«HETEROGLOSSIA. Quaderni di Linguaggi e Interdisciplinarità», 20 (2024), pp. 33-62
ISSN 2037-7037 © 2024 Roberth Pascal
https://rivisteopen.unimc.it/index.php/heteroglossia

Roberth Pascal

Legitimation through Image and Discourse: official portraiture and political legitimation in Iran between the monarchy and the Islamic Republic

Riassunto

Questo lavoro mira a esplorare la possibilità di condurre un'analisi del ruolo della ritrattistica ufficiale nel fornire legittimità ai leader politici in Iran. Il nostro studio si concentra sui mezzi discorsivi e visivi di legittimazione della monarchia Pahlavi e della Repubblica islamica dell'Iran, tentando una "impollinazione incrociata" tra il metodo Discourse-Historical sviluppato in Critical Discourse Analysis e i principi di analisi della comunicazione visiva che vedono le immagini come esecutrici di una funzione argomentativa. Sosteniamo che i ritratti ufficiali riflettono le particolari lotte di legittimazione dei leader in essi raffigurati e agiscono come un aspetto dello sforzo discorsivo per affermare la propria legittimità, sia essa concepita in termini modernisti o tradizionalisti.

Abstract

This work aims to explore the possibility of conducting an analysis of the role of official portraiture in providing legitimacy to political leaders in Iran. Our study focuses on the discursive and visual means of legitimation of the Pahlavi Monarchy and of The Islamic Republic of Iran, by attempting to "cross-pollinate" the Discourse-Historical method developed in Critical Discourse Analysis with principles of visual communication analysis which see images as performing an argumentative function. We argue that official portraits do reflect the particular legitimation struggles of the leaders therein depicted, and

act as an aspect of the discursive effort to assert one's legitimacy, be it conceived in modernist or traditionalist terms.

Parole chiave: Iran, legittimazione, comunicazione visiva, Pahlavismo, Velayat-e Faqih

Keywords: Iran, legitimation, visual communication, Pahlavism, Velayat-e Faqih

Introduction

The field of visual political communication has been a serious theoretical concern for researchers for only fifteen years at best (Bucy and Joo, 2021). Nonetheless, the importance of visual communication cannot be underestimated. As Grabe and Bucy put it "visuals are equally processed in the thinking part of the brain and contain a great deal of nuanced social information important for political decision making"[1]. Research has shown that the role of visuals in political communication is multifaceted and contributes to the conference of political legitimation as visuals "can shape arguments, build the political image, arouse emotions, symbolize broader meanings, help identification, and by documenting the present, they can transport the audience to different times and space, also to add ambiguity"[2]. Given that in recent times most studies in visual political communication are conducted from the theoretical standpoint liberal democracy, analysis of political leadership is mainly focused on issues such as personalization (e.g. Karvonen, 2010), celebritization (e.g. Ekman & Widholm, 2017), and populism (e.g. Gimenez & Schwarz, 2016).

Methodology and objectives of the study

The present study aims to push the theoretical boundaries of research into visual political communication through the in-

[1] Grabe & Bucy 2009, p. 21.
[2] Farkas 2023, p. 8.

tegration of previous theoretical suggestions in the study of visual communication in politics with an analytical framework based in Critical Discourse Analysis. As Gerodimos (2019) has suggested, visual communication research must embrace its interdisciplinary nature as well as the inherent physicality of the visual medium. In a similar vein, Kautt (2018) suggests that it is crucial to consider the dimensions of materiality, of the body, of space-time constellations, of emotionality, of frames, and of collective identities and genres into our understanding of the visual aspects of political communication. Our approach aims to "cross-pollinate" visual communication analysis with the Discourse-Historical approach of Critical Discourse Analysis (Wodak, 2001; 2015) in order to conduct an analysis of the visual representation of Iranian leaders in official portraiture. In order to avoid biased analyses, the Discourse-Historical approach takes into account four distinct levels of context: 1) the immediate internal co-text; 2) the intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between texts, genres, and discourses; 3) the extralinguistic variables that constitute the "context of the situation"; 4) the broader socio-political and historical context (Wodak, 2001). Our analysis will proceed from the broader context towards the inner co-text: the attempt to cross-pollinate the Discourse-Historical approach to visual communication analysis will consist in treating images as part of broader discourse. Consequently, we will explore the interdiscursive relationships occurring between image and discourse as means of political legitimation. Firstly, we will explore the historical context of the Iranian revolution and the roots of its political ideology in the Wilāyat-i faqih (Graziani, 2023). Secondly, we will provide a summary of the institutional features of the Pahlavi monarchy and of the Supreme Leadership of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The intertextual/interdiscursive level and the level of co-text will be accounted for in our analysis of three official portraits, depicting Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Ayatollah Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini and Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei. In our analysis we will aim to answer the following research question: what can official portraits tell us about the struggles for political legitimacy of the leader they depict?

1. *The broader historical context: Shi'a Islam*

Shi'a Islam is the minoritarian branch of Islam, originating from a doctrinal split in matters of succession that traces its origins in the immediate aftermath of the prophet Muhammad's death. This divide, between those who believed that the *Khalifa* must come from the direct bloodline of Muhammad (later to be known as the *shi'a 'Ali*, meaning *the partisans of 'Ali*, Muhammad's cousin and son in law) and those who believed that eligibility to the caliphate was only limited by the membership to the *Quraysh*, the tribe of Muhammad, opened "in an age infused with apocalyptic and messianic expectations, where the actual political rulers—Umayyad and 'Abbasid caliphs—rapidly lost any claim to religious authority"[3]. For the first 24 years after the death of Muhammad, the muslims were governed by leadership that was outside the direct bloodline of the prophet. In this period the minoritarian partisans of 'Ali developed a series of sophisticated arguments to justify the peculiar salvific qualities of the *ahl al-bayt*, the house of the prophet, which revolved around 'Ali's role as "the supreme leader of the Muslim community, not as a prophet but as a divinely sanctioned leader (imam)"[4]. 'Ali's own caliphate, that had begun in 656 and had ended by 661, was brief and marred by continuous infighting, impeding the consolidation of the imamate as an institution. Despite the fact that 'Ali was the only imam to exercise temporal authority upon the entire *ummah* (the Islamic community), successive generations of the partisans of 'Ali continued to consider the descendents of the first Imam as the only legitimate successors of Muhammad, as the only men that were chosen by *Allah* to lead[5]. After the death of 'Ali, however, the Shi'i gradually splintered into different communities that elaborated "their own distinctive narratives of the past, theological visions built around those narratives, and characteristic forms of worship"[6]. It is important for our analysis to

[3] Karamustafa 2018, p. 160.
[4] Ivi, p. 161.
[5] Akhavi 1996, p. 230.
[6] Karamustafa, 2018, p. 162.

sketch out a few key peculiarities of Twelver messianism, since these particular theological doctrines lie at the heart of the discourses that legitimize the Iranian islamic regime. The name of this sect, the "Twelvers" comes from the role that the Twelfth imam assumes in their messianic theology. The twelfth imam unexpectedly disappeared in the late 9th century (ca. 873-874): his sudden disappearance led the imamite clergy to develop the idea of an "occultation" (*ghayba*) willed by *Allah* "for fear that he might be killed and the line extinguished"[7]. The occultation posed a series of fundamental questions pertaining to what happened to the authority (*wilāyah*[8]) of the imam after his disappearance. The clergy had to answer not only the question of who had to exercise this authority *pro tempore*, but also a series of questions regarding the implementation of the penal code (*ḥudūd*) and the leadership of the community in holy war (*jihād*), and also the pressing issue of what the occultation meant for the future of Shi'i islam. The answer to the latter question was the development of a messianic eschatology that identified the twelfth imam with the *mahdi* (divinely guided leader) that will return to usher the end of time[9]. The questions of *ḥudūd and jihād* were resolved by judging them to be in abeyance: consequently "Shi'ites were enjoined to withhold their allegiance from all leaders, pending the return of the Imam"[10]. As Norman Calder argues, this injunction was not seen as a pretext for rebellion against the ruling authorities, but rather as enabling "a perennial *de facto* rapprochement with actual governments"[11]. In so far as the question of the *wilāyah* is concerned, this question revolved around the scope of the authority granted to the clergy, in particular to the *faqih*, the islamic jurists: does this authority only concern juridical matters or does it also include political authority? Historically,

[7] Akhavi, 1996, p. 230.

[8] The concept of *wilāyah* has been articulated in a few different ways: as *al-wilāyah al-i'itibārīyah* (relative authority); as *al-wilāyah al-'āmmah* (general *wilāyah*, occasionally rendered as *al-wilāyah al-takwīnīyah* [formative *wilāyah*] and sometimes as *al-wilāyah al-muṭlaqah* [absolute *wilāyah*]) (Akhavi, 1996: 233).

[9] Karamustafa 2018, p. 163.

[10] Akhavi 1996, p. 230.

[11] Calder 1982, p. 4.

the prevalent school of thought has been the one who asserted that the jurists only held relative authority over the community, while "[t]he doctrinal position that a jurist is entitled to exercise the political authority of the Imams and thus to rule society [...] would appear to have its provenance at the time of Ahmad b. Muhammad Mahdi al-Naraqi (d. 1828/9)"[12]. As Arjomand argues, even after the initial elaboration of the doctrine of absolute authority of the jurists, this position continued to be minoritarian within Shi'a Islam: during the nineteenth century the clergy did not contest the monarchy's authority over political affairs[13]. Even during and after the Persian constitutional revolution (1905-1911), despite the fact that the clergy had been somewhat emboldened towards the prospects of assuming an active political role by the success of the tobacco protest movement of 1891-92, the prevalent opinions of the clergy reflected an effort towards "justifying parliamentary democracy in terms of the Shi'ite belief system"[14]. The effort of supporting parliamentary democracy as the lesser evil between it and despotism[15] ultimately led to a renewal of the clergy's "pious indifference to worldly politics", given that their expectation of participating in the legislative process in order to insure "conformity of all ratified laws with the sacred law of Islam" was eventually betrayed by the failure to include such a provision in the 1906 constitution[16].

2. *Institutional context: the Pahlavi monarchy*

The effort to build legitimacy for the dynasty's right to rule begins with Reza Khan Pahlavi, Mohammad's father and the founder of the Pahlavi dynasty, who became monarch in 1926 by decision of Iran's constituent assembly, deposing the weak Qajar monarch Ahmad Shah. His takeover of the monarchy

12 Akhavi 1996, p. 234.
13 Arjomand 1980, p. 149; 1981, pp. 40-78.
14 Arjomand 1980, p. 149.
15 Hairi 1977, pp. 193-194.
16 Arjomand 1980, p. 152.

was seen by some influential Persian intellectuals of the time, known as the Berlin Circle, as necessary for the strengthening of the nation, after the failure of the 1906-1911 Constitutional Revolution to "create the conditions for state centralization, the implementation of reforms and the end of imperialist exploitation"[17]. The Berlin Circle argued that a monarch that was able to pursue modernization in an authoritarian manner was a *sine qua non* for reaching any degree of national sovereignty[18]. The modernization effort was to be pursued within the limits of the 1906 constitution, namely of the "Fundamental Laws" whose 51 articles provided the legal framework for a Constitutional Monarchy influenced by the 1931 Belgian Constitution. Under these articles a bicameral National Consultative Assembly (*majles-e shura-ye melli*) was established. The relationship between the Shah and the Assembly was typical of any constitutional monarchy:

> The shah possessed the authority to appoint half of the deputies of the senate, but no timetable was established for the body's formation, and the senate was ultimately not convened as the constitutionalists were not interested in augmenting the king's powers. The Majles was invested with the legislative authority to propose laws subject to royal approval (Arts. 15, 17 and 47); conversely, the Majles' approval was required for laws emanating from the shah or his ministers (Arts. 16, 33 and 38). The Fundamental Laws further established the Majles as an independent governmental body by granting it the right to regulate its own internal affairs (Art. 14), and established immunity for its deputies from molestation, intimidation or prosecution without the Majles' approval (Arts. 12 and 38)[19].

In his brief coronation speech the newly crowned Shah focused on a few themes that attempted to reconcile the respect for tradition and the pursuit of modernization, two contradictory themes that his successor, Mohammed Reza, will inherit, as we will see shortly. On the one hand, Reza Khan declared that he will focus on "security, education, public sanitation and agriculture", promising to "improve economic condi-

[17] Shakibi 2020, p. 103.
[18] *Idem*.
[19] Massie and Afary 2018, p. 4.

tions, means of transportation, commerce and the judiciary"[20]. Despite declaring himself a guardian of religion, Reza Khan's reign was characterized by a continued campaign of anticlericalism that included the use of state propaganda to influence public opinion on the authority of the clergy, successfully portraying its members as "parochial ignoramuses who opposed the concept of civilization", a campaign which resulted in a "drop in the popularity of clerics in urban areas"[21]. The core element of Reza Khan's efforts for modernization is the cultural revolution he attempts to promote among the Persian people, a revolution that attempts to not only promote western style education and western ideals but also to promote western esthetic standards in terms of appearance. The politics of dress took a central role in this westernizing effort: the Shah believed that Iranians should dress like Westerners so that they would not feel inferior in front of Westerners. His policies began by targeting government officials first, with the imposition of the "Pahlavi hat" in 1928. These policies were then expanded in 1935, with the introduction of an obligatory Western style felt hat, which became obligatory for all government employees[22]. While such policies were controversial, the true controversy concerned the policies around women's clothing. These policies, which culminated with the 1936 banning of the islamic veil, put the Pahlavi monarchy in direct contrast with the clergy: all protests were violently suppressed and state propaganda was tasked with spreading "the idea that what some reactionary elements condemned as Westernization of dress was in reality a return to Iranian authenticity"[23]. The abdication of Reza Khan Pahlavi in 1941 left his successor, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, in the midst of "growing economic and political turmoil"[24]. After the British had destroyed his army, Reza Khan was faced with the necessity of accepting their terms:

[20] https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1926/10/i-reza-place-this-crown-upon-my-head/649650/, retrieved on 24/08/2024.

[21] Shakibi 2020, p. 107.

[22] Ivi, p. 121.

[23] Ivi, pp. 123-124.

[24] Ivi, p. 127.

The British, who respect even those monarchs who betray them, left Reza Khan an honorable way out: Would His Highness kindly abdicate in favor of his son, the heir to the throne? We have a high opinion of him and will ensure his position. But His Highness should not think there is any other solution[25].

The first twelve years of the young Shah's reign are a period in which the monarchy loses "the primary position it had enjoyed in the political arena"[26] as its legitimacy comes to be contested by a diverse array of political threats emerging from the humiliating circumstances of the forced abdication of Reza Khan Pahlavi, ranging from the return of exiled enemies, the liberation of political prisoners, requests of giving back confiscated terrains, along with the increasing activity of the clergy[27]. Furthermore, during the five years in which Iran was occupied by the British, the Soviets and the Americans, from 1941 to 1946, Iran's internal affairs were under constant interference by the occupying powers: while the soviets supported the communist Tudeh party, the British aimed to use the clergy as a buttress against Soviet expansion[28]. Despite the concerns of the British, the communist party showed itself to not be the biggest threat to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's authority. The greater threat was an internal one, the National Front led by Mohammad Mossadegh, who became Prime Minister in 1951 and was later ousted by a 1953 US/UK coup after nationalizing the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company[29]. It was only after 1953 that the Shah could begin to reinstate the role of the monarchy within the Iranian Political system. His intentions were those of starting the Pahlavi dynasty anew[30] and he was guided by a conviction that his reinstatement on the throne was the product of divine providence[31]. By the mid 1960s the Shah seemed to have succeeded in his project: even the clergy, the most fastidious enemy, had been subdued with the exile of Ayatollah Khomeini

[25] Kapuscinski 2006, p. 25.
[26] Ansari 1998, p. 101.
[27] Hoveyda 2003, 14.
[28] *Idem.*
[29] Shakibi 2020, p. 128.
[30] Takeyh 2021, p. 117.
[31] Zonis 1991, p. 151.

after being found guilty of fomenting sedition during the 1964 Qum protests against land reforms[32]. As Hoveyda argues, these victories had a profound effect on the Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, greatly increasing his self confidence and leading him towards developing megalomania[33]. Cultural policies reflected these tendencies. Not only had Pahlavi rediscovered his father's arguments for Iranian greatness, he undertook the task of promoting his own ideology, called "Pahlavism" by publishing a four-volume series of the same name "in the immediate run-up to the shah's coronation in 1967" which was presented as "a total ideology, that established the theoretical elements common to modern ideologies, namely politicized historiography, comparative political systems, a world view, economic theory, sociology and a programme for rapid modernization"[34]. This passage from Volume 1 of the series, cited by Shakibi, is exemplary of these tendencies:

> Its creative power is greater than that of socialism, its freedom and equality of rights is superior to those of democracy, and its method of action is stronger and more effective than those of radical liberals. It tramples the bases of the bourgeoisie and feudalism while eliminating the anarchism that emerges from liberalism. [...] It must be registered as a political culture under the name of Pahlavism. [...] In a world where theories and idealistic theorists are registered under the rubric of political cultures, what is the problem with the progressive School of Pahlavism, whose teachings are improving the world's situation, also being recognized as a political culture and school?[35]

What Mohammad Reza Shah inherited from his father was also a difficult relationship, to say the least, with the islamic clergy. Khomeini's nationalism, which was ultimately successful in deposing the Shah, was a response to Mohammad Reza Shah's weak attempt to build legitimacy for the Pahlavi dynasty by appealing to a diverse and often contradictory array of symbols and narratives.

[32] Hoveyda 2003, p. 24.
[33] Ivi, p. 25.
[34] Shakibi, 2020, p. 134.
[35] Ivi, p. 136.

2.1. *Institutional context: the Islamic Republic of Iran*

Clerical quietism did not show any signs of change until Ruhollah Mosavi Khomeini emerged as the leading voice of the persian shi'i clergy in the 1960s, as Khomeini's radical and uncompromising rhetoric against the Shah's secularizing policies captured the Persian people's imagination. As Mahdavi has shown, between the 1920s and the 1940s Khomeini's own views had reflected the prevailing clerical consensus towards quietism. Later on, until 1971, he publicly espoused constitutionalist views, arguing that the form of government was of little concern "if *shariah* was enforced"[36]. Nonetheless, by 1970 he already "took the unprecedented step of assuming the title of Imam"[37]. The true turning point in Khomeini's political philosophy was the series of lectures he gave in the early 1970s in Najaf, later to be compiled in the book *Islamic Government: Governance of the Jurist*, first published in 1971, where he introduces his revolutionary interpretation of the the theory of the *wilāyah* (*Velayat-e Faqih*, in persian). Despite the fact that his own opinions upon the matter had been the result of gradual change over the course of decades, Khomeini introduces his theory of the *Velayat-e Faqih* as "self-evident":

> The governance of the faqīh is a subject that in itself elicits immediate assent and has little need of demonstration, for anyone who has some general awareness of the beliefs and ordinances of Islam will unhesitatingly give his assent to the principle of the governance of the faqīh as soon as he encounters it; he will recognize it as necessary and self-evident[38].

This "bold innovation in the history of Shi'ism"[39] was thus presented as the only and obvious way to interpret the Islamic tradition. The starting point of the argument presented in *Islamic Government* is that *Allah* provided divine guidance for all human affairs in the *Quran*, including those affairs pertaining to the political realm: the establishment of an islamic

[36] Mahdavi 2014, p. 43.
[37] Arjomand 1980, 153.
[38] Khomeini 1981, p. 27.
[39] Arjomand 1980, p. 154.

government is thus to be considered a duty incumbent on all muslims. This means that the clergy must denounce monarchy as an illegitimate institution, since Islam "islam does not recognize monarchy and hereditary succession"[40]. Khomeini's arguments, especially in the first section of the book, are developed through constant reminders that Islam has always had to deal with subversion from the outside, first from the Jews and then from others "who were in certain respects, more satanic than they", the latest of them being the western "imperialists"[41]. Religious fundamentalism is the basis for one of the most important semiotic resources in the political legitimation of the Iranian regime (Gruber, 2008; Seyed-Gohrab, 2021), that of martyrdom, as this passage from Khomeini's lectures attests:

> We fear neither military action nor economic boycott, for we are the followers of Imams who welcomed martyrdom. Our people are also ready to welcome martyrdom today. ... We have a population of thirty-five million people, many of whom are longing for martyrdom. All thirty-five million of us would go into battle and after we had all become martyrs, they could do what they liked with Iran[42].

There are more elements to Khomeinist ideology besides religious fundamentalism: the *Velayat-e-Faqih* configures itself as a complex interplay between traditionalist, pre-modern elements and modern modes of argumentation. First among the latter is nationalism. Tareen argues that the Khomeinist ideology of the *Velayat-e-Faqih,* while clearly characterized by theological concerns, values and arguments, has a strong relationship to nationalism to the point where the doctrine can be thought of as "less the intervention of religion in politics than the politicization of religion, since ultimately, despite its religious overtones, at the center of Iran's 1979 revolution was the promise of consolidating the nation"[43]. Khomeini interprets the nation in markedly paternalistic terms:

40 Khomeini 1981, p. 31.
41 Ivi, p. 27.
42 Ivi, p. 285.
43 Tareen 2018, p. 539.

The governance of the faqīh is a rational and extrinsic matter; it exists only as a type of appointment, like the appointment of a guardian for a minor. With respect to duty and position, there is indeed no difference between the guardian of a nation and the guardian of a minor. It is as if the Imām were to appoint someone to the guardianship of a minor, to the governorship of a province, or to some other post. In cases like these, it is not reasonable that there would be a difference between the Prophet and the Imāms (ʿa), on the one hand, and the just faqīh, on the other[44].

Another key element of Khomeini's ideology is that of revolutionary discourse. Revolutionary thought completely permeates Khomeini's thought. As Adib-Moghaddam shows, Khomeini understood the world through broad categories of thought such as "world history, nobility, God, universality, heroism, Islam, greatness" which were a very effective rhetorical weapon[45]. Such revolutionary discourse was highly polemic, as well as filled with utopian aspirations, which are perfectly exemplified by this passage from Khomeini:

Islam is the religion of militant individuals who are committed to truth and justice. It is the religion of those who desire freedom and independence. It is the school of those who struggle against imperialism. But the servants of imperialism have presented Islam in a totally different light. They have created in men's minds a false notion of Islam[46].

These arguments, formed around both pre-modern and modern lexemes, show that ultimately the *Velayat-e Faqih* is an utopian ideology which aims to realize "an ideal political and social order for human beings" in order to create the conditions that would produce "the ideal *homo islamicus*"[47], in which the state would be an instrument for the perfect realization of the will of *Allah*. Khomeini's doctrine of the *Velayat-e-Faqih* was the basis for the founding of a revolutionary theocratic regime that produced a constitutional order in which the sovereignty of the state, as Khomeini stated in a 1979 interview "is the right of the religious jurists": consequently the purview of parliamentary legislation is limited to those questions of policy that

44 Khomeini 1981, p. 98.
45 Adib-Moghaddam 2014, p. 2.
46 Khomeini 1981, p. 28.
47 Ivi, pp. 1, 5.

are "beneath the dignity of Islam"[48]. The islamic revolution in Iran was a truly innovative episode in constitutional history, creating "new institutions that had never existed in human history in this shape and form before"[49]. In the turbulent process of drafting the constitution, article 5, that devolves "the governance and leadership of the nation" to the figure of "the just and pious faqih"[50] was among the first items to be discussed and approved by the Assembly of Experts, thus introducing the constitutional role of the supreme leader[51]. The duties of the supreme leader are governed by article 110, that attributes to the *faqih* a great array of powers, the most important of which are: "appointment, dismissal, and acceptance of resignation of: the *fuqaha'* on the Guardian Council [the religious half of the Council], the supreme judicial authority of the country, the head of the radio and television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the chief of the joint staff, the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, the supreme commanders of the armed forces"; the delineation and supervision of the "general policies of the islamic republic"; commanding the armed forces and issuing the declarations of war and peace. Aside from the innovative office of the Supreme Leader, there are a few other constitutional innovations in the form of a series of institutions that are peculiar to the Iranian regime: the Assembly of Experts, constituted by representatives of the clergy tasked with the selection (art. 107) and dismissal of the Supreme Leader (art 111) as well as with the duty of examining the compliance of legislation with *Shari'a* and the Constitution; the Guardianship council, tasked with taking over the powers of the Supreme Leader in case the Assembly fails to agree on a single person for the role of the *faqih*; the National Exigency Council, whose members are elected by the Supreme Leader, which has the duty of providing a final decision upon the compliance of bills from the Consultative Assembly (the Iranian

[48] Arjomand 1996, pp. 155-156.

[49] Adib-Moghaddam 2014, p. 4.

[50] https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Iran_1989, retrieved on 28\07\2024.

[51] Saffari 1993, p. 69.

Parliament) with the Constitution or with *Shari'a* in the case in which "the Assembly is unable to meet the expectations of the Guardian Council" (art. 112).

As Semati points out, despite the authoritarian and theocratic elements that predominate in the Iranian constitution and political system, Iran "is one of the few countries in the region with the best chance for producing a democratic system of governance", and this is testified by the degree to which local and general elections are unpredictable, constituting a properly democratic element within the iranian regime that has shown its resilience time and time again. The political dynamism of culture in Iran is shown by its capability of generating political narratives of "reform". These narratives started to emerge as early as 1989. Semati divides the post-revolutionary history of Iran into four "distinct periods or republics", each with its own media landscape[52]. While the first period (1979-1988) was characterized by religious fervor, substantiated in the project of "Islamization" of society conducted by the National Iranian Radio Television and in the use of war propaganda against western-backed Iraq, the other three periods, corresponding to Ayatollah Khamenei's tenure as Supreme Leader, were characterized by efforts to achieve a "reform" of Iranian society and political system. These efforts differed in scope and in the meaning attributed to the term. The "second republic" (1989-1987) introduced the topic of reform in the Iranian cultural debate, mainly though the medium of the now defunct left leaning monthly magazine *Kiyan*, in which topics such as religion, philosophy and political theory were discussed "albeit within a framework that is compatible with the established religious culture and the larger ideological cosmos of the Islamic Republic"[53]. The third period (1997-2005), starting with the landslide election of Hojatoleslam Mohammad Khatami was characterized, as we have previously mentioned, by an initial impetus toward press liberalization in which print media was able to "reflect popular discontent, embodying oppositional tendencies, and articulating alternative visions of the social and

[52] Semati, 2007, pp. 4-7.
[53] Ivi, p. 6.

political orders"[54]. This period was followed by a "counter-reform" era (2005 and onwards) that shifted the focus of political reform away from the cultural aspects that had been at the center of the Khatami's presidential agenda toward socio-economic issues, at the forefront of Ahmadinejad's presidential campaign[55]. Writing in 2007, Semati predicted that the "counter-reform" era would be "more turbulent" than the previous two periods. This has certainly been the case. As Misagh Parsa argues, after his victory in the 2005 election, Ahamadinejad "demonstrated that he had no interest in liberalizing the Islamic system", sponsoring the repression of political dissent and politicizing the socio-economic issues that were at the core of his bid for the presidency[56]. This was further demonstrated by the events of the 2009 presidential election, which cast heavily into doubt the possibility of Iran achieving democratic reform under the current constitutional system, as the election procedure was tainted by political repression and grave irregularities such as a lack of proper monitoring of the process by the opposition. The 2009 election can be seen as another watershed moment, initiating a "fifth republic" in which the topic of reform has passed from being co-opted to being actively suppressed: the 2011 dissolution of the most important reformist parties, the arrests of the leadership of dissident and reformist movements, and the harsh sentences issued against writers and bloggers confirms this assertion. In the 2013 presidential elections, Hassan Rouhani, a centrist cleric seen by some as a successor to Khatami[57] became the President of Iran. Despite the hopes that his presidency would lead to substantial reforms, that has not been the case because of his ties to Khamenei and his commitment to furthering the interests of the Iranian regime[58]. Rouhani's centrist agenda did not engage the public interest for increased civic freedoms, leaving the issue of freedom of

[54] *Idem.*
[55] Ivi, p. 7.
[56] Parsa 2016, p. 206.
[57] Rad 2022, p. 182.
[58] Litvak 2014, p. 42.

expression largely unresolved[59]. As a conservative hard-liner, Rouhani's successor, Ebrahim Raisi had shown little interest in improving the freedom of the press. His election, marked by "the lowest turnout ever since the Islamic Republic's establishment" has resulted in the conservative faction achieving complete control of the Iranian government. As Bernard Hourcade argues, the election of Raisi has meant the loss of relevancy of "reform" as a topic of political discussion within the Iranian regime due to the "political elimination" of those who supported it[60].

3. *Legitimation through the image: the role of photography in leadership*

The relationship between politics and aesthetics in modernity has been, as Nikolas Kompridis observed, mostly interpreted through the Weberian/Habermasian lens that sees ethics, politics and aesthetics as having "progressively split off from one another, and split off from science and from art, becoming institutionalized in autonomous expert cultures themselves split off from everyday life"[61]. This split, as Walter Benjamin argued, was not without its reasons, as "All efforts to aestheticize politics culminate in one point. That one point is war"[62]. Kompridis, while acknowledging that Benjamin's warning had a certain basis in reality, criticizes his understanding of aesthetics and politics as being too limited, arguing instead for recognizing that "politics is irreducibly aesthetic" (Kompridis, 2014: xvii), relying on Jacques Rancière's reply to Habermas's arguments in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*: "There has never been an aestheticization of politics in the modern age because politics is aesthetic in principle"[63]. As Kompridis reminds us, the relationship between politics and aesthetics has

[59] Randjbar-Daemi 2017, p. 262.
[60] Hourcade 2023, p. 21.
[61] Kompridis 2014, p. xvii.
[62] Benjamin, 2008, p. 41.
[63] Rancière 1999, p. 58.

been a topic of philosophical debate ever since Plato, and the resulting argument "remains unresolved and when it flares up, as it has, again and again, unsettles and disturbs"[64]. Plato's considerations concerning the role of art in the *Politeia*, in particular his "distrust" of poetry[65] are of course well known, but there are also other passages in which the relationship between aesthetics and politics is discussed less directly, but perhaps more revealingly. Let us consider the following passage from Book 4 of the Republic:

> You see, we know how to clothe the farmers in purple robes, festoon them with gold jewelry, and tell them to work the land whenever they please. We know we could have our potters recline on couches from right to left in front of the fire, drinking and feasting with their wheel beside them for whenever they have a desire to make pots. And we can make all the others happy in the same way, so that the whole city is happy. But please do not urge us to do this. For if we are persuaded by you, a farmer won't be a farmer, nor a potter a potter, nor will any of the others from which a city is constituted remain true to type. But for most of the others, it matters less: cobblers who become inferior and corrupt, and claim to be what they are not, do nothing terrible to the city. But if the guardians of our laws and city are not really what they seem to be, you may be sure that they will destroy the city utterly and, on the other hand, that they alone have the opportunity to govern it well and make it happy." (Republic: 420a-421b)

Here Plato argues that the guards[66], whose education is to be carefully curated in order to "enhance their propensity for adopting philosophical values"[67] must be "really what they seem to be" in order to properly govern the polity. His argument consists of an analogy that compares the polity (the body politic) to a statue (the body proper). Building upon the anal-

[64] Kompridis 2014, p. xv.

[65] E.g. Fronzi 2012, p. 70; Burnyeat 1999, pp. 217-22, 236-63.

[66] M. F. Burnyeat, who credits Malcolm Schofield for "opening his eyes" to the matter, argues that the standard translation of this term is inexact, as it does not encompass the full extent of the duties of the philosopher class, which are at the same time "guardians" against external threats as well "guards" that are tasked with "internal police duties, to stop anyone disobeying the law". Thus, the correct translation should be "guards", as the usual translation is to be deemed "too kindly".

[67] Yunis 2007, pp. 18.

ogy, Plato makes a practical consideration in favor of moderation as a political principle: in the same way an attempt at beautifying a statue that does not take into consideration the harmony that is inherent to the human body it tries to represent will only create confusion, missing the reason for painting the statue entirely, that of increasing its beauty, an attempt to make only a part of the citizens "outstandingly happy" will fail to reach the purpose of the body politic, which is the happiness of the city as a whole. The argument proceeds with a *reductio ad absurdum* that sees the effects of the complete lack of moderation: if we were to "clothe the farmers in purple robes" and so on, then "a farmer won't be a farmer, nor a potter a potter, nor will any of the others from which a city is constituted remain true to type". This passage thus argues for what could be called "the sincerity of political aesthetics", a principle that is elucidated by Plato in relation to the role that political leaders must have within the body politic: the guards must not only be virtuous, but they also must be perceived as such. If they must be "what they seem to be", they also must seem to be what they are.

Making a sudden leap to modernity, we can observe that the crucial innovation that Machiavelli brought forth is precisely the introduction of the opposite principle into political theory: it is more important for leaders to *appear* to have good qualities such as mercy, faith, and humanity than to actually possess these qualities. Machiavelli, in fact, goes even further, arguing that "there is danger in having those qualities and always respecting them, whereas there is utility in seeming to have them"[68]: in the modern era appearance reigns supreme. Returning briefly to the ancient greeks, John Hartley observes that "Aristotle himself grounded politics upon the faculty of looking"[69]: on the basis of this observation Anne Krogstad argues that Aristotle's conception of good governance as a derivation of the capability of each citizen to "see – and thus evaluate political candidates" was eventually superseded by the possibility "to spread messages more efficiently and to greater

[68] Machiavelli 2008, p. 283.
[69] Hartley 1992, p. 35.

numbers"[70]. This is of course permitted by the technological advancements of modernity: as Krogstad points out, it is in fact on the basis of these advancements that media theorists have elaborated their concept of information eras (e.g. Haugseth, 2013). Lilleker et al. argue that in the current era of "information overload [...] the image may be an even more powerful means for grabbing attention than ever before"[71].

Images, as opposed to other forms of communication, have two main advantages: their immediacy, linked to their attention grabbing capacity[72] and their ability to directly evoke emotion[73]. In his 2012 review of visual communication research, Dan Schill identifies ten functions of visuals in politics: 1) Images function as (mostly implicit) arguments "in conjunction with linguistic or textual arguments"; 2) Images can have an agenda setting function because politicians can "control the news agenda by providing news outlets with attention-grabbing images"; 3) Visuals are used to dramatize events in order to further the politician's arguments; 4) Images have an emotional function as they are "uniquely equipped to produce an emotional response from viewers"; 5)The use of visuals in political communication has an "image-building" function, they consolidate a politician's public image into a certain visual archetype such as the media star, the candidate as father figure" and so on; 6) Images create identification between audiences and politicians; 7) Visuals have documentation function and are used to prove or disprove that events have happened a certain way; 8) Images can "tap into iconic, societal symbols and draw on the emotional power associated with those symbols"; 9) Images are capable of transporting the audience "to a different time or place in ways that words alone cannot"; 10) Images may be used to confer ambiguity to an argument, because they can imply arguments that are not explicitly stated through verbal means[74]. In order to pursue our analysis we will assume

[70] Krogstad 2017, p. 9.
[71] Lilleker et al. 2019, p. 2.
[72] Krogstad 2017, p. 11; Brantner et al., 2011; Bucher and Schumacher, 2006.
[73] Lanzetta et al., 1985; Hill, 2004; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007.
[74] Schill 2012, pp. 122-133.

that the visual communication within the Iranian context functions in a manner that reflects the functions of political communication identified by Schill.

5.1. *The Shah and the Supreme Leader: a comparative analysis*

Our comparative analysis of the photographic representation of leadership in Iran focuses on the depictions of the highest levels of leadership in Iran between the pre-revolutionary and the post-revolutionary period, by focusing on official portraits. As Anne Krogstad argues, political leaders "tailor visual portrayals of themselves in ways that allow them to influence others and strengthen their position"[75]. In our comparative analysis we will explore how these official portraits aim to accomplish such aims.

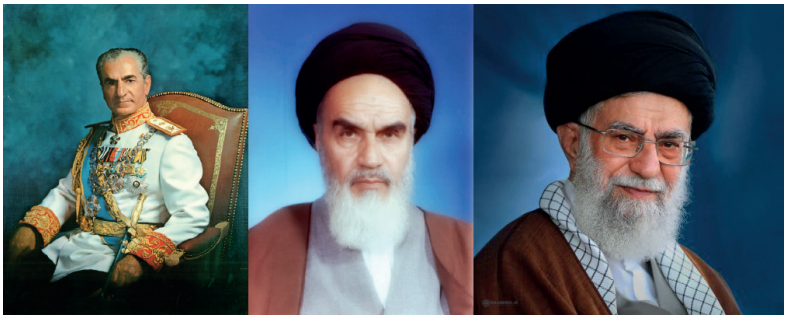

Figure 1. The official portraits of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi[76], Ruhollah Musavi Khomeini[77] and Seyyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei[78] side by side.

The first noteworthy aspect of the comparison between the three official portraits is of course the obviousness of the transitions between the monarchic and the theocratic regime,

[75] Krogstad 2017, p. 7.
[76] http://www.pahlavi.org.
[77] https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Ruhollah_Khomeini.jpg.
[78] https://x.com/khamenei_ir.

which is immediately visible through the presence of a throne in the first picture and difference in apparel between the Shah and the other two men. The difference in clothing is telling of the deep ideological differences between the two regimes. While the Shah, similarly to his predecessors, both his father and the shahs of the Qajar Dynasty starting with Mohammad (1834-1848), donned european style military apparel, the Supreme Leaders are clothed in the traditional dress of the *mullā*, the shiite clergyman, consisting of a turban, a *qabā*, the long gray coat and the *abā*, the brown open cloak, signifying their commitment to a different principle of political legitimacy, namely the theocratic principle as opposed to the monarchic principle. It is obvious that the distance of the camera from Reza Shah is deliberate. The monarch is depicted from further away so that the photo could include the symbol of monarchic power, the throne. As Gudmund Hernes argues, monarchies display power not only through "podiums and platforms, thrones and tribunes" but also through the creation of distance between the ruler and the people[79]. The creation of distance is thus achieved by the distance between the photographer and the Shah: a distance that serves the image-building function of the photo. This official portrait of the Shah was taken in 1973, at the height of Pahlavi's power, during the oil boom of the 1970s, a time in which "[h]is dreams of grandeur overbalanced his sense of reality"[80]. Five years after the photo was taken he would write in his manifesto *The Great Civilization*: "A king in Iran represents the people [...] He is the teacher, the master, the father, he is everything"[81]. In contrast to the distance created by the framing of the first photo, the depiction of Khomeini is strikingly intimate, thanks not only to the reduced distance between the camera and its subject but also to the frontal camera angle, as opposed to the weak bottom up camera angle of Pahlavi's portrait. Similarly to the Shah, Khomeini looks toward the viewer, yet there is a subtle difference that can only be observed close up.

[79] Hernes 1989, pp. 91-92.
[80] Hoveyeda 2003, p. 25.
[81] Pahlavi, 1978.

Figure 2. Close up of the official portraits of Pahlavi and Khomeini

While the Shah is looking directly at the camera's scope Khomeini is gazing ever so slightly above it. As Luciano Cheles and Pierre Sorlin argue, "in portraiture apparently minor details may in fact carry important symbolic meanings"[82]. While the Shah's gaze symbolizes his commitment to be "everything" for the persian people, to "represent" them as the guardian of "the great civilization", Khomeini's gaze aims to show that his commitment lies above the service to a people. Symbolically, Khomeini does not look at the people, he looks above them and beyond them, peering into a realm that is unseen and immaterial, pointing to the spiritual role of Khomeini as Imam. The impression of immateriality is also communicated to the viewer by the lighting of Khomeini's portrait as opposed to that of the Shah. The Shah is lit laterally, creating a stark contrast between the lit parts of the picture and dark sections, conferring depth to his figure. This choice of lighting aims to emulate the aesthetics of an oil painting, in order to provide a sense of magisterial gravitas to Pahlavi, linking Reza Shah's portrayal to the long lasting tradition of depicting monarchs as awe inspiring figures. Khomeini's photograph, on the other hand, does not

[82] Cheles and Sorlin 2020, p. 2.

have many shadows and lacks in contrast: the image is particularly bright, to the point of being almost fuzzy. Khomeini is lit less laterally than the Shah and the background is strategically used to suggest that he is also being lit from behind: this, along with the low contrast of the picture, creates an impression of otherworldliness into the viewer.

The comparison between the portraits of Khomeini and Khamenei is also very telling. First of all, one can easily tell that, aside from the three quarters angle in which Khamenei is depicted, rather than the frontal angle used in Khomeini's portrait, the two portraits are very similar in composition. Both images have a blue and white background, even if the shade of blue in Khamenei's portrait is quite darker. We have the same choice in the orientation of the lights, even though Khamenei's image is less lit and more rich in contrast. Both portraits create the same impression, that the figure depicted is surrounded by light: in Khamenei's portrayal the shading in the light seems to suggest that it emanates from Khamenei himself. The clothing is also quite similar, and that is neither a coincidence nor an immediate consequence of clerical codes of dress, which does not dictate specific colors for different clerical ranks, although the choice in color for the *abā* is usually limited to black or brown[83]. Aside from the blackness of the turban, which testifies a claim of descent from Muhammad, the colors of the *qabā* and the *abā* are the product of a deliberate choice which shows that Khamenei aims to mold his visual identity on that of his predecessor, a choice which Cheles and Sorlin argue is usually done to "suggest allegiance to specific values, indicate continuity with the policies of a predecessor and, by doing so, seek legitimation"[84]. However, there is one crucial difference between the two depictions of Khomeini and Khamenei, and that is the facial expression. Khomeini, similarly to the Shah, adopts a stern, penetrating expression, which characterizes the typical depiction of political leaders of the twentieth century that aimed to communicate self-confidence. Khamenei abandons this expression in favor of a more relaxed and warm, al-

[83] https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2781816.
[84] Cheles and Sorlin 2020, p. 51.

though not fully blossomed smile, suggesting that he, like other contemporary political leaders, prefers being considered "benevolent and friendly"[85] rather than risk the political costs of further emulating his predecessor.

Conclusions

It is clear from our analysis that official portraits do reflect the legitimation struggles of political leaders. The choice of the Iranian case was apt, given the tumultuous nature of modern Iranian history: each of the three leaders is faced with different challenges to their legitimacy, and this is reflected in the choices they make when commissioning an official portrait. Mohammad Reza Shah was faced with the difficult task of communicating through his official painting his high minded intentions and political philosophy. The ornate and bombastic character of Pahlavism is reflected in his choice of dress and the overall style of the photography. The first Supreme Leader, as the guiding light of a revolutionary political movement, needed to communicate to the Iranian people that he is the rightful *faqih*, tasked by *Allah* himself to be the guardian of the muslimdom during the Occultation. His legitimacy depended upon his capability to embody such an ideal not only in spoken discourse but also through the more immediate means of visual communication: his constitutional powers over the radio and television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran testify to this fact, because they were tailored to accommodate the increasing role of visual communication in the formation of public opinion. While Khomeini argued that technological progress is not essential for "the solution of social problems and the relief of human misery", which could only be ultimately resolved by faith in *Allah* and his Messenger[86], he also paid close attention to the power of technology, perhaps due to his experience with the international media during his parisian exile, who at the time "under the pretext of informing the world, amplified the

[85] Ivi, p. 55.
[86] Khomeini 1981, p. 36.

Khomeini propaganda"[87]. Perhaps the most interesting figure is that of Ayatollah Khamenei, as he is faced with the most complex media environment. The fact that Twitter (now known as "X") is banned in Iran and yet Supreme Leader Khamenei has an active account shows us that the legitimation challenges facing Khamenei have also an international dimension. The most interesting aspect of Khamenei's portrait is the overall disposition which he chooses to portray, in stark contrast to that of his predecessor, as it reflects the difficulties inherent in the process of governing as the successor to the charismatic leader: Khamenei cannot hope to outdo his predecessor in matters of unquestionable charisma, so he chooses a softer facial expression that communicates an openness to dialogue.

Bibliography

Adib-Moghaddam A. (Ed.). (2014), *A critical introduction to Khomeini*, Cambridge University Press.

Akhavi S. (1996), *Contending discourses in Shi'i law on the doctrine of Wilayat Al-faqih*, «Iranian Studies», *29*(3-4), pp. 229-268.

Ansari A. M. (1998), *Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and the myth of imperial authority*, University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom).

Arjomand S. A. (1980), *The state and Khomeini's Islamic order,* «Iranian Studies», *13*(1-4), pp. 147-164.

Arjomand S. A. (1981), *The Shi'ite Hierocracy and the State in Premodern Iran: 1785–1890*, «European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie», *22*(1), pp. 40-78.

Benjamin W. (2008), *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility*, in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*, Harvard UP, pp. 19-55.

Brantner C., Lobinger K., Wetzstein I. (2011), *Effects of visual framing on emotional responses and evaluations of news stories about the Gaza conflict 2009*, «Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly», 88, pp. 523-540.

Bucher H.-J., Schumacher P. (2006), *The relevance of attention for select-*

[87] Hoveyda 2003, p. 83.

ing news content. An eye-tracking study on attention patterns in the reception of print and online media, «Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research», 31, pp. 347-368.

Bucy E. P., Joo J. (2021), *Editors' introduction: Visual politics, grand collaborative programs, and the opportunity to think big,* «The International Journal of Press/Politics», 26(1), 5-21.

Burnyeat M. F. (1999), *Culture and society in Plato's Republic*, «Tanner Lectures on Human Values», 20, pp. 215-324.

Calder N. (1982), *Accommodation and revolution in Imami Shi'i Jurisprudence: Khumayni and the classical tradition*, «Middle Eastern Studies», *18*(1), pp. 3-20.

Cheles L., Sorlin, P. (2020), *Introduction: Faces of politics*, in *The Political Portrait*, London, Routledge, pp. 1-23.

Ekman M., Widholm, A. (2017), *Political Communication in an Age of Visual Connectivity: Exploring Instagram Practices Among Swedish Politicians*, «Northern Lights», 15, pp. 15-32.

Fendler U. (2019), *Icons of Political Leaders–From Sacral To Popular Images,* in *Revolution 3.0: Iconographies of Radical Change,* edited by U. Fendler, K. Fink, N. Siegert, U. Vierke. München: AVM Edition.

Fronzi G. (2012), *Arte, estetica e politica. Spunti per un approfondimento*, «Segni e comprensione», 77, pp. 66-81.

Gelvin J. (2004), *The Modern Middle East: A History*, New York: Oxford University Press.

Gerodimos R. (2019), *The interdisciplinary roots and digital branches of visual political communication research*, in *Visual Political Communication*, edited by A. Veneti, D. Jackson, D. G. Lilleker. Cham: Springer International Publishing, pp. 53-73.

Gimenez E., Schwarz N. (2016), *The visual construction of "the people" and "proximity to the people" on the online platforms of the National Front and Swiss People's Party.* «Österreichische Zeitschrift für Soziologie», 41(2), pp. 213-242.

Grabe M. E., Bucy, E. P. (2009), *Image bite politics: News and the visual framing of elections*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press.

Graziani, E. (2023), *The discursivity of the theory of the Wilayat-i faqih as the foundation of the ideals of order and unity in the theocratic vision of power in Iran,* «Soft Power, Revista Euro-Americana de Teoría e Historia de la Política», 10(1), pp. 207-222.

Gruber C. J. (2008), *The message is on the wall mural arts in post-revolutionary Iran.* «Persica», 22, pp. 15-46.

Hairi A. H. (1977), *Shi'ism and Constitutionalism in Iran*, Leiden.

Hariman R., Lucaites J.L. (2007), *No caption needed: Iconic photo-*

graphs, public culture, and liberal democracy, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hartley J. (1992), *The Politics of Pictures: The Creation of the Public in the Age of Popular Media*, London: Routledge.

Haugseth J. F. (2013), *Sosiale medier i samfunnet*, Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

Hernes G. (1989), '*Maktens estetikk*', in *Arenaer. Om politik og iscenesættelse*, edited by H. Fink. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.

Hill C.A. (2004), *The psychology of rhetorical images*, in *Defining visual rhetorics*, edited by C.A. Hill, M. Helmers. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Hourcade B. (2023), *Ebrahim Raisi's Domestic Policy: Conservative, Pragmatic or Paralyzed?*, «Muslim World», 113.

Hoveyda F. (2003), *The Shah and the Ayatollah: Iranian mythology and Islamic devolution*, Bloomsbury Publishing USA.

Kapuscinski R. (2006), *Shah of Shahs,* Penguin Books.

Karamustafa A. T. (2018), *Shi 'is, Sufis, and Popular Saints*, in *The Wiley Blackwell history of Islam*, pp. 159-175.

Karvonen L. (2010), *The personalization of politics: A study of parliamentary democracies,* Colchester: ECPR Press.

Khomeini R. (1981), *Islam and revolution: writings and declarations of Imam Khomeini*, Berkeley: Mizan Press.

Kompridis N. (2014), *The aesthetic turn in political thought,* New York: Bloomsbury.

Krogstad A. (2017), *A political history of visual display*, «The poster», 4(1-2), pp. 7-29.

Machiavelli N. (2008), *The Prince: Translated, with introduction and notes by James B. Atkinson*, Hackett Publishing Company.

Lanzetta J.T., Sullivan D.G., Masters R.D., McHugo G.J. (1985), *Emotional and cognitive responses to televised images of political leaders,* in *Mass media and political thought: An information-processing approach*, edited by S. Kraus & R.M. Perloff. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage, pp. 85-116.

Lilleker D. G., Veneti A., Jackson D. (2019), *Visual political communication*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Litvak M. (2014), *Is Iran Indeed More Moderate?* in *The Interim Deal on the Iranian Nuclear Program: Toward a Comprehensive Solution?*, edited by E. B. Landau, A. Kurz. Memorandum n. 142. Tel Aviv: Institute for National Security Studies.

Mahdavi M. (2014), *The rise of Khomeinism: Problematizing the politics of resistance in pre-revolutionary Iran*, in *A critical introduction to*

Khomeini, edited by A. Adib-Moghaddam. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 43-68.

Modarressi H. (1991), *The just ruler or the guardian jurist: An attempt to link two different Shi'ite concepts*, «Journal of the American Oriental Society» , Jul. – Sep., 1991, Vol. 111, No. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1991), pp. 549-562.

Mohseni E., Gallagher N., Ramsay C. (2017), *The Ramifications of Rouhani's Re-electio* , <https://cissm.umd.edu/research-impact/publications/ramifications-rouhanis-re-election>, 10.10.2024.

Pahlavi, M. R. (1978), *Toward the Great Civilization*, Teheran.

Parsa M. (2016), *Democracy in Iran: Why it failed and how it might succeed,* Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Rancière J. (1999), *Disagreement,* trans. en. Julie Rose. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Randjbar-Daemi S. (2017), *The Quest for Authority in Iran: A history of the Presidency from Revolution to Rouhani,* Bloomsbury Publishing.

Saffari S. (1993), *The Legitimation of the Clergy's Right to Rule in the Iranian Constitution of 1979*, «British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies», 20(1), pp. 64-82.

Saikal A. (2021), *Raisi's election : supreme leader-president in one?*, «RSIS Commentaries», pp. 110-121.

Semati M., ed. (2007), *Media, culture and society in Iran: living with globalization and the Islamic state* (Vol. 5), Routledge.

Seyed-Gohrab A. A. (2021), *Martyrdom, mysticism and dissent: the poetry of the 1979 Iranian Revolution and the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988)*, de Gruyter.

Shakibi Z. (2020), *Pahlavi Iran and the politics of Occidentalism: The Shah and the Rastakhiz party*, Bloomsbury Publishing.

Takeyh R. (2021), *The last Shah: America, Iran, and the fall of the Pahlavi dynasty*, Yale University Press.

Tareen S. (2018), *Struggles for Independence: Colonial and Postcolonial Orders*, in *The Wiley Blackwell History of Islam*, edited by A. Salvatore, R. Tottoli, B. Rahimi. John Wiley & Sons, pp. 519-542.

Wodak R., Meyer M., eds. (2015), *Methods of critical discourse studies,* London: Sage Publications.

Wodak R., Meyer M., eds. (2001), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*, London: Sage Publications.

Yunis H. (2007), *The Protreptic Rhetoric of the Republic* in *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic,* edited by G. R. F. Ferrari, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-26.

Zonis M. (1991), *Majestic Failure: The Fall of the Shah*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Sitography

https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1926/10/i-reza-place-this-crown-upon-my-head/649650

http://www.pahlavi.org

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Ruhollah_Khomeini.jpg

https://x.com/khamenei_ir

https://www.mehrnews.com/news/2781816