

# 79. Slavs 89. and 09. Tatars



Slavs and Tatars, billboard, Eastside Projects, 2011

## Only Solidarity and Patience Will Secure Our Victory

79. 89. 09. looks at three key dates: 1979, 1989, and 2009 in order to better understand the world we live in. Coinciding with twentieth anniversary celebrations across Eastern Europe for the fall of Communism, the financial crisis of 2009 marked another significant shift, as much of the mind as of the pocket, one would hope. While it is rather difficult to interpret the present or recent past, history will have no qualms in putting the financial crisis of the early twenty-first century on equal footing with the late twentieth-century fall of Communism. And perhaps we would better understand the severity of this earlier event, the collapse of Communism in 1989, if the US had split up into, say, fifty different republics, as the Soviet Union crumbled into several independent nations.

1979 might strike some as less evident: however, the Iranian Revolution of that year presaged many of the major (and minor) geopolitical issues facing the world today. Considered by political think tanks in the US and

Europe to be the second most important event of the twentieth century, after the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 has triggered one of the major geopolitical narratives of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century: revolutionary Islam.

In the same way that the events of 1917 defined the world for the following seventy-odd years, the arrival of an Islamic theocracy, for the first time in over a millennia via perhaps one of the last truly popular modernist revolutions of the twentieth century, has defined the subsequent thirty years. The debates regarding Islam's compatibility with modernity, the viability of a political form of Islam and even such tropes as martyrdom first grabbed the attention of the non-Muslim world in 1979 and has, for better or worse, occupied the airwaves ever since.



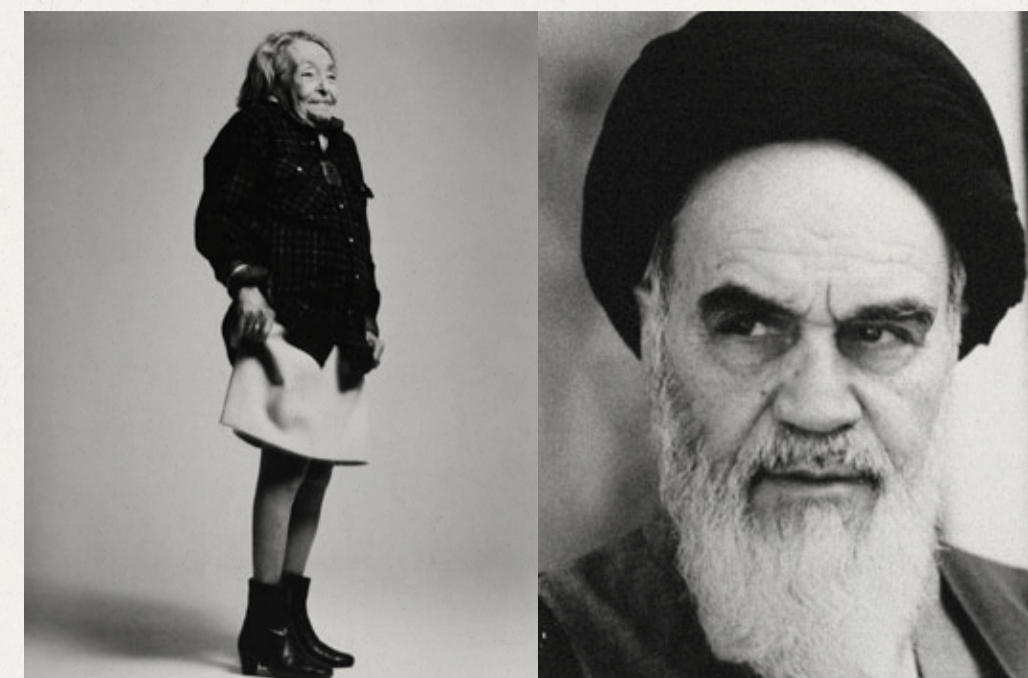
Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran with Empress Farah (left), a statue of the Shah torn down in 1979 (right)

## The Peacock with a wee cock

Nothing perhaps better crystallises the rapidity of the Shah's fall than the celebration of 2,500 years of Iranian monarchy, known as the Peacock Throne, in 1971. With no extravagance spared, an air-conditioned tent city was erected on the site of Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of the Achaemenid Empire, near Shiraz in southern Iran. Maxim's de Paris did the catering — which included roast peacock stuffed with foie gras — Limoges provided the dinnerware, and Lanvin the uniforms for the Imperial

household. 250 red Mercedes Benz limousines shuttled hundreds of presidents, prime ministers and royalty around, in what turned out to be the swan song of the Pahlavi dynasty.

Within an eight-year span, the Shah would flee the country, Khomeini would return from exile in Neauphle-le-Château, the Iran hostage crisis would bring down the Carter administration and the first Muslim theocracy in more than one thousand years would come into existence.

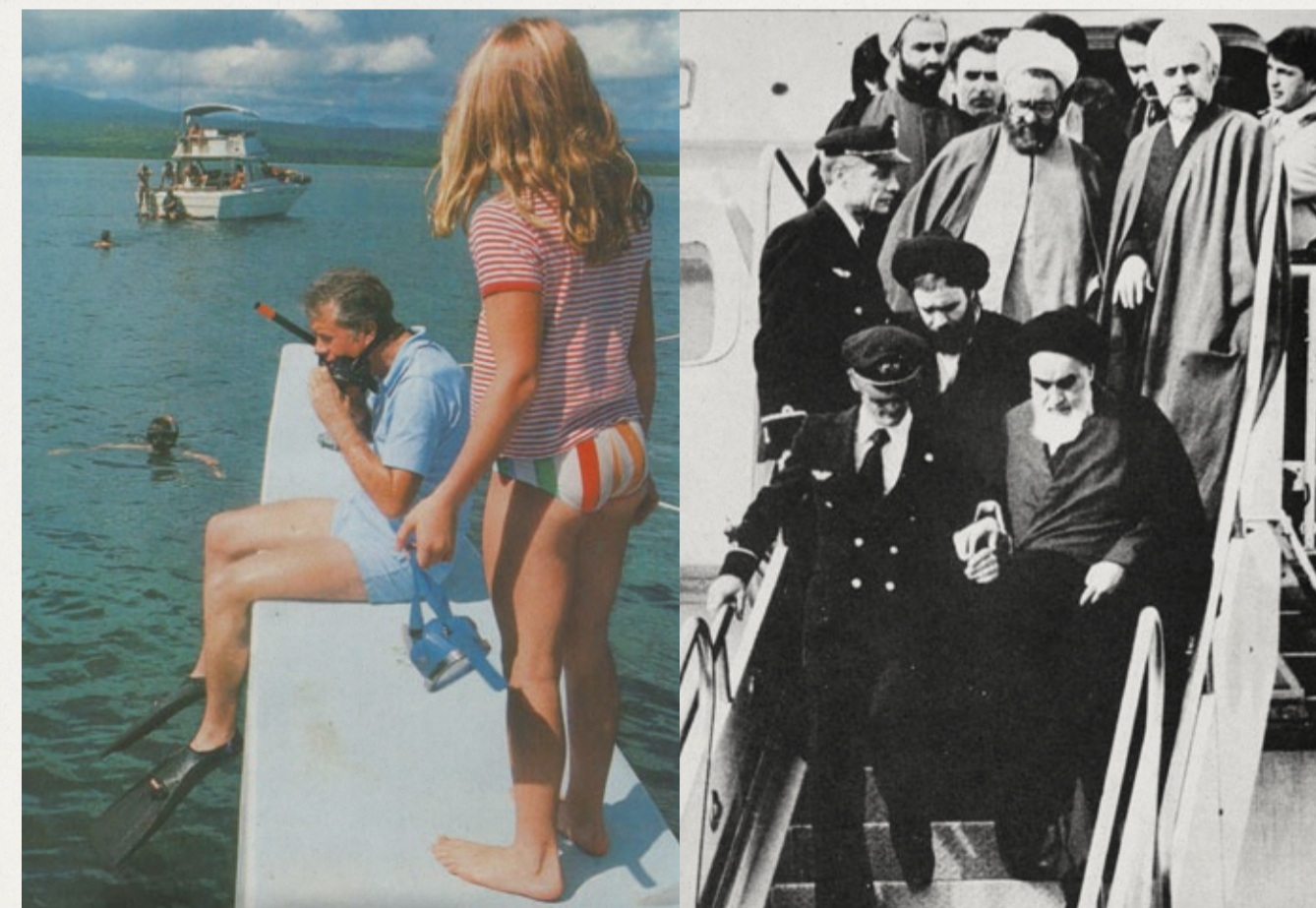


Marguerite Duras (left), Ruhollah Khomeini (right)

## Meanwhile in Neauphle-le-Château ...

After more than a decade in exile in Turkey and Iraq, Khomeini spent some time in Neauphle-le-Château, a leafy suburb outside of Paris, where urban legend has it he often ran into Marguerite Duras at the local grocery store. There, the two would discuss which sorts of pasta

to buy. There is something strangely touching about Duras, the proto-feminist, proto-communist rubbing shoulders with Khomeini, a man considered by many to be, if anything, the exemplary anti-feminist and anti-communist.



Carter being thrown to the sharks (left), Khomeini's triumphant return to Tehran (right)

## Out/In

President Carter's defeat by Ronald Reagan with the largest electoral margin, was in large part due to the 444 days Iran hostage crisis. Carter's inability to resolve the crisis cast him as a weak leader. Perhaps most uncanny of all, was the timing of the release of the hostages — one hour into the inauguration of Ronald Reagan as president, on 20 January 1981.

The 'coronation' of Khomeini, could be gleaned far before his consolidation of power in the early days of

the Iranian Revolution. His return aboard an Air France Boeing — not to mention being escorted by the pilot himself down the stairs to the tarmac — held significant symbolic power, adding a final, gilded legitimacy to a man who had been publicly condemned by the monarchy, whose son had been murdered by the Shah's secret police, and who had been in exile for more than fifteen years.



The US hostages, blindfolded, outside the embassy, 1979

## 444 Days: US hostage crisis

When Iranian university students stormed the US Embassy and took fifty-two Americans hostage for exactly 444 days, it was the first time a non-equal, and non-communist power, had challenged the US, and the US flinched. A friendship now turned into a bitter, melodramatic rivalry, with all the ingredients worthy of a Hollywood

film — in fact, Oliver Stone has tried on many occasions to put together a film on the subject and Peter Brook was exploring the idea of an opera inspired by the episode — this event, set the tone of the relations between these two countries for the next thirty years.



Ted Koppel, anchor of *Nightline*, from 1979 to 2005

## Baby-steps towards the twenty-four hour news cycle

It was out of the US hostage crisis of 1979–81 that ABC's *Nightline*, a pioneering stalwart of nightly news in the television landscape of the US, was launched. Intended to compete with NBC's *The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, *Nightline* was originally called *The Iran Crisis — America Held Hostage: Day XXX*. What was a one-off, special 'interruption' in the nightly news programme, eventually

lasted the whole duration of the hostage crisis. During such a protracted period, of course, nothing much of note happened but it eerily presaged the twenty-four hour news cycle which would come into its own in the 1990s with the O. J. Simpson trial. The programme continues to this day but without the relevance and impact it enjoyed under the helm of Ted Koppel.



An anti-Iran demonstration in Washington DC, 1979

## I'm Rubber, You're Glue ...

Anger has played an important role in the two countries' relationship. Many people characterise the relationship between the US and Iran as an old couple, who sleep in

different beds, but cannot seem to muster enough energy to definitively make a decision, either to get divorced or to live together in peace.



Shell Station, Houston, Texas

## The Petrol Station as Geo-Political Salon

Strangely, the place an Iranian-American is most likely to be told to go back to where he or she came from is at a petrol station. Perhaps rednecks do have a better grasp

of geopolitics and the role commodities, such as oil, play in the relationship between the US and Iran?



'Barbara Ann' by The Beach Boys, promotional image (left) and single (right)

## Barbara Ann

Following the Iranian Revolution, many Iranian emigrants found refuge in the US. The relative youth of the country and pro-business environment suited the preternaturally mercantile Iranians like a glove. Yet, many Iranian-

Americans could not square their pro-American beliefs with what they believed to be a classic American feel-good song by that most bona fide of American bands, The Beach Boys. They mistook 'Barbara Ann' for ...



'Bomb Iran' by Vince Vance and the Valiants, promotional image (left) and single (right)

## Bomb Iran

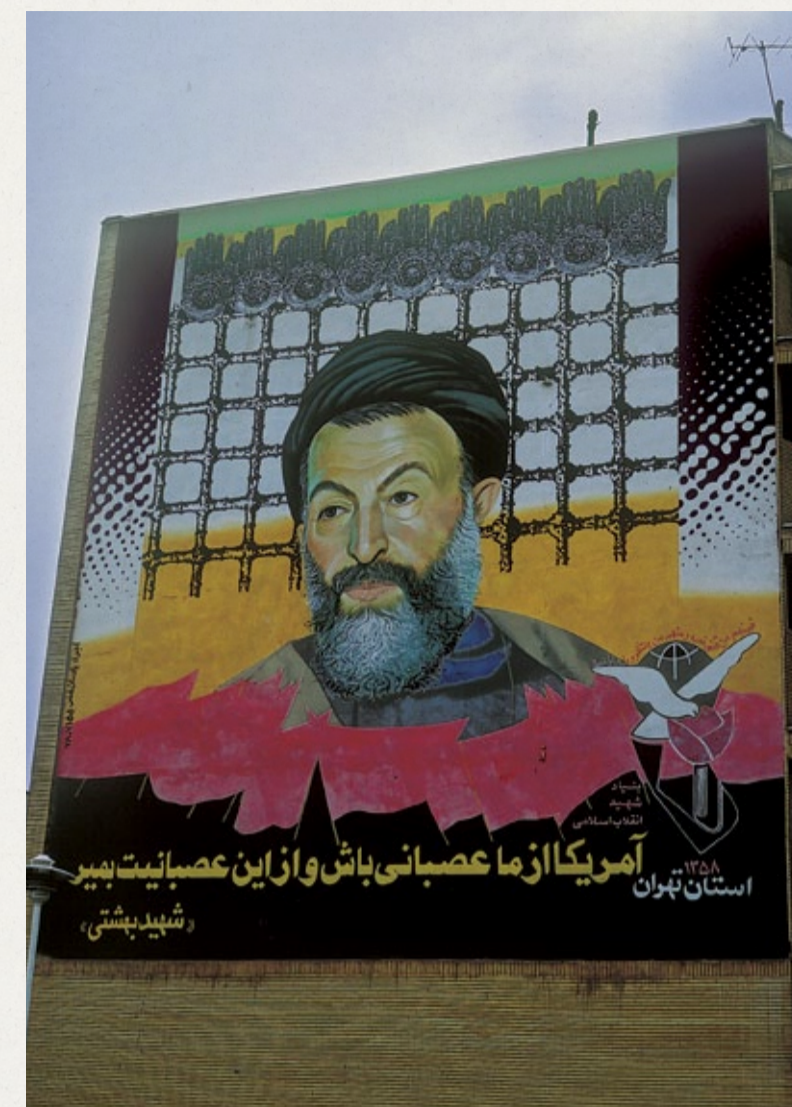
The otherwise saccharine pop lyrics belie a mean-streak in the two countries' long-standing beef. The notion of turning 'Iran into a parking lot' again reveals the sensitive if complex issue of the average American's reliance on the automobile and the immediate impact of a jump in the petrol prices due to a seemingly far away geopolitical crisis.

'Bomb Iran', a spoof composed during the hostage crisis by Vince Vance and the Valiants who happen to also be behind the 2003 track 'Yackity Yak, Bomb Iraq', produced on the eve of the US invasion in 2003.

Instead of:  
*Went to a dance looking for romance  
 Saw Barbara Ann so I thought I'd take a chance  
 Barbara Ann  
 Bar bar bar bar Barbara Ann*

It went:  
*Went to a mosque,  
 gonna throw some rocks  
 Tell the Ayatollah,  
 'Gonna put you in a box!'  
 Bomb Iran.  
 Bomb, bomb, bomb, Bomb Iran  
 And:  
*Our country's got a feelin'  
 Really hit the ceilin', Bomb Iran  
 Bomb, bomb, bomb, Bomb Iran**

Or:  
*Ol' Uncle Sam's gettin' pretty hot  
 Time to turn Iran into a parking lot  
 Bomb Iran  
 Bomb, bomb, bomb, Bomb Iran*



Mural of Shahid Beheshti in downtown Tehran, 1928-1981

## Geopolitical ~~Beef~~ Lamb

The anger of course is equally present on the Iranian side. In Haft-eh Tir square, in downtown Tehran, where the demonstrations following the contested 2009 presidential elections took place, a mural celebrates Shahid Beheshti,

a revolutionary leader killed in a bomb attack in 1981. Under his portrait, in Farsi: *America as mah asabaniyash va az een asabaniyat bemeer America, be angry at us and from this anger, die!*



Crowds gather to listen to Khomeini's speech

## Mix-tapes of Modernist Islam

During Khomeini's fourteen years in exile, his sermons and speeches were smuggled into Iran via audio cassette tapes and distributed throughout the country. The Iranian equivalent of the *samizdat*, the self-published copies

of dissident literature distributed furtively throughout the Soviet Union, Khomeini's tapes played a significant role both in mobilizing the masses and energising the disillusioned middle class during the 1970s.



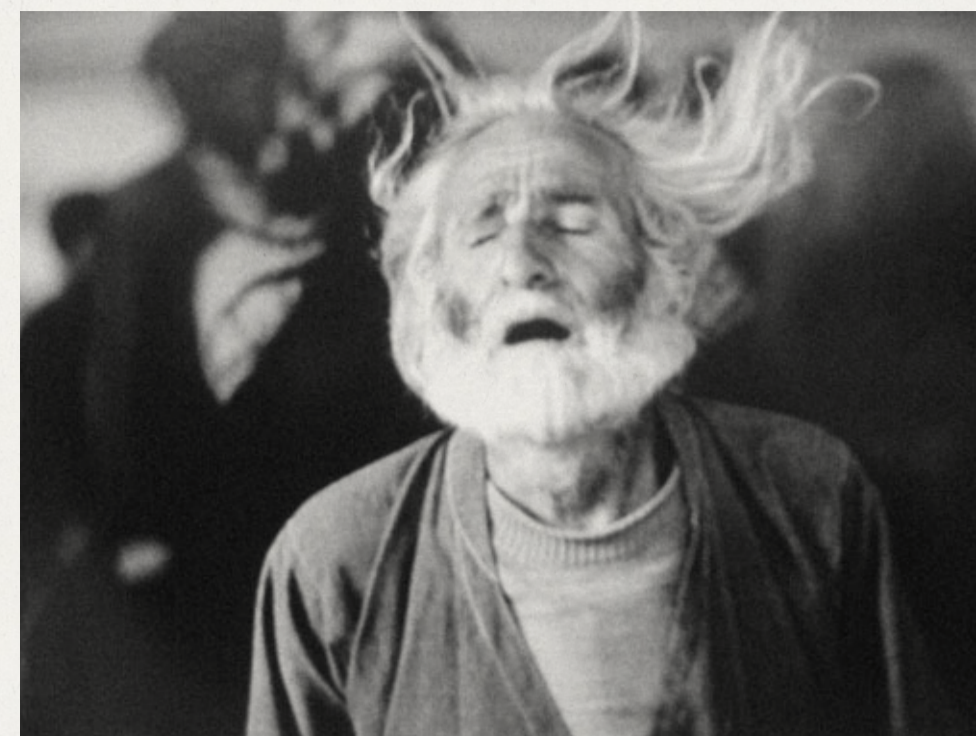
A Shah supporter (above), a Khomeini supporter (below) and pro-Green movement slogans — *Where is my vote? Long live Mossavi!* and *Death to the regime which tricks its people* — on contemporary notes (insets)

## Money: 1979 and 2009

Money has often been a platform for civil disobedience. Supporters of the Shah held up Iranian currency with his portrait to show their support, while opposition Khomeini supporters replaced the portrait of the Shah with that of Khomeini.

Today, money continues to be used as a medium of protest. Commonly found notes in Iran, such as the 20,000 rial or 2,000 toman and 50,000 rial or 5,000

toman, the equivalent of two and five US dollar bills respectively, are often found marked with slogans of the 2009 presidential protest: 'Where is my vote?', 'Long live Mossavi', and 'Death to the regime which tricks its people'.



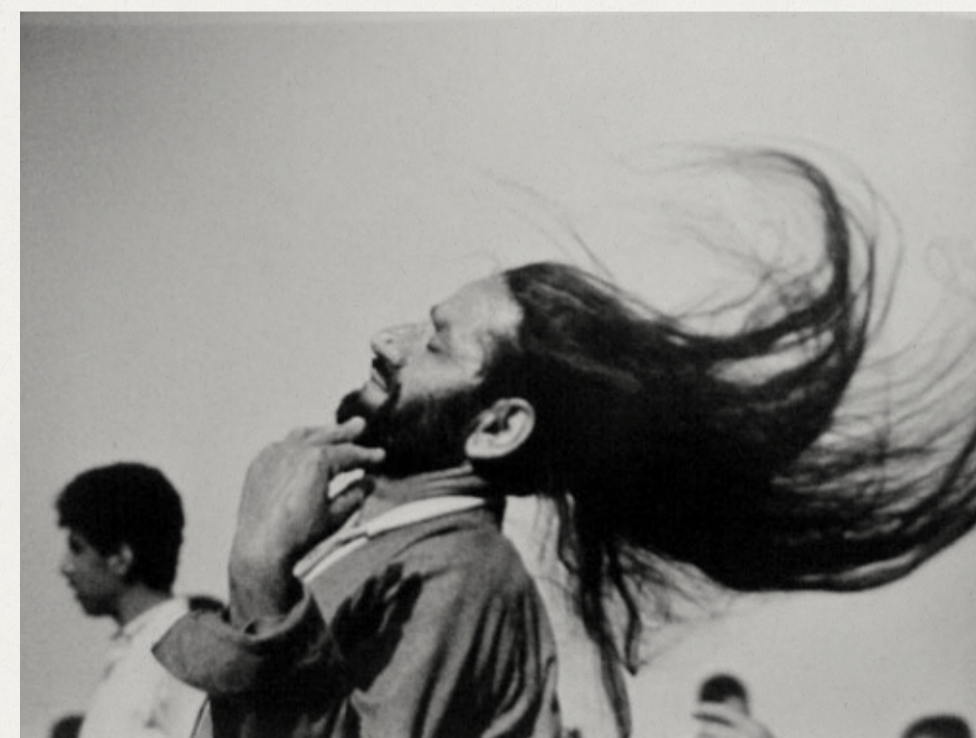
Qaderi Dervish of Kurdistan

## The Metaphysical versus the Material

The Iranian Revolution is the first and only revolution of the modern era to advance a metaphysical agenda. Revolutions are doomed to fail: as anyone remotely familiar with the French or Russian Revolutions can attest to. It is one thing to deliver on certain promises — no matter how lofty, be it a proletarian government,

the abolition of the monarchy, etc. — and quite another when the deliverables — salvation, redemption, and the like — are entirely independent of the material world.

It begs the question: Is it a stroke of genius or bombastic foolishness to define success in such a way that it cannot be measured in this life?



Qaderi Dervish of Kurdistan

## Theocracy = Rule of God Republic = Rule of Man

The unrest in Iran following the contested 2009 presidential elections goes to the very origins and name of the country. Inherent in the name itself — the Islamic Republic of Iran — there are two divergent, almost mutually exclusive, governing philosophies: the rule of God found in a theocracy and the rule of man found in a republic. Only once the trauma of the Iran-Iraq war was over and the country returned to a sense of normality did this tension come to the surface, initially with the reformist

government of President Khatami. Today, the cleavage continues to grow and delegitimise the Islamic Republic. The reformist camp (Moussavi, Karroubi, et al) has tried to move the country towards a republican model where there would be a minimal sense of accountability to the electorate; the hardliners (President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei et al) have strengthened their belief in a more purist theocracy without the need for public participation or accountability.



Between 79.89.09., edition 47 of 100, 2009

## Choosing not to choose

Slavs and Tatars created *Between 79.89.09.* to actively choose not to choose, be it between East and West, the political and the personal, or the analytical and the affective. Each edition features a different opt-out for the dervish. This one reads:

A DERVISH ONCE SAID: BETWEEN WESTERN ALIENATION AND EASTERN SUBMISSION, I'LL TAKE: *A NAP*.  
Some of the others include: *A FAG*, *A HERMES BAG*, *A COKE*, etc.



Woman at Ashura ceremony, Shariati Avenue, Tehran, 2009

## Mo' Money, Mo' Records, Mo'harram

While there seems to be a consensus in the West that the Iranian Revolution was a reactionary revolution, one could look at it from behind, as it were, or upside down. Reinstating an Islamic theocracy in the late

twentieth century, a form of government that has not existed for more than a thousand years, could, in itself, be seen as a radical act.



Imam Ali painted on a water reservoir, near Chak-Chak, Iran

## The Antimodernists are not Antimodern

In his book *Les Antimodernes* (2005), Antoine Compagnon describes the true modernist not as the utopianists who only look forward (e.g. Vladimir Mayakovsky, F. T. Marinetti) but rather as the 'anti-modernists', those somewhat conflicted visionaries deeply affected by the passing of the pre-modern age. As Sartre said about Baudelaire, those who go forward but with an eye in the rear view mirror. Walter Benjamin uses

a similar trope with his Angel of History, thrust forward with her back to the future but facing the past, as does the Malagasy language which, contrary to most Western, positivist conceptions of time, uses words such as 'behind' to describe the future and 'in front' to convey the past.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 was in every sense an anti-modernist revolution.



'Continuity of the Revolution ... 'till the End of Plundering' (left) and *Anti-Imperial Imperialist*, 200 cm x 120 cm, polyester, digital print, stitching, beads, 2011 (right)

## Anti-Imperialist Imperialism

Much like the Russian Revolution, the Iranian Revolution of 1979 was a liberationist revolutionary ideology that was subsequently exported beyond its borders. It's a very interesting dynamic: foreign powers or influences are kicked out before one's own ideology takes on the airs

of those same foreign powers. In this case, several elements of the Iranian Revolution have been exported to the greater Muslim world. In a long-lashed wink at the Soviets, the Islamic Republic of Iran positions itself as a champion of the oppressed and exploited throughout the world.



Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Kurdistan, Iraq, Palestine, (clockwise top left to right)

## One's Fingers in many Kibbehs

As a result of this anti-imperialist imperialism, thirty years after the Iranian Revolution, we see several tenets being played out, pushed, debated, flirted with around the Middle East. In fact, one reason why there are so many proponents of a grand bargain between the US and Iran, in the vein of Nixon's deal with China in the 1970s, is that Iran plays a significant role in the affairs of at least six of its neighbours: In Syria it supports the Assad regime and Hamas; in Lebanon, the creation and financial

support of Hezbollah; in Afghanistan, it supported the Northern Alliance and has been a long-time foe of the Taliban. It also bankrolls several members of the Karzai government; on the Kurdish question, a quarter of the Kurdish population live within Iran's borders; in Iraq, sixty to seventy per cent of the population is Shi'a and heavily influenced by Iran; and finally in Palestine, Iran has gained increasing recognition for its hardline stance against Israel and its financial support for both Hamas and Hezbollah.



The twelve imams of Twelver Shi'ism, with Ali in the middle, Hossein on the left and Abolfazl on the right. The twelfth imam, or hidden imam, is on the far left with his face whitened out. (left) Still from *Reverse Joy*, lecture-performance, 45 min, New Museum of Contemporary Art, NY, 2012 (right).



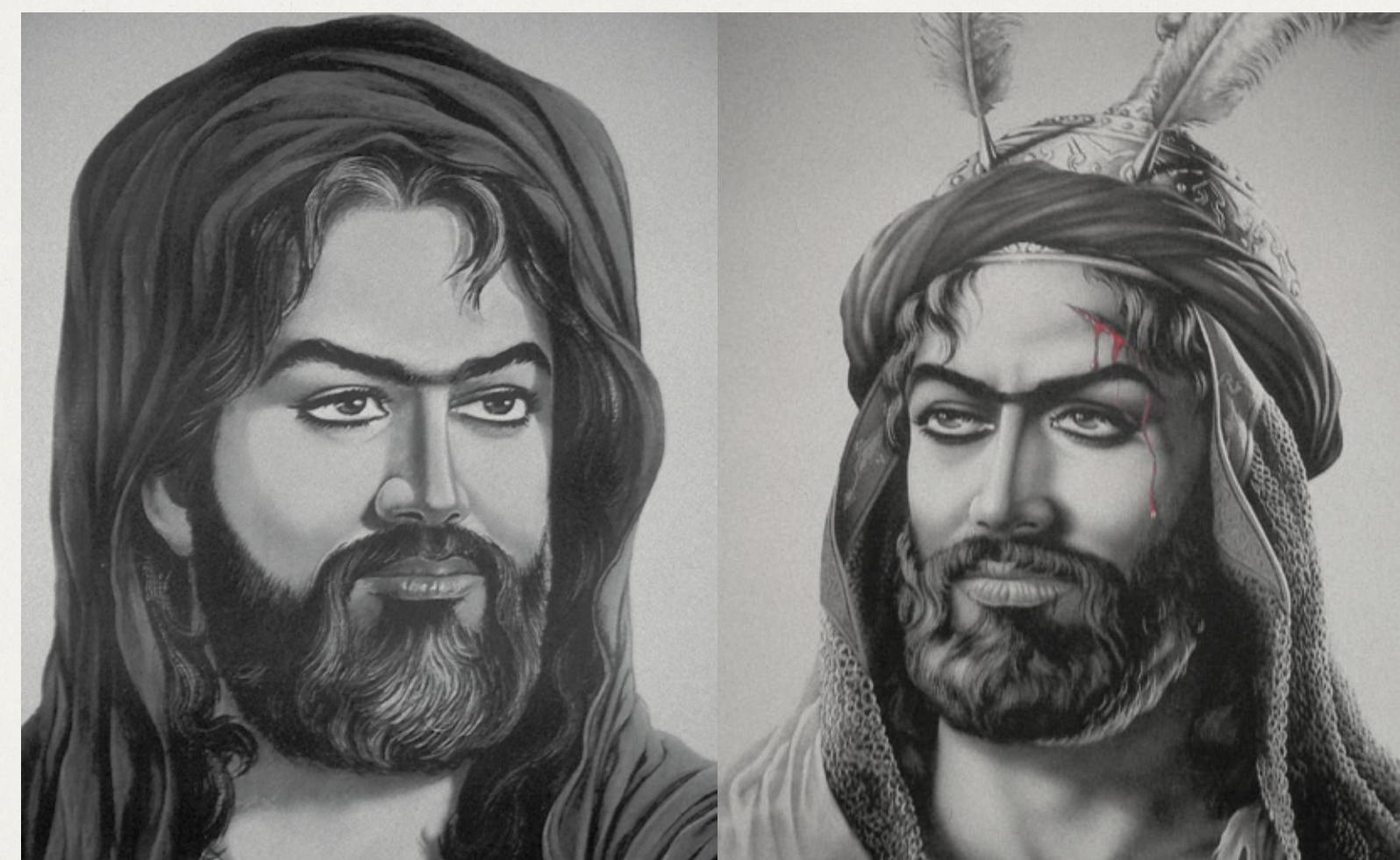
## Martyrdom

For example, one successful 'export', has been the role of martyrdom, a fundamental pillar of Shi'ite identity, in contrast to the majority Muslim Sunni identity. The sense of historical injustice or victimhood underlying martyrdom continues to play a significant role in the Shi'a faith and the seminal split from Sunnis.

Every year, during the holy month of Moharram, Shi'as mourn the beheading of Imam Hossein, one of the twelve imams, at the hands of the Sunni Umayyad Caliph Yazid at the Battle of Kerbala (680 AD). During the Iran-Iraq war, Iran managed to define the war as another struggle against tyranny, a modern-day restaging of the Battle of Kerbala, and sent thousands of young men, sometimes in their early teens, to defend the motherland against the invaders (Saddam's Iraq but also its backers in the West). Despite the contemporary enmity between

the Sunni and Shia, the role of martyrdom has recently been appropriated by Sunnis, particularly Wahhabis, as justification for various suicide attacks around the world.

There is a school of thought, first advanced by the eminent twentieth century Iranianologist Henry Corbin, that sees Shi'ism, with its prominent emphasis on angelology and tradition of Neo-Platonic thinkers, as somewhat similar to Catholicism. A theosophist himself, Corbin traces the unique role of angels, illumination theory, and neo-Platonism to Suhrevardi, the eleventh century Shi'a mystic and founder of the *ishraq* school of illumination. Similarly to Iran, martyrdom is also often invoked in Poland's historical identity: as the story-line of independence perpetually gained and lost as well as in specific events such as the Katyn massacre.



Imam Abolfazl (left), Imam Hossein (right)

## Muslim Monobrows? Good

A slightly less successful export, though, is the monobrow. In Iran, the triumvirate of the eyebrows, eyelashes and eyes are the defining traits of beauty. The portraits of the Shi'ite imams — Hossein and Abolfazl — feature strong

protruding eyebrows as a sign of virility and courage. To this day, in Iran, a monobrow can help you curry favour with the opposite sex ...



Former Massachusetts governor and Democratic presidential candidate Michael Dukakis, 1988

## Gentile Monobrows? Bad

... whereas, in the West, as anyone who has spent time with a monobrow at school can attest, they don't win you points with the girls ... or boys, for that matter.



Frieze Sculpture Park, 2010

## Monobrow — Hot

For the Frieze Sculpture Park in 2010, Slavs and Tatars exhibited *A Monobrow Manifesto*, with Persian epic hero Rostam, from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, marked HOT! on one side and ...



Frieze Sculpture Park, 2010

## Monobrow — Not

Bert, from *Sesame Street*, marked NOT! on the other. The monobrow is an epiphenomenon through which we can demystify the accepted wisdom surrounding the conflict between the West and the East. If in the West, the monobrow has been associated with delinquent

behaviour (Victorian England) or werewolves (France), in the Middle East and the Caucasus, the monobrow is a sign of virility and sophistication. That is, if in the southern parts of Eurasia, the monobrow is *hot*, in the US and Europe, it's clearly *not*.



Greater Iran, wikipedia

## A Greater Iran

The idea of a resurgent Iran is not an isolated or merely contemporary phenomenon. Iranian or Persian linguistic, religious and cultural influence has played a significant role for well over a millennium and extends into several former Soviet republics: The people of Tajikistan speak a modern form of Persian or Farsi; roughly twenty per cent of the population of Uzbekistan are Tajiks; half of the people of Afghanistan speak Dari, an Afghan Persian dialect; Azerbaijan is the only other overwhelmingly

Shi'a country in the world, other than Iran, with which it shares several cultural and historical figures. During the nineteenth century, the Persians lost much of the Caucasus to the Russian Empire in successive wars and several important figures in Azerbaijani history — Nizami and Akhundov — wrote in Farsi. If many of these countries look economically or politically to Russia, culturally and/or religiously, it is to Iran that they are oriented.



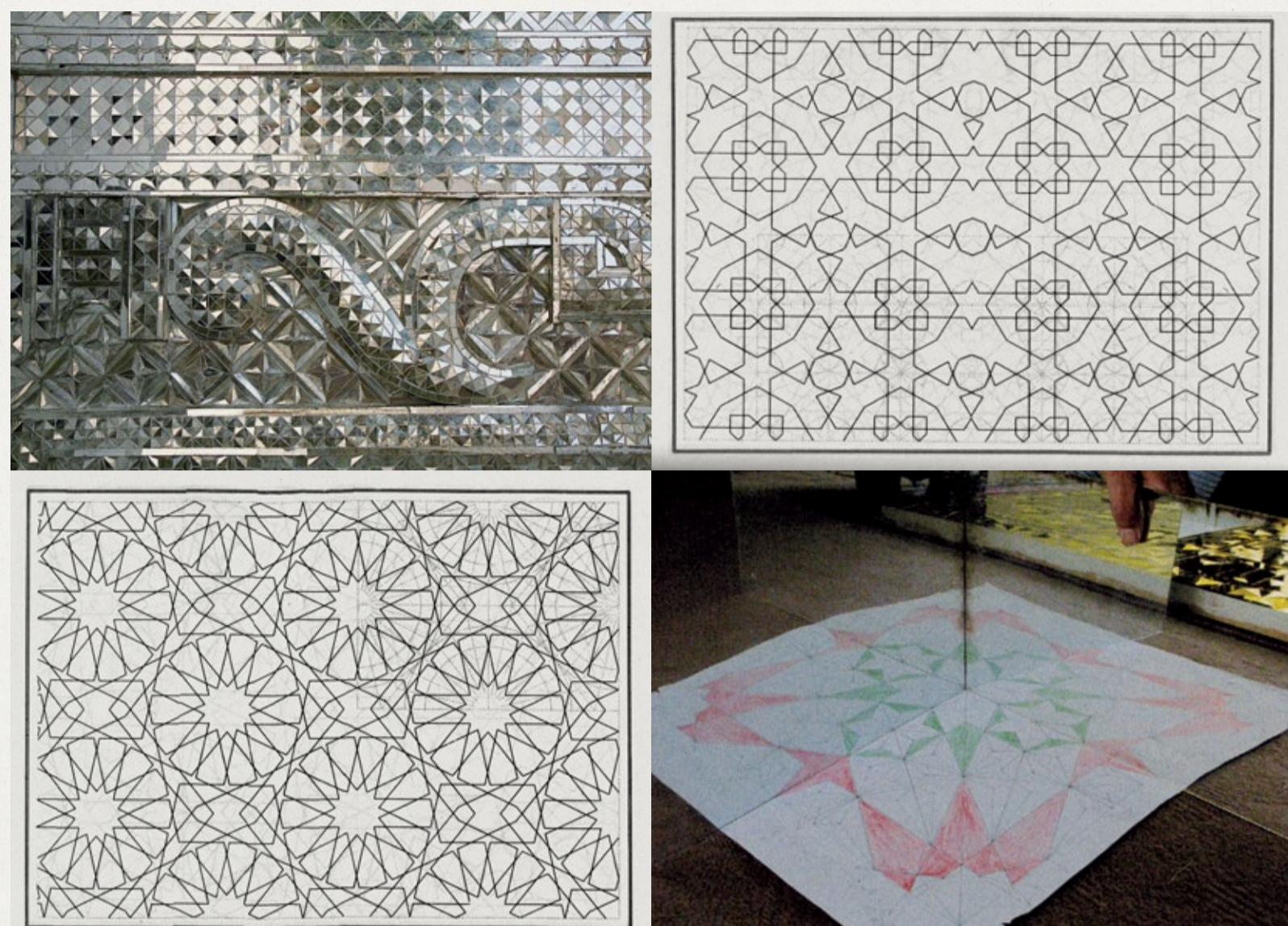
Shah Abdol Azim Shrine, Rey, Iran.

## Bevelled, Brutal Bling

Imagine walking into former palaces of the Shah or Shi'ite shrines, where the entire interior is made of mirror mosaics, each roughly two centimetres square, leaving no part of the wall visible, you could be forgiven for

thinking you've walked into a Swarovski boutique year 4000 A.D. or onto the set of a Kubrick remake. These mirror mosaics represent another interesting if less noted export of the Iranian Revolution.





Golestan Palace, Tehran; geometric patterns; The mirror as tool, used by Golhamhossein Shadzarnagh (clockwise top left to right)

## Mirror, mirror, on the wall ... floor, ceiling, everywhere

The geometric patterns, upon which the mirror mosaics are based, arrived with the Arab invasions of Iran that introduced Islam in the seventh century. Wood or ceramic was the Arab medium of choice. The Persians, always keen to distinguish themselves from their Arab neighbours, used mirrors as a bevelled, brutal option.

Slavs and Tatars are particularly interested in the revolutionary potential of certain crafts. In the case of Iran,

the mirror mosaic best exemplifies the complexity behind the Islamic Republic's particular brand of anti-imperial imperialism. Today, it exports this craft as the aesthetic embodiment of its own ideology to Shi'ite mosques and shrines throughout the region such as the Zeynab Shrine in Damascus.

The true medium of *mise en abyme*, the mirror mosaics require the use of a mirror to actually execute the design.



Resist Resisting God, mirror mosaic, wood, 150 x 100 cm, 2009

## Resist Resisting God

In 2009, Slavs and Tatars created a piece that, when viewed frontally, looked like another decorative mirror pattern ...

but from an angle, a text appeared, somewhat mystically: Resist Resisting God.



Navab Safavi, revolutionary leader 1924-1955 and Gerasimov's Lenin (inset)

## 1917 versus 1979

It requires a certain amount of intellectual acrobatics, if not emotional anxiety, to draw your inspiration or influence from your antithesis. For example, the Iranian Revolution imported wholesale much of its visual language

from the Russian Revolution, even though it resulted in a theocratic regime in total contrast to the atheism of the Russian Revolution.



Khomeini and Khatami represented in murals in Tehran (left), Stalin and Lenin, with text: The spirit of the great Lenin and his victorious standard today inspires us in the Great Patriotic War (right)

## Love thy Predecessor Hate thy Successor

Reminiscent of Stalin who enjoyed being pictured with Lenin in the same way, Seyed Ali Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader in Iran, often pictures himself next to his predecessor, the now-deceased Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the father of the Iranian Revolution.

For both Khamenei and Stalin, the gesture helps bolster a questionable arrival to power and thus their legitimacy as inheritors of the revolutionary legacy of the respective revolutionary founders, Khomeini and Lenin.



Montazeri and Khomeini 1987 (left), Khamenei and Khomeini today (right)

## Montazeri: Iran's Trotsky?

Both scenarios — in the USSR and in Iran — involved a contentious jostle for power with a third person who was marginalised shortly before the succession of power. If in the USSR's case this was Trotsky, in the Islamic Republic of Iran's case, it is the moderate-minded reformer Ayatollah Montazeri whose death in December 2009, while under house arrest, set off a new round of protests against the regime.

The intrigues of Montazeri's sidelining are worthy of a Cold War novel, though one with considerably less

violence than Trotsky's might have had. Long considered to be Khomeini's successor, Montazeri was placed under house arrest for over twenty years after protesting against the summary execution of thousands of political prisoners and questioning the necessity of a *velayat-faqih* or Supreme Leader.

As if these similarities between the two countries were not uncanny enough, is it not an incredible coincidence that both Stalin and Khamenei have a paralysed arm, the left one for Stalin and the right one for Khamenei?

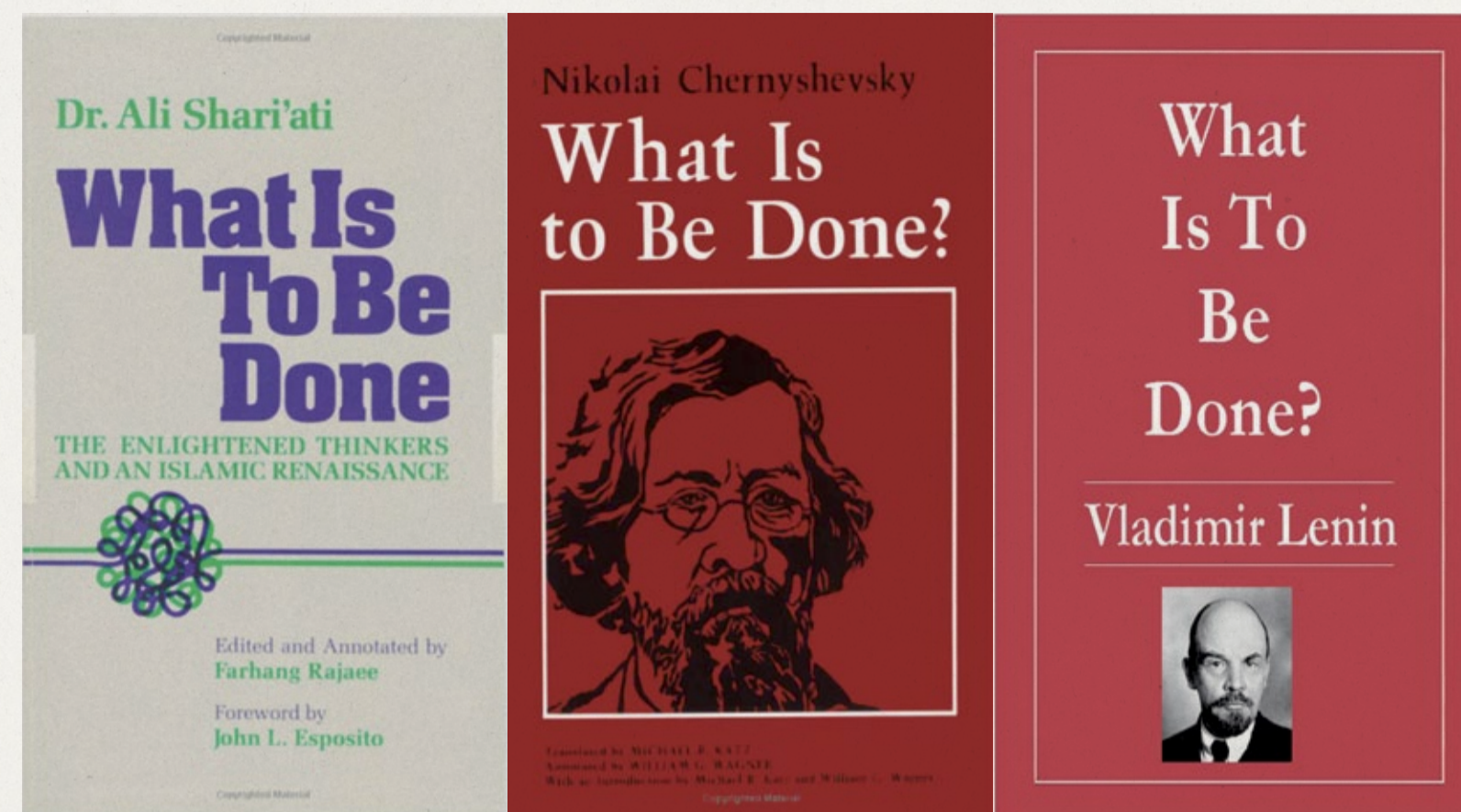


Klutsis (left), anti-Shah propaganda (right)

## The Immaculate Children of Klutsis

It is heart-warming, after all, to see that the decision-makers of a theocracy are open-minded enough to be inspired by their antithesis, the atheist left of Russia. Anti-US sentiment has been a rallying call of the Islamic Republic from day one. Not so much shared by the Iranian

people themselves, the easy jingle of anti-Americanism is periodically played to this day at any opportune moment. The case of Iran goes to show the old adage is true: the enemy (USSR) of your enemy (US), is your friend.



What is to be Done? by Shariati, Chernyshevsky and Lenin

## The Philosopher: Ali Shariati

When Khomeini returned to Iran, much of the groundwork for the revolution had been done: he left as a religious cleric, idolised by the religious classes alone and returned as a national hero. Perhaps no one was more instrumental in this transformation than Ali Shariati who helped make Islam more palatable to Iran's burgeoning middle classes and sparked an Islamic revival among young, educated Iranians by combining Shi'ism with liberationist, anti-colonial thought. Considered to be the most

important Iranian philosopher of the twentieth century, Shariati studied under Sartre and Louis Massignon in Paris in the 1960s, translated Franz Fanon into Persian, and was, until his death under mysterious circumstances in London in 1977, the leader of the opposition to the Shah.

Shariati's *What is to be Done* lifts its title from both the seminal late nineteenth century Russian revolutionary novel by Chernyshevsky and tract by Lenin, *Что Делать* (*Chto Delat/What is to be Done*).



Westoxification (or *Occidentosis*): n. the sense of being contaminated, sullied, or corrupted by the West

## Qarbzahdegi

First coined in the eponymous book by Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, *Qarbzahdegi* refers to the loss of Iranian cultural identity through the adoption and imitation of Western models and Western criteria in education, the arts, and culture.

Ali Shariati revived the concept with his critique and opposition to the transformation of Iran into a passive market for Western goods and as a pawn in Western geopolitics.



Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Ali Larijani, Mir-Hossein Mousavi (left to right)

## Look, Ma: No Tie!

Ali Shariati helped bring leftists and nationalists closer to Islam and, crucially, gave Khomeini and the Islamists a space in which to operate and ultimately marginalise their opponents, these same leftists and nationalists. The ban on the tie in Iran offers a rare insight into the pluralism of the major factions of the Iranian Revolution at the time. The Revolution was first and foremost a national struggle, against the monarchy and against what was perceived as a loss of cultural if not national sovereignty. A disparate mixture of Marxists, nationalists

and Islamists mobilised the Iranian people against the Shah, but once his regime fell, the Islamists, led by Khomeini, quickly filled the power vacuum and marginalised the other groups, including the infamous Mojaheddin, who at the outset had offered their own cocktail of Marxism and Islam.

The ban on the tie is one small area of policy where the left and right overlapped and agreed: for the left, the tie was a symbol of capitalism and for the right, of Western decadence.



Peter the Great (left) forced the Boyars (right) to cut their beards in an effort to 'westernise' the country



## Beards? Banned

According to popular political theory, the seeds of a revolution are sown when a given leader no longer resembles his people. So according to this logic, the Russian Revolution began not in 1917, nor in the aborted attempts of 1905, but in the early eighteenth century

when Peter the Great returned from a trip to Europe and decided to levy a tax on the Russian nobility, the Boyars, if they did not cut their unseemly, decidedly 'Eastern' beards to more resemble Western European nobility.



Reza Shah outlawed the wearing of the veil in 1936



## Veils? Verboten

Similarly, in 1936, in an effort to emulate Ataturk, Reza Shah, the father of Reza Pahlavi, the ousted Shah, outlawed the wearing of the veil in public.



A woman catches the eyes of the Shah's army before the revolution while veiled women turn away from a man, post-revolution.

## Before/After

A British journalist living in Tehran remarked at the time that to require Iranian women to go outside the home

without their veils was equivalent to requiring British women to leave the house topless.



Mural on Hemmat Highway, Tehran (left); A big push for the Bolshevik harvest (right)

## Social Realism: Proletariat Social Realism: Martyrs

Whereas the USSR celebrated the proletariat via the portrayal of the generic, anonymous labourer, the Islamic Republic of Iran, a product of its age, opts for pathos through the excessive portrayal of individual martyrs. George Bernard Shaw once said that the only way for someone without talent or beauty to become famous was martyrdom. It seems unfortunate that the Iran-Iraq war and reality television have done their part to lower the requirements even further.

Nowhere is this more evident than the case of twenty-one-year-old Mazi Mostaffi who attempted, in a joint mission with the Lebanese Hezbollah, to carry out the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, but died en route from diarrhea. It seems even unsuccessful, incontinent martyrs get their fifteen metres of fame.



Horse, Kermanshah (left), The Grapes of Wrath, Qazvin (right)

## The Undecided

Judging by its public art, Iran looks more like Disneyland or a not-so-miniature golf course. Public art and sculpture are among any country's most telling expression of identity. So where the Soviet Union embraced social realism, with monumental sculptures honouring the proletarian hero, the Islamic Republic of Iran trades in magical realism.

No statues of past religious clerics are to be found nor any safe bets such as iconic literary figures. The secular

left digs the dirt on history's clerics, who at one point or another all collaborated with colonial powers, while the religious right accuses the likes of Ferdowsi and Omar Khayyam of religious equivocation. So, instead, an idyllic, fantasy world of deer, doves, horses, lions, and grapes is found. Nothing is as politically safe as plants or animals for they lack ideology. This is very much a third way that would make even Blair and Clinton cringe.



la ilaha illa allah = there is only one god, Allah. Iranian image inspired by the use of crowds in the Solidarność logo

## Iranian Solidarność

The current situation in Iran, after the disputed presidential elections of 2009, has left many people thinking about parallels with Poland in the 1980s.

To cite just one example: the silent marches in Tehran where 100,000 people marched through the city in silence took a page out of Poland's history book and Solidarność's

fight against Communism. Many leaders of the Iranian protests are looking to Poland and the Solidarność period for inspiration on how to bring change gradually and peacefully, from *within* the system. Iran's regime will likely not fall overnight but rather as the Communist regime fell in Poland, over a period of five to ten years.



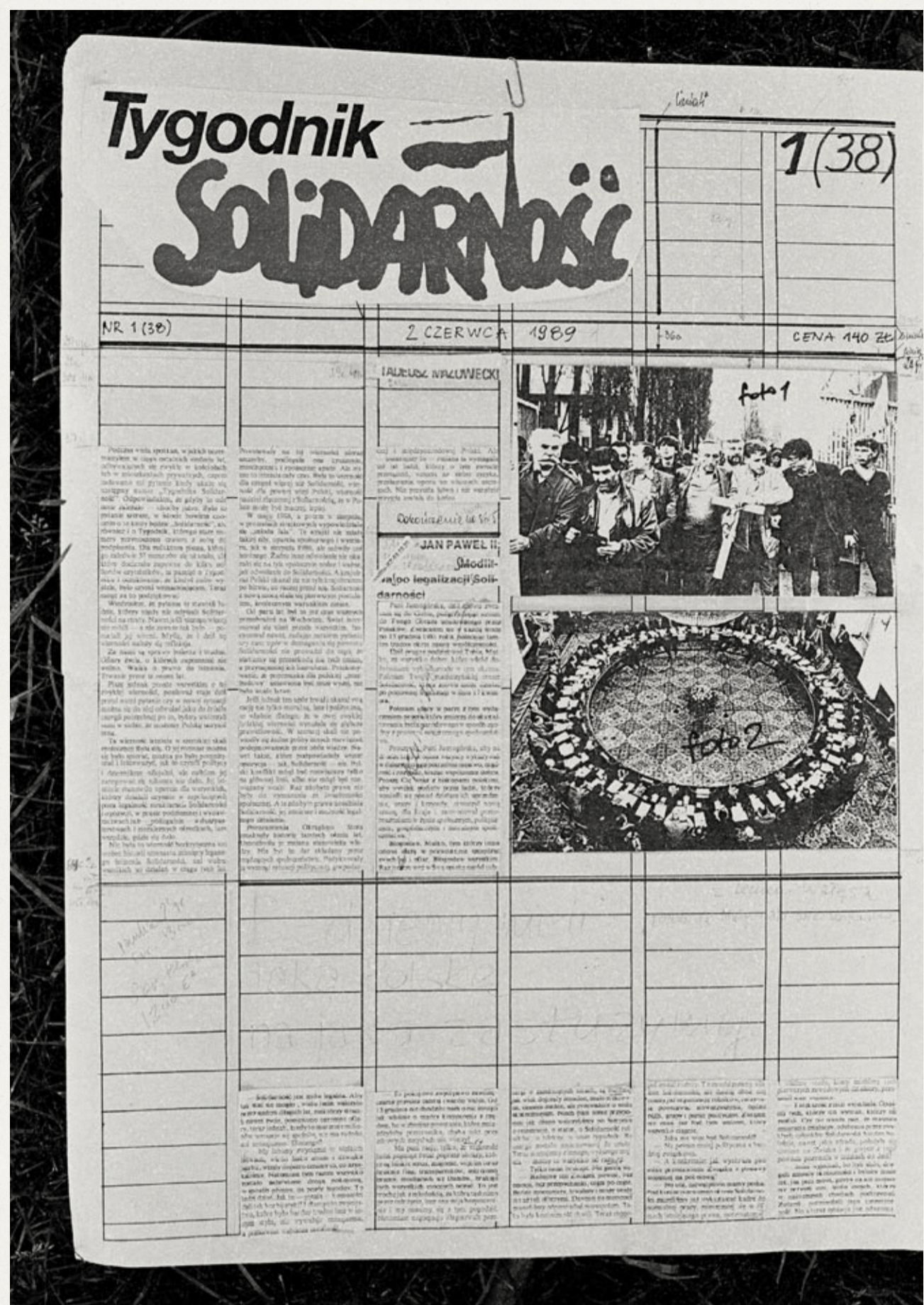
PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party)? NO, THANK YOU

## Solidarność

The full name of the Solidarity movement was *Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy 'Solidarność'* or the Independent Self-governing Trade Union 'Solidarity'.

The movement which helped bring down Communism in Poland and across the Eastern Bloc started off as

a trade union in the Gdańsk shipyard in 1980 and was led by Lech Wałęsa. Solidarity's strikes never demanded an end to Communism itself but instead for relatively tactical but concrete improvements: in living conditions, working hours, food, etc.



The cover of Tygodnik Solidarność, 2 June 1989

# ‘Stop Crying and Start to Work ...’

Marek’s post, on the Tehran Bureau web site, offers a biting if entertaining look at how Poland views contemporary developments in Iran.

*I’m writing from Poland. We have the same experiences from the past with our stupid, bloody Communist regime. Fortunately, now we are free.*

*Iran is close to my heart, because I’ve been there two times and I have many close friends in this wonderful country.*

*I love them, but I have to tell you one thing. I realized that the Iranian soul is too emotional. When one day people won the fight with basijis on the streets, they started to think that freedom was behind the next corner. Now the same people are crying after one defeat. It makes me angry.*

*Fighting for freedom is always the very long path. It is impossible to achieve it only on the street, in seven months. You should have the strategy for few years and smart, active leaders like Lech Wałęsa.*

*Stop crying and start to work, make leaflets, underground presses, convince workers and people from small cities etc., that there are hundreds of methods. I know, it is hard work, but my experiences from Poland told me — there is no other way. You have to deserve your freedom.*

*I love Iran and I’m sure that you will be free very fast, maybe in five years. But stop complaining first.*

Marek/February 15, 2010 2:49 AM Tehranbureau.com



Bucharest, Warsaw, Berlin, Bucharest, 1989 (clockwise top left to right)

# 1989: Radical Chic

In 2009, there were twentieth anniversary celebrations across Europe in memory of the events of 1989. When we think of the fall of Communism in Eastern Europe, iconic images of violence or drama often come to mind such as the crowds on the Berlin Wall or statues of Lenin being

torn down or Ceaușescu’s execution. Despite the public’s and media’s need for iconic or ‘sexy’ imagery, it is often in the shadows rather than the spotlight that true change occurs.



Solidarity flag atop Hala Arena, Poznań

## 1989: More Painstaking than Punk

Poland is perhaps not the most 'sexy' or violent of places but its methodical, boring, and systematic approach to Communism has proved far more effective than the 'sexy' and violent alternatives of its neighbours.

Via strikes and civil disobedience, Poland successfully squared-up against a Communist regime which enjoyed all the military support of the USSR.

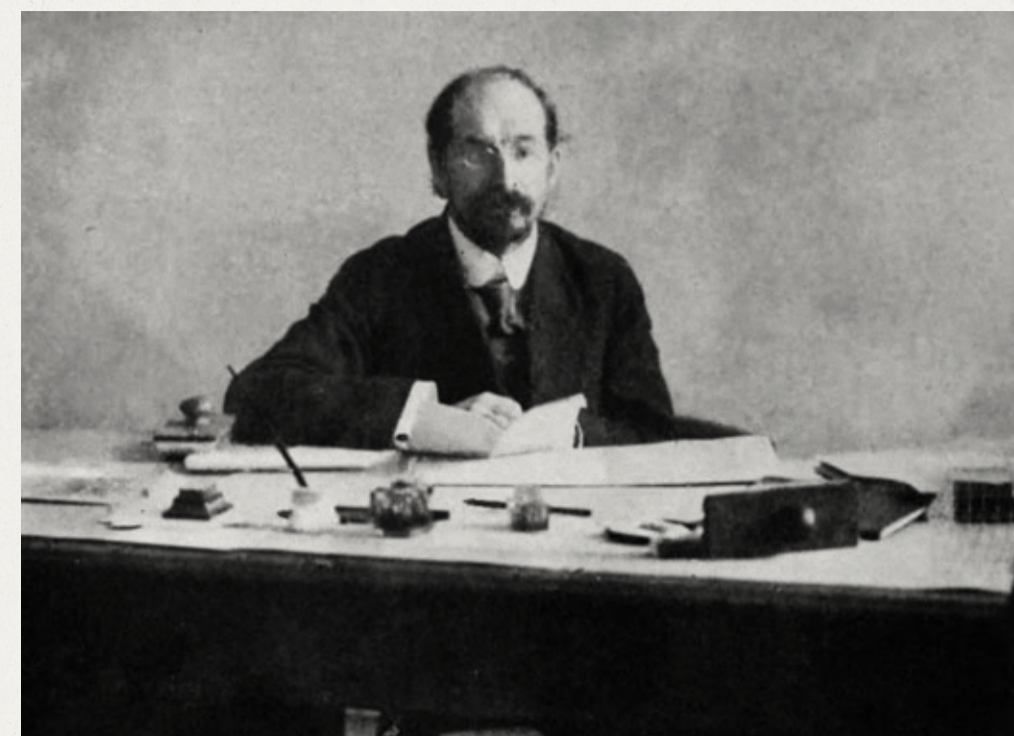


Pope John Paul II's third pilgrimage to Poland and the Pope with Lech Wałęsa and Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki (inset)

## John Paul II

Another 'unsexy', often overlooked but very important factor in the success of Solidarność was the role of the Church (not exactly de rigeur in Western intellectual circles). Appointed Pope in 1978, John Paul II immediately prepared the Poles for a long, peaceful change of the

system from within. Throughout all the negotiations with the government during the 1980s, the Catholic Church acted as a neutral, trusted intermediary or referee between the Communist government and the Solidarność movement.

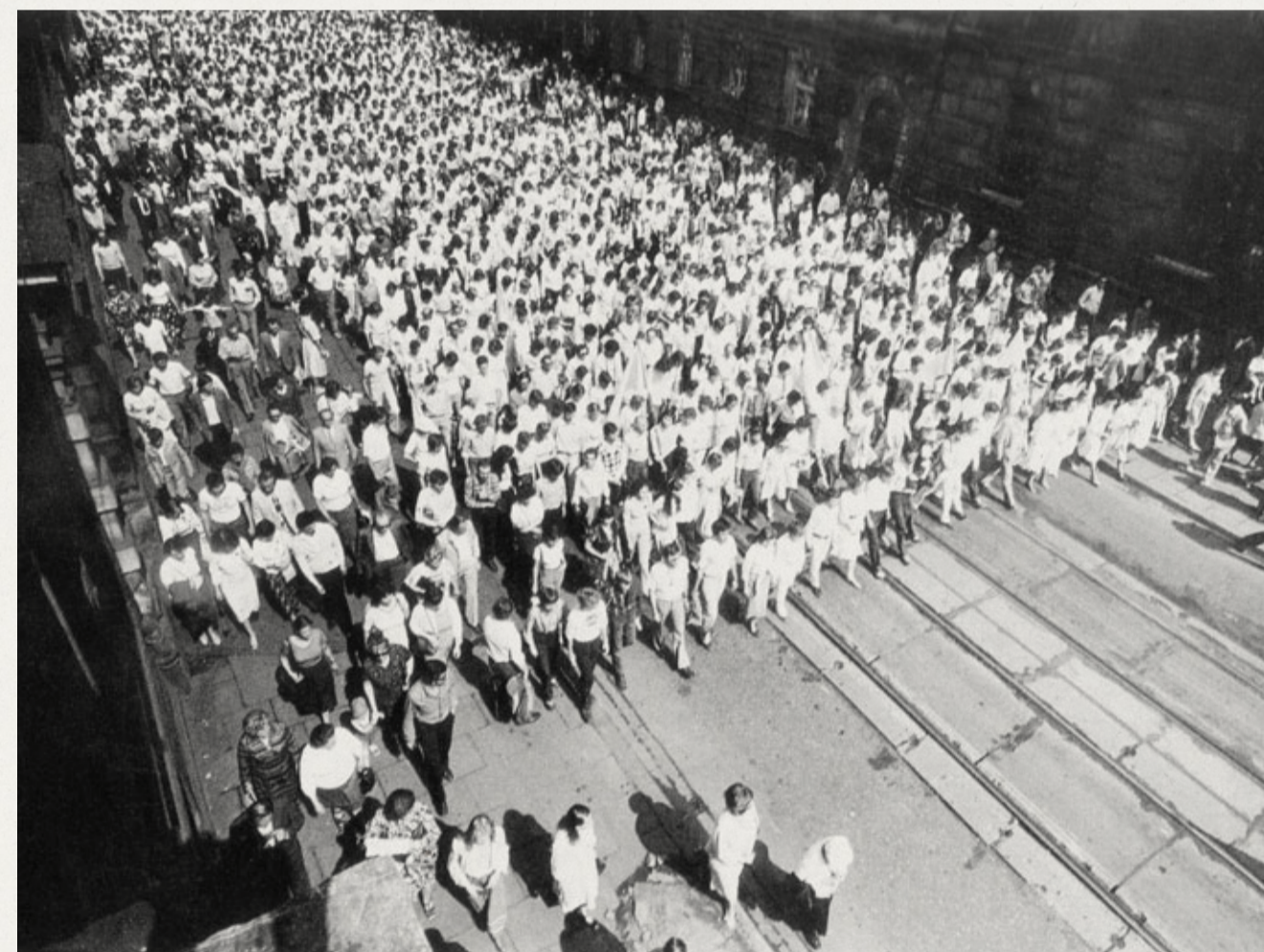


Anatole Lunacharsky

## God-Building

There have been several attempts to incorporate religion into Communism, the most interesting being the God-Building by Anatole Lunacharsky (1875-1933). Proposed to accommodate religious sentiments to the world-view of Communism, Lunacharsky's God-Building

created a new religion compatible with science and not based on supernatural beliefs. Lenin was infuriated by the notion, and considered Lunacharsky's position to be extremely harmful, supposedly transforming Marxism into a mild liberal reformism.



300,000 people attended the famous white marches after the attempt on the life of Pope John Paul II in May 1981

## Let Stars Stay in the Sky, Sickles in the Fields and Hammers in the Factories

Stalin once said that trying to communise the Poles is like trying to put a saddle on a cow. Unlike its status in most Communist regimes, the Church was active throughout

the Polish Communist era: never officially outlawed, it was condoned as realpolitik by the government.

# Unlikely Pen Pals

In an open letter to the Pope, Khomeini answered John Paul II's concerns regarding the deteriorating relationship between Iran and the United States following the hostage crisis.

May 5, 1980

*In the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate*

*His Excellency Pope John Paul II,*

*I received your letter which expressed concern over the strained relations between the Islamic Iran and the United States. I express my gratitude for your good will and would like to inform you that our combatant and noble people regard the severance of relations as a good omen; they have made merry, illuminated, and celebrated the occasion. I thank his Excellency for praying God, the Almighty, on behalf of our combatant nation. Still, I ask his Excellency not to be concerned over the eruption of new, poor relations and greater hazards mentioned in that letter, since Iran's Muslim nation welcomes any predicament which may arise by the severance of ties and is not frightened of the more serious hazards warned of in that letter.*

*The truly dangerous day for our nation is when (foreign) relations similar to those preferred by the former traitor regime are resumed, which, God willing, will not happen.*

*Considering his Excellency's spiritual influence among the Christian believers, I ask his Honor to warn the US government of the consequences of its oppressions, cruelties, plunders, and advise Mr. Carter, who is doomed to defeat, to treat nations desiring absolute independence of global powers on the basis of humanitarian principles. He should be advised to observe the guidelines of Jesus Christ and not to expose himself to and the US Administration to defamation. I pray God, the Almighty, to grant prosperity to the oppressed worldwide and rupture the hand of the oppressors.*

*Ruhollah Mousawi Khomeini*

The last paragraph – where the Shi'a Imam reminds the head of the worldwide Catholic Church that if Carter were a true Christian, his actions would be altogether different – is rich with Khomeini's characteristic chutzpah, unflinching confidence in his position, and dismissive tone towards the US.



The iconic 1980s Gdansk graffiti 'Tylko solidarność i cierpliwość zapewni nam zwycięstwo' was translated into Farsi for our Only Solidarity and Patience Will Secure Our Victory, polyester, synthetic leather, stitching, 200 x 120 cm, 2011 (inset).

# Blinksmanship

'Slavs have always had a different approach to time, one that is more long term than often seen in the West. This was especially the case during Communism. Slavs do not spend time. In the Slavic thesaurus, under duration there is no dollar sign. Time is not money because there always was plenty of the former but never much of the latter. For half a century, the two did not even occupy the same latitude and longitude.' – from Slavs and Tatars manifesto, first published in 032c, 2008

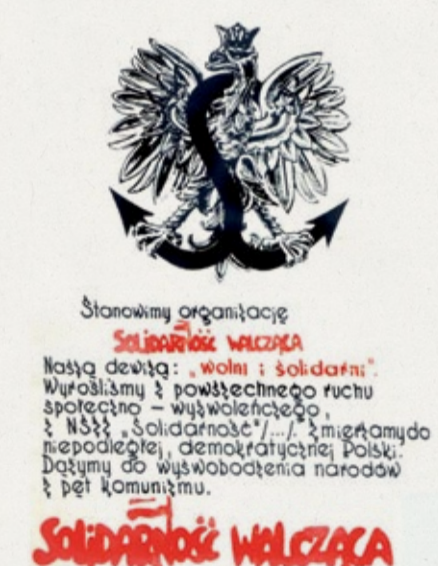
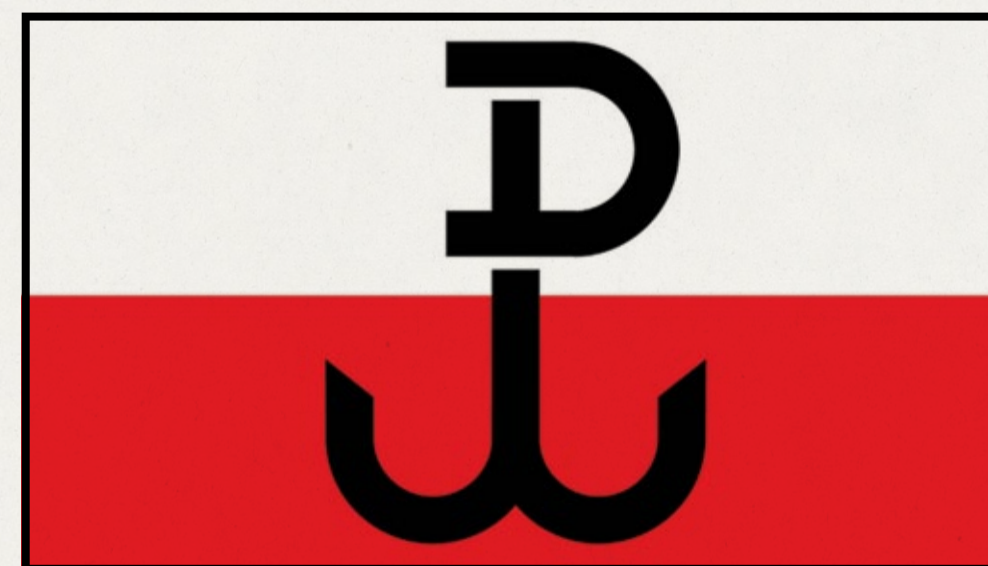
Now, though there's plenty of money in certain Slavic countries, time remains somewhat resistant to late, liberal capitalism.



The mobile church in Poland

# Drive-By Confessionals

During the shipyard strikes, the church would come to the protesters to support them in prayer.



The Polska Walcząca flag (left) and Solidarność Walcząca emblem (right)

# Polska Walcząca

Poland's modern history has been one of independence constantly gained and then lost. The letters P and W of Polska Walcząca, or Polish Resistance, a symbol of Polish resistance from the Second World War, became an anchor in a clairvoyant nod to the origins of the Solidarność movement some forty years later.

When Solidarność was banned by martial law in 1981, Solidarność Walcząca, a Polish anti-communist

underground organisation and one of the more radical splinter groups of Solidarność, was founded.

Solidarność Walcząca changed the P to an S and re-instated the eagle with the crown as the symbol of pre-communist Poland.



Prague, 1989

## It Took 10 Years, 10 Months, 10 Weeks, 10 Days ...

Because it achieved steady, concrete milestones in non-violent ways, Poland's *Solidarność* provided a crucial, continuous momentum to anti-Communist movements across Eastern Europe. The USSR was clearly on the brink

of bankruptcy due to several factors, including low oil prices and the costly invasion of Afghanistan. Poland acted as a persistent thorn in its side, exposing its weaknesses throughout the better part of the decade.



Adam Michnik at the first print run of *Solidarność*/*Gazeta Wyborcza*. Lech Wałęsa wearing an ad-hoc *Solidarność* hat (inset)

## The Thinker: Adam Michnik

Adam Michnik was one of the leaders of the illegal, democratic opposition in Poland, was an adviser to *Solidarność* in the 1980s. Today, Michnik is Editor in Chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, literally 'newspaper of the vote', which

originated as the underground newspaper of *Solidarność*. *Gazeta Wyborcza* is now the largest daily newspaper in Poland, and one of the healthiest in the current uncertain media climate.



Young Poles read about the strikes in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and an activist prepares a banner (inset)

## Civil Disobedience

'The absurdity of the ruling system could be counted on; what was necessary in the meanwhile was the refusal of the lie and the willingness to display civic courage.'

— Leszek Kolakowski, Polish historian and philosopher

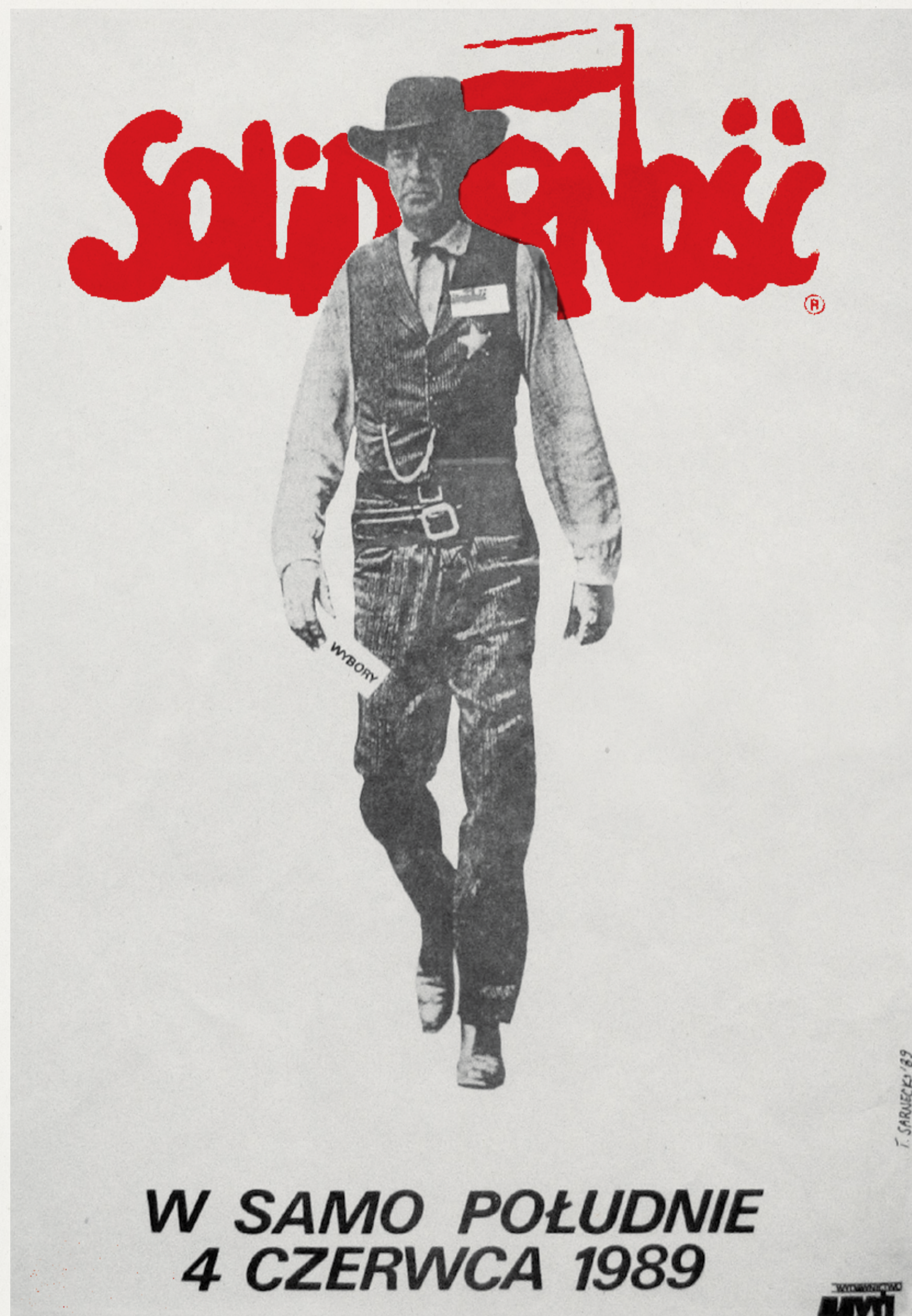


Protesters set light to the Communist mouthpiece *Trybuna Ludu* during a demonstration on the steps of the Church of the Holy Cross in Warsaw in 1989. The printing premises of *Solidarność* in Gdańsk, 1980, (inset)

## Self-Management Body Your Fate in Your Hands

As a result of the Polish 'refusal of the lie' the first semi-free elections in the countries of the Eastern Bloc since World War II took place without recourse to violence.





Iconic Solidarność posters to get out the vote on 4 June 1989.

## 4 June 1989

The calendar date was a momentous one. Firstly, in Iran the night before, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini died, serving as a distinct if depressing milestone for the Iranian Revolution. What had begun as a truly popular revolution in 1978–79, had by the time of Khomeini's death resulted in an autocratic, oppressive regime. In China, on the

same date, a student movement was brutally crushed in Tiananmen Square. At this fork in the road, Poland had two clear paths before it. Instead of going in the direction of either Iran or China, it opted for a third, unknown route, one that ensured progress and continuity over radicalism.



The roundtable discussions of spring, 1989

## Wasz Prezydent Nasz Premier

*Wasz Prezydent Nasz Premier* (literally 'Your President, our Prime Minister') was a famous line that captured the spirit of compromise between Solidarność and the regime. Solidarność won more than ninety per cent of the available seats but accepted to have President Jaruzelski retain his post as President if the opposition were allowed to choose the Prime Minister.

To ask for abstract, rhetorical justice or responsibility after the events, often results in endless recriminations. Solidarność's leaders were keen to move forward and not

to look backwards. Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki coined the term *gruba kreska* or 'the thick line' as the proverbial line in the sand, to stem off the potential for revenge, protecting President Jaruzelski and other Communist officials from prosecution by the incoming government. Many far more radical factions of the opposition objected to Solidarność even sitting at the same table with Communist officials, arguing instead for a total regime change or nothing.



*Ku chwale normalności*, digital print, billboard, Gdańsk, 2012.

## Before Learning to Run We Must Learn to Crawl

In the West, compromise is often seen as a weakness but in the East it is considered a vitally constructive force and a demonstration of strength. Clearly, the role of faith, on this occasion Catholic, played a role in convincing a population which had been brutally repressed of the benefits of forgiveness as well.

Michnik himself spent several years in prison (1968–69, 1981–84, 1985–86) due to his anti-government actions.

At the roundtable discussions, he sat across the room from the very Generals (Jaruzelski and Kiszczak) who had sentenced him to imprisonment.

He said at the time: 'I would be lying if I said I did not want revenge. Anyone who has suffered that humiliation, at some level, wants revenge. I know all the lies. I saw people being killed. But I also know that revanchism is never ending.'



Protestors with a banner; Jaruzelski addressing the nation (inset). Workers in a chemical plant meet with Lech Wałęsa, Oświęcim, 10 November, 1981. The banner reads: "Lech! Break down what can't be broken down with reason."

## There is no Freedom Without Solidarity

Even though Perestroika was well under way, it is important not to underestimate the achievements of Solidarność in bringing down peacefully a Communist

government that had the state security force and an extensive military arsenal at its disposal.



The audience brought their stereo system, as a precursor to the ubiquitous mobile phone at today's concerts, to tape the music.

## Jarocin Festival

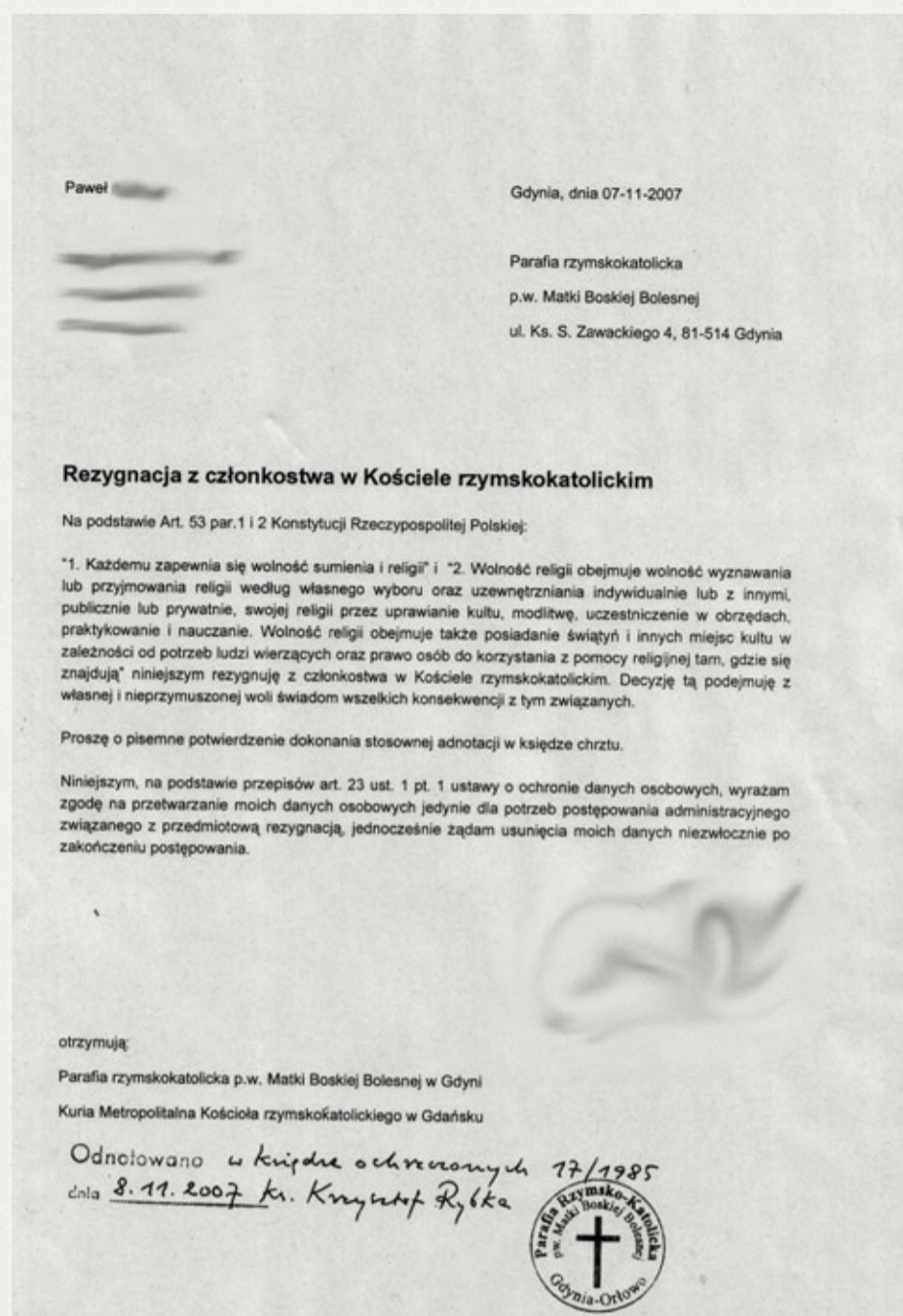
If in pre-revolutionary Iran, people gathered to listen to Khomeini or Shariati, in Poland, it was decidedly more upbeat with rock 'n' roll bringing out the masses. Organised in 1980, the Jarocin Festival was one of the first rock and punk music festivals in the Eastern Bloc. Fans carried ghetto blasters not to listen to but rather to record the live music and be able to relive the music later at home, with friends and family. Perhaps a better analogy to Khomeini's tapes, however, is *Kultura*, a periodical published by Polish émigrés in Paris. Smuggled into Poland as Khomeini's tapes were into Iran, *Kultura* offered an indirect, literary critique of the political situation in the country, with texts by Witold Gombrowicz and Czesław Miłosz, much like the films by Iranian directors such as Abbas Kiarostami, Mahmad Makhmalbaf or Jafar Panahi.

Czesław Niemen, a Polish singer who often performed poetry to pop music, was also a proponent of looking within oneself to change reality:

*Dziwny jest ten świat  
gdzie jeszcze wciąż miesci się wiele zła  
i dziwne jest to że od tylu lat  
człowiekiem gardzi człowiek  
Dziwny ten świat świat ludzkich spraw  
czasem aż wstyd przyznać się  
a jednak często jest ze ktoś  
słowem złym zabija tak jak nożem  
Lecz ludzi dobrej woli jest więcej  
i mocno wierzę w to że ten świat  
nie zginie dzięki nim  
nadszedł już czas najwyższy czas  
nienawiść zniszczyć w sobie*

*Strange is this world  
where still there is so much evil  
and it is strange that for so many years  
Man has had so much contempt for one another  
Strange is this world of human affairs  
sometimes one is ashamed to admit it  
but it happens often that somebody  
with a bad word kills like with a knife  
But there are more people with good intentions  
and I strongly believe in it that this world  
won't perish thanks to them  
it is high time  
we destroyed hatred in ourselves*

Czesław Niemen, 'Strange is this world'



An official attempt to drive the census figures of Catholics down to reflect Poland more accurately

## Apostasy: Poland

Today, among some in Poland, apostasy — the renunciation of one’s religion — is gaining ground as a form of civil disobedience to the growing role of the Catholic Church. Upon birth, many people, even Polish Jews, are automatically counted as Christians for the official census. Some were baptized simply out of tradition

or out of fear of not fitting in. A new generation is trying to define Polishness away from the homogeneity of the second half of the twentieth century and closer to what it was in the early twentieth century: a more cosmopolitan, diverse nation.



The emblem of the Islamic Republic of Iran, a stylized ‘Allah’ (above), the Achameanid symbol of Zoroastrianism (below)



## Apostasy: Iran

In Iran, apostasy is also being used as a form of civil disobedience. With a long history before Islam’s arrival in the seventh century, many young and old Iranians alike are turning to Zoroastrianism, the religion of pre-Islamic Persia. Its main tenet is summed up in the relatively simple maxim ‘good thoughts, good words,

good deeds’ as a form of protest against the absolutism of the Islamic regime. The first monotheistic religion in the world, several tenets of the three main Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) find their origins in Zoroastrianism.



Public fountain, Nayej Al Moghaddass Circle, Mashaad, Iran (top). Good Friday Pilgrims’ prayers, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, Poland, source: Kalwaria Adam Bujak (bottom left). *Sineh-zani* or breast-beating during Muharram, Tehran (bottom right).

## Reverse Joy

Every year, Shi’as around the globe – from Lebanon to Iraq, Iran to Pakistan and all the way to Aceh, the northern tip of Sumatra – commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein, the Prophet’s grandson, during the month of Muharram, in what Elias Canetti has called ‘an orchestra of grief’. Marches, drum beats, drama, dirges, and, perhaps most importantly, weeping, build to a climax on Ashura (literally tenth in Arabic to denote the day of the month of Hussein’s death). Yet, despite – or perhaps because of – this intensive public display of mourning, a palpable sense of exhilaration or even joy seeps through the rituals. Often circumscribed in countries such as Iran, public space comes alive with the air of a street party.

A main element of the complex constellation that makes up Muharram is the *taziyyeh*, a dramatic re-enactment of the Battle of Kerbala, the only indigenous drama of the Muslim world. The Brechtian equivalent of the medieval Passion Play, the *taziyyeh* is a further example of the shared affinity between Catholicism and Shi’ism. It comes as little surprise then that two of the most important international scholars of *taziyyeh* are Aleksander Chodźko (1804-1891) the nineteenth century Slavist and Iranologist, and Peter J Chelkowski (1933–), Professor Emeritus of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies at NYU.



Polish *szlachta* wear long flowing robes in an effort to appear more Oriental

## Sarmatism

Such are genealogies that they have a tentacular success rate: the investigation of the two key dates – 1979 and 1989 – eventually blossomed into an unlikely heritage spanning four centuries, involving two countries’ singular drives toward self-determination. In a further example of the progressive potential of political masquerade, the Polish gentry of the seventeenth century ascribed a romantic notion to their origins by sporting long coats trimmed with fur, carrying at all times a sabre (called *karabela*) and riding horseback. Sarmatism – the lifestyle, culture and ideology of the Polish *szlachta* (gentry) – was inspired by the belief that the Polish nobility were descended from a long-lost Iranian tribe of the Black Sea. A mix of nativism,

Orientalism, and an attempt to distinguish themselves from their Western counterparts, Sarmatism influenced values, fashion, culture, and the political orientation of the Commonwealth, offering a romantic leitmotif to a relatively enlightened empire: where interfaith marriages (between Polish Tatar Muslims and Catholics) were allowed and more (Polish Tatar) Muslims had representation in the *Sejm* (Parliament) than any elected parliament or governing body within the EU today. Polish Tatar Muslims to this day present a little-known progressive model of moderate Islam – with co-ed education and integrated prayer rooms – within Europe’s own borders.



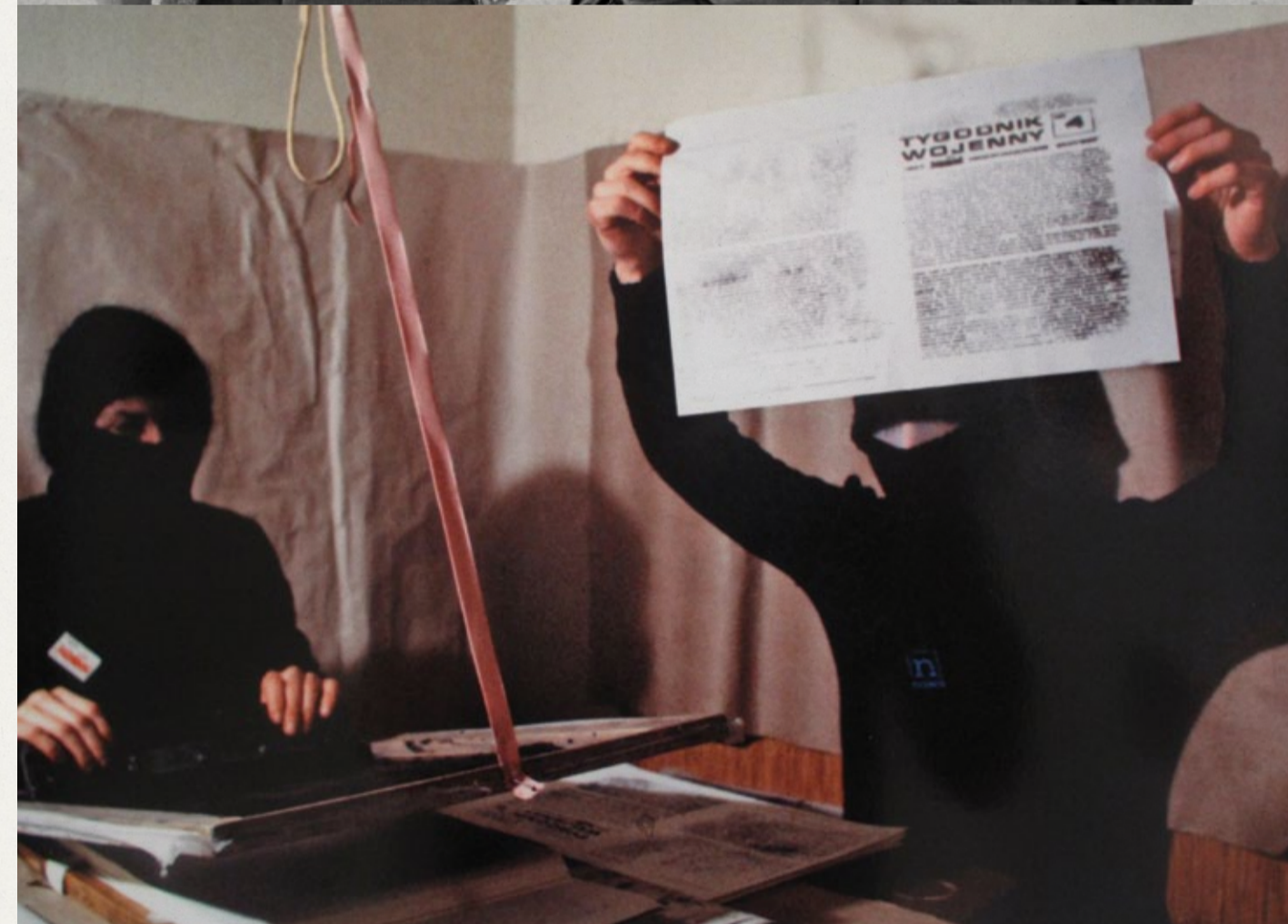
The plaque at the entrance to the Dulab Cemetery in Tehran where more than 2,000 Poles are buried (left) and a drawing of Private Wojtek, the Iranian bear adopted by the 22nd Transport Division (Artillery Supply) of the 2nd Polish Army Corps (right)



## Esfahan — City of Polish Children

During World War II, in one of the many forgotten episodes of the war, more than 116,000 Poles found refuge and rehabilitation in Iran from labour camps in Siberia and Kazakhstan. Iran’s verdant landscape and abundant hospitality seemed positively other-worldly to a people who had lived through the horrors of Stalinism.

As unlikely as this heritage between the two peoples sounds, so too is the nature of gifts: when Iranian passersby threw food wrapped in towels to the exhausted Polish refugees, the latter ducked and covered their faces, mistaking them for rocks and stones.



In 1989, after several years in exile, Czesław Miłosz returns to Poland (top). *Solidarność* secret printing works, print run of *Tygodnik Wojenny* (War Weekly), Warsaw, 1982 Photo: Piotr Jaxa (bottom).

## Wanted: Polish-Persian translators!

Following the protests in Iran over the results of the 2009 presidential elections, Polish authors who had hitherto never been translated into Persian began to appear in Tehran’s book stores. Whether it was the sociologist Zygmunt Baumann, philosopher Leszek Kolakowski, or poet Czesław Miłosz, the new crop of a particular nation’s literature makes the case for early twenty-first century Iran to look to Poland’s late twentieth century struggle with Communism all the more convincing. The latter two figures’ turn to religion and faith for their

progressive potential and effective means of resistance, especially in the face of the creeping secular materialism left unchecked after the fall of the Iron Curtain, resonates with an opposition movement in Iran trying to triangulate between political Islam and the desire for a truly representative government. We praise in particular the efforts of a mysterious R.V., the only Polish-Persian translator in Iran, whom we have not had the chance to meet due to the sensitive nature of her work.



Lowicki pajaki, research, 2010. *Solidarność Pajak Study No. 3*, thread, silk, 80 x 40 x 30 cm, 2011 (left) and *Solidarność Pajak Study No. 5*, hand-blown glass balls, beads, 85 x 42 x 25 cm, 2011 (right).

## The Solidarity of the Spider

Contrary to the stiff Soviet use of the term, *Friendship of Nations* redeems the performative gesture of the gift, from one people to another, not only into the future but also from the past.

Stemming from a pagan tradition celebrating the yearly harvest, the Polish *pajak* (spider) is, like the mirror mosaics, a craft Slavs and Tatars have turned to for its

revolutionary potential, as a testimony to the painstaking diligence and delicate nature of compromise crucial to the Polish precedent of civil disobedience. During autumn, a *pajak* would be traditionally crafted according to local customs – the use of reed or straw a further demonstration of the ephemeral nature of these constructions – and hung from the ceiling.



*Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz* (exterior and installation views), Heritage Area, 10th Sharjah Biennial, 2011.

## Friendship of Nations

An almost mirthful generosity occupied the courtyard of the heritage house at the 10<sup>th</sup> Sharjah Biennial where *Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz* was first exhibited. From the very early days of installation, local Baluchis, Afghans, and Iraqis would stop by, sit down, converse with us or amongst themselves, and seek shade from the scorching sun while sipping orange blossom-infused tea and eating dried mulberries. Adjacent to the only Shi'ite mosque in Sharjah, *Friendship of Nations* acted as the cheerful younger brother to its more indulgent, if edified, blue-tiled elder sibling across the road.

By articulating a space of political discourse shaped first and foremost by the codes of hospitality, in Sharjah, *Friendship of Nations* became a de-facto rest-stop, a meeting point, all the more acute in a biennial taking place under sweltering temperatures nearing 30°C. But heat is often more than mere meteorology: both the immediate and

greater context within which the exhibition took place point to the urgent need to rethink the very delivery, posture and conception of critique itself. *Friendship of Nations*, due to its location, was sandwiched between the censored contribution that sparked the dismissal of the Foundation's director on one end and the only Shi'a mosque in Sharjah on the other. The biennial opened, after all, on the same day that the UAE and Saudi Arabia, two Sunni countries, sent troops into neighbouring Bahrain, an island kingdom with a majority Shi'ite population. That a project addressing self-determination and the translation of civil disobedience from Eastern Europe to the Middle East, amidst the early days of the Arab Spring, within this curated context, did not cause controversy is a testament to the need to commemorate as much as condemn, to critique with a smile as wide as the analysis itself, and to joy through mourning.



The crown is returned atop the eagle as it was on the flag of pre-Communist Poland.

## The Eagle Gets its Groove Back

The crown returns to the eagle and the PPL becomes the Republic of Poland.

'My obsession has been that we should have a revolution that not resemble the French or Russian, but rather the American, in the sense that it be for something, not against

something. A revolution for a constitution, not a paradise. An anti-utopian revolution. Because utopias lead to the guillotine and the gulag.' – Adam Michnik in an interview with Roger Cohen, *The New York Times*.

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by Slavs and Tatars  
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The Henry Moore Foundation

PRESENTATION HOUSE GALLERY



79.89.09. is the first installment in Slavs and Tatars' second cycle of work, *Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz*, a multi-platform look at the unlikely common heritage between Poland and Iran, from 17th century Sarmatism to the 21st century Green Movement. Constructed in equal parts through research and original work, *Friendship of Nations* consists of, amongst others, a contribution to two consecutive issues of Berlin biannual 032c, an investigation of shared craft traditions between Catholicism and Shi'ism (*Resist Resisting God, Solidarność Pajaki, FON banners*), a balloon (*A Monobrow Manifesto*), a print edition, an audio piece (*Samizabt: You Who Wronged*), and a lecture-performance delivered at institutions and universities across North America, Europe and the Middle East.

This newspaper is produced especially for *Again, A Time Machine* at Eastside Projects, along with *Only Solidarity and Patience will Secure our Victory*, a billboard project, and *Dear 1979, Please Meet 1989*, an installation of river beds and an Iranian and Polish book archive.

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*Self-Management Body (from Friendship of Nations: Polish Shi'ite Showbiz), silkscreen, stitching, 2011*

## It Took 30 Years, 30 Months, 30 Weeks, 30 Days ...

The events across the Middle East in 2011 remind the case-hardened among us of 1989, the softer-hearted and often softer-spoken ones of 1848. The new representative governments in North Africa, no matter how rocky, have delivered a blow to Iran whose claims to be the only democratic country in the Middle East were spurious even in the best of times, given its 'managed' vetting

of candidates, and Israel's similarly strident claims. As autocratic regimes from Algeria to Bahrain tremble, the revolutions in Tunisia and in Egypt have been adopted by an impossible list of candidates (from the United States to the Islamic Republic of Iran) in a telling demonstration that success has many parents (even if sparring), and failure is just an orphan.