iranian Students Association (ISA), had been deeply influenced by the Third Worldist solidarity of the era and the antiwar movement in the U.S. They had been exposed more broadly to the images of national liberation movements like the Black Panthers, the Chicano/a Brown Berets, and the radical feminism of the 1970s in a way that had not reached the opposition within Iran and to which they simply did not have access (nor would they have had as much interest in). There was a certain militancy regarding the appearance of women in the ISA that echoed the disciplining of leftist women’s bodies within Iran. Soosan, a woman who joined the ISA in 1978, describes: “When I came, I had my eyebrows fixed and my hair long [like a] typical Iranian woman… But when I came here [laughs] … First thing, my brother took me to buy jeans and a T-shirt and I put my hair up. One of our leaders, the first thing he told me was, ‘Oh if you want to be part of this organization, you should cut your hair.’” The aesthetic requirement, in Soosan’s case, was quite explicit: her long hair and cosmetic management of her eyebrows had marked her as a Pahlavi woman; as soon as she enters the ISA, the first requirement is for her to shed these aesthetic markers and assume uniform of the anti-Pahlavi woman. Nasrabadi links the speed with which Soosan was told she needed to modify her aesthetic (“the first thing he told me”) to the immediate identification of Soosan’s body with an uncontained sexuality that needed swiftly to be managed. Another woman named Shahnaz, a student who joined the Union of Iranian Communists in 1975 and a high-ranking activist within her own organization, recalled a similar attitude within her own group:

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81 Afshin Matin-asgari, *Iranian Student Opposition to the Shah* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2002), 1
83 ibid., 136
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When I go back to those days it was very—we had a very strange kind of behavior. It wasn’t normal. Like all of us decided to cut our hair. I came here with long hair and then after that it was cut so short. We were saying it’s not important, the look of a woman is not important. The clothing that we had, all of a sudden became goshad [baggy]. You were not going to have skirts. Behaviors became like men’s behavior.84

The uniform that these leftist women had assumed in their revolutionary organizations would have been much more influenced by the uniform of women in Third Worldist movements, as well as the second-wave feminism that emerged in the U.S. during that period. The rigidity regarding women’s garb seems to be intensified in diaspora, as if their distance from the revolutionary movement within Iran compelled them to enact their militancy even more so through their clothing than through any concrete actions. Nasrabadi calls this “performing dispossession” or performing the proletariat – although the difference between women and men was that women’s proletarian performance was deeply informed by the need to temper sexuality, in a way that men’s proletarian performance was not.85 A large portion of these activists in diaspora returned to Iran with the proliferation of revolutionary protests in the latter half of 1978. With them, the activist women of the ISA brought their counter-hegemonic appearances which, on top of the concerns over women’s sexualized bodies, had been compounded by the fixed uniforms of Third Worldist militant women and the diasporic need to perform the revolution even more so on their bodies.

Before 1978, visual depictions of leftist Iranian women had been mainly limited to their martyrdom portraits, which had only showed their faces. In the streets of revolution, these martyrdom portraits acquired a renewed significance, for they served to conjure up the memory of the well-known martyrs like Mehrnoosh Ebrahimi and Shirin Fazilatkal (figure 15). They

85 ibid., 138
also projected a new significance on MKO martyrs like Fatemeh Rezaei and Fatemeh Amini (figure 16), who had relatively little notoriety among the public before the revolution. These portraits, however, served a memory and mythology of the heroic martyrdom of women under the unjust regime. They also reinforced an ideal of women’s revolutionary activism against the Shah.

However, in the arena of the anti-Shah protests, it was not enough to imagine the militancy of women – they had to be depicted as such.

By early 1979, the fist of the protesting woman had transformed into a gun in revolutionary posters and images. Now, the figure of the heroic gun-strapped female fighter could be found everywhere, even if she wasn’t Iranian. This popular poster of Palestinian guerrilla women, which had been used since 1970 for various international solidarity campaigns, was sold on the streets of Tehran alongside posters of iconized figures like Khomeini, Ayatollah Taleqani, and Ali Shariati (figures 17, 18). Photographs of Kurdish female fighters appeared on the front pages of popular magazines like Tehran Musawwar and leftist newspapers like Kar, often presented as if they were fedaiyan guerrilla women (figure 19).

In this solidarity poster between the PFLP and the Fedaiyan-e Khalq (figure 20), the woman appears at the front of the crowd, shouting back to her comrades in revolutionary support. She is not strapped with a gun, but still engages with the trope of the heroic woman leading the comrades to victory. The figures of these revolutionary women rendered into imagery served as a certain visual currency of transnationalism – the body through which movements expressed solidarity with each other and the symbol that promised impending victory.

The organization Nabarde Kargar (Worker’s Struggle) published booklets titled “Women and Liberation Movements” which were small enough that they could smuggle them
Figure 15. Martyrdom portrait turned revolutionary poster. Source: Hamid Dabashi (1999)

Figure 16. Martyrdom portrait of MKO guerrilla Fatemeh Amini, turned into a revolutionary poster.

Figure 17. Posters of Palestinian guerrilla girls are sold on the streets outside of Tehran University, next to portraits of Ali Shariati and Ayatollah Khomeini (not pictured). *Tehran Mussawar*, 1979. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 11
Figure 18. Solidarity poster with Palestinian female fighters. Produced in Jordan, 1970-71. Source: Palestine Poster Project

Figure 19. Kurdish guerrilla women on the cover of *Tehran Musawwar*, 1979. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 11
into Iran between 1978 and 1979.\textsuperscript{86} The booklets had information on women in the liberation movements in Vietnam, Cuba, Yemen, Mozambique, Portugal, and China. Just as the symbolic powers of the fist and the V-for-victory sign filtered into the streets of Iran through the transnationalism of the era, so too, it seemed, entered the formidable figure of the “female fighter” into the repertoire of Iranian revolutionary imagery. Iranians had seen the image of the female fighter mean something in other places and other revolutions, so her appearance in the streets of Iran was not only familiar to them, but already laced with powerful political meaning.

Representations of Iranian revolutionary women slid seamlessly into the militant aesthetic of their global counterpart. In this photograph, which circulated widely before the February victory, militant women raise V-for-victory fingers on one side of their bodies, and a gun on their other side (figure 21). They wear the uniform of leftist women, a baggy jacket over t-shirt, a hat or scarf covering their heads. They are centered in the composition of the photograph, obscuring the male comrade behind them. It is unclear whether they are actual guerrilla women, or whether they acquired a gun from the garrison attacks in early 1979 (as Mandana did). Whether or not they participated in the guerrilla movement, however, is irrelevant, for they nonetheless perform the figure of the “militant woman” for the camera, and the aesthetic marks them as such for subsequent viewers.

It is clear that the “woman with gun” aesthetic was not reserved exclusively for guerrilla fighters: in figure 22, “the gun” even makes its way into the hands of a seemingly unassuming young girl reading an oppositional pamphlet. The attacks on the garrisons in early 1979 had planted guns in the hands of many young political women. One woman in Shahidian’s study of women in clandestine politics described one of the first revolutionary events in which she

\textsuperscript{86} “Women and National Liberation Movements,” (\textit{Zanan wa Janbashha-i Azadibakhsh}), Published by Nabarde Kargar (n.d); IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14
Figure 20. Solidarity poster of the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front (PPSF) with the Fedaiyan-e Khalq. Early 1979. Source: Palestine Poster Project Archives

Figure 21. Iranian Women raise the V-for-Victory sign and hold their guns in the air. (n.d.) Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14
participated: “Near my home was the Abbasabad Garrison and I joined the group that was going to take it over. It was unguarded and so we broke down the door, broke into the offices, took down the Shah’s pictures and set them on fire. We took all the guns and ammunition and passed them out to everyone. I was eighteen years old at the time and was given two guns. I was so excited…”87 This statement attests to the fact that the streets of revolution suddenly became the site of political activity – a political activity that had hitherto been enacted through clandestine discussion groups or the regulation of women’s clothing. In the streets of revolution, they could enact a militancy that they had only heard about in Dehqani’s memoir over the radio stations of the opposition, or when they saw the martyrdom portraits of Ebrahimi and Fazilatkalam. The picturing of women who had acquired guns in the streets of 1979 fit directly into the existing narratives of the famous female fighters of the pre-revolutionary era. The widely circulated pictures of these “girls with guns” conjured up the active memory of the heroic guerrilla women of the 1970s, both inside and outside of Iran, and animated her in the visual realm. Now, so the images suggested, these famed female fighters had come alive in the streets of revolution.

As militant women became more and more visible through the street photography of the revolution, they appeared incrementally more “veiled.” In this photograph (figure 23), taken in the days following the attacks on the garrisons, this woman (whose baggy garb marks her as being associated with “secular/leftist” politics) wears a scarf around her head. The women in figure 21 do the same, covering their heads in a hat or cloth. These women were not part of the MKO, which mandated a very specific style of head scarf to be worn by their female members. In February of 1979, no political leader had yet made a speech about the importance of hejab; it

was not, up to this point, a topic that explicitly surfaced in political discourse. Yet, these women, of their own accord, begin to cover their heads and their bodies, to don a sort of veil.

We can understand this gradual “veiling” through the politicization of chastity, the roots of which extended deeply in the discourse of the opposition. As we have seen, women had long been told that their bodies portended sexual impurity, and that if they were to participate in political circles with men, it was their obligation to suppress any sexual intimations of their appearance. In the streets of revolution, this logic was no different, and was in fact compounded due to the “public” nature of the street in which women were appearing. One woman in Shahidian’s study, who had been politically active in Tehran before 1978, remembers an argument she had with two pro-Shah men during the revolution, in which she laughed at them. The next day, she was confronted by the leadership of her cell for laughing, and told she “should have been more serious in order to avoid anything which might give [her] a bad reputation or affect the organization.” Such statements reflect concerns within leftist organizations over the perils that women’s behavioral “looseness” might pose for the organization and its reputation, especially now that they were “exposed” in the streets of Iran. To don the *hejab-i iffat*, the metaphorical and invisible veil of chastity, was a central tenet of women’s ability to appear and participate in the “public” political sphere. To “laugh,” or show one’s behavioral stepping-out-of-bounds, was to neglect the rules of such metaphorical chastity. Within that rationale, women aimed to temper their own inherent “looseness” through aesthetic strategies such as the covering of their hair, even when “the veil” was not an object that was plainly referenced in political discourses.

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Figure 22. Young girl reads a white-book pamphlet while holding a gun. Early 1979. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 19

Figure 23. A woman stands on the street with a gun, as people behind her look at the news bulletins posted on the walls. February 1979. Source: Maryam Zandi (2014)
Conclusion

In revisiting Mandana’s picture, the potency of her image becomes all the more evident. In the streets of revolution, she dons the uniform that had become associated with women in leftist politics: her hair chopped off, her jacket and jeans baggy (goshad), her appearance anti-gharbzadeh. With gun in hand, she is the picture of women’s militancy come alive: anyone looking at her would have seen her as the image of the famed female fighters of the decade. The publication of her image in Kar would have certainly reinforced that association. Her feminine body already central to the political contentions of the Pahlavi era, Mandana’s appearance transcribes a history of revolutionary politics into the imagery of 1979.

Pictures of women’s militancy in the streets of 1979 – like that of Mandana’s – served to make visible what had always existed in discourse, but not in imagery. As it captured the aesthetic of these women, the camera lens rendered into the visual realm not only a woman in a demonstration, but rather the women of the revolution. These were the women who had long existed in myth, and now, suddenly, they seemed to appear on the front pages of the newspaper.

As we will see in the next chapter, the figure of the “militant woman” would remain central to the revolutionary iconography of the Islamic Republic for years to come. It is the project of this chapter to remind us that such images of the chador-clad gun-strapped woman, which would become iconic by the end of 1979, owe their place and representation to the leftist guerrilla woman like Ashraf Dehqani; to the era-specific archetypes like Leila Khaled; to the transnational visual codes that rendered these women into imagery; and, finally, to the manifestation of these heroic figures in the streets of 1979: the formidable Mandana.
There was nothing accidental about what happened that morning. Nothing incidental...This was an era imprinting itself on those who lived in it. History in live performance.


Her story altered, at first, in the retellings, but finally it settled down, and after that nobody, neither teller nor listener, would tolerate any deviation from the hallowed, sacred text.

Chapter 5: The Militant Woman in the Islamic Republic

“A Roaring Flood of Devout and Revolutionary Women”
Continuity and Counter-Memory in the Islamic Republic, 1979-1988

A month after the victory of the revolution, women returned to the streets in droves, but this time for a different reason. On March 6th, two days before International Women’s Day, Ayatollah Khomeini gave a speech in which he stated that Iranian women should wear *hejab* in government offices. Women had long worn head scarves while participating in the revolution; the *Mojahedin* guerrilla women were a prominent example. Some leftist women had even donned the *chador* during the 1978-79 period because they considered it to be the uniform of “the people.” The *hejab* itself was not the issue – after all, political dissidents across the spectrum agreed that the monarchy had jeopardized women’s morality, and all Iranian women should return to modesty. Yet the top-down imposition of clothing – this time by the rhetoric of Ayatollah Khomeini – seemed all too familiar to the discontents of the previous regime.

The discourse that had been produced through Khomeini’s veiling speech and the subsequent protests worked to center the “veil” in the sphere of revolutionary politics in a way that had never existed before March 1979. In the aftermath of the revolution, factionalism and political fissuring characterized the relationship between the Provisional Government and members of Khomeini’s circle.1 Amidst the question over to whom the revolution truly belonged, various groups strove to claim the lineage of the revolution for themselves. The battle over the legacy of the revolution had turned the revolutionary imagery into its own kind of political terrain, and the “militant woman” existed at the center of these contestations.

By the end of 1979, the aesthetic and image of the leftist guerrilla woman had all but faded from official iconography. In her stead, the “gun-toting chador-clad woman” emerged as

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one of the most familiar symbols of the Revolution and the newly formed Islamic Republic. The figure made appearances in the November 1979 parades of “Mobilization Week.” She could be seen guarding the U.S. embassy in the progression of the American hostage crisis. She marched in the February 1980 one-year anniversary of the victory. It was clear that the “militant woman” had remained one of the most politically salient images in Iranian memory.

However, with the consolidation of the postrevolutionary government, the Iranian revolutionary woman acquired new names: Fatimah and Zeinab. “Djamila” or “Leila” seemed no longer to suffice. The figures of devoted mother Fatimah and militant sister Zeinab (in relation to heroic martyr Hussein) had existed in revolutionary discourse since Ali Shariati heralded them as the models for Iranian women in his 1971 speech *Fatima is Fatima*, and they had been publicized through the passion plays of Shi’i martyrdom at Karbala. Yet, before 1979, representations of Fatimah had been passive at best, characterized by maternal devotion, and certainly had not been the inspiration for the militancy of the women in political propaganda. To my knowledge, Zeinab does not appear anywhere in revolutionary iconography before 1980. In interviews of Iranian women after the revolution, many cite Djamila Boupacha and Leila Khaled as models of women’s militancy.2 Not one woman who had participated in the revolutionary movement cited Zeinab or Fatimah as their inspiration for their activism.

In the aftermath of the revolution, the Islamic Republic championed Fatimah as the model for women to return to their homes, a rhetoric aligned with the domestication of women

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Chapter 5: The Militant Woman in the Islamic Republic

under the Islamic Republic. With the initiation of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, the state heralded Zeinab as the pinnacle of women’s militancy, and she featured prominently in the recruitment strategies and mobilization propaganda of the new Iranian government. With “Zeinab” as her new Islamic Republic-championed title, the militant woman represented the necessity of Iranian women’s commitment to the war effort, even from the homes to which they had been relegated. Thus, the figure of the “militant woman”, which had become so central to the imagery of the revolution, was retroactively renamed according to the official discourse of the Islamic Republic through the “Shi’i” categories that had been offered through Shariati but had not been assumed as models for actual militant women in the prior revolution.

This chapter examines the ways the icon of the Islamic Republic’s “veiled militant woman” came to be seen as the sole image of Iran’s revolutionary woman in the aftermath of the revolution. That scholars would later look upon the image of the chador-clad woman as the singular revolutionary woman is in fact a historical fallacy, produced by the postrevolutionary centering of the veil, and the proliferation of “veiled” militant women that followed it. Even in the erasure and revision of revolutionary history by the postrevolutionary state, the figure of the militant woman – ushered into Iran through the guerrilla opposition and the transnational codes of revolution – remained a staple of Iranian revolutionary iconography. This chapter thus maintains that the figure of the “chador-clad, gun-toting woman” – subsequently named “Zeinab” – which has come to be universally associated with the Islamic Republic, is indebted to the “female fighter” of the opposition who served as her historical predecessor.
The Consequences of March 1979

Women Return to the Streets: The Discourse Surrounding the Women’s Day Protests

On February 26th 1979, only two weeks after the victory of the revolution and twelve days after Mandana appeared on the front page of Kayhan, the Provisional Government announced that the Family Protection Law, which had granted women legal rights to divorce, was to be abrogated. On March 3rd, they announced that women would be prohibited from becoming judges. Three days later, Khomeini announced in a speech that women should wear hejab in government offices, for “naked women shouldn’t be coming to Islamic ministries.”3 It was evident that the politics of women – where they appeared and what they looked like – was to remain central to revolutionary discourse.4

On March 8th, 1979, women of all classes and political affiliations returned to the streets to protest the imposition of hejab. A substantial portion of these women had not participated in the revolution months before; in fact, some were vocally pro-Shah. Still, a majority of them had indeed participated, and were already mobilized to immediately challenge what they saw as the revolution straying from the path they intended for it.

The symbols that women selected to represent their protest on March 8th, 1979, were telling. The Soviet figure of the “Emancipated Woman” proliferated upon the signs of the marching crowd, evidencing the fact that their vision of “women’s liberation” had been influenced by the discourse and iconography of other revolutions (figure 1). The writings of Soviet feminist Alexandra Kollontai – the woman who compelled the Russian Communist Party to devote a branch of the party to women’s liberation (called Zhenotdel) – was also circulated

Figure 1. Women Hold up the “Emancipated Woman” in the Women’s Day protests against Khomeini’s veiling speech. March 1979. Source: <http://ciml.250x.com/archive/events/english/iran_revolution/iran_revolution_1979.html>

among leftist women and Women’s Day protestors. In figure 2, a woman holds up a poster of several women – both veiled and unveiled – throwing up their fists in protest of Khomeini’s remarks. At the top right corner of the poster were the words “Freedom of woman, freedom of everyone.” The photograph later became iconic, a symbol of women’s struggle for autonomy in the aftermath of the revolution.

Leftist organizations had little to say in support of the women’s protests. After all, the socialist guerrilla groups had always considered the “woman issue” to be a matter of structure, not culture. The oppression of women had been created through the promotion of a feudal and eventually capitalist society – in a Marxist-inspired revolution, women’s issues would disappear with the classed society that had created them, so the Left believed. “Feminist interests” were a bourgeois concept, and would only serve to distract the movement from its goal. This statement issued on March 8th by the Confederation of Iranian Students encapsulates the sentiment in the Left regarding the demonstration: “The exploitation (istismar) of the women of toiling classes is in no way comparable to the injustices (sitam) inflicted upon bourgeois and petit-bourgeois women. Indeed, peasant or working women are exploited exactly like the men of the same class and at the same time have to endure extremely harsh pressures from their husbands.”5 To many revolutionaries who had believed women’s issues were a problem of super-structure, the Women’s Day demonstrations were a distraction, if not overtly deviationist.

The organizations that did speak against the veil on Women’s Day did so by emphasizing the necessity of women’s chastity. One article in the widely read newspaper Ettela’at reported that

the main point of the [Feda’i khalq] was this, “when women of their own accord fight side by side with men against a tyrannical regime linked to Imperialism, they have enough moral sense and humanity to struggle against any kind of corruption or lack of modesty in the free choice of their clothes, and no particular style of clothes in this situation should be imposed on women.”  

According to the Fedaiyan-e Khalq (OIPFG), the revolution had taught women their own modesty, and this new morality would ensure that they would not return to the gharbzadeh woman that was so despised. Thus, in their argument, veiling was unnecessary, for women would naturally protect their modesty through their newly acquired revolutionary inclinations.

Yet, the organizations still maintained that the specificity of women’s issues was not in the best interests of the revolution. On March 15th, a week after the demonstrations, the Fedaiyan published another statement in the leftist newspaper Kar titled “Women’s Emancipation is Not Separate from the Emancipation of Society.” In it, the maintained that “freedom (azadi) is a humanitarian goal not determined by sex.”

The Mojahedin-e Khalgh took a similar stance toward the veiling speech. They were against the forceful imposition of hejab, not because they disagreed with veiling as a concept (all of the women in their organization were required to wear the veil), but because the “heavy burden of the imperialist culture cannot be eliminated all at once and other than through a long term and gradual process.”  

They believed that a top-down imposition of clothing would not suffice to assuage the cultural imperialism in Iranian society – the postrevolutionary government

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8 Mojahedin-e Khalgh, 1979b; cited in Paidar, Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran (1995), 244
would have to address the maladies of bourgeois culture at a grassroots level. Most of the Mojahedin support base had also been university students, a demographic that was especially sensitive to any forced impositions by the new government. By rejecting Khomeini’s stance on hejab while still agreeing with its logic, the Mojahedin treaded a fragile line of rejecting Westoxication while being careful not to alienate their support bases.

The mojahed woman, after all, could serve as the perfect picture of ideal revolutionary womanhood. She was seen as both veiled and militant, within an organization that promised and claimed egalitarianism among its male and female members. Similar to the Fedaiyan, the Mojahedin feared that the protests against veiling were not in support of revolutionary progress – rather, they were obstructive. In response to the women’s protests, the Mojahedin stated:

The struggle is intricate and the enemy is lying in ambush. The fundamental bases of imperialism have not been uprooted from our society and consequently the future of the Revolution is still in danger. In these conditions it is only by recognition of major problems and their distinction from minor ones, avoiding minor details, concentrating all our popular forces, and the elimination of the internal bases of imperialism, that we can turn the poisonous atmosphere into a permanent and desirable breath of freedom.

To the Mojahedin-e Khalgh, the women protesting the veil were demonstrative of the “contemptuous and cynical imposition of the Shah's sister, this embodiment of Western corruption and arrogance, as the symbol of the free women of Iran.” Parvin Paidar notes that by issuing the warning of revolutionary deviation to women, and not the Provisional Government,

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they made it clear that the making or breaking of revolutionary dedication rested on the bodies of women, not the emerging political structures.13

In their own opposition to the veil, leftist women echoed this rationale. They argued that they too were against being turned into a Western doll (zan-i ‘arusaki), and that the garb they chose to wear during the revolution had already ensured their modesty. On March 12th, well-known writer Qodsi Qazinur critiqued the imposition of veiling in Kayhan (the same newspaper that published Mandana’s photograph) by stating:

If by hejab is meant modesty, then why not do something fundamental? Why not teach women to dress simply – a baggy pair of pants, a long and loose blouse with hair tied behind the back with a rubber band… Then womanhood will no longer be so problematic, the borders of a woman’s freedom will not be a problem anymore, her hejab will not be a problem. Instead, she will be a human being armed with knowledge. If she seeks knowledge, if she seeks awareness, then being a woman will not be her tool anymore.14

In Qazinur’s argument, women would be able to transcend their own gender, and thus their inherently problematic sexuality, if they were taught a different value system, one that prized knowledge over their bodies. To all, the root of the problem was the inherent sexuality that women’s bodies implied. It was women’s obligation to overcome the paradox of gender and the perils it implied, while the category of masculinity was left unquestioned. Qazinur’s argument is not much different from those advocating hejab, for she also suggests a uniform as a solution to the problem of women’s unrestrained sexuality – except her choice was the leftist woman’s uniform of baggy clothing, not the veil.

13 Parvin Paidar, Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran (1995), 244
Women’s Day protestors insisted on their own honor as they reminded the Iranian populace of their integral participation in the revolution. A March 10th article in *Ettela’at* on the demonstration at the Ministry of Justice stated:

… Given that the unfailing participation of women in the struggle against imperialism and despotism comprised an important part of Iran’s revolution and that their role in the victory of the revolution has been accepted and confirmed by all the founding factions of the revolution; given that in the difficult and critical days of this nation, women showed themselves capable of considerable resistance and sacrifice that was confirmed by the revolution’s leader and attested to by the speeches, interviews and flyers that he put out with the promise of freedom, equality and the conferral of all social and political rights on women and which even directly stated that they would not return to fourteen hundred years ago; we, the women of Iran, announce our demands with the following declaration: 1) We, the women who carried out our social responsibilities shoulder to shoulder with men, and who bear the responsibility of raising the nation’s future generation are imminently respectable and we insist on the preservation of our dignity, character, and honor. While firmly believing in the necessity of preserving women’s status, we hold that women’s modesty is not manifest in any particular form or style of dress, and that the proper dress for women – taking custom, cost, and the environment into account – must be left to their own discretion.15

In their opposition to forced veiling, women asserted that they had already “shown themselves capable of considerable resistance and sacrifice.” They argued for their gender parity by insisting that they “carried out our social responsibilities shoulder to shoulder with men,” even as they acceded to the fact that their version of revolutionary responsibility had an additional level, for they were also tasked with “raising the nation’s future generation” and maintaining modesty within culture and society. In their opposition to the veil, they opt for a discursive strategy of claiming chastity for themselves even without the veil, that they could preserve their “dignity, character, and honor” even without “any particular form or style of dress.”

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In examining the responses of both leftist women and revolutionary organizations, we find that the reasoning behind Khomeini’s speech on *hejab*, and the reasoning used to negate the imposition of the veil, were grounded in the same logic of the necessity of women’s chastity. Khomeini’s veiling speech had simply made explicit what had always been implied in the foundational discourses of the opposition: revolutionary women were to be first and foremost figures of purity and embodiments of the ideals of the revolution. Those who opposed the veil did not oppose it because they disagreed with its logic, rather because they disagreed with the form that the logic took. In other words, they could all accept the importance of keeping women’s bodies from the treacherous grip of capitalism and cultural imperialism that incited women’s unchecked sexuality; they differed, however, in how women’s bodies should be regulated as such.

“*The Hejab Is A Revolution*”: Re-scripting and Re-membering the Militant Woman

In the weeks after the mandate, prominent newspapers like *Ettela’at* and *Kayhan* printed fervid debates between clerics and political leaders on the rightfulness of forced veiling. On March 11th, *Ettela’at* made the words of Ayatollah Taleghani, the ideological father of the Liberation Movement of Iran and one of the foremost revolutionary clerics, the headlines of their front page: “There Is No Compulsion In the Veil” (*dar mord hejab ejbar dar kar nist*).16 Some clerics qualified the imposition of *hejab*, claiming that just because women should veil doesn’t mean they need to wear the *chador*. One newspaper published an opinion by a young schoolgirl responding to Iranian writer Simin Daneshvar’s statement against veiling. The headline of the

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girl’s piece read: “*Hejab is a Revolution.*”¹⁷ The papers showed Iranian women protesting at the judiciary, and urging Bazargan to challenge Khomeini’s stance.

During the weeks of these debates, the newspapers teemed with photographs of the Women’s Day protests, for obvious reasons. But this time, the image of the “protesting woman” had fissured. The women who appeared in the Women’s Day marches were militant for a cause not deemed “necessary” for the revolution; “women’s issues” were, after all, a distraction. In this famous photograph, leftist women hold up their fists not for the overthrow of imperialism, but for solidarity with Iranian women’s rights (figure 3). While the symbol of the woman’s fist was revolutionary if it was for the overthrow of the Pahlavi regime, it was deviationist if it was for an issue deemed obstructive to the progress of the revolution. The National Television, which had been taken over by Khomeini’s close associate Sadeq Qotbzadeh, lifted the news blackout to show the women’s demonstrations, yet the montages they compiled heavily associated the protests with the policies of the Shah’s regime and the Westernized bourgeoisie.¹⁸ The demonstrating women were increasingly charged with being complicit in the “idolatrous” (*taghoot*) Pahlavi era, as well as accused of being prostitutes (*faheshehha*).¹⁹

The discourse produced through the events of March 1979 thus transformed the image of the *goshad*-clad leftist woman. After the Woman’s Day protests, her image was reinscribed with a postrevolutionary reality: she was indicative of the fault lines that had begun to fissure in the revolutionary aftermath, and was positioned as the antithesis of Khomeini’s direction for the revolution. Additionally, the discourse of March 1979 had worked to construct a notion of “veiled-ness” as linked with proper revolutionary zeal, and centered the object of the veil in

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Figure 3. Leftist-inspired goshad-clad woman raises her fist in protest of Khomeini’s veiling speech. March 1979. Source: PBS.org

Figure 4. The Hijab Debate Among Clerics and Intellectuals – the “Militant Woman” at the center of it all. March 1979. Source: Pars Times <http://parstimes.com/women/hijab/01.jpg>
oppositional discourse in a way it had never been before. Thus, the image of the leftist *goshad*-clad woman had changed because the viewer was now made aware of her unveiled-ness in the way that unveiled-ness came to be understood after March 1979.

As the veil was increasingly centered in political discourse in the weeks following the protests, images of “militant woman” who had appeared veiled in the streets of revolution proliferated in the press and published imagery. No longer just a symbol of a “woman with a gun,” for she was now centered in revolutionary imagery by the very fact of her being “veiled.” Printed beside the clerical debates in *Ettela’at* and *Kayhan* were images of gun-toting women who had been veiled in her militant opposition to the Shah. This March 1979 newspaper publication printed a photograph of veiled women with guns (taken most likely in the early months of 1979) at the center of the deliberations on *hejab* by revolutionary “forefathers” like Shariati and Taleqani (figure 4). In the image, one woman holds up a sign of Yasser Arafat (another “revolutionary forefather” in a transnational sense). Amidst the debates on the rightfulness regarding the imposition of the veil, such photographs served to validate Khomeini’s stance on the veil, for it made it seem as if the purist and most devout form of the militant woman had always appeared veiled in the streets of revolution. In other words, the publishing of such images at the center of the *hejab* debates precipitated a reading backwards of those image – for it made them appear as if their veil had been produced through Khomeini’s championing of it, when that was not the case. The inclusion of such images in the midst of the veiling debates served to purport that *hejab* did not impede on women’s rights; rather, it promoted their activism.

Indeed, the photograph, captured by photo-journalist Mohammad Farnood, enjoyed widespread circulation in both newspapers and on political posters in the aftermath of March.
1979. In the following months, it became one of the most demonstrative images of the figure of the militant woman. On this poster (figure 5), the photograph is reproduced with the caption: “Militant woman, defender of her land and the fate of her society.” The caption of “militant woman” (zan mubaraz) marks the (veiled) figures in this photograph as the personification of what women’s militancy looked like in the revolution. There is also a word play happening here: it tasks her with the role of “defender of land and the fate of her society,” but the syntax of the caption also works to label her, the militant woman, as “the fate of her society.” Such language echoes the association that had always existed between the militant woman and the purification of society, or the rectification of cultural maladies. The reproduction of this version of the militant woman, who had always worn a headscarf but whose “veiled-ness” was only now centered in political discourse, served a political memory that recalled a very specific image of the “veiled” gun-toting woman and worked to elevate her as the most devout and pure form of the militant woman.

The artists behind the revolutionary imagery of 1978 and 1979 followed suit in this transformation of the “militant woman.” This poster by Morteza Momayez (figure 6), one of the principal artists behind the image-making of 1978 (discussed in Chapter 3), shows a line of veiled women holding up their fists. Titled “Women of the Revolution,” this poster was most likely produced in the middle of the year after the events of March 1979. Such images reveal that the manufacturers of the revolutionary imagery in the 1978 poster-production were the same artists who produced images of the veiled militant woman in the postrevolutionary political atmosphere. They had familiarity with both the Iranian militant woman as well as with the broader visual traditions in the movements of the era. In this poster, Momayez transposes the image of the clenched-fisted veiled woman into the realm of poster imagery, not because he
Figure 5. Mohammad Farnood, “Militant woman, defender of her land and the fate of her society.” circa March 1979. Source: Palestine Poster Project Archives

supported any Khomeini-centric direction of revolutionary politics, but rather because this was the new form the “militant woman” had taken in imagery after March 1979. This was the version that now had political currency.

Thus, we find that the proliferation of the “veiled woman with a gun” in the aftermath of the events of March 1979 did a very specific type of work in terms of the re-scripting of the figure of the militant woman. First, it implied that *hejab* and women’s revolutionary activism were not mutually exclusive, and in fact validated Khomeini’s claim that true revolutionary women wore the veil. Second, it served to offer an alternate memory of women in the revolution: a memory in which the militant woman had always been centered by virtue of her veiled-ness.

That being said, the leftist-inspired militant woman did not disappear overnight. In the months immediately following Khomeini’s speech, both veiled and unveiled woman continued to be represented in Iranian media. This April 1979 issue of the newspaper *Sogand* shows two side-by-side drawings of young girls with guns fighting for the revolution. The drawings were part of a newspaper spread titled “The International Year of the Child” and included a letter from a young Iranian girl named Leyla Azadi to then nine-year-old Leyla Pahlavi, the daughter of the abdicated Mohammad Reza. To the right of the letter was a child’s drawing of three veiled girls, raising their fists and their guns above their heads (figure 7). Behind the girls are the mountains of rural Iran, where much of the guerrilla training in 1970s Iran had taken place. On the same page, a corresponding child’s drawing shows two young militant girls appearing unveiled, printed within an editorial titled “Meet the Children of the Revolution.” Drawn by a first-grade student named Jalal Mir Jawadi, one girl holds up a gun while the other holds up a flag on which the word “Freedom” (*azadi*) appears (figure 8). These corresponding images show that even in the months after March 1979, the “veiled” and the “unveiled” militant woman were not
Figure 7. Children’s drawing of “veiled” girls raising guns above their heads. Behind them are the rural mountains where guerrilla training mostly occurred in Iran. *Sogand* Newspaper, April 1979. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 13

Figure 8. Children’s drawing of “unveiled” girls. One holds a gun, the other a flag with the word “freedom” written on it. *Sogand* Newspaper, April 1979. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 13

Figure 9. Ashraf Rabi’i, MKO guerrilla at a shooting range near Tehran. April 1979. Source: http://shahinsartipi06.blogspot.com/2014/12/blog-post_44.html
concretely distinguished, and the two were still seen, to a degree, more in conjunction with each other than in separation.

It is evident in these children’s drawings that the model of armed militancy set for young women in the revolution remained a significant component in the memory of women’s revolutionary activism, even months after the victory. This memory was reinforced by photographs of MKO guerrilla women that circulated during this period. Before the revolution, it was predominantly *Fedaiyan* women who had achieved notoriety as guerrilla fighters. Yet, in the aftermath of 1979, some MKO women rose to a certain level of fame for their anti-regime activities than they had in the decade prior to the revolution. The image of the *mojahed* Ashraf Rabi’i (who would marry MKO leader Massoud Rajavi in the summer of 1979) circulated widely in the various organs and booklets of the MKO and other *Mojahedin*-aligned students associations. Ashraf Rabi’i had a similar story to Dehqani: she was imprisoned by the Shah in 1971, released, and imprisoned again in 1976. She was brutally tortured both times. After being freed from prison in January 1979, she rejoined the *Mojahedin* guerrillas, and continued to train recruits after the revolution. In an interview with Rabi’i on April 22nd, 1979, the New York Times Magazine expressed awe that she was “a woman who actually fought – carried a rifle and fired it – in the revolution.”20 This quote attests to the fact that the preeminent feature that made Rabi’i an admirable revolutionary woman was not the thought of her being tortured by the Shah or organizing oppositional activities but that she “carried a rifle and fired it,” that she held the object of the “gun” during the revolution. During this period (between March and June of 1979), photographs of Rabi’i training in the mountainside were common. If we look back at figure 7,

20 “An Interview with Ashraf” from the *New York Times Magazine*, 22 April 1979, in the publication “Massoud Rajavi: A People’s Mojahed,” published by the Union of Iranian Students Societies Outside Iran (March 1980); IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 22
the drawing of the three veiled girls in front of a mountainous landscape are clearly inspired by those circulating photographs.

One can speculate as to why the images and stories of MKO women came into this new significance in the aftermath of the revolution. I propose that as the veil increasingly became the object around which revolutionary activism was performed, the figure of the guerrilla woman who seemed to always have appeared “veiled” in her militancy acquired a new currency in revolutionary discourse and imagery.

The Consolidation of the Revolution

The period from the February victory of the revolution to the summer of 1979 is colloquially referred to as “the spring of freedom,” when there existed a sense that anything was possible, and that the revolution could truly offer the abundance of possibilities that Iranians had imagined for their country. Yet during this period, the problems of post-revolutionary reality began to manifest at the fore. On March 31st, a referendum was held to vote for an Islamic Republic. While the Fedaiyan overtly boycotted it, the Mojahedin-e Khalgh, the National Front, the Tudeh Party, and the Liberation Movement gave it its tacit support.21

Although Khomeini’s close circle did not yet have official control of the government, local groups of mobilized Iranian youth began to serve as a grassroots army to serve Khomeini’s

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21 On the debate over the referendum, Parvin Paidar writes:

The Islamic leadership put everything it had into the establishment of an Islamic Republic which included political manipulation of its supporters and suppression of its opponents. When the Provisional Government was preparing for a plebiscite on a future political system, the political parties called for an open referendum to give the widest possible options to the public, and presented their own choices. The Islamic parties proposed a ‘Democratic Islamic Republic’, secular nationalists called for a ‘Republic of Iran’, and the left campaigned for a ‘Democratic Republic of Iran’. Ayatollah Khomeini, however, refused to hold an open referendum and dismissed out of hand the proposals put forward by various political parties. He insisted that people had already chosen the ‘Islamic Republic’ as their future political system when they demonstrated against the Shah and demanded an Islamic Republic.

agenda. Khomeini encouraged his circle to maintain a connection with these revolutionary committees (komiteh) and to keep them mobilized. In the months following the referendum, Mojahedin and Fedaiyan members were slowly purged from the revolutionary komitehs, and the groups of radical youth soon became the enforcers of Khomeini’s proclamations and policed anything they considered to be “counter-revolutionary” activity. On the power of these local komitehs, Prime Minister Mehdi Bazargan complained: “In theory, the government is in charge; but, in reality, it is Khomeini who is in charge – he with his Revolutionary Council, his revolutionary Komitehs, and his relationship with the masses.”

While Khomeini had not actively established these komitehs in a top-down fashion, the power of this grassroots mobilization in support of Khomeini was still a force to be reckoned with. By the summer of 1979, although the Provisional Government was officially the governing body in Iran, these paragovernmental networks aided in the consolidation of Khomeini’s vision for the revolution.

While the active political debate and protests over hejab would continue until 1980, these revolutionary committees (komiteh) were central to the enforcement of an “Islamic dress code” among women, for they considered the failure to wear hejab as overtly counter-revolutionary, in the manner that counter-revolutionary was now being defined. In the phase of nationalist and political consolidation, hejab was a definitive marker of the change that had occurred in Iranian society by way of the revolution: it proved that the harmful tendencies of the Pahlavi state would be tolerated no more. Even Ayatollah Taleqani, who did not support forceful imposition of hejab, nevertheless insisted: “We want to show that there has been a revolution, a profound change.”

While before the debates of the veil, the anti-Pahlavi dress code included any clothing deemed sufficient to conceal women’s bodies, now the anti-gharbzadeh dress code was

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23 Paidar, Women and the Political Process in Twentieth-Century Iran (1995), 233
explicitly to take the form of the veil as a definitive marker of political and cultural change. Parvin Paidar writes: “By bringing the question of women's position onto the political agenda, the Islamisation policy forced the break-up of the revolutionary construction of gender. The boundary of gender identity which had been drawn during the Revolution by opposing Iranian national identity to that of a Western imported identity, lost its unifying significance.” In other words, what had been deemed anti-Pahlavi in the pre-revolutionary period – baggy clothing that obscured women’s bodies – was no longer sufficient to mark that difference: only the assumption of the veil could truly indicate gharbzadeh and gharbzadeh-resistant. With this new logic, anyone who didn’t veil was not just “un-Islamic” – they were evidence of the corruptive cultural continuities from the Pahlavi era. To protests against hejab was to hinder the project of national consolidation and demarcation in the post-revolutionary state. And the komitehs took this counter-revolutionary expression very seriously: they set up road blocks and checkpoints, searched houses, and were on constant lookout for “un-Islamic activity,” which included the failure to wear hejab.25

By the summer of 1979, the power of the roving komitehs came to the fore in the realm of postrevolutionary politics. After the prosecutor general banned the left-wing newspaper Ayandegan in August of 1979, the local groups of mobilized youth attacked the Ayendegan office and confiscated the printing equipment. In the subsequent demonstration against this closure, mobs of hezbollahi attacked protestors and rampaged the headquarters of the Fedaiyin-e Khalgh. The closure of leftist and secular newspapers indicated a narrowing of the political sphere in favor of the politics of the “Islamists.” By the end of 1979, the leftist groups and their

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24 ibid., 233
publications had been driven underground. The *komitehs* were also responsible for a larger campaign of intimidation when it came to voting in elections, which resulted in an overwhelming number of members of the Islamic Republic Party (IRP) to be voted into the Assembly of Experts.

With the closure of the independent secular press and the increasing uniformity of veiling, the leftist version of the militant woman had all but disappeared. Certain sectors of the *mojahedin* that had not yet fallen out of favor with Khomeini continued to publish booklets within Iran, and the *mojahed* woman could still be found within certain Iranian political circles on a much smaller scale. Yet, the visibility of leftist guerrilla women on the streets had diminished almost entirely. What remained of her figure was cast as the “bourgeois” deviationist anti-*hejab* protestor in propaganda and political discourse. Certain *Mojahedin*-aligned Muslim students associations still produced images of the *mojahed*-style militant woman; the veil had not been yet imposed uniformly, and varying styles of headscarf were sill permissible. Still, the predominant version of the “militant woman” that had survived the divisive politics of postrevolutionary Iran was the Khomeini-championed *chador*-clad version.

However, the visual codes of this chador-clad gun-toting woman bore striking resemblance to those that governed the militant women in the pre-revolutionary era. In figure 10, which is undated but was taken sometime in 1979, shows a chador-clad woman with her V-for-victory fingers thrust in the air and her gun held to her body. This aesthetic should look familiar, for it is the exact same pose that Mandana strikes when she is asked to pose atop the tank by Mehdi Sahabi. Her pose demonstrates that she possesses an identical knowledge as Mandana as

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27 Women’s demonstrations had subsided somewhat by the summer of 1979 when women were threatened with massive lay-offs after they protested the closure of day-care centers, yet they would continue on a smaller scale until Khomeini’s June 1980 decree on the “administrative revolution” which required women to wear *hejab* in all government offices.
to how a “militant woman” should perform for the camera on the stage of revolution (acquired through the transnational figure of the militant woman), both in pose and affective gesture, and presents herself accordingly.

Similarly, this photograph (figure 11) of chador-clad women standing guard at a Khordad rally in the summer of 1979 also betrays the way the codes of women’s militancy in the pre-revolutionary era directly informed the gun-toting woman who dressed in a chador. Take a look at the poster behind the women. Does it remind you of anything? It should. We saw a version of this poster in Chapter 1 (figure 1.10); it was a 1970 Cuban political poster celebrating the International Week of Solidarity with Latin America. In the Cuban version of this poster, the fist emerges from the continent of Latin America and clutches a guerrilla’s gun. In the poster behind these militant women in figure 11, the fist emerges from the country of Iran, but clutches the guerrilla’s gun just the same. Even within this single photograph, the transnational codes of revolution govern the logic of these women and their guns. There is a second notable feature of this photograph. On the arm of the woman to the left of the photograph, we can see the sleeve of a plaid shirt. As we have seen, the plaid shirt was a main staple of the leftist woman’s uniform across the globe, and promoted in Iran as a form of “baggy” clothing to conceal women’s inherently sexual bodies. It is unclear whether this woman is aligned with Khomeini or is a leftist woman donning the “people’s uniform” of the chador. Regardless, the presence of the plaid shirt speaks to the fact that the visual codes that governed the appearance of militant women spanned across the political spectrum.
Figure 10. Chador-clad woman raises the V-for-victory sign while clutching a gun to her body. 1979. Source: BBC News / Sipa Press

Figure 11. Chador-clad woman stand guard at a Khordad rally, c. May-June 1979. Source: Getty Images
Chapter 5: The Militant Woman in the Islamic Republic

On November 4th, 1979, the power of komiteh activity came under an international lens, when Islamist youth overtook the U.S. embassy at the behest of the radical clerics, beginning a 444-day hostage crisis.

Photographs of veiled women guarding the gates of the embassy became a staple of the imagery of the hostage crisis. One woman, Masoumeh Ebtekar, became known to the world as “Mary” for being the spokesperson of the student group who took the hostages (figure 12). Ebtekar was a student at Tehran International School before the revolution, and a follower of Ali Shariati and his version of revolutionary Shi’ism. During the hostage crisis, Masoumeh “Mary” Ebtekar gave a name and a face to the archetypal militant woman of the ever-more bellicose postrevolutionary Iran. Other women like Forouz Rajaifar could be seen guarding the gates of the embassy, and became known to an international audience as representative of the hostage crisis (figure 14). The November 1979 hostage crisis had brought international eyes into the new political landscape of postrevolutionary Iran, and the figure that they saw representing this radical direction of the revolution was none other than the veiled militant woman, Masoumeh (a.k.a “Mary”), Forouz, and other female student militants.

On November 6th, two days after the takeover of the embassy, the Provisional Government resigned. Although Khomeini embraced it, Bazargan’s government had not supported the hostage crisis, and documents found in the embassy implicated Bazargan’s government in maintaining relations with the U.S. The Council of the Islamic Revolution

28 Ebtekar was born with the name Niloufar. It is unclear when she changed her name to Masoumeh.
29 In 1981 Ebtekar would become the editor-in-chief of Kayhan International. She would afterward become a high-ranking government official in the Islamic Republic. She was the Vice President of Iran under Mohammad Khatami and is currently the Vice President again under Hassan Rouhani.
30 In the mid 2000s, Forouz Rajaifar was an outspoken critic against re-opening an American consulate in Tehran, claiming it would prepare the grounds to overthrow the Islamic Republic. Mahan Abedin, “The great wall between Iran and the US,” Asia Times Online, 12 December 2008, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/JL12Ak02.html> (accessed 10 April 2016)
Figure 12. Masoumeh Ebtekar, the spokesperson for the Iranian student militants and the international press during the hostage crisis. November 1979. Source: Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wB3HJAlsN7Y>

Figure 13. Arnaud De Wildenberg. A student militant guarding the U.S. embassy. November 30, 1979 in Tehran, Iran. Source: Getty Images

Figure 14. Abbas Attar. Forouz Rajaifar patrols the periphery of the U.S. embassy. November 1979. Source: Magnum Photos/Abbas
stepped in as the governing body in Iran until the formation of the first parliament the following August. In addition to the political fracturing, the Iranian military was also highly unorganized. In May of 1979, Khomeini had formed the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, a grass-roots army that recruited the members of the komitehs and aimed to mobilize other revolutionary youth. (It is notable that the issues of women’s veiling/chastity took priority in the postrevolutionary state before the mobilization of an army did.) Yet, with the acceptance of ex-Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi into the U.S. in October of 1979 and the subsequent takeover of the embassy, a rhetoric of anti-imperialism re-ignited with a fervor, and Khomeini called for the expansion of the army to combat the ever-growing imperialist threat. On November 26th, Khomeini stated that “a country with twenty million youths must have twenty million riflemen or a military with twenty million soldiers; such a country will never be destroyed.” The statement effectively called for all “twenty million” of Iranian youth to enroll in the newly mobilized army in order for the Islamic Republic to become impenetrable. With that, the Sepah-e Basij (volunteer militia army) was established.

In the weeks following Khomeini’s announcement on the army of twenty million, parades celebrating the “Mobilization Week” marched through the streets of Tehran. And who was the figure who took prominence in the parades? None other than the chador-clad, gun-toting woman. Lines of women marched through the streets of “Mobilization Week” with guns held in front of them and carnations stuck in the muzzles (figure 15). (The symbolism of Portugal’s 1974 Carnation’s Revolution had clearly a lasting effect.) Photographs of these marching women were published both within Iran and the international press.

Figure 15. Reza Dehqati. Women in headscarves march in “Mobilization Week” at the end of 1979. Source: Getty Images

The photographers who had captured the visual culture of revolution in 1978 were the same ones to picture these “militant women” during the events of November 1979. Abbas Attar (also published under the title A. Abbas), who had been among six or seven prominent photographers responsible for picturing the streets of the revolution, was now behind the lens documenting the transformed version of the militant woman. Prior to the revolution, he had been a photojournalist in Vietnam, Biafra, and South Africa, and had worked for the French photo agency Gamma. In his time working in other revolutions, he had seen and documented the imageries of other revolutions, and including the transnational figure of the militant woman. Now, he was picturing the postrevolutionary Iranian version of her – guarding the embassy and marching in military parades. This photograph by Abbas Attar (figure 16), taken in December 1979, shows a chador-clad woman armed with an Uzi machine gun, guarding a demonstration against Iraq (it would be several months before the breakout of war).

During the marches in support of the U.S. embassy takeover and “Mobilization Week”, there occurred another change regarding the image of militant women: the codes of women’s militancy had been transposed onto the bodies of children. Girls under the age of six years old were dressed in women’s chador and given a gun with which to be photographed (figure 17, 18). Outside of the walls of the embassy, fathers hoisted their daughters onto their shoulders and taught them to raise their fist high in the air; mothers gave their little girls toy wooden guns and pinned photographs of Khomeini to their headscarves.

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the politics of children’s images during this time period, it is a field of inquiry that is of historical significance and should be investigated by future scholars. Of significance to me, however, is the way the political currency of images of children converges with the political currency of images of women’s militancy. In
Figure 17. A picture of Ayahtollah Ruhollah Khomeini pinned to her clothing, this little girl clutches a toy gun in front of the U.S. Embassy in Tehran December 1979. Source: Bettman/ Getty Images

Figure 18. Abbas Attar. A little girl is armed with a toy gun, with a carnation tied to the muzzle, in the marches supporting the overtaking of the U.S. embassy. 1980. Source: Magnum Photos/Abbas
Figure 19. A young girl holds a rifle with a carnation in the muzzle. Quote by Ayatollah Taleqani reads: “Our army does not belong only to our brothers in the armed forces. Men and women, young and old in our country are the members of the Islamic Army, and are the guardians of Islam.” Published during “Mobilization Week,” end of 1979. Source: University of Chicago Library
Figure 21. Woman being trained in gun use in the mountains by the head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Circa December 1979. Source: Reza/Getty Images

Figure 22. Women being trained in military ropes courses in the mountains. December 1979. Source: Getty Images
Chapter 5: The Militant Woman in the Islamic Republic

dthis poster, produced at the end of 1979, a young girl holds a rifle with a carnation stuck in the muzzle (figure 19). On the poster, the words of Ayatollah Taleqani read: “Our army does not belong only to our brothers in the armed forces. Men and women, young and old in our country are the members of the Islamic Army, and are the guardians of Islam.” The quote by Taleqani that the “army does not belong only to our brothers… Men and women… are the guardians of Islam” attests to the fact that the duty of militancy in postrevolutionary Iran applied, at least metaphorically, to both men and women. In reality, women’s were asked to assume their patriotic duty by caring for their children in the home, and let politics be handled by men. However, both women and men were tasked with being the “guardians” of Islam and the Islamic Republic – and the visual translation of that duty was through the holding of a gun.

Within the visual logic of the photograph, however, there are two “protections” happening. In the first, the young girl with a gun is posed to defend her homeland (which would become necessary in a few months at the start of the Iran-Iraq War). Yet, in the second “protection”, the men standing behind her appear to form a line to “guard” the young girl: after all, if the “militant woman” was the “fate of her society” (see the inscription on figure y), then “the child” was the future of society to be protected at all costs.32 In the logic of the photograph, the young girl is mobilized to protect her homeland, but the men behind her are also mobilized to protect her, another embodiment of homeland and society.

In the weeks following Khomeini’s call for an “army of twenty million,” The Islamic Republic provided gun training to young women in their efforts at keeping them mobilized in service of the newly formed state. This photograph (figure 21), taken by photojournalist Reza Deghati in December of 1979, shows a woman being trained in the mountains by the head of the

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32 The political symbolism of children would later gain a new significance with the start of the Iran-Iraq War, where boys as young as eleven and twelve were recruited to the volunteer *basi*j militia.
Chapter 5: The Militant Woman in the Islamic Republic

Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Other photographs show women balancing across intricate training courses such as ropes bridges (figure 22). Footage from a German documentary in 1980 showed several young women being taught how to use a gun by *hezbollahi* men. The fact that these sessions were elaborately photographed and filmed speaks to the fact that the training of women in the matter of guns was itself a kind of national showing, a projection of revolutionary symbolism into the images of the budding Islamic Republic.

One of the most interesting documents I have found that came out of the period following Khomeini’s statement on the “army of twenty million” is a booklet by a *Mojahedin*-aligned Muslim students association published in an effort to recruit Iranians to the local militias (figure 20). Titled “Militia,” the text of the front page reads: “In order to be able to mobilize the masses for a full scale people’s war against our main enemy, in the first place we have to organize them. Militias are an integral part of the big twenty million army that is necessary to be organized in order to combat the imperialists.”

Throughout the booklet are paragraphs that explain the formation of militias, the importance of mobilization parades, the place of militias within a revolutionary morality. While nowhere in the booklet are women mentioned specifically, the pages are filled with photographs of Palestinian, Cambodian, Vietnamese, and Algerian militia women training and fighting in their respective revolutionary movements. In roughly a dozen photographs, only two of them depict men. The last pages of the booklet show photographs of *Mojahedin* women marching in parades that appear to be during Mobilization Week.

The date that the booklet was produced is not specified, but it was most likely issued in late 1979 or the early months of 1980 when a clear effort was made by the government and revolutionary organizations to train women for the project of mobilization. Although the main

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33 “Militia [milishya],” *Association of Students and Muslim Students in Tehran* (n.d., est. early 1980s); IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 22
Figure 20. Pages from the “Militia” booklet in support of Khomeini’s “twenty million” army. Published by a Mojahedin-aligned Muslim Students Association. No where in the pamphlet are women mentioned explicitly. Late 1979, early 1980. Source: Militia [milishya],” Association of Students and Muslim Students in Tehran (n.d., est. early 1980s); IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 22
Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalgh (MKO) had for the most part broken with the government by the Spring of 1980, their base did not disappear overnight – many of the Islamic students associations who had supported them remained intact and participated in postrevolutionary politics. Publications such as this one reflect an effort of these smaller political groups – who were aligned with the Islamic Marxists but still attempted to ingratiate themselves within the increasingly Islamist-centric political landscape – to use the mobilization effort in order to maintain relevance within Iranian politics.

The most striking feature of this booklet, however, is the way it uses the figure of the militant woman in order to drive its message of militia mobilization. The booklet itself does not focus on women – its central point is the importance of militias in the mobilization of an army for the Islamic Republic. Yet it highlights the figure of the female fighter as emblematic of this project of militancy for nationalist aspirations. The document itself almost serves as a story book for my argument, highlighting the militant woman in all geographies of revolution. It places the Iranian militant woman – who in this booklet seems to be a mojahed woman – in a tradition of other revolutionary movements who also elevated the figure of the female fighter in their nationalist discourses. This booklet demonstrates how, even in 1980, Iran’s female fighter is framed by her own transnational heritage from which she derives much of her visual import.

Thus, at the turn of 1979, the figure of the veiled gun-toting woman became visible to the world and to the new political culture of Iran as the preeminent embodiment of the “militant woman” who had fought in the revolution and who would now rise to the task of protecting her homeland. In the phase of national consolidation, she gained a new currency as the devout and moral woman who would dedicate herself to her nation at all costs. She could indeed be seen doing so: guarding the U.S. embassy, marching in Mobilization Week parades, “training” in the

34 These remaining bases were the ones who helped Banisadr to escape in June 1981.
mountains, guarding anti-Iraq demonstrations. Even children as young as three or four were taught the codes of women’s militancy. To an international audience who closely observed the crisis, the chador-clad version of the militant woman had become famous as an indicator of the growing fundamentalist tendencies of the new Islamic Republic. To all, both in and out of Iran, she had become the emblematic figure of Iran’s new political landscape.

Enter 1980: The Militant Woman in the Newly Formed Islamic Republic

Fatimah Zahra... “A Divine, Celestial Being.” “A Lady of Struggle, Resistance, and Revolution.”

In the aftermath of the revolution, there emerged a paradox concerning women in the revolution. As we have seen, the image of woman’s militancy was deployed in revolutionary imagery when it was politically salient; yet at the same time, in the period following the revolution, political discourse increasingly attempted to relegate women to the home. With the ratification of the constitution in December 1979 (which looked almost nothing like the draft that the Provisional Government had passed the previous June), the “place of women” in the postrevolutionary state looked like what many revolutionary women had feared most – their place, the constitution stated, was in the homes. On the role of women, the preamble of the Constitution stated:

The family is the cornerstone of society and the primary institution for the growth and improvement of the individual; consensus and ideological belief in the principle that the formation of family is fundamental for the future development of the individual is one of the main aims of the Islamic government. According to this line of thinking regarding the family, women will no longer be regarded as a mere “thing” or “instrument” in the services of consumerism; but, while being restored to the worthwhile and responsible task of motherhood, they will be primarily
responsible for the raising of committed individuals… Consequently, they will be given a greater responsibility, and a higher worth and value from the Islamic point of view. The constitution officially legalized what had been enacted in the previous months: it prohibited women from becoming judges, and it stripped them of the right to divorce. Khomeini emphasized the man’s patriarchal rights over his household: “A woman contracted in a permanent marriage to a man must not leave the house without her husband’s permission and must surrender herself to him so he can attain any pleasure he desires. She must not refuse to make love to him without legitimate shari’ah excuse.” As one scholar noted in 1980: “The role of women in the revolution is still praised by various leaders and the pictures of revolutionary women with chador, gun, and fist are a mainstay of the new regime; yet every possible means is being used to drive women back into the seclusion of the home.”

What seemed like a paradox, however, could be reconciled by the pre-existing “Islamic” categories put forth for the ideal revolutionary woman. The contents of Ali Shariati’s 1971 treatise Fatimah Is Fatimah, which offered the mother of Shi’i martyr Hussein as the model for Iranian woman, was incorporated into the official discourse of the Islamic Republic with a vehemence. Before the revolution, Shariati’s Fatimah Is Fatima was certainly influential; it had existed as a cultural critique of Pahlavi Western corruption, and participated in a similar tradition as Al-e Ahmad’s Gharbzadegi in its focus on women’s appearances and modesty. Fatimah Is Fatimah was influenced by the work of Louis Massignon and Frantz Fanon in their writings on cultural imperialism; he even quotes Jean Paul Sartre on the logical rationale behind women’s nature and behavior. Shariati even offers the French Joan of Arc (whom we have seen re-

38 Shariati writes:
emerge as a symbol during the French Revolution and remained a politically salient trope into the twentieth century) as a corresponding example of the ideal revolutionary woman. To Shariati, Fatimah was

a symbol for all the various dimensions of womanhood. She was the perfect model of a daughter when dealing with her father. She was a perfect model of a wife when dealing with her husband. She was the perfect model of a mother when raising her children. She was the perfect model of a responsible, fighting woman when confronting her time and the fate of her society.

While Shariati praised Fatimah for her revolutionary devotion, he cited very few examples of Fatimah’s actual militancy – he praised her for washing the sword of her father and mourning her martyred son, but never for fighting in battle herself. Shariati put Fatimah forward as the counter to the bourgeois housewife who had become too invested in capitalist consumption; he did not put her forward, however, as an actual example of militant activism. She demonstrated how women could be revolutionary if they remained chaste in their homes and devoted to their selves to their husbands and fathers, and remembered their honor in the face of Iran’s West-struckness.

Women fighting in the guerrilla movement in the 1960s and 1970s did not find this model very inspirational, for obvious reasons. The chastity part they could agree with, but the in-the-home-ness of women was something they actively challenged within their own groups. Recall that leftist women de-gendered themselves in their presentation of both body and self in order to participate in the leftist organizations so as to not highlight their own “womanhood” in

Sartre presents an example. A woman is the wife of a man who has no attractive qualities. In comparison to him, there is an attractive man who loves her. The intelligent way is clear. Both men need her. One needs her as a wife, the other as a lover. The woman does not need the first man but rather the second… The duty of this woman is clear. Her intelligence makes the decision a clear mathematical formula. The reason behind why a woman would sacrifice two needs for one is not simply an intellectual, logical Cartesian or Freudian one. An intelligent woman thinks and acts logically. Economic freedom and social rights present her with the possibility of doing it. She does it.

the co-ed groups. The “corruptive Pahlavi womanhood” was obstructive to militant women, for they had to consistently mark themselves as its antithesis, yet Shariati’s Fatimah was equally hindering, for it presented a domestic model of womanhood that simply could not exist within the realities of the militant organizations.

Some scholars argue that Zeinab, the wife of Hussein, was also put forth as a second model of the Iranian woman, one who was more applicable to the reality of women’s militancy. Shariati mentions only briefly Zeinab in the treatise, but when he does he compares her to the French Joan of Arc

a sensitive and imaginative girl…of sacrifice and of revolutionary courage to enlightened, aware and progressive French people. Compare Joan to Zeinab, the sister of Imam Hussein, who carried a heavier mandate. Zeinab’s mandate was to continue the movement of Karbala. She opposed murders, terror and hysterics. She continued the movement at a time when all the heroes of the revolution were dead, when the heroism and wisdom of the commanders of Islam at the time of the Prophet were gone.

The ta’ziyeh passion plays of Muharram in the days of the revolution had also shown Zeinab at Karbala rousing the soldiers with a passionate speech. Many historians refer to both Fatimah and Zeinab as the model of women’s militancy in the pre-revolutionary landscape.

Yet, in examining both the images and narratives of militant women, this assumption becomes less and less convincing. Before the revolution, women cited freedom fighters Djamila Boupacha, Djamila Bouhired, Leila Khaled and Dalal al-Mughrabi as inspirations for their activism. Posters of Kurdish and Palestinian female fedayin were sold in the streets of 1978 next to posters of Shariati. In the Women’s Day protests of March 1979, women held up signs of the

39 Minoo Moallem, Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 93
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Soviet “Emancipated Woman” and of Iranian women throwing up their fists. Nowhere were
Fatimah or Zeinab to be found.41

Yet, in the postrevolutionary landscape, Fatimah was championed by Khomeini as the
example of Iran’s revolutionary woman. In May of 1979, Khomeini deemed the birthday of
Fatimah to be Women’s Day in Iran, and heralded

Fatima Zahra, upon whom be upon peace. She was not an ordinary woman; she was a spiritual
woman, a heavenly woman, a human being in the true sense of the word… a divine celestial
being who appeared in the form of a woman. She personified all the very best human and female
traits that one can image. Tomorrow, then, is Women’s Day, tomorrow is the day on which such a
woman was born.42

Khomeini had adopted Fatimah not as a model of women’s militancy, but as the ideal Iranian
woman who had returned to her home under the new state. As such, women were not being
“domesticated” – they were being given the opportunity to walk in the steps of Fatimah Zahra. In
Khomeini’s speeches from 1979 and 1980, Zeinab is rarely mentioned – if she is, it is in a line of
other Islamic models like Khadijah and Mary (i.e. the Virgin Mary).

By the end of 1979, the official discourse of the revolution had adopted Fatimah as its
model of the revolutionary woman in a way that the pre-revolutionary discourse had never done.
True, the category of the dedicated mother Fatimah had existed through Shariati, but she had
been offered as a counter example in the context of the fear of cultural imperialism: she was
presented as a culturally indigenous “Iranian” model, not a religious “Islamic” model. Even so,

41 Some scholars maintain that women had used the image of Zeinab to convince their traditional relatives
to allow them to demonstrate in the streets in 1978. This may be true (although I have not found any
interviews that explicitly state this), but it is clear that neither Zeinab nor Fatimah impacted the visual
representation of women’s militancy – that aesthetic had come from the transnational visual codes of the
female fighter.
42 Ayatollah Khomeini, “The Divine Personality of Hazrat Fatima Zahra,” (16 May 1979) [26
Ordibehesht 1358], cited from: trans. Juliana Shaw & Behrooz Arezoo, “The Position of Women from the
Viewpoint of Imam Khomeini,” The Institute for Compilation and Publication of Imam Khomeini’s Work
(Tehran, Autumn 2001): 9
she effectively remained on the pages of Shariati’s 1971 treatise – neither intellectuals nor guerrillas (to my knowledge) took her up as their model in their own writings. This 1979 poster of Fatimah Zahra (figure 23), released for the May 17th celebration of Iran’s “Women’s Day” (this “Women’s Day” to be championed by Khomeini), is the first poster I have come across that portrays Fatimah in revolutionary iconography. The text beneath her reads: “Fatimah’s rising, celebrating the true leader of women.” The image shows a relatively passive form of Fatimah, where only a silhouette appears, as if she is transcendental and “a divine celestial being” (in Khomeini’s words). The silhouetted aesthetic underscores her innocence and the fact that her version of ideal womanhood is nearly unattainable. Even as Fatimah began to visually materialize in postrevolutionary iconography, she was certainly not a picture of the veiled “militant woman” who was so ubiquitous during this period.

On Women’s Day in May 1980, women marched in the streets for a very different reason than they had fourteen months before: to celebrate the birthday of Fatimah Zahra, the “day on which such a woman was born… the day when woman’s dignity and woman’s character came into being.” Instead of protesting hejab, women in the streets “chanted pro-Islamic slogans along the way… and concluded that women will achieve their freedom when their social behavior is in accordance with the principles of Islam and the explicit text of the Qur’an.” The images of Women’s Day in the newspapers were also markedly transformed. On the front page of Kayhan on May 6th, 1980, were two photographs: a cluster of veiled women, which only showed the back of their veils, and Khomeini raising his hand in greeting. The headline displayed the words of the Imam: “Women should forget about the behavior under the Shah’s

Figure 23. White Silhouette of Fatimah. May 1979. Source: University of Chicago Library, Middle Eastern Posters Collection

Figure 24. Nasser Palangi, A Woman Holding a Rifle, 1980. Source: University of Chicago Library, Middle Eastern Posters Collection

Figure 25. Nasser Palangi, Heirs of Zeinab, 1980. Source: University of Chicago Library, Middle Eastern Posters Collection

regime.” On Women’s Day of 1980 (now celebrated as the occasion of Fatimah’s birthday), the newspaper Ettela’at described Fatimah as “the lady of struggle, resistance, and revolution.” Fatimah Zahra, who is here described as a “lady of resistance”, was set as a model for women who marched in the public performances of nationalism for the Islamic Republic, even as she was simultaneously figured as the devoted mother for women to emulate in their homes.

“In the Karbala of Iran, Zeinab-like, You Have Risen Against the Yazid of this Age”: The Militant Woman in the Iran-Iraq War

Even as women were increasingly domesticated in political discourse in order to “purify” Iranian society – with the justification that they should follow in the way of Fatimah – the figure of the chador-clad gun-toting woman was still deployed in all manners of national performance. As the newly formed Islamic Republic entered into its first year of existence, the veiled militant woman marched in the parades of the one-year anniversary of the revolution in February of 1980 with guns in hand. She was a symbol of the proper direction of the revolution, and of a radical youth that remained mobilized to carry out the ideals of the revolution in the phase of national consolidation.

On September 22nd, 1980, the army of Iraq invaded the southwestern border of Iran near in the province of Khuzistan. Five days before, Saddam Hussein had announced the abrogation of the 1975 Algiers agreement and plans to restore Iraqi positions in the region to the pre-1975 status. Some of the heaviest fighting occurred at Khorramshahr, which later came to be referred

to as “The City of Blood” (Khuninshahr) for the intensity of the violence in the battles during the first months of the invasion.

Within weeks, stories began to circulate of women who picked up weapons and joined the ranks of the Basij militiamen to defend their home fronts at Khorraramshahr. If they weren’t directly fighting, they aided the male soldiers by transporting weapons to the frontline and providing food and medical care to injured soldiers. These women were fondly and proudly referred to as the “daughters of the South” in the stories of the battles at Khorramshahr. Women were also reported to fight in the southern cities of Abadan, Ahwaz, Susangerd, and Bostan, and “took part in military and martial training and gradually formed the Sisters’ Basij Resistance Force and its military branch.”

Three paintings by the artist Nasser Palangi became symbolic during this period of the heroism of Iranian women in defending the frontlines. In this painting (figure 24), commissioned “On the Occasion of the Week of War,” a veiled woman looks off to the battlefield ahead while clutching her rifle to her body. Her chador seems to fade out of the city behind her, as if shrouding it in order to protect it. In the second painting (figure 25), titled “Heirs of Zeinab,” a similar veiled woman clutches an ammunitions box, as she seems to hover in mid-air. In the third painting (figure 26), titled “Daughters of the South,” the veil of the gun-holding woman fades into the murky oblivion, as her eyes zero in like lasers on her patriotic aim.

The Party of the Islamic Republic widely disseminated posters with Palangi’s paintings on them in the first weeks of the war as an example of the heroic Iranian woman who took her militancy seriously and defended her homeland. Such posters were likely also intended to mobilize men who saw women fighting on the frontlines and were thus themselves galvanized

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Figure 27. Iranian woman defending her home town. Early 1980s. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14

Figure 28. Iranian woman stands by with a gun at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq War. Early 1980s. Source: IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14

Figure 29. Stamp produced by the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1981. Source: Chelkowski & Dabashi (1999)
into action. One magazine, produced in the early wartime years and printed in Persian, Arabic, and English, showed photographs of women prepared to defend their towns with guns (figure 27, 28). One page of the magazine shows a little girl with the caption: “The heroic small sister is responsible for the system of the army of twenty million.” During this early wartime period, the Islamic Republic also championed the veiled militant woman in their state insignias, like on stamps and official logos (figure 29).

On the imagery and rhetoric of the Iran-Iraq War, Farideh Farhi writes: “The propagated ideal type of behavior [in the discourse of the war effort] was not completely distinct from the images generated for an ideal Islamic revolutionary during the revolution.” Indeed, the memory of the “veiled” gun-toting woman in the streets of revolution – which was, as we have seen, a manipulated and amnesic memory – came to the fore as the figure of national heroism in the new wartime landscape. Whereas in the earlier months of 1980, Fatimah had been heralded as a model for women to align with the project of the Islamic Republic to return women to their homes and re-join them with their children, now the figure of Zeinab, who had been offered as a model of women’s militancy but had not been promoted in officially discourse in the earlier months of 1980, also came forth as the template for women in the current realities of wartime Iran.

To be sure, as men returned from the frontlines with the trauma of war on their bodies, the image of Fatimah was also widely deployed as the “mourning mother” of the dead or injured Iranian boys (figure 29). Indeed, the “mother of martyrs” trope was central to the wartime

48 “The War As Represented By Photograph: On the Occasion of the Brutal Attacks of Iraq to Iran,” [al-harb kema tarwa al-suwwar] (n.d.); IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14
propaganda machine to recruit young boys and encourage mothers to raise and send off their sons to be soldiers for the new Iranian state.

Yet, some scholars argue that the “mourning mother” trope was the singular image of Iranian women’s revolutionary devotion during this period. As one claims: “The image of the true Muslim woman during the war years was strictly limited to that of the mother and wife who sacrifices her sons and husband for the Islamic cause.” Such statements, however, are only partially true, for along with the “mourning mother” was the “militant woman” who remained a salient image of revolutionary and nationalist aspirations during the early wartime period. This “militant woman” was, of course, the version adopted by the Islamic Republic and given the name of Zeinab.

By 1981, Zeinab, as a model of women’s wartime militancy, emerged to the forefront of the Islamic Republic’s discourse on the ideal “revolutionary woman.” Whereas in the Women’s Day May of 1980 only Fatimah Zahra had been referenced, in the Women’s Day of 1981 (which was now being celebrated to commemorate Fatimah’s birthday), Hazrat Zeinab was included in almost every sentence where Fatimah was mentioned. At a Women’s Day ceremony in April of 1981, a nine-point declaration stated the following: “And you, oh Women of Iran, oh Followers of Fatimah’s path, who carry her mission on your shoulders and who have the message of Zeinab in your voice, in the Karbala of Iran, Zeinab-like, you have aided Hossein and have risen against the Yazid of this age.” The potent metaphor of Karbala, which had allegorized the entirety of the Iranian Revolution and anti-Pahlavi opposition two years before, was now used to frame the war with Iraq – wherein Saddam Hussein was the wicked Yazid, and the Iranian woman fighting

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Iraqi aggression were Zeinab who “aided the fighters of Islam so greatly that your Imam has called you the teachers of men.”52 Whereas, just a year earlier, women were expected to emulate the “divine and celestial” Fatimah as they returned to their homes, now they were asked to “continue in the dignified path – the path of Fatimah and of Zeinab” in order to aid the war effort.53 Another article published by Ettela’at on the same day of the Women’s Day parades described the women in the streets as a “roaring flood of devout and revolutionary women.”54 By 1982, the figure of Zeinab also proliferated in Khomeini’s speeches: “Hazrat Zeinab… taught us that women and men should not be afraid before a tyrant or a tyrannical government. Hazrat Zeinab, upon whom be peace, stood up to Yazid and humiliated him in a way that his tribe, the Bani Umayyads, had never before experienced.”55

It was during this period in the early 1980s that Zeinab began to explicitly appear in political imagery. This poster (figure 31), produced in the early years of the war, depicts the silhouette of a veiled woman who throws up her fist to crush the crown of imperialism. The poster describes this woman as Zeinab. Within her white figure, a crowd of chador-clad women also chant and throw up their fists. On the ground below her, rows of militia women and men stand at attention. The militant woman who raised her fist in the streets of revolution was an extremely familiar and powerful symbol. The poster now re-inscribes her image as “Zeinab,” the militant woman who stood up to Saddam Hussein, the Yazid of the era, and defended the Islamic Republic from the aggression of the imperialist infidels.

53 “Women’s Day Declaration,” Ettela’at (26 April 1981: 1); ibid., 74
Figure 30. Mourning mother with the blood of martyred Iranian soldiers. Artist: Kazim Chalipa. 1981. Source: University of Chicago Library

Figure 31. Zeinab smashes the crown of imperialism. Caption is roughly translated to: “O Zeinab, the tongue of Ali in the mouth.” Early 1980s. Source: Hoover Library Online

Figure 32. Kaveh Kazemi. Basij women familiarize themselves with AK-47 rifles in a classroom in west Tehran, as part of a mass mobilization at the end of the Iran-Iraq War. May 1988. Source: Getty Images
In the first years of war, women were mainly expected to aid the war effort from the home front. On the wartime responsibilities of women, Elaheh Koolaee writes:

Distance from the war zone encouraged women to take up other roles, such as supporting the combatants. As an example, women in villages spontaneously established volunteer groups to support the front and supply their children, brothers and husbands with food and clothing. The average age of those who established these groups was between 35–36 years, out of whom 95.5 percent were housewives. Meanwhile, 81 percent and 19 percent of the women, respectively, were illiterate and literate.\(^{56}\)

However, as the death toll mounted for the war, women were asked again to pick up their guns in order to supplement the war effort, this time on the front lines. By 1986, six years of warfare later, the government began to mobilize Iranian women for the warfront to match the recruitment efforts of women in Iraq.\(^{57}\) Forming the Sisters’ Basij Resistance force, women were recruited as active combatants in these later stages of the war as a way to compensate for the rising death toll.

In the later years of the war, one women’s magazine, *Mahjubah* (printed in English for an international audience), published photographs and stories of women who aided the war effort through participation in the fields of medicine and chemistry. Even these women are invariably pictured with guns, and contextualized with captions like “Zeinab’s Mission.”\(^{58}\)

One scholar maintains that the announcement to accept women into the Basij militia was also intended to galvanize men into mobilization if they saw their female relatives also pick up weapons for combat.\(^{59}\) Indeed, we have seen before the “female fighter” serve to remind her fellow countrymen of the direness of the political situation by the fact that even women are forced to take up arms. Throughout the eight years of war, 710 women were disabled by wartime injuries, 71 women were captured as prisoners of war, and 6,420 women were killed on the

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\(^{57}\) Dilip Hero, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq War Military Conflict* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 75

\(^{58}\) *Mahjubah*, June 1987; IISH, Siagzar Berelian Collection, Box 14

\(^{59}\) Hero, *The Longest War: The Iran-Iraq War Military Conflict* (1991), 171
Figure 33. A Basij woman learns to use the Colt, in a classroom in west Tehran, as part of the mass mobilization project in the final year of the war. May 1988. Source: Getty Images/Kaveh Kazemi
Chapter 5: The Militant Woman in the Islamic Republic

battlefront, totaling about 3% of martyrs during the eight-year period. In these photographs taken in 1988 (figure 32, 33), Iranian photojournalist Kaveh Kazemi captured Iranian women training in gun use and target practice – much like the project of documenting the training of women in 1980 following “Mobilization Week.” By the end of the 1980s, the picturing of the woman with a gun symbolized the gravity of the need to defend the nation, and was a hallmark of newborn state in the first decade of the Islamic Republic.

Conclusion

Through tracing the changing discourses regarding women and their imageries in the postrevolutionary state, this chapter demonstrates that the “militant woman” of the Iranian Revolution remained a salient symbol in the postrevolutionary state. She became legible to an international audience – already familiar with tropes of women’s militancy in revolutions – as emblematic of the new, more radical direction that Khomeini’s leadership seemed to be taking the postrevolutionary state. She could be seen representing Iran in national performances such as mobilization marches and the celebrations of Fatimah’s birthday. Her image also gauged a kind of “revolutionary devotion” in the factional politics of the revolutionary aftermath. As Iran entered into the wartime era with Iraq, she was a critical figure in mobilizing an army for the new state, representing a heroism as she “led the comrades to victory,” so to speak, and galvanized the nation into action.

It is in this postrevolutionary phase that the conflation of the “militant woman” with Zeinab of Shi‘i history occurs. This conflation, however, has worked to support a counter-memory of the Iranian revolutionary woman, wherein we believe that the militant woman of

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Iranian history was always “Zeinab.” As memory filters through the production of the Islamic Republic, the militant woman of the pre-revolutionary era is often viewed only through the lens of the postrevolutionary militant woman. This chapter shows that this memory is in fact an amnesic one. Yet, even as she was given the name of Zeinab and incorporated into the official discourses of the postrevolutionary state, the “militant woman” remained central to political, social, cultural, and visual transformations in the sphere of nation and revolution in Iran.
There are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before; like the larks in this country, that have been singing the same five notes over for thousands of years.

– Willa Cather, *O Pioneers* (1913)
Epilogue: The Legacy of Mandana

When Mandana’s photograph was reposted on a blog on the website Iranian.com in August of 2012, her image elicited a host of varying responses.¹ The 2009 Green Movement had unfolded three years before this posting, and notions of uprising in Iran were both fresh and altered by the new political landscape. Some commenters lamented sadly that she symbolized the revolution before it was derailed by extremists. Others blamed her, and the militants that she represented, for creating a revolution that paved the way for the establishment of the Islamic Republic. One exclaimed: “They had their 5 mins [sic] of glory and We had 33 years of hell because of their sillyness [sic]! Nothing Heroic about them!”² Another disdainfully asserted: “The likes of Mandana helped Khomeini and gang come to power.”³

Yet a remarkable number of the comments highlighted a parallel between Mandana of the photograph and another heroic woman of revolution that they recognized: Marianne, or the “heroic woman leading the comrades to victory.” One commenter proposed: “She should be called Marianne of Iran.”⁴ Another debated that “May 68’s Caroline Bendern would be a more accurate parallel,” and posted a photograph of French model Caroline Bendern waving the

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Vietnam flag at the Paris student protests of 1968, who had been termed the “Marianne of May 1968” in contemporaneous magazines and news articles.\(^5\)

One commenter proposed that the pose in photograph reminded her more of Patty Hearst, the American heiress who was abducted by the radical Symbionese Liberation Army in February of 1974 and brainwashed to participate in their extremist activities. The commenter posted this photograph to evidence her point (figure 1).

Stripped from its historical context and reproduced three decades later, the tropes that manifest in Mandana’s image are still palpable to its viewers in 2012. What is telling about the comments is not that they call her “Marianne,” or “Caroline Bendern,” or “Patty Hearst,” but that the viewers, upon seeing her photograph, recognize a visual pattern that they’ve seen before, and attempt to frame this pattern through references to a contemporaneous aesthetic or a relatable figure. Their strategy of identification and comprehension is somewhat similar to the strategy of Ashraf Dehqani’s torturers when they call her another “Leila Khaled.” Through placing Mandana within a lineage of revolutionary women, they can come to better comprehend her own militancy, for she now has – at least in their minds – a history that they recognize. They can understand the codes of her photograph if it exists inside a logic with which they already have an intimate knowledge. The meanings generated by the tropes of the image did not freeze in time. Although, when it emerged decades later, the context and significance of the photograph was evidently different, the responses generated by the image of Mandana were still deeply indicative of her lineage.

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Figure 1. Patty Hearst poses with a gun in front of the flag of the Symbionese Liberation Army. 1974. Source: PBS.org

Figure 2. A woman protests against the 2009 election results. She holds up her green-painted fingers in a V-for-victory sign.

Figure 3. Woman draped in a green scarf raises her fists in support of Iranian reformist Mir Hossein Mousavi before the presidential election of 2009. Source: Ben Curtis/AP
What this thesis has aimed to do is to show that even as images travel through place and time, even as their political and social meanings transform, the tropes within the images are still generative of meaning and import. It has demonstrated that symbols themselves do not exist in a vacuum – they have multiple histories, with varying origins, and those histories often trespass the lines we draw to demarcate where those origins should take place. The responses to Mandana’s image, posted in 2012, corroborate this notion.

The work that this thesis has done to map a genealogy of political symbols can expand the existing scholarship on the imagery of the Iranian Revolution in multiple ways. It opens up a space to analyze the many aesthetics of the revolution beyond the single “Shi’i lineage” that has been currently mapped for it. It also allows us to interrogate the validity to describing imagery as “Shi’i” versus “leftist,” for if the lineage of the militant woman has shown us anything, it is that a symbol is a language, a means of communication, through which multiple and contending political meanings can be expressed. Symbols do not exist solely in one domain nor do they ever remain in one place – their utility is such that competing discourses are often mapped upon them simultaneously, and they are often deployed for varying political purposes at once. As such, the political intents of the “Islamic Republic” are expressed just the same through symbols such as the fist, the V-sign, the gun, and of course, the militant woman. There is a breadth of academic work to be explored here, far beyond that which I’ve written in these chapters.

This thesis also allows us to examine the way the imagery of the 1979 revolution still retains a salience in the visual sphere of Iranian politics. As much as a bloodied hand or a mourning mother show up in political iconography in present-day Iran, so too do the V-for-victory sign and the fist.
For example, at the center of the imagery of the 2009 Iranian Green Movement is a young girl, draped in a green scarf, throwing her V-fingers painted green into the air (figure 2, 3). This thesis reminds us that her presence is absolutely not an accident, and offers a road map to trace the origins of such images. She is the militant woman of revolutionary memory, performing the history of her figure in the present-day streets of political contention.

At the same time, she is transformed. She has changed with time, with new visual codes – such as the color green, or the band around her forehead – to mark her place in the current political reality. She is generated by her visual ancestry, but she presents new codes to signify her political and social import.

The centering of the “revolutionary woman” in the imagery of the 2009 Iranian Green Movement ultimately shows us that just as Mandana had a lineage, so too does she have a legacy. And that legacy is multivalent and constantly changing. But it exists, and its existence has resonance beyond the surfacing of her photograph in the pages of Kayhan or the blogisphere of the twenty-first century. It has resonance in visual communication and political expression, beyond the moments we can verbally name, beyond the events we can concretely locate. Mandana’s photograph appeared to the world for a brief moment in history, but the meanings that produced her image, and the meanings that her image produced, are far from gone.
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